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# Exploring the Effectiveness of Various Delivery Models Within Ontario's School Within a College (SWAC) Dual Credit Programs: A Multi-Stakeholder Perspective

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Exploring the Effectiveness of Various Delivery Models Within Ontario's School Within a  
College (SWAC) Dual Credit Programs: A Multi-Stakeholder Perspective

by

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A THESIS

SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES  
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## **Abstract**

The Ontario School Within a College (SWAC) dual credit programs aim to support disengaged, or at-risk, high school students who have the potential to succeed, by removing them from their high school environments and engaging them in dual credit (which is where they receive both college and high school credits for their coursework) and high school learning fully on a college campus. To date, limited research has been conducted as to whether SWAC programs promote student persistence into post-secondary education (PSE), where persistence means students persevere with their studies and follow through into post-secondary programs. The purpose of this research was to examine the leadership and delivery of Ontario SWAC programs to determine their effectiveness in preparing students for persistence into PSE and how they could be made more effective. After examination of program effectiveness, the goal of this research was also to create a proposed model of delivery to be used by any educational institution looking to implement similar programming. To determine effectiveness, a review of Ontario SWAC programs was conducted, highlighting the various delivery models, including successes and challenges, program leaders and staff face in supporting students, and exploring leadership factors which could impact student persistence.

By utilizing a mixed-methods research design, within a pragmatic paradigmatic orientation, multiple stakeholders were involved including: ministry representatives; college and school board administrators; college advisors and program staff; high school teachers; and school board monitors, guidance officers, and board office staff. Two methods of qualitative data collection were utilized including a focus group with six ministry representatives, and semi-structured interviews with 11 delivery staff and administrators. Quantitatively, 33 delivery staff completed a questionnaire on their SWAC experience, and pre-existing provincial PSE transition

reports were examined. Through a process of triangulation across data forms, similarities and differences in perspectives were found with five common themes identified that impacted program effectiveness in preparing students for PSE.

First theme – both students and those supporting students required a focus on community building to feel a sense of belonging in their teaching and learning environment, with the opportunity to share experiences and learning. Second – students in SWAC experienced various levels of support and advocacy across the province, and there was a need for social work and financial support. Third – across SWAC stakeholders, differences in views regarding the definition of persistence were found, highlighting variances in perceived program goals, especially between high school and college delivery staff. Fourth – the delivery of curriculum and classroom experiences varied, however, a blend of traditional teaching with course recovery methods was found to be ideal along with inclusion of life skill development. Fifth – program leadership and oversight from the provincial level was perceived positively, but a lack integration and collaboration between colleges and school boards was identified. Inconsistent program delivery provincially was also found to be a challenge, as well as high rates of staff turnover.

Based on these findings, a proposed model for SWAC delivery was developed to inform others who wish to implement similar programming, or for Ontario to evaluate current practices. Core to the proposed model, a student-centred, collective approach must be foundational and, once established, a focus on: adult learning principles, holistic student experiences and supports, and thoughtful onboarding, training, and professional development of staff can be achieved. Throughout all phases of program implementation and delivery, it was recommended that continuous evaluation must be conducted with a focus on student perspectives and voice.

*Keywords: dual credit, persistence, disengaged, at-risk, post-secondary education*

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Four years ago, when I first registered into the Doctor of Education program at the University of Calgary, I tried to imagine the moment when, after completing my dissertation, I would start to write the acknowledgements page and thank all those who had helped me along the way. Now that I am here, there will never be enough space, words, or sentiment for me to write that would even come close to acknowledging my sincere gratitude and appreciation for everyone who has helped me get to this stage.

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## **Dedication**

For the *School Within A College* students, who overcome seemingly unsurmountable odds through sheer will and determination – your courage and resilience is inspiring and encourages us all to do better.

For the staff, teachers, faculty, and administrators working in SWAC – your passion, dedication, and commitment provides the space and support needed for students to succeed. Your compassion and selflessness makes a real difference every day.

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# Chapter 1 – Introduction

The Ontario School Within a College (SWAC) dual credit program is one in which high school students complete both secondary school courses and college courses, which count towards their secondary school credits, full-time on a college campus (Ministry of Education, 2020). The SWAC program is “aimed at disengaged students who have the potential to succeed but are at-risk of not graduating, and students who have left school before graduating but have returned to earn their diploma” (Ministry of Education, 2020, p.17). The following mixed-methods research project aimed to determine whether the leadership and delivery of Ontario School Within a College (SWAC) dual credit programs effectively prepared students for persistence in post-secondary, and if so, how the programs could be made more effective. What follows is an overview of the background, context, guiding questions, and conceptual framework that provided structure for this research. The significance of this research has been explored along with the definition of key terms that were utilized throughout. First, some background and context on the dual credit program and SWAC will be provided.

## Background

Dual credit, or dual enrolment, programs have been utilized extensively throughout North America and around the world. The meaning of the term dual credit can differ depending on the geographic and political environments. Dual enrolment, used in conjunction with the term dual credit, programs outside Ontario, Canada, have permitted high school students to enrol in college-level courses simultaneously with high-school courses in an effort to provide benefits to students such as “greater access to a wider range of rigorous academic and technical courses, saving time and money on a college degree, promoting efficiency of learning, and enhancing admission to and retention in college” (Kleiner & Lewis, 2005, p. 1). Traditional dual credit

programs in the United States, Australia, England, and areas of Canada, such as Alberta and British Columbia, typically focus on students who demonstrate strong academic capabilities and are designed in a way that “shuts out low-income and low achieving students” (Krueger, 2006, p. 2). Ontario, on the other hand, takes a very different approach to dual credit programming.

In Ontario, dual credit programs are overseen by the School College Work Initiative (SCWI), a joint task force between the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities. All dual credit programs in Ontario aim to assist secondary school students with completion of high school and “making a successful transition to college and/or apprenticeship programs” (Ministry of Education, 2020, p. 5). Ontario dual credit programs primarily focus on students who are identified as disengaged, otherwise known as ‘at-risk’ (Ministry of Education, 2020). It is important to note that while the term at-risk may be used as shorthand within this study, the narrative is not meant to denote that students’ themselves are ‘at-risk’. Rather, the students indicated in this study may be facing significant challenges to success, but do have the potential to succeed and thus are not defined by their ‘at-risk’ label (Ministry of Education, 2020). For Ontario, dual credit high school students participate in “a college course or courses targeted to ‘at-risk’ high school students and counting as both a high school and a college credit(s). These courses are taught by college professors or team-taught with high school teachers” (Philpott-Skilton, 2013, p. 10). In this context, team-taught meant that both a college professor and a high school teacher were partnered to deliver a dual credit course. As an extension of dual credits, the School Within a College (SWAC) program exists to better support “disengaged and underachieving students who have the potential to succeed but are at-risk of not graduating, and students who have left school before graduating” (Ministry of Education, 2020, p. 17).

The SWAC program removes students entirely from the high school environment and places them into collaborative learning communities on college campuses where students complete secondary school courses and dual credit courses (Ministry of Education, 2020). High school teachers located on the college campuses provide supervision and support for SWAC students in instruction and access to services between the college and school boards (Ministry of Education, 2020). Integrating SWAC students into college campuses is ideally suited for students who are uncomfortable in their high school setting, unable to continue in their high school environment for a variety of reasons (e.g., expulsion, bullying, anxiety), and/or face significant conflicting priorities (e.g., caring for an ill parent, taking care of their children, self-sufficient for funding, supporting family financially) (Ministry of Education, 2020). As will be discussed throughout this research, those delivering SWAC programs believe that with the added support of the high school teacher, college supports, and a more mature learning environment, SWAC students are provided with the resources needed to increase their chances of successful high school completion, and eventual persistence into and through post-secondary education (PSE).

SWAC programs are implemented using a variety of models with variances in scheduling, number of dual credit courses taught, high school course delivery method, pre-existing student dimensions, supports and services available, and program expectations. While multiple models are implemented across the province, the efficacy of each has not been evaluated in terms of whether they are adequately supporting student persistence. In the past, pilot projects have been implemented to provide additional support for students in SWAC. While dual credit programs, including SWAC, traditionally have a high completion rate, studies have shown that students who participated in dual credits did not progress to post-secondary in the year following their enrolment (School College Work Initiative, 2017). The purpose of this study



was to review the leadership and delivery models of SWAC across the province, determine what supports were being provided to students across SWAC models, and explore whether SWAC prepared and encouraged students for persistence into PSE.

### **Context**

As part of this research project, multiple fields of study have been incorporated including social cognitive theory, leadership theory, dual credit history, underlying factors of ‘at-risk’ students and implications for support, post-secondary transition supports and programming, persistence theories, and adult learning principles. An in-depth overview of each of these concepts has been outlined in Chapter 2. It is first important to understand the educational community context in which SWAC exists before exploring the theoretical underpinnings which have guided this study.

The SWAC program in Ontario is a unique approach to high school completion and encouragement to pursue PSE. What follows is an overview of the Ontario dual credit program, SWAC, and student experiences within the program, which can vary depending on the delivery site.

#### **Ontario Dual Credit**

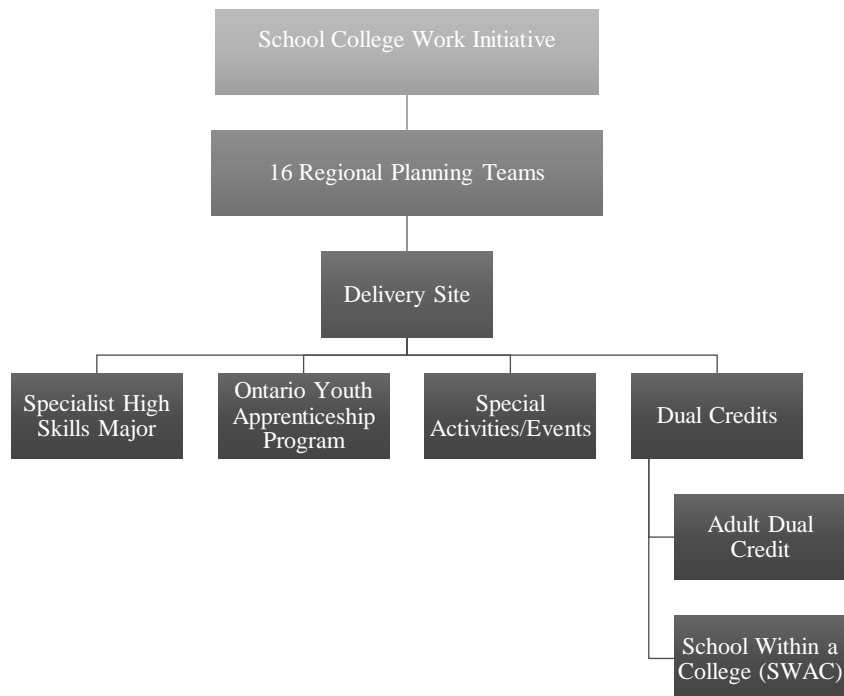
The Ontario dual credit program has been in existence since 2005, although the concept of dual enrolment is much older (School College Work Initiative, 2017a). Dual credit courses in Ontario are “a way for Grade 11 and 12 students, while still in high school, to earn a credit towards their Ontario Secondary School Diploma while sampling college or apprenticeship industry-specific courses” (School College Work Initiative, 2017a, para.1). Students may take up to four dual credit courses as part of their Ontario Secondary School Diploma (OSSD) at any of

the 22 Ontario colleges who offer a dual credit program through SCWI (School College Work Initiative, 2017a).

The Ontario Dual Credit programs are overseen by both the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Training, Colleges, and Universities through a working group called the School-College Work Initiative (SCWI). As showcased in Figure 1, SCWI oversees programs across the province which are operationalized by Regional Planning Teams (RPTs) that work together in partnership with colleges and school boards at delivery sites. Provincially, there are 16 RPTs which coordinate programming in their geographically assigned area and oversee the dual credit programming conducted in their area by SWAC delivery staff (School College Work Initiative, 2017a). For the context of this research, a delivery site is where a college and school board partnered to deliver one or all varieties of SCWI programming.

**Figure 1**

*School College Work Initiative Hierarchy*



As evident in Figure 1, there are a variety of programs offered through SCWI including: Specialist High Skills Major, which allows students' to target their high school courses on a career path of interest to gain industry specific skills; Ontario Youth Apprenticeship Programs, which provide high school students the opportunity to register as an apprentice and complete hours towards apprenticeship training as part of their OSSD; special activities and events, such as providing conferences or short-term opportunities for high school students to engage in a college environment early; and traditional dual credits (School College Work Initiative, 2017a). Adult Dual Credits offer mature students', who are completing courses towards their OSSD, the opportunity to also complete a dual credit. SWAC programs operate in conjunction with traditional dual credit programs as SWAC students must be enrolled in a dual credit course as part of the program (Ministry of Education, 2020).

### ***School Within a College (SWAC)***

The majority of dual credit programming is made up of single or double dual credit courses occurring at college campuses one day a week, however, the SWAC program has seen a significant increase in student participation. In 2017-2018, 3,320 students participated in 100 SWAC programs in Ontario (School College Work Initiative, 2017). To deliver SWAC there are multiple staff involved including high school teachers, high school guidance counsellors and monitors, school board administrators, in conjunction with college faculty, college advisors, college administrators, and college support staff. For the purpose of this study, all of these various professional staff will be referred to collectively as SWAC delivery staff. Each member of the SWAC delivery staff must work together to deliver SWAC programs effectively.

**Classroom Experience and Curricular Delivery.** There are multiple varieties of classroom experiences and curriculum delivery formats for SWAC, collectively referred to

throughout this research as delivery models, utilized across Ontario. Delivery models for SWAC programs vary across the province in terms of the number of dual credit courses offered, scheduling, student characteristics, and supports provided for students. There are combinations of credit recovery, credit delivery, and co-operative education. Credit recovery is available for students who have previously failed a course and involves students working with their previous teacher to retake the units where the expectations were not met, rather than retaking the whole course (Ministry of Education, 2013). Course delivery involves the on-site high school teacher (or teachers) delivering specific course content to students while located on the college campus. Co-operative education is when high school students can gain secondary school credits through employment and/or community experiences (Ministry of Education, 2018).

Students can take up to four dual credits towards their high school diploma (Ministry of Education, 2020). However, most SWAC programs are structured so that students take one or two dual credits while enrolled in SWAC. There are variations in the time-of-day students are required to be on campus as well as the length of time students may remain in the SWAC, from one to two semesters. Some SWAC programs are targeted to specific student characteristics such as Adult SWAC, French Language speakers, English Language Learners sometimes referred to as English as a Second Language (ESL), or Indigenous students. Depending on the delivery site, SWAC students may or may not have access to a variety of student supports.

