Children of the Earth
Medical Careers Exploration Program
Program Evaluation Report

2015
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NURTURING CAPACITY
FOUNDING SPONSOR
Preface

Nurturing Capacity:

The K-12 Indspire Institute is focused on dramatically increasing high school completion rates among Indigenous students by building strong foundations in their K-12 education. Through various programs, resources and events, the Institute fosters collaboration between educators, communities, and others to improve educational outcomes for Indigenous students.

Indspire conducts research to identify and document educational best practices from across Canada and shares these successful practices through the K-12 Indspire Institute. Indspire also champions Indigenous approaches to education, those that honour Indigenous culture, values, and world views.

Project Abstract

The following evaluation provides a summative report of the Children of the Earth Medical Careers Exploration Program (MCEP). The focus of this program is to develop and implement strength-based educational opportunities through mentorship in a healthcare setting while providing relative academic programming in a community high school. MCEP provides support and encouragement to Aboriginal high school students from Winnipeg’s inner city while they explore medical career opportunities as an enrichment portion of their regular high school program.

The evaluation takes into account the voices of the school staff and administration, contributing healthcare partners, and participating students. Information has been collected in the form of surveys, focus groups, interviews and statistical student data.

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Executive Summary

The Medical Careers Exploration Program (MCEP) is an innovative career exploration program delivered in partnership with Children of the Earth School (COTE) and three major health facilities (Pan Am Clinic, Health Sciences Centre, and Grace Hospital) in Winnipeg, Manitoba. The program objective is to expose Aboriginal youth to careers in the medical field, where Aboriginal people are significantly underrepresented, and encourage post-secondary attendance.

MCEP began at COTE in 2007 with small cohorts. They participate in an intense academic program that had a strong focus on math, science as well as School Initiated Courses (SICs). SICs curriculum concentrate on health care subject matter and cultural studies.

Students are first exposed to the program in Grade 9 with a “Discovery Phase” which consists of a 3-day orientation session at Pan Am Clinic. They are introduced to some of the Clinic staff and interact with students currently enrolled in the program. MCEP begins “Phase 1” in Grade 10 with cohorts with academic studies at COTE and practicum placement at Pan Am Clinic. Practical experiences include exposure to several departments within the clinic including but not limited to: surgery, casting, physiotherapy, and MRI.

MCEP continues through Grades 11 and 12 with practicum placements expanding to the Health Sciences Centre and Grace Hospital. When students enter practicum placements they are treated as part of the professional team and they are given appropriate identification and scrubs. Students have indicated the positive and educational impact of being able to participate in such a hands-on, “real-life”, way as opposed to learning through reading or lecture. The ability to be in the room and ask questions of doctors, nurses, and other medical professionals has proven to be a unique and rewarding opportunity for the students.

An important aspect of this program is the small class size with a maximum of 12 students. Students participating in the program have indicated this is an integral part of MCEP as it allows them to feel comfortable and find a sense of belonging within the classroom, like a family, while also offering opportunity for one-on-one help as needed with academic studies. Although there would seem to be some trepidation concerning the high level of academics (pre-cal mathematics in particular), confidence and pride are evident as successful coursework continues. Students nearing completion of the academic program feel they are ready to handle the pressures and expectations of post-secondary education.
The academic portion of the program at COTE also includes a cultural component delivered and designed with the assistance of Cultural Advisors on school staff. This programming includes a mandatory language component as well as sage harvesting, smudging, beading, and medicine wheel teachings. An Elder is brought in to share traditional medicinal and healing practices. Traditional medicine and healing are also included in the SIC unit work delivered throughout the grade levels.

Students completing the program receive a bursary ($1000 per year completed) to apply to post-secondary studies. In order to access this bursary, students must be enrolled in a college, university, vocational or apprenticeship program.

MCEP owes much of its longevity and success to the integrity and commitment of its partners including the Winnipeg Regional Health Authority (WRHA), Aboriginal Health Programs, Pan Am Clinic, and Children of the Earth School. These groups have worked together to provide support while sharing vision and a common goal: to provide meaningful academic and practical experience to students who may not otherwise consider a medical career and see them continue to post-secondary studies.
Context

The Medical Careers Exploration Program (MCEP) has been an active enrichment program at Children of the Earth School since 2007. The program has developed strong partnerships between the educational and healthcare community while providing meaningful academic and practical experience to students who may not otherwise consider a career in the medical field. MCEP continues to move forward with several graduated students attending post-secondary institutions and building their educational capacity in a variety of fields.

