



Raising the Grade evaluation: Final report

Social Research and Demonstration Corporation

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Since its establishment in December 1991, SRDC has completed over 300 projects and studies for various federal and provincial departments, municipalities, as well as other public and non-profit organizations. SRDC has offices located in Ottawa, Toronto, and Vancouver, and a satellite office in Calgary.

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Executive Summary

Every young person deserves a chance to succeed at school and become a life-long learner. *Raising the Grade (RTG)* aims to promote academic engagement among young people and increase their rate of high school completion and participation in post-secondary education. A partnership between the Boys and Girls Clubs of Canada (BGCC) and Rogers, the program was designed to provide young people at risk of dropping out of high school with enhanced supports and diverse, youth-driven learning opportunities, including technology-based learning, academic support, career exploration and discovery, mentorship, and positive, supportive relationships.

The *RTG* evaluation was conducted by the Social Research and Demonstration Corporation (SRDC) from 2012 to 2017, and took a developmental approach to evaluating program design, delivery, and outcomes. While the evaluation was limited by several methodological constraints, we were nevertheless able to develop a detailed, *national* portrait of the program's first five years, document the considerable learning that took place, and help build capacity for program monitoring and evaluation among Clubs and the national office.

As described in the following pages, we found that the need for a rapid, large-scale launch to 25 clubs came at a cost in terms of a shared understanding among stakeholders of key program design elements and how to implement them. Yearly face-to-face training for program staff was invaluable, but much of the collective energy of the first two years was spent trying to deal with design changes and operational challenges amplified by the early stage and scale of program development. Insights gained from this early period include the need to develop clear program essentials, logic, and theory; identify achievable intermediary goals aligned with program intensity and expected participation; and develop plans for supporting implementation and capacity-building, ideally through a small-scale pilot.

In Year 3, support to Clubs for *RTG* delivery became much more structured and responsive, through such mechanisms as regional forums, committees, and a portal for lesson planning. These mechanisms enabled National to hear more directly from Clubs about program delivery issues, achievements, needs, and suggestions, and Clubs to take a more hands-on role in program planning. As the program evolved, digital literacy and career education became less integral, funding for scholarships was discontinued, and eligibility was expanded to non-registered youth and those in middle school. Delivery insights include the importance of monitoring and measuring program implementation and participation, finding ways to share collective lessons learned, and incorporating these into ongoing program development.

A key area of collective challenge and learning has been balancing the desire to preserve universal eligibility with programming designed to meet the needs and characteristics of a specific target group. Defining and recruiting at-risk teens was initially difficult, particularly for Clubs used to working only with younger children. This could explain the shift in *RTG* participants over time toward younger participants and those whose parents had more education. Yet some Clubs developed partnerships with local high schools to identify potential participants, and over 40 per cent of *RTG* youth overall were new to Clubs when they registered. Curriculum that builds over time

to address the needs of older and at-risk youth could help engage this group and maintain their participation for more than the one year average documented by the evaluation.

There is every indication that overcoming this challenge is worth the effort. While we were unable to detect many outcomes for *RTG* participants overall – as is common with universal programs – we did observe significant positive changes after one year in the program for a subset of *RTG* youth we identified as academically vulnerable. Their outcomes included greater academic engagement, feeling they were smart in school and wanted to do well, and spending more time on homework and finding out about future careers. Similarly, *RTG* youth who reported receiving checking in with their mentor and homework help once a week or more reported positive changes in academic engagement and reported stress, compared to those who had less exposure to these program components.

On the basis of this and corresponding qualitative evidence, we conclude that *RTG* is a promising program for youth facing a number of risk factors, and that this group's needs should be the focus of ongoing program design and delivery, while still retaining the principle of universal access. Continuing to align program design and delivery with evidence-based practices in after-school youth programming, along with ongoing program monitoring and performance measurement, can only enhance program effectiveness moving forward.

The *RTG* story suggests what can be achieved when creative ideas develop into intentional program planning and design, and with sufficient resources – time, funding, and staff engagement – to support program delivery. Our thanks are owed to all the *RTG* youth and staff who have participated in and shaped the first few years of the program, and shared their experiences and insights with us.

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Introduction

The issue

A substantial body of research underscores the benefits derived from education, not only for employment and income,^{1,2} but also for a wide range of social and even health outcomes.^{3,4} Moreover, these benefits tend to accrue regardless of the chosen educational pathway⁵ (albeit to varying degrees) and tend to last throughout an individual's life.

Not all Canadian youth are able to experience these benefits to the same extent, however, because of either barriers to post-secondary education^{6,7} or an earlier lack of educational success in high school and middle school.⁸ A lack of educational support and exposure to stressful life events or harsh environments – whether at home, school, or in other areas of their lives – can lead some youth to disengage from learning or leave school altogether.⁹ Unfortunately, early leaving increases their risk of a range of negative experiences (including early pregnancy, exploitation, and criminality) and limited opportunities.¹⁰

Every young person deserves a chance to succeed at school and become a life-long learner. While stress and adversity cannot be avoided, providing youth with support, resources, and opportunities to develop their own skills and strengths can build their resilience – the ability to bounce back from adversity.¹¹ Supportive relationships with family members, school staff, community members, and peers are particularly important to developing resilience.¹²

“The new paradigm [a strengths-based approach] avoids labelling and assumes power in children, youth and families to help themselves as well as casting service providers as partners rather than as experts, authorities, initiators and directors of the change process.”
Hammond, 2010, p. 4

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- ¹ America's Promise Alliance. (2014).
 - ² Cole, S., Paulson, A., & Shastry, G. K. (2014).
 - ³ Ibid.
 - ⁴ Feinstein, L., Sabates, R., Anderson, T.M., Sorhaindo, A., & Hammond, C. (2006).
 - ⁵ That is, college, trade school, private vocational school, or university.
 - ⁶ Bourbeau, E., Lefebvre, P., & Merrigan, P. (2010).
 - ⁷ DeClou, L. (2014).
 - ⁸ The Educational Policy Institute. (2008).
 - ⁹ America's Promise Alliance. (2014).
 - ¹⁰ Ibid.
 - ¹¹ Condly, S. J. (2006).
 - ¹² Greenberg, M. T. (2006).

Similarly, a strengths-based approach can help youth identify the resources they already have to address challenges in their lives, and to develop new resources based on their abilities and needs.¹³ Access to educational information technology and mentorship (particularly for minority youth and those with limited resources) have been shown to positively affect school attendance, performance in core school subjects, community involvement, higher levels of post-secondary participation, and educational resilience.^{14,15,16}

The response

In late 2011, Rogers approached the Boys and Girls Clubs of Canada with an opportunity to partner in the development of a new, innovative after-school program.

Boys and Girls Clubs of Canada (BGCC)

BGCC is one of Canada's leading non-profit youth service delivery organizations and providers of quality after school and out-of-school programs to children and youth. The BGCC network includes 99 member Clubs serving youth in over 650 different service locations across the country.

Rogers Youth Fund

Starting in 2011, one of Canada's largest communications and media companies made a national commitment to help youth overcome barriers to education. Through the Rogers Youth Fund, Rogers formed strategic relationships with charities across Canada, including with the Boys and Girls Clubs of Canada.

Raising the Grade (RTG) was developed to promote academic engagement among young people and increase their rate of high school completion and participation in post-secondary education. *RTG* pursued these goals by providing young people with enhanced supports and diverse, youth-driven learning opportunities, including technology-based learning, academic support, career exploration and discovery, mentorship, and positive, supportive relationships.

RTG was a partnership from the outset. BGCC contributed its vast experience in youth mentorship and program delivery to the partnership, as well as a large network of Clubs and youth members. Rogers contributed technology and community investment dollars, as well as a contingent of Rogers employees with paid volunteer days to bolster the pool of *RTG* mentors.

Funding from Rogers for *RTG* was provided from 2012 to 2017, and used to design the program and related content, renovate existing Club space to make room for computer and learning labs (*RTG*

¹³ Hammond, W. (2010).

¹⁴ Rockman et al. & YDSI Youth Development Strategies, Inc. (2009).

¹⁵ Gastic, B. & Johnson, D. (2009).

¹⁶ Erickson, L. D., McDonald, S., & Elder, G. H. (2009).

Tech Centres), provide participating Clubs with *RTG* annual operating grants, staff key *RTG* administrative positions at the National BGCC office, provide scholarships to youth in Years 1-3, and evaluate *RTG* implementation and outcomes.

In its first year, *RTG* launched in 25 Clubs across Canada; by Year 3, it had grown to 37 Clubs, all of which are continuing to operate the program at the time of writing this report.

Figure 1 *RTG* clubs by province



The *RTG* evaluation

Early on in the project, BGCC engaged the Social Research and Demonstration Corporation (SRDC) – a not-for-profit research evaluation firm with a long history of piloting and evaluating social policy programs in Canada – to lead the evaluation of *RTG* over a five-year period. The evaluation included both a formative evaluation focused on program design and delivery, and a summative evaluation focused on outcomes.

Working closely together using a developmental evaluation approach,¹⁷ BGCC and SRDC co-developed an evaluation framework that guided what areas to focus on and the methods to be used. The *RTG* evaluation did not examine value-for-money, efficiency, or program impacts in the sense of comparing outcomes with those of a control or comparison group; since these were not feasible, outcomes were determined based on pre- post differences¹⁸ and qualitative data. Instead, the evaluation focused on developing a systematic, detailed portrait of this national program in its first five years, and on building capacity for program monitoring and evaluation. Above all, the evaluation prioritized learning and making results useful for decision-making, whether by the BGCC National office or participating Clubs.

① Developmental evaluation

- Focused on and responsive to social innovation (dynamic, flexible, interested in differences and innovation)
- Rooted in positive, trusting relationships built over time
- Rapid feedback, collaboration
- Evaluator as critical friend, providing advice and professional judgment
- Flexible methods to fit research questions

Patton, 2011

The key evaluation questions addressed by the *RTG* evaluation were:

- ① How did the program expect to create change?
- ② How was the program implemented across Clubs?
- ③ Who participated in the program?
- ④ How did youth respond to the program?
- ⑤ What have been the key lessons learned that could help improve future implementation?

¹⁷ Patton, M. Q. (2011).

¹⁸ That is, youth survey responses at baseline compared to those after one or two years of participation.

A multitude of data sources was used to answer these questions, including both qualitative and quantitative data from participating youth, Education Managers (EM), and other Club and National office staff. A full breakdown of the data sources, including response rates, can be found in Appendix A.

Over the course of the evaluation, SRDC used a team of five researchers to analyze the *RTG* data. At any given time, two SRDC researchers thematically analyzed qualitative data sources using an emergent (i.e., not pre-defined) coding structure. Two SRDC researchers also cleaned, prepared, and analyzed the quantitative data. In addition to basic frequency counts, statistical significance of t-tests was used to identify meaningful differences in quantitative data across time and cohorts of youth participants, across Clubs, and across different implementation contexts.

Two researchers with in-depth knowledge of *RTG* examined both the quantitative and qualitative data to integrate the findings. Different methods of triangulation were used to validate data and themes, including:

- ❶ Methodological triangulation of multiple sources such as interviews, observations, questionnaires, and documents;
- ❷ Investigator triangulation of multiple researchers.

Triangulation increased SRDC's confidence that the findings presented here are meaningful, accurate, and consistent, because they were evident in multiple data sources and were identified by multiple researchers.

Key findings and insights

About RTG's design

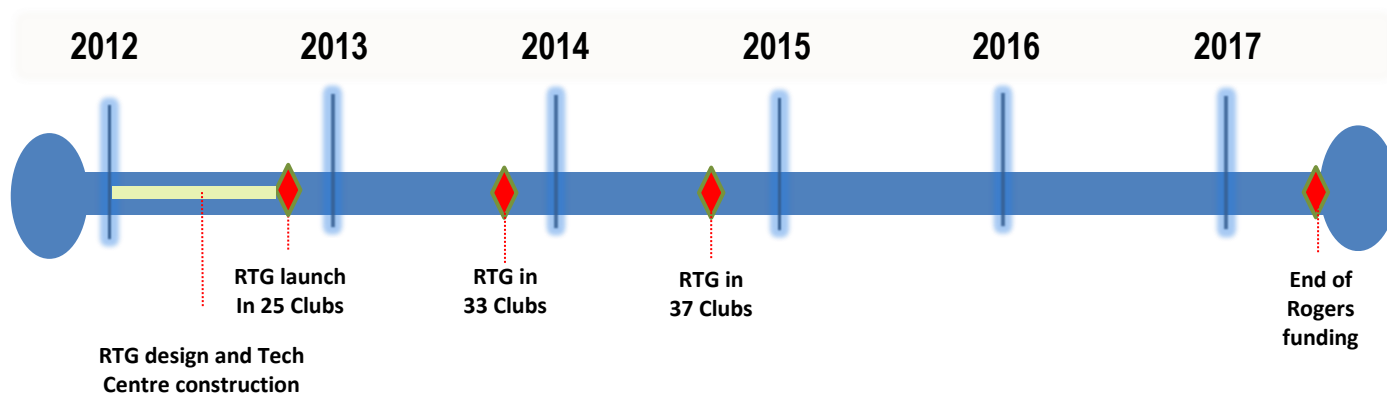
This section provides a summary of the most important findings about how *RTG* was designed, and how it changed during the first five years.

