Fostering Opportunities: Improving Educational Outcomes for Youth in Care in British Columbia

by

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Ethics Statement

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Abstract

Children and youth in care in British Columbia face significantly lower high school completion rates than their peers, with only half of these young people completing high school by the age of 19. This study addresses systemic barriers in the child welfare and education systems in British Columbia that contribute to poor educational outcomes for youth in care. Systemic barriers and promising practices are explored through a literature review, jurisdictional scan, case study analysis, and expert interviews. Drawing on research findings, key challenges that contribute to poor educational outcomes are identified. These findings are then used to identify and analyze policy options targeted at improving educational outcomes for youth in care in BC. In the short to medium term, the study recommends the implementation of professional development for school district staff and the creation of a new Ministry of Education designation that includes targeted funding and an Individualized Education Plan for all youth in care in BC schools. In the long term, the study recommends extending the age of care supports to 21, implementing school-based social workers in all school districts, and increasing alternative education programs within schools in districts with an identified need.

Keywords: children and youth in care; educational outcomes; child welfare; Indigenous youth in care; British Columbia; policy analysis
This project is dedicated to all of the resilient young people and families who have ever been in contact with a child welfare system that has been unable to support them to reach their full potential. I would also like to dedicate this project to the individual children who inspired me to conduct this research and whose strength continues to inspire me every day.
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List of Acronyms

AYA  Agreements with Young Adults
BC   British Columbia
BCTF British Columbia Teachers’ Federation
CCI  Complex Care and Intervention
CCO  Continuing Custody Order
CFCSA Child, Family and Community Service Act
CYMH Child and Youth Mental Health
DAA  Delegated Aboriginal Agency
FSA  Foundation Skills Assessment
IEP  Individualized Education Plan
MCFD Ministry of Children and Family Development
RCY  Representative for Children and Youth
TCO  Temporary Custody Order
TRRUST Transitioning in Resources, Relationships and Understand Support Together
VSH  Virtual School Heads
Executive Summary

Introduction and Background

Children and youth who have spent time in the care of the Ministry of Children and Family Development (MCFD) or a Delegated Aboriginal Agency in British Columbia (BC) face significantly worse educational outcomes than their peers who have not spent time in care. In the 2015/2016 academic year, approximately 54.2% of youth in care graduated with a high school credential, compared to 83.6% of the general student population (MCFD, 2017). Youth in care often face a number of unique challenges throughout their lifetimes that may have adverse impacts on their educational outcomes, however, this study focuses on systemic barriers in the education and child welfare systems that contribute to poor educational outcomes for youth in care. These systemic barriers include factors such as frequent placement, school, or community changes; unmet mental health needs; disconnection from culture and community; lack of cross-agency collaboration and information sharing; lack of resources; and several other factors.

Methodology and Key Findings

This study uses the following four methodologies to inform the analysis: 1) a jurisdictional scan of existing programs that are underway in BC, including programs in five different school districts and the province-wide MCFD Complex Care and Intervention Program; 2) a case study analysis using program evaluations of the following three international programs: the Virtual School Head for Looked After Children program in England; the FosterEd: Santa Cruz County program in Santa Cruz County, California; and the Skolfam model in Sweden; 3) ten interviews with experts and key stakeholders; and 4) a group interview with seven members of the TRUUST Collective Impact Education Cluster, which includes representatives from local non-profit organizations, the province, and educational institutions.

Key findings from the case study analysis identify cross-agency collaboration, Individualized Education Plans, and relationships as key characteristics of successful programs to improve educational outcomes for youth in care. Several key themes were also raised throughout the one-on-one and group interviews. Participants emphasized the importance of providing opportunities for children and youth to develop consistent,
meaningful relationships with peers and adults. They also discussed the impact that frequent placement, school, and community changes can have on these relationships and the importance of maintaining stability. The majority of interview participants also discussed the need to facilitate connection to culture and community, to provide adequate mental health supports, and to provide individualized support as opposed to a one-size-fits-all approach. Finally, nearly all participants emphasized the lack of resources in education and child welfare that can result in children not receiving the services they need.

Policy Analysis and Recommendations

Based on research findings, this study analyzes five different policy options against a set of ten evaluation criteria. The policy options that are considered in this analysis are the following: 1) creating a new Ministry of Education designation for students in care that includes targeted funding to schools and an Individualized Education Plan; 2) school-based social workers in all school districts in BC that act as a liaison between education and child welfare systems; 3) professional development for all staff in schools where there is an identified need; 4) increasing alternative education programs within schools in districts where there is a need; and 5) extending the age of care from 19 to 21. Based on this analysis, this study recommends professional development for school staff and creating a new Ministry of Education designation for students in care in the short to medium term. The study also recommends school-based social workers, increasing alternative education programs, and extending the age of care in the long term due to significant feasibility and implementation considerations.
Chapter 1.

Introduction

On March 31, 2017, 6,950 children and youth in BC were in the care of the Ministry of Children and Family Development (MCFD) (MCFD, 2017). The 2017 MCFD Performance Management Report finds that only 54.2% of children and youth in care in BC who turned 19 had finished school with a high school credential in the 2015/2016 academic year (MCFD, 2017, pp. 65). Indigenous children make up a significant proportion of youth in care, with approximately 69% of students with a CCO identifying as Indigenous compared to only 10.6% of students without a Continuing Care Order (CCO) in the 2014/15 academic year (RCY, 2017, pp. 10).

Youth in care face a number of unique challenges throughout their lifetimes, many of which have adverse impacts on their educational outcomes. Although many of these barriers precede a child’s experience in the child welfare system, many systemic factors also contribute to the poor educational outcomes.

Extensive research highlights the importance of educational attainment in determining an individual’s future outcomes. The social and economic benefits of education provide the rationale for implementing policy that has a positive impact on the educational outcomes of children in care. Higher levels of education are found to have positive impacts on health outcomes, income, social-emotional skills, happiness indicators, and participation in civic activities and public institutions (OECD, 2013).

Youth from care are significantly more likely than their peers to experience homelessness, take up income assistance, be involved in the criminal justice system, and have an early pregnancy. Average lifetime earnings for youth from care are also lower than their peers, which can be a direct result of poor educational outcomes. The long-run costs of these adverse outcomes to youth, to government, and to society as a whole are extremely high, and providing better support for youth would be much more cost effective than maintaining the status quo (Shaffer, Anderson, Nelson, 2015a) (SAN).
Chapter 2.

The Gap in Educational Outcomes

2.1. Evidence of the Gap in Educational Outcomes

The Child, Family and Community Service Act defines youth in care as someone who is currently, or has received care from MCFD or a Delegated Aboriginal Agency (DAA) through the Child, Family and Community Service Act for a minimum of twelve months (consecutive or accumulated) in any, or a combination of the following categories: Continuing Custody Order, Temporary Custody Order, Special Needs Agreement, Voluntary Care Agreement, Youth Agreement, Extended Family Plan, Permanent Transfer of Custody Order, and Temporary Transfer of Custody (CFCSA, 1996).

As previously mentioned, the 2017 MCFD Performance Management Report finds that only 54.2% of children and youth in care in BC who turned 19 had finished school with a high school credential in the 2015/2016 academic year. This rate was approximately 53.5% for Indigenous children and youth in care and 54.9% for their non-Indigenous counterparts (MCFD, 2017, pp. 65). This is a significant gap between the 6-year completion rate for all BC students, which was approximately 83.6% in the year that this study was completed (British Columbia, 2017). This study also shows an increasing trend in high school completion rates of youth in care but emphasizes that a significant gap persists between the completion rates for these children and their peers without experience in care (MCFD, 2017).

The Foundation Skills Assessment (FSA) is administered to children in Grades 4 and 7 in BC and evaluates how these students are doing in reading, writing, and numeracy. The FSA tests are designed to evaluate how students are achieving these basic skills and to provide information on how best to intervene and improve student achievement in the three evaluation areas. Longitudinal data from the Ministry of Education shows the achievement gap on FSA tests between students with and without a CCO from the 2007-2008 school year until the 2012-2013 school year. This data shows the percentage of students with or without a CCO who met or exceeded expectations on the Grade 7 FSA reading test in this five-year period. The results show
not only that a significant gap between the FSA results of students with and without a CCO persists, but that the gap continues to be widening, with an increase from 13.8 percentage points to 24.7 percentage points (RCY, 2015, pp. 55). This shows that FSA results for children without a CCO are improving, while outcomes for children with a CCO are worsening.

Although these statistics are compelling, they do not explain the effects that the child welfare system has on the educational outcomes of children who spend time in care. Doyle (2007), Sweetman, Warburton and Hertzman (2007), and Warburton et al. (2014) attempt to estimate the effects of foster care placement on child outcomes by assessing the educational outcomes of youth considered to be “on the margin” of being taken into care. These studies consider youth to be “on the margin” if they have been in contact with the child welfare system and assigned a case manager, however, that case managers had some disagreement about whether or not the child should be placed in care (Doyle, 2007). Doyle (2007) uses regression analysis with data from Illinois to estimate the impact of foster care placement on delinquency, teen motherhood, employment, and quarterly earnings and finds that of the group of children on the margin, those who are placed in care are found to have higher delinquency rates, some evidence of higher teen birth rates, and lower earnings.

Sweetman, Warburton, and Hertzman (2007) uses a similar methodology with data from British Columbia to estimate the impacts of foster care placement on health, education, welfare, and corrections outcomes for 16-18 year old boys. This study finds that foster care placement reduces high school graduation, and increases welfare use, likelihood of contact with corrections, and likelihood of being treated for a medical disorder related to substance use. These findings are similar to the findings of Warburton et al. (2014) that finds that placing 16 to 18 year old males in care decreases or delays high school graduation, increases income assistance receipt, and has alternative effects on criminal convictions. These studies suggest that placement in care has adverse impacts on the educational outcomes of youth on the margin of being taken into care and that if these youth on average had stayed in their biological homes, they may have experienced more success. These findings are critical because they highlight that systemic barriers in the child welfare system have a negative impact on educational outcomes and provide a rationale for using policy to address these systemic barriers.
2.2. The Costs of Adverse Outcomes

Adverse educational outcomes for youth in care in BC come at a high cost to youth themselves, to all levels of government, and to society as a whole. SAN (2015b) finds that the costs of adverse outcomes are predominantly driven by low educational attainment, poverty, and poor mental well-being, and that these factors result in limited earnings potential, health costs, costs associated with the criminal justice system, early pregnancy, homelessness, substance use, and the risk of premature loss of life. SAN (2015b) finds that the cost of not closing the high school completion gap of youth who age out of care is between $142,000 and $180,000 per youth in foregone income and $32,000 in terms of health, with most of this cost being borne by taxpayers. The cost of extending care supports for youth to remain in care until the age of 25 is estimated to cost $57,000 per youth (based on the assumption that 80% of youth would take up these supports) (SAN, 2015c).

2.3. Overrepresented Groups

2.3.1. Indigenous Children

Figure 3.1 highlights the significant overrepresentation of Indigenous children in care, with approximately 69% of children with a CCO being Indigenous (RCY, 2017, pp. 10). Due to this significant overrepresentation, it is critical to consider these children in policies that affect youth in care. Indigenous children with a CCO face even worse educational outcomes than their non-Indigenous peers in care. The six-year high school completion rate for Indigenous students with a CCO increased from 35% in 2010/2011 to 44% in 2014/15, however the gap in educational attainment between Indigenous and non-Indigenous students in care persists with these students having a completion rate of 61% in 2014/15 (RCY, 2017, pp. 15).
Indigenous children in care face unique challenges from their non-Indigenous peers as they navigate the educational system in BC. The intergenerational history of colonialism and its resulting discrimination of Indigenous peoples has had significant adverse impacts on the educational outcomes of children in care. The foster care system in Canada, in the context of Indigenous children, is often referred to as a colonial practice that extends the historical pattern of child removal that began with the residential school system (Sinha & Kozlowski, 2013). In recent years there has been significant discussion about reducing the number of Indigenous children in care, with the federal government putting forward $1.4B in Budget 2018 to provide better support to Indigenous Child and Family Service Agencies (Government of Canada, 2018, pp. 130). In addition to this, the Government of Canada announced on November 30, 2018 that legislation will be passed in 2019 to transfer jurisdiction of Indigenous child welfare services to Indigenous governments (CBC, 2018). Although these are steps in the right direction, there continues to be a need for policy that addresses the overrepresentation of Indigenous children in care and their educational outcomes.
2.3.2. Children with Special Needs

In the 2014/2015 school year, more than half of students with a CCO in British Columbia had a special needs designation, compared to only 10% of students without a CCO (RCY, 2017, pp. 11). Students with a CCO who have a special needs designation also face lower completion rates than students with special needs who do not have a CCO, with 67% of children with special needs without a CCO completing high school in 2014/15 compared to only 44% of those with a CCO (RCY, 2017, pp. 17).

