

An Evaluation of the Ontario Ministry of Education's Students as Researchers Program

An Evaluation of the Ontario Ministry of Education's Students as Researchers Program

DR 598: Master's Project

Defence Date: **January 19th, 2018**

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Table of Acronyms
(in order of appearance)

Name	Acronym
Ministry of Education	EDU
<i>Students as Researchers</i>	StAR
Collaborative Inquiry-based Research	CIBR
Minister’s Student Advisory Council	MSAC
Ontario Educational Leadership Centre	OELC
Student Success Leader	SSL
District School Board	DSB
Student Achievement Division	SAD
Regional Student Success Leader	RSSL
British Columbia	BC
Youth Participatory Action Research Hub	YPRAH

Executive Summary

Introduction

This research paper evaluated the Ontario Ministry of Education's (EDU) *Students as Researchers* (StAR) program. StAR is part of EDU's broader *Student Voice* program, which seeks to increase student involvement in their learning. *Student Voice* was implemented in 2009, while StAR was added in 2012. StAR is an annual student engagement initiative for students in grades 7-12. The program provides student-teacher teams with training in collaborative inquiry-based (CIBR) research to complete a research project about their school. EDU defines CIBR as conducting research in collaboration with peers, fellow students and the community to create change that reflects the needs of all parties involved in, and affected by, the research (Ministry of Education and Access Alliance, 2012, p. 10). The program is premised on the belief that students are the best means by which to obtain research that can inform recommendations about improving student engagement (Courtney, 2016, p. 24).

StAR teams are selected on an annual basis and are typically chosen on a first-come first-serve basis. They consist of 1 teacher advisor and 4 students from grades 7-12, who receive training from EDU in the fall of each year. The teams then conduct research in their schools with support from EDU at 3 points in the year via Adobe Connect. StAR teams are invited to apply to attend a research Symposium, hosted by EDU, in the spring of each year to present their findings. Finally, teams are asked to submit a research report to the Ministry in any format that they choose. According to EDU, these results are then utilized by EDU to inform decisions made at all levels of education.

The program has been in existence for 5 years but has not yet been evaluated to determine its impact. EDU commits approximately \$2 million annually to its *Student Voice portfolio* which includes StAR, along with 2 other initiatives; the Minister's Student Advisory Council (MSAC) and *SpeakUp*. There has not been an evaluation of any of the programs since they were introduced in 2009. The Ministry of Education has expressed concerns that these programs are not reaching marginalized students and students at-risk of not graduating.

Primary research questions:

1. *To what extent is StAR meeting the outcomes that have been identified for the program? How well does the program align with government priorities?*
2. *What are the implications of StAR's current internal organizational structure and its program delivery method?*

Secondary and supplementary research questions:

1. *What are students and teachers learning at the fall training forums?*
2. *What can EDU learn from other student research and engagement programs that exist across Canada and the United States? How does the program align or compare with other similar programs across Canada and the United States?*
3. *How is StAR impacting student engagement?*
4. *Who are the students that are participating in StAR?*

Methodology and Methods

The research methodology for the project was an evaluation, including an analysis the program's ability to meet the expectations that have been identified in the StAR logic model and its relation to the broader EDU mandate. A mixed methods approach was used by collecting qualitative and quantitative data to understand the numbers and trends associated with StAR, as well as feedback on the student, teacher and key informant experience with StAR (Flick, 2015). The researcher collected data from a number of key sources associated with the program. Feedback was gathered from students and teachers that participated in StAR for 2016-17, Regional Student Success Leaders, who act as liaisons between EDU and District School Boards for the StAR program as well as EDU staff that were in charge of the program implementation for 2016-17. The researcher also conducted a secondary review of student and teacher feedback from the StAR training sessions in fall 2016 and the final reports that were submitted by StAR teams in May 2017.

The purpose of using these methods was to understand the extent to which the program is meeting the outcomes identified in the program logic model, along with its alignment with the Ontario Ministry of Education's *Renewed Vision for Education in Ontario*.

Literature Review and Jurisdictional Scan

A literature review was conducted to identify theories underpinning and informing student research programs as well as the broader emphasis on student voice in education. The aim was to provide and explore literature and theories related to; student voice, engaging students as partners in their education, measuring and quantifying student involvement and the involvement of students as researchers in education. The literature review found that while EDU has been effective in providing students with an opportunity to conduct research and gain valuable skills through the development of student-led research projects, it could also be perceived as limited in its efforts to genuinely include students as active partners in their education. Some observers may see that the program is achieves *Tokenism*, as EDU has not made considerable efforts to share and broadcast student research data in the past.

A jurisdictional scan was also conducted to present a broad overview of similar programs operating in Canada and the United States (US). Canadian programs were viewed as most relevant since most provinces operate under a similar educational framework. The US was also included as a preliminary review revealed a number of programs that champion the student voice in many different forms. StAR could benefit from exploring similar programs that operate in different jurisdictions as it would allow EDU to engage in conversations related to the efficacy of the StAR model in comparison to others. It would also encourage an open system, which recognizes the value that exists in consultation with outside experts and interested parties (Hurth, 2017, p. 2). Noteworthy programs included; *SpeakOut* (Alberta Ministry of Education), *SoundOut* (Washington, USA), the Youth Leadership Institute (San Francisco, CA) and the Youth Participatory Action Research Hub (University of California, Berkeley).

Findings and Analysis

The findings from the secondary data analysis and primary data analysis were complementary. There were 4 key themes that emerged from the findings: 1) the positive experience for students and the increase in their confidence in conducting research, 2) teachers valuing the opportunity to engage in school change projects with their students, 3) a concern that reports and student research were not being used to their full potential, and 4) a need to better support students and teams at all levels of education as they progress through their projects.

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In terms of the program's ability to meet the outcomes identified in the logic model, it has had some success in meeting the short term outcomes associated with participation, students valuing the opportunity to gain skills and the increased awareness of StAR. That said, it has struggled in its ability to meet the intermediate and long-term outcomes that are associated with transitioning teacher, school, DSB and Ministry practice to include student voice in decision making.

The findings from the evaluation were also analyzed alongside the 4 pillars of EDU's *Renewed Vision for Education in Ontario*. The four pillars are; 1) Achieving Excellence, 2) Promoting Well-Being, 3) Ensuring Equity and 4) Enhancing Public Confidence (Ministry of Education: *Achieving Excellence*, 2013; <http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/about/renewedVision.pdf>). The area in which StAR is most aligned is Promoting Well-being as students and teachers explained that they felt the program had a considerable impact on their self-worth, confidence, engagement and willingness to engage in school-related projects. There was also a connection to Ensuring Equity as the program has made efforts to include a wider variety of students in the program, through its recent emphasis on selecting a representative cross-section of students in team selection. The program's current structure, on the other hand, limits the students that are able and willing to participate in the program. StAR was more limited in its alignment with Achieving Excellence and Enhancing Public Confidence as there was no indication from teachers and students that the program had impacted the achievement of students, nor has there been an effort to track and monitor the achievement of students that participate in StAR. In addition, the lack of the lack of information sharing and publicity surrounding StAR limits the program's effectiveness in Enhancing Public Confidence.

Implications

The findings illuminated eight strategic implications for EDU. This included implications associated with both internal operations and service delivery. First, EDU has done an effective job in aligning the StAR with the other *Student Voice* initiatives that EDU has implemented, meaning that there is a far greater understanding of the program because of its relationship to broader ministry priorities. Second, the decision to include StAR students in EDU's Well-Being Engagement Sessions was an important effort to expand the reach of StAR and include students in conversations related to student well-being. Third, EDU has been limited in its ability to effectively measure the performance of StAR. This is a major risk for the program as it limits the program's ability to justify its value. The fourth implication related to internal operations is that to operate effectively, StAR requires further collaboration inside the Ministry and with District School Boards and schools.

In terms of service delivery, the first implication is that StAR has demonstrated that there is an overwhelmingly positive experience for students. Second, the program requires further work in continually supporting students as they progress through their projects. This implication of the lack of support is that there will continue to be a high turnover rate if students are not supported throughout their projects. Third, there is the implication that the program is limited in its ability to service all regions in Ontario, because of the program's format which caters to students in southern Ontario. The final implication is that the ministry's lack of project and information sharing limits the reach of the program as the work of students is not showcased or advertised by EDU.

Conclusions

The report concludes by acknowledging the work that has been done by EDU to provide students with a platform to exercise their voice, while also explaining the need to continue to amplify the student voice so that their research projects can have a greater impact on educational decision making.

1.0 Introduction

1.1 General Problem

The general problem that will be explored through this research is that the *Students as Researchers* (StAR) program within the Ministry of Education (EDU) has been in existence for 5 years but has not yet been evaluated to determine its impact. EDU commits approximately \$2 million annually to its *Student Voice* which includes StAR, along with 2 other initiatives; the Minister's Student Advisory Council (MSAC) and *SpeakUp*. There has not been an evaluation of any of the programs since they were introduced in 2009. The Ministry of Education has expressed concerns that these programs are not reaching marginalized students and students at-risk of not graduating.

StAR is an annual student engagement initiative for students in grades 7-12. It provides student-teacher teams with training in collaborative inquiry-based (CIBR) research to complete a research project about their school. EDU defines CIBR as conducting research in collaboration with peers, fellow students and the community to create change that reflects the needs of all parties involved in, and affected by, the research (Ministry of Education and Access Alliance, 2012, p. 10). MSAC consists of a group of 60 students with a diverse and unique experience from across the province. Appointed by the Minister of Education through an application and review process, this group meets twice a year to provide advice and comments on Ministry policies and programs. The *SpeakUp* Projects program provides grant funding of up to \$2,500 to help students lead projects that make a difference in their school. Student-led project teams can submit proposals to the ministry for evaluation. The projects take many different forms; including starting a club, hosting an assembly or opening a school garden. Students in grades 7-12 at publicly funded schools are encouraged to develop proposals with the potential to have a lasting impact in their school community.

StAR receives approximately \$500,000 in funding from EDU each year as part of the \$2 million that is committed to Student Voice initiatives, while StAR teams can also access up to \$2,500 in additional funding per team as part of *SpeakUp*, another Student Voice initiative. The objective of StAR is to equip students with leadership, teamwork and research skills which will allow them to become agents of change within their schools and to inform school, board and Ministry decision-making. The evaluation will determine the extent to which StAR is meeting its objectives. A preliminary StAR logic model has been developed based on the ministry's description of the program and a logic model that was developed in 2012 (Appendix A). Any changes to the program logic model that may follow this evaluation will require approval from the Director from the branch that manages the Student Voice portfolio, while any changes to the program structure would require Assistant Deputy Minister approval.

In terms of the impact of the research, the evaluation results will potentially affect how the EDU team administers StAR in future years and may also directly affect the students and teachers that participate in StAR each year. Indirectly, the evaluation and potential recommendations will also affect the broader student and teacher community. EDU, along with all other ministries within the Ontario Public Service, has recently emphasized the importance of evaluation and performance measurement in assessing key initiatives. Outcome-based performance measurement is a priority within the Ontario Public Service as the government seeks to assess, track and evaluate the progress of its priorities to enhance its accountability to the public (Treasury Board Secretariat, 2016, p. 4). StAR must be evaluated to better understand the program's impact on the students participating in StAR and the broader school community. While there is considerable information that has been collected for StAR, including past reports, past agendas, event information and internal ministry planning documents, this project will be

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the first effort to collate and quantify the existing materials along with primary research data to determine if StAR is effectively serving the Ontario education community and contributing to broader discussions in student-centered research.

1.2 Project Client

The client for this project is Jasun Fox, a Senior Policy Advisor with the Student Success Implementation Branch at EDU. The branch focuses on the implementation and innovation of programs related to student achievement in Ontario, with a focus on students in grades 7-12 that are at-risk of not graduating (Directions Evidence and Policy Research Group, 2014, p. 7). The branch is also the lead on *Student Voice* and has been since it was created in 2009.

1.3 Research Questions and Project Objectives

Research Questions

Three primary research questions will guide the evaluation:

- *To what extent is StAR meeting the outcomes that have been identified for the program? How well does the program align with government priorities?*
- *What are the implications of StAR's current internal organizational structure and its program delivery method?*

Secondary research questions are:

5. *What are students and teachers learning at the fall training forums?*
6. *What can EDU learn from other student research and engagement programs that exist across Canada and the United States? How does the program align or compare with other similar programs across Canada and the United States?*
7. *How is StAR impacting student engagement?*
8. *Who are the students that are participating in StAR?*

Statement of Objectives

The primary goal of this project is to evaluate StAR and to assess its impact on student involvement in educational decision-making (Ministry of Education, 2016). The second objective is to identify the implications of the program's current structure. The client requested that the researcher focus on implications rather than recommendations, as it allows EDU to better understand the consequences of their current structures, which can then be applied to a broader range of programs. The research focuses on the program delivery/participant experience as well as the internal structures and systems that are in place for the program (i.e. organizational and team structures). The first objective of the report was to conduct a review of student voice, students as researchers and student engagement literature. This helped to identify the theories that informed StAR and similar programs in the past, as well as an opportunity to look at how these theories have developed over time. The review included a jurisdictional scan of similar student research and student engagement programs across Canada and the United States. This provides the client with an analysis of gaps in StAR's current structure, opportunities for sharing knowledge and an understanding of StAR's place in the current student voice dialogue.

1.4 Background and Context

In 2009 EDU launched *Student Voice* as an initiative aiming to increase student involvement in their learning. In 2012, StAR was added to *Student Voice* as an annual student engagement initiative that provides students in grade 7-12 with research training to conduct CIBR projects to improve their schools. This is intended to increase student engagement by providing students with the opportunity to become involved in their school and to lead a project. StAR is premised on the idea that students are the best means by which to obtain research that can inform recommendations about improving student engagement (Courtney, 2016, p. 24). A research toolkit was the primary training resource provided to StAR teams and was developed by the Ministry in collaboration with Access Alliance (Ministry of Education and Access Alliance, 2013). The toolkit provides students with information for the entire research process, including ethics, research methods, data collection and analysis. In 2012-13, ministry-created videos were added to the toolkit to be more interactive for students. The toolkit and the videos are available on EduGAINS, a website developed by EDU for teachers (Ministry of Education and Access Alliance, 2013, <http://www.edugains.ca/resourcesSV/StudentsAsInquirers/StudentsasResearchersToolkit/StudentsasResearchersToolkit.pdf>).

The Ontario Educational Leadership Centre (OELC) is funded by EDU to facilitate three, 2.5-day Fall Training Forums that provide student-teacher teams with training on research methods to conduct their StAR research. Prior to 2016-17, there were seven regional forums as opposed to three. The purpose of the change was to centralize training to reduce costs and to create more opportunities for students from different regions in Ontario to come together.

A logic model was developed by EDU in 2012 for the StAR program and identifies short, near and long term outcomes that impact both individual students and student voice within Ontario's publicly funded education system more broadly.

Teams consist of 1 teacher advisor and 4 students from grades 7-12. Teams apply online through a communication that is sent from EDU to Student Success Leaders (SSL) within each school board, who then shares the communication with teachers across their board. Historically, all teams that have applied to attend are accepted, which results in approximately 400-450 total students and teachers in attendance across all Forums each year.

Throughout the year, teams have the opportunity to participate in three Adobe Connect Question and Answer Sessions hosted by EDU Policy Analysts, Researchers and Education Officers. The Adobe Connect Sessions are voluntary for StAR participants and provide teams with the opportunity to have their questions answered regarding any aspect of StAR.

In the spring of each year approximately 35 teams (approximately 250 participants) gather in Toronto for the StAR Research Symposium. The Symposium provides teams the opportunity to present their research to fellow StAR teams, researchers, EDU staff and school board staff. This is a competitive process in which teams are asked to complete proposals that outline their research and their presentation strategy. Teams must participate in one of the following; a roundtable discussion with a fellow StAR team, a student-led interactive presentation based on their research or a poster that summarize their findings. EDU's selection criteria includes; regional representation, grade representation, research theme and topics and the clarity and completeness of the research.

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StAR teams have engaged a variety of participants from students that are highly engaged and academically successful in their education to members of marginalized groups, including students with special education needs such as those with learning disabilities or mental health issues, students at-risk of not graduating and Indigenous students or English Language Learners.

While the StAR program has not yet been evaluated, approximately 40 research projects from 2012-13 were analyzed to highlight the topics and results of the research that students engaged in. Historical StAR documents exist within the SAD's internal database, including past research projects, internal ministry debriefs, key decision notes and work plans. These documents also track the progress and changes that StAR has undergone since it was recommended by students in 2009.

1.5 Roles

While EDU plans, designs, delivers and monitors the StAR program there are many additional actors and key role players that will be defined in this section.

Ministry of Education

EDU is the lead for developing, implementing and monitoring the StAR program to all schools across Ontario. EDU also funds the initiative through direct payments and transfer payment agreements to school boards and external organizations. The SAD has a team of approximately 5 employees (1 Senior Policy Advisor, 2 Education Officers, 1 Junior Policy Advisor/Co-op Student and 1 Research Analyst) that implement and oversee StAR from year to year. This team consults with other branches and divisions of EDU over the course of the program. EDU oversees the StAR training forums in the fall of each year, hosts the Adobe Connect Sessions throughout the winter and organizes the spring Symposium in Toronto.

Ontario Educational Leadership Centre

The OELC is a leadership camp that works with EDU to deliver the StAR fall training forums each year and to assist with the Spring Symposium. OELC staff consists of teachers and students from across Ontario, trained to facilitate students for various educational and/or leadership events throughout each year (Ontario Educational Leadership Centre: Our Philosophy, <https://www.oelccaso.com/about-us/our-philosophy>). Through their leadership camps and work with programs like StAR, OELC's goal is to maximize the potential of youth in Ontario by providing them with opportunities to lead, reflect, grow and interact with their communities (Ontario Educational Leadership Centre: Our Philosophy, <https://www.oelccaso.com/about-us/our-philosophy>).

Ontario District School Boards and Schools

There are 72 District School Boards (DSBs) across Ontario, including 12 French-language DSBs. The French-language school boards operate their own version of StAR, "*Élèves en tant que chercheurs*" which is outside the scope of this evaluation. The role of DSBs is to participate in StAR from a distance and provide support in terms of ethics approval and follow-up with StAR teams regarding their research findings. The DSB-EDU relationship is somewhat distant as EDU communicates with the DSBs via the SSLs.

Student Success Leaders

SSLs are superintendents (1-2 per board) that work within their boards to implement, monitor and track all programs that are developed by the SAD. The SSLs receive funding from EDU each year to support the

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engagement of their board, schools and the individual staff and students within each school in programs and development opportunities for enhancing student achievement. StAR has been administered by the SAD since its creation in 2009. An additional task of the SSLs is to ensure that all programs delivered by the SAD are communicated and advertised within their respective boards. For StAR, SSLs are EDU's first point of contact for announcing the program. The SSLs are an important partner in this process as they determine which schools the StAR application memo is sent to each year.

