

# Successful Alternatives to Traditional School Structure: A Literature Review

Andrew (A.J.) Neufeld

## Abstract

*In reaction to the recent release of the 2013 Pan Canadian Assessment Program results, in which Manitoba's grade 8 students achieved the lowest results in Canada in reading, numeracy, and science, the author conducted a literature review of alternative education programs, seeking to identify successful alternatives to traditional school structures. Four themes were identified. Students demonstrated improved academic achievement and motivation when learning took place in flexible learning environments, when students had opportunities to participate in individualized learning, and when an emphasis was placed on developing relationships. With reference to the fourth theme, while sometimes touted as a solution, alternative education programs were found to be often segregated from the traditional school system, leading to isolation and marginalization for both students and staff members. Administrators are advised, rather, to reduce class sizes within the traditional school system in order to provide teachers with opportunities to emphasize the first three themes in an environment that includes all learners.*

The Pan Canadian Assessment Program (PCAP) is a standardized test initiative developed by the provincial education ministries to assess student achievement in reading, numeracy, and science (O'Grady & Houme, 2014). In 2013, the PCAP was administered to a randomly selected sample of grade 8 students in all ten Canadian provinces. The report that Manitoban students achieved the lowest scores in all three components of the assessment generated concern and debate regarding the processes of teaching and learning across the province. Even as these processes are being evaluated, the structures of education itself should also be evaluated, using current research as the critical lens to determine the effectiveness of commonly accepted practices in the traditional school system. With the goal of improving student learning, those alternative approaches that have demonstrated positive effects on student learning should be identified and implemented when appropriate. A literature review of successful alternative educational programs (AEPs) revealed four common themes. Increased student achievement and motivation have been associated with flexible school environments, individualized learning programs, and an emphasis on relationships. At the same time, the literature has identified the marginalization of students and staff members associated with participation in AEPs as being a significant risk, due to the frequent segregation of these programs away from the traditional school system. Despite the limitations of the research on the subject of AEPs, school administrators are advised to consider how flexible learning environments, individualized learning, and intentionally developed student-teacher relationships can be integrated in the traditional school system.

## Findings of the Literature Search

A common definition for AEPs was not identified in the reviewed literature, nor was a commonly accepted term used to describe the group of programs that fall under the umbrella of AEPs. For example, International Baccalaureate and Advanced Placement programs are considered to be "pathway programs' for post secondary-bound students" (Park, Caine, & Wimmer, 2014, p. 129), whereas experimental schools in Israel are defined as "schools that conduct innovative methods, and have a potential for dissemination of these methods to specific other schools or to the entire system" (Tubin, Likritz, & Chen, 2004, p. 152). In their study of a Norwegian program described as an "alternative course involving increased workplace

practice,” Bruin and Ohna (2013) defined the program as an “academic and vocational experience combined, for students requiring more adaptations to their education than provided by the standard curriculum” (pp. 1090-1091), while Phillips’ (2011) alternative school was loosely defined as having “small class sizes and more student accountability” (p. 681). Because the definition of AEPs varied uniquely among all articles included in this review, it is appropriate to develop a definition that encompasses the many different formats of AEP that are currently implemented.

For the purposes of this literature review, “alternative education programs” are defined as any educational programs (including elementary, middle, or secondary school) that provide education to students by changing one or more of the structures within the traditional school system; these programs can include, but are not limited to, students identified as being at risk of dropping out of school. Given this definition, AEPs are better understood by comparing their structures to those of the traditional school system. The “traditional school system” is defined in this review as the commonly accepted school model, possessing all of the following characteristics: a defined starting and ending time, clearly articulated and rigid class scheduling, a school staff who are the possessors of knowledge and authority, and generally heterogeneous ability groupings of students; this is the dominant form of schooling that is responsible for educating the majority of students.

Though the themes identified in this review are each developed individually, the reader should be aware that none of the themes identified occurred in isolation in the literature and were generally implemented in combination with other interventions. As such, it should be considered how flexible learning environments, individualized learning, and strong teacher-student relationships can work together in a symbiotic and synergistic approach to improve student learning, while keeping in mind how the application of these concepts within AEPs risks the segregation of certain populations and perpetuates the “stratification” of student abilities (Bruin & Ohna, 2013, p. 1103).