Figure 2.2. Proportion of Students With a Special Needs Designation With and Without a CCO, 2014/15 School Year
Data Source: RCY (2017)
Chapter 3.

Contributing Factors to Poor Educational Outcomes

3.1. Challenges Preceding Care

Youth in care have often had experiences before their time in care that impact their emotional, social, and cognitive development. These factors are all in turn likely to have an impact on the educational experiences of these children (Day et al., 2012). Some of the early factors experienced by these children include living in poverty, experience of abuse and trauma, mental health challenges, neglect, parental substance use and/or neuro-developmental disabilities associated with maternal substance use, and intergenerational factors (National Working Group on Foster Care and Education, 2014).

The long-term impacts of trauma are an important consideration in the educational outcomes of youth in care and an important rationale for the use of trauma-informed practice in education, child welfare, and other services such as health care and criminal justice. Repeated exposure to traumatic events can affect psychobiological development and increase the risk of low academic performance, engagement in high-risk behaviours, involvement in the criminal justice system, use of health and mental health services, and difficulties in peer and family relationships (Ko et al., 2008).

3.2. Challenges During Care

Children and youth in care face a number of different challenges throughout their lifetimes, many of which have adverse impacts on their educational outcomes. Although many of these barriers precede a child’s experience in the child welfare system, this study focuses on systemic factors that also contribute to poor educational outcomes faced by youth in care in BC.

3.2.1. Consistency

One of the systemic barriers that is most commonly cited in the literature is the frequency of school changes as a result of frequent placement changes for youth in
care. Various studies have identified the importance of maintaining as much consistency as possible in the lives of youth in care (Rutman & Hubberstey, 2018). School is often a place where children in care are able to feel safe and have the stability that they may not have outside of school (Rutman & Hubberstey, 2016). When children remain in the same placement or in the same school for a longer period of time, they have the opportunity to build stronger relationships and support systems than if they are required to move frequently. A study conducted in the United States of over a thousand youth in care finds that a decrease in the number of moves experienced by children in care results in an increased probability of completing high school (Pecora et al., 2006). Another study conducted in the United States finds that school changes do not have a direct measurable impact on academic achievement for youth in care, however, it does show that school stability is important for mental health outcomes (Leonard & Gudiño, 2016). It is also important to consider that the process of changing schools often disrupts the education of youth, leading to missed school days or missing part of the curriculum. Some youth surveyed in a study by the Representative for Children and Youth reported stopping attending school altogether due to a change in school placement (RCY, 2017).

It is important to acknowledge the consistency of relationships with peers and adults that occurs when youth have stability in their schools and foster homes. Developing connections with adults and peers can be difficult for youth who have experienced instability in relationships in the past. Support from adults including teachers, school counsellors, Aboriginal Education staff, foster parents, social workers, and mentors can have a positive impact on youth and their educational outcomes (RCY, 2017). The 2013 BC Adolescent Health Survey conducted with 1,000 youth who have been in care finds that youth who have healthy relationships with their family, school, community, and peers reported better health and mental health outcomes, greater likelihood of planning to pursue post-secondary education, and lower likelihood of reporting problematic or heavy alcohol use (Smith et al., 2015).

3.2.2. Cross-Agency Communication and Collaboration

The second key theme that emerges throughout the literature is communication and collaboration between adults who support children and youth in care. Many people are involved in the lives of youth in care and it is important that all of these individuals work together to create a wraparound of supports to best support youth. It is also critical
that youth are given a voice in the decisions that are made about them by including them in meetings between teachers, social workers, and/or foster parents in a meaningful way (Evans et al., 2016).

In 2008, the Ministry of Education and MCFD published the “Joint Educational Planning and Support for Children and Youth in Care: Cross-Ministry Guidelines” in an effort to improve information-sharing, promote joint planning, and improve communication and collaboration among educators, school-based teams, child welfare workers, caregivers, and family members (MCFD & Ministry of Education, 2008). These guidelines were reviewed and updated in 2016/2017 and a revised version was released in 2017 (MCFD & Ministry of Education, 2017). Little published research exists that explores the implementation, consistency of application, and impacts of these Guidelines, however awareness of these Guidelines by those who they apply to appears to be low (Rutman & Hubberstey, 2016). In a survey conducted by the RCY, only 6.2% of teachers, 28.5% of principles, 27.5% of social workers, and 15.8% of foster parents were aware of the Guidelines, understand their relevance, and agree that they have had a positive impact on collaborative planning (RCY, 2017, pp. 46). These figures imply that a gap exists in the implementation of these Guidelines.

Gaps in communication between individuals working with youth and care can occur due to heavy workloads and frequent staff turnover, being unable to make contact between social workers and school staff, and insufficient information being shared about children between the education and child welfare systems (Rutman & Hubberstey, 2016).

It is also found that students who are in care are sometimes unable to participate in class outings and extracurricular activities because permission slips require a signature from a social worker, which can result in delays. This excludes these youth from participating in social activities and can cause stigmatization (RCY, 2017).

3.2.3. Culturally Relevant Supports for Indigenous Students

A number of gaps in culturally relevant supports for Indigenous children in care in education have been identified (Johnson, 2014). Indigenous children are often placed in non-Indigenous foster homes that are unfamiliar with their culture and may be far from
their communities and therefore Indigenous children in care often face barriers to forming meaningful connections to culture (RCY, 2017). It has also been identified that while Aboriginal Education staff in BC schools are valuable supports, there are often too few of these staff members resulting in Indigenous youth not receiving the support they need (RCY, 2017). Strengthened connection to Indigenous culture and community can foster a sense of pride and belonging for Indigenous youth, which is an important factor in improving educational outcomes (RCY, 2017).

The literature finds that Indigenous youth in care are more successful in school when they learn about their culture, traditions, and history as part of the regular school curriculum. Incorporating Indigenous perspectives in all aspects of school and teaching these perspectives to non-Indigenous youth is considered to be a promising practice (Rutman & Hubberstey, 2018). Strong Indigenous language and cultural programming with the support of well-trained teachers and culturally relevant curriculum and resources is also found to have a positive impact for Indigenous students (Pelletier et al., 2013).

In addition to this, there is a need for political recognition of Indigenous rights, zero tolerance for racism policies, trauma-informed supports, greater stability and safety in foster homes and schools, and setting realistic educational goals for Indigenous youth who have been and continue to be impacted by Western colonial child welfare practices (Johnson, 2014).

Supporting teachers and other school staff as well as other service providers in strengthening knowledge and practice related to cultural competency is important to support Indigenous youth in care as they go through their education. Providing professional development opportunities to these staff members to better inform them about their roles as allies may improve outcomes for Indigenous youth (Rutman & Hubberstey, 2016).

3.2.4. Mental Health Services

Unmet mental health needs are another systemic factor that contributes to poor educational outcomes. Youth in care are significantly more likely than their peers to have at least one lifetime diagnosis of a mental illness (Pecora et al., 2009) and elevated rates of depression, anxiety, aggression, and Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) have all
been found in youth in care (Pecora, 2012). Despite the significant need for mental health services, there are many gaps in these services, which can have adverse impacts on their educational outcomes (Pecora, 2012). Burns et al. (2004) finds that fewer than half of the children in foster care who need mental health services receive the services they need.
Chapter 4.

Methodology

4.1. Jurisdictional Scan

A jurisdictional scan of existing programs in BC uses publicly available literature and data to explore the characteristics, gaps, and outcomes of these programs. These programs include programs in five school districts across BC as well as the province-wide MCFD Complex Care and Intervention program. A limitation of this scan is that the majority of these programs are relatively recent and therefore minimal evaluation data that measures the impacts is available.

4.2. Case Study Analysis

Three case studies are analyzed using program evaluation data to understand characteristics that are associated with success in educational programs to support youth in care. Case studies analyzed include the Virtual School Head for Looked After Children program in the England, the FosterEd: Santa Cruz County program in Santa Cruz County, California, and the Skolfam model in Sweden. These three cases are analyzed based on descriptive characteristics and their ability to meet a set of measured criteria that are identified in Table 6.1.
Table 4.1. Case Study Evaluation Framework

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristic</th>
<th>Measure</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Program Characteristics</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Location</td>
<td>Where is the program located?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Type of Program</td>
<td>What type of program is it?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stage of intervention</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
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<td>When was the program implemented?</td>
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<td>Number of Participants</td>
<td>How many students participate in the program?</td>
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<td>Funding Source</td>
<td>How is the program funded?</td>
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<td>Cross-Agency Collaboration</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meetings</td>
<td>Does the program facilitate regular meetings between child welfare and education professionals as well as other adults who work with the child?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information-Sharing</td>
<td>Do various agencies/organizations share information about the child?</td>
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<td>Individualized Education Planning</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IEPs for Youth in Care</td>
<td>Does the program develop an individualized education plan for youth in care?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tracking Progress</td>
<td>Does the program involve monitoring and tracking progress?</td>
</tr>
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<td>Program Referrals</td>
<td>Does the program provide referrals to outside services including trauma-informed services?</td>
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<td>Relationships</td>
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</tr>
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<td>School Point Person</td>
<td>Is there a point-person at the child’s school for them to go for support?</td>
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<td>Consistency</td>
<td>Is there a consistent point person that supports the child’s education even if they change schools?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outcomes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic Performance</td>
<td>Did the program have a positive impact on academic performance?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High school Completion</td>
<td>Did the program have a positive impact on high school completion rates?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School Attendance</td>
<td>Did the program have a positive impact on school attendance?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4.3. Expert Interviews

4.3.1. One-on-One Interviews

Expert interviews are utilized to complement the findings of the literature review, jurisdictional scan, and case study analysis. These interviews are also used to contribute to the development of policy options, considerations for analysis, and assessing the feasibility of policy options in the BC context. Interviews were conducted with ten individuals who have expertise in the fields of child welfare and education. The following experts were interviewed:
• Lorena Bishop, Executive Director, Federation of BC Youth in Care Networks.

• Alan Markwart, Deputy Representative, Operations, BC Representative for Children and Youth.

• Christopher Rambaran, Former Social Worker.

• Dr. Deborah Rutman, Adjunct Associate Professor, School of Social Work, University of Victoria.

• Participant 1, Consultant, Delegated Aboriginal Agency (DAA) in BC.

• Participant 2, Classroom Teacher, Inner-City School.

• Participant 3, Student Support Teacher and Children in Care Representative, Inner-City School.

• Participant 4, Vice Principal and Former Counsellor, Inner-City Secondary School, Surrey School District #36.

• Participant 5, Executive Director, BC Representative for Children and Youth.

• Participant 6, Education Program Coordinator, Non-Profit Organization supporting youth in care.

4.3.2. Group Interview

A group interview was conducted with the TRRUST (Transitions in Resources, Relationships and Understanding Support Together) Collective Impact Education Cluster. The TRRUST Collective Impact Education Cluster consists of professionals from various non-profit organizations, educational institutions, and the province, some of whom have lived experience in the child welfare system in BC and were able to share their first-hand experiences. This involved a group discussion with the seven members of the Education Cluster in attendance about the systemic barriers that impact the education of youth in care in BC and a policy discussion about addressing these barriers.

4.4. Limitations

The most evident limitation of this study is the inability to include any participants below the age of 19. Children and youth in care are the target population of this study and the group of individuals who will be most affected by any policy changes in this area
and therefore it is critical to understand their first-hand experiences when creating policy. To address this limitation, this study includes a number of participants with lived experience in care as well as a number of frontline service providers who witness the experiences of youth in care second-hand on a daily basis. An additional limitation is that children and youth in care are one of British Columbia’s most vulnerable populations and therefore MCFD maintains strict confidentiality of data about these individuals. Although some data is available through MCFD’s annual Performance Management reports, there is minimal publicly available data that offers greater detail about children and youth in care. Finally, due to time constraints and the difficulty of recruiting interview participants, all interview participants are located in the Lower Mainland and Greater Victoria and therefore the unique challenges faced by youth in care in rural areas may be underrepresented.
Chapter 5.