Indigenous Language Groups: Cree, Ojibway and Oji-Cree

Province and Region: Winnipeg School Division, Manitoba

Number of People/students the organization serves annually: MCEP accepts a cohort of 12 students annually for a total of 36 students in the three-year program.

Percentage of students who are Indigenous: All students participating in MCEP are Indigenous.

Number of years in operation: 8 years (first cohort in 2007)
Percentage of Board Members that are Indigenous: MCEP is not governed by a board. The administrator for COTE School is an Indigenous person.

Development Focus: Intermediate and Secondary
The Medical Careers Exploration Program officially began its pilot year in September of 2007 with a 2 part (academic and practicum), 4-year, tiered approach for intermediate and secondary level students as follows:

Year 1 – Grade 9 Discovery Year
In this year the program is promoted through inner city schools and students are actively recruited to take part beginning in their Grade 10 academic year. Promotion includes three orientation days where students are given information about the program and watch a live surgery while conversing with medical staff in the theatre as well as in the operating room. They also partake in hands-on workstations where they may observe x-ray, casting, MRI, physiotherapy, and/or telehealth, and clinic exposure to athletic therapy, nursing and arthroscopy.
**Year 2 – Grade 10 Exploratory Year 1**

Students accepted into the program begin with a specialized academic program at Children of the Earth (COTE) high school where they are provided with necessary supports to ensure the highest level of success. Students participate in School Initiated Courses (SICs) designed to prepare them for practicum experiences. Units studied in these courses include CPR/First Aid, Customer Service, Anatomy and Physiology, Traditional Medicines, and Holistic Healing and Healthcare. As these students work towards graduation, they also participate in regular academic programming with a strong emphasis on math and science and a mandatory heritage Aboriginal language class. In addition to academic programming, students participate in practicum placements at Pan Am Clinic where they are exposed to a variety of careers in the healthcare field. An additional requirement for students in Year 1 is to participate in PHIA (Personal Health Information Act) training with a Winnipeg Regional Health Authority privacy officer.

**Year 3 – Grade 11 Exploratory Year 2**

Grade 11 students continue with an integrated high school academic and practicum program extending the experiential portion of their learning to the Health Sciences Centre. Supports continue to be in place for students in order to maximize achievement and success. Professional development opportunities are also made available at this time.

**Year 4 – Grade 12 Specialization**

Grade 12 students complete their high school experience with practicum exposure extending beyond Pan Am Clinic and Health Sciences Centre to Grace Hospital. They participate in a specialized academic program that prepares them for post-secondary studies toward a medical career. At this time, students are assisted with college and university applications and they are connected with recruitment officers from a variety of post-secondary education institutions as part of the support to ensure their success in pursuit of a post-secondary education.

Students participating in the Medical Careers Exploration Program are eligible to receive scholarships in the amount of $1000 per year successfully completed in the program. In order to access this scholarship, students must enrol in post-secondary education such as a University, College, Vocational or Apprenticeship program.

**Average number of participants in project per year:** The total possible participants in the program per year is 36. (12 students per year x 3 cohorts).

**Geography of the area (including social make-up and economy):** Children of the Earth school is located in Winnipeg’s north end, an area of diverse culture and socio-economic status.

**Category of Indigenous educational practice applies to this project:** Students participating in the Medical Careers Program are required to take a mandatory Indigenous language class (as are all students at Children of the Earth). A cultural advisor facilitates a variety of teachings and holistic medicine is integrated into the program curriculum.
Guiding Principles that this Project Meets:

The foundations of all educational innovations, programs, or policies that Indspire supports are rooted in seven guiding principles. The Indspire foundational guiding principles for Indigenous educational practice are based on opinions from two national consultations, and reflect the values of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

MCEP is based on the following Indspire principles:

Principle 2: The Medical Careers Exploration Program is built on partnerships between the education and healthcare systems with support from secondary and post-secondary institutions, healthcare facilities and provincial government representatives. All parties share a common goal of providing meaningful opportunities to Indigenous youth and increasing the representation of Aboriginal professionals in health care careers.

Principle 5: Education provided to students at Children of the Earth School is mindfully designed to meet provincial curriculum standards while supporting and prioritizing the inclusion of integrated cultural language and teachings. The practical health care facilities offer students experiential, hands-on learning opportunities in a real-world environment mentored by health care professionals. This community of learning is dedicated to providing academic as well as spiritual support to each student.