## **Flexible Learning Environments**

Flexible learning environments have been shown to have a positive effect on both student motivation and academic achievement. In a study comparing middle class grade 7 students who attended an Israeli AEP to those attending a traditional public school in the same area, Tubin et al. (2004) found that AEP students scored higher on academic achievement tests, demonstrated more proficiency in academic skills (such as computer literacy), and possessed higher levels of academic motivation than their traditional public school counterparts. The AEP facilitated an open learning schedule in which a bell system was not used, and wherein the learning environment was divided into three distinct areas: a computer lab, lecture area, and open working area. Fenzel and Monteith (2008) demonstrated the benefits of an extended school day and school year in an analysis of the effectiveness of Catholic Nativity middle schools designed “to provide at-risk urban youth with the kind of educational program . . . that typically is available only to the children of economic privilege” (p. 383). These schools normally had a 9-hour school day, rather than the traditional 6.75-hour day, and required students to participate in a summer school program ranging from two to six weeks in length, depending on the individual school. Significantly higher percentages of students who participated in this AEP gained one or more grade equivalencies per year in math and reading, in comparison to students of a similar demographic who participated in the traditional school system.

In contrast to the earlier start time and longer school day advocated by Fenzel and Monteith (2008), however, Wolfson, Spaulding, Dandrow, and Baroni (2007) found that academic achievement and school attendance improved for grade 8 students whose school times started later in the morning when compared to students who had earlier start times. This latter research was grounded in the idea that the sleep needs of adolescents change as they reach puberty and they “experience a biological delay in the timing of sleep onset and awakening that is

associated with pubertal status and not chronological age” (p. 195). The application of Wolfson et al.’s (2007) finding should be considered with reference to the school start times identified in the study (7:15 a.m. versus 8:37 a.m.). In Hanover School Division in Manitoba, for example, Clearspring Middle School begins classes at 9:08 a.m., suggesting that research related to adolescent sleep needs has already influenced school starting times in that school division.

Flexible learning environments were effective in improving student motivation. Students considered the traditional school system to be “impersonal and unnecessarily stressful” (Watson, 2011, p. 1506), whereas creating a non-linear school schedule with flexible start and end times reduced deadline anxieties for many of the studies’ participants, giving students the feeling that they had the time to learn the content required of them (Bruin & Ohna, 2013). Students who participated in flexible learning environments also expressed appreciation for a non-linear curriculum, whereby they had the opportunity to review material in advance and come back to it later in the school year (Phillips, 2011). Flexibility in scheduling created opportunities for students to extend their learning through vocational experiences while still completing their academic courses. In a qualitative study of a successful AEP, Watson (2011) documented students working on assignments at their own pace. In the flexible environment observed in this study, students had the ability to make meals, when desired, in an onsite kitchen, and had the opportunity to move around in the space and socialize with peers and staff members. In these examples, flexible learning environments sought to “overcome the culture of schools that hold time constant, which therefore forces student learning to vary” (p. 1518). It has been the demonstrated tendency of schools to require student learning to occur within a discrete timeline; in doing so, student learning is observed to vary when all students are unable to demonstrate the required learning within the defined amount of time given to do so. Students who participated in flexible environments demonstrated appreciation for the flexibility that they experienced in the AEP, and showed improvement in academic achievement when they received additional flexibility in time and environment. The flexibility experienced by these students was not limited to their learning environment only, however. Participants in AEPs frequently also experienced flexibility in their learning experiences, in the form of individualized learning.

### **Individualized Learning**

The second theme that emerged in consideration of successful AEPs was the understanding that students will both appreciate and benefit from an individualized approach to learning. In one study, Tubin et al. (2004) found that when grade 7 students had opportunities to participate in individually based learning in combination with other factors, they performed better on academic achievement and skill-based tests, and also showed better long-term retention of knowledge and skills. Tubin et al. suggested that permitting students to “confront difficulties and manage their own tasks” individually in this AEP had a positive effect on student motivation and feelings of self-efficacy (p. 161); however, this assertion appeared to be based on the researchers’ own opinions, because a direct connection between individualized learning and student motivation was beyond the scope of the study.