Jurisdictional Scan

A patchwork of promising practices have emerged in BC in recent years that have the goal of better supporting youth in care throughout their education. School districts in Chilliwack, Sooke, Kamloops, Langley, and Prince George have all implemented programs that provide additional supports for youth in care. MCFD has also implemented the province-wide Complex Care and Intervention program to support youth in care in BC who have experienced complex trauma.


The Chilliwack School District has adopted a protocol that was developed in collaboration with MCFD to outline how information is shared between both institutions. MCFD first identifies who the children in care are in the district and then a “Children in Care Monitoring Plan” is initiated. The Children in Care Monitoring Plan is two-fold with the first section providing relevant information concerning the child with the parent or guardian’s consent and the second section allows the school district to track attendance and outline expectations, goals, supports that are needed and received, and participation in extracurricular activities. These plans are submitted to MCFD at the end of the school year and MCFD monitors the content of the plan and the child’s progress to identify gaps that must be addressed in the following academic year (RCY, 2017). This joint monitoring system is in the process of being fully integrated and therefore there is no data available on the impact of this program.

5.2. Sooke School District 62: School-Based Social Work Program

The Sooke School District has three school-based MCFD social workers working throughout the district to support children and youth in care. These social workers receive a weekly list from MCFD of new children in care who are registered in the district’s schools and meet with these children when needed to evaluate their individual
needs and progress. School-based social workers can identify which services are available to best support each child and provide youth and families access to these services. They work to build relationships and offer support for youth in care through collaborating with various school district staff such as the Aboriginal Education department, mental health services, and community liaison workers. Individual schools in Sooke are additionally working to develop a point of contact or “school champion” to conduct daily check-ins with youth who are in care. Although there has been no formal evaluation of this program, the district is working with researchers to develop a tracking system and a method to measure the impact of this program (RCY, 2017).

5.3. Kamloops Thompson School District 73: Monitoring System for Youth in Care

Kamloops Thompson School District implemented a monitoring system for children in care in 2009 that involves contacting MCFD and the local DAA to ensure that the school district is aware of all children and youth in care who attend their schools. Schools then document whether there is an Individualized Education Plan or care plan in place for the child as well as attendance, report cards, strengths and needs of children, and sending reports to the school district bi-annually. The identified case manager at the school then follows up on attendance, grades, or other challenges that the student faces through a school-based team process that involves collaboration between the student’s school and caregiving team (RCY, 2017). Similar to other programs in this jurisdictional scan, there has been no formal evaluation of this program.

5.4. Langley School District 35: Children in Circles of Caring

The Children in Circles of Caring program was introduced by the Langley School District in 2016 as a result of an Aboriginal Education Enhancement Agreement and following a recommendation made by the RCY. The program places the student at the centre of this circle that is formed by school district staff and community partners such as Fraser Valley Child and Family Services. In addition to school staff and staff members from the local DAA, all individuals who work directly or indirectly with the student are in the circle, this may include mental health supports, the child development centre, the Fraser Valley Aboriginal Society, and representatives from three local First Nations. In
the Children in Circles of Caring program, Indigenous children and youth in care who have a Temporary or Continuing Custody Order are identified and the school district’s Indigenous support worker works as a liaison between all individuals that work with the child to ensure that Indigenous children in care receive the supports and services necessary for the student to be academically successful (RCY, 2017). Due to the recent introduction of this program, there have been no comprehensive evaluations conducted that measure the program’s success.

5.5. Prince George School District 57: Aboriginal Education Department

The Prince George School District has an Aboriginal Education Department that has experienced great success in improving the educational outcomes of Indigenous youth. In Prince George, 30% of the student population identifies as having Indigenous ancestry, and approximately 45% of these students are involved with MCFD or a local DAA (RCY, 2017, pp. 34). The Aboriginal Education Department has a Social Work Program that employs Aboriginal Social Workers to help students, families, administration and teachers in a number of ways to support Indigenous students throughout their education. Aboriginal Social Workers also provide individualized and culturally safe support to students, realistic and healthy coping strategies and goals, support for mental health and addictions, access to community services, and increased school connectedness. One of the key roles of these social workers is also to build relationships with students and families to overcome some of the external barriers that may prevent success at school. Students can be referred to this program to receive support by school-based teams, by parents or guardians, or by student self-referral (Prince George School District No. 57, 2014). The graduation rate of Indigenous youth in the Prince George School District has increased from 31% in 2004 to 57.3% in 2017 (British Columbia, 2017).

5.6. MCFD Complex Care and Intervention Program

The Complex Care and Intervention (CCI) Program is a trauma-focused intervention planning tool for youth in care who have experienced significant trauma or maltreatment in BC. MCFD has contracted with Complex Trauma Resources to make
this program available to youth in care in BC. The CCI Program trains professionals who provide support to the adults involved in youth in care’s lives to assess their individual needs. Once the child’s needs are determined, those who work with the child can develop trauma-informed ideas of appropriate interventions that can be used in the child’s home, school, and community. CCI professionals work with social workers, foster parents, school staff, community service providers, day care workers, counsellors and mental health workers, extended family members, as well as birth parents or adopted parents. A child’s CCI team meets monthly for 12 to 18 months to discuss interventions and progress and to make decisions in collaboration with each other. CCI professionals continue to coach the care team until they have built enough internal capacity to continue their work without this support. The CCI Program is currently being adapted to include Indigenous cultural perspectives and culturally relevant tools for Indigenous children in the program (RCY, 2017). Outcome data collected by Complex Trauma Resources finds that the CCI program has contributed to improvements in a wide range of outcomes for participants, one of these outcomes being improved success in school (Complex Trauma Resources, 2018).
Chapter 6.

Case Study Analysis

6.1. England Virtual School Head for Looked After Children

Program Overview

The Virtual School Head for Looked After Children (VSH) program is a two-year pilot that was undertaken in 11 local authorities around England from 2007 to 2009. This program is funded by the Department for Children, Schools and Families with each local authority receiving an average of £70,000 per year for participation, depending on the number of children in the program (Berridge et al., 2009). The VSH approach is to work with all children in care as if they were in one single school. The virtual school headteacher, who is often supported by a larger team, works as a liaison with the schools, tracks student progress, and supports students to achieve as well in school as possible. The VSH is therefore not a school where children are taught, but a model in which authorities provide services and supports to hold those who provide general services accountable. VSH follow children in any educational setting including early years settings, public schools, independent schools, and a variety of alternative education programs. VSH are also responsible for managing the Pupil Premium Grant, an additional source of public funding for schools in England to improve educational outcomes for disadvantaged children and deciding how this funding should be allocated to schools and education providers (UK Department for Education, 2015). England has since made a commitment in 2015 to expand the VSH initiative to all local authorities and this is now legally mandated under the Children and Social Work Act 2017 (Rivers, 2018).

Program Outcomes

Two key evaluations have been conducted to assess the impacts of the VSH pilot. An initial evaluation was conducted by Bristol University (Berridge et al., 2009) and a later evaluation was conducted by the Office for Standards in Education, Children’s Services and Skills (Ofsted, 2012). Berridge et al. (2009) finds that before the VSH program began in 2007, the percentage of youth in care finishing school with at least one qualification ranged from 49% to 76% in the various authorities and that this percentage
increased in 2008 after the initiation of the VSH program to a range between 61% and 82% (pp.20). The proportion of youth in care finishing school with at least five qualifications (the amount typically required to pursue post-secondary education) also increased in 2008 (Berridge et al., 2009, pp. 24). This shows that there was a noticeable improvement in educational outcomes for youth in care in the local authorities where VSH was piloted in the first year of the program, although it is not clear if these improvements can be attributed to the VSH pilot. This evaluation finds that the VSH pilot had positive outcomes in bridging the gap between schools and social workers, early identification of academic difficulties and attendance patterns, smoothening the transition out of care, effective Personal Education Plans, and an improved sense of belonging (Berridge et al., 2009).

The Ofsted evaluation (2012) finds that most outcomes improved, although performance was variable from year to year and there was little evidence of the nationwide educational gap between youth and care and their peers narrowing. This study finds that financial constraints had resulted in several local authorities decreasing the number of VSH staff as well as significant variability in the quality of data management systems and Personal Education Plans. On the other hand, program evaluators found evidence of very effective support involving the VSH that not only made a difference in educational progress, but also enhanced the stability of their placements and had a positive impact on emotional well-being (Ofsted, 2012). The VSH pilot also showed evidence of increased levels of attendance and a decrease in suspensions and expulsions (Ofsted, 2012).

6.2. FosterEd: Santa Cruz County

Program Overview

The Foster Youth Education Initiative, a project by the National Centre for Youth and Law in the United States, developed the FosterEd Initiative in Indiana in 2009, which was later developed as a two-year pilot in Santa Cruz County, California in February 2013 (NCYL, 2015). FosterEd is a collaborative program where social workers, foster youth educational liaisons, the Santa Cruz County Office of Education Foster Youth Services staff, the Juvenile Court, as well as other community non-profits and school districts work together to support youth in care in their education. In this program, each
child has an “educational champion” who is trained by education liaisons, social workers, and other county staff who identify the student’s needs and how to address them. Whenever possible, the educational champion is someone who has a pre-existing relationship with the child and continues to serve in this role for the entirety of the child’s time in care regardless of school changes. Once the educational champion is identified, educational liaisons assess the student’s school records and gather input from any individuals involved in the child’s education. Individualized intervention plans for students are then established based on these assessments and educational liaisons determine the training and support needs for educational champions. Finally, liaisons continue to implement, monitor, and update these intervention plans with input from other organizations that work with the child for as long as the child remains in care (NCYL, 2018). The FosterEd pilot in Santa Cruz County was chosen for this analysis because program evaluation data is publicly available for the duration of the two-year pilot. FosterEd has since been expanded across various counties in California, Arizona, and New Mexico, and has been adopted as a statewide program in Indiana (NCYL, 2018).

Program Outcomes

A program external evaluation measures progress on a series of 12 infrastructure indicators that reflect systems, staff, and products that must exist for successful implementation of FosterEd. The evaluation also assesses progress on various practice indicators for adults and outcomes indicators for students. The evaluation finds that over the course of the two-year pilot, median GPA increased from 2.04 to 2.80 (NCYL, 2015, pp. iv). The sample size of youth who remained consistently in the FosterEd program for the entirety of the two-year pilot is small (N=28) due to students moving counties or being taken out of foster care, and because GPA is only calculated at the end of the term, these results should be interpreted with caution. The study also finds an increase in school attendance, with approximately 75% of participants who entered FosterEd with an attendance rate below 95% (N=75) experiencing improved attendance. For those whose attendance rates increased, they increased by a median of 9.3 percentage points after ten months in the program (NCYL, 2015, pp. 34).

Adult team members were asked about their perceptions of the impacts of FosterEd on youth participants in eight different areas. These areas are attitude towards school, attendance, behaviour, grades, relationships with peers, relationships with
teachers, confidence, and involvement in extra-curricular activities. At least 75% of respondents perceived at least “a little” positive impact on each of these areas with the exception of extra-curricular activities (NCYL, 2015, pp. 32).

The most common positive feedback about the program is that it facilitates collaboration, provides motivation for youth and their support networks to stay on track, and provides an opportunity to access additional resources as well as a support network for navigating education. The most common negative feedback is that there is not enough interaction between all of the adult supports and that the program requires more buy-in from students (NCYL, 2015).

6.3. The Skolfam Model

Program Overview

The Skolfam model originated in the municipality of Helsingborg, Sweden as a pilot project from 2005 to 2008 to promote educational success and mental well-being for children in care. This is an early intervention program that is delivered to students in care who are attending preschool or any of the first six grades of primary school. In order to participate in the program, students must be in long-term care for a minimum of two years to complete the entire process outlined in the model (Durbeej & Hellner, 2017).

The Skolfam model is based on three basic values. The first is inclusion rather than exclusion, which highlights that all children in foster care in a municipality with the Skolfam model must be serviced by the program regardless of their academic, social, or cognitive needs. The second basic value is interprofessional collaboration, which highlights the shared responsibility of schools and social service agencies to collaborate with professionals in all roles as well as the foster parents, and to place the child at the centre of decision-making about their education. The third basic value of Skolfam is measurability, which includes standardized tests to assess strengths and needs of children and to adapt teaching methods to these needs (Skolfam, 2018).

In practice, this program begins with guardian consent for participation in the program and to conduct standardized tests and share information between involved actors. The second step is to collect information about the child’s strengths and needs through an assessment by a school psychologist and a special education teacher, which
is conducted in a place where the child determines they feel comfortable. The third step involves the Skolfam team presenting assessment data to foster parents and school staff and developing the “Skolfam plan”. The Skolfam plan addresses competencies, skills, and needs, and contains stepwise objectives that can be evaluated. The fourth step is the intervention, which includes monitoring the child’s progress and hosting follow-up meetings with the team 3-4 times per year. The fifth and final step is to repeat the same initial assessments 24-36 months later to determine the student’s progress and if there is a need to revise the intervention (Skolfam, 2018).