Principle 6: The goal of the MCEP is to provide experience, support and opportunity to its Indigenous students. This is done by providing meaningful cultural and academic programming along with the appropriate and necessary encouragement and supports to promote student success and well being.

Brief History of the Project

Recognizing a gap in the number of Aboriginal healthcare professionals relative to Manitoba’s Indigenous population, Dr. Wayne Hildahl, Chief Operating Officer of Pan Am Clinic, initiated discussions to provide Aboriginal high school students with opportunities to learn more about healthcare and different careers available in the medical field.

In 2006, Children of the Earth School (of the Winnipeg School Division), Pan Am Clinic and Aboriginal Health Programs, the Winnipeg Regional Health Authority (WRHA), and the University of Manitoba – ACCESS Program developed a working group to produce a high school educational program involving several key stakeholders that would promote interest and access to careers in the healthcare professions.
Activities Accomplished by this Project

The following activities have been successfully implemented in the MCEP:
- Grade 9 orientation – takes place in the spring at Pan Am Clinic. Potential student candidates are invited to view a live surgery via teleconferencing, meet and hear from program partners as well as interact with first year MCEP students.
- CPR/First Aid Training is including as part of the SIC learning plans.
- Personal Health Information Act (PHIA) training is included in first year programming.
- All students are provided with scrubs, ID badges, and transportation (bus tickets).
- All students are eligible to receive bursaries ($1000 per completed year) toward post-secondary studies.
- Students participate in cultural studies with cultural advisors as part of their academic program at Children of the Earth School.

Materials or Tools that were Developed During the Project.

The MCEP program has developed School Initiated Courses (SICs) to compliment and enrich the Medical Careers Program. These courses have been approved for credit by the Manitoba Department of Education and offer an academic supplement to clinical experience including units dedicated to anatomy and physiology, holistic healing, traditional medicines, First Aid, and customer service. These courses are delivered at all 3 levels of study.

Logic Model Used for the Project.

The logic model is attached in Appendix I and it illustrated the breakdown of planned resources, strategies, and intended results including short, intermediate and long-term outcomes. The following is a detailed narrative of the model, providing clear insight into the inputs, strategies, major achievements, intended results, short term outcomes, intermediate outcomes and the ultimate goal for MCEP.

Planned Work Inputs: Resources Human & Financial

MCEP takes place at a high school and requires two specialized teaching positions as the teacher plays an essential role in MCEP. The positions are required to deliver the mandated Manitoba Curricula and to incorporate, in consultation with the Aboriginal Advisor, the Aboriginal perspective into provincially mandated curricula.

In addition, the two teaching roles have these requirements:
- Responsible to develop, plan and deliver subject program offerings.
- Ability to mentor and coordinate activities of inner city MCEP students.
- Strong math / science background; ability to teach to a variety of learning styles and address significant learning gaps.
• Experience working with Aboriginal youth.
• Sound knowledge of traditional Aboriginal culture.
• Knowledge of the medicine wheel philosophy.
• Responsible for the assessment and reporting procedures to the parents of the students.
• Strong oral and written communication skills.
• Ability to participate/facilitate traditional ceremonies.
• Strong advocacy skills.
• Strong teamwork skills.
• Planning, coordination, overseeing MCEP delivery
• Networking with other programs and schools in the area to develop enrichment activities to assist in the delivery of MCEP.

Additional resources required:
• Partners in the public medical system (WRHA, HSC, Grace, Pan Am Clinic).
• Funders (Pan Am Clinic, Pan Am Clinic Foundation, Bright Futures, WSD, WRHA.
• Funds required for the following:
  o Transportation.
  o Meals for students.
  o Bursary incentive.
  o To implement Grade 10 SIC.
  o Hands-on anatomical learning models/tools.

**Strategies/Major Activities**

**Orientation:**
Grade 9 Orientation Days takes place between 5 different schools, to introduce students to a healthcare environment. Grade 10 students act as mentors on the final Grade 9 orientation day.

**Mentorship:**
In any program, the value of having a mentor cannot be overstated. Mentors are experienced and trusted advisors. By supporting and redirecting young people, mentoring focuses attention on successful behaviours and encourages the attainment of potential. In addition, mentors provide direct assistance to young people, promote school achievement and helps youth avoid activities that may prevent them from reaching their goals. Having someone to turn to who can answer questions and act as a guide often means the difference between a young person being successful in an endeavour or giving up.