**Student Supports.** Out-of-class student supports can be defined as the extra-curricular activities, supports, and engagement opportunities with peers and faculty/staff (Reason, 2009). It has been shown that “positive interactions with faculty members and peers, especially interactions that further relate to academic matters, increase the likelihood that students will persist” (Reason, 2009, p. 674). For the purpose of this study, student supports referred to the

supports and experiences SWAC students were able to connect with at the delivery site of their program. Supports available and used by SWAC students varied. In 2017, funding was allocated from the province to provide SWAC students with an advisor with the goal to support students in addressing immediate issues by helping students “explore barriers, find resources, [and] make referrals to college and community services” (School College Work Initiative, 2017, p. 6). However, as was determined in this research, the presence and availability of the advisors at each SWAC delivery site varied, and if an advisor was present, the amount of time they have to provide for each student varied as well.

Throughout this research it became evident that each geographic area across Ontario had its own unique areas of focus for student support based on student demographics (e.g., immigration/refugee concerns, Indigenous populations, lack of transportation, community funding, employment opportunities, etc.). Access to student supports for SWAC students was dependent on the high school teachers, high school guidance counsellors, college delivery staff, and the college itself. SWAC programs in this research often demonstrated that they operate in isolation on college campuses and within their geographic areas, SWAC delivery staff determined appropriate supports and referrals for students, often with little guidance and resources. While some staff within this research indicated that colleges allowed SWAC students to access all college resources such as career counselling, the gym, and health services, other colleges did not. Similarly, some school boards encouraged direct, regular involvement with guidance counsellors and school board monitors, while others took a more hands-off approach, leaving the student support aspects up to the high school teacher(s) on site.

Any effort to determine the effectiveness of SWAC programs in preparing students for persistence in post-secondary education needed to include an exploration of student supports

being provided at each delivery site. The level of supports available to students was impacted by the leadership approaches at all levels of program delivery from ministry representatives, Regional Planning Teams, college and school board administrators, and program delivery staff. As such, in addition to determining what supports were available to SWAC students, it was also important to determine what leadership approaches were being utilized at all levels of program delivery.

### **Purpose**

The purpose of this study was to examine the leadership and delivery of Ontario School Within a College programs effectiveness in preparing students for persistence in post-secondary education to determine if an ideal model of delivery could be created. Up until this research, there had been no in-depth examination of the Ontario SWAC program and its unique incorporation of dual credit, holistic support for students, and encouragement and support with entry into post-secondary education. While there had been limited research on the Ontario dual credit program itself, only one study of a single SWAC program in Ontario was found. An exploration of the SWAC program on a provincial level was conducted to explore the models of SWAC delivery across Ontario to compare successes and challenges of each. Student supports provided were assessed to determine if there were some supports that could increase levels of student persistence. Finally, the leadership approaches at all levels of program delivery were examined to determine whether certain approaches and considerations could lead to an increase in the likelihood of student persistence into post-secondary education.

The findings of this research provided a suggested model of delivery for SWAC programs that could be used by other education systems looking to implement programming to support youth at risk of not successfully completing their high school, and to encourage

persistence into post-secondary education. The findings and recommendations gathered were also shared with Ontario SWAC programs to support program planning and evaluation, stakeholder training, and improve student experiences in the Ontario SWAC program. The information gathered in this research also helped to reduce the gap in published research on the Ontario SWAC program.

### **Assumptions**

It was assumed within this research that through post-secondary transition programs and supports, students are more likely to persist in post-secondary education (Lizzio, 2006, 2011; Tinto, 2006;). Another assumption was that persistence in PSE involves multiple variables including pre-college student characteristics, the college context, individual student experiences, and out-of-classroom experiences (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Reason, 2009; Terenzini & Reason, 2005).

### **Problem Statement**

Thus far, there had been no exhaustive research on SWAC delivery models and their effectiveness in supporting student persistence, indicating an important gap in research. While SCWI monitored student retention and progression into post-secondary, analysis of SWAC delivery models in conjunction with feedback from SCWI ministry representatives and SWAC delivery staff had not been conducted. Lacking comprehensive feedback from practitioners in the field, the effectiveness of the program's mandate of preparing students for a successful transition to PSE could not be fully determined. Without a comprehensive overview of the SWAC program, other educational institutions outside of Ontario interested in implementing similar secondary school dual credit programs would be unable to have a comprehensive understanding of the requirements and needs for similar programming in their own context. Thus, the final

model (in the final chapter) provided a guide for other educational administrators to follow if they planned to establish similar programs.

### **Research Questions**

The following overarching question was used to guide this research project: *How effective are School Within a College (SWAC) programs in promoting student persistence into post-secondary education and can these SWAC programs be made more effective?* In an effort to answer this overarching research question, the following sub-questions guided this research:

- How are SWAC programs being delivered across the province?
- What successes/challenges are SWAC programs facing in terms of out-of-class experiences and student supports?
- Are there specific successes/challenges SWAC programs face depending on the particular delivery model?
- Are SWAC programs adequately preparing students to be successful and to persevere in post-secondary education?
- What additional leadership factors are needed to enhance the SWAC program?

By exploring the above research questions, it was possible to gain a better understanding of how the SWAC program was being delivered. This developed the foundation for a recommended model for SWAC delivery for other institutions wishing to implement similar programming. The information gathered also provided SCWI, Regional Planning Teams, and SWAC delivery staff with information on potential avenues for future development and enhancement of program delivery.

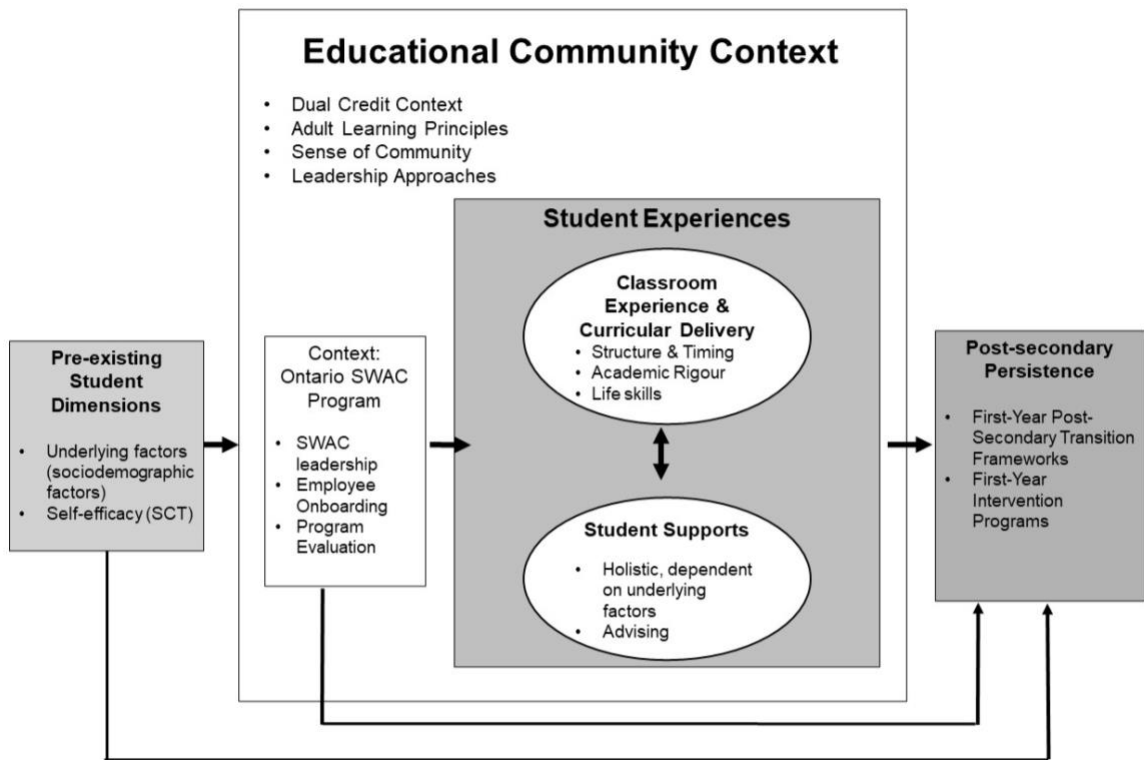


## Conceptual Framework

Reason (2009) determined that pre-college experiences and characteristics, and the college experience itself, can impact a student's likelihood of persistence in post-secondary. In their Comprehensive Model of Influence on Student Learning and Persistence, Terenzini and Reason (2005) posited that students' pre-college characteristics and experiences can be a determinant factor of persistence in post-secondary education. Within the college experience itself, the organizational context, peer environment, and individual student experiences such as classroom experiences, out-of-class experiences, and curricular experiences, all contribute to a students' likelihood of persistence (Reason, 2009; Terenzini & Reason, 2005). Using the Comprehensive Model of Influence on Student Learning and Persistence as a foundation, the SWAC experience was explored in terms of student persistence. As can be seen by *Figure 2 The Research Conceptual Framework*, there were a variety of theoretical and conceptual elements examined including: pre-existing student dimensions, the educational community context, including the Ontario SWAC program context; student experiences, including classroom experience and curricular delivery; as well as student supports, and the impact of each on post-secondary persistence.

**Figure 2**

*Conceptual Framework*



As evident in Figure 2, it was first important to identify the pre-existing student dimensions that students possess on entering the program. In particular, underlying sociodemographic factors were investigated well as the implications these factors had on student support. While sociodemographic characteristics varied, those of greatest importance to post-secondary persistence have been argued to include socio-economic status, income background, race and ethnicity, and family support (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Reason, 2009). Social cognitive theory was used, and, within pre-existing student dimensions the component of self-efficacy was defined and examined. Self-efficacy has been defined as the core foundation of human motivation, and the belief that people have that they can produce change by undertaking activities or to persevere in the face of difficulties (Bandura, 2013).

Once a sense of the students' who accessed SWAC was gained, the educational community context was explored. The educational community of SWAC included dual credit, including the national and international dual credit contexts, as well as the Ontario SWAC leadership structure. Adult learning principles were defined as the dual credit environment aimed to remove students from the high school learning environment and place them into a more self-directed adult learning environment on a college campus. The concept of community and building a sense of community within SWAC was identified as a component of the educational community and as such was defined. It was believed that leadership approaches could impact program delivery and, as such, a brief overview of selected leadership approaches, which later became evident throughout SWAC, were outlined within the literature review. At each level of the program delivery different leadership approaches became evident, and at different times certain leadership approaches such as instructional, transactional, transformational, authentic, servant, and inclusive leadership were seen as more appropriate by administrators and delivery staff in SWAC. Each leadership approach was defined as various program contexts called for different leadership approaches.

SWAC programs presented in multiple contexts. Therefore, it was necessary to understand the unique characteristics and implications of various SWAC programs, including the different delivery models and locations. The classroom experiences and curricular delivery models, including learning components of social cognitive theory were explored, such as structure and timing of delivery, and level of academic rigour. Components of adult learning principles were explored in classroom and curricular delivery in review of life skill inclusion in curriculum and classroom experiences. Through information gathered from ministry liaisons, regional planning team (RPT), college administrators, school board administrators, high school

teachers, high school guidance counsellors/monitors, college advisors, and college support staff, multiple perspectives, and understandings of the successes and challenges of SWAC were gathered.

A variety of student supports and experiences were offered throughout program delivery dependent on location. As was discovered in this research, these student supports and experiences could include career counselling, advisement, support with college/funding applications, an involved guidance counsellor, or other supportive practices. Student supports differed by SWAC program and so identifying the supports provided in various programs made it possible to identify best practices and opportunities for development of student supports.

Post-secondary persistence appeared to be an underpinning aim of the program and, as such, the theoretical underpinnings of student persistence and transition theories were explored. Due to the scope of this project, a selection of persistence frameworks were highlighted within the literature review, including the comprehensive model of influence on student learning and persistence, longitudinal model of dropout, input-environment-output model, and the five senses framework. First year post-secondary transition frameworks and intervention programs and supports were highlighted as SWAC acted as a bridge between secondary school and post-secondary education. Dialogue with SCWI leaders and SWAC delivery staff allowed for a greater understanding of how the SWAC program impacted student persistence into PSE. Review of government statistics, including the application statistics of SWAC students into PSE from the Ontario Colleges Application Systems, as well as rates of participation in SWAC programs posted on the SCWI website were also examined. Through analysis of the qualitative feedback from SCWI ministry liaisons and SWAC delivery staff, as well as quantitative data from a questionnaire and government statistics, the effectiveness of SWAC delivery models in

preparing students for persistence in post-secondary education was extrapolated. By extrapolating the effectiveness of the SWAC program in promoting post-secondary persistence, a recommended model for program delivery was created providing other educational institutions interested in implementing similar programming with a foundation to do so. The researcher herself played a role in the collection and analysis of information and, as such, it is important for the reader to understand the background and history of the researcher.

### **About the Researcher**

For over ten years, I worked in a public employment centre providing support to youth facing multiple barriers to obtain and retain permanent, or summer employment. For seven years, I was also a dual credit professor. In 2017-2018, I was appointed the SWAC advisor for a large college within the Greater Toronto Area. While supporting SWAC students, I was able to witness the challenging and unique needs these students faced. I struggled with providing support for students in order for them to achieve their goals, so I reached out to the other advisors within my Regional Planning Team and we created a community of practice for advisors in the Greater Toronto Area. At a provincial symposium of practitioners in Spring 2018, where I presented with colleagues from our community of practice, it became clear that SWAC programs were being delivered differently in each college, with out-of-classroom experiences ranging from full supportive practices to very few supports for students. I became interested in finding out more about how the differences in program delivery and out-of-classroom experiences could impact student persistence and dedicated my doctoral research to the topic.

Shortly after beginning my research proposal, I took on a new role outside of SWAC, at a different college, planning and coordinating transition programming for first year students. The connection between SWAC and first year persistence was intriguing and I hoped that, even

though I was no longer associated with dual credit and SWAC programs professionally, by studying the SWAC program more in depth, I would gain a better understanding of incoming students and be able to plan for more inclusive programming once students arrive at college. Having connected with SCWI ministry representatives regularly, both while employed as a SWAC advisor and now having left the role, I had the support of SCWI in promoting this research project and was permitted to recruit participants through SCWI email lists. As a field dissertation project, I worked closely with SCWI in the initial stages of this research in order to gather information which could be mutually beneficial for their needs as well as mine as a doctoral student. My research of the SWAC program was supported by my pre-existing background in the program from first-hand experience, and that I was removed from any professional interaction with SCWI. As a now outsider looking in, I was able to gain trust and engagement from participants as I had no influential impact on their roles or the administration of the program moving forward.