Since the introduction of the Skolfam pilot project, the program has been implemented in more than 28 Swedish municipalities (Skolfam, 2018) and similar models have been adopted in Finland, Norway, and Denmark (Pirttimaa & Välivaara, 2017).

**Program Outcomes**

Annual surveys are given to all Skolfam teams in Sweden in order to measure outcomes of the program. The September 2017 survey finds that 812 students had begun the Skolfam program and that 465 had participated in the final assessment. 145 of these students had completed the compulsory primary school and 78% achieved eligibility to apply for upper secondary school. Upper secondary school is optional schooling from age 16 through 18 that is intended to prepare students for employment or post-secondary education. In 2015, only 55% of Swedish children in foster care were eligible to apply for upper secondary and hence this survey demonstrates progress in this area (Skolfam, 2018, pp.8).

The annual Skolfam survey does not utilize a comparison group for evaluation, although the Swedish National Board of Health and Welfare commissioned an independent review of the program in order to determine causality of the program on positive outcomes. Durbeej & Hellner (2017) finds that the group of Skolfam participating children experienced small improvements in perceptual reasoning, general cognitive ability and reading skills relative to the comparison group, and that the Skolfam model may serve as a protective factor against adverse outcomes for children in care.
6.4. Summary and Analysis

All three of these programs are found to have a positive impact on educational outcomes for youth in care in their respective jurisdictions, although there is some variance in how each program achieves these outcomes. Table 8.1 includes a summary of the program characteristics of all three case studies. A checkmark (✓) indicates that the criteria is met and table cells that are left blank indicate that the relevant data for this criterion is not available.

6.4.1. Characteristics of Successful Programs

Facilitating cross-agency communication and collaboration through meetings and information-sharing agreements are important features of all three programs that are analyzed. Although the form of meetings and information-sharing varies across the different cases, all three programs have demonstrated an improvement in this communication that likely contributes to improved outcomes. The Skolfam model has a more formal model of collaboration that facilitates more frequent meetings and formal consent processes for information-sharing, whereas VSH and FosterEd have less rigid meeting and information-sharing requirements. However, the Skolfam model only includes these requirements for the duration of the child’s time in the program and not to all children in care at all times throughout their stay in care.

Individualized education planning is another component that is included in all three case studies in different forms that is likely to contribute to positive outcomes in these programs. All three programs require Individualized Education Plans (IEPs) to be developed based on the strengths and needs of students in order for educators to meet the individual needs of each child. Along with IEPs, all programs require the student’s progress to be monitored in order to determine program effectiveness as well as to update IEPs to ensure that they meet students’ current needs. In addition to the IEP that is created by the program’s support team, the Skolfam model also provides a number of different interventions such as trauma therapy, other forms of counselling, and social emotional learning programs. Referrals to outside programs and services that may benefit the student also occur under the Skolfam model when the program is unable to provide these services (Durbeej & Hellner, 2017).
All three programs vary in the way that they address consistency of relationships for youth in care. FosterEd incorporates an “educational champion” to ensure that youth have a stable and consistent relationship with an adult who supports their education and is often an individual who already has a personal relationship with that student. The VSH program similarly provides an adult that has a consistent relationship with the student throughout their education regardless of school changes, however this adult is an education professional and not an individual with a personal relationship with the child. The Skolfam model on the other hand, does not emphasize consistency in relationships due to the limited time frame of the program and does not have one consistent person to support the child throughout their education. None of the programs explicitly mention the presence of a point person at the child’s school who the student can go to for support, which is an important feature of some BC programs identified in the jurisdictional scan.

Based on the analysis of these three programs, it is clear that programs that include a combination of cross-agency collaboration, individualized education planning, and relationship consistency contribute to improved educational outcomes for youth in care in their respective jurisdictions. In terms of applicability to the BC context, one of the most important considerations is that none of these programs specifically address the needs of an Indigenous population, which is a feature that would need adaptation to meet the needs of Indigenous children in care in BC. Due to the difference in how education and child welfare services are administered in Sweden and England, both VSH and the Skolfam model would need to be adapted to be administered in BC. Sweden and England also follow quite different education models from Canada, whereas the United States has a more similar model of K-12 education, which may make FosterEd more easily applicable in the BC context. In addition to similar education systems, the responsibility for education and child welfare services in the United States falls primarily on state governments, which is a similar structure to provincial jurisdiction in Canada.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristic</th>
<th>Measure</th>
<th>England Virtual School Head for Looked After Children</th>
<th>FosterEd: Santa Cruz County</th>
<th>Skolfam Model</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Program Characteristics</td>
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Chapter 7.

Interview Findings

7.1. Relationships

The first of two key themes that was emphasized in every expert interview is the importance of fostering meaningful, positive, and lasting relationships between youth in care and their peers as well as the adults who support them. Several interview participants identified that it generally takes time for youth in care to build trust and to form relationships and that it is important for those working with them to spend this time building relationships.

Participant 4 discussed that in many years of counselling experience in inner-city schools, students with relational attachments are consistently those who succeed. Several participants discussed the importance of having a point person at school for students in care to go to for support. Dr. Rutman also identified the need to embed relational practices within the education system in order to foster consistent relationships between youth in care and school staff.

Christopher Rambaran discussed the impact that poor relationships with school can have on a young person’s education. Lorena Bishop agreed, explaining that youth can sometimes be labeled as non-compliant or lazy, but that these behaviours are generally a direct result of their life experiences.

7.2. Stability

The second key theme that was emphasized in every expert interview is the importance of stability and continuity in all possible aspects of youth’s lives. Every interview participant discussed that children in care often experience several moves and that minimizing this instability is critical to improving educational outcomes. The majority of participants discussed the need for children in care to have the opportunity to stay in their schools if this is their preference when they are moved to a foster home in a different neighbourhood or school district. Participants 1 and 3 discussed attendance gaps that can occur when students are required to change schools, especially when this
occurs during the school year, and the impact this disruption can have on education. As a member of the TRRUST Education Cluster emphasized: “if you get moved 3 times in a year and you’ve been uprooted from school three times, guaranteed that year is a write off”.

To highlight the magnitude of instability that can occur, a member of the TRRUST Collective Impact Education Cluster spoke of children on their caseload who have been in up to 35 different foster placements throughout their childhood, which limits their chances of experiencing success.

### 7.3. Mental Health

A frequently recurring theme in expert interviews is the importance of ensuring that youth in care have access to the mental health supports that they need. Several participants highlighted the importance of addressing needs of children who have experienced trauma. Members of the TRRUST Education Cluster emphasized the need for service providers to provide trauma-informed practice and to receive better training on supporting youth who have experienced trauma.

Alan Markwart highlighted the need for mental health supports to be available to students, including supports within schools. Participant 5 echoed that school-based mental health services are a promising practice to ensure accessibility and identified the need for a menu of mental health supports to be available.

Participants 2, 3, and 4 also discussed the large caseloads that school counsellors have in BC schools. Participant 2 highlighted the severity of the situation by mentioning that one of her grade one students whose parent was recently incarcerated has only been able to see the school counsellor twice in three months. Dr. Rutman also discussed the possibility of implementing mental health nurses in schools in order to ensure mental health needs are met.

### 7.4. Culture and Community

Another theme that was commonly discussed was the disconnect from Indigenous culture that Indigenous children often experience as a result of a shortage of
Indigenous foster homes. Members of the TRRUST Education Cluster discussed the need to incorporate Indigenous perspectives as a mandatory component of school curriculum for all students and that incorporating more cultural activities and even territorial acknowledgements can play a big role in making Indigenous children feel safe at school. One member, a former social worker, discussed the importance of collaboration between service providers for all youth and how this collaboration can play an important role in connecting Indigenous students to culture:

When teachers and I worked together, amazing things happened. A youth, he wasn’t going to school, but he was working on carving canoes with his dad and going hunting, and the school made that creditable, so they gave him school credits to do that stuff. So, when you talk about Indigenous culture integrated into school, valuing it from a school perspective, that’s the definition of decolonization of education. That wouldn’t have happened if we didn’t get together.

Participant 1 and several others identified a need for more alternative programs such as Cedar Walk, an alternative education program for Indigenous youth in Vancouver (UNYA, 2018).

7.5. Flexibility and Individualized Support

Nearly every participant discussed the importance of flexible policies that allow for individualized support to be provided to youth in care and that one-size-fits-all strategies only meet the needs of a select few. Tutoring supports, individualized support focused on strengths, and including youth in decisions are some of the methods that interview participants suggested to ensure flexibility and individualized support. Alan Markwart emphasized the need to view youth in care not as one entity, but to recognize that these children have a wide variety of different experiences. Christopher Rambaran explained the need for teachers to recognize individual needs of youth in care:

They need to know that kids are carrying a lot more in their backpacks than just homework, they’re carrying neglect, they’re carrying trauma, they’re carrying their parents’ mental health issues, they’re carrying maybe substance abuse issues at home, teachers can’t lose sight of that and when students are struggling academically then the question shouldn’t be why are they struggling, it’s how can we support them to do better.
7.6. Lack of Resources

A final common theme that was discussed in all expert interviews was the lack of resources across the board in education and child welfare as well as many of the social services. Alan Markwart of the RCY emphasized that in order for a policy to meet the needs of youth in care, sufficient resources are needed to back up the policy. Participant 3 also highlighted the need for resources by referencing long waitlists at Child and Youth Mental Health: “it’s a swamped system, which is then failing those kids because they don’t need service in 12 to 18 months, they need it now”.

In child welfare, participants discussed overworked social workers with very large caseloads and quick turnover rates, a lack of foster homes, particularly Indigenous homes and in Vancouver, a lack of funding for extended family placements, and a lack of supports as youth turn 19. Participants discussed that due to stretched resources, social workers sometimes have to prioritize other immediate needs and aren’t able to treat education as a priority.

In education, participants discussed large class sizes, a lack of support for students with special needs, a lack of alternative education programs that allow youth to remain in their schools, a lack of tutoring support, and a lack of life skills training in high schools. Participants also mentioned that school staff don’t receive adequate professional development and that better training teachers to understand trauma and mental health would make a big difference in how children in care experience education. Finally, many interviewees spoke about the benefits of alternative schools and how these programs are inconsistent outside of the larger districts in BC. Many also mentioned the stigma that can be associated with alternative schools and the need for more alternative programs within schools.
Chapter 8.

Policy Evaluation Framework: Objectives, Criteria, and Measures

This chapter details the analytical framework that is used to evaluate the five policy options that have been identified through the research as promising practices. Seven criteria have been identified to assess the extent to which the policies are expected to achieve the following societal objectives that have been identified throughout the research:

- Improve educational outcomes of youth in care in BC through increased high school completion rates, academic performance, and school attendance.
- Foster healthy child development through strengthening social-emotional well-being, relationships and consistency, individualized support, collaboration, and youth engagement.
- Ensure that all children and youth in care in BC receive appropriate supports that foster meaningful connections to culture and community.

In addition to this, three criteria have been selected to evaluate the expected impact of the policy options on governmental management objectives. These objectives are cost, administrative complexity, and stakeholder acceptance.

This evaluation framework conducts analysis that systematically evaluates each policy option against the same ten criteria in order to produce objective recommendations. Each option is rated as high, medium, or low against each criterion, with high always representing the most desirable outcome and low representing the least desirable outcome. In cases where a lower value is the most desirable, such as cost and administrative complexity, the most desirable option is still rated as “high”. The summary of the analysis of each option is colour-coded with green, yellow, and red, with green always representing the most desirable option. Table 8.2 provides a summary of the policy evaluation framework including how each criterion is measured.
8.1. School Completion and Academic Performance

The first criterion that measures the overall effectiveness of proposed policy options is the increase in school completion and academic performance that is expected to result from the proposed option. Options are assessed by the extent to which the policy is expected to increase school completion rates and academic performance for youth in care. This evaluation is done qualitatively using findings from the literature, jurisdictional scan, case study analysis, and expert interviews due to data availability constraints and difficulty of measuring a policy’s impact on these factors.

8.2. School Attendance and Connectedness

The second criterion that measures the overall effectiveness is the increase in school attendance and connectedness. Findings from the literature and expert interviews show that consistent school attendance and positive relationships with school have a positive impact on educational outcomes. This criterion is also measured qualitatively due to limited access to relevant data and difficulty of measuring these impacts.