In a qualitative study involving interviews of an AEP’s students, Phillips (2011) found that a certain level of student autonomy during learning appeared to be connected to achieving academic goals. Phillips opined that when students were given the opportunity “to decide where they were heading within certain academic boundaries, and were given the time and space to reach those goals on their own, they felt as if their learning experience was more successful” (p. 690). As well, Watson (2011) documented students’ opportunities to choose the academic outcomes they were working on, with collaboration from a staff member. The students expressed appreciation for the flexibility that was offered within their individualized plans, and the individual attention that they received from staff members in developing and assessing their learning. In their interviews, staff members noted that the students who participated in

individualized learning of this nature were motivated to work, in contrast to a lack of motivation and learning in the more regimented and linear learning environment of the traditional classroom. The idea of staff responsiveness to individualized student needs was also supported by Caroleo (2014), in her synthesis of research on the benefits and risks of participating in AEPs. Caroleo reported that staff members in AEPs had the ability to respond individually to students due to smaller class sizes. In their well-designed quantitative study, Blatchford, Bassett, and Brown (2011) supported a higher likelihood of individualized student learning experiences when class sizes were smaller in both elementary and high school settings. Student academic achievement appeared to be enhanced when students were given opportunities to participate in individualized learning experiences, and received individualized attention from their teachers. Student attitudes toward their own learning also appeared to improve under these conditions. It should not come as a surprise that AEP participants who experienced smaller class sizes and more frequent interactions with teachers also experienced unique relationships with each other and with their teacher; these relationships also had a positive influence on student learning.

### **Positive Relationships**

The importance of positive relationships was also identified consistently in the literature, and constitutes a third theme of interest in the area of alternative methodologies to traditional school structures. Middle years students in Catholic “Nativity” schools participated in a school structure that emphasized small class sizes, small group activities, and small group advisories, all which led them to describe their school experiences in terms of a “family” wherein their teachers cared for them (Fenzel & Monteith, 2008, pp. 393-394). In the same study, students in the school described staff members as “caring,” supportive of students, and “respectful” (Fenzel & Monteith, 2008, p. 393). In a different study, students who described higher levels of perceived academic success in AEPs also described positive relationships with their teachers in their areas of success, whereas they connected negative academic experiences with concurrently negative teacher-student relationships (Phillips, 2011). A similar association was seen by Watson (2011): when AEP teachers intentionally took the time to form meaningful relationships with their students and advocate for their best interests, their students were more engaged in their learning and demonstrated more willingness to do their school work. In Watson’s study, the teacher-student relationships were maintained after the students left the school; graduates were observed returning to the AEP to reconnect with staff members, demonstrating the strength of the relationships that had been established. The connection between student engagement and student-teacher relationship was especially significant in light of the students’ previous inability to function productively in a school setting, having previously failed or been expelled. Similar teacher-student relationships were a characteristic of the “community-like” environments identified by Caroleo (2014) in her synthesis of AEP research (p. 44); feelings of community were considered to be beneficial for students participating in AEPs, when considered in light of the educational experiences of the same students in traditional schools.

Positive teacher-student relationships were not unique to AEPs designed to support at-risk students, however. Participants in International Baccalaureate (IB) and Advanced Placement (AP) programs also described better relationships and “more adult-like” interactions with their teachers than with their teachers in traditional subject areas (Park et al., 2014, p. 130). Interestingly, the at-risk students in AEPs designed as “last chance” programs (Caroleo, 2014, p. 37) and the IB and AP students both described instances of disengagement from learning when they experienced teacher interactions and relationships that were perceived to be negative (Park et al., 2014; Phillips, 2011), suggesting that the concept of developing strong teacher-student relationships is important as it relates to student perceptions of learning, regardless of student ability level. The literature suggests, then, that developing positive

relationships with students is an important component of student learning. However, while the participants found meaningful relationships and identities within AEP communities, they were simultaneously separated from the mainstream school community, creating (or in some cases, reinforcing) a sense of isolation from society.

### **Risk of Segregation and Stratification**

While the development of flexible learning environments, individualized learning programs, and intentional student-teacher relationships all appear to be correlated with improved student learning and improved student attitudes toward learning, it is important to acknowledge the risk of segregation apart from the traditional school system inherent in the facilitation of the AEPs that were studied in the literature included in this review. This risk of isolation due to segregation is connected largely, but not exclusively, to Last Chance AEPs (Caroleo, 2014). It is appropriate to identify the characteristics of students considered to be at risk of dropping out or failing to graduate, and receiving a final opportunity to participate in formal education through an AEP. An appreciation of these characteristics is important for the reader to understand the context for the identification of the risks of segregation.