Regional Student Success Leaders

Regional Student Success Leaders (RSSLs) are former SSLs that have been employed by EDU to act as the representatives for SSLs across the 7 school board regions in Ontario. The regions are, Barrie, London East, London West, North Bay/Sudbury, Ottawa, Thunder Bay and Toronto. RSSLs represent the interests and concerns of SSLs from across their respective regions, meet regularly with EDU and are integral to the development, implementation and monitoring of student success programs and initiatives within EDU. For StAR, RSSLs are historically the first point of contact for EDU when planning for StAR each year. They are required to track StAR team participation and engage in assisting teams throughout the year. RSSLs meet with StAR teams, DSBs and SSLs to receive feedback and to relay messages across to EDU regarding the uptake in StAR across their region.

StAR Teacher-Advisors

The StAR teacher-advisors are the first point of contact for students throughout their projects and they act as a coordinator for the student teams. The teacher-advisors accompany students to the StAR Training Forums in the fall and guide them throughout the process. Teacher-advisors are expected to plan frequent meetings with their StAR team throughout the process. After the Fall Training Forums, EDU communicates primarily with the StAR teacher-advisor, while notifying the SSLs of any communication. The purpose of this is to maintain direct contact with StAR teams. While the teacher is intricately involved in the entire StAR process, they are encouraged to allow the students the freedom to choose their topics and to conduct their research in the way that they choose. The purpose of this is to place the research in the hands of students while at the same time providing them with a teacher-advisor that can assist in keeping them on track and guiding students through the process.

Students

The role of a student in the StAR program is to lead the research in their schools. Students receive training in research methods and ethics in the fall of each year and determine their research topic while they are at the training forums (if not already chosen). The research topics and process are intended to be student-led, with minimal input from their teacher aside from guidance and clarification. Students are expected to complete all reports associated with their research projects.

1.6 Definition of Terms

The following terms can take on multiple meanings and must be defined to clearly articulate a message through this evaluation.

Collaborative Inquiry-Based Research (CIBR)- Refers to the type of research that StAR students engage in throughout the process. Students are trained in CIBR methods in the fall of each year to complete the project in their school. Within the StAR Toolkit, CIBR specifically refers to a research process in which students conduct research in collaboration with their peers and their community (teachers, parents and community stakeholders) (Ministry of Education and Access Alliance, 2012, p. 9).

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Student voice- Refers to the theory of student voice in which students are viewed as active partners in their education (Bahou, 2011, p.3). This theory has been actively popularized by scholars like Rudduck, Fielding and Soohoo as they were early proponents of including a greater student presence in educational decision making. Student voice theory informs and underpins the programs, like StAR, that seek to utilize the voice and opinions of students to inform decision-making.

Student Voice- In the context of this report, *Student Voice* refers to the program that is offered by EDU. *Student Voice* consists of three programs that seek to improve student engagement and to involve students in key decisions; StAR, *SpeakUp* and the Minister's Student Advisory Council (MSAC). This is to be differentiated from student voice, the theory, which is discussed above.

2.0 Methods

2.1 Methodology

The research methodology for the project is an evaluation, including an analysis the program's ability to meet the expectations that have been identified in the StAR logic model and its relation to the broader EDU mandate. The evaluation examines the student, teacher and Student Success Leader (SSL) experience in the program as well as the internal structures and systems that are in place for coordinating, developing and growing the program. EDU's Renewed Vision for Education in Ontario identifies four areas of focus, which all programs must align with; achieving excellence, ensuring equity, promoting well-being and enhancing public confidence (Ministry of Education, 2014, p. 5). The evaluation also identifies the implications associated with the program's current internal structure and program delivery based on the data that is collected.

2.2 Methods

This research uses a mixed methods approach by collecting qualitative and quantitative data to understand the numbers and trends associated with StAR, as well as feedback on the student, teacher and key informant experience with StAR (Flick, 2015).

Surveys

Surveys were distributed to students and teachers that attended the StAR Symposium in April 2017, while another was sent to teams that did not participate, but due to timing, was not completed. The researcher used a simple population sampling method. A simple population sampling method occurs when each individual is chosen randomly to participate in a survey, meaning that all participants have an equal chance to participate (Flick, 2015, p. 101). Teachers and students were administered separate feedback surveys. Participants were asked to rate their experiences and level of agreement with statements using Likert-scale questions (Appendix B). Qualitative data was also gathered in these surveys through the use of open-ended questions regarding their experience. Teachers were asked to reflect on their selection process and to describe the changes, if any, in their students throughout the program. Students were asked to reflect on their experience as researchers, their engagement and learning and their experience working with their teammates. For those that did not attend the Symposium, they were asked a question regarding the challenges that had contributed to them not completing a Symposium application.

Focus Group

The researcher conducted Focus Groups with RSSLs that represent SSLs from the 7 different regions in Ontario. RSSLs are relied upon by EDU to support and promote StAR within their regions and have been SSLs in the past. The focus groups were guided discussions with the RSSLs in which every participant was given the opportunity to answer each question (Berg and Lune, 2014, p. 165). They were completed in person at EDU's main office in Toronto, Ontario and were recorded using the researcher's typed notes. The focus groups concentrated on how the program can better serve the board contacts and key informants that are integral to the promotion and sustainability of the program. RSSLs had the opportunity to reflect on the program broadly and make recommendations based on their experience. This information was coded and analyzed to highlight the themes that emerged from the data and to determine the needs and interests of the RSSLs throughout the focus group. Themes were used as the

coding mechanism because it was important to understand the main ideas mentioned in the focus group (Flick, 2015, p. 184).

Document Review

This researcher for this report also conducted a document review of past and current StAR project reports as well as previous program materials, including analyzed data from feedback surveys that were completed at the fall training forums. Document reviews allow the researcher to better understand the history of the program, past successes and any changes that have been made (Duby, Ganzert and Bonsall, 2014, pp. 75-76). A sample of final research reports from 2017 were analyzed to understand the topics of interest to student teams, to determine the depth of research and action that was taken and to understand if the projects align with EDU's mandate. The researcher reviewed the logic model that was developed by EDU for StAR in 2012, paying close attention to the short, medium and long-term outcomes. Figure 1 displays an abbreviated version of EDU's logic model for the StAR program. The researcher also reviewed past work plans, electronic materials and files to gain a contextual understanding of StAR and to understand the internal processes that are currently in place for the program.

The researcher also reviewed data that had been analyzed from a feedback survey that was completed by students and teachers at the 2016 fall training forums (Appendix C). The survey collected qualitative and quantitative data from participants as there were both closed-ended Likert Scale questions and questions that prompted an open ended response. The analyzed data was used by the researcher to examine the participant experience at the fall training forums, including if the students felt they had received enough training to be able to begin their projects.

2.3 Data Analysis

Symposium Surveys

The quantitative data was measured to understand the mean, distribution and included a graphical analysis of the data. It also allowed the researcher to conduct a sub-group analysis in comparison to the demographic data (i.e. grade, attendance at fall training) (Better Evaluation, "Analyze Data", http://www.betterevaluation.org/en/plan/describe/look_for_patterns). It was also compared against the data from fall 2016 that was collected and analyzed by EDU. The comparative variables were assessed for their correlation. A time series analysis was also conducted for the student ratings of their confidence before and after the Symposium, along with a comparison to ratings from the fall training forum data.

The qualitative data was manually coded by the researcher as there were a small number of survey responses (134 student responses and 39 teachers). The researcher conducted a content analysis of the feedback by grouping the responses into themes, based on the outcomes identified in the StAR logic model (Ryan, G. and Bernard, H., 2003). The qualitative feedback grouping also included themes which linked the responses to the skills and competencies that students were able to gain as a result of StAR.

Focus Groups

The researcher used a content analysis to analyze the focus group data that was gathered in May 2017. The feedback was recorded through the researcher's notes and then analyzed to identify the trends, themes and key issues identified in the responses (Berg and Lune, 2014, p. 187). The analysis assisted in

understanding the role of RSSLs in StAR and their perspective on StAR's current structures, systems and operations within the boards.

Document Review

The researcher conducted a content analysis of the past research reports, fall survey data and internal ministry documents. The content analysis allowed the researcher to understand the program in its entirety, with a particular focus on 2016-17 to understand the development of the program (Berg and Lune, 2014, p. 375). In regards to the analyzed StAR training forum data, the researcher followed a similar pattern to the analysis of the primary data that was gathered at the Symposium. The analyzed data was used to understand the student experience at the training forums and was compared against the Symposium data to understand how the overall experience and broad themes progressed over the course of the program.

2.4 Strengths and Limitations

The strength of the methodology used for this research is that there are both qualitative and quantitative methods used for collecting data, along with a jurisdictional scan of similar programs and a literature review. The literature review helped to form a basis to understand the theories and legislation in place that supports student voice. The jurisdictional scan presented opportunities for EDU to engage with similar programs across Canada and the United States. The focus group interview with key informants outlined how the program operates at both the DSB and Ministry levels including the historical challenges and opportunities for the program. The surveys of teachers and students provided insight into the participant experience over the course of the entire program.

The evaluation is limited by the availability of potential research participants that were invited to participate in the evaluation. Originally, it was intended that the SSLs from the DSBs across Ontario would participate in focus group interviews. The purpose of their participation was to understand the program at the board level. They were unable to participate due to delays with the individual ethics requirements from each DSB. This limitation was remedied by interviewing the RSSLs from each region in Ontario. They are EDU staff that act as the coordinators for all SSLs in Ontario. This provided a unique perspective as it allowed for the viewpoint of an SSL while at the same time gaining an understanding of the EDU perspective through their role and involvement in the implementation of the program.

This project may also be affected by the researcher's role as an employee of EDU. This indicates that there is a potential for bias on the part of the researcher. To mitigate this limitation, all participants in interviews and focus groups were told prior to the survey and focus group that the information they provided would be confidential and would not include any identifying factors. Participants were also informed that the data was strictly for the purposes of this research and that their information would not be shared with EDU until it had been combined with all other data in the final report.

An Evaluation of the Ontario Ministry of Education's Students as Researchers Program

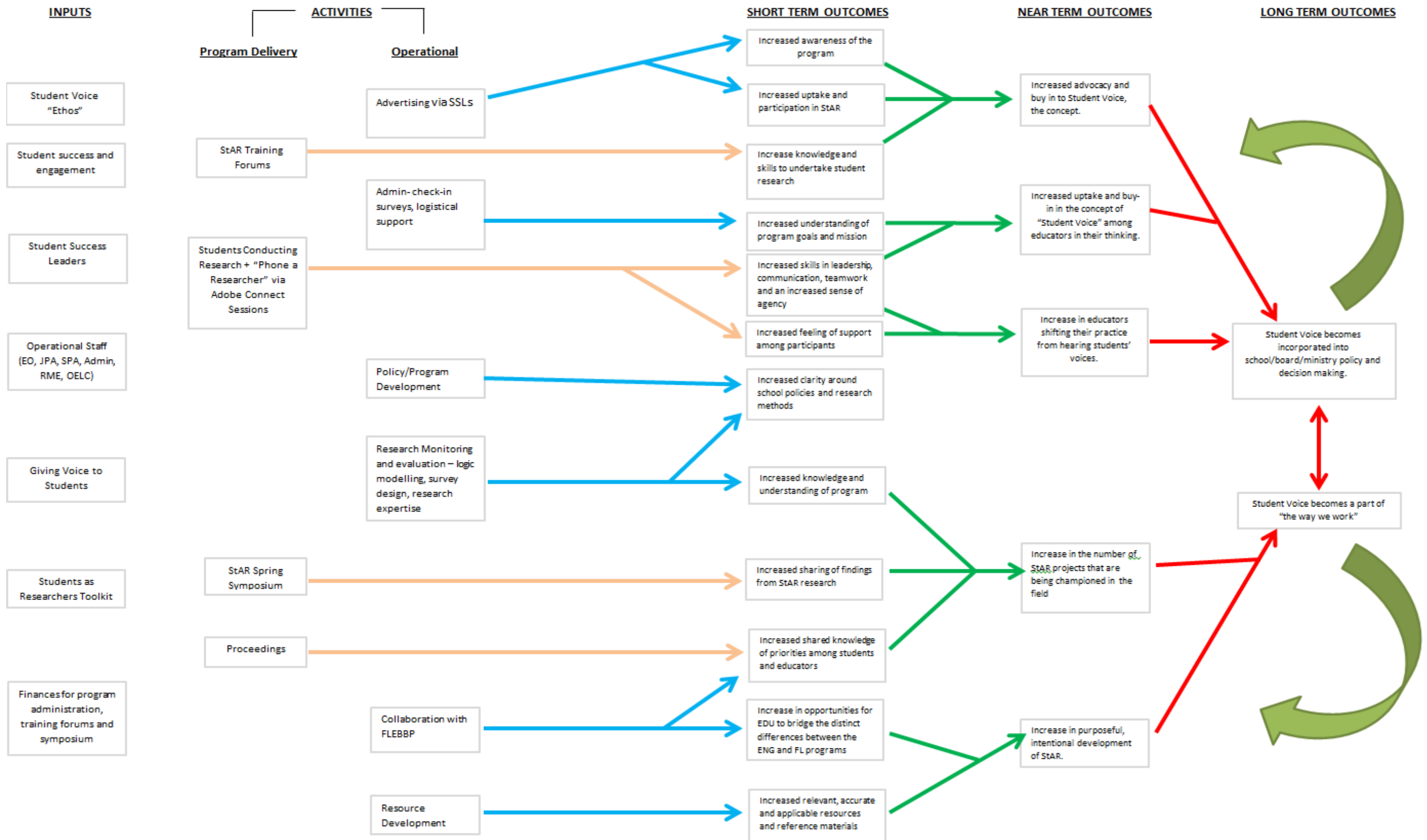


Figure 1: Students as Researchers Logic Model (Ministry of Education, 2017)

3.0 Literature Review

A literature review was conducted to identify theories underpinning and informing student research programs as well as the broader emphasis on student voice in education. The aim was to provide and explore literature and theories related to; student voice, engaging students as partners in their education, measuring and quantifying student involvement and the involvement of students as researchers in education. A jurisdictional scan was also conducted to present a broad overview of similar programs operating in Canada and the United States (US). Canadian programs were viewed as most relevant since most provinces operate under a similar educational framework. The US was also included as a preliminary review revealed a number of programs that champion the student voice in many different forms.

The review is organized by first exploring the theories that underpin StAR and Ontario's *Student Voice* and then exploring similar programs that operate across Canada and in the US. The search targeted students as researchers and student engagement resources that explore theories of student engagement and student voice programs. Published and unpublished journal articles, books, conference proceedings, webpages and reports were included in the search. Using this approach, hundreds of resources were identified. Many of the titles were related to post-secondary educational institutions. These were excluded from further review as it was outside the scope of this research. The final selection of sources included those that discussed student voice theories, the inclusion of students as partners in their education and students as researchers in educational decision making at the elementary and secondary level. Finally, information about specific programs that operate in Canada and the US presented some difficulty, as there was often limited research done to identify programs that are/were operational.

In conducting the research the sources used to find articles were Google Scholar, Summon @ the University of Victoria Libraries, the Brock University libraries, the Ministry of Education library and the Educational Research Information Centre Database. The key search terms used to research the academic literature on this subject area were; "Student Voice", "Student Research" and "Education" with "student voice theory", "student engagement", "student involvement", "youth voice" and "outcomes-based performance measurement." Focusing on narrow terms and specific jurisdictions yielded too few results resulting in the need to use the broader terms above. The information that was collected through the searches above was grouped by theme with similar information combined.

3.1 Theories Underpinning Student Voice and Student-led Research Programs

The first section of this literature review explores the theories, legal requirements and values that inform StAR. This will be an overview of the theories and beliefs that informed the creation of StAR and the developments in literature that have occurred since the program was implemented. The broader *Student Voice* initiative was implemented in 2009, thus much of the research that informed the program (i.e. student role in research and student participation in decision making) was conducted in the years prior to 2009. This section will explore student voice as a theory which is described by Bahou (2011, p. 3) as an intentional effort made by schools, boards or other decision making bodies in education to actively seek input from students on decisions that affect them.

3.1.1 Student Voice Legislation

1989 United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child

The 1989 United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child is a human rights treaty that sets out the civil, political, economic, social, health and cultural rights of children. The treaty was ratified by Canada in 1991 and identifies the universal needs of children across the world and outlines the basic conditions that must be in place for children to succeed. For education, children have a right to an educational experience that is free from discrimination, inclusive and that allows students to provide input on all matters that affect them (United Nations General Assembly, 1989, p. 9).

According to Roberts and Nash (2009, p. 174), while the treaty recommends that children be consulted on issues affecting them, there have been few legislative changes that reflect an effort to change the role of a student to being active participants rather than passive recipients in educational decision-making. In the years following the Convention, the lack of legislative changes was reflected in the student experience as students still felt marginalized with limited opportunities to contribute to their education. Roberts and Nash argue that, decision makers in education must adhere to the Convention and provide opportunities for students to develop skills that will allow them to actively contribute to broad institutional changes in their education (Roberts and Nash, 2009, p. 175). They argue in favour of programs that enable students to become researchers as they provide students the opportunity to lead school change through researching, analyzing and understanding problems and concerns within their education.

The Canadian Coalition for the Rights of Children (2011) published a report outlining Canada's progress in meeting the articles of the Convention. In regards to a child's right to participate and be heard in matters affecting them, the federal government has required that all departments and ministries that are responsible for children facilitate the participation of children in all policy formation. EDU has consulted students on decisions affecting them and have implemented *Student Voice*, which encourages students to speak out about the issues and topics that are of concern to them. *Student Voice* is the most notable aspect of Ontario's response to the Convention. Ontario's *Renewed Vision for Education in Ontario* also includes the student voice and student ownership of their education as part of Ontario's educational priorities (Ministry of Education, 2013).

3.1.2 Students as Partners in their Education

The central belief among scholars that have explored student voice in the past twenty years is that students should be included and consulted as partners in their education (Cook-Sather, 2006, p. 363). Fielding and Rudduck have had prominent roles in student voice literature and have engaged in research that emphasizes the importance of programs that seek student input and participation in educational decision-making.