8.3. Social-Emotional Well-Being

The first criterion that considers the objective of child development is social-emotional well-being. One of the key findings from expert interviews is the emphasis on improving overall social-emotional well-being for youth in care through improving consistency, meeting their mental health needs, and enabling them to build lasting, positive relationships with peers and caring adults. The research thus far finds that improving social-emotional well-being can have a significant positive impact on educational outcomes.

8.4. Individualized Support

The second criterion that considers child development is providing individualized support and flexibility to meet the individual needs of all youth in care. Findings from the literature, jurisdictional scan, case study analysis, and expert interviews emphasize the importance of taking an individualized approach in educating youth in care in order to meet their personal and educational needs.
8.5. **Collaboration and Information-Sharing**

The third criterion that considers child development is collaboration and information-sharing by all adults who work with youth in care. Interview participants emphasized the importance of collaboration between all service providers as well as foster parents, biological parents when appropriate, and youth themselves. Participants expressed a need for these individuals to collaborate and share information about youth when doing this can provide better support to youth.

8.6. **Youth Voice**

The fourth and final criterion that considers child development is the ability of the policy to give youth a voice in decisions that are made about them. Interview participants highlight that youth in care may feel that they do not have agency or control over the decisions that are made about them such as being placed in foster care or being moved from one home to another. These research findings show that when youth are included in decisions that are made about their education, they are more likely to become engaged in education and to feel a greater sense of agency.

8.7. **Cultural Relevance**

The criterion that considers equity and fairness is cultural relevance. Research findings emphasize the importance of connection to culture for Indigenous youth in care for a number of reasons. Due to a shortage of Indigenous foster homes and an overrepresentation of Indigenous children in care, many Indigenous children are placed in non-Indigenous homes. Indigenous children who are placed in non-Indigenous homes may have limited connections to their cultures and communities, which can have a negative impact on educational outcomes. Policies that foster connections to Indigenous culture not only for Indigenous youth, but for all youth in schools, can give Indigenous students a greater sense of belonging and contribute to more positive educational outcomes.
8.8. Cost to Government

The first criterion that considers governmental management objectives is cost to government. As a result of budget constraints, governments are often less likely to be willing to implement policies that have high costs. This criterion estimates the cost of each policy option to the provincial government, with options rated as “high” having the lowest cost as this is the most desirable option. All costs are approximate based on existing publicly available data. When assessing cost to government, it is important to consider that policies that contribute to improving educational outcomes are likely to generate long run savings on current government spending associated with adverse outcomes.

8.9. Administrative Complexity

The second criterion that considers governmental management objectives assesses the expected level of administrative complexity associated with the policy. Due to the complex nature of this policy problem, policies to address it often require collaboration between government departments, services providers, youth and families, and other stakeholders. A key finding of this research is that collaboration between all adults who support youth in care is critical to improving educational outcomes. Although this is beneficial to youth, it can be more time consuming, complex, and difficult to achieve at the policy level. This criterion therefore measures the degree of collaboration required between all of these groups, with options rated as “high” having the lowest levels of administrative complexity as this is the most desirable option.

8.10. Stakeholder Acceptance

The final criterion that considers governmental management objectives assesses the likelihood of opposition to the policy by key stakeholders. Three stakeholder groups are considered under this criterion. Youth and families are considered first and foremost followed by school districts and child welfare agencies. This is measured by the likelihood of opposition to the policy option by these three groups, with options rated as “high” being unlikely to face opposition by these groups and options rated as “low” being likely to face opposition by these groups.
Table 8.1. Evaluation Framework

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Objective</th>
<th>Criterion</th>
<th>Measure</th>
<th>Measurement Scale</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Effectiveness</td>
<td>School Completion &amp; Academic Performance</td>
<td>Extent to which the policy is expected to contribute to an increase in high school completion and academic performance of youth in care</td>
<td>High: Expected to have a significant positive impact on school completion rates and academic performance for youth in care</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Medium: Expected to have a moderate positive impact on school completion rates and academic performance for youth in care</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Low: Expected to have little to no positive impact on school completion rates and academic performance for youth in care</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>School Attendance &amp; Connectedness</td>
<td>Extent to which the policy is expected to contribute to increased school attendance and connectedness for youth in care</td>
<td>High: Expected to have a significant positive impact on school attendance and school connectedness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Medium: Expected to have a moderate positive impact on school attendance and school connectedness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Low: Expected to have little to no impact on school attendance and school connectedness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child Development</td>
<td>Social-Emotional Well-Being</td>
<td>Extent to which the policy is expected to contribute to an increase in social-emotional well-being for youth in care including building lasting, positive relationships with peers and caring adults</td>
<td>High: Expected to have a significant positive impact on social-emotional well-being</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Medium: Expected to have a moderate positive impact on social-emotional well-being</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Low: Expected to have little to no positive impact on social-emotional well-being</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Individualized Support</td>
<td></td>
<td>Extent to which the policy provides flexibility and individualized support to youth based on their personal and educational needs</td>
<td>High: Provides a significant amount of individualized support</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Medium: Provides a moderate amount of individualized support</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Low: Provides little to no individualized support</td>
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<tr>
<td>Collaboration &amp; Information-Sharing</td>
<td></td>
<td>Extent to which the policy enables all adults who support youth in care to collaborate and share information about the youth</td>
<td>High: Enables significant collaboration between all adults who support youth in care</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Medium: Enables a moderate amount of collaboration between all adults who support youth in care</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Low: Enables little to no collaboration between all adults who support youth in care</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Objective</td>
<td>Criterion</td>
<td>Measure</td>
<td>Measurement Scale</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------------------</td>
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<td>-------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Youth Voice</td>
<td>Extent to which the policy involves youth in decisions made about their education and services provided to them</td>
<td>High: Expected to give youth a significant voice in decisions made about their education and services provided to them</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Medium: Expected to give youth some voice in decisions made about their education and services provided to them</td>
<td>Low: Expected to give youth little to no voice in decisions made about their education and services provided to them</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Equity/Fairness</td>
<td>Cultural Relevance</td>
<td>Extent to which the policy is expected to foster improved connections to Indigenous culture</td>
<td>High: Expected to foster strong connections to Indigenous culture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Medium: Expected to foster some connection to Indigenous culture</td>
<td>Low: Expected to foster little to no connection to Indigenous culture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cost</td>
<td>Cost to Government</td>
<td>Approximate cost to government of implementing the policy</td>
<td>High: Annual cost of &lt;$10M CAD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Medium: Annual cost between $10M and $25M CAD</td>
<td>Low: Annual cost of &gt;$25M CAD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Administrative Complexity</td>
<td>Administrative Complexity</td>
<td>Degree of collaboration required between government departments, service providers, youth and families, and other stakeholders</td>
<td>High: Little to no collaboration between government departments, service providers, youth and families, and other stakeholders is required</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Medium: Some collaboration between government departments, service providers, youth and families, and other stakeholders is required</td>
<td>Low: Significant collaboration between government departments, service providers, youth and families, and other stakeholders is required</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stakeholder Acceptance</td>
<td>Support from youth and families, school districts, and child welfare agencies</td>
<td>Likelihood that youth in care and their families, school districts, and/or child welfare agencies will oppose the policy</td>
<td>High: Unlikely that youth in care and their families, school districts, and/or child welfare agencies will oppose the policy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Medium: Youth in care and their families, school districts, and/or child welfare agencies may oppose the policy</td>
<td>Low: Youth in care and their families, school districts, and/or child welfare agencies likely to oppose the policy</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Chapter 9.

Policy Options

This chapter outlines five policy options that have been selected for analysis based on findings from the jurisdictional scan, case study analysis, and expert interviews. The five policy options for analysis are all intended to be implemented at the provincial level. The five options analyzed are not mutually exclusive and can be adopted individually or as any combination of the five. All of the options considered in this analysis have significant flexibility in how they can be implemented in order to be broadly applicable to all youth in care. Although these options do not explicitly target subgroups of youth in care, it is recognized that they may need to be tailored to address the unique needs of certain subgroups, particularly Indigenous children. The first four options can be modified to specifically target Indigenous children and provide enhanced culturally relevant supports in cases where this is appropriate.

9.1. Option 1: New Ministry of Education Designation for Youth in Care

This option proposes implementing an additional designation to the existing Ministry of Education funding model and designation system. This system identifies specialized needs of students and allocates additional funding to schools based on the number of students with these designations. This designation would fall under the “Low Incidence” category of Ministry designations and would be an additional designation under a new Level 4 funding stream. The Level 4 funding stream would be valued at 50 percent of Level 3 and would therefore provide $4,805 per student (British Columbia, 2017). Funding would be allocated at this level because many youth in care already receive designation funding and this would provide an additional layer of funding for these children and a new pot of funding for students without a designation. These funds may be used to provide additional support to these students in the form of additional support worker hours, additional counselling hours, teacher coverage, lunch hour and after school programs, and any other supports that may benefit students in this category. In addition to providing funding, this designation mandates that all students in care have
an IEP that identifies their individual strengths and needs. As part of the IEP, all service providers and adults who support the child as well as the child themselves are required to participate in regular meetings to discuss the student’s progress and update the IEP. This IEP may look different than existing IEPs that are developed for students with special needs and may take a similar form to the Alberta Success in School Plan for Children in Care\(^1\). Finally, this option incorporates all three characteristics of successful programs identified in the case study analysis, which are cross-agency collaboration, IEPs, and relationships.

### 9.2. Option 2: MCFD School-Based Social Workers

This option proposes introducing a school-based social work program similar to the current program in Sooke School District #62 across all districts in BC. This option involves MCFD hiring social workers to be placed in all school districts based on the number of secondary schools in that district. Social workers would be assigned responsibility to one high school and its feeder elementary schools. The role of these social workers would be to keep track of all children who are in care in these schools and to meet with these children when needed to evaluate their individual needs and progress. School-based social workers can identify which services are available to best support each child and provide youth and families access to these services. They can also work to build relationships and offer support to all youth through collaborating with various school district staff, mental health services, and community liaison workers.

The purpose of this option is to create a liaison between school districts and MCFD and to act as a resource not only for youth, but also to school district staff who are required to collaborate with MCFD and outside agencies. This option therefore incorporates two of the three characteristics of successful programs identified in the case study analysis, which are cross-agency collaboration and relationships. This would also be a resource for all children and youth in these schools and not only to those in care in order to account for the fact that many children who are not in care at a certain point in time may still benefit from these supports.

\(^1\) Accessed: https://education.alberta.ca/media/3739962/success_in_school_plan_template.pdf
9.3. Option 3: Professional Development for School District Staff

This option proposes mandatory professional development for school district staff that provides training about a number of issues related to educating children in care. This would give educators a basic understanding of how the child welfare system works in BC, give an overview of how the Ministry of Education and MCFD Cross-Ministry Guidelines should work in practice, and provide additional training about trauma-informed practice, social-emotional learning, and cultural competence. This professional development would give teachers and other school staff the tools to better understand the circumstances of students in the child welfare system and to build effective positive relationships with these children, which has been identified as a key characteristic of successful programs.

Interview participants in the education field have expressed that five out of six professional development days in BC allow teachers to choose which workshops they attend on these days or to take self-directed days. This option would involve implementing a minimum of half a day of mandatory professional development for teachers and school staff in schools with several children in care.

9.4. Option 4: Increase Alternative Education Programs in Schools

This option proposes increasing the amount of alternative education programs that are available within schools in BC. Interview participants highlighted that the availability of alternative programs is inconsistent outside of large districts in BC such as Vancouver and Surrey and that there is a particular need for more programs within standard secondary schools to minimize the need to move youth in care out of the school where they already have a community and a support team. Participants also emphasized the need for more Indigenous perspectives to be incorporated into schools and for more alternative programs for Indigenous youth such as the Cedar Walk program in Vancouver. Several participants discussed how alternative programs can meet the needs of youth whose needs are not being met in traditional programs through more flexible curriculum, individualized education, more robust support, and self-paced learning.
This option would involve the Ministry of Education providing funding to all school districts with a need for more alternative education in order to incorporate these programs into standard schools. This funding would also require that a portion be allocated to create Indigenous-specific alternative programs such as Cedar Walk in districts where this is appropriate.