Based on data from:

Program materials, Education Manager (EM) Forum notes, EM annual surveys, and observations by SRDC researchers over time.

The funder's need to launch the program quickly and at a large scale (25 clubs) came at a cost in terms of initial program design. There was a shared initial vision for the program between Rogers and BGCC in terms of supporting young people's learning success, but this was at a high level; agreement on the details was not sustained over time. Moreover, the vision for *RTG* and the original program model were crafted in a short time period, allowing for limited consultation with Clubs during the early development phase. As a result, there was insufficient time to develop a shared understanding among Clubs of *how* the vision would be achieved, or shared curriculum.

Figure 2 *RTG* timeline



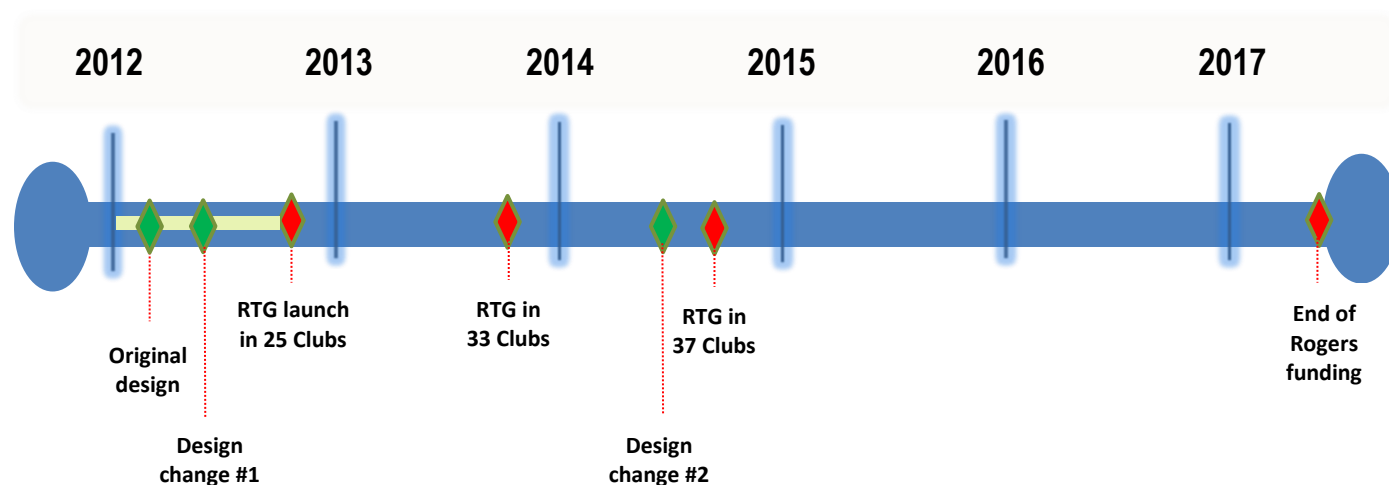
The initial *RTG* design was innovative and compelling, but certain key assumptions weren't substantiated, especially those regarding the underlying mechanisms for change, some aspects of need for the program (specifically, youth's lack of access to the Internet and digital technology), how to engage youth and who should be targeted, and what was needed to build and support the

capacity of Clubs to deliver this type of program. These were all areas of considerable learning, especially in the first two and a half years of *RTG*.


***RTG* program design changed considerably over the course of five years.** During the period of the evaluation, there were two major design changes in response to both the funder's and Clubs' needs:

- **Original *RTG* design:** Developed in early 2012, driven largely by BGCC's vision. Ten Clubs were selected to serve as pilot sites to serve as a research and development incubator that would inform the design of the program.
- ① **First design change:** In April 2012 – five months prior to launch – major changes were made to the program, driven largely by Rogers' demand for broader reach. These included dropping the intensive academic case management approach for a more universal and modest intervention, and reducing the scholarship from \$4,000 to \$1,000 per participant. The pilot phase with 10 Clubs was eliminated in favour of a full-scale launch in 25 Clubs. At this point, SRDC was engaged and developed the first detailed logic model with Clubs and BGCC National.
- ② **Second design change:** In June 2014, turnover in key *RTG* staff positions at National and a potential withdrawal of funding from Rogers drove major changes to the program, with the intent of reducing costs and standardizing programming. These changes included dropping the scholarship component altogether; broadening the target group to include all youth in Grades 7 and up (in some Clubs, programming for younger youth became known as *Junior RTG*), extending *RTG* activities to non-registered youth; a more explicit focus on program curriculum, especially life skills (known as Life after high school) and engaging teens. The logic model was updated at this point to reflect the changes (see Appendix B).

Figure 3 *RTG* design change timeline



It should be emphasized that change is not necessarily a weakness – it was always intended that *RTG* would change somewhat over time as the program’s design underwent improvement (see below). However, the extent of the changes described above complicated delivery for Clubs by making it difficult to identify the key elements of the program, especially in the early days. In addition, the extent and nature of the changes – especially broadening the target group to all youth, not just those at risk – have made it more challenging to achieve and detect desired outcomes.

 **Elements of *RTG* design are gradually becoming more aligned with evidence-based practice.** Research evidence identifies four practices that successfully promote young people’s personal and social development: 1) a **Sequenced**, step-by-step training approach; 2) **Active** learning that allows youth to practice new skills; 3) **Focused** time and attention on skills development; and 4) **Explicit** definition of what skills the program is trying to promote.¹⁹ These **SAFE** practices are associated with significant improvements in young people’s self-perceptions and positive social behaviours; decreases in problems behaviours; and academic engagement and achievement. To the extent that *RTG* continues to develop a more explicit focus on life skills and providing structured academic support,²⁰ participating youth will be more likely to experience similar outcomes, especially if all **SAFE** practices are incorporated.

***RTG* program design continues to reflect BGCC’s broader focus on healthy development and academic engagement and participation, but some desired outcomes are still very ambitious.** While useful as an ultimate vision, attaining goals such as high school graduation and PSE participation for large number of *RTG* youth is likely to require significant programming and support – more like the original vision of the program – given the number of other factors in young people’s lives that influence these outcomes. The types of activities and intensity of *RTG* delivery to date mean that achieving these goals for large numbers of participants will continue to be challenging even in the long term.

¹⁹ For example, see Durlak, Weissberg, Dymnicki, Taylor & Schellinger, 2011; Durlak, Weissberg, & Pachan, 2010.

²⁰ That is, intensive small-group instruction or individual tutoring versus unstructured homework time (Durlak et al., 2011).

Insights gained about program design:

- Innovative programs are more likely to succeed (in terms of buy-in, smooth delivery, and achievement of outcomes) when the program logic is clear and there's a strong program theory grounded in verified need and best practices. These best practices should be based on both evidence AND tacit/practice-based knowledge; for BGCC, research and input from Clubs and youth are all essential.
- Ambitious, visionary goals are important, but for ongoing operations, it makes sense to identify and focus on intermediary goals (such as academic engagement and a sense of belonging) that are achievable and aligned with the strength and intensity of the program and predicted levels of participation.
- Having a detailed implementation plan is very helpful – ideally, one that includes how to address inevitable staff turnover and build/support delivery capacity over time. It is useful to have Clubs engaged in this process, such as with self-assessment and planning.

About *RTG* delivery

This section provides an overview of findings about how *RTG* design was linked to program delivery over the first five years.

i Based on data from:

Program materials, club application forms, annual surveys of Education Managers, Education Manager forum notes, interviews with Education Managers, administrative data, web analytics, informal observations, youth registration forms, youth baseline and annual surveys, and youth discussion forums.

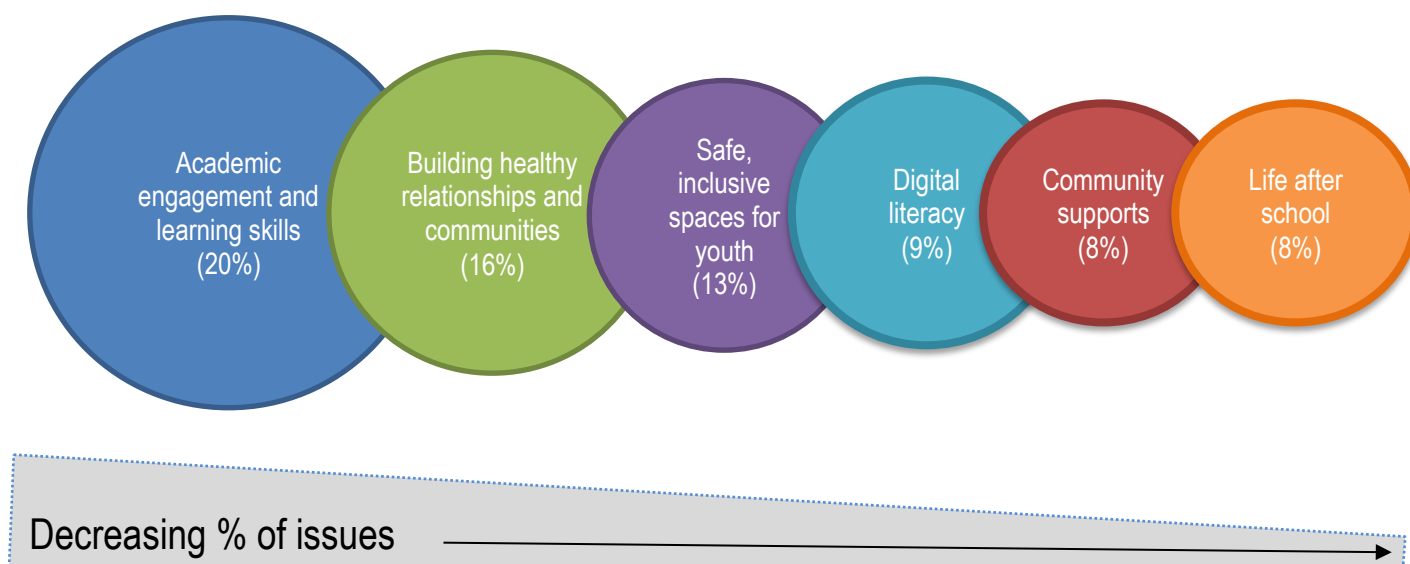
Alignment of *RTG* delivery with program design varied across Clubs and across time, as is common in any large program delivered across multiple sites and multiple years. Looking at key principles of *RTG*'s design – matching youth with mentors, providing homework support, recruiting the identified target group – delivery in about half the participating Clubs aligned with most of the major program elements, though not all. The remaining Clubs were evenly split between those that were able to deliver virtually all program elements, and those whose delivery aligned with few of those principles.

Factors associated with delivery consistently aligned with program principles included having had a full-time *RTG* Education Manager, higher numbers of registered Club youth,²¹ and previous experience working with teenagers and providing academic programming.

With some exceptions, *RTG* delivery over time tended to reflect what Boys and Girls Clubs and Club staff know best – how to create welcoming, safe environments; building relationships with youth; providing homework help; and organizing field trips and guest speakers. Except in a few instances where Education Managers or volunteers had specific relevant skills, program components related to technology and school/career planning were not implemented as consistently. On the other hand, some Clubs proactively partnered with local high schools to engage at-risk youth, despite this not being a typical target group for previous programming.

In Year 4 of *RTG* delivery, Education Managers were asked to identify the main issues, challenges, or needs that *RTG* was helping to address in their communities. As seen in Figure 4 below, results generally aligned with what Clubs tend to do in general, even in the absence of *RTG*. In other words, some of the most distinguishing features of *RTG*'s design – developing skills in digital literacy and life after school – were identified much less frequently by Education Managers than those elements that are typical of generic Club programming. That said, academic engagement and learning skills were also a focus of *RTG* design, in addition to being the area of need most identified by Education Managers.

Figure 4 Community issues, challenges, or needs linked most closely to *RTG* by Education Managers in Year 4



²¹ Above the median for all participating Clubs.