### **Significance**

At multiple levels, the research that was conducted could be significant including:

- Educational Institutions Interested in Implementing Retention Programs for At-Risk Youth: can utilize the recommended model of delivery and best practices discovered to implement, or improve, retention and progression programs for at-risk secondary school students.
- Scholars Researching Models for Student Support: can utilize this information as a guide to support program development and enhancement. This research also fills a gap of a comprehensive review of SWAC programming at multiple locations, thus providing a

more fulsome understanding of the implications of support with using a program similar to SWAC.

- Ontario Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Training, Colleges, and Universities: may use the information found to better evaluate funding and create a rationale for future funding distribution practices for at-risk secondary school student programming.
- Ontario School College Work Initiative (SCWI): may use the findings as justification for funding proposals, rationale for program delivery changes or retention of practices, and potential for provincial training for new SCWI members.
- Ontario College and School Board Administrators: could evaluate their leadership of the SWAC program through comparison with other programs across the province, best practices for delivery may be highlighted which can be used for future program planning.
- Ontario SWAC Delivery Staff: may find the information useful for program delivery, professional development, and opportunities for student supports.
- Students: should all Ontario program delivery staff and educational institutions implement programming based on the recommended model and use the information gathered to enhance delivery, students' who participate in programs will be given more appropriate and targeted support, thus potentially increasing student persistence into PSE.

### **Delimitations**

While it is important to understand what information and concepts were included in this research study, it is also important for the reader to be aware of what the researcher was not able to do or include, otherwise known as delimitations (Leedy & Omrod, 2015). Student dispositions including academic-motivation, self-discipline, self-confidence, academic preparation, and performance, while originally included in the Comprehensive Model on Student Learning and

Persistence, were not included within this research. Students' selected for SWAC typically demonstrated none or very few of the positive dispositions identified in the original model, and the SWAC program targeted students with lower academic preparation and performance upon entry (Ministry of Education, 2020; Reason, 2009; Terenzini & Reason, 2005). There was relatively little literature about the role of student dispositions in terms of persistence, aside from psychologically specific literature (Reason, 2009). Students were not spoken to prior to SWAC program entry or throughout, nor were former SWAC program students spoken to, so it would have been impossible to gauge student disposition.

Students who were currently enrolled in SWAC were not included as part of this research for a variety of reasons. First, it would not have been possible to determine from which specific programs current students would have been able to speak with the researcher. In order to speak with currently enrolled students in SWAC programs, additional research ethics applications would have needed to be submitted per each school board across the province, with many boards only conducting yearly reviews of ethic applications. At the time of this research, there were 72 school boards located within Ontario (People for Education, 2021). Secondly, there would have also been the potential that currently enrolled students would be underage and need parental consent to participate. Based on the researcher's experience as an advisor, many SWAC students faced family conflict, and thus it was believed that it would be difficult to obtain parental consent without causing undue harm to the student through family interactions. Finally, within the scope of this research, the time required to collect and ensure ethical and informed collection of information from current students would not have been feasible. While former students were initially included in the research design to obtain the student perspective on the effectiveness of



SWAC programs, unexpected limitations prevented this sample group from participating as will be explained in Chapter Six.

### **Organization of the Dissertation**

Following this chapter, an extensive review of the literature identified in the conceptual framework has been provided in Chapter Two, including pre-existing student dimensions such as underlying factors, and self-efficacy as part of social cognitive theory. The educational community context is provided including dual credit context, adult learning principles, sense of community, leadership approaches, and SWAC implications. Student experiences such as classroom and curricular delivery, and student supports is then presented, followed by persistence theory, first year post-secondary transition frameworks, and advising approaches. In Chapter Three, the research design is presented, including an overview of the pragmatic paradigmatic orientation, mixed methods methodology, the impact COVID-19 had on this research, rigour in research, instrument design, sampling and samples, procedure, data analysis, and ethical considerations. Chapter Four presents the results of this research, including the five major themes highlighted by participants including community building, student support and advocacy, multiple facets of persistence, delivery, and program leadership. In Chapter Five the results of this research are discussed in the context of the theories identified in the conceptual framework, highlighting five areas, including the community context, pre-existing student dimensions and support, post-secondary persistence, classroom and curricular delivery, and leadership and evaluation. Finally, in Chapter Six, a proposed SWAC delivery model is presented, highlighting the need for a student centred, collective approach which emphasizes adult learning principles, a holistic student experience, employee onboarding, training and professional development, and continuous evaluation.

## Definitions of Terms

**At-risk:** Students' who face a variety of underlying factors (e.g., low socio-economic status, addictions, mental health, single/no parent, have children, legal concerns etc.) which makes them at greater risk of failure to graduate and not progressing to post-secondary education. At-risk for the context of this research refers to students' who are disengaged but have the potential to succeed (Ministry of Education, 2020)

**Classroom Experience:** The classroom experience encompasses the environment in which a student participates in SWAC such as the timing of the program, amount of time required on campus, and the structure of the program in terms of teacher support, and level of academic rigour.

**Cooperative Education:** High school students can gain secondary school credits through employment and/or community experiences. Credits can be attached to specific related courses or can be created based on a students' current employment (Ministry of Education, 2018).

**Credit Delivery:** In SWAC programs when high school teachers deliver course content in traditional classroom formats with scheduled classes, assignments, and exams. Credit delivery is the typical formats utilized in traditional high schools.

**Credit Recovery:** Allows students who have failed a course to work independently, and with their previous teacher, to retake the units where the students did not meet the expectations, rather than retaking the whole course (Ministry of Education, 2013). In SWAC programs, SWAC high school teachers support students, if needed, with content, deadlines, and submission to the previous teachers.

**Curricular Delivery:** Curricular delivery is the way in which credits are delivered within in SWAC whether that be credit delivery, credit recovery, cooperative education, or a combination of multiple methods.

**Delivery Model:** The method through which SWAC programs are delivered. There are multiple delivery models across the province that vary in the number of dual-credit college courses offered, timing, course delivery model (credit recovery or credit delivery), and unique pre-existing student dimensions. Delivery model refers to the combination of classroom experience and curricular delivery.

**Delivery Site:** The location where SWAC students study, typically on a college campus. SWAC delivery sites are overseen and delivered in partnership with a school board and a college.

**Dual Credit:** A program where high school students are enrolled in one or more courses that count as both a high school and a college credit. In Ontario, students in dual credit programs are typically designated at-risk.

**Post-secondary Education (PSE):** Training and education delivered at a college or university including certificates, skilled trade courses, diplomas, or undergraduate degrees.

**Regional Planning Teams (RPTs):** College and school board administrators who oversee School College Work Initiative programs, including dual credit and SWAC, in their geographic areas. One ministry representative sits on each RPT along with the local college and school board representatives who oversee dual credit programming at their institutions. There are 16 RPTs in Ontario.

**School College Work Initiative (SCWI):** A joint task force between the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities lead by ministry representatives that oversees all Ontario dual credit programming including School Within a College.

**School Within a College (SWAC):** A program in Ontario where high school students are fully removed from high school environments and attend classes at college campuses. A high school teacher provides their high school education, SWAC students are enrolled in one or more dual credit courses, and students receive targeted supports.

**Student Supports:** The supports and experiences SWAC students are able to connect with at the program delivery site; the supports and experiences SWAC students have from both college providers and high school providers while enrolled in SWAC.

## Chapter 2 – Literature Review

As stated in Chapter One, one purpose of this research was to fill a gap in research surrounding the effectiveness of the Ontario School Within a College (SWAC) program in preparing students for persistence into post-secondary education. The additional goal of this research was to use feedback gathered from staff and administrators of SWAC programs to create a recommended model that could be used by other educational institutions to implement programming aimed at encouraging post-secondary persistence for high school students at risk of not successfully completing their high school diploma. To structure the research conducted within this study, the research conceptual framework, evident in Figure 2 in chapter 1, provided an outline for the base of the theoretical underpinnings which contributed to the final recommended delivery model.

What follows is an in-depth overview and analysis of the theoretical concepts and previous research that was of importance to this research. Structured to mirror the areas found within the conceptual framework, the following literature review emulated the chronological progression of the experience of students and those delivering SWAC have in delivering the program.

### **Pre-existing Student Dimensions**

Pre-existing student dimensions and characteristics have been explored providing the context in which the SWAC program provides supports to students. Underlying factors including sociodemographic traits have been explained as many students entering the SWAC program possess multiple factors that could impact their likelihood of persistence into post-secondary. Bandura's (2001) Social Cognitive Theory provided an understanding of the contextual elements

which could influence a students' likelihood of post-secondary persistence both within and/or notwithstanding the SWAC programs educational community context.

### **Educational Community Context**

The educational community context was provided including the dual credit context, both within Canada and internationally, and an overview of what research has been conducted on the Ontario SWAC program. Adult learning principles are then presented as the SWAC program aimed to remove students from traditional high school learning environments and move them into more mature learning setting on a college campus. Within the educational community on the college campus, a sense of community was identified through this research as required for both students and staff to feel connected and supported in their learning and support of students. Leadership approaches could influence all levels of the SWAC hierarchy, which in turn, could affect program delivery. A brief overview of select leadership approaches, including instructional, transactional, transformational, authentic, servant, and inclusive leadership have been explored, followed by an explanation as to why these approaches were highlighted in relation to the SWAC program and this research. Issues surrounding employee onboarding, including hiring, training, and orientation, became evident through administrators and senior leaders of the SWAC program and thus an exploration of related literature has been provided.

### **Student Experiences**

Student experiences have been presented including classroom experience and curricular delivery, and student supports. Within the classroom experience and curricular delivery, three main areas of focus emerged throughout this research including structure and timing of support programs, academic rigour of secondary school courses, and embedding life skills into curriculum and classroom experiences. An overview of theories related to student supports,

including the holistic approaches associated with underlying pre-existing student dimensions, and various approaches to advising have been provided, all of which could influence post-secondary persistence.

### **Post-Secondary Persistence**

The theoretical implications and definitions of post-secondary persistence have been provided as this research study aimed to evaluate the SWAC programs influence. First year student transition frameworks have been defined below, including the longitudinal model of dropout, input-environment-outcome model, the five senses of student success, and first year intervention programs. SWAC students were transitioning from high school to post-secondary and, as such, many of the SWAC delivery approaches emulated the principles and strategies governed within first year transition and support literature. Before delving into the theoretical approaches that informed this research and SWAC programs, it was first important to understand the targeted demographic of students who participated in SWAC. The following review began first at the very start of the SWAC process as defined by the research conceptual framework: pre-existing student dimensions.

### **Pre-existing Student Dimensions**

According to the Ministry of Education (2018), the selection criteria for SWAC students focuses on students who are disengaged from their educational environment. Through this research, participants emphasized that upon entry to the SWAC program, there were a variety of pre-existing student dimensions which could impact a student's learning experience. At times, students facing significant challenges in completing their high school requirements and/or progressing to post-secondary were often referred to as 'at-risk' or 'disengaged'. The term 'at-risk', in the context of this thesis, has been defined as students who experience a variety of

underlying factors which put them at greater risk of not graduating high school and progressing to post-secondary education, but who have been identified as demonstrating the potential to succeed (Ministry of Education, 2020). It is important to note the narrative used within this study: while the term at-risk may be used as shorthand, the meaning is such that students' may have been facing significant challenges to succeed but are not to be defined by an 'at-risk' label. Throughout this section, an overview of underlying contributing factors to a student's level of risk has been presented, followed by an overview of the concept of student readiness in terms of progression from secondary school to the post-secondary level.

### **Underlying Factors of Students At-risk**

There are a tremendous number of reasons why a student may be at-risk of not succeeding in education. For the purpose of this study, these reasons were referred to as underlying factors that lead to a categorization of at-risk. Fortin et al. (2006) described the typology of students at-risk of dropping out based on factors that may be faced in personal, family, and school contexts. For example, in the family context "low parental expectations towards school achievement and inadequate supervision of day-to-day activities" were factors that could lead to dropout (Fortin et al., 2006, p. 365). In a review of literature, Wotherspoon and Schissel (2001) discovered 450 symptoms or characteristics experienced or demonstrated by youth deemed at-risk, which covered personal, family, and school contexts.

Heisserer and Parette (2002) defined at-risk students as those students who are "a) ethnic minorities, b) academically disadvantaged, c) disabled, d) of low socioeconomic status, and e) probationary students" (p. 69). While Heisserer and Parette's (2002) definition was a start to understanding the term, there were many other underlying factors which may classify a student as at-risk. At-risk, disadvantaged, or marginalized were considered new concepts in comparison



to the identification of students with disabilities or special needs, which have a long history in education (Wotherspoon & Schissel, 2001).

Tinto (2006), in his longitudinal model of dropout, articulated individual characteristics related to dropout included family, individual, educational experiences, and expectations of educational attainment. Tinto (2006) stated that socioeconomic status, family educational attainment level, and quality of relationships within the family could be considered family characteristics which impacted an individuals' likelihood of success. Individual characteristics that could have led to increased levels of dropout included measured ability (demonstrated by high school grade achievement and standardized tests), gender (men persist more than women), and social status (Tinto, 2006).

Expanding on the pioneering work by Tinto (2006), research has also been conducted which demonstrated that the following variables could impact the likelihood of students dropping out: full/part-time attendance, employment status, ethnic minority, family obligations, distance from home town, financial concerns, and gender (Parker et al., 2004). Ethnic background and living situation could also impact a student's likelihood of completing high school. In Canada, between 2007-2010, Indigenous students, including First Nations, Metis, and Inuit youth, had a 23% dropout rate as opposed to 9% for non-Indigenous students (Public Safety Canada, 2012). A student's living situation also impacted success as only 44% of children in foster care were likely to graduate as opposed to 81% of their peers (Public Safety Canada, 2012). Dupéré et al. (2018) stated that recent stressors in a student's life precipitated "high school dropout over and above, or in interaction with, pre-existing vulnerabilities" (p. 117). Severe acute stressors such as severe life events (e.g., school change, failure, family crisis, peer-related problems) and chronic ongoing

difficulties (e.g., school related, conflict with families) could have increased the likelihood that students were vulnerable to dropping out (Dupéré et al., 2018).

