



ABACUS

Advancing Post-Secondary Access



ABACUS, a collaborative initiative of Hamilton Community Foundation and The Fairmount Foundation, is a catalyst for educational transformation. By focusing on improving the academic, community and environmental factors that most directly affect students' likelihood of continuing their education, and starting the intervention in middle school, Hamilton students facing multiple barriers will increasingly access post-secondary education.

How did we get here?

After more than a decade of convening a city-wide collaborative effort to reduce poverty in Hamilton, we recognize that increasing access to post-secondary education is the next logical step to improving our city's prosperity. Local citizens concur, identifying post-secondary education and skills training as priorities in their own Neighbourhood Action Plans.

Research conducted by Hamilton Community Foundation over the past three years has affirmed this direction. This work included mapping the landscape of Hamilton children's services from birth to post-secondary graduation, gathering community-wide input from educators and other key stakeholders and researching promising practices in post-secondary access from across North America. From this research, we identified the key barriers to post-secondary education, the populations who would most benefit from programming, the common elements of successful programs and the critical intervention points to ensure all efforts generate the most impact.

Our goal: to improve high school graduation rates and access to post-secondary, including trades and apprenticeship opportunities, by focusing our efforts on Grades 6, 7, 8 and supporting the transition into high school.

What makes this approach different?

Part of what makes ABACUS unique is a focus on early intervention that gets students and their parents thinking about life after high school – during their middle school years. These pivotal years are characterized by significant developmental changes, yet are among the least supported in terms of focused community programs and other education strategies.

ABACUS is based on four pillars of successful intervention programs:

- Academic upskilling: supports the educational success of students
- Mentoring: provides counseling and encourages accountability
- Goal-setting: creates and fosters career aspiration, and provides timely information at pivotal moments
- Incentives: uses financial and motivational supports to encourage students throughout the program

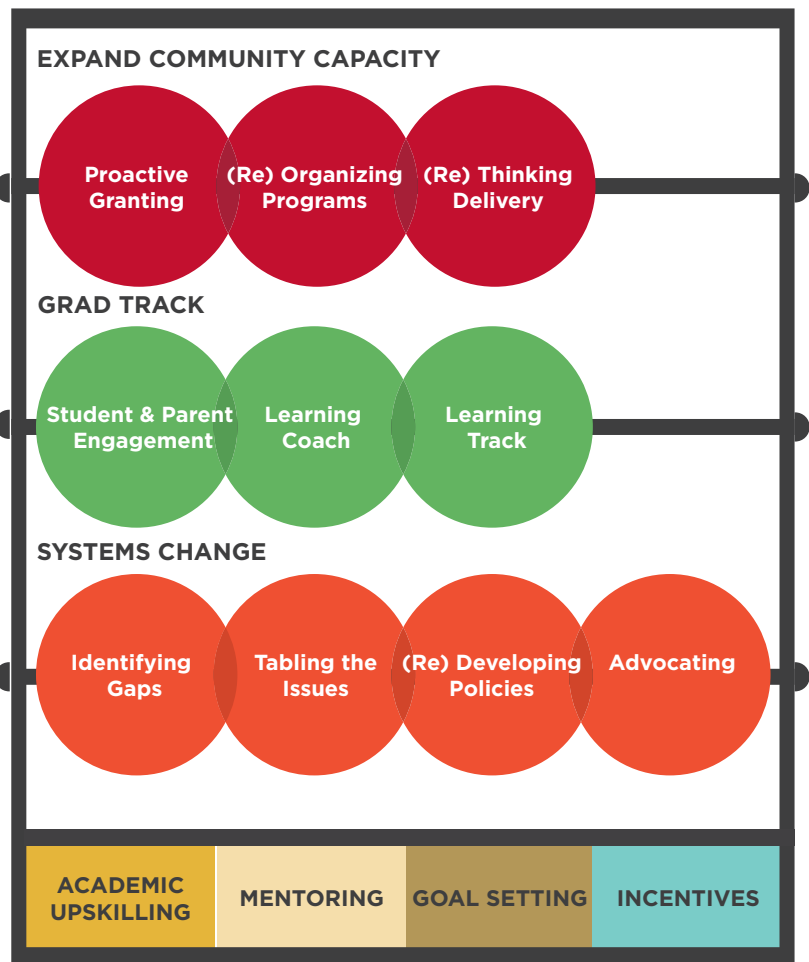
ABACUS also recognizes the importance of parental engagement to post-secondary access.

ABACUS' three components are:

- Expansion of community programs through proactive granting, encouraging the reorganization of initiatives, implementing engagement strategies such as arts & recreation, and rethinking delivery methods. In addition, we promote enhanced collaboration among organizations that reflect the four pillars.

- *Grad Track*, an ABACUS pilot project to deliver more intense programming to a small group of students who face multiple disadvantages and who are disengaging from school. These students may require specific outreach to engage in an early intervention program. It encourages student success through an educational coach, parental supports and incentives for program completion.

- Support for systems change through convening Hamilton's education stakeholders to examine and address issues, re-develop policies, and advocate improving systems gaps to advance educational outcomes for students.



What's the latest?

In fall 2015, HCF awarded the first grants aimed at expanding community capacity through programming based on the four pillars of successful intervention. An initial commitment of more than \$1.9 million over the next three years will fund initiatives including extracurricular academic, recreational and arts programs, college and university campus visits, “STEM” programs such as coding and robotics clubs as well as programs that specifically support Aboriginal and newcomer students. Learning from the impact of these programs will be an important part of ABACUS' Grad Track and systems change components as they are developed.

Why HCF?

Hamilton Community Foundation has a history of bringing the right stakeholders to the table, generating collaborative solutions to complex and seemingly intractable problems. Our community supports the Foundation's commitment to advancing post-secondary access in Hamilton, knowing that each student's success is instrumental in improving our city's prosperity.

While Hamilton is our focus, we believe that ABACUS can provide a framework for other Canadian communities that want to improve individual and collective prosperity.

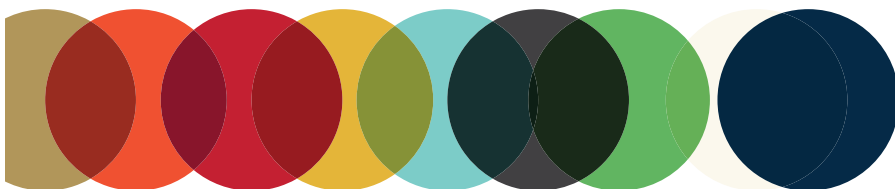
For more information:

Hamilton Community Foundation

120 King Street West, Suite 700, Hamilton, Ontario, L8P 4V2

Phone: 905.523.5600

Web: hamiltoncommunityfoundation.ca



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