In 2001, Fielding (p. 100) sought to further understand; which students are or are not participating, who is listening to these students and what systems, culture changes or spaces (physical and metaphorical) are needed for this work to develop and grow. His study of student voice programs found that many student voices were not being heard and that the student voice was not being listened to in a meaningful and impactful way (Fielding, 2001, p. 104). This is a topic that has been addressed by many scholars as they see that these programs are often intellectually demanding and inaccessible to students that are disengaged, underachieving academically or otherwise unable to engage in extracurricular student voice activities (Bahou, 2011, p. 8).

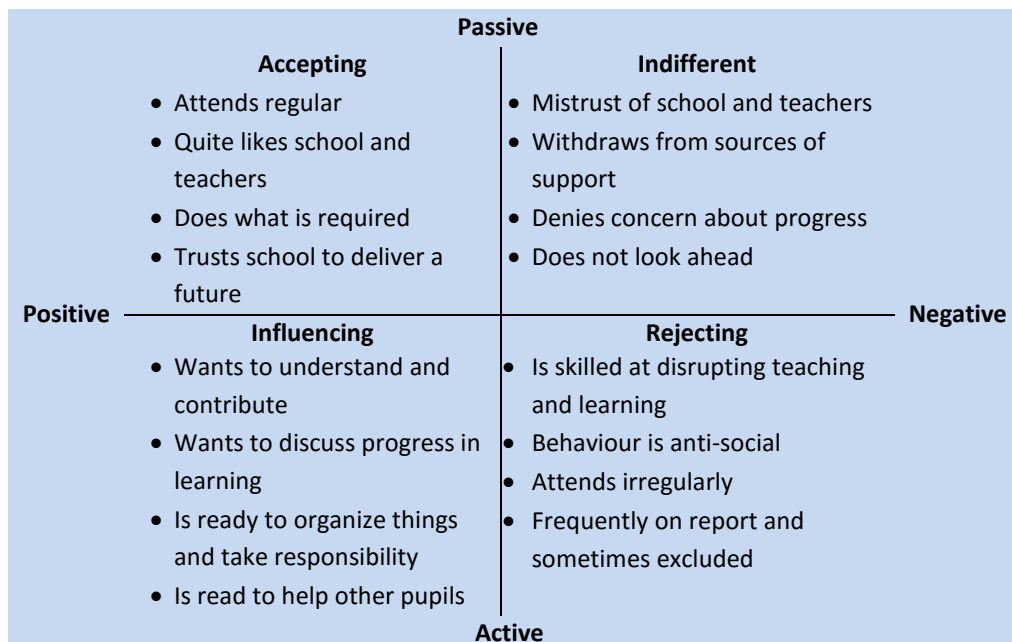


Figure 2: Rudduck’s Pupil States (n.d., p. 1)

Rudduck (2007, p. 588) considers student voice to be the process of consulting students about things that matter within their schools. In her article, “Pupil voice is here to stay!” Rudduck identified four arguments in support of student participation in conversations about education. She argued that, engaging in a dialogue with students will help to bridge the gap between planning and practice; that student participation is central to the children’s rights movement; school improvement benefits from including the student voice; and that participation as partners in education allows students to develop qualities that teachers look for in students (Rudduck, n.d., p. 1). Figure 2 is a recreation of Rudduck’s “Pupil States”, which outlines the 4 quadrants that a student may fall into. She discusses the need to consult and include students from all categories as they each have much different educational experiences (Rudduck, n.d., p. 1.). Through student engagement and the inclusion of students as partners in their education, Rudduck’s belief is that educators and decision makers in education must make deliberate attempts to access the student voice to shed light on the value of the practice. In doing so, she believes that the more educators are exposed to the student voice, the more it can be a part of the regular practice in the future (Rudduck, n.d., p. 1).

In recent years, the involvement of students in student voice programs has come into question as questions have been raised regarding whether these programs genuinely access the student voice to change schools. Robinson and Taylor (2012) explored and sought to understand the power relationships that exist when students are included as consultants, or partners, in educational decision-making. They explored two “students as researchers” projects in the United Kingdom to understand the impact of student voice programs on school change and student involvement in the process. They found that the structure of student research programs creates power dynamics where teachers and school administrators exercise considerable control over the programs, limiting the genuine student voice in the program (Robinson and Taylor, 2012, p. 43). That said, Robinson and Taylor explained that educators expressed a greater desire to listen to the voices of students within their classrooms. This critique demonstrates the need to understand the depth in which students are being listened to and included as partners and to acknowledge that student voice programs may not address power imbalances as teachers

An Evaluation of the Ontario Ministry of Education’s Students as Researchers Program and school administrators continue to maintain guidance and authority over the projects.

3.1.3 Hart’s Ladder of Student Involvement and Student Engagement Continuums

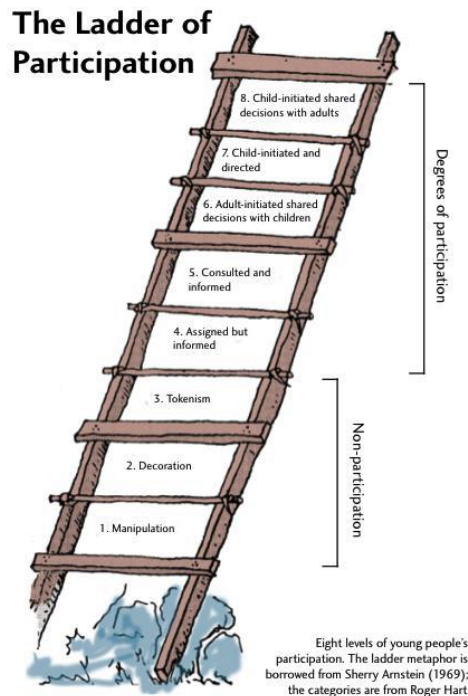


Figure 3: Hart’s Ladder of Student Involvement (Hart, 1992, p. 8)

As the literature surrounding student voice and the number of student engagement programs has grown, so too has literature that seeks to measure and quantify a program’s ability to access and listen to the student voice. The work that is most often cited is Hart’s “*Ladder of Student Involvement*” (Hart, 1992, p. 8). The purpose of the ladder is to hierarchically identify the 8 levels of student participation and why, when and how each level can be used in decision-making (Figure 3). The 8 levels are; Manipulation, Decoration, Tokenism, Assigned but Informed, Consulted and informed, Adult-initiated shared decisions with children, Child-initiated and directed and Child-initiated shared decisions with adults.

The first 3 levels of the ladder, which Hart considers “non-participation”, are Manipulation, Decoration and Tokenism. Manipulation refers to student feedback being manipulated in such a way that confirms educator beliefs (Hart, 1992, p. 11). Decoration and Tokenism refer to student voice being used symbolically or as a public relations opportunity, with minimal depth and genuine interest in the student voice on the part of the educator/educational decision maker (Hart, 1992, p. 11). In each of these, students are not genuinely being included considered in decision-making.

The next 5 levels, considered by Hart to be “Degrees of participation”, as educators and educational decision makers are viewed to be making a deliberate effort to listen to the voices of students and, to varying degrees, include it in decision making. The difference between these levels and the first 3 levels is that the raw information provided by students is being used by educators and decision-makers to inform

planning and to provide students the opportunity to exercise their power (Bahou, 2011, p. 7). The work of Hart and those that have followed, seeks to demonstrate that the theory of student voice should not be painted with broad strokes, but instead it is important to understand the varying levels of student engagement and to understand what is required for an educational body to move from non-participation to the active participation of students in programs that seek, value and consider the student voice.

3.1.4 Students as Researchers

Students as researchers programs have the potential to include students as partners in their education as they typically provide students the opportunities to engage in school change projects. There has been limited literature that specifically addresses the role of students acting in the role of researchers in their education. The reason for this is because student engagement in research is just one of many programs that have been put in place to intentionally seek student input. The articles explored in this section explore school-based student research programs.

Of the articles that have explored student research programs, Soohoo's work (1993) is some of the earliest work that sought to understand the role of student research in creating agents of change in schools. Soohoo worked within a middle school to train students in research and to have them think critically about their learning and learning environment (Soohoo, 1993, p. 386). She regularly met with 12 students (co-researchers) to conduct interviews and to understand the student experience in conducting research on school improvement. Soohoo found that the experience had inspired students to seek out opportunities for encouraging change within their schools and sought opportunities to connect with the school administration (Soohoo, 1993, p. 392). She argued that providing students with this opportunity allowed students to have a genuine impact on their school practices and that programs that enable students to conduct research have the potential to include students as partners in their education.

Fielding and Bragg (2003) explored the role of intentional programs that are developed to enable students to become researchers and inform decision making at all levels of education. Their research proposed that students as researchers programs allow students the opportunity to take action on issues that concern them and provides them with a platform to be heard.

Roberts and Nash (2009) explored students as researchers programs in response to the greater push for student voice initiatives within schools across the United Kingdom. They explain that there are considerable benefits to having student research programs, as they allow students to explore opportunities for school change, they build strong teacher/student partnerships and they carve out their own voice in the conversation around school improvement (Roberts and Nash, 2009, p. 174). Bobledyk and Fraser (2012, p. 3) have echoed a similar message through their work with a grade 9 class in Queensland, Australia. Students volunteered to be trained in research and to conduct a research project in their classroom. They were made aware that their research and recommendations would be given consideration. Bobledyk and Fraser (2012, p. 5) found that students were inspired to contribute to change within their schools and felt that it was a program to build a mutually beneficial partnership between students, teachers and school administrators. The work of Bobledyk and Fraser demonstrates the real-life application of the programs that scholars like Fielding, Roberts and Nash have explored.

Kincheloe and Steinberg (1998, p. 2) explored the role of students as 'players' in their education through preparing students to conduct school-based research. They took a different approach from the previous scholars as their work focused on enabling students to be researchers in the classroom through teaching practices, assignments and critically analyzing the lessons they are taught. They argued that students are

best inspired to engage in school improvement if they engaged in an inquiry-based classroom every day rather than to implement one-off research programs (Kincheloe and Steinberg, 1998). Lapp, Fisher and Frey (2015, p. 7) explored the role of teachers as the facilitators of student research through classroom instruction. By enabling students to become research in the classroom, through course-related activities, the authors argue that students will acquire the skills to take a more critical approach to their education and will investigate issues outside of the classroom. This differs from StAR as it argues to empower students to ask questions through incorporating research into regular classroom activities.

There is potential for students as researchers programs to reach the "Adult-initiated shared decisions with children" rung of Hart's ladder. These programs are introduced to students by teachers, school administrators or adult decision-makers in education, yet the products they develop are student-driven and have the potential to start conversations between students and educators (Hart, 1992, p. 12). Roberts and Nash (2009) caution that the creation of a program could limit the impact of student research, as teachers or administrators have the final say in the use of the submitted materials and not all students may be included in such activities. This could result in the program existing for "Tokenism" or "Decoration" as they give students the impression that their research is valued, yet they may only be invited to the table to represent the interests of the adults involved. There is also an argument (Bland and Atweh, 2007) that students as researchers programs are too intellectually demanding to include the participation of disengaged or underachieving students and that it does not reach all students as a result. This would lead to false claims by educational bodies (i.e. schools, boards and ministries) as empowering student voices as a number of subgroups of students could be excluded from the programming, based on the rigid and intellectually demanding structures.

3.1.5 Skill Development

Another focus of the literature surrounding student research programs has been the emphasis on skill development. Fielding (2001) argued that providing students with research training and the opportunity to complete a research project in their schools allows students the opportunity to develop valuable skills that they can carry over into other aspects of life. According to Fielding (2001), Raymond (2001), Watkins (2005), Roberts and Nash (2009) and the skills that students can acquire through these programs include; research, communication, teamwork, confidence and a cultural awareness of the education system.

Roberts and Nash (2009, p. 182) analyzed qualitative feedback from students that participated in a students as researchers program and found that many students identified the program as having a personal impact on their development, through acquiring skills, as a positive outcome of their involvement in the program. Some of these students were also skeptical of the broader impact that their research could have but were thankful for the opportunity to develop skills. A skill that was identified most by Roberts and Nash is confidence, as the students identified the program as having a profound impact on student confidence in their abilities as researchers as well as in their ability to inspire change (Roberts and Nash, 2009, p. 185).

These themes are similar across a number of scholars, including Bobledyk and Fraser (2012, p. 5), who identified that their students gained valuable and transferable skills through their participation in the research process. In this context, scholars believe that students are not only conducting research to inform key decisions in education, but they are also gaining valuable skills that will enable further participation in their schools and skills that will be increasingly valuable in a 21st century learning environment and workforce.

3.2 Jurisdictional Scan of Similar Programs across Canada and the United States

While the first section of this literature review has demonstrated that there are a considerable number of theories and beliefs that underpin student voice and the various methods of doing so, it does not address the practical application of such theories. This section will explore programs that are similar to *Student Voice* and StAR across Canada and the United States.

3.2.1 Canada

British Columbia: "BC Student Voice"

BC Student Voice is the British Columbia (BC) Ministry of Education's effort to provide high school students with opportunities to engage in key decisions regarding their education (British Columbia Principals' & Vice Principals' Association, 2015: "Student Voice.", <http://bcpvpa.bc.ca/student-voice/>). *BC Student Voice* was created in conjunction with BC's Principal's and Vice Principal's Association. The program is comprised of diverse group of students within each school jurisdiction across the province to represent the unique perspectives of students on issues related to education (British Columbia Principals' & Vice Principals' Association, 2015: "Student Voice."). In regards to accessing the student voice, *BC Student Voice* takes the form of regional conferences for students and educators to discuss the current state of education and to make recommendations. Within each BC regional conference, 4 students from each school can be selected to attend. At these conferences, student representatives learn about the strategies for creating change in their schools and have the opportunity to share ideas with one another. While the schedule for each conference is determined by the students, a sample conference agenda from March 2016 included; alternative learning strategies, financial and literacy planning and the Aboriginal Education Enhancement Agreement. This program does not offer explicit research opportunities similar to StAR. It does however provide students with opportunities to engage in conversations on school improvement, with the hope that students use the information to take action within their own schools (British Columbia Principals' & Vice Principals' Association, 2015: "Student Voice").

Alberta: "Speak Out"

Prior to 2015-16, Alberta's *Speak Out* program operated in a similar fashion to *Student Voice* in Ontario. Students could participate in a variety of different programs, including a Premier's Advisory Council and research opportunities. Alberta has recently revised their student engagement processes to better address regional needs and to genuinely access the student voice (Alberta Education, 2015, <http://www.speakout.alberta.ca/LinkClick.aspx?fileticket=67Jb6JDeLPg%3D&tabid=60>). Each jurisdiction in Alberta has its own Jurisdiction Student Engagement Team (JSET) that consists of 1-2 students aged 14-21 from each middle/secondary school in the school authority. *Speak Out* offers student representatives the opportunity to earn class credits while they work with district leaders, teachers, parents and board trustees to inform jurisdictional decision making (Alberta Education, 2015). *Speak Out* consists of 2 regional meetings for each jurisdiction. The agenda includes; opportunities to meet with Superintendents to address topics of importance, training sessions delivered by the Ministry of Education on school-based research projects, issues in education and an opportunity to work with the ministry to determine priorities (Alberta Education, 2015). The program was revised to better align with Alberta's Education Act which requires, "collaboration, engagement and empowerment of all partners in the education system to ensure that all students achieve their potential. (Province of Alberta, 2012, p. 10)" This approach emphasizes the importance of collaboration across the different levels of education to maximize the depth in which all students can exercise their voice (Alberta Education, 2015). As the program is relatively recent, there are

no immediate results that have been shared by Alberta's Ministry of Education.

3.2.2 United States

SoundOut

SoundOut is an organization that was founded in 2002 in Olympia, Washington which provides a wide range of services to schools, boards, districts and other education agencies across the world (SoundOut: About Us, 2016, <https://soundout.org/about-us/>). *SoundOut* was founded out of the belief that school and educational improvement is most effective when it involves the consultation of the students (SoundOut: About Us, 2016). The program is focused on student engagement, student voice and Meaningful Student Involvement (SoundOut: About Us, 2016). Meaningful Student Involvement, according to *SoundOut*, is "the process of engaging students as partners in every facet of school change for the purpose of strengthening their commitment to education, community and democracy (SoundOut: About Us, 2016)." While the program provides a comprehensive website with materials for educators to use, they also offer their own *Student Voice Program (SVP)*. The *SVP* provides educators with training and resources on how to engage in school improvement through accessing the student voice. In this context, the *SVP* is not focused directly on students but instead, how educators can improve their classroom practices to include students as researchers or as facilitators of classroom/school change (SoundOut: About Us, 2016). The program support is available to any school that is looking to implement a student engagement program within their school (SoundOut: About Us, 2016).

Youth Participatory Action Research Hub: University of California, Berkeley

The Youth Participatory Action Research Hub (YPARH) is an online database devoted to youth and community development through research. The online source provides youth with comprehensive information related to carrying out research within the lives, communities and institutes that serve students. The purpose of the YPARH is to inform students of the importance of participation and to provide easily accessible materials to students (Youth Participatory Action Research Hub, 2016, "What is YPAR?" <http://yparhub.berkeley.edu/>). The online website was developed out of a partnership between the University of California, Berkeley and San Francisco Peer Resources with the intention of creating a source for all students to use. While the database itself is not associated with specific students as researcher programs, it would be beneficial for programs to consult as it provides lessons to children and adults for all steps in their research. The website also features projects across the US and South America that utilized the YPARH to conduct their research and contribute to change within their communities, organizations and schools (Youth Participatory Action Research Hub, 2016, "YPAR in action"). This is an effective resource for programs to consult and engage with as it connects students to a broader network of researchers and resources.

Youth Leadership Institute: San Francisco, California

Based out of California, the Youth Leadership Institute is an organization that funds research-based leadership development programs for youth across in 4 locations across the state. The Institute offers programs that are tailored to the specific needs of the 4 locations that they serve (San Francisco, Marin, Central Valley and San Mateo). The programs include; youth leadership projects, community action projects, community organizations minority groups, education equity committees and nutrition programs (Youth Leadership Institute, 2016, "Who we are", <http://yli.org/our-impact/>). Across the 4 jurisdictions, the Youth Leadership Institute reported expenditures of \$2,765,106, 77% of which was used for youth programs (Youth Leadership Institute: Final Report, 2016). A number of the programs encourage youth

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and students to engage in participatory action research. For example, the 2015-16 Youth Leadership Annual Report indicated that for the 2015-16 program year, 69% of youth engaged in research as part of their project/campaign and 84% of youth believed that they could influence community change through their programs (Youth Leadership Institute: Final Report, 2016). It is also important to note that the program attracts a diverse range of youth as the 2015-16 report noted that 90% identify as youth of colour, 65% qualified for Free and Reduced meals due to family income, 65% speak a language other than English at home and 33% of students worked with the Institute for multiple years (Youth Leadership Institute: Final Report, 2016). This is a demonstration of a broad organization that facilitates the creation and funding of programs that are administered, developed and carried out at local levels to account for the local context of each community that is served.