Educational experiences themselves have also been shown to be related to the likelihood of student persistence. While it is not surprising that those who achieved higher grades in high school were more likely to persist into and through post-secondary, it is not as well known that the characteristics of the high schools themselves, including status and level of facilities and staff, could have impacted a student's likelihood to persist (Tinto, 1993, 2006). The influence of schools, including organization, leadership, and teachers, also impacted a student's likelihood of completing high school (Knesting, 2008). Interactions between schools and students, including a student's perception of teacher investment or care, has been shown to impact the likelihood of student dropout (Knesting, 2008). Discussed below in alignment with social cognitive theory, underlying factors of a student's situation could also impact a student's belief in oneself and belief in their ability to change their situation.

### **Social Cognitive Theory**

Social cognitive theory is based on the foundation of agency as the primary conception of human development, adaption, and change (Bandura, 2002). Agency is the ability "to influence intentionally one's functioning and life circumstances" (Bandura, 2002, p. 270). Agency has four core features: intentionality, forethought, self-reactiveness, and self-reflectiveness (Bandura, 2001). Agency must include intentional acts, in other words, a plan of action is mapped out to determine potential outcomes of a set action (Bandura, 2001). Forethought is the process of people motivating themselves in anticipation of future events, goals, and purposes, and for the most part, guiding towards positive outcomes whenever possible (Bandura, 2001). Self-reactiveness is that in addition to planning, thinking ahead, and motivating, an agent must self-

regulate to make choices and actions that are based on monitoring oneself to ensure that actions provide self-satisfaction, pride, and self-worth through adherence to morals (Bandura, 2001). Lastly, self-reflectiveness is required for people to judge their own thinking and outcomes of actions through the efficacy of their actions (Bandura, 2001).

No human agency mechanisms are more pervasive than a person's belief in their efficacy to influence their lives (Bandura, 2013). Self-efficacy is the core foundation of human motivation, performance accomplishments, and emotional well-being (Bandura, 2013). Bandura (2013) states, "unless people believe they can produce desired effects by their actions, they have little incentive to undertake activities or to persevere in the face of difficulties" (Bandura, 2013, p. 711). The lower an individual's self-efficacy, the less likely it is that they will persist. In reference to persistence in post-secondary, Bandura (2002) explains:

The higher people's perceived efficacy to fulfil educational requirements and occupational roles, the wider the career options they seriously consider pursuing, the greater interests they have in them, the better they prepare themselves educationally for different occupational careers, and the greater their staying power in challenging career pursuits. (p. 279)

Self-efficacy is needed to pursue and persist through challenging career and educational obstacles.

In the Benight and Bandura (2004) study on self-efficacy building for those who have suffered a traumatic event, it was explained that self-efficacy played a key role in stress reactions and quality of coping in threatening situations. After reviewing the traumatic aftermath recovery of individuals from natural disasters, terrorist attacks, interpersonal traumatization (e.g., physical and sexual assault, criminal victimization), and spousal bereavement, Benight and Bandura

(2004) determined that perceived self-efficacy was a focal mediator for post-traumatic recovery. In other words, people who believed they could overcome the traumatic event were more likely to do so. According to the participants of this research, and based on the researcher's experience, many students who accessed SWAC had suffered at least one traumatic event. However, even if SWAC students were not recovering from a traumatic event, Benight and Bandura's (2004) study demonstrated the impact self-efficacy could have upon persistence. While self-efficacy potentially could have played a part in SWAC student success, the use of proxy and collective agency through the SWAC environment was shown to have influenced student persistence.

According to Bandura (2013) "human functioning is a product of the interplay of intrapersonal influences, the behaviour individuals engage in, and the environmental forces that impinge on them" (p. 711). Through the three modes of human agency: personal, proxy, and collective, individuals can influence life circumstances (Bandura, 2001). Personal agency is when someone has direct control over the social interactions and institutions that affect their lives, whereas proxy agency is aiming to get those with power and resources to act on the person's behalf (Bandura, 2001). Collective agency is "people's shared belief in their collective power to produce desired results" (Bandura, 2001, p. 14). While ideally individuals have control over their lives and the influences that impact them, personal agency is not always a possibility, especially when influences are out of an individual's control (Bandura, 2013). In such a case, having a proxy, or someone who has the ability to influence circumstances on behalf of the individual is required (Bandura, 2013). People may use proxy agency when they do "not possess the necessary knowledge and skills to act intentionally by themselves to obtain desired outcomes (Hanham et al., 2020, p.135). Changing a person's life circumstances is not always possible to do in isolation, and relying on another as an advocate is not always suitable. In such a case, using

the collective power of the group, or collective agency is effective (Bandura, 2013). As explained later within the findings of this research, many of the students who accessed SWAC had existing dimensions, or characteristics, that may have made it challenging to fully embrace personal agency, and, as such collective and proxy agency was used by teachers, delivery staff, and administrators in an effort to support student success.

From a learning application of social cognitive theory, learning must have a “reciprocal relationship among personal characteristics, behaviours, and environment while also recognizing the agentic, active role of individuals” (Rubenstein et al., 2017, p.101). The environment “consists of teachers’ perceptions of level of support, constraints, and/or requirements embedded within a social context at both micro- and macro levels” (Rubenstein et al., 2017, p. 101). The microsystem is the amount of support teachers and students have within a classroom, whereas the macro system includes factors outside the classroom including social and cultural values, political, and economic systems (Rubenstein et al., 2017). The roles and responsibilities of teachers and those supporting programs demonstrates the importance of the teachers’ sense of collective agency in actively creating an environment that can influence and intentionally produce outcomes for those that they support (Bandura, 2001; Rubenstein et al., 2017). By creating a learning environment that supports both proxy and collective agency, teachers, delivery staff, and administrators are creating an educational context for SWAC students that promotes student success and persistence.

### **Educational Community Context**

As demonstrated in the research conceptual framework in Chapter One, the educational community context of this research encompassed multiple components. A review of dual credit programs was provided including an international and Canadian context where dual credit or

dual enrolment programs were most prevalent, primarily the United States, Alberta, British Columbia, Manitoba, and Saskatchewan, followed by the Ontario context. An overview of the School Within a College (SWAC) context was also presented to provide context of the specific setting in which the program existed. An overview of the benefits and pitfalls of adult learning principles was provided as, shown further below in the findings of this research, the SWAC program embedded adult learning concepts within its design. The importance of sense of community was then reviewed as within the educational context of the SWAC program, community building was emphasized for both students and staff. Finally, various leadership approaches were examined as throughout the Ontario SWAC and dual credit program, leadership principles were evident. To begin, it was first important for the reader to understand the dual credit context.

### **Dual Credit Context**

As defined in Chapter One, dual credit or dual enrolment programs, are situations where a student can complete one course credit that counts towards both a high school credit and a college credit. Dual credits are either taught fully by college professors or team taught between a high school teacher and a college professor (Ministry of Education, 2020). Participation in dual credit programs has been connected with a variety of positive outcomes including: secondary school academic success, increased success in post-secondary courses, greater engagement on post-secondary campuses, employment potential, and workforce engagement (Borovilos, 2015; Christian, 2016; Colleges Ontario, 2006; Watt-Malcolm, 2011; Whitaker, 2011). The value in dual enrolment or dual credit programming has been demonstrated in academic success for students both in their high school and post-secondary academics (Andrews, 2000; Bragg et al., 2006; Jones, 2014; Kim & Bragg, 2008). The strategic value of increasing work readiness and

workforce engagement through dual enrolment has also been shown to be influential (Morrison, 2008). While there are examples of dual credit programs that have not had such positive results (Colleges Ontario, 2006; FitzGibbon, 2015), many of the concerns with dual credit programming has been linked to organizational support and implementation of programming rather than the program itself (Irving, 2017). Dual credit programming structure varies significantly between Ontario, Canada, and the United States.

### ***Dual Credit within the United States***

Within the United States, dual credit or dual enrolment has become synonymous with high achieving students being granted access to an accelerated pathway to college education (Kleiner & Lewis, 2005). While dual enrolment programs in the United States have focused on higher achieving students, recently there have been an increase in programs utilizing dual enrolment for those students who traditionally have been underrepresented in higher education (Barnett & Stamm, 2010). In 2010-2011, only four percent of dual enrolment programs in the United States were targeted specifically to students at-risk of educational failure, and the majority of dual enrolment courses needed to be paid for by the students themselves (Marken et al., 2013).

Dual enrolment models emerged within the United States that were dropout recovery initiatives (Barnett & Stamm, 2010). The Gateway to College National Network utilized dual enrolment to support youth who had dropped out of high school to earn college credits while completing their high school diplomas and provide support and guidance to assist youth with getting “back on track, college, and career ready” (Gateway to College National Network, 2018, para. 2). This shift of focus to underrepresented students coincided more closely with the Ontario

model of dual credit, whereas the original dual enrolment format was similar to other models used throughout Canada.

### ***Dual Credit within Canada***

Dual Credit programs across Canada varied in their delivery and facilitation. Alberta, British Columbia, Manitoba, and Saskatchewan all had government funded dual credit programs. Between 2008-2011, Alberta funded some dual credit pilot projects, while many school boards and post-secondary institutions created their own, non-government funded dual credit programs (Alberta Education, 2017). In an effort to expand the dual credit program, Alberta Education (2017) created a Dual Credit Strategy that saw 51 dual credit partnerships created between 2013-2016. The Alberta Dual Credit Framework provided opportunities for students to access dual credit programs, however, it did not specify the demographics of students beyond an explanation that the programs are open to all students (Alberta Education, 2017).

The dual credit program in Alberta provided a larger scope than dual credit offerings in Manitoba. In Manitoba, post-secondary courses were offered to students while they attended high school or an Adult Learning Centre and were counted as both a high school and post-secondary credit (Government of Manitoba, 2017). Their popularity, however, was not widespread (Government of Manitoba, 2017). While there had been expansion of the dual credit offerings in Manitoba, the policies, procedures, and scope of dual credit had not reached the level of Alberta, Ontario, or British Columbia as yet (Alberta Education, 2017; FitzGibbon, 2015; Government of Manitoba, 2017; Ministry of Education, 2020;). In British Columbia, the Ministry of Education had supported dual credit for career-based pathways for over two decades, and since 2015 had expanded the dual credit opportunities they offer (FitzGibbon, 2015). For example, from 2005-2015, the South Island Partnership saw a collaboration between one college



and five school districts in the South of Vancouver Island, British Columbia (Drover-Davidson et al., 2017). Students in grades 10, 11, or 12 were permitted to take courses in ‘Transition Programs’ including communication, business, health, trades, and technology, provided they had completed the pre-requisite courses (Drover-Davidson et al., 2017). Similarly, in Saskatchewan, dual credit courses were recognized as part of the secondary school curriculum, however, post-secondary institutions were free to determine entry criteria which could have included age and pre-existing grades (Government of Saskatchewan, 2018). The requirement of pre-requisite courses or certain grades prior to enrolment into dual credit courses indicated that students must have demonstrated a higher level of academic success prior to dual credit enrolment, something that would not be the case in the Ontario context.

### ***Dual Credit Programs in Ontario, Canada***

The majority of Canadian resources and literature on dual credit programming comes from the province of Ontario (FitzGibbon, 2015). In Ontario, dual credit programs primarily focus on students who are identified as disengaged, otherwise known as “at-risk”. The target demographic for students in the Ontario dual credit program are those that “face significant challenges in completing the requirements for graduation but have the potential to succeed” (Ministry of Education, 2020, p. 5). In 2016, there were 20,265 students enrolled in dual credit programs, with 75% of students identified as disengaged and underachieving, and 10% who had left school and returned (School College Work Initiative [SCWI], 2018). Across Ontario, all 22 provincially funded colleges participate in dual credit programs (SCWI, 2018).

The Ontario dual credit programming is overseen by the School College Work Initiative (SCWI) which, since 1997, funds opportunities for students in secondary education to gain assistance in their transition to college programs (SCWI, 2017). SCWI is a collaboration between

the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Training, Colleges, and Universities. The primary goals of SCWI are to increase completion rates of the Ontario Secondary School Diploma (OSSD) and encourage a seamless transition to post-secondary (SCWI, 2018a). SCWI has a distributed leadership structure. Overseen by Ministry Representatives, there are sixteen Regional Planning Teams (RPTs) of school boards and colleges divided geographically across the province (SCWI, 2020). As explained by participants in this research, and based on the researcher's experience, RPTs are led by a team comprised of representatives from each college and school board and can include multiple levels of leadership from colleges (e.g., deans, associate deans, managers, program staff) and high school representatives (e.g., school board superintendents, school board liaisons, high school monitors). Together, RPTs coordinate resources and funding for their areas and discuss opportunities for shared resources and activities, including the School Within a College (SWAC) Program.

### ***Ontario School Within a College Program Context***

The School Within a College (SWAC) program exists to support “disengaged and underachieving students who have the potential to succeed but are at-risk of not graduating, and students who have left school before graduating” (Ministry of Education, 2020, p. 17). SWAC programs can be delivered in a variety of ways such as programs with students on campus five days a week for one or two semesters, a focus on high school credits and then college credits, or a variety of different organization models of delivery (Ministry of Education, 2020). In all SWAC programs, supervision and support includes “instruction in literacy, learning skills, and work habits. Teachers also assist students in accessing support from the college and the school board as needed” (Ministry of Education, 2020, p. 18). At each college where SWAC programs are delivered there are multiple levels of SWAC delivery staff available which may include

college program staff, college advisors, college faculty/professors, high school teachers, and high school guidance/monitors. Each delivery site is also overseen by school board administrators and college administrators. The majority of students enrolled in SWAC face significant barriers towards successful completion of their Ontario Secondary School Diploma and are selected based on the “Disengaged and Underachieving Students” criteria which can be found in Appendix A (Ministry of Education, 2020).

By removing SWAC students from traditional high school settings, as will be explained in the findings of this research, students are provided with opportunities to complete their high school courses in ways that account for the personal, social, and family characteristics that influence drop-out. In Ontario, as explained by participants in this research, the inclusion of cooperative education can also be a part of a students’ SWAC experience. Cooperative education provides secondary school students with learning opportunities connected to the community outside school (Ministry of Education, 2018). Generally offered to Grade 11 or 12 students, cooperative education allows students to gain secondary school credits through a conjunction of classroom preparation and employment opportunities that are either directly linked to secondary school courses or unique high school credits that are created through a cooperative education placement (Ministry of Education, 2018). For example, if a student is fully employed, they could receive high school credits for their employment (Ministry of Education, 2018).