MCEP was developed with the idea that mentorship would be incorporated into all phases of the program with the hope that these students will become mentors for younger students. Within the academic segment, students work as a cohort unit, mentoring and supporting each other in their learning. Additionally, each grade is assigned a teacher who will work as both an instructor and a role model. Any feedback, information and/or concerns related to a student in MCEP is directed to their teacher role model. Within the practicum segment of the program, a representative from Children of the Earth is assigned for all grades, acting as a support for students at the clinical sites and working with
the school and clinic/hospitals to organize the students and ensure they are successful in their practicum hours.

New mentorship relationships are being developed between new students entering the program and the students currently in the program. In this way, new students will always have someone who has recently been through the program that they can go to for information and support.

MCEP is committed to the idea of using mentorship to assist students to develop and grow in their chosen area of study. Mentorship also benefits mentors by helping to improve communication skills, and develop leadership skills.

Classes and Teaching

Classes are small, with a maximum of 12 students per cohort. The teachers focus on conveying professionalism through their curriculum as well as foster a strong connection between home and school. They have regular communication with parents/guardians regarding progress and attendance. In addition, where appropriate, teachers at COTE utilize the male and female Cultural Advisors as well as Elders from the local community to make connections to the curriculum.

Students are required to undertake the following training:
- CPR and First Aid Training.
- Personal Health Information Act (PHIA) Training, with a privacy officer from the Winnipeg Regional Health Authority (WRHA).

Courses unique to MCEP:
- SIC which includes customer service component, pre-calculus, chemistry, biology.

Some additional resources include:
- Behaviour contract— this includes expectations of classroom and practicum attendance, positive attitude, and a strong work ethic.
- MCEP Panel of former graduates.
- Pinning ceremony each June.

Practicum

The practicums include a cultural component. Also, evaluations play an important part in the learning process and student evaluation of experience and staff evaluation of students are conducted at end of day

Resources

Resources provided to the students:
- scrubs, lunches, and bus tickets/transportation.
- $1000 bursary incentive for each successful year in the program.
- Promotional video for MCEP (work in progress).
• Opportunity for summer employment with WRHA.

**Goal**

MCEP is aspiring to draw on a larger audience of MCEP students from other schools. Currently, most MCEP students are COTE students. This is an area that is a focus for future improvement.

**Intended Results: Outputs or Performance Indicators**

• Credit completion.
• School attendance.
• Practicum attendance.
• Professionalism, positive attitude, and strong work ethic.

**Short Term Outcomes**

**Grade Specific Outcomes/Focus:**

Grade 10 School Initiated Course (SIC) and Practicum – Exploratory 1

• Accepted student candidates attend Children of the Earth High School and actively participate in MCEP.
• Academia appropriately planned and supported to ensure highest probability of success.
• School Initiated Course (SIC) written based upon expected outcomes per selected discipline field.
• School Initiated Course counts for one credit (110 hours) towards completion of High School requirements.
• Content Classroom 50 hours - attend 50 hours preparatory educational curriculum preparing the student for the educational prerequisites to pursue a high school education that supports and enhances the success of students in the health education faculties in post secondary educational institutions.
• Practicum 50 hours - attend 50 hours of practicum experience at the Pan Am Clinic that allows the student to experience up to eight or nine various careers in the health care field.
• Promote and support their continued success and interest in their high school education that will prepare the student to pursue a post secondary education in faculties/programs focusing on careers in the health service sector.

Grade 11 Curriculum and Practicum - Exploratory 2

• Academia appropriately planned and supported to ensure highest probability of success.
• Content Classroom 50 hours - attend 50 hours preparatory educational curriculum preparing the student for the educational prerequisites to pursue a high school education that supports and enhances the success of students in the health education faculties in post secondary educational institutions.
• Practicum 50 hours - attend 50 hours of practicum experience at the Pan Am Clinic, the Health Sciences Centre and the Grace Hospital that allows the student to experience various careers in the health care field.
Promote and support their continued success and interest in their high school education that will prepare the student to pursue a post secondary education in faculties/programs focusing on careers in the health service sector.

During this year of the program, networking and professional development opportunities will be promoted.