The shift in program design and delivery was also partly due to the need to launch the program at a large scale and grow it quickly. *RTG* was delivered in 25 Clubs at launch, to 33 Clubs within approximately a year, and ultimately to 37 Clubs roughly two years after launch. This left very little time to plan for supporting Clubs with delivery other than through yearly training. These trainings were critical – affording Club staff with valuable opportunities for face-to-face time to plan and support each other – but they did not compensate for the fact that mechanisms for ongoing support for Clubs weren’t fully planned or developed in the first couple of years. As a result, program delivery was quite variable the first two years, as Clubs addressed challenges with recruitment, staff turnover, and lack of clarity on how to implement core program components.

🔊 In Year 3, support to Clubs for *RTG* delivery from the National office became much more structured and responsive. With a new senior *RTG* program manager at BGCC National, and in response to funder demands and Clubs’ needs, support for program delivery became much more structured. Regional forums were created that allowed Club Education Managers to meet regularly to discuss program delivery issues, and receive training and support. *RTG* lesson plans and a portal for sharing these were also co-developed with Clubs, and several committees were created to guide ongoing program development (e.g., regarding curriculum, mentorship, youth engagement, and evaluation).

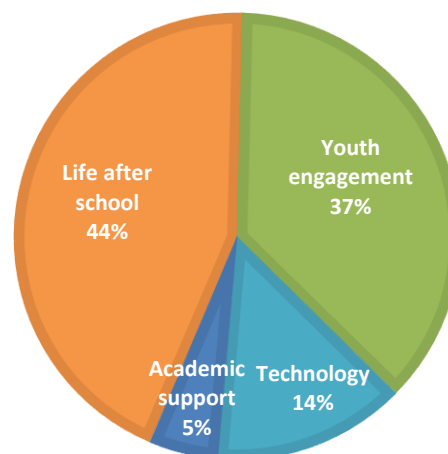
These regional forums and committees provided good opportunities for BGCC National to connect more directly to how *RTG* was actually being delivered in Clubs, and hear from Club staff about delivery challenges and achievements, local needs, and ideas for program improvement. Likewise, Education Managers were given more of an active role in articulating program priorities, and providing feedback on delivery issues. In this way, both BGCC National and Clubs were able to see what direction the program was moving in, and to coordinate that movement across Clubs. BGCC National staff noted that, “At that point, Clubs had a voice, ... a bigger role in directing programming.”

Figure 5 *RTG* Education Manager Portal program plans by primary component

***RTG* Program Plans**

Although still emerging as a widespread tool, over 350 *RTG* program plans were submitted by Education Managers in 2015-16 and are now housed on the *RTG* Education Manager Portal.

Clubs submitted between 2 and 44 program plans each. The figure to the right shows the proportion of program plans by primary *RTG* program component they support.



Insights gained about program delivery:

- Identifying core/critical program elements and areas that have more flexibility at the outset can help ensure consistent delivery across Clubs while still accommodating Clubs' need to adapt to meet local needs.
- Assessing Club capacity *before* delivery can help identify what kind of support is likely to be needed, and what materials would be most effective for providing that support. This is particularly important for new and innovative program components (such as those related to technology) that might require more intensive and ongoing support to build capacity.
- *Measuring* ongoing implementation is particularly critical when variation in delivery is expected, to inform both ongoing design and implementation, and to contextualize outcomes. Measurement via self-assessment can be a valuable monitoring, evaluation, and learning tool for Clubs, too.
- *Piloting* new and innovative programs can help identify and address delivery challenges before ramping up to a larger number of Clubs, when challenges inevitably multiply.
- Enabling Clubs to relate their experiences with the program, share promising practices, problem-solve challenges, and otherwise contribute to ongoing discussions regarding program development and delivery can be a very effective way to build delivery capacity, and in turn, enhance alignment with program principles and the likelihood of achieving desired outcomes.

About RTG youth

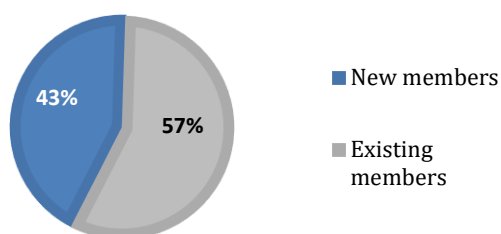
This section provides an overview of the most important findings concerning youth who participated in RTG. For more information on participating youth, please refer to Appendix C.

① Based on data from:

Registration forms and baseline/annual surveys of RTG youth, and annual surveys of Education Managers

RTG brought lots of new members into Clubs. Overall, 43 per cent of *RTG* youth were not currently Club members at the time of their registration to *RTG*.

Figure 6 Registered *RTG* participants



Compared to existing Club members who joined *RTG*, new members were more likely to be girls, in higher grades, and slightly older. This likely reflects the fact that prior to *RTG*, programming in most Clubs was designed for younger age groups rather than teens, so Clubs had to conduct outreach – such as to local schools – to recruit teen participants.

***RTG* members had several key characteristics.** As expected, the vast majority (94.2 per cent), were aged 12 to 17. A slight majority of *RTG* youth were girls (51.3 per cent), 29 per cent identified as part of a visible minority group, and 10 per cent of youth self-identified as either First Nations, Inuit or Métis, which is higher than the Canadian average (4.3 per cent, 2011 figures).²² Across all four cohorts, self-reported average school grades at registration did not vary greatly, remaining within the low-70s.

The profile of *RTG* youth changed over time. The average age of incoming youth dropped almost two years between program start and Year 4, possibly due to the introduction of Junior *RTG* for younger participants. This is consistent with comments from Club staff that younger children sometimes showed more interest in the program than teenagers did. On the other hand, this change could reflect Clubs' overall lack of experience working with teens, and the challenges of recruiting them and keeping them engaged.

"Youth think 'the Boys and Girls Club' is for young kids and they don't want to come here."
Education Manager, Year 4

"We had to overcome the stigma in our community that we are a Club for younger children, with no youth programs offered." Education Manager, Year 1

²² Statistics Canada (2011).


By Year 4, registered youth accounted for only half of all RTG youth. Beginning in Year 3, a large non-registered segment of RTG youth emerged as Clubs began allowing youth to participate in RTG without formally registering. When asked the proportion of registered and non-registered youth participating in RTG at their Clubs, Education Managers estimated that approximately 50 per cent of their participants were unregistered. Unfortunately, little else is known about these non-registered participants, their participation in RTG and any benefits they might have experienced.

“We have many youth who regularly participate in RTG, but who do not hand in registration forms. We fully include these youth in all RTG-related programming; however, it presents challenges for staff with regards to record keeping and check-ins.” Education Manager, Year 3

Recruitment of ‘at-risk’ participants presented a challenge, both in determining a common definition of ‘at-risk’ across Clubs, and BGCC’s tradition of universal and inclusive programming. Initial recruitment of youth to RTG was slow, but when recruitment was broadened to include all high school students in Years 3 and 4, most Clubs met their targets. As a result, ‘at-risk’ status as a qualification for participation was ultimately dropped.

“In my experience it takes time to make the connections with schools, teachers, principals, youth and their families in order to recruit teens to the program.” Education Manager, Year 1

Evidence suggests that most youth in RTG were academically engaged. Doing their best in school was very important to 80 per cent of RTG youth at baseline, with only two per cent reporting it being not at all or not very important to them. Youth and their parents also had high academic aspirations, with 65 per cent of youth reporting their desire to achieve a university degree, and the same proportion of youth reporting that their parent(s) wanted them to get the same type of credential. Most youth also said they feel a sense of belonging at school, with between 72 and 85 per cent of participants agreeing or strongly agreeing on each of the five items positively related to sense of belonging at school.

 **However, there was a significant minority of *RTG* youth who can be considered academically vulnerable.** We created an index of academic vulnerability (see text box), which ultimately described about 30 per cent of *RTG* youth at baseline. The proportion of academically vulnerable youth changed over time, however (35.8 per cent in Years 1 and 2, and 26.4 per cent in Years 3 and 4).

i Academic vulnerability was determined on the basis of five factors reported at baseline:

- Below average feelings of well-being (e.g., satisfaction with yourself, feeling like a failure, pride in yourself, and feeling as though you have good qualities);
- Mothers' low education (high school diploma or less);
- Low academic self-confidence (participants who self-identified as not feeling confident in school);
- An average grade at registration below the group average (79.7 per cent); and
- A report of previous suspensions and expulsions.

Participants were considered academically vulnerable if they reported three or more factors out of five. Participants who reported two or fewer factors were not considered academically vulnerable.

In addition, 39 per cent of all *RTG* youth reported missing school at least one time in the previous two weeks at baseline, and 20 per cent reported already having been expelled or suspended from school at baseline, which is considerably higher than rates in the general population.²³ Finally, three per cent reported having already dropped out of school at some point before joining *RTG*.

²³ The Ontario Ministry of Education reports that 5.3 per cent of all secondary students were suspended in 2013-14. (<http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/safeschools/facts1314.html>)

Insights gained about *RTG* youth:

- It is important to support both the BGCC tradition of universal access and the need to provide programming for those most in need. The concept of “*proportionate universality*” allows for universal eligibility criteria, but modifies programming in terms of intensity and other features in a way that takes the needs and characteristics of a specific target group into account, so participants who need the program most are still able to experience meaningful changes. Planning for this more explicitly at the outset – and supporting it throughout – could help prevent the natural tendency for programs to “drift” over time from original design principles.
- Expanding recruitment into a new target group (in this case, teens) requires time and resources in order for Club staff to build new relationships with referral sources and youth themselves. Additional support and guidance are needed to help Clubs address recruitment challenges, especially when resources and capacity are limited. Otherwise, Club staff are likely to rely on existing practices and networks such as working with younger participants and non-registered youth.

About *RTG* youth participation

i Based on data from:

Participant registration forms, youth baseline and annual surveys, and annual surveys of Education Managers

This section provides an overview of important findings concerning how and why youth participated in *RTG*. For additional information on youth participation, please refer to Appendix D.

Youth said they joined *RTG* for reasons well aligned with the program’s design. Reasons most frequently cited by youth for joining *RTG* were to get better marks, help with homework, or to find out about careers.

Figure 7 Participants' reasons for joining RTG



Understanding heat maps:

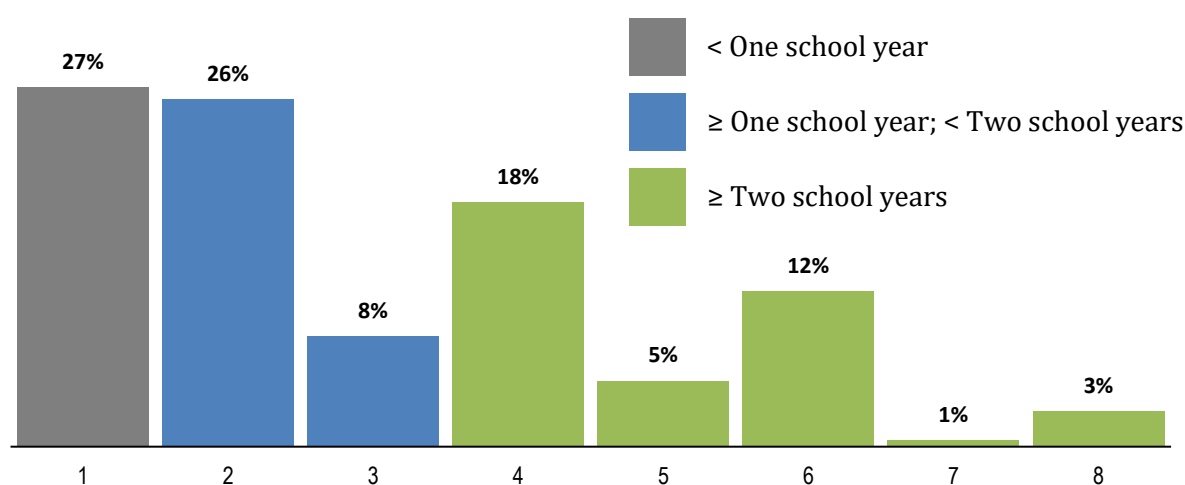
The easiest way to understand a heat map is to think of a table which contains colours instead of numbers. The default colour gradient sets the lowest value in the heat map to dark red, the highest value to dark green, and mid-range values to yellow, with a corresponding gradient between these extremes.

Reasons for joining remained mostly consistent for each cohort of youth, although applying for college or university and finding a scholarship were cited more often in the first two years, when scholarships were still available. Youth joining in Years 3 and 4 were more likely to say they joined to have something fun to do after school. Girls and boys also had mostly similar reasons for joining,

although boys were more likely than girls to say that they wanted to join *RTG* to play with computers, while girls were more likely to want to find out about careers.