4.0 Research Findings: Secondary Data

This section will describe the findings from all secondary data that was analyzed. The secondary data included; analyzed survey data from the 2016 StAR training forums and the final research reports from the 2016-17 StAR cohort. The training forum data was used to understand the student experience at the forum. Final research reports were analyzed to understand the variety of research projects, the depth to which students engaged in the research and to what extent students took action.

4.1 Fall Training Forum Survey Data

A total of 104 teacher advisors and 396 students participated across 35 school boards participated in the StAR training forums. 22 teacher advisors (21% response rate) and 338 students (85% response rate) completed the feedback survey. Table 1 is a breakdown of those that participated in the fall training forum. It is important to note that there were only 21 Grade 9 students that participated in the survey, the least of all groups that were surveyed. 2016-17 was the largest year in terms of DSB participation (35) and the second largest in terms of student participation (83 schools).

Session	# of Teacher Advisors	# of Students	# of Boards
Training Forums	104	396	35 (58% of English Language DSBs)
Training Forum Survey	22	328	

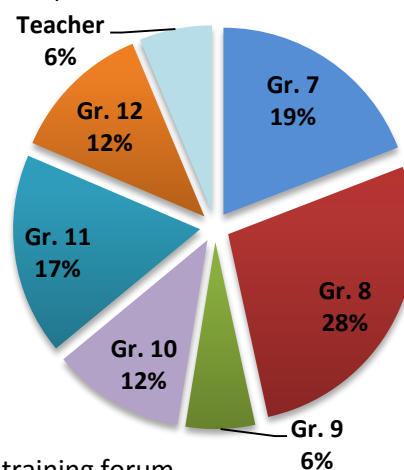


Table 1 and Figure 4: Participation in the fall training forum feedback survey.

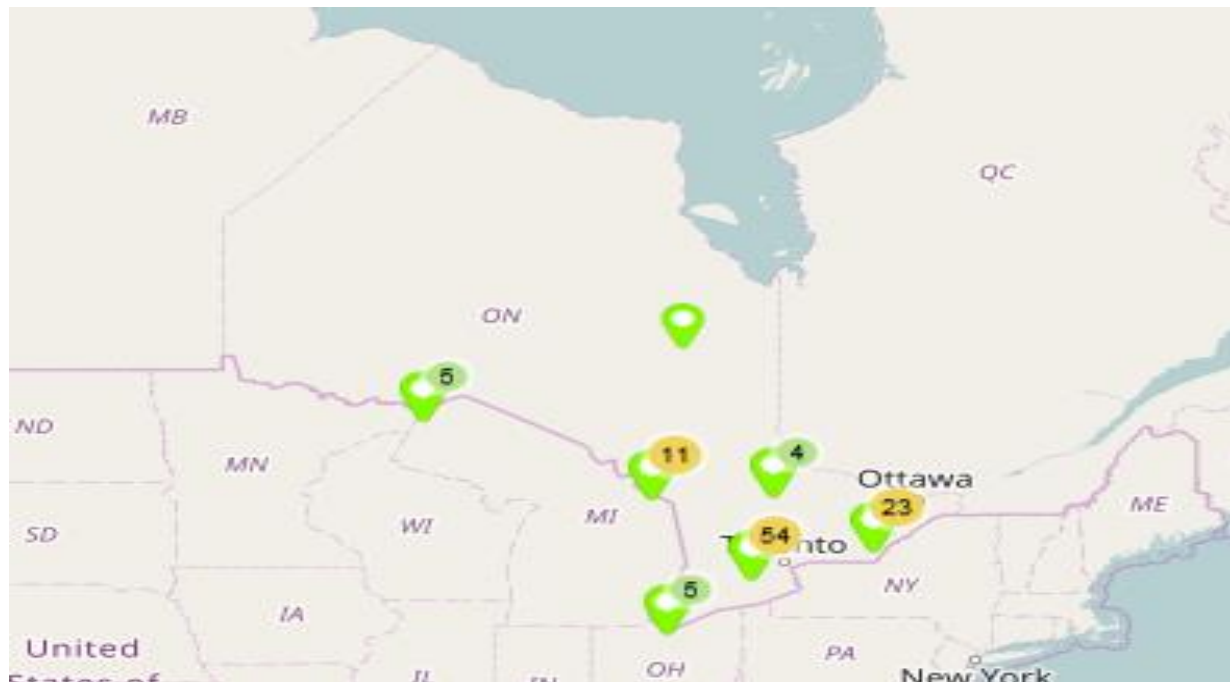


Figure 5: A data distribution map of the schools that participated in StAR for 2016-17.

Figure 5 geographically displays the DSBs that participated in StAR in 2016-17. As the map demonstrates, there was considerable representation from Southern and Central Ontario, while Northern Ontario was less represented. Approximately, 57% of schools were from south of Toronto, while 22% were from the Eastern Ontario and 20% were from regions north of Toronto and Ottawa. This is consistent with previous years, as a report published by the Ontario Principal’s Association (Meliksetyan, 2015) produced similar maps outlining the participating from 2012-2014.

Overall Experience at the Forum

The average rating for overall experience at the fall training forums was 4.18, based on a 5 point scale, with over 80% of participants rating their experience as a 4 or above. The most frequently occurring response was 4, occurring 44% of the time. The group of participants that had the highest overall rating for their experience was students in Grade 7 with an average rating of 4.3 and 90% of students rating their experience as a 4 or higher. The group that had the lowest rated experience was the Grade 9 students as their average rating was 4.1 with 62% of students rating their experience as a 4 or higher.

After rating their overall experience at the forum, participants were asked to: “Please explain why you selected this rating.” The responses were coded, sorted and reviewed by the researcher to identify key themes. Table 2 outlines the key themes that emerged from the responses as well as responses that align with the outcomes identified in the StAR logic model. The columns titled “Affirmative” and “Negative” refer to the forum’s ability to meet the needs of the participants. For example, in row 8.1 there were 15 participants that affirmed they were given adequate opportunities to gain knowledge in research while 4 participants felt they did not. The first 7 rows reflect comments regarding the structure of the training forums, while rows 8.1-10 reflect the outcomes in the StAR logic model that were identified by the participants in their responses.

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Legend		Affirmative	Negative	Total
1	The effectiveness and readability of the StAR Toolkit	0	2	2
2	High School and Elementary School students paired together	0	6	6
3	OELC and Ministry responsiveness to student requests	0	1	1
5	Time with teachers and their research	0	16	16
6	Forum structure and activities	34	35	69
7	Notice to attend	0	2	2
8.1	Students gain: knowledge in research	15	4	19
8.2	Students have: Opportunity to determine a meaningful StAR Research Topic	14	0	14
8.3	Students gain: Leadership experience	3	0	3
8.4	Students engage in: Teamwork/Relationship-building	34	3	37
8.5	Students gain: Confidence in exercising their own voice	9	0	9
8.6	Students gain: A sense of agency in their schools	18	0	18
9	Students have the opportunity to share ideas with their schools	8	0	8
10	Educators affirm the value of training students to carry out self-directed student-led collaborative research	1	0	1

Table 2: Please explain why you selected this rating (Coded)

The most frequently referenced outcome was teamwork and relationship building, as 37 participants referenced this in their responses. Of the 37 participants, 34 explained that there were ample opportunities for teamwork, while the remaining 3 participants wrote that they had hoped for more time dedicated to work within their StAR teams. In 33 responses, participants identified the opportunity to engage in research as a justification for their conference rating. 29 of these participants wrote that they had ample opportunity to engage in their research, while the other 4 participants had hoped for more time to truly engage in research and learn about the research process. 16 participants also felt that while they had time to conduct research, there was insufficient time for teachers and students to work on the research together. Many respondents felt that teachers should have had greater involvement in the development of their StAR team’s research question.

There were an additional 145 responses to this question that were excluded from the analysis as they were outside the scope of this evaluation. These questions included responses about the quality of the food, the sleeping arrangements, weather and other matters that outside of the control of the StAR program.

4.2 Final Research Reports

StAR teams engaged in a wide variety of research topics including, student well-being and self-worth, Indigenous cultural awareness within schools and boards, racism and stereotypes and issues surrounding the closure and amalgamation of rural schools. Of the 104 teams that participated in StAR for 2016-17, 69 (66.4%) teams completed and submitted a report, 10 teams (9.6%) contacted the Ministry to let them know that were unable to complete their research and 25 (24%) teams did not identify whether or not they had completed their StAR research.

StAR teams were permitted to submit their reports in whichever format they preferred, including slideshows, Google Drive folders, photo galleries and written reports or any combination of these. The majority of reports were submitted as written reports that ranged from 1-5 pages in length. There were also a number of reports that were completed in the form of a slideshow (i.e. PowerPoint and Google Slides). Teams also submitted their report in the form of a photo gallery/album that summarized their work visually. Students that attended the Symposium had the opportunity to submit a video synopsis of their research to supplement their final report. Of the 40 teams that participated in the Symposium, all teams completed the synopsis video, while there were no teams outside of the Symposium that submitted their project in video format.

Teams that submitted final reports were asked to identify a theme for their research projects. Teams could choose from 4 topics identified by EDU as part of the *Achieving Excellence Strategy* (Achieving Excellence, Ensuring Equity, Promoting Well-Being and Enhancing Public Confidence), or there was an option to select “other” and identify their own theme. “Enhancing Public Confidence” was the only option that was not selected, while there were 4 additional themes added by StAR teams. Figure 6 outlines the frequency of themes selected by StAR teams. Teams that did not complete their research projects were asked to write to the ministry to explain their reasoning for not completing. The reasons included; the students lost motivation throughout the year, lack of DSB support for their projects, delays in the ethics approval process and teams could not find adequate time to meet and plan their research.

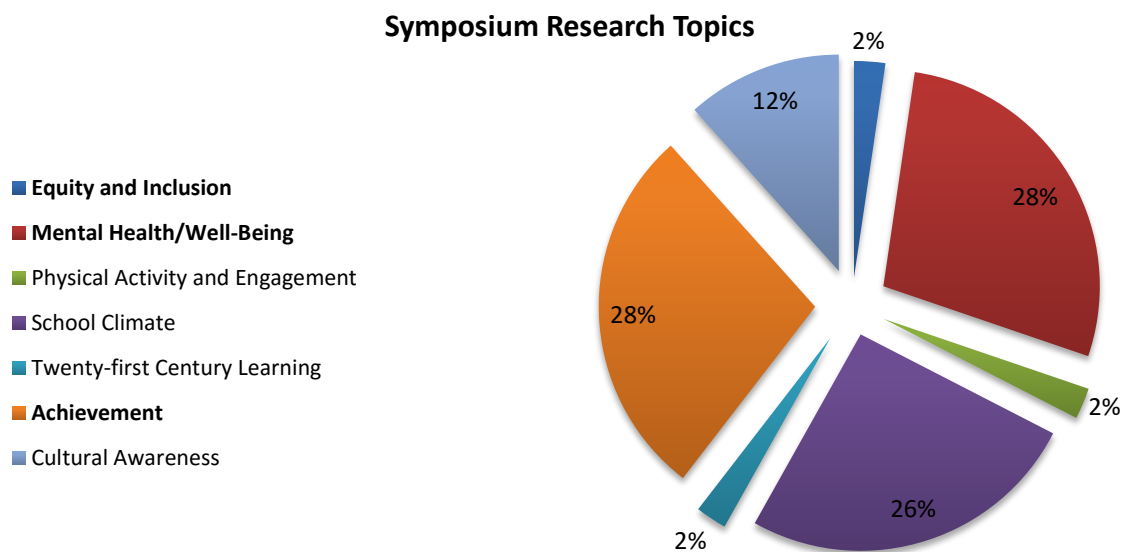


Figure 6: Student Final Research Report Topics

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The most frequently occurring research themes were Mental Health/Well-Being (28%) and Achievement (28%), followed by School Climate (26%). Projects with a theme of Mental Health/Well-Being included school-based research on how to improve the well-being of students, through the introduction of classroom activities, student self-worth studies, physical activities and/or school-wide events. The projects that were themed "Achievement" focused on teaching styles, student responsiveness and school structures (i.e. semestered vs. non-semestered schools). The "School Climate" projects included topics related to improving the sense of community within recently amalgamated schools, or studying the relationship between a school and its broader community.

Approximately 36% of StAR teams completed action-based research projects that were funded through *SpeakUp*. *SpeakUp* is an application process used to award *SpeakUp* Project Grants for student-led teams in grades 7-12. Students can apply for grants of up to \$2,500. These grants can help students take action by leading projects that make a difference in their classrooms, schools and communities. *SpeakUp* Projects also support the government's renewed vision for education, *Achieving Excellence* by encouraging students to focus their project ideas on the core goals for education: achieving excellence, promoting well-being and ensuring equity. StAR teams used this funding to support their projects through a number of different ways, including; incentives for participation in school activities, hiring facilitators for school presentations and for decorating/brightening common areas in schools. Each year, EDU promises to collect an abstract from all StAR teams that completed the final research report so that it can be sent to all schools that participated in StAR, SSLs, Directors of Education and internal EDU staff. Due to timing issues, competing deadlines, as well as shifting internal team members, this has yet to happen for any of the years that StAR has been operational.

5.0 Research Findings: Primary Data

This section will describe the findings from the primary data that was collected. This includes; survey data from the StAR Symposium and data from a focus group with 7 RSSLs from each of the 7 geographic regions defined by EDU (Barrie, London East, London West, Ottawa, Sudbury/North Bay, Toronto and Thunder Bay).

5.1 Spring Symposium Survey

At the Spring Symposium, separate surveys were distributed to teachers and students that participated in StAR for 2016-17. In total, 139 students out of 173 participated in the survey, while 15 of 21 teachers participated.

5.1.1 Quantitative Data

Demographic Data

	Number of Teacher Advisors	Number of Students	District School Boards
Symposium	43 (41% of fall participants)	173 (43% of fall participants)	21 (35% of total English Language DSBs)
Symposium Survey	39 (91% response rate)	139 (77% response rate)	15 (25% of total English Language DSBs)

Table 3: Participation in the Spring Symposium and Spring Symposium Survey

Table 3 describes the participation in both the StAR Symposium as well as the participation in the survey that was distributed at the Symposium. 15 of Ontario’s 60 English Language DSBs were represented identified in the survey and there were an additional 7 respondents that chose not to identify their DSB. There was a relatively equal split between elementary students (41%) and secondary students (56%) that participated in the survey, as they accounted for 41 % and 56% of the total participation, respectively. In terms of the regional representation, there were 15 DSBs represented at the Symposium, with representation from all 7 school regions in Ontario. The most represented DSB was Simcoe County was the most DSB, located in Southern Ontario, north of Toronto with 37 participants, while there were an additional 49 school boards that did not participate.

Overall StAR Experience

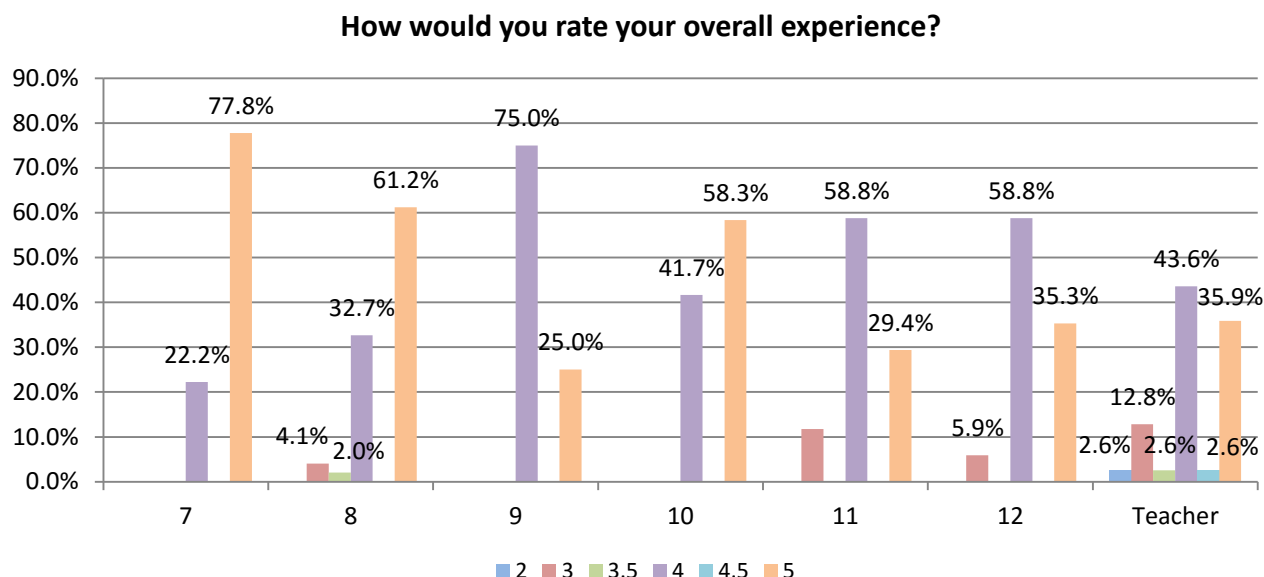


Figure 7: Overall Student Experience with StAR

Students and teachers at the Symposium were asked to rate their overall experience with the entire program, including their experience conducting their time conducting research within their schools, on a scale of 0-5, with 5 being the greatest. A breakdown of their responses is summarized in Figure 7. The average rating for StAR in 2017-18 was 4.4, with 47.4% of participants rating the program as a 5 and approximately 91% of the participants at the Symposium rated their overall StAR experience as a 4 or higher. The standard deviation for the data was 0.65.

Grade	7	8	9	10	11	12	Teacher	Total
Average Rating	4.8	4.6	4.3	4.6	4.2	4.3	4.2	4.5
% rating of 5	77.8%	61.2%	25%	58.3%	29.4%	35.3%	35.9%	47.4%
% > 4	100%	93.9%	100%	100%	88.2%	94.1	82.1%	91.3%
# of Responses	18	49	4	12	34	17	39	173

Table 4: Analysis of Student Experience across Grades

Table 4 outlines the distribution of overall ratings across each grade level and for teachers. Grade 7 participants had the highest overall experience rating as 77.8% of students rated their overall experience in StAR as a 5 and an average overall experience rating of 4.78. The Teacher-Advisors had the lowest overall rating of the StAR program as the average rating was 4.18, with just 35.9% of teachers rating the program as a 5 and 82.1% of students rating their overall experience as a 4 or higher. Among student participants, the grade that rated the overall program the lowest was the grade 11 students. The average

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rating for grade 11 students was 4.18, with 29.4% of students rating the program a 5 and 88.2% of students rating the program a 4 or higher. The table also shows that just 25% of grade 9 students rated their experience as a 5. The grade 9 data should be looked at with caution though as just 4 students in grade 9 attended the Symposium.