Beyond the Ministry guidelines and information regarding SWAC, the only resource that was found with research about SWAC was a report conducted in 2014 about the George Brown College SWAC program (Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario, 2014). The purpose of that report was to examine the educational outcomes of the George Brown SWAC program to explore the outreach, transition, and retention strategies used to attract students to SWAC, as well

as to consider whether academic preparation and motivation impacted student outcomes (Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario, 2014). The report found that SWAC was effective for helping students access and transition into postsecondary education, however, more research should be conducted to examine persistence into post-secondary and a system-wide efficacy review of the SWAC program (Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario, 2014). While the George Brown SWAC report provided a justification for one location of SWAC, the research conducted within this study aimed to fulfil the gap indicated in providing a system-wide review with an exploration on the impact on post-secondary persistence. Consideration was given as to whether the mature learning environment SWAC provided to students, including the use of adult learning principles, could have been an indicator as to the likelihood of student transition into post-secondary education.

### **Adult Learning Principles**

Andragogy, or the art and science of how adults learn, has developed over the past fifty years through the creation and articulation of core adult learning principles (Knowles et al., 2012). There are six core adult learning principles which guide the success of adult learning including: a need to know, or students desire to learn; learner self-concept (self-directed); learner's experiences; readiness to learn (life tasks); problem-centred orientation to learning; and an internal motivation to learn (Knowles et al., 2012, p. 141). A student must have the intrinsic desire and need to learn a concept, while also having the ability to self-direct learning in areas of interest (Merriam, 2001). Prior life experiences often lend themselves to enhanced learning opportunities, whereas a student's readiness to learn to advance their life stage can also be important (Knowles et al., 2012). Problem-centric orientation to learning can be related to the need for immediacy in learning to adjust lifestyle for intrinsic, or internal needs and motivations

(Merriam, 2001). Each of the six principles of adult learning has implications for program design and instruction as the underlying belief is that, as individuals mature, they require more of learning facilitation rather than content delivery (Merriam & Bierema, 2014). These six assumptions of adult learning demonstrate that, at the core of adult learning, the learner must be the driving force behind knowledge attainment and the instructors' roles are to facilitate an environment in which learning can take place. Self-directed learning opportunities are often the way in which adult learning takes place.

Self-directed learning is when the learner takes control of the learning in that “they decide what and how something is learned” (Merriam & Bierema, 2014, p. 62). One study found that self-directed learning facilitated self-organization, creative learning, and collaboration, which increased engagement of at-risk youth and fostered additional individual agency and identity development (Hennis et al., 2017). Another study of at-risk students in a correctional treatment facility demonstrated that, when provided with the environment for self-directed learning, including access to technology tools to facilitate learning and creativity, students were able to further develop their perseverance through challenging situations (Hughes, 2016). While self-directed learning could be appropriate for some learners, it was seen as not necessarily ideal for everyone, and so instructors' must be ready and able to customize learning accordingly in order to adapt teaching practices for those not ready, or able, for self-directed learning environments (Merriam & Bierema, 2014).

Knowles et al. (2012) stated that readiness to learn life-tasks and a problem-centred orientation were both principles of adult learning. Life tasks, or transferable knowledge and skills, were determined to be of utmost importance in the 21<sup>st</sup> century (National Research Council, 2012). Danish et al. (2004) defined life skills as “those skills that enable individuals to

succeed in the different environments in which they live, such as school, home, and in their neighbourhood” (p. 40). Gould and Carson (2008) narrowed down the definition to be “promotion of any number of desirable competencies or outcomes in young people” (p. 5). In particular, educators should connect “topics to students’ personal lives and interests, engaging students in collaborative problem solving, and drawing attention to the knowledge and skills students are developing rather than grades or scores” (National Research Council, 2012, p. 10). According to the National Research Council (2012), there are three domains of competence required for describing the 21<sup>st</sup> century required skills: cognitive, intrapersonal, and interpersonal. For the National Research Council (2012), the cognitive domain involves thinking and reasoning, intrapersonal skills involve emotions and feelings, including self-regulation, and interpersonal skills relate to the ability to express information, interpret messages, and respond appropriately (pp. 21-22). While the National Research Council’s (2012) study focused on information gathered from the United States, results from this research and other research indicated that there is a related Canadian perspective. Rubenson et al. (2007) explored the number of participants in adult education and training institutions across Canada and concluded that there were levels of inequity in those participants. In their review of international and Canadian adult education programs, Rubenson et al. (2007) found that there was a need for “importance and urgency of supporting adult basic skills programmes” (p. 75). The study also found that “almost everybody is involved in some form of informal learning” and that “vulnerable groups.... report a substantially lower engagement in many of the informal activities for which data is made available” (p. 76). Informal learning was defined as “learning that results from daily life activities related to work, family, community or leisure” (Rubenson et al., 2007, p. 11).

An example of an alternative adult learning approach for underserved communities was found in the Community Wellness, Empowerment, Leadership and Life skills (CWell) program delivered in Ireland (Quillinan et al., 2019). The two-year community driven program was developed in conjunction with a university and an underserved community to focus on transformative teaching and learning with a focus on mental health, physical health, and personal and professional development (Quillinan et al., 2019). Teaching and learning in the CWell program focused on a student-centred approach, rather than a content-centred approach, and emphasized the importance of culturally responsible pedagogy (Quillinan et al., 2019). Educators in CWell focused on “deliver[ing] learning that was meaningful for the students and situated in the context of life-skills development” (Quillinan et al., 2019, p. 241). After a review of mental health promotion interventions from low and middle-income countries, Barry et al. (2013) determined that, for the most part, school-based interventions and community-based interventions for adolescents that focused on emotional and behavioural well-being showed positive impacts on mental well-being and self-esteem.

As shown in Chapter Four, the findings of this research indicated that in SWAC settings, many of the delivery formats utilize self-directed learning, incorporate informal learning opportunities, embed life skills within learning experiences, and appear to be based on the six principles of adult learning. Life skills such as coping skills, cooking, living independently, health, accessing transportation, among other skills were either provided or desired within SWAC and have been explored more fully in Chapter Four. Historically, across Canada, and in the United States as explained above, dual credit and dual enrolment programs, including SWAC, strove to provide more mature learning environments for targeted high-school students.

Adult learning principles are not without their limitations within a SWAC context. Self-directed learning, while possible for some, is not universally applicable to all learners and all situations (Arghode et al., 2017; Levett-Jones, 2005). Specifically, in SWAC, delivery staff and administrators indicated that students may not be capable of self-directed learning due to their level of maturity or traumatic experiences they may have faced in their past, as described above in the pre-existing student dimensions. There is also critique that adult learning theory does not consider aligning previous conditioning of individuals which could impact adult learning principles (Arghode et al., 2017). For SWAC in particular, as described in the selection criteria for SWAC, students are coming from traditional secondary school institutions where pre-existing conditioning may impact the students' ability to adapt to a more mature learning environment. It has also been argued that "Andragogy works best in practice when it is adapted to fit the uniqueness of the learners and the learning institution" (De Vito, 2009, p.8). Based on this researcher's experience, within a SWAC context, the variety of learners, as well as the differences in educational requirements between a secondary school and college level, creates a situation where the uniqueness of each student may make it challenging for the program's collective success. As discussed in Chapter Five, creating a sense of community within SWAC can help decrease the limitations associated with adult learning principles.

### **Sense of Community**

For many researchers, "a sense of community is central to student engagement and satisfaction" (Berry, 2019). A sense of community is beneficial to students for both academic and social reasons (Berry, 2019). Those experiencing strong classroom communities have feelings of connectedness and they possess a shared faith that members' educational needs will be met through their commitment to shared learning goals (Berry, 2019). Members must have



strong feelings of community, that is, they must have a motivated and responsible sense of belonging and believe that active participation in the community will satisfy their needs (Rovai, 2002, pp. 198-199).

Community building can also be seen as creating a sense of belonging both for students and for those supporting the students. Generally speaking, “sense of belonging denotes a feeling of relatedness or connection to others...[a] sense of being accepted, valued, included, and encouraged by others in the academic classroom setting and of feeling oneself to be an important part of the life and activity of the class” (Booker, 2016, p. 218). Especially for those from oppressed or racialized groups, community cultural wealth can support the understanding of unique strengths and perspectives of students in the classroom (Liou et al., 2016). Community cultural wealth:

describes the kinds of cultural capital that students of colour possess by virtue of their experiences within their culture and ways of knowing at home. These experiences are forms of capital that teachers and mentors can draw upon for empowerment. (Liou et al., 2016, p. 111)

Use of community cultural wealth can support high school students to strive towards both their short-term and long-term goals as they navigate the educational institution, including norms and policies (Liou et al., 2016).

Petrillo et al. (2016) determined there are five dimensions of a classroom’s sense of community: sense of belonging and emotional connection with peers; satisfaction of needs and opportunities for involvement; support and emotional connection in the community; support by peers; and opportunities for influence. As will be discussed within the Longitudinal Model of Dropout, the Input-Environment-Output model, and The Five Senses of Success, each of the five

dimensions of Petrillo and his associates' (2016) classroom sense of community can directly lead to student success and persistence when implemented within a post-secondary education (PSE) setting.

It is not just students who should have a sense of community but that all members of strong classroom communities have feelings of connectedness. They have duties and obligations to each other and to the school and they possess a shared faith that members' educational needs will be met through their commitment to shared learning goals (Rovai, 2002, p.199).

The sense of community in a classroom is comprised of: "(a) the feelings of learning community members regarding the degree to which they share group norms and values and (b) the extent to which their educational goals and expectations are satisfied by group membership" (Petrillo et al., 2016, p. 400). Teachers and staff members who provide students support require a sense of community and sense of belonging to better connect with students and staff they are assisting, and to avoid feelings of isolation and disconnection (Eib & Miller, 2006). As Eib and Miller (2006) propose:

Simply working in the proximity of others does not ensure a motivating environment that enhances professional collegiality. All educational institutions and the sub-groups that operate within them should attend to the development of dynamic and nurturing interactions among faculty that support excellence in instruction and the scholarship of teaching. (p. 1)

Eib and Miller (2006) promote the use of faculty development through a community of learning, which can reduce feelings of isolation, improve teaching, and build organizational capacity.

Communities of learning, or communities of practice, are a concept that was put forward by Wenger (1998, 2003, 2011) as a way to improve collective learning. According to Wenger (2011), “Communities of practice are groups of people who share a concern or a passion for something they do and learn how to do it better as they interact regularly” (p.1). Coming together as practitioners in their field allows members to work together to learn and improve their practice (Wenger, 2011). By focussing on supporting members, sharing knowledge, and building a sense of belonging amongst members, the concept of a community of practice may be beneficial (Li et al., 2009). Communities of practice have been shown to be effective in improving the teaching, research activities, interaction among members, and in creating a culture within a teacher group that is “positive, sharing encouraging, and harmonious” (Kong, 2018, p. 162). The creation of effective communities of practice can lead to strong organizational success, however, as discussed in Chapter Six below, within a SWAC context, the creation of communities of practice may need to be spearheaded by those in leadership positions. What follows next is an exploration of the variety of leadership approaches used within a SWAC context.

### **Leadership Approaches**

Highlighted by this research and discussed in Chapters Four and Five, at all levels of the School College Work Initiative (SCWI) hierarchy, effective leadership practices was required to ensure smooth program delivery. It has been argued that leadership practices and approaches can have a direct impact on student outcomes in educational settings (Robinson et al., 2008; Waters et al., 2003). For the purpose of this study, instructional, transactional/transformational, authentic, servant, and inclusive leadership approaches were explored, followed by an explanation as to why these specific approaches were selected and the leadership implications for

SWAC. First, instructional leadership was presented as, at all levels of the SWAC leadership structure, instructional leadership practices were utilized.

### ***Instructional Leadership***

Instructional leadership, once relegated to the role of the school principal in K-12 education, has expanded considerably since the 1980s (Hallinger, 2003). Hallinger (2003) proposed three dimensions of instructional leadership including “defining the school’s mission, managing the instructional program, and promoting positive school-learning climate” (p. 332). Definition of the school’s mission, historically associated with the role of the principal, involved working with staff to create clear, measurable goals focused on the academic progress of students (Hallinger, 2003). In the SWAC context, as discussed in Chapter Four below, the focus and process used at each delivery site varied in development, and was created by a combination of delivery staff (including teachers and advisors), administrators, and ministry representatives. Managing the instructional program involved the coordination and control of the instruction and curriculum and included the leader being involved in the school’s instructional development (Hallinger, 2003). In the SWAC context, the instructional program management and coordination involved each regional planning team and delivery site in coordinating the method, delivery format, structure, and supports provided to students in each area. It has been noted that promoting positive school-learning climates should include protecting instructor time, professional development, incentives for teachers, and continuous improvement (Hallinger, 2003). Creating a culture of learning and support at each delivery site, within each regional planning team, and across Ontario for SWAC delivery staff and administrators would be considered creating a culture of learning and support, and as showcased in Chapter Six was one of the final recommendations of this research.

Overall, instructional leadership has been referred to as it pertains to teaching and learning, but also all other functions that contribute to learning, including manager-type behaviours (Marks & Printy, 2003). Instructional leadership has evolved from focusing only on secondary school principals, to now include principals and their designees, those in positions of responsibility, and within shared instructional leadership systems (Robinson et al., 2008).

Shared instructional leadership involves “the active collaboration of principal and teachers on curriculum, instruction, and assessment” (Marks & Printy, 2003, p. 371). Teachers and staff participate in a shared approach whereby teachers “assume leadership responsibility when they interact with other adults in the school community around school reform efforts, encourage others to improve their professional practice, or learn together with their school colleagues” (Marks & Printy, 2003, p. 374). Within the SWAC context, leadership is shared amongst all teachers, administrators, and staff involved in program delivery. Principals may or may not be directly involved in the leadership of SWAC, and if they are involved, that leadership is shared with the college administrators, and ministry representatives also associated with the SWAC program as discussed in Chapter Four. Marks and Printy (2003), in the findings on their study on shared leadership, suggest that shared leadership promotes and improves school performance. While the Marks and Printy (2003) study supports shared leadership, unfortunately, the majority of instructional leadership literature retains a focus on the role of the principal and there is a lack of cohesion in research on instructional leadership that involves multiple stakeholders outside of principals (Neumerski, 2012). Involving multiple stakeholders and exploring leadership outside of a principle may be a lack in instructional leadership literature, however, other forms of leadership such as transformational leadership, does take into consideration multiple stakeholders.