Grade 12 Curriculum and Practicum – Specializations
- Academia appropriately planned and supported to ensure highest probability of success.
- Content Classroom 20 hours - attend 20 hours preparatory educational curriculum preparing the student for the educational prerequisites to pursue a high school education that supports and enhances the success of students in the health education faculties in post secondary educational institutions.
- Practicum 90 hours - attend 90 hours of practicum experience at the Pan Am Clinic, Health Sciences Centre, Grace Hospital and Red River College that allows the student to experience two or three different selected disciplines of their choice in order to streamline their future academic and professional goals.
- During this year of the program, networking and professional development opportunities are promoted.
- Assist students with links to post-secondary resources and recruitment officers to promote and support their continued success and interest in a post secondary education in the healthcare sector.

Grade 12 Graduation and Celebration
- Successful credit completion.
- Exposure to a variety of careers in the medical field.
- Successful practicum attendance.
- Successful school attendance.
- Successful completion for each student of his/her current year in the program.

The program also has an overall aim to promote students making career and post-secondary related decisions while giving them appropriate educational opportunities and experiences.

Intermediate Outcomes
- Successful credit completion, particularly in math and science.
- Exposure to a variety of careers in the medical field.
- Successful practicum attendance.
- Successful school attendance.
- Successful completion for each student of his/her current year in the program.
- Retention of students in each grade of the program.
- Student recruitment.
- Higher graduation rates of students in the program.
Ultimate Goal/Impact

In February 2007, The Winnipeg School Division: The Children of the Earth School, in developmental partnership with the Pan Am Clinic, WRHA Aboriginal Health Programs, Winnipeg Regional Health Authority and the University of Manitoba-Access Program constructed a working group to develop an educational and health career promotional program for Aboriginal students in the inner city of Winnipeg.

MCEP involves the development, implementation and evaluation of an experiential strength-based educational/mentorship program within a healthcare setting and community high school. The program provides support and encouragement to Aboriginal high school students from the inner city of Winnipeg to stay in school and gain confidence in their educational aspirations to pursue careers in the Healthcare Sector.

MCEP aspires to make the following long term impacts:
- Increase program recruitment
- Retention of students in the program, leading to higher graduation rates.
- Students pursuing post-secondary.
- Students choosing to make meaningful contributions to society, in the field of healthcare, or not.
- MCEP students’ contribution to a greater representation of Aboriginal people working in the medical field in Manitoba.

Additional Criteria used to Determine Success

As a result of interviews and data collected over the course of this evaluation it can be determined that outcomes established in the MCEP Logic Model have been met by the following factors:

- Student cohorts were established and participated in program specific academic timetables with an emphasis on math and science as well as discipline specific SICs. Students participating in the program completed several high school credits.

- Students have attended practicum placements in three partnering medical facilities: Pan Am Clinic, Health Sciences Centre, and Grace Hospital. These placements have introduced students to a variety of medical career options including surgery, radiology, physiotherapy, and nursing.

- To date, the Medical Careers Exploration Program has seen 29 students graduate. This year, 7 students graduated MCEP with 7 students intending to pursue post-secondary education in the fall of 2015. Many previous graduates have gone on to become Health Care Aides or Unit Clerks, several have enrolled in post-secondary programs including nursing, medicine (oncology and pediatric), general studies (pre-med), criminal justice, Para-medicine, photography and culinary arts. These enrolments represent a significant indicator that barriers to education beyond high school are being reduced.
Evaluation on Project Success

It is the collaboration of partners that makes this program a truly unique enrichment opportunity. The practicum facilitation at Pan Am Clinic, Health Sciences Centre and Grace Hospital allow the students to feel truly as part of the team rather than just an observer. In keeping with how paid staff is treated, each student is given appropriate attire (scrubs) and identification at their placements. Working side by side with doctors, nurses, technicians, and other clinical staff allows for hands on, explorative learning where questions can be asked and dialogues can happen in real time.

Wayne Hildahl, Chief Operating Officer at Pan Am Clinic, founded and developed the program along with former Children of the Earth principal, Lorne Belmore. Wayne states their goal was to “demystify the health care system for young people and provide the support and encouragement they need to achieve success”. Recognizing the great potential of COTE students to become medical professionals, they developed a program that would work together to develop a unique medical curriculum that would provide credit at the high school level and a community of mentors at the clinical level to engage the students and peak their curiosity. Doors have been opened to the opportunity of student self-realization that “I can do that!” and, in Wayne’s words, “We haven’t looked back.”