Participants were asked to explain why they selected their rating in an open-ended format. The participants that rated their experience as less than 4 (15 total responses) were analyzed further to understand their low rating for the StAR experience. The majority of students that rated their experience as a 4 or less stated that there was not enough differentiation between the needs of students in secondary school and those in elementary school. This included a desire to have more involvement of EDU during the team presentations. Another comment mentioned that the program lacked organization between the Ministry and schools. As for the teachers (7) that rated their participation as a 4 or less, it was identified that the projects lacked in support from their board and the Ministry, they had concerns with organization and direction from EDU in terms of teacher responsibilities and timelines and a concern that EDU did not make a genuine effort to listen to the student voice through StAR.

Confidence in Conducting Research

Teachers were asked to rate their confidence in their students' ability to conduct research, while students were asked to rate their own confidence in conducting research before and as a result of the StAR program. The average confidence rating across all teachers was 8.2, with a standard deviation of 0.93. Elementary school teachers appeared less confident in their students with 68.8% of teachers (11 of 16 respondents) rated their confidence in their students as 8 or higher, as compared to 87.3% secondary school teachers (19 of 22 respondents). Figure 8 displays the teacher confidence in their students' ability to conduct research, separated by level of school taught.

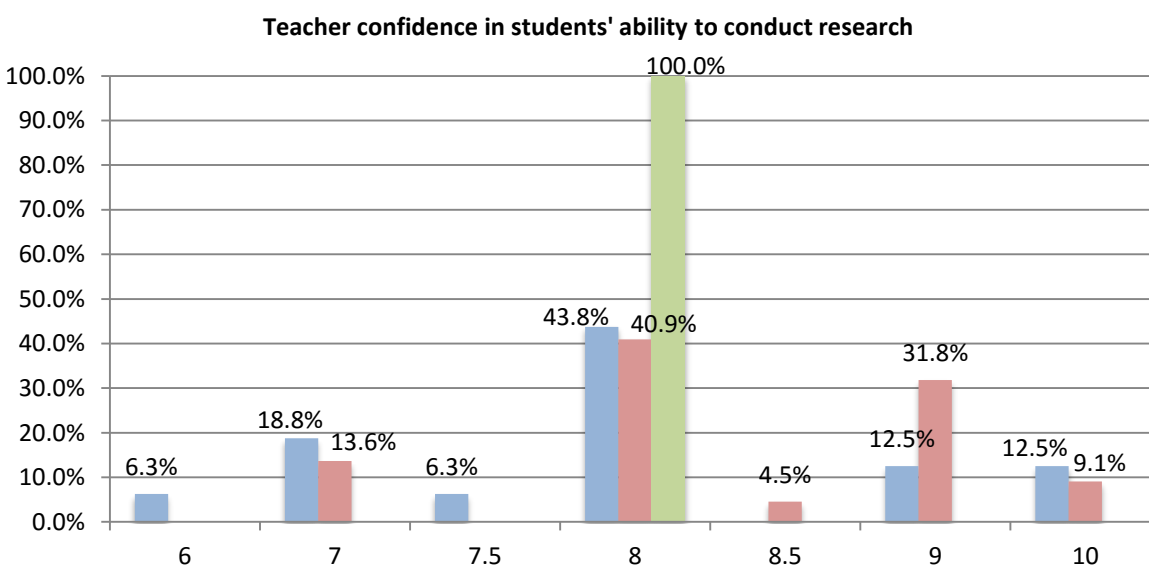


Figure 8: Elementary and Secondary teachers' confidence in their student's ability to conduct research.

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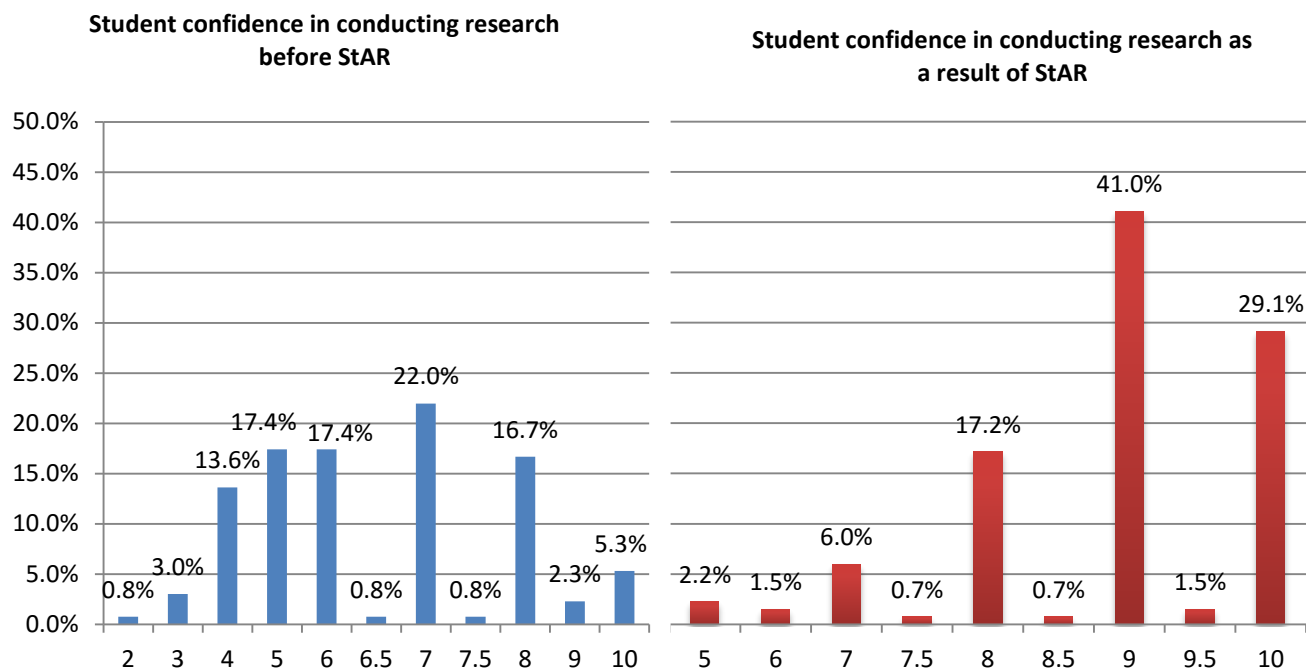


Figure 9: Student Confidence in Conducting Research (Before and After StAR)

Figure 9 compares the responses from students regarding their confidence in conducting research before and after the StAR program. Prior to StAR, the average confidence rating among students was 6.3, with 24% of students rating their confidence as an 8 or higher. In addition, 24% of students that rated their confidence prior to StAR as a 5 or less. The grade with the highest confidence rating before the StAR program was the Grade 12 students as their average confidence rating was 6.8, while the grade with the lowest confidence rating were Grade 9s with an average rating of 5.5.

The average confidence rating for students as a result of StAR was 8.9, with 72% of students rating their confidence as an 8 or higher. In addition, 2.2% of students rated their experience as a 5 or less. As a result of the Symposium, the grade with the highest average confidence rating were Grades 7 and 10 students with an average confidence rating of approximately 9. Participants across all grade levels had a minimum confidence rating of 8.7 after StAR. The data for students that rated their confidence as a result of StAR as 5 or less was analyzed alongside the qualitative statement on the impact of StAR. These students (3 total) did not address their confidence in their responses, but two of the students explained that the program positively impacted them in different ways including in the development of leadership skills and the opportunity to present in a judgment-free environment. The third student explained that the program was interesting at first, but became too demanding over the course of the year, causing them to lose interest. When compared to the training forum data, the average rating after the Symposium was lower by 0.8 points, while 10% more students rated their experience as an 8 or higher after the Symposium.

Likert-Scale Questions

Teachers and students were also asked to rate their level of agreement with a number of Likert-Scales about their StAR experience. Teachers and students were asked to rate their level of agreement with

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different statements as it was important to differentiate between the unique experiences of both groups. All responses that were left blank were rated as N/A and were included in the overall totals but did not undergo any further analysis.

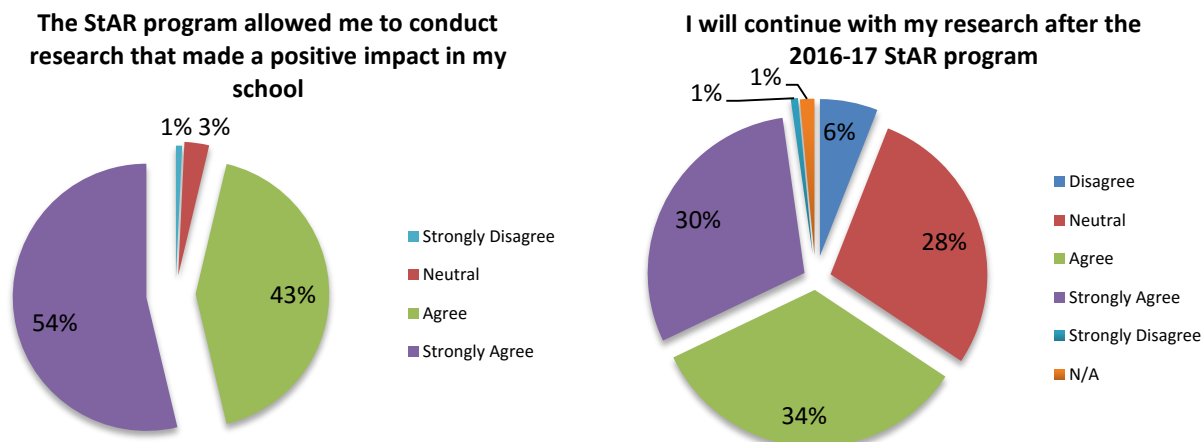


Figure 10: Student Likert-Scale Responses

Students were asked whether or not their research had a positive impact, if they gained leadership skills as a result of StAR, whether or not they will continue with their research and if they felt prepared to conduct research after the fall training forums. Generally, the student responses were positive as at least 60% of responses either agreed or strongly agreed with each statement. The statement that students agreed with least was whether or not they would continue with their research after StAR (Figure 10). Of the students that responded, 30% of students strongly agreed, 34% agreed, 28% were neutral, 6% disagreed and 1% strongly disagreed. The average rating was 0.87, which is meant that most students agreed with the statement. When looked at in terms of grade distribution, the grade with the least likelihood to continue with their research were the Grade 12 students with 40% of students selecting either neutral or disagree and the Grade 8 students with 39% selecting either disagree or neutral. Logistically, this makes sense as the students would both be leaving their schools at the end of the school year. It is important to note, that there were 9 Grade 12 students and 29 Grade 8 students that selected either agree or strongly agree for this statement.

The statement that was agreed with most was whether or not the StAR research had a positive impact within their schools. In these responses, 54% of students strongly agreed, 43% of students agreed, 3% of students chose neutral, and 1% of students strongly disagreed. The average confidence rating was 1.48, meaning that, on average, students either agreed or strongly agreed with the statement. The grade with the highest percentage of students that had the most positive reaction to this question were the Grade 8 and 11 students with 96% of students selecting either agree or strongly agree.

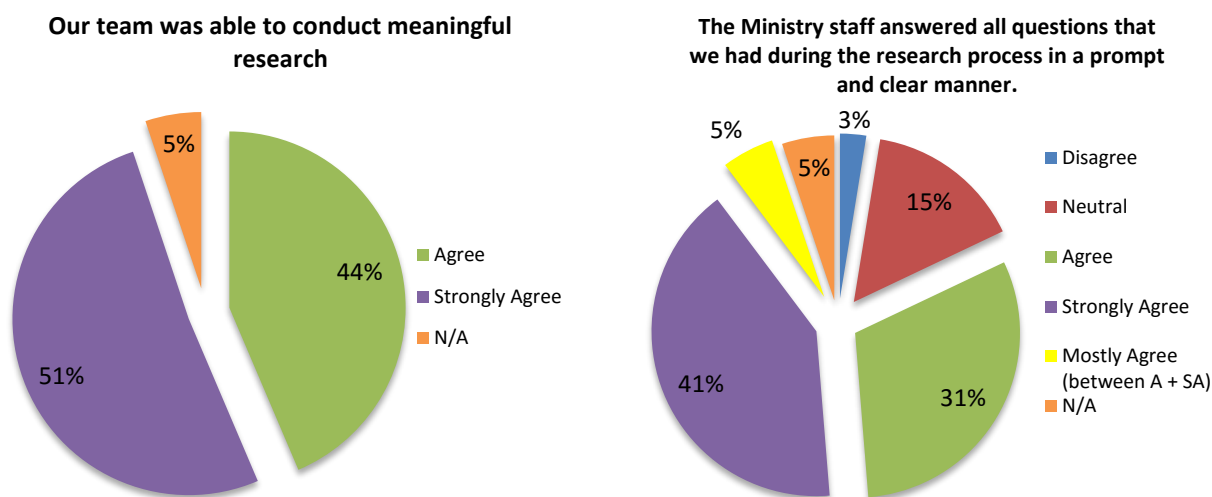


Figure 11: Teacher Likert Statement Responses

Teachers were asked; if their team was able to conduct meaningful research, if the Ministry staff were responsive to their questions/concerns, if their students were engaged throughout the entire process and if they felt the StAR training forums prepared them for the StAR process. The teacher statement that was most positively responded to was whether or not their StAR team was able to conduct meaningful research. Of the teachers that responded to the statement, 51% of teachers strongly agreed, 44% agreed.

The teacher response that was least positive was whether or not the Ministry staff sufficiently answered all questions that teachers had throughout the research process. In this statement, just 41% of teachers strongly agreed, 31% agreed, 15% selected neutral, 3% disagreed, while an additional 5% selected a rating between agree and strongly agree. The average rating for this statement was 1.2, meaning that though it was the least positive response to a statement, most teachers agreed with the statement. Teachers in elementary schools were generally more affirmative for this statement as 56% of elementary teachers agreed with the statement, while approximately 50% of secondary teachers disagreed.

5.1.2 Qualitative Feedback

In both the teacher and student surveys that were distributed at the Symposium, participants had the opportunity to respond to multiple open-ended questions. The qualitative questions were then analyzed and coded by the researcher to understand the key themes that emerged through participant responses.

Teacher-Identified Selection Process

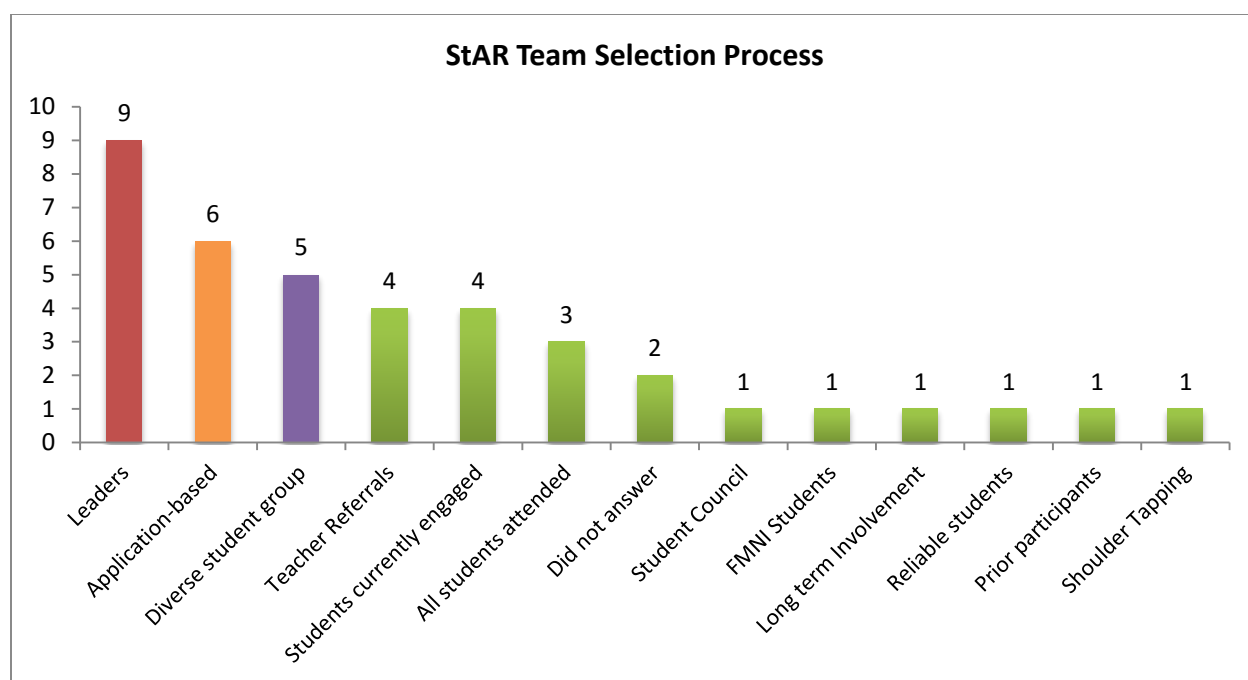


Figure 12: Teacher-Identified StAR Team Selection Process

Figure 12 displays coded responses to the teacher-identified process for selecting their StAR team, each option is mutually exclusive. This was an open-ended, qualitative question, which was then coded and analyzed by the researcher. “Leaders” was the most frequently occurring theme, as teachers identified that they selected students based on their established leadership within their schools. 6 teachers identified an application-based process for selecting their students, which included written applications, conversations with the teacher advisor and/or video submissions that demonstrated their interest in pursuing a StAR project. There were also 5 teacher-advisors that selected a diverse student group to make up their StAR teams. The term diverse included a variety of factors, including student achievement, peer groups, grades and extracurricular involvement. Other frequently occurring selection processes included, referrals from teachers, students that are active and engaged in their school community and that limited student interest allowed for all interested students to attend.

Teacher-identified changes in students

Teachers that participated in the survey were asked to explain whether or not they had noticed any changes in their students throughout the program. These responses were analyzed based on the main themes that were identified by teachers. The most frequently occurring teacher responses cited increases

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in student confidence, leadership and risk taking as a result of StAR. Teachers felt that their students were able to develop greater critical thinking skills and a much greater awareness of their school's internal functions and the issues and challenges facing students.

Some teachers felt that StAR also had a negative impact on their students. They felt that students experienced higher stress levels, an increased workload, less time in class to work on assignments and in one case, alienation from peer groups due to their time committed to the program.