### ***Transactional and Transformational Leadership***

Transactional leadership consists of relationships that are based on contingencies, or rewards, based on behaviour, and typically are conducted as transactions or exchanges between leader and follower (Judge & Piccolo, 2004). Based on both positive and negative rewards or punishments, transactional leadership may fail if rewards are inadequate, punishments are too severe, conflicts arise between leader and follower, or the group, rather than an individual, are punished or rewarded (Bass, 1990). In the SWAC context, participants of this research indicated that transactional relationships could present themselves in the funding metrics for program success. SWAC funding could be impacted by successful outcomes, with the reward of funding based on numbers of students progressing, or completing the program. Certain delivery staff or administrators shared that some staff view the student experience as transactional, with rewards and punishments for program sustainability dependent on the student behaviour. Rather than working towards the transformation of students, according to some participants of this research, some delivery staff may instead focus on getting students in and out of the program as quickly as possible. There is the potential that delivery staff may knowingly, or unknowingly, use a transactional approach with students. Staff could adjust their support of students using a rewards/punishments approach whereby students are rewarded for their positive behaviour (e.g., attendance, submitting assignments on time) with additional support and encouragement. Similarly, students may be punished for negative behaviour (e.g., absences, lack of communication, missing assignments), with a lack of advocacy or focus on the students' internal motivations, and long-term goals.

Where transactional leadership focuses on the give and take of resources or supports, transformational leadership instead moves beyond short-term goals and instead focuses on

internal motivators and long-term needs of followers' (Judge & Piccolo, 2004, p. 755). There are four components of transformational leadership which include "charisma or idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration" (Judge & Piccolo, 2004, p. 755). Charisma is the ways in which the leader behaves that cause the followers to identify with the leader, whereas inspirational motivation is how appealing and inspiring a leader is to followers (Judge & Piccolo, 2004). Intellectual stimulation is how much a leader challenges assumptions, takes risks, and solicits followers' ideas, whereas individualized consideration is how much a leader focuses on each follower's needs and acts as coach or mentor (Judge & Piccolo, 2004). In the SWAC context, delivery staff and administrator participants in this research indicated that they work towards supporting students in their personal and academic transformation from secondary school students into post-secondary education or employment through positive relationships with students.

The work of Kouzes and Posner (2019) primarily focuses on encouraging relationships with followers as the key to transformational leadership, with their theory being based on five foundations of leadership. The first foundation of leadership, "model the way", encourages leaders to demonstrate the behaviour that they expect, while the second foundation, "inspire a shared vision", suggests that leaders engage their followers in shared goals and visions for future actions (Kouzes & Posner, 2019). The third foundation, "challenge the process", fosters the idea of challenging routine processes and to take risks to achieve goals (Kouzes & Posner, 2019). The two final foundations, "enable others to act" and "encourage the heart", suggest that leaders ensure their followers have the support and resources needed to succeed and are recognized for their actions through celebrations of victories (Kouzes & Posner, 2019).

Through applied leadership practices, Kouzes and Posner (2019) recommend leaders encourage the transformation in others by building relationships and a foundation of trust with their constituents. Potentially criticized for commercialization and the profitability associated with their work, Kouzes and Posner's (2019) application of transformational leadership partially connects to some aspects of authentic leadership in the first practice, that is, "model the way". While the authors contest that leaders must undergo self-development and exploration, the concept, "model the way", does not necessarily mean working in an authentic manner and could instead be interpreted as *acting* in the best interest of the organization, not necessarily one's authentic self. Through authentic leadership there is an opportunity for showcasing one's true beliefs and nature in supporting others.

### ***Authentic Leadership***

Argued as the foundation for all positive leadership approaches, authentic leadership is when "leaders demonstrate a passion for their purpose, practice their values consistently, and lead with their hearts as well as their heads" (George et al., 2007, p.129). Authentic leaders are those who are extremely self-aware and who inspire that self-awareness in followers and constituents (Avolio & Gardner, 2005). Authentic leadership is included in this study as the passion those who work within SWAC bring to their roles was often evident throughout this research process, as is the belief in the purpose of the program, with a strong focus on the need to support students extensively through the roles of SWAC staff.

Authenticity, according to Avolio and Gardner (2005), is connected with Maslow's top hierarchical need of self-actualization. The concept of an authentic leader goes beyond self-actualization and into the appearance to followers of one who is confident, hopeful, optimistic, resilient, and has high moral fibre (Avolio & Gardner, 2005). The concern with the definition and



construct presented by Avolio and Gardner (2005) is the difficulty in measuring a leader's "authenticity".

Walumbwa et al. (2007) attempted to overcome the difficulty of measuring a leader's authenticity by conducting a large-scale study of authentic leadership practices and supervisor performance. Samples were taken from China, Kenya, and the United States. Based on results, there was a positive connection between leaders who demonstrated practices associated with authentic leadership and how supervisors were rated on their performance (Walumbwa et al., 2007). Followers' perceptions of a leader's authenticity directly related to satisfaction and performance as well as organizational climate (Walumbwa et al., 2007). Rego et al. (2012) also evaluated the effects of authentic leadership on employees and ascertained that authentic leadership helped encourage an employee's creativity which, in turn, helped the organization stay competitive. It has been suggested that, in order to become authentic leaders, individuals must reflect and discover their full authentic self through critical self-evaluation, which can be taught and encouraged in others (George et al., 2007).

Some have questioned whether self-actualization, and thus your authentic self, can ever be achieved. Kiel (1999) suggested that the triangular nature of Maslow's hierarchy was outdated and that one could never achieve full self-actualization. Rather, since a person continuously developed through lifelong learning, self-actualization continuously evolved as the individual evolved (Kiel, 1999). There are also those who suggested that developing one's authentic self poses significant challenges that must be considered before promoting the implementation of an authentic leadership training or development process. Cooper et al. (2005) identified four potential issues with any authentic leadership development program including:

1. Ensuring that the program, itself, is genuine;

2. Determining how “trigger events” can be replicated during training;
3. Deciding whether ethical decision-making can be taught; and (if these first three issues can be addressed)
4. Determining who should participate in authentic leadership training. (p. 483)

As an authentic leadership approach may not be ideally suited to all of those staff and administrators supporting SWAC programs, it was necessary to consider other leadership approaches which incorporated a focus on passion for purpose. Servant leadership included passion for purpose and support of others while not requiring an in-depth process of first developing one’s authentic self.

### ***Servant leadership***

Greenleaf (2016) first used the term *servant leadership* explaining,

A servant-leader focuses primarily on the growth and well-being of people and the communities to which they belong ... the servant-leader shares power, puts the needs of others first and helps people develop and perform as highly as possible. (para. 3)

Servant leadership “is demonstrated by empowering and developing people; by expressing humility, authenticity, interpersonal acceptance and stewardship; and by providing direction” (van Dierendonck, 2011, p. 1254). Servant leadership is unique from other leadership approaches in the sense of its “philanthropic characteristics, leadership intent-and focus, and multi-dimensional leadership attributes” (Coetzer et al., 2017, p. 2). Within servant leadership, the servant leader does not focus on organizational objectives, but instead focuses on his or her followers; focusing not on results, rather the service itself (Russell et al., 2004). Criticized for its lack of theoretical structure and tangible operationalizing concepts and principles, servant leadership increases followers’ well-being, team level effectiveness, and is found have cross-

cultural applicability (Parris & Welty Peachey, 2013). Within a SWAC context, support for students classified as at-risk can often take on the perspective of service towards others.

Focusing on the philanthropic support of students in SWAC, many of participants of this research appear to take on a servant leadership perspective. Servant leadership's focus on providing opportunities for individuals to feel empowered has some commonalities with the practices of inclusive leadership.

### ***Inclusive Leadership***

Inclusive leadership was identified in response to the growing need to “identify, emphasize and integrate an awareness of diversity with its value as a potential resource within the practice of educational management” (Rayner, 2009, p. 440). Inclusive leadership focuses on creating environments in which individuals are not excluded based on diversity in race, social class, ethnicity, religion, gender, and ability (Kugelmass, 2003). Inclusive leadership involves a number of practices including:

Advocating for inclusion, educating participants, developing critical consciousness, nurturing dialogue, emphasizing student learning and classroom practice, adopting inclusive decision and policymaking strategies, and incorporating whole school approaches. (Ryan, 2006, p. 9)

Rayner (2009) states that inclusive leadership is a form of distributed leadership whereby every member of the learning community is involved in “learning leadership” (p. 439). At its core, inclusive leaders aim to “facilitate the transforming and transformative effect of learning in the work of making provision for the most vulnerable in the learning community” (Rayner, 2009, p. 445). Based on Rayner's (2009) definition of inclusive leadership, the process assumes that decision making in a student's educational journey is an inclusive, shared approach. In the

SWAC context, based on the researcher's experience, the students' educational journey may not necessarily include shared decision making as students have certain requirements to complete based on the Ontario Secondary School Diploma (OSSD). The principles of inclusive leadership can be nurtured in a SWAC delivery site in terms of the whole program, rather than whole school, approach to nurturing dialogue, emphasizing student learning, and inclusive approaches. As will be explored in the Chapter Four, many teachers in SWAC classrooms appear to be implementing an inclusive leadership approach in their conversations and teaching approaches with students. Throughout this research, within the SWAC program a variety of leadership applications became evident.

### **SWAC Leadership Applications**

As indicated above, the leadership practices and approaches taken by all members of SCWI in their implementation of the SWAC program can have a direct impact on student outcomes (Robinson et al., 2008; Waters et al., 2003). Instructional leadership as explored by Hallinger (2003) has moved beyond only the principal, and as shown in the results of this research in SWAC, instructional leadership is utilized by school board administrators and college administrators in their oversight of the program. As experienced by the researcher, each regional planning team (RPT) must clearly articulate the coordination and control of the design of the instructional program, whereas the delivery staff and faculty at each learning site work together to create a culture of learning and support (Hallinger, 2003; Marks & Printy, 2003). Creating an impactful learning environment for students, the focus of instructional leadership, is mirrored in the purpose of the SWAC program in developing learning environments that support student development and success. In Chapter Six, it is explained that college and school board delivery

staff and administrators must collaborate on assessment, curriculum delivery and support, and instructional strategies, emphasizing the core of instructional leadership (Marks & Printy, 2003).

The work conducted by RPTs involves an integrated approach where administrators at the colleges work closely with school board and ministry representatives ranging in position from Dean or Superintendent, to high school teacher or college program support staff. Together, all levels of the SWAC hierarchy define and create the mission of SWAC, manage the program, and promote a positive learning environment (Hallinger, 2003). While instructional leadership is evident in the coordination and delivery of SWAC programs, aspects of transactional leadership are evident in funding models reliant on student outcomes.

In a government funded environment, outcomes and targets are used to determine funding allocations, which could lead to a transactional nature of program delivery. Similarly, there may be delivery staff who interact with students and college/school board partners in a transactional manner. As described above, student behaviour, both positive and negative, could impact how a student is supported within SWAC, leading to a more transactional nature. With the requirement of successful outcomes for funding, the focus may shift the short-term goal of getting students through the program quickly, rather than focusing on the internal motivations and needs of students themselves.

Utilizing a transformational leadership approach, rather than transactional, could lead to improved relationships between delivery staff and students. Interactions between students and delivery staff could also be improved by a strong foundation of trust, inspiration, and leading by example, especially as the students of SWAC are identified as at-risk (Kouzes & Posner, 2019). Rather than focusing on a rewards/punishment model with students, delivery staff instead could use charisma, inspirational motivation, individualized considerations for students, and

intellectual stimulation for student learning (Judge & Piccolo, 2004). Delivery staff and regional planning teams must work together to build a foundation of trust through relationships with school boards, colleges, and the ministry (Kouzes & Posner, 2019).

Authentic leadership is particularly appropriate for at-risk or marginalized individuals. In reference to developing leadership experiences for marginalized youth, MacNeil (2006) stated: “within a societal context where youth are marginalized and where adults hold the power, then we are talking about a critical role for adults in creating those authentic and meaningful roles” (p. 34). Creating trusting, credible, relationships with youth who may not have had positive experiences in learning environments, is crucial. Without trust in the system, teachers, and staff supporting students, there is possible that there is less likelihood that the students will commit to pursuing their personal goals. If SWAC delivery staff create an environment utilizing authentic leadership approaches, caution and consideration should be given to ensuring that the program itself is authentic, supports are in place to assist students should they experience trigger events, there are methods for teaching ethical decision making, and the students in SWAC are able and ready to handle an authentic leadership development approach (Cooper et al., 2005). In working within the SWAC context, authenticity may be an important part of program delivery for the greater good of the program and students. This could similarly be supported by a servant leadership approach.

Within the results of this research, it became evident that many of those leading, coordinating, and delivering SWAC programs do so from a servant leadership approach. Focusing on the needs of the SWAC students and the inclusive nature of the program highlights the focus on ensuring students, who may be marginalized in other environments, are provided with a space where they can complete their education. Both servant and inclusive leadership

approaches could be beneficial to the students within the SWAC program, as the Ontario SWAC program targets some of the most vulnerable and at-risk students within the high school system in order to help increase student success and persistence into post-secondary.

As evident by the variety of leadership theories and approaches explained above which are evident in SWAC programs, embracing multiple leadership theories and approaches is necessary in the complex SWAC environment. Each leadership approach, instructional, transactional, transformational, authentic, servant, and inclusive, could have both positive and negative implications in the practices of SWAC. Instructional leadership, while focused on creating a strong learning environment for students, if used independently could create an environment that is not an authentic environment for some of those leading programs. Transactional leadership approaches may be needed by RPTs and Ministry Representatives to ensure programs are effectively delivering programs and that funding allocations are appropriately distributed. However, relying solely on transactional interactions could cause delivery staff or students to lose motivation. Transformational leadership approaches can create environments where followers, such as students or staff, connect with the leader and are intellectually motivated, however, if the leader's charisma is considered inauthentic, there may be a lack of trust. Authentic leadership approaches used by teachers and delivery staff can create an environment which is hopeful, optimistic, and where the leader is perceived as true to themselves. However, presenting a true authentic self can be difficult to achieve and the development needed by staff to discover their authentic selves could be challenging. While servant leadership could be used by all levels of the SCWI hierarchy to serve students by focusing on the growth and well-being of others, without a focus on organizational objectives and results, funding for the program could be impacted. Inclusive leadership practices such as

advocacy, educational, inclusive decision making, and creating learning environments for the most vulnerable of a learning community, can be necessary for students marginalized or at-risk who participate in SWAC. However, with the regulations and requirements of the Ontario Secondary School Diploma and college entry requirements, there is not an option for shared decision making around certain learning and program requirements.

