



Project Insights Report

# The Study Buddy Program



**PARTNERS**

Diversity Institute  
 Ontario Tech University  
 Jean Augustine Centre  
 Lifelong Leadership Institute



**LOCATIONS**

Across Canada



**INVESTMENT**

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## Executive Summary

During the COVID-19 pandemic, Canadian students had to switch abruptly to online learning, which disrupted their education and added stress for many parents. Additionally, teacher-candidate students struggled to complete required volunteer hours. To address these challenges, the Diversity Institute and its partners, with the support of the Future Skills Centre, launched the Study Buddy program in May 2020. This free, online tutoring initiative aimed to support students, especially Black, racialized and newcomer students, while providing work-integrated learning opportunities for teacher candidates.

The Study Buddy program connected families, children in grades K–12 and teacher candidates. It had three objectives: skills development among children and youth, particularly Black, Indigenous, racialized and newcomer populations; skills development among post-secondary students (tutors); and (3) skills and capacity development among parents and guardians. The program engaged 684 students from 451 families and involved 331 tutors, who dedicated over 8,600 hours in more than 12,800 sessions.

Evaluations through surveys and digital platform data showed positive impacts on parents, students and tutors. Parents experienced reduced stress and increased hope, while students gained access to quality educational resources and positive social experiences. Tutors enhanced their skills and career training. The Study Buddy program's success led to several recommendations, including recognizing the value of tutoring; applying an equity, diversity and inclusion lens to tutoring programs; exploring the broader effects of supporting students and families; enhancing tutor training; and leveraging new technologies while addressing the digital divide. These efforts are crucial for advancing equity in education and ensuring long-term social and economic well-being in Canada.

#### KEY INSIGHTS

- 1 Almost all (90%) of the parents and guardians agreed that the program helped their child learn important skills.
- 2 About 85% of tutors said they developed new teaching and learning skills in the program.
- 3 The majority of parents and guardians agreed that Study Buddy helped students feel more comfortable with online learning, less anxious and stressed, more hopeful about the future, more confident in time management skills and more in control of school work and their schedules

## ► The Issue

Racialized and marginalized students, and newcomers face numerous barriers that result in negative academic and long-term economic outcomes. The inequities in education for Black students are reflected in disparities in graduation rates and dropout rates between Black students and their white counterparts.

Research on the impact of COVID-19-pandemic-related school disruptions on children revealed a multidimensional lack of school engagement that negatively affects student learning outcomes and emotional well-being. When looking at the effects of the pandemic on student learning outcomes, students from groups that struggled before the pandemic faced even greater barriers, as they were less likely to have the foundations for success.

School closures during the pandemic negatively affected families, especially working mothers. One in three Canadian women say they considered [quitting their job](#). Families from equity-deserving groups were challenged by the convergence of multiple stresses, which were compounded by school and daycare closures, the burden of unpaid work in the home and unequal access to basic infrastructure supports.

Addressing these issues for students and their families required a proven strategy. One-on-one tutoring has been proven to be one of the most effective education intervention strategies; it leads to more motivated students who work at a more advanced pace.

Study Buddy brought together stakeholders (parents and guardians, communities, students, community services and education institutions) to provide educational support to equity-deserving students during the COVID-19 pandemic. It was launched in May 2020 by the Diversity Institute, in collaboration with Ontario Tech University, the Jean Augustine Centre and the Lifelong Leadership Institute, along with other universities, community organizations and schools, and with the support of the Future Skills Centre. As a result of the program's initial success, Study Buddy was extended in 2022, in partnership with the Peel District School Board and the Province of Ontario.

The students from kindergarten to Grade 12 were recruited into Study Buddy through partner organizations that provided connections with families belonging to equity-deserving groups. Participating students were matched with tutors based on subject expertise and provided with access to an online tutoring platform with an interactive whiteboard, video and audio conferencing, and content modules. Students received up to three hours per week of one-on-one, individualized homework and lesson support from trained and qualified professionals. Tutoring was provided in K–12 subjects including mathematics, chemistry, biology, French and other elementary courses.