### 9.5. Option 5: Extend Care Supports to Age 21

This option proposes extending supports to youth in care until they turn 21 instead of 19. This would give youth the option to access care-related supports including a foster home, social worker, mental health services, and any supports associated with being in care for an additional two years if they choose. Extending care supports to age 21 would allow youth to continue to be supported if they go back to finish high school or upgrade their courses after the age of 19, which many youth from care do (MCFD, 2016). This would also give youth the option to remain in a foster home and maintain those relationships as young adults if they choose.

This option would require funding from MCFD to provide an additional two years of support to youth from care who wish to receive it. It would also require acquiring foster homes and maintaining existing foster homes for an extended time frame, as well as hiring additional social workers to manage increased caseloads.
Chapter 10.

Policy Analysis

10.1. New Ministry of Education Designation

School Completion and Academic Performance

This option is expected to have a significant positive impact on high school completion rates and academic performance for youth in care. The additional supports that could be offered to youth through the additional funding allocated to schools are likely to have a positive impact on their educational outcomes. In addition to this, the requirement of an IEP would ensure that students receive the individualized support that they require and that the team of adults working with them would be required to meet regularly and monitor progress.

School Attendance and Connectedness

This option is expected to have a moderate positive impact on school attendance and school connectedness. The potential increase in support staff and other supports that foster positive relationships with school may lead to increased school connectedness as well as improved school attendance. This may be especially true for youth who are occasionally sent home from school because the current support model is not equipped to meet their behavioural needs on a full-time basis. Funding attached to this designation may also be used to staff attendance intervention programs and IEPs can directly address attendance goals. Although this would likely have some impact on school connectedness and attendance, it is important to consider that school connectedness is also associated with school stability, and this may be more difficult to achieve if students are required to change schools frequently.

Social-Emotional Well-Being

This option is expected to have a moderate positive impact on social-emotional well-being. This is because this funding is likely to increase the level of mental health and behavioural supports for youth in addition to having the possibility of funding positive social opportunities such as after school programs or other activities with peers. This is again dependent on how the school spends the funding that is allocated.
**Individualized Support**

This option provides a significant amount of individualized support to students for two primary reasons. The first is that the IEP component of this option requires taking an individualized approach in the students’ learning, and that all adults who work with the student must commit to following this individualized plan that is based on the student’s specific needs. The second reason is that the funding allocation that is associated with the designation can be administered by the school in a way that they determine best meets the needs of the students in care in their schools.

**Collaboration and Information-Sharing**

This option enables significant collaboration and information-sharing between all adults who support youth in care. This is because all adults who support youth in care are required to have regular meetings that include the youth themselves and to share relevant information with each other when this is in the student’s best interest. This also gives service providers the space to discuss strengths and challenges that the youth is facing and to collaborate to determine how best to support them.

**Youth Voice**

This option is expected to give youth a significant voice in decisions made about their education and the services that are provided to them. This is dependent on implementation and how much the team of adults working with the youth allows them to contribute to IEPs in practice. If youth are meaningfully engaged in the IEP process, they have the potential to have a significant voice in decisions that are made about their education and how some of the funding allocated to them is distributed.

**Cultural Relevance**

This option is expected to foster strong connections to Indigenous culture provided that the implementation of this policy allows for this. It is likely that this would vary slightly from school to school depending on how the school administration chooses to allocate the funding that is associated with this option and the value that service providers who work with the youth place on connections to Indigenous culture. If schools and service providers value the importance of building strong connections to Indigenous culture, this option provides the individualized approach and the financial resources to
allow for this. An example of using this funding to increase connections with culture may be to implement more cultural programs and activities in schools.

**Cost to Government**

This option would incur high costs relative to the other options considered. This policy would provide $4,805 of additional funding to schools annually for every child or youth who is in care. In September of 2016, 6,097 children and youth in care were enrolled in school (MCFD, 2017) and this would therefore incur an annual cost of $29.3M. If this option is extended to all children and youth who have spent any amount of time in care as Participant 4 suggested, cost of this policy would be significantly higher.

**Administrative Complexity**

This option requires significant collaboration between government departments, service providers, youth and families, and other stakeholders. Although the framework for administering designations already exists within the Ministry of Education, adding a new designation that differs from the existing special needs designations would create an administrative burden on the Ministry of Education. In addition to this, the strong degree of collaboration between service providers, families, and youth themselves that is required can be time-consuming, complex, and difficult to achieve due to time and availability constraints.

**Stakeholder Acceptance**

*Youth and Families*

Youth and families are unlikely to oppose this policy.

*School Districts*

School districts may oppose this policy because it is associated with an increased reporting burden for staff who already have a significant reporting burden for youth with designations. There may also be some opposition from school staff and administrators who are required to participate in additional meetings.
Child Welfare Agencies

Child welfare agencies may also oppose this policy to some degree due to increased meetings and reporting burden.

Table 10.1. Summary of Analysis of Option 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Area</th>
<th>Level</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>School Completion &amp; Academic Performance</td>
<td>High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School Attendance &amp; Connectedness</td>
<td>Medium</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social-Emotional Well-Being</td>
<td>Medium</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Individualized Support</td>
<td>High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collaboration &amp; Information-Sharing</td>
<td>High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Youth Voice</td>
<td>High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Culture</td>
<td>High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cost</td>
<td>Low</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Administrative Complexity</td>
<td>Low</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stakeholders</td>
<td>High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Medium</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

10.2. School-Based Social Workers

School Completion and Academic Performance

This option is expected to have a moderate positive impact on school completion rates and academic performance. Several interview participants have emphasized the need for this policy to implement a sufficient number of social workers in school districts and to ensure this service is available to all youth in schools in order to have a meaningful impact on educational outcomes. Due to social workers being required to service a large number of children and to travel between schools, the positive impact on educational outcomes is likely to be moderate.

School Attendance and Connectedness

This option is expected to have a moderate positive impact on school attendance and school connectedness. Implementing school-based social workers would create an additional resource in the school that youth can connect to. School-based social workers
may also play a role in supporting youth in care to achieve consistent school attendance through appropriate interventions.

Social-Emotional Well-Being

This option is expected to have a moderate positive impact on social-emotional well-being. School-based social workers may provide increased access to services that foster social-emotional well-being such as mental health supports. School-based social workers may also form strong relationships with youth, however the impact of this on social-emotional well-being is expected to be moderate because of social workers have many children to support.

Individualized Support

This option provides a moderate amount of individualized support to youth in care because it provides more individualized support than the status quo through meetings between the students and social workers and increased access to services in the school and the community. However, due to social workers being assigned to high schools as well as the feeder elementary schools for that school, the time that they would be able to spend with each student may be limited and it may be difficult to provide consistent individualized support to each student.

Collaboration and Information-Sharing

This option enables significant collaboration between adults who support youth in care. Implementation of school-based social workers provides a liaison between the education and child welfare systems and can provide the school with a better understanding of the child welfare system and vice versa. In addition to providing a liaison, school-based social workers can also coordinate collaboration and information-sharing between the various professionals as well as youth and their families.

Youth Voice

This option is expected to give youth some voice in decisions that are made about their education and the services provided to them. School-based social workers would be able to advocate for youth in care to school staff and administrators responsible for making decisions related to the child’s education. However, this advocacy would depend on the individual social workers who are assigned to the
schools and how much they consider and advocate for the student’s opinions. Interview participants emphasized that there is extreme variability between social workers, which is an important consideration in giving youth a voice in decision-making.

Cultural Relevance

This option is expected to foster some connection to Indigenous culture for Indigenous youth in care. School-based social workers would have the ability to collaborate with Aboriginal Education departments in order to provide a more robust wraparound of supports to Indigenous youth. These social workers are also responsible for connecting youth in and from care to services and opportunities in the community such as culturally relevant mental health services or cultural programs and activities. Due to limited time and resources to spend with each individual youth, the positive impact on connection to culture is expected to be moderate.

Cost to Government

This option would incur moderate costs relative to the other options considered. Based on the average starting salary of a child protection social worker at MCFD, the salaries of these school-based social workers would be $50,875 (British Columbia, 2015). If social workers are allocated to school districts based on the number of standard high schools in each district, 279 social workers would be required to fill these positions across BC therefore incurring an annual cost of $14.2M. This does not include allocating social workers for alternative schools because these schools have a different staffing model to standard schools and may be included in a standard high school’s family of schools.

Administrative Complexity

This option requires some collaboration between government departments, service providers, youth and families, and other stakeholders. This is because MCFD and school districts are required to work together to have MCFD staff that are assigned to schools within a district and these staff members are expected to have knowledge and relationships with outside agencies that support youth in care.
Stakeholder Acceptance

Youth and Families

Youth and families are unlikely to oppose this policy.

School Districts

School districts are unlikely to oppose this policy.

Child Welfare Agencies

This policy may face opposition by MCFD if they are required to bear the cost. Another important consideration is that social workers are a scarce resource and MCFD may not have the means of recruiting enough social workers to place in all districts.

Table 10.2. Summary of Analysis of Option 2

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10.3. Professional Development for School Staff

School Completion and Academic Performance

This option is expected to have a moderate positive impact on school completion and academic performance for youth in care. If school staff are receptive to this professional development, they may witness some degree of greater success from their
students. This is especially true in the long-term as staff continue to build relationships with youth and implement trauma-informed practice in the classroom.

**School Attendance and Connectedness**

This option is expected to have a moderate positive impact on school attendance and school connectedness. Depending on the receptiveness of the teacher, teachers would likely develop skills that allow them to form stronger connections with youth in care that would in turn have a moderate positive impact on school attendance and connectedness.

**Social-Emotional Well-Being**

This option is expected to have a significant positive impact on social-emotional well-being. As teachers become better trained in building relationships with children who have experienced trauma and better understand the experiences of youth in care, students will become more likely to form strong relationships with their teachers. As expressed by many interview participants, forming these strong relationships is critical to improving educational experiences. This impact is expected to be significant because teachers and school staff spend a significant amount of time with these children, especially at the elementary level.

**Individualized Support**

This option is expected to provide little to no additional individualized support to youth in care. Professional development for school staff may contribute to a small marginal increase in individualized support as a result of educators having a better understanding of the experiences of youth in care, however, it does not involve any additional in-school resources that would support teachers to provide this support in the classroom. The impact on individualized support that would result from this option is also dependent on how receptive staff members are to professional development.

**Collaboration and Information-Sharing**

This option enables little to no additional collaboration between adults who support youth in care. Similarly to individualized support, this option may contribute to a small marginal increase in collaboration and information-sharing as a result of educators having a better understanding of the need for collaboration and how to undertake it,
however, it does not involve any additional resources that enable this and therefore the impact is likely to be small. The impact on collaboration that would result from this option is also dependent on how receptive staff members are to professional development.

**Youth Voice**

This option is expected to give youth little to no additional voice in decisions that are made about their education and the services provided to them. There may be a slight positive impact on this because classroom teachers may be more willing to give youth a voice in the classroom, however, the majority of educational decisions are made by the school-based team that works with the student throughout their school career as well as the child’s social worker.

**Cultural Relevance**

This option is expected to foster some connection to Indigenous culture because professional development would include training for teachers about the unique challenges faced by Indigenous youth in care and the positive impact on education that can result from connecting students with culture and valuing that culture.

**Cost to Government**

The cost of this option would be very low in comparison to the other options considered. Teachers are already required to receive six professional development days throughout the school year, one of which is mandatory to attend at the school. Making half of one of the other five days mandatory would incur no additional costs because teachers are already paid for these days and other workshops are already offered. Implementing this option would involve an opportunity cost because some other trainings would be relinquished and it involves re-directing funds towards workshops under this option. Small administrative costs may be incurred to implement these changes.

**Administrative Complexity**

This option requires little to no collaboration between government departments, service providers, youth and families, and other stakeholders. Aside from the possibility of contracting presenters from outside agencies to give training to school staff, this option would only involve working within school districts and the Ministry of Education.
**Stakeholder Acceptance**

**Youth and Families**

Youth and families are unlikely to oppose this policy.

**School Districts**

Teachers and school districts may oppose this policy. This is because for all but one professional development days, teachers have the option to choose the sessions that they attend or to take a self-directed day. It is likely that at least some teachers and possibly the BCTF would oppose the implementation of more mandatory professional development.

**Child Welfare Agencies**

Child welfare agencies are unlikely to oppose this policy.

**Table 10.3. Summary of Analysis of Option 3**

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**10.4. Increase Alternative Education Programs in Schools**

**School Completion and Academic Performance**

This option is expected to have a significant positive impact on school completion rates and academic performance for youth in care. This is because alternative programs are designed to focus on students’ strengths and allow students to learn in a more
flexible way than in traditional school. Interviewees mentioned that many students who attend alternative programs in upper secondary school may not have completed high school if they were attending a traditional program.