Impact of StAR on Students

Students were asked a similar question to their teachers, as they were asked to explain the impact that StAR has had on them. The responses were also based on the main themes that were identified by the students. The largest impact that StAR had according to students was that it gave them the realization that they could have a say in their education and that their voice matters when exploring and identifying issues and concerns that they had within their schools. Students confirmed that StAR helped to improve their soft skills, including; self-confidence, leadership and communication. They identified additional skills, including; mathematics, research and analysis and writing. When speaking about the Symposium specifically, students expressed that a major impact of the program was the opportunity to understand the issues and challenges that are present in different schools across Ontario. In terms of the negative impact that StAR had on students, some of the participants identified increased stress levels and less free time to complete school assignments and/or socialize with friends.

5.2 Focus Groups

A focus group was conducted with the 7 RSSLs from across Ontario, 1 Education Officer and 1 Senior Policy Advisor with EDU. Participants had been involved in the education sector 5-30 years and the RSSLs had been involved in StAR in various roles since its inception in 2012, while the Education Officer and Senior Policy Advisor have been involved since 2015. 8 of the 9 participants are former classroom teachers that have also had considerable experience working for the school board either as an SSL or a board liaison staff.

The intention of the focus group was to interview a number of like-role individuals that have a key responsibility in communicating, tracking and monitoring StAR within the DSBs in their region. Each RSSL had differing levels of involvement in StAR, based on the uptake in StAR within each of their regions. The list of questions that were used to guide the focus group is in Appendix E.

All participants had rich experience to share and there were a number of key themes that emerged. While they were supportive of the concept behind the program, they were concerned with a number of aspects, including; the students were being reached through StAR, the program's effectiveness in accessing the student voice and the extent to which StAR is impacting changes at the school, board and ministry levels. The RSSLs also identified a need, on the part of the StAR program, to reach a greater number of school boards and to increase buy-in to the program at all levels of education. Finally, they identified the need for more effective collaboration between schools, boards and the ministry in the planning, implementation and monitoring of the StAR program each year.

Accessing the Student Voice

During the focus group interview, the panel identified that they were skeptical as to how much of the student voice is being accessed through StAR. The participants appreciated that the initial call for StAR

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applications encouraged the selection of a diverse range of students (see Appendix D). The inclusion of prayer rooms, gender neutral washrooms and spaces for traditional Indigenous practices also allowed for a more diverse student population to access the program. That said, they felt that the program's structure was still geared toward students that are already achieving success (academically or socially). The research-based nature of the program makes it difficult to attract students that are at-risk of not graduating due to credit accumulation, struggling academically, or disengaged from school. In their past and current experience (as teachers, principals, system leaders and as SSLs/RSSLs), they explained that these students would not commit to StAR as it was far too demanding for students of this nature to complete. The students do not receive a credit for their participation and were unable to see what they could gain from their participation. The participants also mentioned that the structure of the training forums and Symposium limited student participation in StAR. There are many different students that were not able to participate due to personal circumstances including; students with mental health issues (including high anxiety), students that are required to care for their family and students with family, employment, or extracurricular obligations. These students could not participate as their obligations and mental health concerns limited them from being able to attend a multiple-day/overnight trip that was multiple hours away from their schools, jobs and homes.

The focus group participants also felt that the program was limited in its ability to amplify the student voice and to provide students a platform for creating change in their schools, boards or the ministry. They argued that there are few ministry supports for students to access for assistance with their research throughout their participation in the program. In terms of continuing projects after StAR, the responsibility often falls on the StAR team to continue with their projects beyond StAR, without support or encouragement from the ministry. This limits the success of a number of projects as students lose the motivation to continue in the program. As a result, the projects typically end in the research or analysis phase, as the ministry has not done an effective job in advertising the program to DSBs. The participants also explained that the successes have been attributed to the individual schools and teams, rather than as a result of EDU's program structure. The limited effort to follow-up with StAR teams and their schools limits the impact that StAR can have on amplifying the student voice. The students are provided with a platform for one day in the spring, but after the Symposium, students return to their classrooms without follow-up from EDU. The responsibility then falls on the students and teachers to build on the research and take action.

A positive aspect of the program's ability Students that participated in StAR did have the opportunity to utilize the student voice came in December 2016 as students had the opportunity to participate in the EDU's Well-Being Engagement Sessions. The purpose of the sessions was to consult teachers, school leaders, support staff and students from various regions across Ontario to get a better understanding of how EDU could best support the well-being of students. The focus group participants explained that the students were invited to attend a session within their region. While the participants were unclear what the role of the students was at these conferences as it was hosted by another branch within the EDU, they valued the opportunity that students had to go beyond the StAR program and to engage in conversations with staff from across the ministry on issues related to the student experience.

School and Board Involvement: Collaboration and Outreach

The participants also discussed the limitations that exist when sending communications to Directors of Education and Student Success Leaders to share with their schools. One participant explained that there are typically two outcomes that occur when unfamiliar programs are advertised to senior leadership within the DSBs, particularly early-on in the school year. The first outcome is that the communication will

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be lost and the message will not filter down to the school level, while the second is that the communication will be sent to the schools that are already most engaged and interested. Many of the focus group participants agreed with the statement and added that the reason for minimal commitment from senior leadership is due to their unfamiliarity with the StAR program. StAR is only communicated to senior leadership at the beginning of the school year, when all schools are busiest. According to the participants, this limits the degree of involvement that senior leadership can have in the program as they do not have the time or information to invest in the program and to understand the impact of the program.

There was also a general consensus among focus group participants that a contributor to the lack of communication and outreach is due to the constant change in leadership for the program. Since its inception, there have been 5 different managers that have managed the file, while much of the implementation was completed by temporary employees (either through co-operative education programs or through contract agencies). They explained that this has limited the program as it does not allow information to be easily shared from year-to-year, leaving the new teams to repeat much of the work that had already been done. It also limits the program's ability to be critically analyzed as there are few employees that have experienced StAR in its entirety.

The focus group participants explained that the program could benefit from greater collaboration and communication with schools and DSBs across Ontario. They explained that re-assessing the program's goals and structures could be effective if students, schools and DSBs were consulted in the process. Involving DSBs in the re-design of the program would create better connections within school boards and create precise and targeted selection processes.

6.0 Discussion and Analysis

6.1 Literature Review

This section analyzes the data and feedback that was collected for the StAR program and compares it against the theories and topics explored through the literature. The first topic that will be explored is whether or not there is a true representation of the student voice in the StAR program. Robinson and Taylor (2012, p. 43) explored the power relations that can exist when students are provided with opportunities to exercise their voices. They argued that students should have the platform to make decisions on their own and to research topics of their choice, while educators are to act as advisors and/or facilitators, rather than to have a direct role in the research. These statements demonstrate that the student research question development process is a genuine attempt to access the student voice and to limit the impact of the power relationship that exists between students and their teachers. Through StAR, students are given the agency to determine which research projects they will undertake, while the teacher-advisor guides them through the process. In this context, the student voice is represented in the research projects that are submitted as it confirms Robinson and Taylor's statement that the research must be a genuine product of the students' interests and concerns. Although teachers mentioned that they would have liked greater involvement in the determination of their schools' research topics, their involvement could have hindered EDU's attempt to access the student voice rather than the teacher's recommended topics.

Hart's Ladder

When looking at Hart's Ladder, the researcher argues that the StAR program's current iteration is a model of non-participation and it consistently fails to facilitate meaningful student involvement (Hart, 1992, p. 9). Non-participation, particularly between *Tokenism*, occurs when students are provided the opportunity to exercise their voices, but the purpose of the activity is to promote a positive image on the part of the organizing body, in this case EDU (Hart, 1992, pp. 9-10). *Tokenism* can also be used to fulfill a contractual, legislative or political requirement, while limiting the reach of the student voice. In these cases, students are viewed as opportunities to create stories and positive press, rather than as partners in their education. Though the program may have been created to provide students with a platform for exercising their voice on matters affecting them, the structure of StAR limits the impact of the program to potentially be perceived as *Tokenism*, rather than as a genuine effort to include students as partners.

StAR's outreach and communication model limits the extent to which the program is able to access the student voice as all communications and promotions for StAR are geared toward educators and school board leaders. Each year, the initial communication regarding the launch of StAR is sent to Directors of Education and SSLs for each school board. They are asked to forward the information to the schools in their DSB, where the schools are then asked to communicate the message to their teachers. There is no direct communication with students via social media or other platforms that are accessible to students. This communication path demonstrates a potential disconnect between the program's objectives and its structure as the population that is the recipient of the program is often the last to know, after it has been potentially filtered down to a select student population, thus limiting the variety of student voices that are heard through StAR.

Evidence of this is found when discussing the teacher-identified process for selecting their students to participate in StAR. Many of the teams selected to participate in StAR did not represent a diverse range

of students across their schools. Instead, teams were mostly made up of leaders, engaged students and high-achieving students. The filtering process used by teachers demonstrates the potential for filtering and strategic selection of participants for StAR to occur at all levels of communication. Limiting the program to only the students that are currently achieving success limits the impact of the student voice as it has less potential to address the concerns, interests and needs of the students that are most in need of a voice. It demonstrates an aspect of *Tokenism*, in which select groups of students are chosen to participate and promote a positive image of EDU rather than to make a genuine effort to access the student voice (Hart, 1992, p. 16). Adopting a plan to strategically communicate directly with students through social media could provide a more diverse student population as there would be less potential for teachers, Principals and board leaders to filter their selection to certain groups of students. That said, communications should go to Directors of Education and SSLs at the same time, to keep all parties informed of the projects operating in their DSBs. A revised communication strategy would have greater potential to provide students that are at-risk of not graduating or in-risk situations with an opportunity to participate in StAR and to exercise their voice on issues affecting them. As it currently stands, the program is advertised as an experience that is open to all students, yet the teacher selection process demonstrates that there is potential for the program to demonstrate *Tokenism* by filtering StAR to the students that are already achieving success and that are already engaged as leaders in their school community, rather than to include the entire student population.

During the focus group interviews, RSSLs expressed concerns that EDU has yet to follow-up with a summary of the research projects that were completed for StAR each year, despite it being an identified outcome in the StAR logic model. EDU has also committed to sharing StAR research with schools, boards and other education partners across Ontario. This has yet to happen and, based on an internet search of StAR, the program has received little attention outside of EDU. It could be argued that students do have the opportunity to mobilize their research projects and to share knowledge through the StAR Symposium as it provides students the opportunity to discuss the research that they conducted with school, board and ministry staff for one day in Toronto. That said, EDU does little to follow-up from the Symposium and the lack of materials to summarize student participation in StAR each year demonstrates a lack of interest and commitment to student voice on the part of EDU. This further demonstrates that the program could be perceived by some as *Tokenism* and non-participation as the student voice is not being used to its full potential by the ministry. Instead, it appears to some that the purpose of the program is to create a positive self-image, while there is little to no action taken to mobilize student voice and share student research findings and concerns with a broader and in some cases more applicable audience.

Skill Development

Skill development is an aspect of student voice theory that is often overlooked. While the emphasis of student voice research is typically on the products that students can create or contribute to, there is less of a focus on the skills that students are able to gain as a result of exercising their voice. According to Roberts and Nash (2009), skill development is a key aspect of student research programs that should not be lost. While the programs have the potential to impact school change, they can also impact and shape students' skills in a variety of transferrable areas. Through StAR, EDU has been successful in providing students with the opportunity to develop research skills along with other essential skills. When students were asked to explain the impact that StAR had on them, most of the students indicated that they positively impacted their research skills along with the more transferrable skills of communication, leadership, writing and mathematical skills. This included one student who mentioned StAR gave her the

opportunity to present in English (her second language) for the first time in front of a large group of people.

The responses of teacher's reflected similar skills and an emphasis on the student opportunity to develop critical analysis skills. They felt that their students had been able to understand the education system more, which allowed them to take a more critical lens when discussing issues within their school. This is an important aspect of StAR as it demonstrates that students are not only engaging in projects related to school change, but at the same time they are able to recognize the skills that they are able to gain as a result of the program. This is identified as a logic model outcome in the program which demonstrates that there is an intentional effort on the part of EDU to have students gain skills that will assist them in both their research and in their schooling in general.

6.2 Jurisdictional Scan

While the previous paragraphs have addressed the aspects of StAR that could be addressed internally, or through consultation with the field, it is also important for EDU to think about the program in comparison to the programs explored through the jurisdictional scan. The researcher's jurisdictional scan presents opportunities for EDU to develop partnerships or critically analyze their work alongside similar programs. As the jurisdictional scan has demonstrated, there are many programs that operate across Canada and the United States, including those with interesting formats, partnerships and differences from StAR.

EDU could engage with the Alberta Ministry of Education to engage in conversations related to the transformation of student voice programs. Alberta's Ministry of Education has recently undergone considerable changes to their student voice programming. Prior to 2015-16, they operated a similar program to Ontario's Student Voice, which included a research aspect. Students had the opportunity to engage in research, engage in funded projects and serve on a Minister's Advisory Committee. In 2015-16 the program was changed to a new format. The changes in 2015-16 placed a greater emphasis on the regional needs of students across the province ((Alberta Education, 2015, <http://www.speakout.alberta.ca/LinkClick.aspx?fileticket=67Jb6JDeIPg%3D&tabid=60>). Rather than having the Ministry coordinate and plan the program, each jurisdiction (DSB equivalent) was to have its own Student Engagement Team, made up 14-21 students from each secondary school in the region. These students met 2 times each year at conferences in their jurisdiction. The agenda included; networking with jurisdiction and Ministry staff, training on how to implement research and school change projects, and working with their jurisdiction and the ministry to determine education priorities. The changes to Alberta's SpeakOut program present an opportunity to engage with Alberta's Ministry of Education to discuss the changes and the motives and research behind the decision.

There are also youth engagement programs that encourage partnerships with non-profit organizations and other public service agencies. The Youth Leadership Institute (YLI) is a youth research and engagement program that provides funding to students to complete change projects within their community. They serve 4 cities across California and receive funding from donors and government assistance to implement their programs. The program emphasizes that projects be grounded in research. In terms of the audience, many of the participants come from diverse backgrounds in terms of race, family income, language and different levels of engagement with the program each year. This is a potential relationship or conversation to be pursued by EDU as the program seeks a diverse student population and operates at the local level. The StAR program is limited in its ability to reach a diverse student population as it is often leaders, engaged students and those already achieving success that participate in the program. The YLI has demonstrate that it is able to reach diverse youth population and could provide insight to EDU on how to

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better do this, while continuing to emphasize research as the main goal of the program. In addition, StAR currently operates as a program that is delivered directly through EDU, rather than at the local level. By engaging in conversations about the effectiveness of delivering the program at the local level could assist EDU in determining if there is potential to include more localized supports for students through the program.

As has been discussed, *SoundOut* is an American organization that has explored StAR, along with Ontario's *Student Voice* in the past and has featured the program on its website. This is an organization that has provided training and expertise to similar programs across the world. EDU should explore opportunities to engage or partner with *SoundOut* as they present a number of options for how to engage in conversations with the organization. The organization could either work with EDU to develop a more effective and impactful Student Voice program, or organizational representatives could speak at EDU sessions, including either the training forums or Symposium. The consultative services of *SoundOut* have been used around the world and some of the most impactful student voice programs have been developed in collaboration with *SoundOut*. They are an organization that is well-connected within the student voice community and the founders and partners of the organization are well-known student voice researchers and writers, including Adam Fletcher, a prominent student voice advocate and Jean Courtney, a former EDU employee and co-founder of StAR (*SoundOut: About Us*, 2016). Establishing a partnership with the organization would be beneficial to StAR as they would employ the expertise of an organization that has worked around the world on issues related to student voice in educational decision making.

StAR could benefit from exploring similar programs that operate in different jurisdictions. These conversations would allow EDU to engage in conversations related to the efficacy of the StAR model as well as the effectiveness of different models. It would also encourage EDU to develop an open system when it comes to their student voice programming. An open system is an organization that recognizes the changing world that is in front of them and calls on the expertise of others to provide input into their decision making (Hurth, 2017, p. 2). Open systems can be effective in public sector organizations as they engage the public, private sector organizations, non-profits and other jurisdictions in conversations and in the development of materials. When applied to StAR, this could be quite effective as it would allow student voices to not only be heard within the Ontario education realm, but to also be heard across Canada and the United States. By participating in these conversations, student research and the program model could be further included in the conversations that are currently ongoing between researchers, similar programs, educational institutions and child rights activists across the world. Allowing StAR to be part of these conversations would be valuable as it would bring a greater awareness to the theories that inform student voice programming and could allow EDU to better assess the purpose of StAR.

6.2 Research Questions

This subsection will revisit the first of two research questions that guided the evaluation. While the focus will be on the primary research question, the secondary questions will be addressed. The first research question explores the depth in which the program has met the outcomes identified in the StAR logic model, while the second research question addresses the implications of the current format and discussed in section 7.0.

6.2.1 Outcome Measurement

The StAR logic model was developed in 2012 with support from internal research staff and outlines the programs inputs, outputs and short, near and long-term outcomes (See Figure 1, p. 17). The program has demonstrated that it has been somewhat successful at meeting its short-term outcomes, while there is much less evidence to demonstrate that the intermediate and long-term outcomes are currently being met.

Short Term Outcomes

Of the 12 short term outcomes identified through the program, the program has been relatively successful in meeting three of the outcomes for students;

- Increased participation in StAR;
- Increase knowledge and skills to undertake student research and skills in leadership, communication and teamwork; and
- An increase in the sharing of research findings.

In 2016-17, StAR had the largest number of students participate to date with approximately 400 students from 35 of Ontario's 70 publicly-funded DSBs. The increased participation demonstrates that the program is meeting the short-term outcome of increasing StAR participation year-over-year, which is significant as it means that there is a greater awareness of the StAR program and that there are more students being indirectly served as a result of the programming.

The program has also confirmed that students have experienced an increase in the knowledge and skills needed to undertake student-led research as well as the broader skills of leadership, communication and teamwork. The Symposium surveys demonstrate this as approximately 87% of secondary school teachers, 68% of elementary school teachers and 90% of students rated student confidence in conducting research as an 8 or higher. The qualitative feedback from students and teachers identified students gaining valuable skills as a common impact of the program. Teachers and students appreciated the opportunity to further develop their leadership, communication and teamwork skills, along with an enhanced ability to critically analyze information that is shared with them. The program has done an effective job in equipping students with a variety of skills that can be utilized beyond StAR and that be easily applied to their course work.

To some extent, the program has also successfully increased the sharing of StAR research findings through the Symposium. Over 250 students and an additional 50 EDU and DSB staff attend the session to hear about the research of students from across the province. The Symposium structure allows for opportunities to share knowledge and to engage in conversations related to student research. The area that requires more attention is the follow-up from the StAR Symposium and sharing the student research with a broader audience of school, board and ministry staff that did not attend the Symposium. That said, while this has been an effective method to share information between students, the program is limited in its ability to share the students' research findings with a broader audience. The focus group participants

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explained that they have a hard time buying-in to StAR and taking action on student research as they are typically unaware of what students are researching, due to limited communication and outreach from EDU regarding StAR.