In the conceptual framework of this research, (see Figure 2 in Chapter 1), leadership approaches are but one component of the educational community context and SWAC program context. Now that leadership approaches and their influence on the SWAC program have been explored, the support for new employees who enter the program will be presented.

### **Employee Onboarding**

Employee onboarding, or the hiring, orientation, and training of new staff or administrators, is integral to long-term satisfaction and decreases turnover. (Hillman, 2020) Hillman (2010) explains that “onboarding involves a special, conscious effort to make a new employee quickly become a productive member of the organization, laying a solid foundation for a long-term relationship” (p. 1). Zink and Curran (2018) further explain that staff onboarding is “characterized by a series of events... that helps newcomers understand how to be successful in their day-to-day job and how their work contributes to the overall organization” (p. 112). Organizations that put an emphasis on a strong employee onboarding process can improve new hire retention by 82% as opposed to those companies with weak onboarding programs (Laurano, 2015). In particular, roles that involve high human capital to deliver services, where service effectiveness is dependent on relationships between clients and staff, may face high turnover (Selden & Sowa, 2015). Selden and Sowa (2015) determine that “staffing practices of onboarding and leadership succession have significant, negative effects on voluntary turnover”



(p. 195). Skill enhancement, including staffing and training practices, and the working environment, including quality of relationships between manager and co-workers, can have significant impact on turnover (Selden & Sowa, 2015). Selden and Sowa (2015) emphasize that:

Especially in human service non-profits, where employees may experience a significant amount of job stress due to the nature of their work, managers should invest the time in monitoring and managing employee relations to retain their high-quality employees.

(p. 196)

While they are not non-profit organizations, educational programs supporting at-risk youth exhibit many of the same attributes of human service non-profits, and thus effective onboarding and ongoing relationships with staff, teachers, and administrators could support retention.

There are a variety of approaches that can assist with the effective onboarding of new staff to any organization. There is often a lack of formal succession planning in schools and higher education, so exploration of formal onboarding and succession planning should be considered by schools (Campbell, 2019). Onboarding for new employees is essential, but just as important as easing the transition of new employees to a team, existing employees also may need support with acclimatization and socialization of new members (Snyder & Crane, 2016). Eisner (2015) promoted the use of faculty mentorship as a successful onboarding tool that can be effective when “those collectively engaged in shared outcomes collaboratively conceive, launch, participate in and enliven in a win-win model they feel ownership of and actively support” (p. 18). In particular, Eisner (2015), in a review of a faculty mentorship program in the United States, finds that a strong onboarding mentoring program is most effective when there is a “formal structure, strong participation, mentor paired with mentee from a different department, mentor of rank senior to mentee, and group meetings for all participants” (p. 17). In a study on

school principal succession and retention, Cieminski (2018), states “educational leadership should leverage current supports for incoming principals such as induction, mentoring, and transition plans as well as provide continued professional development and instructional leadership support” (p. 35). To ensure long term success of school principals, Cieminski (2018) suggests leaders apply the following strategies:

1. Be mindful of the workload to keep the work engaging and meaningful;
2. Provide differentiated support, especially for newer administrators;
3. Foster a collaborative culture among principals; and
4. Build and maintain supportive relationships between principals and their supervisors at the district level (p. 36)

Since the SWAC program does not fall into a traditional instructional leadership category, the strategies suggested above for ensuring long-term administrator and principal success could be applied in the context of administrator onboarding to SWAC programs. Consistent and ongoing program evaluation for both onboarding and the SWAC program itself requires consideration.

### **Program Evaluation**

Program evaluation in an educational context, “consists of those activities undertaken to judge the worth or utility of a program (or alternative programs) in improving some specified aspect of an educational system” (Worthen, 1990, p. 42). Program evaluations, according to Balmer et al. (2020), have one of two purposes in using data collected through evaluation, the information is used to either “(1) determine the overall value or worth of an education program (summative judgements of a program) or (2) plan program improvement (formative improvements to a program, project, or activity)” (p. 346). In the SWAC context as discussed in

Chapter Four, program evaluation of the SWAC program could be used to both determine the value or success of the entire program, and to determine how to improve the program itself.

There are three common types of program evaluations: needs assessment, curriculum mapping, and program review (Yale, 2021). Needs assessments focus on whether the program achieves desired outcomes based on the needs of an audience, whereas curriculum mapping identifies if the objectives of a program are met through courses and education provided (Yale, 2021). Program reviews are regularly scheduled reviews of a program to determine how it has changed over time and whether the program still meets the original goals (Yale, 2021). The focus of program evaluations over time has transitioned to focus on formative processes that can help improve programs (Hogan, 2007).

When conducting a program evaluation consideration must be given as to what specifically will be evaluated, the purpose of the evaluation, what type of information will be gathered, the process of collecting information, the analysis of information, and the use of any information gathered in an evaluation (Taylor-Powell et al., 1996). Similar to the process undertaken when conducting research, careful care and consideration must be taken at each step of a program evaluation process to ensure information gathered achieves the goals of an evaluation (Yale, 2021).

Program evaluation and assessment is important, especially in higher education, as “institutions of Higher Education aiming to remain relevant in a rapidly changing world need to evaluate outcomes of their work and use the results of such evaluation in the process of continuous readjustment of their programs” (Praslova, 2010, p. 218). Within SWAC there does not appear to currently exist a schedule for in-depth program evaluation. In order to determine

whether the SWAC educational context provides students' the experiences they require to ensure persistence, regular program evaluation would be ideal.

### **Student Experiences**

As described above in the conceptual framework of this research, the concept of student experiences encompasses the classroom experience, curricular delivery, and student supports. Classroom experience and curricular delivery encompasses the academic considerations of SWAC including the structure and timing of learning, as well as the level of academic rigour within curricular delivery. Student supports involves the level of support provided to students based on pre-existing student dimensions and factors students exhibit including, but not limited to, the type of advising students receive. An overview of the classroom experience and curricular delivery will first be presented, followed by an in-depth overview of student supports.

#### **Classroom Experience and Curricular Delivery**

The classroom experience and curricular delivery of SWAC programs utilize components of social cognitive theory and adult learning principles. The benefits and limitations of adult learning principles and social cognitive theory have been described in depth above, as have the applications of each to SWAC programming. In the context of classroom experience and curricular delivery, adult learning principles and social cognitive theory can most readily be visible in the structure and timing of SWAC.

#### ***Structure & Timing***

The structure and format of course delivery for SWAC programs, as described above within the educational context, varies between programs. To remind readers, programs are structured to allow for students to complete their high school courses in a way that accounts for the personal, social, and family characteristics of the student. SWAC programs are structured to

be delivered at various times of the day (e.g., morning, afternoon, evening), with varying lengths of completion (e.g., on semester, two semesters). The structure of curricular delivery varies between programs and can include traditional course instruction/delivery, credit recovery, or cooperative learning opportunities. As explained above, the use of self-directed learning, problem-centred learning, and embedding life skills into the structure and timing of SWAC programs demonstrate the application of adult learning principles (Knowles et al., 2012).

In alignment with social cognitive theory, students' levels of personal agency determine the length and format of their instruction, with teachers and staff working collectively and through proxy agency to support student learning (Bandura, 2001). Working collectively with students, staff, teachers, and administrators who support SWAC programs aim to create learning environments that promote student success. In reviewing the findings of the information gathered through this research, the concept of academic rigour in high school courses was raised as a consideration for student post-secondary success.

### ***Academic Rigour***

High school academic rigour can be an important factor in college success (Wyatt et al., 2011). The concept of academic rigour can be challenging to define as there are conflicting definitions as to what is meant by the term (Wyse & Soneral, 2017). According to Wyse and Soneral (2017), academic rigour is defined as “learning meaningful content with higher-order thinking, at the appropriate level of expectation in a given context leading to ownership of ones’ learning” (p. 2). Pathways to College, a group in the United States focused on supporting underrepresented groups in post-secondary stated that, “rigorous academic preparation is essential for today’s young people to meet the demands of 21<sup>st</sup> century life and careers” (Savitz-

Romer et al., 2009, p. 5). In order to prepare students for future success, academic rigour, according to Pathways to College, is achieved through:

- Vertical alignment of courses: ensuring course completion signifies student mastery of course material;
- Curriculum content: ensuring specific courses such as English and math are taught throughout high school;
- Acquiring skills and knowledge: mastery of certain subjects and skills, knowledge and habits that can lead to college success;
- Assessment: constructive and consistent feedback is provided that allows students and teachers to accurately monitor progress; and
- Requiring challenging courses: hold students to high standards rather than allowing some students to progress without mastering difficult academic work. (Savitz-Romer et al., 2009, pp. 5-6)

Through the provision of both academic and social supports throughout the high school experience, but most importantly through the final year of high school, educational institutions can ensure academic rigour while providing students the skills and knowledge needed for college success (Savitz-Romer et al., 2009).

Wyatt et al. (2011) stated that “the academic rigour of high school course work has been found to be inversely related to remediation rates and positively related to four-year college graduation rates” (p. 1). Campbell and associates (2018), on the other hand, state that the difficulty level or rigour of college academics is not related to academic achievement, but instead defines rigour as “deep inquiry-based and equity-based learning that sufficiently challenges and encourages all students to achieve their full potential including both academic and broader

development” (Campbell et al., 2018, p. 12). Campbell et al. (2018) discuss the need to look holistically at student development that expands the concept of rigour to include development of self and providing supports to students throughout their education. The inclusion of life skill development within educational settings can support a holistic student experience.

### ***Life Skills***

Life skills, or life tasks, as explored above, are one of the six principles of adult learning, which explores a student’s readiness to learn transferable skills (Knowles et al., 2012). To remind readers of the definition, Danish et al. (2004) defined life skills as “those skills that enable individuals to succeed in the different environments in which they live, such as school, home, and in their neighbourhood” (p. 40). As stated above, the National Research Council (2012) suggested three areas for skill development: cognitive, intrapersonal, and interpersonal. Examples of cognitive skills to be developed could include thinking and reasoning, which within a SWAC context could involve supporting students in career decision making, budgeting, grocery shopping, or use of public transportation. Intrapersonal skills, such as examination of feelings and self-regulating behaviour within a SWAC context, could involve development of coping, anger management, or emotional regulation skills. Interpersonal skills, such as expressing information, interpreting messages, and responding appropriately, within the SWAC context could involve the ability to work with staff through booking appointments, seeking and obtaining support from advisors, or self-advocating with community resources. As described above by Rubenson et al. (2007), the importance of including basic skills within educational programs is essential for student success in a Canadian context. As part of the SWAC educational context, life skills development can be embedded within the formal learning

environment created by teachers and faculty, but can also be embedded into the supports those students receive.

## **Student Supports**

The underlying factors that make students more likely to drop out present significant implications for supporting these students. Based on the findings of Fortin et al. (2006), students are affected by risk factors very differently, meaning that school dropout prevention program effectiveness relies upon the program's ability to target the specific needs of the students concerned. By developing early warning systems which help identify early indicators for drop out, it has been shown that schools will be more likely to identify the specific needs of students and address concerns early, before a student leaves the system (Kennelly & Monrad, 2007).

Knesting (2008) demonstrated that schools and school systems themselves can positively or negatively influence students' abilities to persist through positive engagement with teachers and other members of the school system. Fredericks et al. (2004) defined three levels of engagement that can impact a student's likelihood of persistence, including:

- Behavioural engagement – involvement in academic, social, or extracurricular activities is crucial for achieving positive academic outcomes;
- Emotional engagement – encompasses positive and negative reactions to teachers, classmates, academics, and school, and is presumed to create ties to an institution; and,
- Cognitive engagement – incorporates thoughtfulness and willingness to exert the effort necessary to comprehend complete ideas. (p. 60)

Many interventions in high schools have focused on behavioural, emotional, and cognitive engagement activities as a route to increased retention in students (Fredericks et al., 2004). While students themselves control many levels of engagement, teachers and staff can also make a



difference. According to interviews conducted by Knesting-Lund et al. (2015) with recent high school dropouts, students described their own behaviour as impeding their success, however, they also acknowledged that how valued they felt at school, and how supportive teachers were perceived to be, impacted their willingness to attend or complete their education. Both students and teachers articulated the importance of teacher support, including the teacher's ability to create caring, well-structured learning environments, as having a direct impact on the level of engagement by the student (Klem & Connell, 2004).

For Canadian Indigenous youth, in particular, interactions with school staff were “particularly influential to the development and school success of students (Whitley, 2014, p. 165). Teachers in a study conducted by Whitley (2014) understood the need to make space for students to celebrate their successes in order to provide a greater sense of self-worth. The time spent on counselling and connecting with students' emotional and psychological needs was seen as important (Whitley, 2014, pp. 168-169). In Reimer's (2014) doctoral research of teachers in Manitoba, it was found that teachers tended to creatively strive to connect with students and colleagues to support students at-risk of dropout, but that school systems would benefit from adjusting policies and procedures through input from teachers.

Teachers' views on their relationships with students may be skewed to lessen the impact of the student-teacher relationship and thus impact student success (Nairz-Wirth & Feldmann, 2017). In a study of 60 Austrian teachers, Nairz-Wirth and Feldmann (2017) stated that while the relevance of teacher-student relationships had not been fully researched, in their study the teachers they interviewed attributed high school dropout to personal and family factors while ignoring the school-related causes that could impact dropout. For the teachers interviewed, “blame [for dropout] is attributed to parents, students, and, more rarely, society at large...the

relevance of the teacher-student relationship and its importance in the context of school disengagement and dropout is thus separated from the core work of teaching” (Nairz-Wirth & Feldmann, 2017, p. 132). On the other hand, Holloway and Salinitri (2010) in their field research with teacher candidates, student success teachers, and at-risk students, found that when a mentoring relationship between students and teachers was utilized, human relations and attendance in students improved. Teacher candidates who engaged with at-risk students in their field experience that focused on praxis and social justice, felt of their relationship with students “a mutual respect and appreciation for the idea that they could learn from each other” (Holloway & Salinitri, 2010, p. 399). Holloway and Salinitri (2010) concluded that teacher candidates who experienced a more mentorship and experiential learning experience during their initial teacher training, built capacity to “think critically about the institutional systems of power that hinder or support-at-risk students” and that “teacher candidates and at-risk students are moving toward redefining success in holistic terms” (p. 399). New research also suggests, in particular with the health and wellness concerns associated with the COVID-19 pandemic, that there may be benefit from training teachers as health promoters to deal with the health and wellness needs of students and increase the prevention of high-risk behaviours (Pulimeno et al., 2020). Pulimeno et al. (2020) argued that teacher training should include training teachers to handle student socio-emotional and mental problems, especially since children and adolescence are facing new and challenging health threats, and that the training should include promoting healthy behaviours, cognitive development, and the access to fully trained health professionals. Mental health training in particular was indicated as something that was needed by teachers (Kratt, 2018). While curricular frameworks that embed mental health and wellness were seen as positive,

teachers in Kratt's (2018) study indicated a desire for training focused on "explicit instruction on practical strategies rather than a curriculum framework" (p. 32).