Program partner, Bright Futures, a government of Manitoba program dedicated to funding projects that increase graduation rates and break down barriers to post-secondary education, praises the programs high expectations of students for “preparing them for university-level coursework in a shorter school day while contributing respectfully to a confidential, professional and sensitive workplace”. It is the organization’s hope that the program continues in its “integrity and purposeful innovation while preserving the mentorship relationship between students and teachers”.

MCEP coordinator at Pan Am Clinic, shared the following statement regarding the growth and participation of students as well as the benefits to clinical staff, “When students first come to Pan Am Clinic in their first year of the program, they all share in the same emotions- feeling anxious, scared and nervous. During their first few weeks of placements, the Grade 10 students are relatively quiet, demonstrate a lack of confidence, and find difficulty in communicating and/or making eye contact with staff members while working in their assigned departments. With the continuous support and ongoing encouragement provided by staff members, it doesn’t take long for these students to feel at ease and express their interest and desire to learn about healthcare.

After only a few weeks of placements and time spent in all areas of Pan Am Clinic, it becomes quite clear that students of the program have found their place as a student representing the Medical Careers Exploration Program. Not only are they a student of the MCEP, they are a member of Pan Am Clinic. Each student, in his/her own way, has demonstrated a level of confidence that they didn’t have before walking through the doors of the clinic. The excitement in their eyes when describing their experience while in their assigned placement whether it is Surgery, Casting, X-ray, etc., is a validation of their newfound level of confidence.

The returning Grades 11 and 12 students further confirm the individual growth and personal development that comes from being a student in the Medical Careers Exploration Program. Higher
attendance rates, willingness to take on more responsibility and increased student engagement while in placements are strong indications of student commitment and dedication to the program. The sense of pride and accomplishment that students show upon graduation is what really adds to the success of this program.

Not only do the students in the Medical Careers Exploration Program benefit from participation in the program, healthcare staff who mentor these students gain valuable in-depth knowledge and understanding of not only the Aboriginal culture, but also the unique challenges that these individuals face on a daily basis. Through this reciprocal teaching and education between students and staff, both walk away with a much better understanding than they did before.

Since the program was first developed in 2007, after the fifth MCEP cohort graduation, and going into the ninth year of the program, Pan Am Clinic is proud of the program’s accomplishments to date and is looking forward to further growth and success in the future. Their hopes for the program moving into the future are to one day have students who were once participating in the program become staff members working in health care, whether that is within the Winnipeg Regional Health Authority or in their respective communities/reserves. There is no greater joy than to see students of the Medical Careers Exploration Program graduate high school and then continue on to complete a post-secondary education, but to have them one day join their team as a healthcare professional- this is considered to be the ultimate of successes.

The Medical Career Education program maintains high academic expectations and standards in an effort to help students achieve success within the program while also preparing them for the academic expectations of post-secondary institutions. School Initiated Courses (SICs) have been developed to introduce students to course work relative to the medical field so they are well prepared to participate in practicum placements. Students in the MCEP are enrolled in a high school program that qualify them for further healthcare studies. This includes courses such as pre-calculus math, biology, and chemistry as part of their regular timetable.

The 2014-15 school year marked the first time MCEP cohorts were integrated into the regular school population for courses taken outside of the program. Students and teachers indicated that this came with both advantages and disadvantages. Both groups stated it provided a better social experience to have more integration as this diversified peer groups and experiences. Some concerns were also expressed regarding MCEP students missing time in regularly scheduled classes to attend practicum leaving them responsible to catch up on their own outside of class.

Students in Grade levels 10 through 12 were registered in between 7 and 13 credits for the academic school year. (Note: general high school average is 7 - 8 credits.)
The following graph indicates the credit completion summary experienced at each grade level in the 2014-15 school year.

In addition to conventional academic programming, a cultural component is also included. An Elder/teacher is brought in to share traditional medicinal and healing practices and opportunities to attend and participate in sweatlodges are provided. The four medicines (sage, sweetgrass, cedar and tobacco) are introduced to all students at Children of the Earth and used as a base for sharing and teaching. MCEP students host seasonal feasts throughout the school year for the rest of the school body. Other cultural activities provided for all students include harvesting sage, smudging, beading classes and Medicine Wheel teachings. These teachings are facilitated and supported by Traditional Advisors on staff at the school.