While AEPs have been developed for a variety of purposes, including to “make school more challenging and fulfilling” for high achieving students, rehabilitating students who are struggling academically, and providing last chances for students “as an alternative to suspension” (Caroleo, 2014, p. 37), the majority of the AEPs included in this review provided programming for at-risk students. These students were considered to be at risk for a variety of reasons, including low family support, teenage pregnancy, drug addiction, “extreme behavioural problems,” criminal records, and having been expelled from the traditional school system (Watson, 2011, p. 1503). In addition to these characteristics, at-risk students may also come from low socio-economic backgrounds, belong to urban minorities (Fenzel & Monteith, 2008), and/or have significant difficulty attending school regularly for a number of reasons (Bruin & Ohna, 2013). Last Chance AEPs have been developed to provide students at risk of dropping out of school, or not graduating, with a final opportunity to succeed in their formal education.

Despite the positive intent of AEPs to provide educational access to all students regardless of their life situations or previous academic experiences, researchers are concerned about the tendency of administrators to segregate AEPs from the traditional school system. Bruin and Ohna (2013) expressed concern that, in an effort to be inclusive by providing at-risk students with separate programming uniquely designed for the needs of at-risk learners, the AEP actually promoted the marginalization of the students who participated. The authors felt that the students found an educational identity within a community of students who shared similar at-risk characteristics and school experiences; in doing so, it was possible for the students to become more isolated from society, contributing to what Bruin and Ohna termed as the “stratification” of the educational system, whereby an AEP would actually reinforce and perpetuate the at-risk characteristics of participants (p. 1103), rather than equip students to participate in and contribute to society. In particular, concern was expressed regarding the quality of education received by AEP participants (Bruin & Ohna; Caroleo, 2014). Bruin and Ohna indicated that students participating in AEPs may receive substandard academic education compared to their peers in the traditional school system, resulting in less job readiness or a false sense of capability, further promoting the at-risk characteristics and isolation of AEP participants. The likelihood of this isolation was evident in consideration of student interviewees’ contrasting opinions of the two systems, wherein the traditional school system was described in terms such as “fear,” “loneliness,” “overwhelmed,” and “betrayed” (Bruin & Ohna, pp. 1095-1096). The AEP was described in a more positive light, as participants spoke about themes including “turning points,” “increased quality of life,” and “hopes for the future” (Bruin & Ohna, pp. 1096-1097).

Watson (2011) echoed the concerns of Bruin and Ohna (2013), though interestingly the implications of isolation due to segregation were extended to include staff members of the AEP.

In Watson's study of an off-campus high school AEP, students expressed feelings of marginalization due to the segregated nature of their AEP; in this case, all students attending the AEP were prohibited from accessing the traditional school property and would be arrested if found there. As a result of this prohibition, the AEP students were also prevented from taking part in social and cultural functions with the larger school-aged population, including school dances and athletics. The staff members reported feelings of relational isolation from their colleagues in the traditional school system, where the staff members of the AEP felt they were "looked down on [by traditional school system staff members] for teaching the 'problem kids'" (Watson, p. 1517). Both staff and students of the AEP felt labelled by the traditional school system: the students felt they had been labelled as "problems," whereas the staff felt they had been labelled as giving students "credit for doing nothing" in the AEP (Watson, p. 1517). The staff members described the AEP as the "ugly stepchild of the high school, the black sheep of the family" (Watson, p. 1517).

Observations of isolation and segregation were not limited only to Last Chance AEPs, however. Park et al. (2014) noted a trend of isolation in IB and AP programs as well. In their review of student experiences in IB and AP programs, student success was linked to conforming to group ideals regarding participation, rather than ability; student disengagement and isolation within the group were reported when students did not conform. In addition to isolation within the IB and AP programs, Park et al. also identified "strained relationships" between students who participated in IB and AP programs, and their peers in the traditional school system (p. 135), because the participants considered themselves to be members of a "prestigious" group, separate from other parts of the school community (p. 147). An example was seen in Park et al.'s findings of the stratification of student ability levels addressed by Bruin and Ohna (2013).

In her synthesis of 53 articles and reports on AEPs, Caroleo (2014) indicated the tendency of AEP programs to be segregated from the traditional school system. The separation from the traditional school system was considered to perpetuate the negative labeling of students who attend an AEP, as well as the stratification of student ability (Bruin & Ohna, 2014), whereby participants were "conceptualized as second class citizens compared to those attending [traditional] schooling (Caroleo, p. 43). It seems evident that, despite the academic benefits that AEP participants experience while in the program, the likelihood of stratification and perpetuation of at-risk characteristics and identities, due to the segregation of students from the larger community of the traditional school system, is a significant negative counterpoint that requires administrative consideration.