**School Attendance and Connectedness**

This option is expected to have a significant positive impact on school attendance and school connectedness. This is because alternative programs are intended to meet youth where they are at and to provide a flexible and comfortable learning environment in which they can succeed. Interview participants emphasized that many youth in care who attend alternative programs may not otherwise attend school at all, and therefore providing more options to students to attend alternative programs would likely increase school attendance and school connectedness for those students.

**Social-Emotional Well-Being**

This option is expected to have a significant positive impact on social-emotional well-being. Alternative education programs often have more social-emotional supports for students and due to more flexible curriculum and self-paced learning, can often have a strong positive impact on social-emotional well-being for youth. Interviewees highlighted that alternative programs can often be stigmatized and that it is essential for these programs to be implemented within schools and in a way that minimizes stigma.

**Individualized Support**

This option provides a significant amount of individualized support to students because the premise of alternative programs is to meet the individual needs of students whose needs are not being met in traditional school. Smaller class sizes and self-paced learning are some ways that alternative education provides more individualized support than traditional school.

**Collaboration and Information-Sharing**

This option is expected to enable a moderate amount of collaboration between adults who support youth in care because alternative programs are likely to provide a greater variety of supports and therefore staff are likely to collaborate with outside service providers.
Youth Voice

This option is expected to give youth some additional voice in decisions that are made about their education and services that are provided to them. Due to the self-paced nature of most alternative programs, youth in these additional programs would likely have greater control over their education than in traditional programs. However, this is dependent on the individual program and how much the staff engage youth in decision-making.

Cultural Relevance

This option is expected to foster strong connections to Indigenous culture because it would allow for more options that include Indigenous perspectives in the curriculum and more culturally based education services. These alternative programs may also include greater culturally relevant mental health supports.

Cost to Government

Unlike the other options, it is difficult to estimate the cost of this policy because there is no clear figure available that estimates the number of students who would be enrolled in alternative programs if these were available to them. In addition to this, alternative programs receive funding from various different streams and costs vary significantly from one program to another. Due to the need for programs to be implemented in many small districts where enrollment in these programs may be low, costs of implementation and staffing are likely to be high.

Administrative Complexity

Although this option does not require significant collaboration between government departments and stakeholders, it is considered to have significant administrative complexity because it requires implementing several new programs across the province, many of which will have to be implemented in districts with small student populations.

Stakeholder Acceptance

Youth and Families

Youth and families may oppose this policy to some degree due to the stigma that is often associated with alternative education.
School Districts

School districts are likely to oppose this policy due to the high cost, administrative complexity, and staffing considerations of implementing more alternative programs in school districts outside of Vancouver.

Child Welfare Agencies

Child welfare agencies are unlikely to oppose this policy.

Table 10.4. Summary of Analysis of Option 4

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10.5. Extend Care Supports to Age 21

School Completion and Academic Performance

This option is expected to have a significant positive impact on school completion and academic performance because many youth from care continue to complete high school after they turn 19. Allowing youth to access care supports until they are 21 would likely provide the support that many youth need to finish high school after the age of 19 and therefore increase the number of youth who continue to complete high school.

School Attendance and Connectedness

This option is expected to have a significant positive impact on school attendance and connectedness because it would give youth between the ages of 19 and 21 the additional support that they may require to maintain a connection with school.
This would likely significantly increase the percentage of youth between the ages of 19 and 21 who continue to pursue high school completion.

**Social-Emotional Well-Being**

This option is expected to have a significant positive impact on social-emotional well-being, especially for youth between the ages of 19 and 21. Maintaining relationships with families and social workers would allow youth to maintain the relationships and supports that many youth not in care continue to have at this age, which in turn would be likely to have a significant positive impact on social-emotional well-being.

**Individualized Support**

This option provides little to no additional individualized support to youth in care in their education. Extending care supports would continue to give youth the support of individualized case management until they are 21, however, this does not provide additional individualized support in school.

**Collaboration and Information-Sharing**

This option is expected to enable little to no additional collaboration between all adults who support youth in care. This may enable a small amount of additional collaboration between adults working with youth between the ages of 19 and 21, but it is not likely to have a noticeable impact on collaboration between service providers.

**Youth Voice**

This option is expected to give youth some additional voice in decisions made about their education and services provided them because youth would have the choice to access extended care supports or not. This would also enable youth to some degree to make decisions about pursuing education between the ages of 19 and 21 because they would have the supports needed to do so, however, it would not have an impact on youth voice until the age of 19.

**Cultural Relevance**

This option is expected to foster little to no additional connection to Indigenous culture because there continues to be a lack of Indigenous foster homes and being in care until the age of 21 would therefore not foster any additional connection to culture.
This option may have a small impact if students are accessing culturally relevant education programs between the ages of 19 and 21 that they would not otherwise have accessed.

**Cost to Government**

The cost of implementing this option is expected to be high. The average annual cost per child or youth in a care placement in BC is $33,233 (MCFD, 2017, pp. 56). Approximately 566 youth aged out of care in 2016 and based on doubling this figure for the two additional years of care between age 19 and 21, care supports would need to be extended to a maximum of an additional 1,132 youth (MCFD, 2017, pp. 53). Using these figures, this policy would therefore cost a maximum of $37.6M annually because not all youth would take up this option.

**Administrative Complexity**

This option requires some collaboration between government departments, service providers, youth and families, and other stakeholders. Although this is an expansion of an existing structure that already exists, MCFD would be required to secure resources through the Ministry of Finance and to work with foster families to ensure that these supports are available to youth between age 19 and 21.

**Stakeholder Acceptance**

**Youth and Families**

Youth are unlikely to oppose this policy, however, foster families may oppose the policy to some degree due to additional responsibility that they would be encouraged to take on.

**School Districts**

School districts are unlikely to oppose this policy.

**Child Welfare Agencies**

Child welfare agencies are likely to oppose this policy because of the high costs associated with it as well as the larger caseloads that social workers would be required to take on and the need to acquire or retain foster homes for youth until the age of 21.
Table 10.5. Summary of Analysis of Option 5

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## 10.6. Summary of Analysis

### Table 10.6. Summary of Analysis

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<th>Option 2: School-Based Social Workers</th>
<th>Option 3: Professional Development for School Staff</th>
<th>Option 4: Increase Alternative Programs in Schools</th>
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Chapter 11.

Recommendations and Implementation Considerations

Based on the analysis in Chapter 12, this study recommends the simultaneous implementation of the following two policy options in the short to medium term: Option 3: Professional Development for School Staff and Option 1: New Ministry of Education Designation. Due to budgetary constraints, political feasibility, and significant implementation considerations that may limit the possibility of implementing the three additional options in the short term, these options are recommended in the long term. These options are still recommended in the long term because a need for these policies has been identified and they are likely to have a positive impact on educational outcomes.

11.1. Professional Development for School Staff

Although this option does not perform the strongest against the criteria overall, it is the most feasible to implement immediately. This option is still recommended because of the positive impact that it may have on school completion rates, academic performance, school attendance and connectedness, and social-emotional well-being at almost no cost, minimal administrative complexity, and minimal opposition from stakeholders.

11.1.1. Implementation Considerations

An important consideration in implementing this policy would be to consult with the BCTF prior to implementation to ensure they support the policy. The BCTF may oppose the policy and the province would be required to address these concerns prior to implementation. The province would also be responsible for determining the content of professional development and ensuring that resources are available to deliver these workshops to all districts in BC. In the long-term, the province could also incorporate these concepts as mandatory coursework in teacher education programs.
11.2. New Ministry of Education Designation

This option performs very strongly on all criteria that measure overall effectiveness, child development, and equity and therefore is likely to have the most significant positive impact on educational outcomes of youth in care. For these reasons, it is recommended that this policy is implemented in the short to medium term. Unfortunately, high performance on all societal objectives outlined in this analysis requires a trade-off for poor performance on governmental management objectives. High cost and administrative complexity may have a significant impact on the ability to implement this policy in the short term. That being said, a key finding from expert interviews that is consistent across the board is that funding for education and child welfare as well as programs that support youth in care is insufficient to meet current needs and this policy provides a method of addressing this funding gap.

11.2.1. Implementation Considerations

Due to the high cost of implementing this policy in the short term, the province may elect to phase the funding component in slowly. In the short-term, the policy may be implemented with a lower level of funding and this can be slowly increased on an annual basis until it reaches the recommended level. In the long-term, this policy should be expanded to reach all youth who have spent time in care because these children are often moved in and out of care and often do not spend their entire school-age lives in care. This would ensure that these children are supported throughout their entire education regardless of changes in their type of placement or custody order.

Teachers interviewed in this study have expressed a concern about the additional reporting and meeting burden that would be associated with this policy. Teachers and counsellors in inner-city schools with high relative numbers of youth with designations are already a stretched resource because they are required to produce numerous IEPs and attend several meetings for students with IEPs. For this reason, it is essential that implementation of this policy is associated with the necessary human resource capacity in order to minimize negative impacts on school staff. The same consideration is true for social workers and other service providers who may have difficulty adding additional meetings and paperwork to their work schedules. Finally, it is
critical that this policy does not take away from the number of hours school counsellors are able to spend with students because this number is already low.

11.3. Long Term Recommendations

11.3.1. Extend Care Supports to Age 21

This option performs very well in overall effectiveness and in improving social-emotional well-being and is therefore a recommended action in the long term. Due to high cost and political feasibility concerns of implementing this policy, it is unlikely that the province would be ready to implement it in the short term. However, the significant positive outcomes associated with implementing this policy are sufficient rationale for this to be a recommended action and for the province to consider implementation in the long term.

11.3.2. School-Based Social Workers

This option performs the lowest of the five options on criteria that measure effectiveness and child development and is recommended in the long term due to significant implementation considerations that may require a longer time-frame. This policy is expected to have a moderate positive impact on the majority of societal objectives, with a significant positive impact on collaboration and information-sharing at a moderate annual cost.

Implementation of this option must be contingent on program evaluation results of the School-Based Social Work Program in Sooke. If this program evaluation confirms the intended positive impacts of the program, the most significant implementation consideration is that it involves hiring 279 MCFD social workers to staff every standard secondary school in the province. Interview participants expressed the current need for social workers in BC and this implies that hiring 279 new social workers would likely require training more individuals to fill these positions. Attracting social workers to rural school districts may also require additional consideration because positions will need to be filled in all parts of the province. In addition to staffing considerations, participants expressed the need for this policy to allocate sufficient resources so that social workers are not required to support more children than they are able to. Finally, participants
highlighted that for this policy to be effective, social workers must be a resource that is available to all students and not only those in care to provide more robust support and minimize stigmatization.

**11.3.3. Increase Alternative Education Programs Within Schools**

This option performs the highest of all five options across the board and is therefore likely to have a significant positive impact on the educational outcomes of youth in care in BC. For this reason, this option is recommended for implementation in the long term. The reason for recommending this option in the long term as opposed to the short term is the significant administrative complexity associated with implementation. Many alternative programs are available in larger school districts because they have larger student populations and implementing more alternative programs in smaller districts would likely require allocating significant resource to provide services to a small number of students. This option is therefore recommended, but time needs to be taken to establish the best way to implement the policy.
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Appendix A.

Key Stakeholders

Youth and Families

    Youth and families are the target population of all policies related to improving educational outcomes for youth in care in BC and should be considered first and foremost in policy development.

Provincial Government

    The Ministry of Children and Family Development (MCFD) is the primary provincial body with responsibility related to youth in care in BC. The purpose of MCFD is “to support all children and youth in British Columbia, Indigenous and non-Indigenous, to live in safe, healthy and nurturing families and to be strongly connected to their communities and culture” (MCFD, 2018, pp. 5). Achieving this purpose involves delivering inclusive, culturally respectful, responsive and accessible services that support the well-being of children, youth and families in BC (MCFD, 2018).

    As part of a plan to address the number of Indigenous children in care, MCFD develops delegation agreements to give authority to Aboriginal agencies and their employees to undertake administration of all or parts of the Child, Family and Community Service Act. There are currently 23 Delegated Aboriginal Agencies (DAAs) in BC with various levels of delegation ranging from voluntary services and recruitment and approval of foster homes to full child protection responsibilities including the authority to investigate reports and remove children (MCFD, 2018).

    Child and Youth Mental Health (CYMH) is part of MCFD and offers services to infants, children and youth up to 18 years of age who are experiencing mental health challenges and frequently works with youth in care (CYMH, 2018).