## What We Investigated

Study Buddy was designed to address disparities of access and opportunity for students who have been historically underserved. The program had a particular focus on Black, racialized and Indigenous children and youth. The program addressed the differential impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic for three specific groups: children, parents and teacher candidates. It provided K–12 children with free, one-on-one, online tutoring through remote learning to meet the needs of students. Parents benefitted by receiving support during a challenging time. By providing tutoring services, teacher candidates could complete practicum hours to fulfill graduation requirements.

To understand the impact of the Study Buddy program on students, their parents or guardians, and tutors, two surveys were administered—a pre-program registration survey and a post-program satisfaction survey—with four cohorts of parents and tutors from September 2020 to December 2021.

The Diversity Institute reviewed user data to evaluate the success of the program in supporting students and their families, to gauge the effectiveness of the program in improving educational opportunities for students, and to evaluate the program's impact on the tutors' skills. The data were also used to examine the effectiveness of one-on-one tutoring in closing gaps in educational equity for students from equity-deserving groups.

## **What We're Learning**

Of the 302 students from 247 families who received services, 57.3% were girls and 42.4% were boys. Of the 214 children who self-identified, 85% were racialized, 14% were newcomers arriving in the last five years and 5.6% identified as having a disability.

The survey results showed that students and their parents or guardians found the program helpful. A large majority—91%—of participating parents and guardians agreed that their child felt more confident in school work. Further, 90% said that their child learned important skills, and 89% felt more supported and connected. Ninety-four percent agreed that their child's experience in the program was useful, 92% said it was enjoyable and 91% agreed it met their needs. Eighty-five percent of the parents and guardians agreed that students developed problem-solving and decision-making skills, 82% said their child developed interpersonal skills, and 79% said it helped students gain experience in technology skills. Less than 10% found the program stressful or difficult.

Analysis of the tutors' experiences showed they also found the program beneficial. Of the 84 tutors who answered questions about their satisfaction with the program, 99% felt that Study Buddy was useful for the students, and 96% said it was useful for the students' families. When it comes to skills, 85% of tutors said they developed teaching and learning skills and the program provided new skills. Moreover, 89% said they developed interpersonal skills, 79% said they developed problem-solving and decision-making skills, and 74% said they developed technology skills.

## **Why It Matters**

Research on the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic has shown a need for creating unique ways to support the academic achievement of students from equity-deserving families. During the pandemic, the systemic barriers embedded in the education system were compounded by a lack of tailored support and resources for students. Moreover, parents and guardians tasked with attending to their children's academic needs in a virtual setting faced the hardship of accessing tutoring support while fulfilling their own daily obligations.

Study Buddy successfully met the needs of equity-deserving students and their families during the difficult period of the COVID-19 pandemic. Study Buddy also provided a useful work-integrated learning opportunity for teacher candidates that built their skills. What was critical in achieving this success was incorporating an ecosystem of partners into the program who each brought their particular expertise, whether it was knowledge of an equity-deserving community, teaching expertise or program management. By incorporating a network of partners into the initial program design, the Study Buddy model has the potential to scale to provide tailored educational services that address educational inequities for more students.

## ► What's Next

As a model, the Study Buddy program successfully leveraged multi-stakeholder partnerships and the engagement of parents to ensure the successful implementation of education programs within equity-deserving communities. In Canada, education is one of the strongest drivers of social mobility, yet persistent gaps remain in academic achievement for equity-deserving groups, contributing to unequal outcomes in employment, health and belonging. Given the demonstrated benefit of the Study Buddy program at the societal, organizational and individual levels of the education ecosystem, building on its success could help to reduce inequities in the education system.

Have questions about our work? Do you need access to a report in English or French? Please contact [communications@fsc-ccf.ca](mailto:communications@fsc-ccf.ca).

### How to Cite This Report

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### State of Skills: Enhancing Career Prospects and Well-Being for Canadian Youth

To stem the recent downturn in labour market conditions of youth and to lay the groundwork for them to play a pivotal role in fostering growth and inclusion, it is imperative to address and dismantle the multiple and intersectional barriers they encounter.

[Read Thematic Report](#)

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