**Student Voice**

Students from each participating grade level were interviewed in focus groups. Each group was asked a series of questions about their experience in the program. The following is a summary of their responses:

**Grade 10**

Students in Grade 10, while still speaking with pride, appeared to be in an adjustment phase regarding their program experience. It was stated that the high expectations made the program difficult (but possible if you don’t “slack off”) but also sparked interest in the sciences (anatomy and physiology in particular). One student stated MCEP made her dream of becoming a medical professional obtainable where it otherwise did not seem like a possibility. Several of the Grade 10 cohort transferred in to Children of the Earth specifically to participate in the Medical Careers Exploration Program.
This group expressed how they truly appreciated the hands-on participation offered at their Pan Am practicum placement. They found that the opportunity to observe and contribute to practices in the clinic such as casting, observing surgeries, talking to patients and doctors was all rewarding experiences. Being introduced to the variety of options available within the medical field was a highlight for this cohort.

They deemed small class size as a benefit for they got the opportunity to get to know one another, be themselves in this intimate group, and become a close unit. Teacher availability to offer one-on-one help as needed was seen as a contributor to student success.

**Grade 11**

The Grade 11 students interviewed all claimed to find great value in the program and attribute their participation to their dedication and motivation regarding their high school experience. All students felt that the small class sizes and relationship with their teacher were key components to success. One student claims this close connection made him want to do more and do better as he did not feel he was “just a number” as may be the case in a large group. These relationships also made it possible to have the necessary supports when circumstances arise outside of the school day. Compassion and time available for tutoring have made it possible for some students to stay on top of their program.

All students agree that the academic portion of the program is quite challenging and several admit to being unsure they would be able to achieve such high academic standards. It was interesting to note that confidence in this domain increased with each grade level and this challenge became a note of pride among the students and they felt this put them ahead of peers in terms of being ready and qualified to pursue post-secondary avenues.

The practical portion of the program was seen as beneficial as each student stated they thought they were being well prepared to pursue a career in a medical profession. All agree to benefitting to the exposure to the variety of positions available in healthcare with several claiming they would not have considered these areas otherwise. They expressed how they really appreciated the opportunity to work hands-on alongside professionals and having the opportunity to ask questions as they found it to be an essential part of practicum learning.

**Grade 12**

This year’s graduating students spoke highly of their experience in the program. Two young women transferred in to Children of the Earth specifically to attend MCEP. In one case, the family moved from a rural community to support their daughter’s ambition to attend. These students shared the previous cohorts sentiments that the program had prepared them to move on to post-secondary endeavours in the coming fall. One student, attending Red River’s ACCESS Nursing Program in the fall, stated the program was the reason for her gaining entrance as it put her a step ahead of other applicants in terms of preparedness.

These students also agreed that they benefited from the high demand placed on them as a result of the program. At this time, they recognize the maturity and growth achieved and how they participated in their education because they “wanted” to. Relationships with teachers are once again attributed to the necessary support leading to success as help was always available when needed. Having the same
teacher throughout the experience was seen as beneficial as the class and teacher developed a sense of family and belonging.

Most evident in conducting these focus groups was the level of maturity and growth evident over the course of the program from Grade 10 to Grade 12. While students in Grade 10 still seemed unsure of where their participation in MCEP would lead, the senior class spoke with confidence about their experience in the program and the advantages it offered. One such advantage was that exposure to the medical field, through the program, offered enough experience to be able to understand that this may not be a life-long career goal, but offered the skills necessary to pursue post-secondary in an alternate field (i.e. culinary arts). The drive to pursue further educational goals was clearly intrinsic.

**COTE Administration and Staff Reflection**

In response to surveys issued to staff, there was a very strong consensus of support for the program. Teachers recognize MCEP as an incredible opportunity for students and held much pride in the high expectations the program places on students. It is felt that these students set the bar higher for their fellow classmates as they participate in the program and its academic expectations.

The relationship between students and their dedicated MCEP classroom teacher(s) is also seen as a leading factor in the program’s success according to staff and administration. Developing strong relationships with committed staff allows for academic support as well a caring advocate when social/emotional support is needed.

Perhaps most importantly, the staff and administration appreciate the value of the program in terms of offering inner-city Aboriginal youth a hands-on, practical approach to medical career exposure. The enrichment program strives and succeeds in breaking down barriers not only to encourage young people to consider healthcare careers, but also in developing empowered and driven academics ready for a post-secondary experience (healthcare or otherwise).

The Principal at Children of the Earth school shares her hopes that the MCEP will continue to be available not only for Aboriginal youth in her school but in high schools across the city and province. She believes that “the students at Children of the Earth, our Aboriginal students, are capable of achieving whatever it is they put their minds to. They are intelligent, driven, resilient and highly caring individuals. The Medical Careers Exploration Program allows and encourages them to remain in school and gain the confidence needed to pursue their educational dreams and aspirations”.