Almost three quarters (73 per cent) of youth in Cohorts 1 to 3 were active in *RTG* for at least one school year. However, *RTG* was originally designed for at least two years of youth participation, based on research showing that the benefits of mentoring accrue to youth when the mentoring relationship lasts at least one year. This threshold of two years was only met by just over a third of *RTG* participants in Cohorts 1 to 3 (39 per cent).

Figure 8 Number of active sessions²⁴ in *RTG*, by administrative data from Education Managers

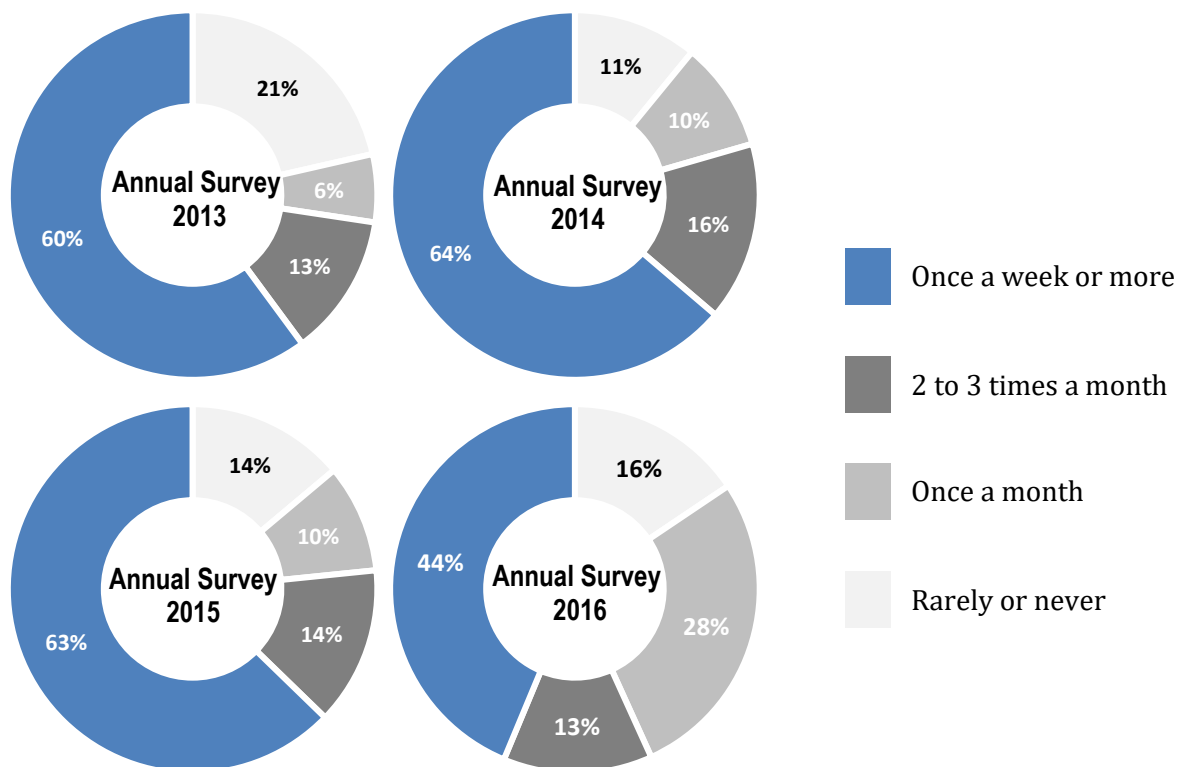


Note that this analysis doesn't include *RTG* participants from Cohort 4, who could only have participated for a maximum of two semesters before the last phase of data collection. It also doesn't account for the rise in participation by non-registered youth, for whom we have no data.

Half of all *RTG* youth met with their mentor at least once a week, although this has decreased significantly in Year 4. Over all four years, 57 per cent of *RTG* youth reported that they met with their mentor once a week or more. However, there was a recent decline in this number, from the low 60s in Years 1 to 3, to 44 per cent in Year 4. The last year of data collection saw a large increase in participants who only met with their mentor once a month.

²⁴ A session refers to an academic semester, such that two academic sessions encompass one school year.

Figure 9 Number of times youth report meeting with an *RTG* mentor, by survey year



Youth also identified spending time with their mentors and Club staff as the most enjoyable *RTG* activities, as well as getting help with their homework and working on their own.

"I had expected it to be a place where I would go for an hour each night to meet with someone who would help me with my homework and then I would return home. But it is much more than that. I meet with a mentor who not only helps me with my homework but we are able to talk about anything and everything. My mentor is great motivation." *RTG* participant

Insights gained about youth participation:

- Ongoing engagement with youth during and following recruitment is important in order to maintain relationships (e.g., maintaining mentorship relationships, prioritizing youth interests in programming) and participation over time.
- Consultation with youth prior to program launch and on an ongoing basis can be helpful in identifying key areas for youth engagement and developing youth buy-in for the program.
- Developing a curriculum that builds over time is important for maintaining engagement with youth as they progress through the program, particularly for programs that, like *RTG*, are designed for longer-term participation.

About *RTG* outcomes

This section provides an overview of the main findings about outcomes for *RTG* youth, based on both quantitative and qualitative data.

① Based on data from:

Youth registration forms, youth baseline and annual surveys, annual surveys of Education Managers, Education Manager forums, youth forums, and youth interviews.

① Quantitative analysis of youth outcomes

For the *RTG* evaluation, youth outcomes were assessed quantitatively in terms of a pre-post change, that is, the difference between participants' responses on their registration forms at baseline, and those on their annual survey after one year of being registered in the program. This time period matched the most common length of participation in the program, and with a large sample size, increased our ability to detect change.

We also analyzed outcomes for those who participated in the program for two years, but there were few significant results, likely due to the small sample size.

Only statistically significant results of at least $p=0.10$ are presented here – that is, we can say with 90 per cent confidence that there was a change in a given outcome. This is a minimum; some results were even more highly significant, at $p=0.05$ or $p=0.01$; that is, with 95 per cent or 99 per cent confidence.

There were limited outcome results for the overall group of *RTG* youth, some of which were counter-intuitive. The quantitative analysis revealed very few statistically significant results, and no discernable pattern. We found one significantly positive outcome, that participating youth appeared to care more about what their teacher thought of them after a year in the program, compared to previously. However, participants also reported a decreased sense of belonging in school and decreased perceived autonomy in schoolwork; and everyday stress also increased for participants, on average, after a year in the program. However, these results were not supported by our qualitative findings, so are hard to interpret.

① Limited and counter-intuitive results could be influenced by many factors:

- Surveys were administered at the end of the school year, at a time when students might be stressed by final exams, and feeling more tired and less motivated than at other times in the academic year;
- Sociodemographic factors (e.g., gender, race, language), socioeconomic status (e.g., family income), and other large life factors or events may also have influenced program outcomes in ways we couldn't observe or control for in the analysis;
- Differences in delivery at individual Clubs might have influenced results;
- Some results might be developmentally normative, such that youth may report more negative experiences – such as stress – as they progress through adolescence.

In the absence of a comparison group, we cannot assess whether negative trends might still have occurred in the absence of *RTG*, or if *RTG* reduced the strength of those trends by providing a protective influence.

 **Academically vulnerable students reported the most positive changes.** While the overall group showed few results, *RTG* participants who were described as academically vulnerable²⁵ reported significant positive changes in their academic engagement, perceived competence in school, and perceived autonomy in school. They also reported spending more time finding out about future careers, and on homework at home, compared to students who did not meet the criteria for academic vulnerability.

For example, after one year in *RTG*, the proportion of participants categorized as academically vulnerable that agreed or strongly agreed that they are “very smart in school” increased by

²⁵ That is, they reported three of the following: Below average feelings of well-being; low maternal education (high school diploma or less); low academic self-confidence; an average grade at registration below the group average (79.7 per cent); previous suspensions and expulsions.

18 percentage points. Comparatively, that proportion decreased by seven percentage points for participants who did not meet the criteria for academic vulnerability. Statistical significance means we can say with 99 per cent certainty that there was a real difference between those two groups in the proportional change in agreement with that statement after one year. In regards to academic engagement, results were particularly driven by two items on the surveys:

- “I work very hard on my schoolwork.”
- “I do not often come to class unprepared.”

Figure 10 Youth changes in academic engagement, perceived competence and autonomy in school, academic participation, and finding out about future careers after one year, by academic vulnerability²⁶

		ACADEMICALLY VULNERABLE	NOT ACADEMICALLY VULNERABLE
ACADEMIC ENGAGEMENT	Overall scale ²⁷	↑ 0.43 pts	↓ 0.49 pts
PERCEIVED COMPETENCE	Participants agree/strongly agree that they are very smart in school	↑ 18 pp ²⁸	↓ 7 pp
PERCEIVED AUTONOMY	Participants agree/strongly agree that they feel bad if they don't do their homework	↑ 14 pp	↓ 2 pp
	Participants agree/strongly agree that they do work in class because doing well in school is important to them	↑ 13 pp	↓ 3 pp
ACADEMIC PARTICIPATION	Participants spend four hours or more on homework at home per week	↑ 12 pp	↓ 1 pp
FIND OUT ABOUT FUTURE CAREERS	Participants have read information about different types of work or careers ²⁹	↑ 16 pp	↓ 14 pp

²⁶ The results presented here, and in all subsequent tables, are those for which there were significant difference between the two groups. These changes do not necessarily represent significant increases or decreases *within* each group. For example, the two per cent decrease in participants who, among those who do not qualify as academically vulnerable, agreed/strongly agreed that they *feel bad if they don't do their homework* is not statistically significant – we cannot say with confidence that there was any significant change in that item for that group. However, we can say that there is a 90 per cent chance that there is a significant difference between the changes reported by the two *different* groups. That is, there was a significant difference between the two groups, even if the groups did not necessarily see significant change on their own.

²⁷ The academic engagement scale combines the results of four individual items, such that a higher score on the scale indicates that students are more engaged. The scale has a minimum score of four and a maximum score of 16.

²⁸ The abbreviation *pp* stands for “percentage points”, and indicates the difference between the baseline proportion and the proportion after one year in the program.

When outcomes were analyzed in relation to program delivery, academic outcomes were better for youth who were exposed to two key *RTG* features:

❶ **A strong relationship with a mentor**

Participants who met with their mentor *once a week or more* reported positive changes in their academic engagement, perceived competence in school, and attitudes towards school after one year in the program.

“Most importantly, I received a gift of coming to a place where every adult I met motivated me. This is what kept me going, this is what drove me to work harder and harder in school.”
Youth forum participant

Figure 11 Youth changes in academic engagement, perceived competence and attitudes towards school, by participation in mentorship activities

		MET WITH THEIR MENTOR ONCE A WEEK OR MORE	MET WITH THEIR MENTOR LESS THAN ONCE A WEEK
ACADEMIC ENGAGEMENT	Participants agree/strongly agree that they <i>work very hard on their schoolwork</i>	↑ 6 pp	↓ 4 pp
PERCEIVED COMPETENCE	Participants agree/strongly agree that they <i>could do well in school if they want to</i>	↑ 4 pp	↓ 2 pp
	Participants agree/strongly agree that they <i>can work really hard in school</i>	↑ 2 pp	↓ 5 pp
ATTITUDES TOWARDS SCHOOL	Participants agree/strongly agree that <i>finishing high school is important</i>	↑ 2 pp	↓ 4 pp

²⁹ In the year since joining *RTG*, compared to those who had reported ever reading such information before joining the program.

② Regularly receiving homework help

RTG participants who received homework support once a week or more reported positive changes in academic engagement, and less increased stress after one year in the program in comparison to those who received homework support less than once a week.

"I am always backed up in my school work and encouraged by them to do my best. The staff are very helpful in getting [me] to my goal to move on from high school and into college."

RTG participant

Figure 12 Youth changes in academic engagement and stress, by participation in homework support

		RECEIVED HOMEWORK HELP ONCE A WEEK OR MORE	RECEIVED HOMEWORK HELP LESS THAN ONCE A WEEK
ACADEMIC ENGAGEMENT	Participants agree/strongly agree that they <i>work very hard on their schoolwork</i>	↑ 7 pp	↓ 2 pp
STRESS	Participants agree/strongly agree that <i>most days are stressful</i>	↑ 6 pp	↑ 15 pp

Qualitatively, developing meaningful relationships outside school was frequently identified as one of the most successful elements of *RTG* by both youth participants and Education Managers. The theme of *RTG* as fostering a sense of community emerged for many youth participants, by providing a place where supportive relationships with adults could be developed that did not necessarily exist in other realms of youths' lives, and that contributed to furthering both academic and life outcomes. Although we did not have the data to analyze this specifically, it seems likely that this dynamic may have been particularly relevant for academically vulnerable students, half of whom reported that school is a place where they feel awkward and out of place.