## **Discussion**

The preceding literature review found that students in AEPs experienced improved academic achievement and attitudes toward education when they participated in programming with flexible learning environments and individualized learning, and when significant relationships were formed with both fellow students and staff members. Simultaneously, both staff and students in many of the AEPs documented in the review reported feelings of isolation and segregation from the greater educational community. Consideration of the last finding, in particular, raises some troubling questions regarding the nature of alternative education programming. Before interpreting these findings, it is important to consider the many limitations associated with the current research on the topic of AEPs. These limitations are discussed, followed by some possible implications that should be considered by school administrators as AEPs are implemented or assessed.

## Limitations

Significant limitations are associated with the applicability of this literature review. AEPs do not have a commonly accepted definition, or a common purpose; in fact, programs may exist for at least one of five different reasons: making school more challenging in preparation for post-secondary schooling (Park et al., 2014), modifying the behaviours of students “considered to be chronically disruptive” (Caroleo, 2014, p. 37), remediating emotional or academic concerns (Caroleo, 2014), “offer[ing] better answers to the diversity of learning styles and subjects of interest within the student population” (Tubin et al., 2004, p. 152), and “provid[ing] at-risk urban youth with the kind of educational program, free or nearly free of charge, that typically is available only to the children of economic privilege” (Fenzel & Monteith, 2008, p. 383). The lack of a commonly accepted definition of AEP creates difficulties in determining what forms of program should be considered an AEP for the purposes of analysis (Caroleo, 2014).

The studies that investigated specific AEPs each had considerable concerns regarding sample size and makeup, transferability, and author bias. These studies were typically qualitative in nature and relied on small sample sizes in focus groups (sometimes as few as two participants; Phillips, 2011). Applying the results of these studies beyond their original context is difficult, given the high degree of variation in participant characteristics. The reviewed studies included a range of student ages and demographics, from grade 6 boys attending a gender-specific urban Catholic Nativity school (Fenzel & Monteith, 2008) to teen-age mothers attending an off-campus AEP (Watson, 2011). In the case of comparative studies, there were large differences in size between groups under study and control groups, calling into question the validity of conclusions made in comparison of the two groups. Given the substantial range in age, gender, and life experiences of students participating in the AEPs, trying to create connections among student experiences within and across the programs should be done only in the broadest possible terms, because comparisons among AEPs without similarities in population, demographics, or purpose are inappropriate. The bias of the authors in the majority of the included studies also challenges the validity of their conclusions. Many of the included studies promoted the success of the AEP being studied, or used the results of the research to make conclusions that were not directly embraced within the scope of the research purpose. Despite these limitations, some conclusions can be made with regard to the implementation of AEPs.

## Implications

The 2013 PCAP results, in which Manitoban grade 8 students had the lowest achievement scores in reading, numeracy, and science (O’Grady & Houme, 2014), have refocused attention on teaching and learning in Manitoba. This literature review was conducted to identify successful alternative methodologies to traditional school structures that could be submitted for consideration in light of Manitoba’s PCAP results. The themes of providing flexible learning environments, individualized learning, and emphasizing both teacher-student relationships and student-student relationships emerged as strategies that could be used to improve student achievement and motivation, particularly in at-risk students. However, the application of these strategies in the current AEP model of segregated programs has resulted in a negative counterbalance whereby participating students and staff members were marginalized and isolated from the community of the traditional school system.

In their study investigating the effect of smaller class sizes on classroom processes in the traditional school system, Blatchford et al. (2011) indicated that students received two to three times as much individual teacher attention and that teacher-to-whole group lecturing decreased when students participated in class sizes of 15 students, compared to class sizes of 30 students, leading them to conclude that smaller class sizes lead to more individualized instruction. Blatchford et al. also determined that student engagement increased in smaller class

sizes, including the engagement of low-achieving high school students. Small class size was an identified characteristic of AEPs in the majority of studies included in this review (Caroleo, 2014; Fenzel & Monteith, 2008; Phillips, 2011). Given the apparent positive effect of reducing class sizes, rather than segregating low-achieving students school administrators are advised to decrease class sizes in the traditional school system in order to promote the development of meaningful relationships in existing classrooms among students and between students and teachers. Decreasing the pupil-to-teacher ratio may also provide teachers with more opportunities to design individualized learning opportunities for students. In light of the findings related to providing students with flexible learning environments, students may benefit from a classroom environment that includes frequent opportunities for movement during lessons, and that permits students to eat and socialize during class time, because students expressed appreciation for more relaxed learning environments and demonstrated higher levels of engagement when in less formal environments (Tubin et al., 2004; Watson, 2011).