**Outcomes: Most Significant Accomplishments and Lessons Learned**

MCEP graduates at the 2015 ceremony received several awards including: the Winnipeg School Division (WSD) Scholarship Award, a Youth Role Model Award, Winnipeg School Division AAA Award, WSD Scholastic Book Award, Governor General Bronze Medal, Cultural Program Achievement Award, Chown Centennial Scholarship, Aboriginal Language Achievement Award, Winnipeg Teacher Association Award,
Athlete of the Year, and the Kyle Courchene Memorial Sportsperson Award. This is a significant achievement for a small group, as well as a representation of MCEP student citizenship and diversity. Several certificates were also distributed to students acknowledging their high level of attendance and commitment to the program.

Solid long-term partnerships are a significant achievement of the MCEP. Through the many years the program has been running, strong partnerships have endured since the beginning. Participating staff, including teachers, clinic, and partner representatives continue to engage in a positive and enthusiastic manner. Belief in the program, its benefits and contributions to the students is apparent across the board.

It should be noted that the Medical Careers Exploration Program Model is not owned by copyright and could be considered a model for those wishing to develop a similar explorative model in other fields. This could include any professional field where partners are willing to work together to provide and develop meaningful curriculum at the high school level as well as meaningful practicum experiences that will give students the opportunity to develop skills and talents while preparing them for any necessary post-secondary requirements and workplace demands.

Next Steps for the Project

As the goal for the Medical Careers Exploration Program is to increase the number of Aboriginal youth pursuing long-term careers in a healthcare profession, continued exposure, supports and encouragement are certainly essential. As not all students will find their passion in this field despite graduating from the program, there are some potential benefits to consider in increasing the number of students entering each cohort at the Grade 10 level. This may also offer potential retention of a desired number of MCEP graduates as some are unable to complete the program. Increased recruitment efforts would be necessary as would careful consideration of what this would look like in the school environment.

An expressed asset to the success of the program to date is the relationships developed between teacher and students, due to small group sizes, and amongst the cohorts themselves. Special care should be taken to not compromise these relationships by stretching resources too thin. Expansion of the program may include an additional teaching position or the program growing to a new/different high school location.

In speaking with students, Children of the Earth staff, and community partners, it is clear that all parties wish to see this program continue and expand. It would be the visionary goal of all parties to see this program offered in other high schools throughout the city and even the province. In order for this to happen, other schools would need to develop a similar model, dedicating staff and resources and expanding clinical partners to accommodate practicum work placements.

A final suggestion offered by students is to streamline transportation to practicum placements. At this time, students rely on public bus transportation to travel to and from their clinical placements. They have expressed concerns as buses do not always run on schedule, which in turn, can make them late. Students are spending up to 2 hours on a bus to travel to placements within the city, needing to transfer buses 2 to 3 times. A consideration may be to dedicate a staff member, perhaps a support worker, or
rotate through the MCEP staff, to provide transport. It would be necessary to have regularly scheduled placements to allow this to operate smoothly and funds allocated to bus passes could be used to cover mileage. Perhaps a “one way” option could be considered with students finding their way home via public transport. Appendix I: Medical Careers Exploration Program Logic Model
MCEP Logic Model

**Inputs**
- High School
- 2 specialized teaching positions
- Cultural Advisors/Elders
- Partners in the public medical system
- Funders
- Funds required for transportation, meals, bursaries, cover costs of SICs and hands-on anatomical learning models/tools
- Grade 10 students mentors
- Orientation day
- CPR, first aid and PHIA training
- Small class size (max 12)
- Practicum experience

**Outputs**

*Performance Indicators*
- Credit Completion
- School Attendance
- Practicum Attendance
- Professionalism,
- Positive attitude,
- Strong work ethic

**Outcomes**

*Short Term*
- Successful credit completion in math and science
- Exposure to a variety of careers in the medical field
- Successful practicum attendance
- Successful school attendance
- Retention of students in each grade of the program

*Intermediate*
- Higher graduation rates of students in the program
- Students pursuing post-secondary studies
- Students choosing to make meaningful contributions to society in the field of healthcare or not
- Student contribution to greater representation of Aboriginal people working in the medical field in Manitoba

*Long Term*

**Time Frame**
- One year
- Two years
- Five years