"It is a community where I meet other youth my age... youth whom I can relate with, talk with and connect with. I meet adults who give me a good laugh, the best advice, and let me leave the club with a smile on my face." *RTG participant*

This theory is supported by existing research, which has found that youth with relatively few resources are likely to benefit more than others from mentorship and supportive relationships with non-parental adults, in terms of increased educational achievement and attainment.³⁰ More broadly, community development has been shown to promote personal resources and social supports, so that youth “feel valued, experience greater intrinsic motivation to achieve, and develop a broadly applicable set of social-emotional competencies that mediate better academic performance, health-promoting behavior, and citizenship”.³¹

There were very few differences in outcomes between boys and girls, so there is little evidence RTG has an overall structural or systematic gender bias. However, girls did report an increase in their perceived competence after one year in the program, and in attending “a presentation of people working in different types of jobs” since joining RTG,³² while boys saw a decrease in both areas.

“We have made RTG into an indispensable program... We make ourselves available to the needs of the youth during day and evening hours, we provide academic support to those who need it and we maintain a meaningful connection to the people they care about, need and are attached to, who either do or who are supposed to be providing support for them. We are connected through relationships, interest-based learning options and academics.

Youth are drawn to our services because they know we care AND because they know we have the ability to assist them with what they need. They also trust [that] if we cannot fulfill their needs directly, we are going to work TOGETHER with them to get them the help they require. This decreases the sense of hopelessness and increases the sense of connection and value they place on their communities, parents, schools and peers.” Education Manager, Year 4

³⁰ Erickson, L. D., McDonald, S., & Elder, G. H. (2009).

³¹ Durlak et al. (2011).

³² Compared to those who had reported ever attending such a presentation before joining the program.

Figure 13 Youth changes in perceived competence and finding out about future careers, by gender

		GIRLS	BOYS
PERCEIVED COMPETENCE	Overall scale ³³	↑ 0.78 pts	↓ 0.20 pts
FINDING OUT ABOUT FUTURE CAREERS	Participants had <i>attended a presentation by people working in different types of jobs</i>	↑ 7 pp	↓ 11 pp

These findings are difficult to interpret however, in the absence of a more detailed gender-based analysis that also includes potential differences in exposure to and participation in specific program activities.

³³ The perceived competence scale combines the results of six individual items such that a higher score on the scale indicates that students perceive themselves as more competent. The scale has a minimum score of 6 and a maximum score of 24.

Insights gained about youth outcomes:

- Participants who are already academically engaged at the outset may see limited benefits from participating in a program like *RTG* in terms of changing their academic aspirations, their views on the importance of school, and their sense of belonging at school.
- Mentorship and academic support appear to be particularly important components to improve youth's academic engagement and perceived competence in school. It would be useful to work with Clubs on ways to support these areas (e.g., how to overcome challenges to recruiting and supporting mentors to develop young people's skills), to maximize benefits to participants.
- Having a caring adult to talk to and developing healthy friendships in an after-school program can help youth increase their sense of belonging in the community and improve their well-being. As both factors are predictors of academic success, continuing to offer a warm, welcoming environment is key to achieving this long-term objective. However, while these are necessary, they are unlikely to be sufficient for achieving academic outcomes. Engaging youth in structured academic and learning-related activities is also important.
- Shorter-term participation and limited program exposure are also likely to limit achievement of desired outcomes, especially those that are more ambitious and take longer to achieve, such as going on to post-secondary education. It is important to find ways to support youth's *ongoing* program participation and engagement, such as with curriculum that builds over time.
- Including a comparison – or better yet, a randomly assigned control group – in future evaluations would allow analyses to show whether or not program participation had a protective effect, and to attribute positive changes to the program instead of other factors.

About the *RTG* evaluation

This section provides an overview of key points about the *RTG* evaluation, and reminders about how to evaluate complex programs in a dynamic environment.

① Youth participation

While *RTG* youth registration forms generally provided fulsome information, youth surveys had relatively low response rates:

- 45 per cent average response rate at baseline
- 36 per cent average response rate on annual surveys


Across Clubs, response rates varied from 0-94 per cent, indicating that youth from certain Clubs were less likely to participate in the survey.

An online youth discussion forum was also conducted with 20 youth in Year 2, and interviews were conducted with 10 youth who expected to graduate in Year 4.

The *RTG* evaluation met some needs, but not all. Despite the best of intentions, the *RTG* evaluation tried to cover too much ground. In part this was due to the innovative nature of the program, which meant the evaluation had to establish what types of outcomes could reasonably be achieved. However, we also underestimated the challenge of evaluating the national scale of the program, given the heterogeneity of Clubs and varied program implementation. Our primary focus on the national-level meant we had more limited information about Club-level adaptations and outcomes, and regional differences. It was also a challenge collecting a nationally representative sample of youth voices (e.g., limited survey response rates, limited qualitative data).

Nevertheless, we were able to develop a good portrait of the national-level implementation of the program over time and to share that periodically with national staff and Clubs, to help with ongoing program improvement.

Challenges with evaluation design made it difficult to detect change. These challenges stemmed from the lack of a control or comparison group, and methodological constraints such as changes to survey measures (and consequently, relatively small sample sizes). These in turn made it difficult to detect change over time, across cohorts, in relation to other variables, and in comparison to those who left the program or who did not respond to the surveys. In the end, we were unable to attribute change to the program, as distinct from other influences such as normal youth development. Where possible, we tried to mitigate these limitations with multiple data types and sources, and rigorous analysis.

 **A developmental approach to the RTG evaluation was absolutely the right way to proceed**, especially at this early stage in the program's development. Evaluation was integrated into design early on, so we were able to help identify gaps in early design planning and suggest an internal logic and theoretical basis for the program. As the program developed, we ended up spending considerable time designing and supporting mechanisms for program monitoring and data collection, entry, and analysis, but these appear to have helped build evaluation capacity at BGCC National and Clubs, and have strengthened ongoing program improvement. In addition, we feel a developmental approach facilitated collaboration with BGCC and among Clubs, and generated extensive joint learning for all involved.

Insights gained about evaluation:

- **To enhance appropriateness, usability, and relevance, it is important not to rush evaluation design.** Essential first steps in any evaluation include checking assumptions with stakeholders, and getting a good understanding of the intervention and its context, so a realistic plan can be developed that is appropriate for the program's stage of development.
- **Anticipate change during the delivery of an innovative new program.** New programs are likely to revise and adapt to reflect delivery conditions, changing demands, and other changes in circumstance. Developing risk management strategies during the planning stage can help prepare for such changes, and ensure that key components remain a priority and the most important data are collected.
- **Develop a strong mixed methods design from the outset.** This includes identifying which areas would benefit from collecting both quantitative and qualitative data and the proper sequence of data collection. Qualitative data can help nuance and explain quantitative findings, particularly in cases where it is difficult to attribute causation quantitatively.
- **It is important to evaluate risky behaviour and negative outcomes, even for a positive youth development program.** These outcomes help identify the risks/outcomes that might be *avoided* as a result of the program. This is particularly important for universal programs, since many youth are likely to show natural changes on some outcomes as a result of normal development, even in the absence of a program. This can also provide a useful perspective on the program for the subset of academically vulnerable youth.
- **Identify a CORE set of appropriate and realistic short-term and medium-term outcomes, especially for programs with ambitious long-term goals.** Measurement of long-term goals (e.g., PSE participation) may be limited by project timelines, data availability and other constraints, but measurement of short-term and medium-term outcomes is more realistic during the course of program delivery. Identified goals should also be aligned with the intensity of the program and expected participation. A well-articulated theory of change with a clear path between project activities, participant engagement and reactions, and short-, medium-, and long-term outcomes can help focus the evaluation on the most relevant and realistic outcomes.

Conclusion: Final thoughts

The *RTG* story detailed on the previous pages of this report is one of experimentation and learning, and many successes. Each participating Club will have its own *RTG* story – what the program looked like in that Club, how it was adapted to meet local needs, to what degree youth participated, and what outcomes they experienced. Likewise, each young person participating in *RTG* has his or her own experience of the program. Our challenge as evaluators has been to tell the story of the program overall – on a national basis – without losing the nuance and richness of those individual stories.

RTG was borne of the wish to equip young people facing disadvantage with better skills to succeed in the 21st century, and to build their strengths and resilience so they can use those skills effectively. While digital literacy and scholarships became less integral to the program as it evolved, the principles of academic and learning support, mentorship, and providing a safe, welcoming environment for youth remained important. These design elements reflect BGCC's broader philosophy of supporting strengths-based, positive youth development, and provide a solid foundation for aligning the program even further with the evidence base for quality after-school programming for youth.

The *RTG* story suggests what can be achieved when creative ideas develop into intentional program planning and design, and with sufficient resources – time, funding, and staff engagement – to support program delivery. While these first few years have entailed considerable challenge and change, Club and National staff have worked hard to find creative ways to address these, particularly in developing mechanisms for more collaborative program development, support, and capacity-building. To the extent these efforts can be joined with more robust data collection on an ongoing basis, Clubs and National will have a powerful set of tools to support program monitoring, evaluation, and learning.

Having quality information is important because *RTG* appears to be a promising program. Like many universal programs, we found positive outcomes for a subset of registered *RTG* youth rather than the overall group. Those considered academically vulnerable reported significant positive changes after one year in the program, including feeling more engaged academically overall, feeling they were smart in school and wanting to do well, and spending more time on homework and finding out about future careers. Even without a comparison group, there is enough evidence to suggest that this group's needs should be the focus of ongoing program design and delivery, while still retaining the principle of universal access.

While future funding for *RTG* is uncertain, BGCC National and Clubs are committed to continuing to deliver and develop the program. Moving forward, the challenge is how to differentiate *RTG* from Clubs' usual, ongoing programming, in order to maximize benefits for youth. Our best advice as evaluators is to focus on what makes *RTG* distinct, and on those who stand to benefit most. It is clear *RTG* is a promising after-school educational support program, and we hope the lessons learned throughout the first five years of this experiment will prove useful – to Clubs, National, and any others wishing to support youth to become engaged and successful life-long learners.

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Appendix A: Data sources and response rates

RTG Program manuals (3) – Version 1 first provided to SRDC (included both research/rationale and operational details), version 2 (circulated to Clubs between June 2012-14), and version 3 (circulated to Clubs between June 2014-ongoing)

Club application forms (26) – Complete application forms received for about 70 per cent of Clubs delivering *RTG*, 11 missing; no application forms for initial ten clubs selected for piloting *RTG*; no application forms from Clubs that were unsuccessful in obtaining an *RTG* grant; most questions in the form have responses (i.e., good coverage) but dependability of data could be affected by missing 30 per cent of forms

Annual EM reports (4) – almost 100 per cent participation across Clubs for each of the four years of *RTG* delivery, with nearly every question answered (i.e., little missing data); a highly credible and dependable data source

Education Manager interviews (8) – rich source of information but covers only eight Clubs in Year 2; used sparingly in this report

Administrative data – relies on data entry by Education Managers and BGCC coordinator; likely data gaps for: youth status in the program (i.e., withdrawn, active, inactive), expected high school graduation date, actual graduation date; a reliable source to report on the total number of registered youth in *RTG*

Web analytics – generated automatically from the *RTG* website, very trustworthy data for usage of ePortfolios, eLearning modules; dependability of thematic coverage across Education Manager program plans and use of youth weekly check-ins likely affected by low-moderate platform usage by Education Managers; however, still a good indicator of overall activity in *RTG*

Informal observations, meetings, previous annual evaluation reports – Notes taken by SRDC research team throughout the project, and previous annual evaluation reports submitted by SRDC to BGCC

Youth registration forms – relies on proper administration by Education Managers and data entry at BGCC; mostly good coverage across questions, with the exception of total household income