    The Ministry of Education is the primary provincial body with responsibility related to educational outcomes of children in BC. The purpose of the Ministry of Education is to enable students “to achieve their individual potential and to acquire the knowledge, skills and abilities needed to contribute to a healthy society and a prosperous, sustainable economy” (Ministry of Education, 2017, pp. 5). Achieving this purpose involves providing
leadership by establishing provincial policies, legislation, and standards related to education in addition to some level of co-governance with school districts (Ministry of Education, 2017).

**Representative for Children and Youth**

The Representative for Children and Youth (RCY) is a non-partisan, independent office of the Legislature that reports directly to the Legislative Assembly and is not a government ministry. The role and jurisdiction of the RCY is defined in the *Representative for Children and Youth Act* and its regulations that allow them to advocate on behalf of children, youth, and young adults to monitor, review, audit, and publicly report on designated services and to conduct independent reviews and investigations into the critical injuries or deaths of children receiving reviewable services (RCY, 2018). The RCY produces frequent reports and publications that include recommendations for improving the state of child welfare in BC, including recommendations for improving educational outcomes for youth in care.

**School Districts**

Public education in BC is provided through 60 school districts, each of which is governed by an elected Board of Education. School districts are responsible for setting local education policies and for supervising the administration of public schools. They are primarily funded by the Ministry of Education, however, they are responsible for preparing their own annual budgets (Bish and Clemens, 2008).

School districts have the jurisdiction to identify which special programs they offer within their districts, some of which have the potential to provide greater support to youth in care. These special programs may include individualized programs for integrating students with special needs, more generalized programs for English Language Learners, career preparation, French immersion, continuing education, and distance education programs (Bish and Clemens, 2008).

**Other Stakeholders**

Other stakeholders include organizations that support youth in care and individuals who work with them. Unions and professional organizations that represent the interests of various service providers are also considered stakeholders.

• BC Federation of Foster Parent Associations (BCFFPA) – A provincial organization for foster parents and governed by foster representation from all areas of the province (BCFFPA, 2018).

• BC Teachers’ Federation (BCTF) – The union of professionals representing public school teachers in BC (BCTF, 2018).

• Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE) – The union that represents other service providers who support youth in care such as school support workers and support staff from community organizations (CUPE, 2018).

• Federation of BC Youth in Care Networks – A youth-driven provincial non-profit organization focused on improving lives of young people in and from care in BC between the ages of 14 and 24 (Federation of BC Youth in Care Networks, 2018).

• First Call: BC Child and Youth Advocacy Coalition – A non-partisan coalition of 101 provincial and regional organizations that use public education, community mobilization, and public policy advocacy to address early childhood development, support in transitions from childhood to youth and adulthood, increased economic equality, and safe and caring communities (First Call, 2018).

• Other Service Providers – A number of other service providers from various community organizations offer programs that provide support to youth in care.
Appendix B.

Reflexive Analysis

A number of factors may have affected the data that was obtained throughout the interviews conducted in this study and the thematic analysis of these interviews. Although this does not undermine the credibility and objectiveness of the data, it is important to acknowledge that the interviewer always plays a role in co-constructing the information generated in qualitative research interviews such as those conducted in this study. First and foremost, I must recognize that I have never personally spent time in the child welfare system and that my understanding of how children in care experience education comes from my interpretation of the first and second-hand accounts that I have been given. In addition to not having spent time in care myself, I must recognize that I am privileged to be a settler on unceded Indigenous territories and therefore do not have the ability to fully understand the unique experiences of Indigenous peoples and children in care in BC. Although I have spoken with Indigenous organizations that support youth in care and several service providers who work with Indigenous youth in care on a daily basis, it is impossible for a settler like myself who has never spent time in care to genuinely understand the true impacts of colonization on Indigenous peoples in Canada and on the child welfare system in BC.

In terms of addressing potential subconscious biases, the most significant factor to address is that I have personal experience working in this field and have therefore witnessed first-hand many of the systemic barriers that are discussed by service providers in this study. Having personal experience working with children and youth in care also brings a certain degree of emotion because the many challenges discussed in this study are associated with my perception of the experiences of certain families who I have personally worked with in the past. In addition to having recently worked in this field, three of the interview participants are former colleagues and/or supervisors in the field, which has the potential to influence the findings in a nuanced way. Due to previous experience working with these individuals in the field, it is possible that joint assumptions were made about existing knowledge or that interview participants did not elaborate on certain topics because they were aware of my pre-existing understanding of it. On some occasions in these three interviews, participants referred to specific programs and used
acronyms and jargon that they knew I understood, but someone who has never been in this field would likely not understand. Although the themes selected for analysis are directly extracted from the raw data in the most objective form possible, it is essential to point out the interviewer’s role in co-constructing interview data.
Appendix C.

Thematic Analysis of Interview Findings

Relationships

The first of two key themes that was emphasized in every expert interview is the importance of fostering meaningful, positive, and lasting relationships between youth in care and their peers as well as the adults who support them. Several interview participants identified that it generally takes time for youth in care to build trust and to form relationships and that it is important for those working with them to spend this time building relationships.

All participants highlighted the positive impact that having meaningful and consistent relationships can have on youth in care and the way they experience education. Participant 4 discussed that in many years of counselling experience in inner-city schools, students with relational attachments are consistently those who succeed. They also emphasized the role that lunch time and after school programs can play in providing an opportunity for students who are at-risk to develop attachments to school, peers, and school staff. Several participants discussed the importance of having a point person at school for students in care to go to for support. Dr. Rutman also identified the need to embed relational practices within the education system in order to foster consistent relationships between youth in care and school staff.

From a child welfare perspective, Participant 1 expressed the importance of relationships in improving children’s experiences in the child welfare system. They discussed that although this may not have a significant impact on outcomes, it does have a significant positive impact on the way children in care experience the child welfare system. However, Participant 3 expressed concerns about overworked social workers not having the opportunity to develop these relationships with youth due to limited time spent with children on their caseload.

Christopher Rambaran discussed the impact that poor relationships with school can have on a young person’s education, emphasizing the need for teachers and school staff to recognize that behaviours may be a result of adverse experiences and support
these students accordingly. Lorena Bishop concurred with this statement, explaining that youth can sometimes be labeled as non-compliant or lazy, but that these behaviours are generally a direct result of their life experiences. Lorena Bishop also highlighted that better understanding of this from teachers would make a big difference in how youth experience the education system.

**Stability**

The second key theme that was emphasized in every expert interview is the importance of stability and continuity in all possible aspects of youth’s lives. Every interview participant discussed that children in care often experience several moves throughout their experience in care, and that minimizing this instability is critical to improving educational outcomes. The majority of participants discussed the need for children in care to have the opportunity to stay in their schools if this is their preference when they are moved to a foster home in a different neighbourhood or school district. Some participants discussed that school may be the biggest constant in the life of a youth navigating the care system and that maintaining this consistency is necessary in order to maintain a consistent support team, meaningful relationships with peers and adults, and minimizing disruptions. Participants 1 and 3 discussed attendance gaps that can occur when students are required to change schools, especially when this occurs during the school year, and the impact this disruption can have on education. As a member of the TRRUST Collective Impact Education Cluster emphasized:

> If you get moved 3 times in a year and you’ve been uprooted from school three times, guaranteed that year is a write off.

Many participants also discussed that school is often a place where youth can feel a sense of security and belonging, with Participant 4 discussing that some youth often want to stay at school as long as they can in the evening because it is where they feel comfortable. To highlight the magnitude of instability that can occur, a member of the TRRUST Collective Impact Education Cluster spoke of children on their caseload who have been in up to 35 different foster placements throughout their childhood, which limits their chances of experiencing success.

**Mental Health**

A frequently recurring theme in expert interviews is the importance of ensuring that youth in care have access to the mental health supports that they need. Several
participants highlighted the importance of addressing needs of children who have experienced trauma. Members of the TRRUST Education Cluster emphasized the need for service providers to provide trauma-informed practice and to receive better training on supporting youth who have experienced trauma. Several other participants advocated for more intensive mental health supports to be available for children who have experienced trauma.

Alan Markwart highlighted the need for mental health supports to be available to students, including supports within schools. Participant 5 echoed that school-based mental health services are a promising practice to ensure accessibility and identified the need for a menu of mental health supports to be available.

Participants 2, 3, and 4 also discussed the large caseloads that school counsellors have in BC schools. Participants 2 and 3 emphasized that counselling hours are allocated based on the number of students in a school and not based on need, when some inner-city schools may have higher counselling needs than other schools. Participant 2 highlighted the severity of the situation by mentioning that one of her grade one students whose parent was recently incarcerated has only been able to see the school counsellor twice in three months. Several participants discussed school counsellors being required to do academic counselling, triaging, and paperwork, and having very little time to spend building relationships with students. Participant 4 discussed that as a high school counsellor, it is important to connect youth to outside agency mental health services to ensure their needs are consistently met. They also suggested allocating additional counselling hours to high school based on the number of youth in care in that school. Dr. Rutman also discussed the possibility of implementing mental health nurses in schools in order to ensure mental health needs are met. Some participants discussed barriers to accessing outside counselling such as waitlists and lack of cultural safety.

Culture and Community

Another theme that was commonly discussed was the disconnect from Indigenous culture that Indigenous children often experience as a result of a shortage of Indigenous foster homes. Members of the TRRUST Education Cluster discussed the need to incorporate Indigenous perspectives as a mandatory component of school curriculum for all students and that incorporating more cultural activities and even
territorial acknowledgements can play a big role in making Indigenous children feel safe at school. One member, a former social worker, discussed the importance of collaboration between service providers for all youth and how this collaboration can play an important role in connecting Indigenous students to culture:

When teachers and I worked together, amazing things happened. A youth, he wasn’t going to school, but he was working on carving canoes with his dad and going hunting, and the school made that creditable, so they gave him school credits to do that stuff. So, when you talk about Indigenous culture integrated into school, valuing it from a school perspective, that’s the definition of decolonization of education. That wouldn’t have happened if we didn’t get together.

Participant 1 emphasized the role that Aboriginal education departments can play in support Indigenous youth and the importance of connections between these support workers and students for their education. In addition to this, Participant 1 and several others identified a need for more alternative programs such as Cedar Walk, an alternative education program for Indigenous youth in Vancouver (UNYA, 2018).

**Flexibility and Individualized Support**

Nearly every participant discussed the importance of flexible policies that allow for individualized support to be provided to youth in care and that one-size-fits-all strategies only meet the needs of a select few. Tutoring supports, individualized support focused on strengths, and including youth in decisions are some of the methods that interview participants suggested to ensure flexibility and individualized support. Alan Markwart emphasized the need to view youth in care not as one entity, but to recognize that these children have a wide variety of different experiences. Christopher Rambaran explained the need for teachers to recognize individual needs of youth in care:

They need to know that kids are carrying a lot more in their backpacks than just homework, they’re carrying neglect, they’re carrying trauma, they’re carrying their parents’ mental health issues, they’re carrying maybe substance abuse issues at home, teachers can’t lose sight of that and when students are struggling academically then the question shouldn’t be why are they struggling, it’s how can we support them to do better.

**Lack of Resources**

A final common theme that was discussed in all expert interviews was the lack of resources across the board in education and child welfare as well as many of the social services. Alan Markwart of the RCY emphasized that in order for a policy to meet the
needs of youth in care, sufficient resources are needed to back up the policy. Participant 3 also highlighted the need for resources by referencing long waitlists at Child and Youth Mental Health:

It’s a swamped system, which is then failing those kids because they don’t need service in 12 to 18 months, they need it now.

In child welfare, participants discussed overworked social workers with very large caseloads and quick turnover rates, a lack of foster homes, particularly Indigenous homes and in Vancouver, a lack of funding for extended family placements, and a lack of supports as youth turn 19. Participants discussed that due to stretched resources, social workers sometimes have to prioritize other immediate needs and aren’t able to treat education as a priority.

In education, participants discussed large class sizes, a lack of support for students with special needs, a lack of alternative education programs that allow youth to remain in their schools, a lack of tutoring support, and a lack of life skills training in high schools. Participants also mentioned that school staff don’t receive adequate professional development and that better training teachers to understand trauma and mental health would make a big difference in how children in care experience education. Finally, many interviewees spoke about the benefits of alternative schools and how these programs are inconsistent outside of the larger districts in BC. Many also mentioned the stigma that is often associated with alternative schools and the need for more alternative programs within schools. Participant 6 also identified a need for more educational supports for youth from care above 19 who would like to complete their high school education.