The research data suggests that StAR has been limited in its ability to meet the short-term outcomes of assisting teams in their research process at both the board and ministry-levels. This also impacts the short-term outcome of participants' feeling of support throughout the program. When teachers were asked why they selected their overall rating for the program, teachers that rated the program as 3 or less explained that the program lacked coordination and support between the school and board levels. Teachers also that explained they felt they did not have enough opportunities to access research expertise between the training forums and the Symposium. While the Ministry offered Adobe Connect sessions for teams to call in, there was no point of contact within the school boards for StAR teams to work with. This made it difficult for teams to carry out their research as they were, at times, left waiting until the Adobe sessions to connect with Ministry staff for answers on how to proceed with their research. Approximately 23% of teachers selected "disagree", "neutral" or chose not to answer the Likert-Scale question that asked if the Ministry responded to their requests in a helpful manner. This further demonstrates that EDU is limited in its capacity to meet the short-term outcomes of increasing student feelings of support and increasing the assistance provided to StAR teams.

Intermediate Outcomes

The intermediate outcomes that have been identified for StAR are premised around the notion of increased buy-in to Student Voice and StAR as programs, along with a greater emphasis on StAR projects to inform decision-making at various levels of education. In addition, the teachers in StAR are expected to increase their emphasis on the student voice in their educational decision-making. To some extent, these outcomes are being met as one teacher during the Symposium mentioned,

"Excellent workshops for the students at Orillia. Our StAR group learned a great deal about the importance of ethical research and how important it is to use math in our lives. It has reinforced the importance of student voice for me."

There are a number of responses from teachers that reflect a similar message. Teachers acknowledged that their students were able to gain experience in conducting research, while at the same time they were able to shape their teachers' perspectives on student voice and agency in educational decision-making. This confirmed that there were participants who felt that school, DSB and EDU decision makers could greatly benefit from shifting their practices to include more of an emphasis on the student voice. While teachers that have attended the Symposium can confirm the value of student voice, through StAR, the lack of report sharing on the part of EDU and awareness of the program across the province limits the impact that the program can have on broader practices.

The program has also identified intermediate outcomes that relate to the program's ability to increase the number of StAR projects that are championed across EDU and an increase in the purposeful development of StAR. The purposeful development of StAR refers to the strategic selection of projects and inquiries for students to pursue and can include; selecting students based on issues that are present within schools, choosing teams that represent a diverse population or developing similar projects within schools so more students can participate. EDU has been successful in increasing the purposeful development of StAR. 2016-17 was the first year in which the initial StAR launch email included a line encouraging schools to send a diverse group of students that are representative of the school. In response, 5 teachers identified that they selected a diverse range of students, which included diverse student

achievement levels, peer groups, levels of engagement and grade distribution. Although these teachers responded to the EDU's note about a diverse range of students, the remaining teachers had a less equitable approach to selecting their students. These teachers selected students that were; leaders, engaged in school, higher achieving, based on teacher recommendations and those who completed a written essay to express their interest in attending. This limits the purposeful development of StAR as it is clear that in most cases, teachers were interested in having their students attend on the basis of past performance and involvement, which limits a disengaged or previously uninterested student from participating, in most cases. In addition, the increase in the number of StAR projects that are championed is limited as the research is not shared or analyzed to any great extent. The focus group participants expressed concerns that the research was not used for any purposes other than for promoting the program and for making students feel as if they had a voice. This restricts the reach of the projects as they are held within the ministry and not shared across the sector.

Long-Term Outcomes

The long-term outcomes associated with StAR address student voice from a much broader perspective. These outcomes are associated more with incorporating the student voice into educational decision making outside of the program, rather than through students' participation in StAR. In this context, it is difficult to measure whether or not EDU has achieved this longer-term outcome through StAR, but the feedback from the focus group and survey participants can shed light on whether or not it is possible to achieve this outcome through StAR. In the focus group interview, the participants explained that the limited communication about StAR between schools, DSBs and EDU limits the impact that the program can have on decision making at each level. They explained that it is unlikely for StAR become incorporated into the decision making processes at each level of education as there are no systems in place that require decision-makers to include StAR students. They did explain that the Well-Being Engagement Sessions were a success as they demonstrated an effort to include the student voice in consultations related to the student experience. In addition, these students were invited to discuss research topics beyond their StAR projects, which demonstrate the potential that the program has for connecting EDU to students to get their valuable input.

On a concluding note, while there has been some success in meeting a number of the outcomes identified through the StAR logic model, the number of outcomes that have been identified raise questions about the precise and focused nature of the program. According to McLaughlin and Jordan (1999, p. 2), logic models should clearly and succinctly identify the outcomes of a program with a precise and targeted focus. The focus of the outcomes in a logic model should be on quality, rather than on quantity. It is important to identify a few specific and attainable outcomes, rather than to pursue a wide variety of outcomes, in which only a few will be met (McLaughlin and Jordan, 1999, pp. 3-4). When a program introduces such a wide variety of outcomes, it becomes difficult to pinpoint the purpose of the program and the program's strategic objectives. In addition, this limits the programs ability to measure whether or not it has met its outcomes, as there are a wide variety of outcomes that must be measured in order to determine success. Thus, the program would benefit from a reassessment of the logic model outcomes in order to condense and revise the outcomes to reflect the desired outcomes for the program and to clarify what the purpose of StAR is, from a program delivery aspect.

6.2.2 Alignment with the Renewed Vision for Education

The current EDU mandate can be found within the *Achieving Excellence: Renewed Vision for Education in Ontario*, which is guided by 4 main pillars; Achieving Excellence, Ensuring Equity, Promoting Well-Being

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and Enhancing Public Confidence. The *Achieving Excellence* vision was set out in 2013 with the purpose of supporting students during their education so that they have the skills, knowledge, supports and opportunities to be successful in the future (Ministry of Education: *Achieving Excellence*, 2013; <http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/about/renewedVision.pdf>). All programs and initiatives operated by EDU must clearly demonstrate that they align with this vision and must consider the 4 pillars when tracking and monitoring the effectiveness of programs.

Achieving Excellence

Achieving Excellence is defined by EDU as students at all ages having the opportunity to achieve high levels of academic performance and to acquire valuable skills. StAR has been somewhat effective in attaining this aspect of the mandate as students and teachers explained that the largest impact of the program was the opportunities that it provided for students to gain skills in research, communication, critical analysis and writing. These skills are transferrable and apply to much more than the StAR research program and can impact a student's academic performance.

There are currently no systems in place to measure the program's ability to impact the achievement of students that participate in StAR. In addition, there were some teachers and students that were concerned that the program had the adverse effect, as they explained that because of the program, they had less time to focus on their studies, resulting in higher stress levels and decreased school performance. One student mentioned,

"Being in StAR was a great opportunity to learn more about how to improve schools everywhere. I met many new people and it was very rewarding. However it was quite time consuming and I missed some class. Overall I would do it again now that I understand the commitment."

On one hand, teachers and students recognized that there were valuable transferrable skills that students were able to gain from the program but on the other hand, there were participants that felt the program had the opposite effect on their school performance due to the time and commitment to StAR, which is a non-credit program.

Ensuring Equity

The second pillar of the Renewed Vision, Ensuring Equity, seeks to have all students benefit from the programs and services offered by EDU. The mandate specifically references; self-identified Indigenous students, students in rural areas, French-language students, students from low-income families, racialized minorities and students at-risk of not graduating. In terms of meeting this objective, the EDU team in charge of administering StAR made an effort to include a broader range of students in the selection process for 2016-17. In the memo that was sent to SSLs and Directors of Education, StAR teams were encouraged to represent a diverse population:

"Student participants should represent a cross-section of students in the school. This may include students in applied compulsory courses, Indigenous students, English Language Learners, students with special education needs, etc. (Ministry of Education, September 2016)"

This demonstrates effort on behalf of the ministry to encourage a diverse range of students to participate. At the training forums and Symposium, gender-neutral washrooms, accessible spaces for persons with disabilities, prayer rooms as well as traditional Indigenous practices (including Smudging), were offered

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to demonstrate that all students were welcome.

While the steps that have been taken are effective and necessary, the program's structure, along with the teacher-identified selection process, continues to leave out vulnerable student populations. According to the RSSLs, students that are at-risk of not graduating or that are not currently meeting the provincial standard are discouraged from participating in this program as it is intellectually demanding on students. If participating in the program, they are required to complete a non-credit research project within their schools on top of the work that many of them are already falling behind on. In addition, there could be other unique circumstances that could restrict a student's participation in the forum and Symposium, including: students with employment commitments, students with family responsibilities and students that have mental health issues that restrict them from attending overnight trips. It is also important to note that each of the factors mentioned above are not mutually exclusive as multiple factors could apply to one student, further limiting their access to StAR. While it is not the intention of the program to exclude these students from participating, the multiple day, overnight structure of the two showcase aspects of the program limits the accessibility for some students. These factors further demonstrate how the structural systems that are in place can limit the program's ability to ensure equitable access to student engagement opportunities.

Promoting Well-Being

The third pillar of the *Achieving Excellence* framework is "Promoting Well-Being". According to the EDU mandate, this includes allowing all students to develop positive physical and mental health, while creating a sense of belonging and opportunities to make positive choices. The StAR program has potential to be effective in meeting this aspect of the EDU mandate as the purpose of the program is to allow students to become more involved in their education so that it can better meet their needs and can provide students with the opportunity to speak out on issues within their schools. 28% of teams that submitted a final report researched well-being and mental health, along with an additional 26% that explored their school climate, which also explored student well-being to some extent. This confirms that a major concern and emphasis for students was the well-being of their student population and that through StAR, they could take steps to try and improve it. Further, in their qualitative responses, students and teachers identified self-esteem, self-confidence, social skills and improved self-awareness as the impact of StAR on the students. These skills and changes are identified within the *Renewed Vision* as contributors to improved student well-being. StAR students also had the opportunity to participate in the Ministry's Well-Being Engagement sessions, in which they were asked to attend a conference and reflect on their school experience and to provide feedback on how to better support student well-being. The student research and the impact of the program on students confirms that StAR is aligned with the EDU's goal of promoting well-being, while at the same time it verifies that well-being is also a concern for students within their schools.

Enhancing Public Confidence

On the surface, StAR does an effective job in enhancing public confidence. The students and teachers are overwhelmingly supportive of the program and the feedback surveys demonstrate that participants rate the program quite highly. Over approximately 91% of students rated the program as a 4 or higher, along with 82% of teachers that did the same. When asked why, many of the participants explained that students not only have the opportunity to develop skills, but they also conduct research that can impact changes at all levels of education. There are examples of success stories that are frequently cited by EDU, including a research project from Timmins, Ontario in which a team of Indigenous students created

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changes that better assisted Indigenous students in their transition to secondary school from remote communities across Northern Ontario. The program is effective in inspiring public confidence as it is structured as a program that gives students the agency to speak out on issues that exist within their schools and provides them with a platform, and in some cases funding, to inspire change.

While the program does an effective job in presenting a positive image to the public, the programs' follow-through is lacking. As has been previously discussed, the program is limited in terms of the mobilization of StAR projects each year. There is currently no system in place to share the student research findings after the Symposium and year-over-year. During the focus group, some participants explained that it was due to board approval protocols, yet this has not been remedied. While this is not an immediate issue, there should be concern that the positive image of StAR will be damaged as the public, including schools, teachers and students, begin to question whether or not the student research informs decision making or whether or not it is used at all.

7.0 Implications

The following section will explore implications of the current structure of StAR both internally (i.e. program design and collaboration) and through its service delivery (i.e. Training Forums, Symposium and student support) (see Figure 13). The client has requested that the researcher focus on implications as it allows the client to apply the identified implications to a broader range of programs within their Branch. Within both the internal and service delivery aspects of this analysis, the researcher has differentiated between the program’s positive and negative implications. The positive implications are those that contribute to the popularity, growth and ability of the program to meet its outcomes, while the negative implications are those that limit the program’s uptake or restrict the program’s ability to effectively meet its outcomes. The internal operations refer to the systems that are currently in place to coordinate, plan and organize the program, including the communication structures that are currently in place. The program delivery aspect of the implications refers to the participant experience and the systems that are currently in place to assist participants as they make their way through the program.

Internal Operations	Service Delivery
1. Alignment of StAR with <i>Student Voice</i> initiatives	5. Student Experience
2. EDU’s Well-Being Engagement Sessions	6. Continued Support of Students
3. Outcomes-based Performance Measurement	7. Provincial Representation
4. Collaboration across Ministry, DSBs and Schools	8. Report Sharing and Knowledge Mobilization

Opportunities
Risks

Figure 13: Strategic Implications for EDU

7.1 Internal Operations

IMPLICATION 1: Alignment with other Student Voice Initiatives

The alignment of StAR with the other Student Voice initiatives allows for greater DSB, school, teacher and student awareness of the program options available to students to exercise their voices.

The program benefits from its alignment with the other initiatives that are a part of the *Student Voice*. All 3 Student Voice initiatives are operated within the same branch of EDU. According to the focus group participants, the teams work closely to deliver the programs and to share information about participation in each initiative. StAR teams are often granted priority access to *SpeakUp* funding to support their research projects, while there is also a space for students to identify whether or not they are participating in StAR as part of their MSAC application. In 2016-17, 36% of StAR teams took action on their research with funding from *SpeakUp*, while there was 1 student that participated in both MSAC and StAR. Although the relationship between each program has been relatively effective in allowing students to participate in each initiative, there are problems that emerge when the program names become interchangeable within the field. According to the focus group participants, there were major concerns with the effectiveness,

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communication and coordination of *SpeakUp* in 2016-17, which created a negative image of the entire *Student Voice*. Teams that had applied for *SpeakUp* funding in November, were not sent their funds until late March 2017, leaving teams 3 months to complete their projects within their schools. This was reflected in many of the teacher feedback surveys as they expressed displeasure with the program, while they were actually referring to *SpeakUp*. This demonstrates the potential danger associated with the alignment of *Student Voice* programs if one program begins to develop a poor reputation.

The relationship between each program has potential to be further developed as the teams in charge of each initiative could work together to communicate similar messages and to further communicate the differences and intentions of each program. That said, *SpeakUp* and MSAC have been effective in allowing students from StAR to access funding and opportunities to participate on an advisory council. This allows students to build on their research from StAR after the program has ended as they can then explore the other 2 avenues of the *Student Voice* programming, without having to repeat the entire StAR process.

The implication of this alignment with the other *Student Voice* initiatives is that students could have multiple opportunities to engage in educational decision-making and to inform the ministry. StAR provides students with opportunities to conduct research and present on issues within their school or school community, *SpeakUp* provides students with the opportunity to access funds so that they can take action on their research and MSAC provides students with the opportunity to represent like-minded students in conversations and consultations with EDU and the Minister of Education. Bundling the program as a cohesive unit allows for similar messages to be shared and increases the awareness of the programs that are offered to increase student engagement. In addition, this aligns with the EDU mandate as a cohesive portfolio helps to clearly outline the opportunities available for students to participate in educational decisions that will impact their achievement and their well-being.

IMPLICATION 2: Well-Being Engagement Sessions

The inclusion of StAR students in EDU's Well-Being Engagement Sessions demonstrates an effective strategy for utilizing the voices of StAR students in educational consultations and decision making processes.

As was discussed by the focus group participants, all students that participated in the StAR training forums were invited to attend EDU's Well-Being Engagement Session in November and December 2016. These sessions were hosted by EDU in 10 regions across Ontario and focused on how the Ministry could do a better job in supporting the well-being needs of students. While it is unclear how many students participated in the sessions, nor what their role was, the focus group participants that attended the sessions explained that the student involvement had an overwhelmingly positive impact on each session. In their feedback surveys, students and teachers explained that the well-being engagement sessions were a positive addition to the program as it allowed students to feel that their feedback was valued by the ministry. A teacher that participated in the survey explained that the StAR program was valuable as it gave their students many opportunities to present, including at the Well-Being Engagement sessions, which transcend StAR and demonstrate an effort on the part of EDU to include the student voice more broadly.

This is an aspect of StAR that has tremendous potential as it demonstrates an effort on the part of EDU to include student voices in consultations related to student issues. The implication of focusing more on engaging StAR students in consultations outside of the program is that StAR could get close to reaching the longer term outcomes of having StAR participants and the broader student population involved as partners in educational decision making. There were over 400 students that participated in StAR in 2016-

17, creating a significant opportunity for the ministry to easily access these students through communication with their teacher-advisor. The inclusion of the students in the Well-Being sessions signified an effort on the part of EDU to consult students on issues affecting them and to value the feedback of students on priorities issues in education. It is important to note, however, that the role of the students during these sessions was not entirely clear. Though the focus group participants expressed appreciation for the students being in attendance, they did not elaborate on what their participation looked like. As Hart has mentioned (1992, p. 12), students may be included on panels or in consultations, but it does not mean that their involvement is meaningful. There are often times when students are asked to take part in panels but are given little time to prepare for the panel or to consult with their peers to express their mutual interests. In cases like these, the student participation is more relatable to *Tokenism*, rather than meaningful student involvement.

The inclusion of students in the Well-Being Engagement Sessions and the emphasis on continuing to involve students in consultations aligns with EDU's priorities of promoting well-being and enhancing public confidence. It does so by accounting for the student voice in decision making, which includes a focus on their well-being, while at the same time addressing public confidence as it shows that the ministry is focused on improving the student experience through consulting the end-recipients of educational services. There is potential for this to also address the priority of ensuring equity, if EDU is able to make a greater effort to include all student voices in the StAR program.

IMPLICATION 3: Performance Measurement

The lack of performance measurement through StAR can negatively impact the program's future potential for program renewal.

The StAR program is limited in its ability to collect, evaluate and make changes to the program each year. Over the course of the program's 5 year existence, there have been limited changes to the program, with the only major change being a switch to 3 central training forums instead of 7 regional forums. A central reason for this has been the constant changes in leadership for the program, as discussed during the focus groups. This limits EDU's ability to critically analyze the program over periods of time. The implication of the programs limited performance measurement and program tracking is that when pressured by budgetary restrictions or program review, StAR will not have data and results to justify its existence and could be cancelled. Within the Ontario government, there have been increasing pressures to ensure that all programs are regularly monitored and that there are systems in place to account for outcome-based performance measurement.