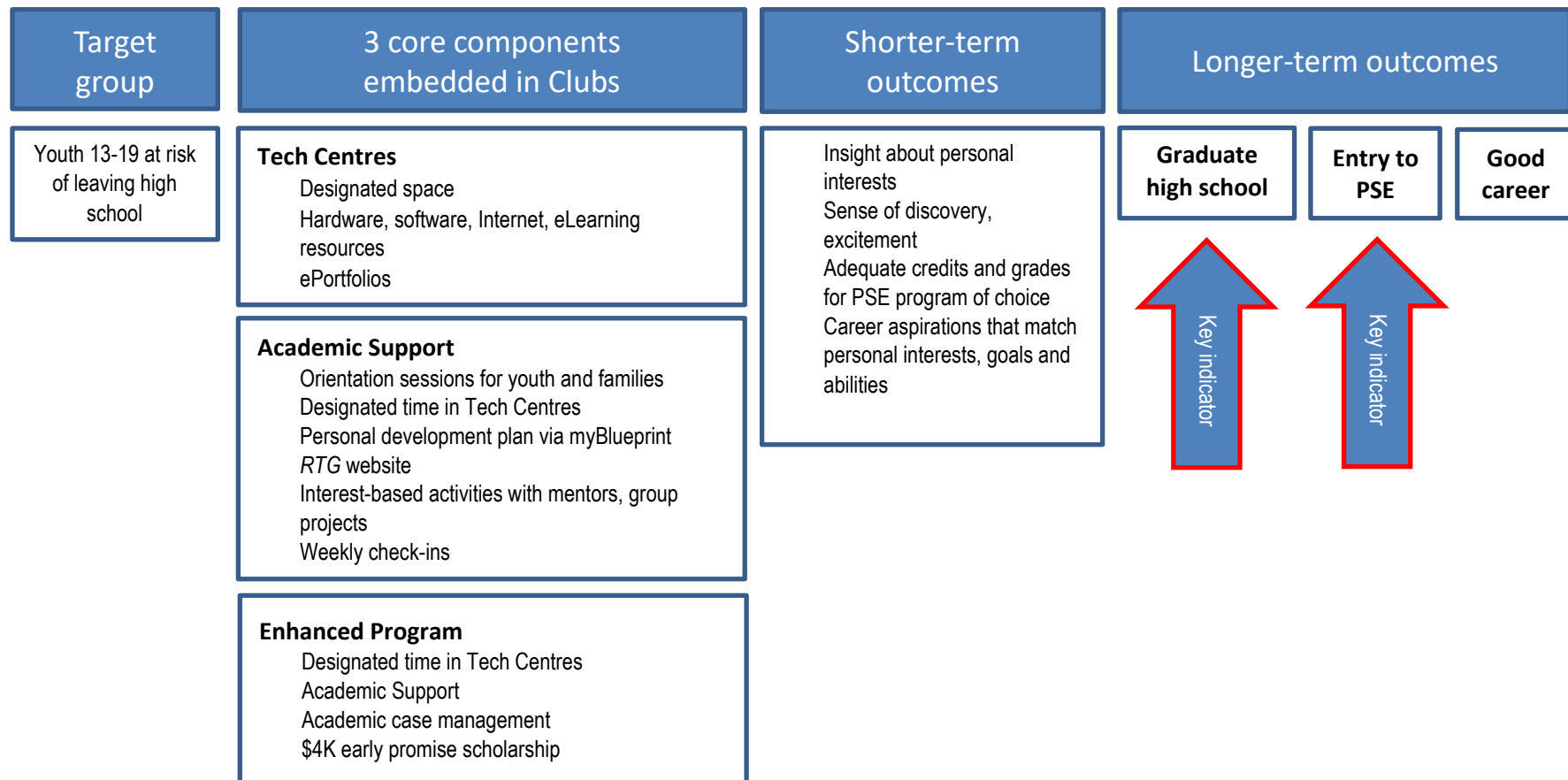
Youth baseline and annual surveys – relies on proper administration by Education Managers and data entry at BGCC; 45 per cent average response rate for baseline, 36 per cent average response rate for the annual surveys; completion rates across Clubs show a wide range of response rates (0-94 per cent), likely indicating that youth from certain Clubs were less likely to participate in the survey and/or may not have been provided the same opportunity as youth at other Clubs to participate

Youth online discussion forum (1) – one online forum conducted with 20 youth in Year 2; used sparingly as a data source in this report

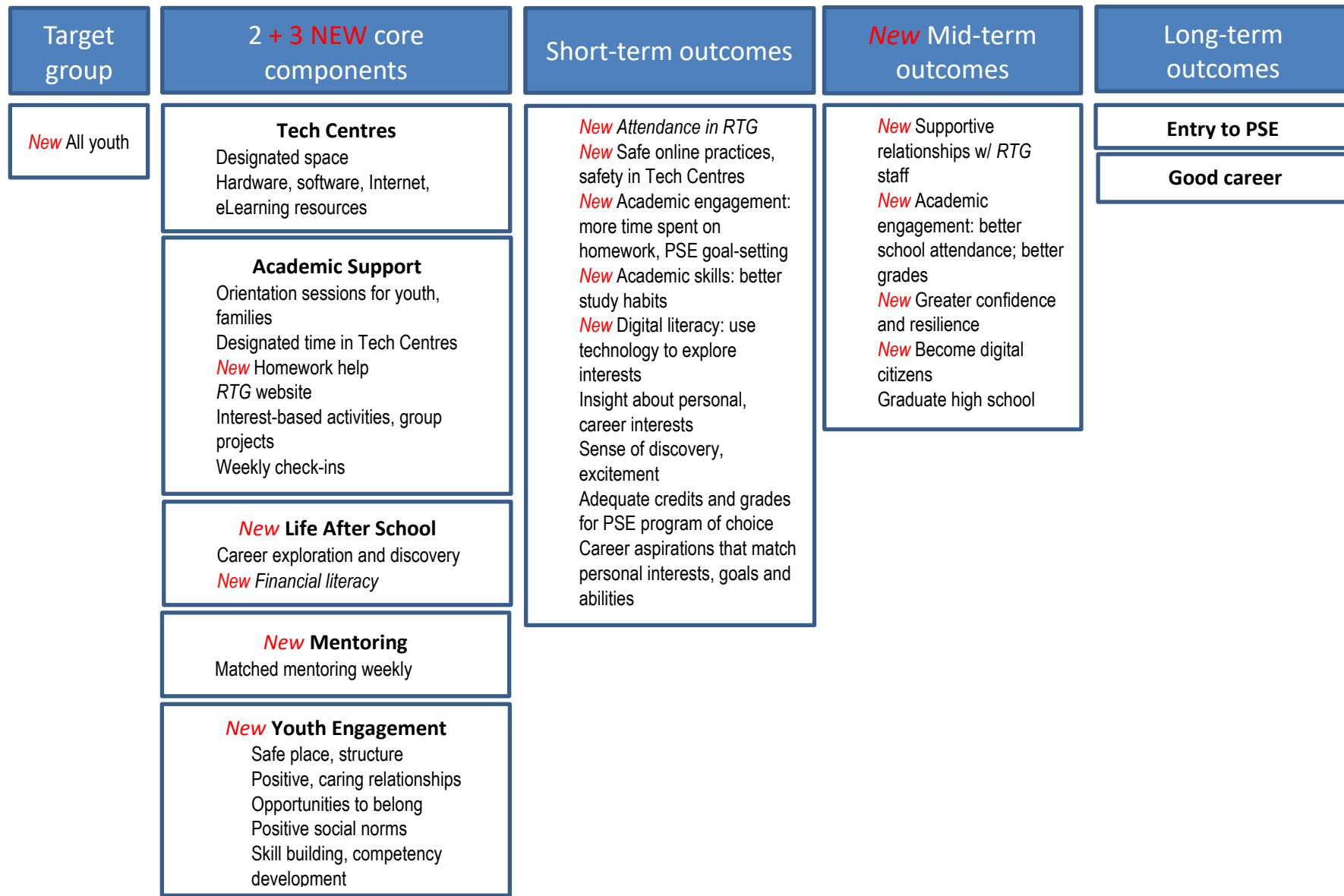
Youth interviews with graduating youth (10) – interviews with youth who, based on their grade level at registration, were expected to graduate at the end of Year 4; used sparingly as a data source in this report

Appendix B: Logic models

Original logic model



Revised logic model



Appendix C: Characteristics of *RTG* youth

Total registered *RTG* youth – 1,646

Total *RTG* Clubs – 37

Average number of *RTG* youth per Club – 45, with significant variance across Clubs; the average number of youth ranged from approximately 18 to 100.

New youth members – About 43 per cent of youth were not currently Club members at the time of their registration to *RTG*. Compared to existing Club members who joined *RTG*, new members were no different in terms of their recent self-reported grade average in school, but were significantly:

- more likely to be girls (54 per cent) than boys (46 per cent)
- more likely to be in Grades 9-12 vs Grade 8 or less
- slightly older (14.8 years old vs 14.4, or about six months older)

Age – At program registration, *RTG* participants ranged in age from ten to 22 years-old. As expected, youth aged 12 to 17 comprised the vast majority of the sample (94.2 per cent). Of particular note:

- *Almost two years' difference between the average age of youth joining in 2012-13 and 2015-16* – Cohort 4 (2015-16) was significantly younger (13.6 years of age) than all other cohorts. Cohort 1 (2012-13) was also significantly older than Cohort 2 (2013-14)

Gender – A slight majority of *RTG* youth were girls (51.3 per cent); there were no significant differences among cohorts.

Visible minority – Overall, 71 per cent of *RTG* youth reported not being from a visible minority group, though this differed significantly between Cohort 1 (39 per cent) vs other cohorts (29 per cent in Cohort 2; 24 per cent in Cohort 3, 25 per cent in Cohort 4).

Aboriginal status – Ten per cent of youth self-identified as being either First Nations, Inuit or Métis, which is higher than the Canadian average (4.3 per cent, 2011 figures).³⁴

Languages other than English – The vast majority (91 per cent) indicated they were English-speaking.

Household income – More than half the families of registered *RTG* youth did not disclose their total household income. Of those that did, 31 per cent reported household income of less than \$25,000 per year; there were no statistically significant differences among the cohorts.

Youth with special needs – At registration, 14 per cent of *RTG* youth reported having a special need. The most common special needs identified were learning disabilities and attention deficit

³⁴ Statistics Canada (2011).

disorders – including attention deficit hyperactive disorder. However, special needs reported in the registration form were identified through self-report, and do not represent a professional or medical diagnosis.

Citizenship of parents – 35 per cent of mothers and 39 per cent of fathers reported not being Canadian citizens at birth.

Parental level of education – Most youth enrolled in *RTG* came from families where parents have a college diploma or a trade certificate or are a high school graduate. A higher proportion of the fathers of *RTG* youth also have less than a high school graduate or, at the opposite, a university degree, in comparison to participants' mothers. Although differences among cohorts were not significant, we observed a trend over the four cohorts towards a higher level of parental education. In other words, over time, a greater proportion of *RTG* youth were being recruited and registered from families with higher levels of education.

Figure 14 Highest level of maternal education, by cohort

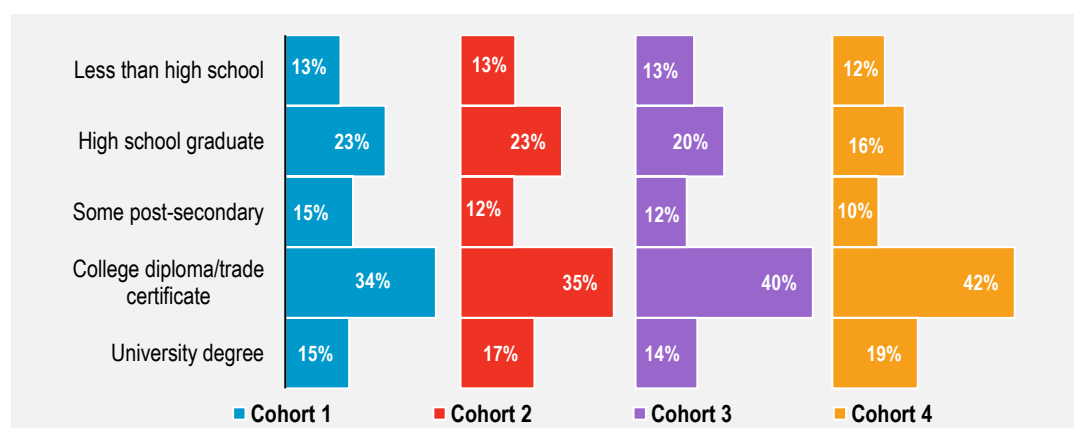
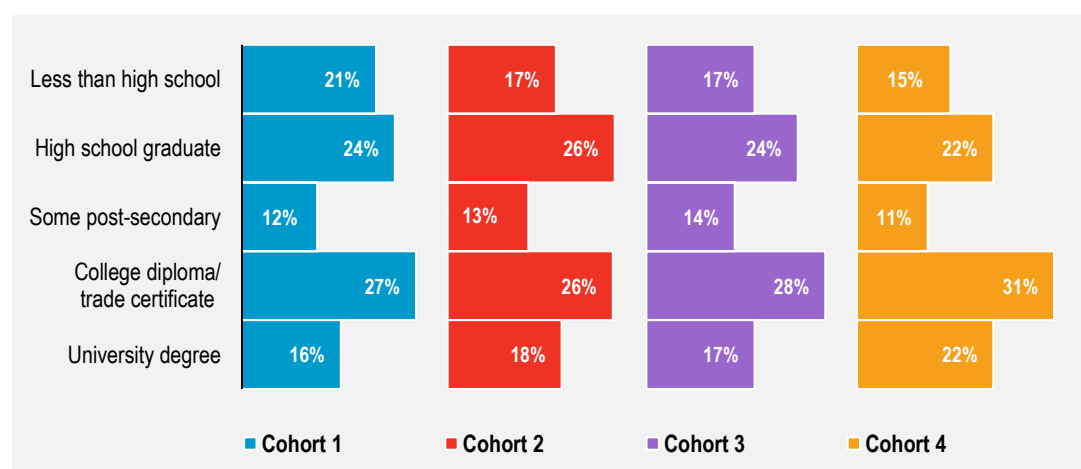


Figure 15 Highest level of paternal education, by cohort



Across all four cohorts, average school grades at registration did not vary greatly, remaining within the low-70s.