In summary, despite the limited research on the effectiveness of AEPs, school and divisional administrators are advised to decrease class sizes within the mainstream educational system. In doing so, at-risk students are likely to experience more individual teacher-student interactions and improved school engagement, while teachers are likely to have more opportunities to provide responsive and individualized learning experiences for all students. These effects will be experienced in an inclusive environment wherein all learners feel a sense of belonging and community, regardless of their life experiences or previous academic success.

### **Conclusion**

The recently released 2013 PCAP results, in which Manitoba's grade 8 students achieved the lowest reading, numeracy, and science scores in Canada, have generated considerable debate regarding the processes of teaching and learning in Manitoba. In addition to investigating how to teach more effectively and learn more deeply, it is important to review the structures of education in Manitoba, and to identify successful alternatives to those structures deemed to be inefficient. This literature review attempted to identify successful alternative methodologies to traditional school structures. Four themes emerged from the included articles, which looked at these alternatives within the context of AEPs. Students demonstrated improved academic achievement when learning took place in flexible learning environments that included varied lengths in the school day and opportunities to move around, and that were developed with the needs of students in mind. Students showed greater levels of engagement and academic achievement when they had opportunities to participate in individualized and non-linear learning. An emphasis on developing strong relationships in the learning environment also showed positive results for participants. However, the students and staff members within the AEPs were frequently marginalized and isolated from the greater school community, due to the common practice of locating AEPs separately from the main school campus. Despite the limitations of the research in the area of AEPs, an emphasis on developing smaller class sizes and lowering the pupil-to-teacher ratio in the traditional school system is advised for school administrators to develop a school community within the traditional school system that is inclusive of all student abilities, and that is responsive to the needs of all students regardless of ability or life situation.



## References

- Blatchford, P., Bassett, P., & Brown, P. (2011). Examining the effect of class size on classroom engagement and teacher-pupil interaction: Differences in relation to pupil prior attainment and primary vs. secondary schools. *Learning and Instruction, 21*(6), 715-730. doi:10.1016/j.learninstruc.2011.04
- Bruin, M., & Ohna, S. E. (2013). Alternative courses in upper secondary vocational education and training: Students' narratives on hopes and failures. *International Journal of Inclusive Education, 17*(10), 1089-1105. doi:10.1080/13603116.2012.735259
- Caroleo, M. (2014). An examination of the risks and benefits of alternative education. *Relational Child and Youth Care Practices, 27*(1), 35-46.
- Fenzel, L. M., & Monteith, R. H. (2008). Successful alternative middle schools for urban minority children: A study of Nativity Schools. *Journal for Students Placed at Risk 13*(4), 381-401. doi: 10.1080/10824660802427686
- O'Grady, K., & Houme, K. (2014). *PCAP 2013: Report on the Pan-Canadian assessment of Science, Reading, and Mathematics*. Retrieved January 22, 2015, from the Council of Ministers of Education, Canada website: <http://cmec.ca/Publications/Lists/Publications/Attachments/337/PCAP-2013-Public-Report-EN.pdf>
- Park, K., Caine, V., & Wimmer, R. (2014). The experiences of Advanced Placement and International Baccalaureate Diploma program participants: A systematic review of qualitative research. *Journal of Advanced Academics, 25*(2), 129-153. doi:10.1177/1932202X14532258
- Phillips, R. S. (2011). Toward authentic student-centered practices: Voices of alternative school students. *Education and Urban Society, 45*(6), 668-699. doi:10.1177/0013124511424107
- Tubin, D., Likritz, R., & Chen, D. (2004). Educational achievements of graduates of an experimental elementary school. *Educational Research, 46*(2), 151-162. doi:10.1080/0013188042000222430
- Watson, S. (2011). Somebody's got to fight for them: A disadvantaged and marginalized alternative school's learner-centered culture of learning. *Urban Education, 46*(6). doi:10.1177/0042085911413148
- Wolfson, A. R., Spaulding, N. L., Dandrow, C., & Baroni, E. M. (2007). Middle school start times: The importance of a good night's sleep for young adolescents. *Behavioral Sleep Medicine, 5*, 194-209. doi:10.1080/15402000701263809

### About the Author

Andrew (A.J.) Neufeld is in his first year of the Master of Education program, specializing in educational administration. A.J. is the physical education specialist at Clearspring Middle School in Steinbach, Manitoba, where he lives with his wife and two children.