The lack of data and information related to the program's successes and challenges poses a risk to the program's future existence. While StAR only receives approximately \$300,000 each year, it is connected to *SpeakUp*, which receives \$1.2 million in funding each year. Financially, this is a sizeable commitment from EDU that has not demonstrated evidence to continue to support the program and to justify the spending of taxpayer dollars. In order to develop measures to support the program's existence, the StAR program and *Student Voice* must identify deliverables that can be reported on. While this report is a start, the program must be able to do so internally so that it can consistently refer to year-over-year data that supports the value-for-money of the program. In its current format, the program does not report on any outcomes each year. Thus, StAR has to begin to focus on evaluating its performance year-over-year so that if asked, it has data and evidence to support the existence of the program and to avoid the implication of the program being cancelled due to a lack of outcome measurements.

IMPLICATION 4: Collaboration inside Ministry and with DSBs/Schools

EDU's current communication regarding StAR with DSBs and across the Ministry limits the program's ability to shape and influence educational decision making processes.

A major theme that was identified by the research participants was the disconnect that existed between EDU and the DSBs participating in StAR. In their survey responses, teachers identified that they were not supported at the DSB or school level. When approaching their DSB for assistance in the research process, the DSB was unaware of the program and unable to help due to their lack of knowledge of the program. It was expected from EDU that the SSLs be the first point of contact for StAR, yet there were limited communications and resources sent to boards to help support with the StAR process. The focus group participants explained that the lack of DSB awareness of the program was the result of limited communication and outreach from the ministry to DSBs regarding StAR and the broader *Student Voice*. The lack of DSB involvement in StAR hindered a number of projects as teams that did not complete a final report explained that they could not get ethics approval or they were unable to make the necessary connections within their board to carry out their research.

The implication of this lack of communication is that the potential of StAR is not realized. Approximately 50-60 StAR teams from across Ontario complete projects each year, yet the research cannot be shared due to the lack of DSB involvement in the StAR process. The sharing of StAR projects requires DSBs to approve the research from their boards. According to the focus group participants, this does not happen each year because the research and StAR process has been done without the consultation of DSB leads, including the SSLs. The only time the SSLs are included is at the conclusion of the year, when DSBs are preparing for the year end and are focused on the transition of students between grades. The participants explained that there is not enough time for the SSLs to review all StAR projects from their DSB and approve them for distribution across Ontario. In addition, they are not willing to approve without reviewing as the materials would be public and could have the potential to paint a negative image of their DSB. Thus, this limits the ability of the StAR projects to be shared as the DSB involvement in the projects occurs far too late in the process. If EDU were to a more collaborative approach to StAR with the DSBs and to inform the SSLs of the schools and projects early on in the year, this could remedy some of these issues. The DSBs would have a far greater understanding of the projects in their board and they could be far more accountable to the research, based on their understanding and involvement in the project. Enhancing the communication between EDU and DSBs would also allow DSBs to take a much more focused approach to StAR by understanding how to best support the goals and outcomes of StAR and how to utilize the student voice that is elicited through StAR.

7.2 Program Structure

IMPLICATION 5: Student Experience

The overall student experience through StAR is positive and contributes to their schools' continued participation in StAR each year.

Generally, students that participate in StAR and attend the Symposium identify that they have had a positive experience. As demonstrated by both the training forum and Symposium feedback surveys, StAR participants are overwhelmingly positive about the program and they are supportive of being able to participate in research projects that could potentially impact decisions made at all levels of education. In many of their qualitative responses, students explained that they had not only gained valuable

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transferrable skills, but they had also gained a greater sense of their school and school community through StAR, along with having the opportunity to meet students from other places in the province. One student commented that,

"I really enjoyed the time spent at the StAR events and working on our project. I think it's a great opportunity for students and an important thing to do, giving students a voice. I feel like as I learn more about how these things work I will have a better experience."

Many other students had similar comments, which speak to the ability of the program to inspire students through the program and to make them feel as if they are being heard at different levels of education. In addition to students feeling that they had a great experience throughout StAR, their teachers further confirmed that their students had a positive experience with StAR. For some teachers, they mentioned that the experience of travelling to Toronto or to the StAR training forums were entirely new experiences for students that had never left their home town. In addition, one teacher had mentioned;

"My quietest student became more assertive in their leadership skills and took charge in keeping them other team members on track. An awesome and rewarding transformation to see."

Not only does this speak to the student experience, but it also addresses the skills that teachers had recognized in their students as a result of the program. Teachers and students valued the opportunity to conduct research and generally felt that the StAR program, the Symposium and training forums in particular, were effective in making students feel that their voices matter. The implication of the positive is that the general format used for StAR is effective in providing students with a worthwhile experience. This positive experience may give students high expectations that their work will be recognized or acted upon. This could set students up for disappointment as the program is limited in its ability to meet outcomes and to follow-up with the student research. If the program were to enhance its ability and effort to access the student voice and continue or follow-up with research projects, this could extend the student experience over a longer period of time. This would further the student experience as their research findings could be translated into conversations at various levels of education, which would further enhance the utilization of student voice in educational decision making.

IMPLICATION 6: Continued Support of Students

There is currently a lack of support for students between the StAR training forums and the Symposium, which contributes to the program's high attrition rate.

A significant gap that currently exists during StAR is the time between the fall training forums and the Symposium. According to both the survey participants and the focus group participants, the program has been unable to effectively support students during the time between the two main events. In their feedback, some teachers explained that they did not feel supported throughout the program. This was reflected in both the qualitative statements as well as the Likert-scale responses. Teachers were unclear about the program timelines and where they could go to receive support at a more local level and they felt that all of the work was placed on students and their teachers, rather than having the DSB or EDU actively support the teams. Students echoed a similar message to their teacher as some students felt that they did not know where to go when they had questions about their research. In addition, the focus group participants' comments about the involvement of DSBs further supports this. They explained that the DSBs need to have a champion, or an advocate for the StAR teams. In its current format, there is limited support for students at the board-level, and the main point of contact, the SSL may not be able to assist

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the students. In some DSBs, they have researchers at the board-level that assist students with their research and act as a support to students throughout the year. That said, this is not an EDU driven idea, but rather a solution developed by DSBs in response to the limited support from EDU. While EDU offers Adobe Connect sessions to participants, the uptake in these sessions has been extremely low each year.

The implication of this current approach is that the attrition rate, 33.6% of StAR teams did not complete a final report, will remain high when using continuing to use the same approach to StAR. Supporting students through a virtual, faceless Adobe Connect platform does not allow students to connect with those assisting them. Instead, if EDU were able to connect with the DSBs that currently assist students with research expertise, then they could understand how this approach may better support students. Through connecting students with DSB research staff or local partners, the students may be able to commit to the program and maintain the motivation that they identified in their fall training forum feedback forms, while also maintaining a DSB awareness of the projects over the course of the year.

IMPLICATION 7: Provincial Representation

The current StAR format is not conducive to including a representative population that reflects all students from across Ontario.

While it is expected that not all schools or DSBs will be represented through StAR, the program is currently limited in terms of representation from across the province. As has been discussed, the students that participated in StAR in 2016-17 were the students that are already engaged or that are achieving success. The voices of students that are predominantly absent are the students that are not currently engaged, not achieving success and those with family or employment situations that restrict their participation in StAR. In addition to the limitations in terms of the student-types that participate in StAR, the program has been limited in terms of the regions in Ontario that are represented through the program. As was demonstrated in the StAR participation map, there is considerable representation of students from southern Ontario, while northern Ontario is quite limited in terms of participating schools. There were 6 schools that participated in StAR, five from the Thunder Bay region and one from north-central Ontario. As explained by a focus group participant, the program is not structured to support students from northern Ontario. There are three training forums, two of which are in southern Ontario and one in Thunder Bay. While this is helpful for students in Thunder Bay, students from outside of Thunder Bay would have to drive multiple hours or potentially fly to the training forums. In addition, the date of the training conferences (late October and early November) limits the student participation as the weather conditions in northern Ontario are unpredictable during this time, which limits the willingness of schools to send their students on long distance trips to various regions in Ontario. The participant explained that they tried to encourage participation from DSBs in northern Ontario, but the distance and time commitment to travel to the training forum and Symposium were major limitations.

The implication of this is that the current structure of the both Symposium and training forums are limited to students from areas close to the venues. This limits the potential participants in StAR and leaves out voices that could potentially have much different concerns and issues than those in southern Ontario. To address this implication, the program would have to be offered at a wider variety of venues so that students from places like northern Ontario could be more encouraged to participate.

IMPLICATION 8: Report Sharing and Knowledge Mobilization

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The lack of StAR report sharing by EDU contributes to the limited DSB involvement in StAR year-over-year and limits the potential for students to engage in conversations about their research beyond the StAR Symposium.

Another emerging implication of the current program delivery is the lack of Ministry follow-up with StAR teams. There is currently no process for following up with StAR teams nor have projects been shared after each program year. Instead, the spread of information and mobilization of student research only occurs at the StAR Symposium. While students and teachers felt in their feedback surveys that they had been listened to through the Symposium, the focus group participants expressed concerns that all of the momentum and valuable research from StAR is lost with each new program year. This demonstrates the disconnect and limitation that currently exists with the StAR program as participants are led to believe that their research is acted upon and closely examined by the Ministry, while in reality, the information is collected by the ministry but is sparsely shared with colleagues across the ministry and is not reported back to schools and DSBs.

The implications of the lack of EDU follow-up to StAR research are two-fold. First, the lack of follow-up limits the potential impact of the student voice and limits who is able to access the StAR reports. This is a negative implication as the program is premised on the belief that students should be included as partners in educational decision-making and that they deserve a voice in all matters concerning them. To limit the sharing of research findings to just the Symposium limits the audience that is able to benefit from and engage in conversations related to StAR projects. This further becomes a limitation as there are a number of topics addressed through StAR, which coincide with priorities in education (i.e. Indigenous learning and cultural teaching, mathematics achievement and student well-being). The second implication is that the continued failure to share StAR research findings could create resentment towards StAR across schools and boards, which could limit the participation and uptake in StAR in future years.

8.0 Conclusion

The purpose of this research was to evaluate the extent to which EDU's StAR program was meeting the outcomes identified in its logic model and while doing so, the researcher sought to identify the implications of the program's current format. In doing so, it is hoped that EDU can use the findings from this research to critically analyze the StAR program from their perspective, so that they can make changes that more accurately reflect a model of genuine student engagement.

The literature review explored the key themes and theories associated with student involvement in educational decision making. This revealed the underpinnings of most student voice programs and the key conditions that must be in place so that programs can go beyond *Tokenism* and can genuinely involve students in educational decision making. The jurisdictional scan identified student research programs that exist across Canada and the United States. This highlighted the many forms that a student research program can take, including programs structures similar to StAR, online student research platforms, organizations that provide consultative services for student voice programs and engagement with non-governmental agencies and non-profits. In both the jurisdictional scan and the literature review, it was clear that for programs to succeed there needs to be a strong support network for students and a genuine space for students to exercise their voice.

The primary data review helped the researcher to gain a historical understanding of the program and it provided the researcher with data from the fall 2016 StAR training forums. The survey data collected at the Symposium provided the researcher with insights into how the students and teachers had experience StAR over the course of the program. The focus group interviews allowed the researcher to understand the DSB perspective of the program and to understand the relationship between EDU and DSBs across Ontario. Through the utilization of all sources of data, the researcher identified the following implications of the program's current format:

1. The alignment of StAR with the other Student Voice initiatives allows for greater DSB, school, teacher and student awareness of the program options available to students to exercise their voices.
2. The inclusion of StAR students in EDU's Well-Being Engagement Sessions demonstrates an effective strategy for utilizing the voices of StAR students in educational consultations and decision making processes.
3. The lack of performance measurement through StAR can negatively impact the program's future potential for program renewal.
4. EDU's current communication regarding StAR with DSBs and across the Ministry limits the program's ability to shape and influence educational decision making processes.
5. The overall student experience through StAR is positive and contributes to their schools' continued participation in StAR each year.
6. There is currently a lack of support for students between the StAR training forums and the Symposium, which contributes to the program's high attrition rate.
7. The current StAR format is not conducive to including a representative population that reflects all students from across Ontario.

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8. The lack of StAR report sharing by EDU contributes to the limited DSB involvement in StAR year-over-year and limits the potential for students to engage in conversations about their research beyond the StAR Symposium.

This research has demonstrated that StAR has been effective in providing students with a positive experience and allowing students the opportunity to speak to their peers. The program has been able to meet some of its short-term outcomes including the increased participation in the program and increased opportunities for students to engage with other students. The program is limited when looking at its ability to access the student voice, share it with a broader audience and integrate StAR into teacher practice. The program has not met these outcomes as there has not been an effort on the part of EDU to continue engaging with StAR teams after each program year and students are often left to advocate for themselves. In its current format, the program struggles to go beyond *Tokenism* as students are not provided with a genuine opportunity to impact decisions, but rather they are given a small space to express their concerns to a limited audience, without any follow-up from EDU after their project.

Appendix A

StAR Symposium Student Survey

Students as Researchers (StAR) 2016-17 - Student Feedback Survey

1. What grade are you in?

- Grade 7 Grade 8 Grade 9 Grade 10 Grade 11 Grade 12

2. Which Training Forum did you attend?

- October 17-19 (Orillia) October 25-27 (Orillia) November 1-3 (Thunder Bay)

3. Please identify your school board. (Optional)

4. How would you rate your overall experience in StAR this year?

- Poor Excellent
- 0 1 2 3 4 5

Please explain why you selected this rating.

5. Rate your degree of confidence by circling a number from 0 to 10 using the scale below:

Before participating in StAR, my confidence in my ability to conduct research was:

- 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
- Could not do at all Moderately could do Highly certain could do

After participating in StAR, my confidence in my ability to conduct research is:

- 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
- Cannot do at all Moderately can do Highly certain can do

6. Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements.

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
The StAR program allowed me the opportunity to conduct research that made a positive change in my school.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
As a result of StAR, I feel that I have the skills to be a leader within my school.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I was able to make connections within my school community throughout the StAR process.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I will continue with my research after the 2016-17 StAR program is complete.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
My participation in the Fall 2016 Training Forum prepared me for the research process.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

7. Please describe the impact, if any, that the StAR program has had on you.

Students as Researchers (StAR) 2016-17 – Teacher Feedback Survey

10. Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements.

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
My participation in the Fall 2016 Training Forum prepared me for the research process.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The Ministry staff answered all questions that we had during the research process in a prompt and clear manner.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Our team was able to conduct meaningful research.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Students were engaged throughout the entire research process.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Students should receive a credit or partial-credit for their participation in StAR.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

11. Please describe the process that was used for selecting your 2016-17 StAR team.

12. Without identifying students by name, please describe any changes that you have observed in your students as a result of StAR.

This is the end of the survey. Thank you for your answers.

Appendix D: StAR Launch Communication

Ministry of Education

Student Achievement Division

900 Bay Street
Mowat Block, 16th Floor
Toronto ON M7A 1L2

Ministère de l'Éducation

Division du rendement des élèves

900 rue Bay
Édifice Mowat, 16^e étage
Toronto ON M7A 1L2



MEMORANDUM TO: Directors of Education;

FROM: Rob Andrews
Director
Student Achievement Division

DATE: September 13, 2016

SUBJECT: Students as Researchers (StAR)

Each year, the Student Achievement Division provides Students as Researchers (StAR), as an opportunity for student-teacher teams from grades 7-12 to have training to support student-led, ethical, collaborative, inquiry-based research projects related to student engagement.

During the 2016-17 school year, StAR teams will have the opportunity to:

- Attend a 2.5 day overnight StAR Training Forum;
- Engage in a student-led (educator facilitated) collaborative inquiry-based research project;
- Access the research expertise of Ministry staff through 3 optional Adobe Connect meetings;
- Write and submit a StAR Report (in a format the team chooses) to share both findings and anticipated actions or outcomes which will be shared at the StAR Symposium Conference and may be part of a StAR publication; and,
- Attend a StAR Symposium Conference at the Ministry of Education in spring 2017 (TBC) to share the research findings and recommendations with other student-teacher teams, researchers, educators, Ministry policy advisors and education officers.

StAR TRAINING FORUMS

The StAR Training Forums provide students and educators with the opportunity to: work collaboratively to create and share research-based knowledge by raising and exploring their own questions related to student engagement; learn how to ethically conduct action research and produce data of quality, depth and scope; and, learn how to carry out a research project that can inform policy and program changes at the school, board and Ministry.

Outlined below are the upcoming StAR Training Forums dates and locations. Please note, there is limited capacity at the venues and availability is **first-come, first-served**. Registration must be completed before **September 30, 2016**.

Date	Venue	Location
October 17 – 19	Ontario Education Leadership Centre (OELC)	Orillia, Ontario
October 25 – 27	Ontario Education Leadership Centre (OELC)	Orillia, Ontario
November 1-3	TBD	Thunder Bay, Ontario

Expenses (i.e. accommodation, transportation, etc.) related to this event are covered by the Ministry of Education. Once student-teacher teams have been confirmed, additional logistical information will be provided.

ACTION & NEXT STEPS

Please forward this information to appropriate staff to support the completion of the following steps:

1. Identify student-teacher teams from grades 7-12 to participate in StAR.
 - Teams should consist of a maximum of 4 students and 1 teacher from grades 7-12
 - Student participants should represent a cross-section of students in the school. This may include students in applied compulsory courses, Indigenous students, English Language Learners, students with special education needs, etc.
 - Teams must commit to attending both the StAR Training Forum and completing a project and report.
 - Students who are part of the Minister’s Student Advisory Council (MSAC) (see attached list) may be invited to participate in StAR as they are aware of this opportunity and were provided with information at the recent MSAC meeting in August.
2. Complete the StAR Team Training Registration Form in the attached link prior to **September 30, 2016**: [Registration](#).
 - School principals and Student Success Leaders (SSLs) must approve before a StAR team is registered.

CONTACT

Should you have any questions, please contact the Student Voice team at StudentVoice@ontario.ca.

Thank you for your support and involvement in preparing, accompanying and supporting your students through this exciting endeavour.

Sincerely,

Original signed by

Rob Andrews
Director

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Attachment (1)

C: Cathy Montreuil, Assistant Deputy Minister, Student Achievement Division
Steven Reid, Director, Field Services Branch
Richard Franz, Director, Research, Evaluation and Capacity Building Branch
Kate Cowan, Manager, Student Achievement Division
Michael Maiolino, Manager (A), Research, Evaluation and Capacity Building Branch
Jasun Fox, Senior Policy Advisor, Student Achievement Division
Melissa Weyland, Education Officer, Student Achievement Division
Karen Greenham, Education Officer, Student Achievement Division
Scott Damery, Junior Policy Advisor (A), Student Achievement Division
Regional Managers, Field Services Branch
Regional Student Success Leads
Student Success Leaders

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