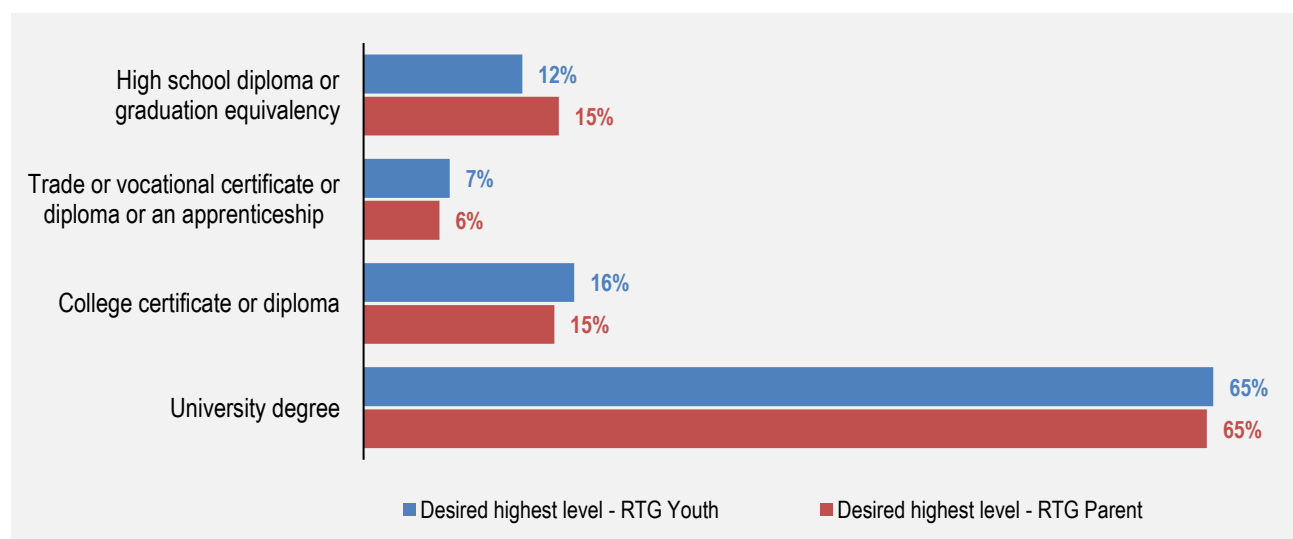
RTG girls reported slightly better academic performance than boys at registration – Girls reported a median average school grade of 75 per cent compared to 73 per cent for boys. These results tend to confirm international OECD data that showed that at 15 years-old, there are generally no significant differences in academic achievement between girls and boys overall; differences only come out when specific skills are measured (e.g., as a group, girls tend to do better in reading and boys in mathematics).³⁵

Doing their best in school was very important to most RTG youth – For 80 per cent of RTG youth, doing their best in school was “very important” to them at baseline, with 18 per cent reporting it was “sort of important”, and only two per cent reported it being not at all or not very important to them.

RTG youth reported high follow-through on schoolwork – At baseline, the majority of youth reported completing their assignments and their homework always or often on time (83 per cent and 72 per cent, respectively).

High academic aspirations among youth and their parents – 65 per cent of youth reported their desire to achieve a university degree. Interestingly, exactly the same proportion of youth reported that their parent(s) wanted them to get a university degree. On the whole, RTG youth also reported aspiring for a level of education higher than that of the highest level of education among RTG parents as a group (recall that most youth enrolled in RTG come from families where parents have a college diploma or a trade certificate).

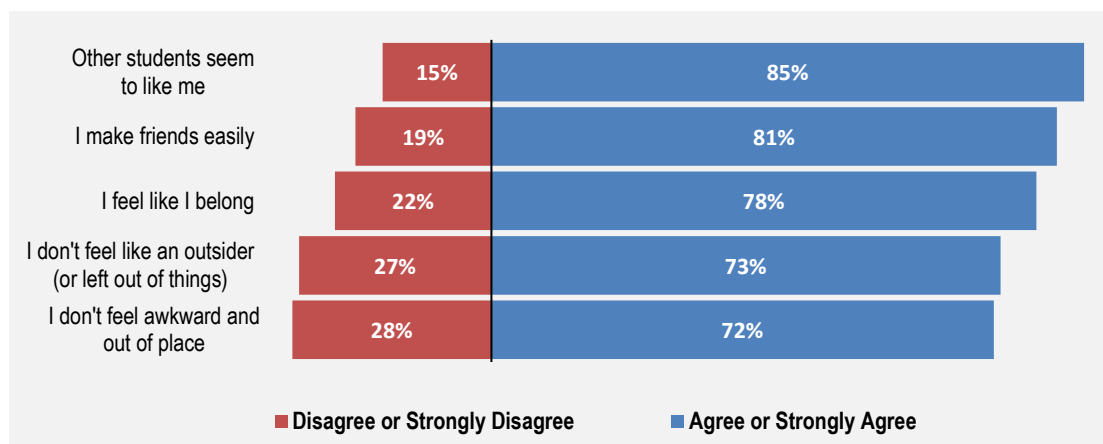
Figure 16 Youths’ academic aspirations at baseline



³⁵ OECD data was sourced from the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) (OECD, 2015).

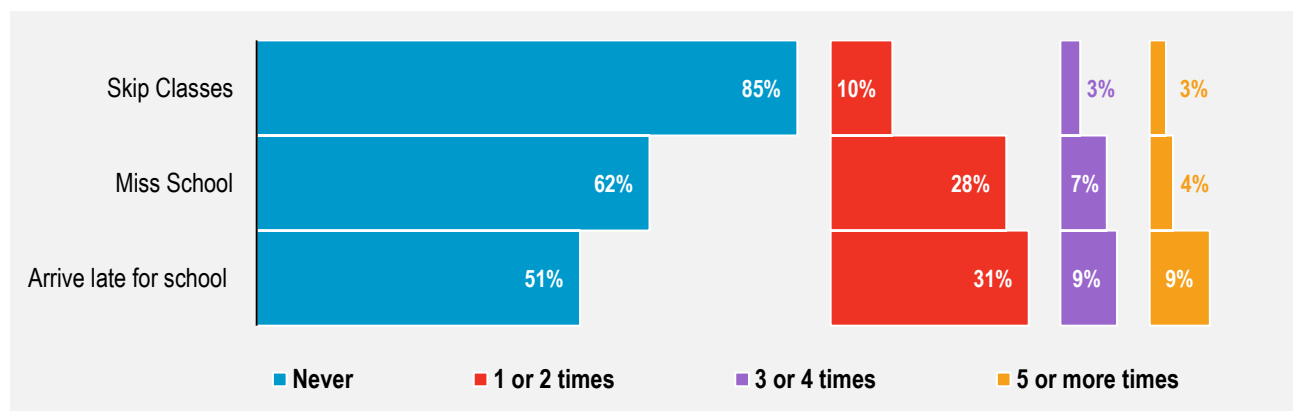
Sense of belonging at school was asked in both baseline and annual youth surveys. Baseline data showed that between 72 per cent and 85 per cent of youth agreed or strongly agreed with each the five items positively related to sense of belonging at school. However, 28 per cent reported feeling somewhat awkward and out of place.

Figure 17 Youths' self-reported sense of belonging at school at baseline



Skipping classes, missing school or arriving late for school was common – At baseline, 15 per cent of *RTG* youth reported that they skipped classes at least one time and 49 per cent arrived late for school in the past two weeks. Additionally, 39 per cent reported missing school at least one time in the two weeks prior to completing their baseline survey.

Figure 18 Attendance issues reported by youth in the two weeks prior to completing their baseline survey



One fifth said they've been expelled or suspended from school before joining *RTG* – 20 per cent of *RTG* youth reported having been expelled or suspended from school, which is considerably higher than the rates published for Ontario schools (average suspension rate of 5.3 per cent, and average expulsion rate of 0.064 per cent, of all secondary students).³⁶

A high rate of high school leaving – Three per cent of *RTG* youth reported having already dropped out of school at some point before joining *RTG*.³⁷

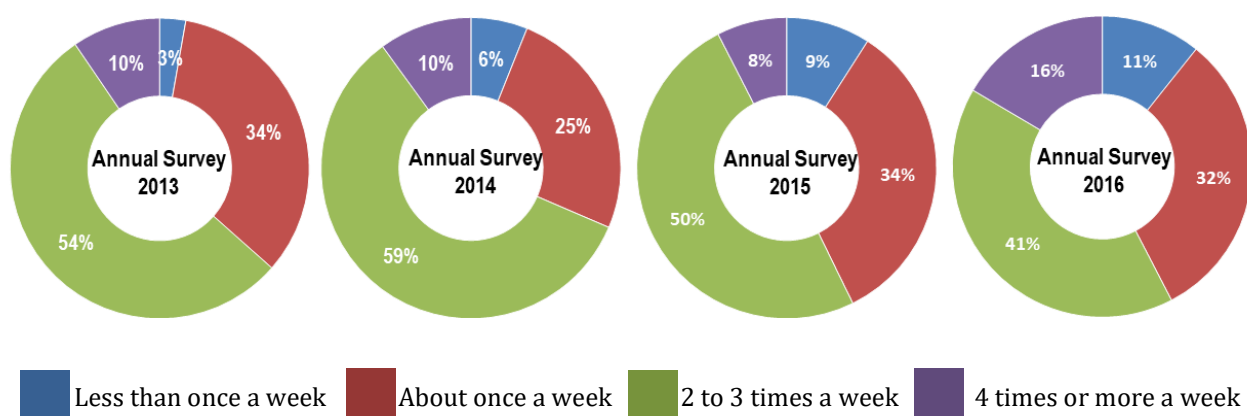
³⁶ Ontario Ministry of Education (2016).

³⁷ Although it is difficult to determine the rate of high school leaving amongst the larger population, in 2015 Ontario reported that 85.5 per cent of students graduated with an Ontario Secondary School Diploma (OSSD) within five years of starting high school (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2017).

Appendix D: Youth participation and preferences

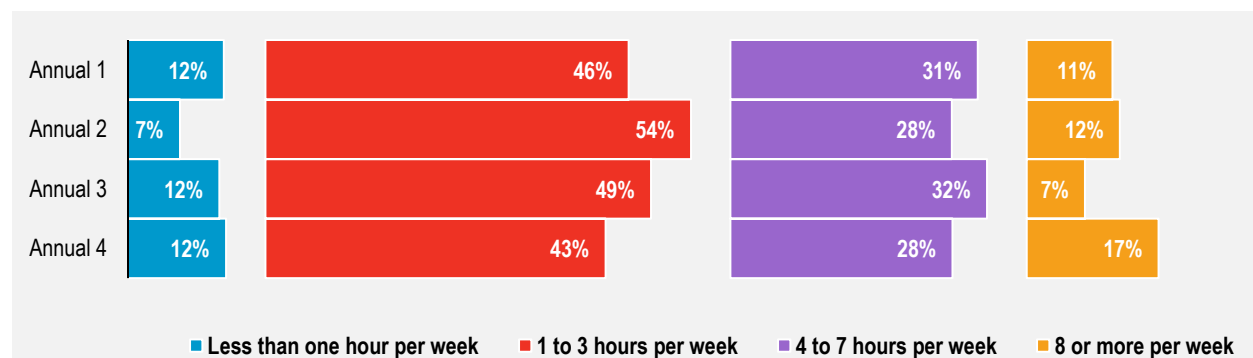
Weekly attendance – Most youth attended *RTG* once a week or more. Depending on the program year, between 25-34 per cent of *RTG* youth reported attending the program about once a week, and between 41 per cent and 59 per cent attended two to three times a week. As a basis for comparison, BGCA's National Youth Outcomes Initiative (NYOI) defines "regular Club attenders" as an average of one time a week, and "high attenders" as those attending two times a week on average.

Figure 19 Frequency of youth participation in *RTG*



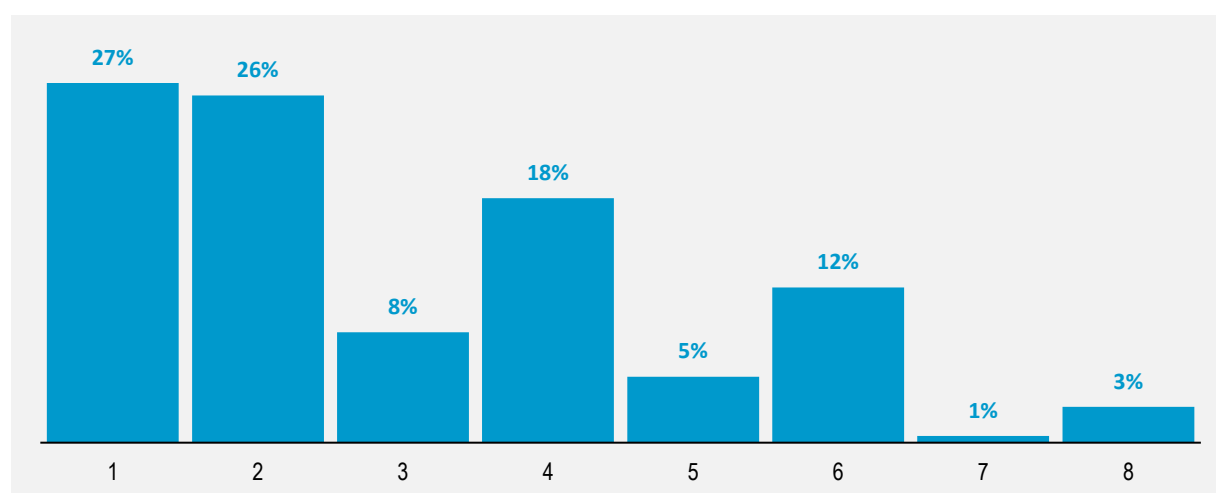
Hours per week – As shown below, almost half (48 per cent) of youth received one to three hours per week of *RTG*. Less than one fifth qualified as "highly engaged" *RTG* youth, calculated as eight or more hours spent in *RTG* per week. Interestingly, about 10 per cent of youth each year reported spending on average of less than one hour per week in *RTG*.

Figure 20 Number of hours per week in *RTG* reported by youth, by cohort



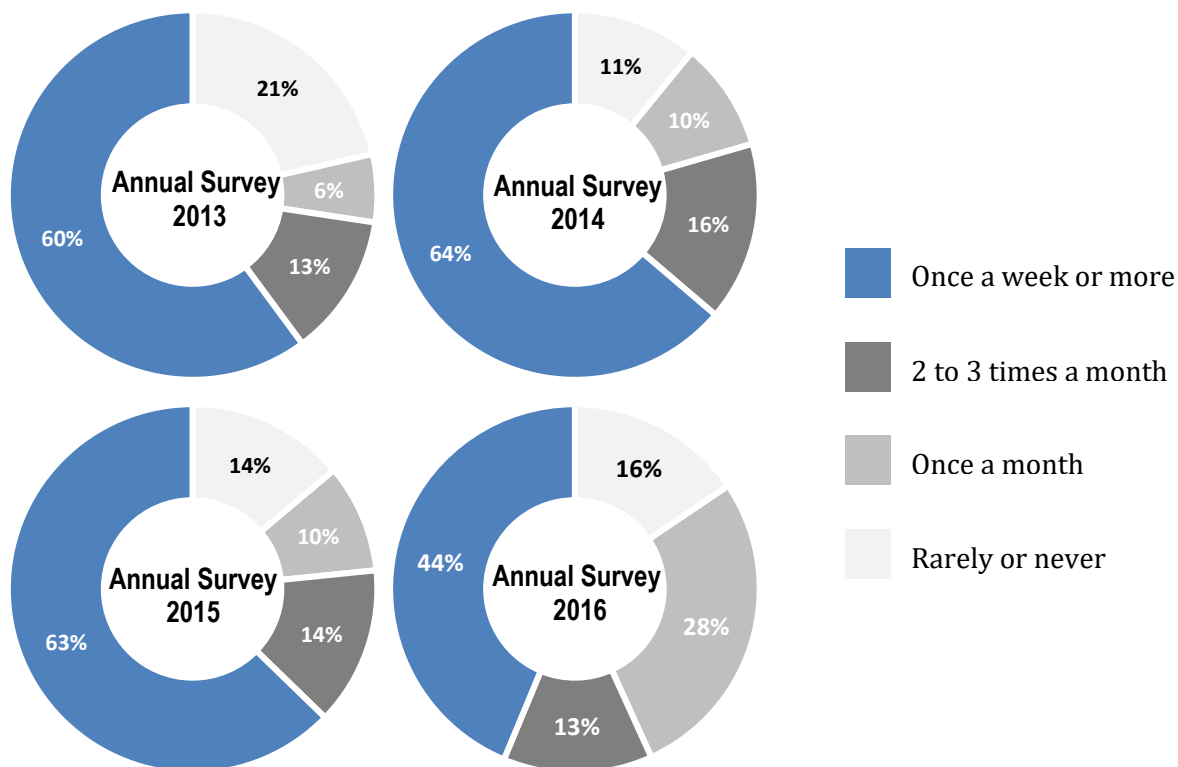
Academic sessions – Education Managers recorded when *RTG* youth were active in the program within any given academic session, with two academic sessions per year – in other words, two active sessions in *RTG* is roughly equivalent to 10 months. Almost three quarters (73 per cent) of youth in Cohorts 1 to 3 were active in *RTG* for at least one school year (two academic sessions). However, *RTG* was originally designed for at least two years of youth participation (four academic sessions), based on research showing that the benefits of mentoring accrue to youth when the mentoring relationship lasts at least one year. This threshold of two years was only met by just over a third of *RTG* participants in Cohorts 1 to 3 (39 per cent).

Figure 21 Number of active session in *RTG*

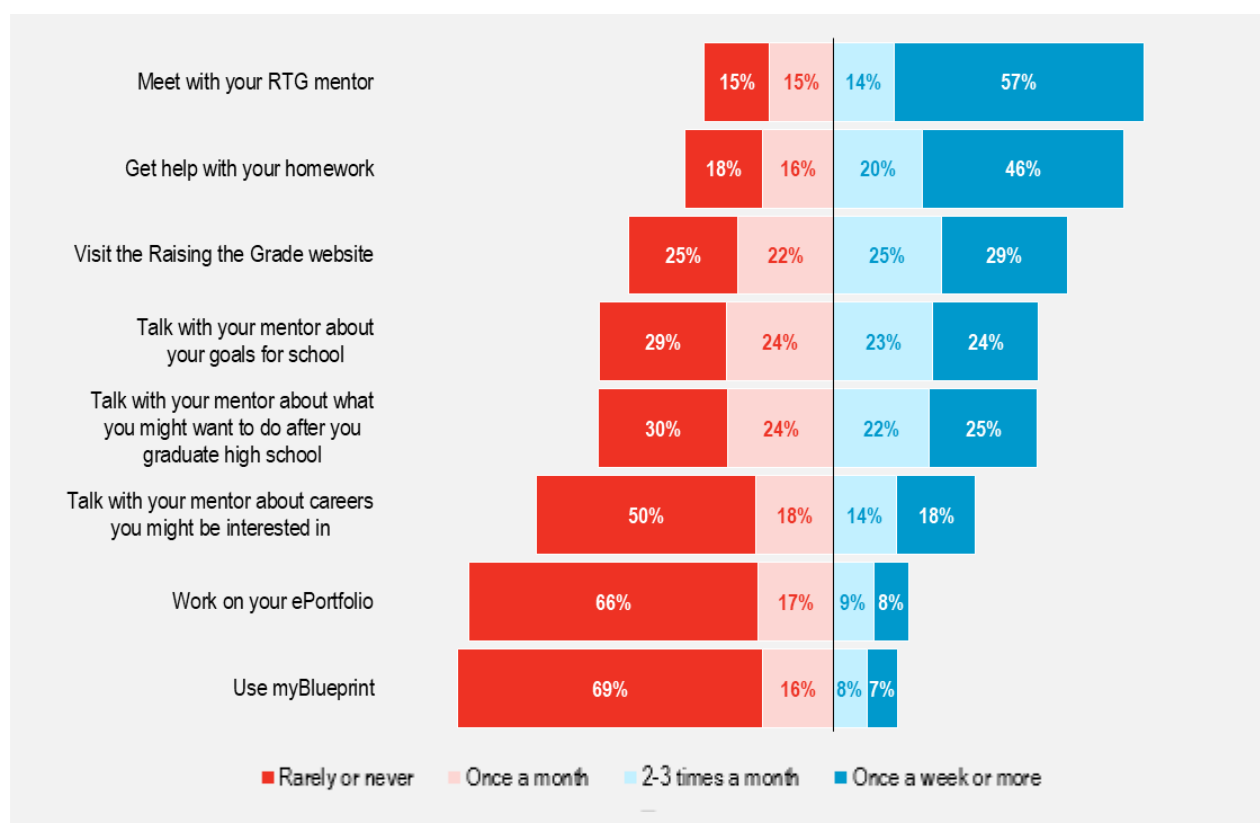


Half of all *RTG* youth met with their mentor at least once a week, although this decreased significantly in Year 4. Over all four years, 57 per cent of *RTG* youth reported that they met with their mentor once a week or more. However, there was a decline in this number, from the low 60s in Years 1 to 3, to 44 per cent in Year 4. The last year of data collection saw a large increase in participants who only met with their mentor once a month.

Figure 22 Number of times youth report meeting with an *RTG* mentor, by program year

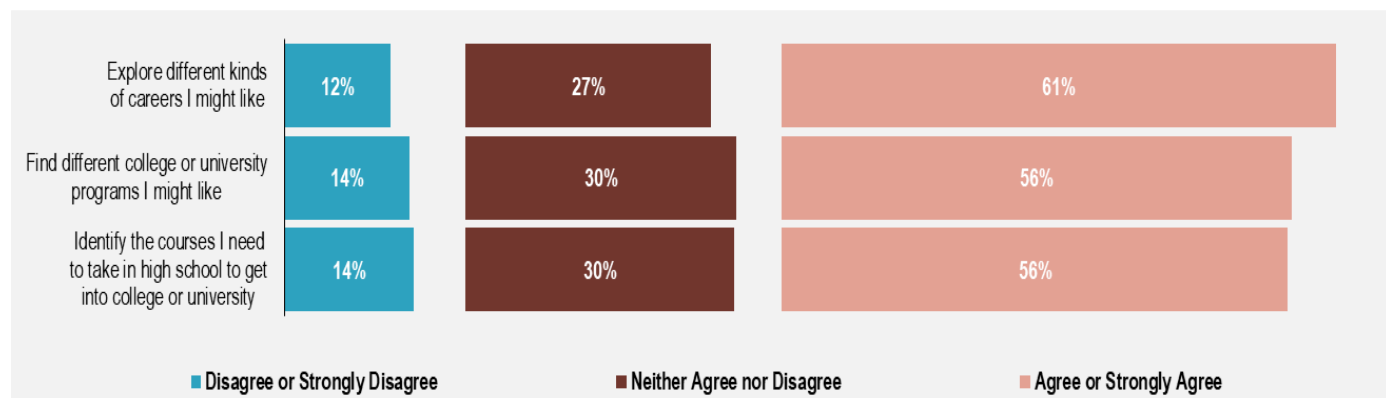


The majority of youth reported meeting with their mentor (57 per cent) or receiving some help with their homework (46 per cent) at least once a week or more, although other *RTG* activities were less frequently reported.

Figure 23 Frequency of participation in RTG activities linked to Academic Support

Only slightly more than half of youth agreed that RTG helped them explore careers and postsecondary options – When youth were asked about their level of agreement on how RTG guided them in their exploration of a career pathway and further education – two key activities under the Life After School component of the program – 61 per cent agreed or strongly agreed that RTG helped them explore different kinds of careers they might like, while 56 per cent agreed or strongly agreed that RTG helped them find different college or university programs they might like and helped identify the courses they needed to take in high school to get into university.

Figure 24 Proportion of youth who agree or disagree that *RTG* helped them explore career and PSE options





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