For students who lack caring, well-structured learning environments within their secondary schools, it may be necessary to find alternative locations and environments within which students may study more effectively to improve graduation outcomes and thus promote their persistence into post-secondary education. Dual credit or dual enrolment programs are one alternative environment that can impact student persistence. Inclusion of advising practices could also be an opportunity for exploration.

### ***Advising***

The term advising can be ambiguous and is often confused with the related term counselling. For the purpose of this study, advising or advisement can be defined as:

a collaborative process in which advisors help students to develop and realize their educational, career, and personal goals. At its most fundamental level, advising is informational and explanatory and progresses through developmental and mentoring phases. (Kuhn et al., 2006, p. 24)

Developmental and mentoring approaches to advising can be effective methods of encouraging student persistence. Through proactive/intrusive advising, students who may need support the most, but who may not ask for help, gain the benefits of the developmental and mentoring advising.

## **Developmental Advising**

One of the most promoted and advocated approaches to advising, developmental advising, entails a strong relationship between the student and advisor that is developed in varying degrees (Barbuto et al., 2009). Advisors offer information in the context of “student needs, values, goals, and personal situations” (Kuhn et al., 2006, p. 26). The developmental model focuses on developing competencies and relationships with students over time, with the advisor and student working together to determine who supplies the knowledge and skills, and how the knowledge is obtained and applied (Barbuto et al., 2009). Developmental advising focuses on teaching students’ autonomy, while also providing choices and opportunities for decision making (Smith & Allen, 2006). Connecting with a significant person within an educational setting is a crucial factor for students to remain in college (Chickering & Gamson, 1999). Developmental advising is meant to direct students to proper resources while creating a relationship between advisor and advisee that allows both parties to decide what role they will each take (Barbuto et al., 2009). Developmental advising can lead to mentoring approaches.

## **Mentoring**

Mentoring moves beyond simply providing information to students and, instead, is meant to provide “an ongoing, caring relationship in which an advisor gives time, support, and encouragement to the mentee. The advisor is a role model and friend who takes a caring interest in students’ academic progress and helps them achieve their potential” (Kuhn et al., 2006, p. 26). Mentoring focuses on “creating an enduring and meaningful relationship with another person... [with an emphasis on] learning in general and mutual learning in particular” (Salinitri, 2005, p. 858). In their study of a mentoring program for first year, low-achieving university students, Salinitri (2005) found increased retention and improvement of the educational experience of

mentees and improved satisfaction in the experience of the mentor through a formalized mentee/mentor relationship between low-achieving first year students, and high achieving upper year students. For students within the Ontario School Within a College program who may not possess a caring relationship with an adult figure in their personal lives, a mentoring approach may be beneficial. As discussed above, students in SWAC also face challenges relating to persistence and thus student success frameworks and supports delivered by the colleges may be beneficial for student support.

### **Intrusive/Proactive Advising**

The terms intrusive and proactive can be used interchangeably when referring to proactive advising. Definitions of intrusive advisement can vary, but all have agreed it typically involves:

some combination of recommended or required advising sessions for students on a regular basis; a predetermined set of goals to be accomplished in advising sessions; and the dual objectives of a) increasing the motivation and academic success of students and b) reducing attrition from the college or university. (Schwebel et al., 2008, p. 28)

One of the pioneers of intrusive advising, Earl (1988), stated that intrusive advising is about more than just academics; it is about exploring academic challenges while considering the holistic campus involvement of students' and those supporting students. Intrusive advisors "can help students to recognize and adopt the outside-of-class behaviours associated with success in college courses" (Thomas, 2017, p. 3). By taking a holistic approach to advisement, the intrusive method supports students with identifying and negotiating solutions to concerns that are affecting them outside of the classroom in order to increase their success within the classroom.

Throughout the literature on advisement approaches, intrusive/proactive advising strategies have

been highlighted as important and effective with students' classified as at-risk and, therefore, proactive advising may be an option for supporting SWAC students (Heisserer & Parette, 2002). Having explained the concepts related to student experience, what follows is an overview of post-secondary persistence and the theoretical implications for this research study.

### **Post-Secondary Persistence**

The process of transitioning from high school studies to college/university studies can be stressful and challenging for many students, let alone those facing significant barriers. In an effort to ensure the success and persistence of students throughout their first year of post-secondary studies, there have been a variety of theoretical frameworks developed to assist institutions in developing student transition plans. An overview of three of the most utilized and referenced student transition frameworks is provided including the longitudinal model of dropout, input-environment-outcome model, and the five senses of success framework. A review of programming designed specifically to support first-year students deemed to be at-risk, including different advising styles is then provided.

#### **Persistence**

Persistence can be defined as "a student's commitment to complete a course and program of study" (Tello, 2008, p. 5). Throughout the literature, two terms are used interchangeably: retention and persistence, though there are distinct differences between the two terms. Retention is an organizational construct concerning an institution's ability to retain students, while persistence is an individual student's ability to persist towards their goal (Reason, 2009). The differentiating piece of the definitions of persistence and retention is the focus; persistence focus on the student's actions and ability to commit and complete a program, whereas retention is the institution's actions towards keeping the student enrolled. As stated above in the

underlying factors of students at-risk, persistence in education can be linked to family, individual, educational experiences, and expectation of educational attainment (Tinto, 2006). Discussed above, variables linked to student success can include full/part-time attendance, employment status, ethnic minority, family obligations, distance from hometown, financial concerns, and gender (Parker et al., 2004).

It needs to be recognized that a lack of persistence in PSE is not always negative, as there are a host of reasons why leaving post-secondary may be the most appropriate action for students (Grayson & Grayson, 2003). For example, students' may face a loss of a family member, struggle with funding and require time to work and save money, or may be faced with extenuating health circumstances, all of which may require students to take a leave from their studies (Grayson & Grayson, 2003). Many students who discontinue their studies return, with some statistics showing that 35% of students who withdrew returned to PSE within two years, and 46% of students who withdrew returned within four years (Parkin & Baldwin, 2009). In Canada, students' who were previously considered as dropouts may, in fact, be referred to as non-traditional pathway students, as there is evidence of a growing number of students' who switch programs, take breaks, and move in and out of PSE as they work through their programs (Finnie & Qiu, 2008). From the researcher's experience, for example, a student who left studies after losing a family member, may returned after working through their grief, whereas others who struggled with money or health issues, returned once they had established greater stability in their personal lives.

Statistics on persistence in Canadian post-secondary institutions was once only available through institutional-specific data, however, beginning in 1999, the Youth in Transition Survey (YITS) has been conducted by Statistics Canada (Parkin & Baldwin, 2009). Age, parental

education level, individuals from single parent households, and scarcity of requisite finances can all impact a student's likelihood of persistence (Finnie & Qiu, 2008). The YITS demonstrated that those who leave PSE are more likely to return, with one study tracking that 78% of students' who did not complete their original college program returned to complete a different program (Parkin & Baldwin, 2009). Students' switching and leaving programs is much higher in the first year, which suggests dropout rates decrease significantly the longer a student is in a program (Finnie & Qiu, 2008).

Terenzini and Reason (2005) conducted a comprehensive review of first-year student experiences across 34 four-year universities in the United States. The purpose of the study was to determine the direct and indirect effects impacting a student's likelihood of persisting until second year of university; while also determining whether those effects are dependent on student race/ethnicity, gender, socioeconomic status, or parental educational attainment (Terenzini & Reason, 2005). In a Canadian study, Grayson and Grayson (2003) found the characteristics and experiences that lead to student dropout depended upon multiple factors and varied from one institution to the next, or from one year to the next. Terenzini and Reason (2005) determined student persistence was impacted by pre-college experiences and characteristics, otherwise considered pre-existing student dimensions. The college experience itself, however, can impact a student's likelihood of persistence. The model posited by Terenzini and Reason (2005) incorporated students' precollege characteristics and experiences. Reason (2009) expanded upon the original framework to highlight the importance of organizational context, peer environment, and individual student experiences upon persistence. The persistence model proposed by Terenzini and Reason (2005) and later refined by Reason (2009) showcased a variety of factors that can influence persistence. However, one area that was not highlighted was the agentic



conception of human development, adaptation, and change described by Bandura's (2001) social cognitive theory.

### **First Year Post-Secondary Transition Frameworks**

While factors leading to dropout may vary, the characteristics explored in Tinto's Longitudinal Model of Dropout have shown to be influential on student persistence (Grayson & Grayson, 2003). First year transition frameworks such as the Longitudinal Model of Dropout, the Input-Environment-Output model, and the Five Senses of Success Framework can provide structure and understanding to the opportunities to increase post-secondary persistence.

#### ***Longitudinal Model of Dropout***

One of the most studied and referenced theories of student persistence and transition is the Longitudinal Model of Dropout (Tinto, 2006). Though the model was first developed in 1975, it is still widely utilized as the foundation for many transitional programs across Canada and the United States, and still remains the foundation of many student transition frameworks (Coulter et al., 2019). The longitudinal model showcases the "explicit connections between the environment and student retention over periods of time" (Tinto, 2006, p. 2). The academic and social systems of an institution and the people who are a part of those systems can determine the levels of persistence of students (Tinto, 2006). Central to the model developed is the concept of integration and interaction between students and institution members, especially throughout the first year of college and the stages of transition as part of the first year (Tinto, 2006). Tinto (2006) initially developed his model of retention and transition in response to the inadequate research on how and why students drop out, including the inadequate delineation between students taking a temporary leave from education and those leaving voluntarily or forced to leave. In the longitudinal model of dropout, dropout can be affected by pre-entry attributes such

as family background, skills and abilities, prior schooling, intention, goal commitment, and external commitments (Tinto, 1993).

A student's high school experiences and family context influence persistence in college (Tinto, 2006). Criticized for its cultural limitations, Tinto's model encourages students to "break away from past associations and traditions to become integrated into the college's social and academic realms" (Guiffrida, 2006, p. 451). For some students, the encouragement to distance themselves from cultural identities can be harmful and detrimental to their success. One demographic that would be harmed from Tinto's (1993) encouragement to distance from cultural traditions is Canada's Indigenous community. With a history of colonization and the residential school system, the encouragement of Indigenous students to assimilate into the post-secondary environment would not only cause potential harm (e.g., depression, mental health concerns, isolation, loneliness, etc.), but it would also contravene the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada's (2015) Calls to Action. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada's (2015) Calls to Action clearly articulate the call to incorporate Indigenous knowledge and teaching methods, increase indigenous student access and inclusion in post-secondary education, and develop culturally inclusive learning environments and credentials. Contrary to these Call's to Action, Tinto's model emphasizes the belief that by integrating into the institution socially, academically, and culturally, students will be at an increased likelihood of persistence and success (Tinto, 2006).

Interaction with the college environment has been a foundational pillar of Tinto's model which, along with goal commitment, are the pathways through which a student will either persist or withdraw. The emphasis on the college environment, in Tinto's model, propelled extensive

research into both academic and extra-curricular programming to support students in their progression through post-secondary.

### ***Input-Environment-Outcome (IEO) Model***

The Input-Environment-Output (IEO) model, originally designed as part of student assessment, has been used as a framework for educational experience in post-secondary (Thurmond et al., 2002). The model theorizes that student outcomes (e.g., learning) are the result of inputs (e.g., demographic characteristics) and environment (e.g., experiences in college) (Strayhorn, 2008). Inputs, or pre-existing student dimensions, impact both the relationship to the environment and the outcomes of learning, whereas the environment can also play a large part in student outcomes. The IEO model has been used to explore a variety of concepts related to student success. Dugan and Komives (2010) used the IEO model to study the proposed outcome of socially responsible leadership in students. One large highlight of Dugan and Komives' (2010) research was the importance of socio-cultural conversations with peers as part of the input-environment-output continuum. Contrary to the controversial promotion of assimilation into the college environment proposed by Tinto (1993), peer interactions and connections have been shown to demonstrate the highest level of positive outcomes in students at college (Dugan & Komives, 2010; Strayhorn, 2008). Dugan and Komives (2010) stressed that "the importance of peer conversations about difference cannot be understated, and educators are encouraged to actively structure and foster such opportunities" (p. 539). While pre-existing student dimensions, or characteristics, were found to be significant in the IEO model, one study found that student characteristics did not influence the environment and, thus, the outcome of learning experience on web-based environments (Thurmond et al., 2002). Fostering a collaborative and integrated environment in which students develop a sense of identity, purpose, and resourcefulness can

improve the likelihood of student success. Another theory of student retention that stresses the importance of environments and output is the Five Senses of Success framework.

### ***The Five Senses of Success Framework***

Developed by Lizzio (2006), The Five Senses of Success framework describes five core needs of students that are relevant to early success including: sense of capability; sense of connectedness; sense of purpose; sense of resourcefulness; and sense of culture. While Lizzio (2006) was primarily focusing on universities, the framework appears relevant to other post-secondary institutions, as the model describes five core needs, or senses that students need for success. A student's sense of capability refers to the level of academic preparedness of students in terms of how well they understand what is expected of them as a student, mastery of basic academic skills, and level of commitment to contributing to their learning community (Lizzio, 2006). The student sense of connectedness is based on the principle that students are more likely to be successful, happy, and effective learners, if they have quality and encouraging relationships with staff and peers (Lizzio, 2006). A sense of purpose relates to how clear a student's engagement with their field of study is as well as how committed they are to persisting and developing their strengths as they work to complete their goal (Lizzio, 2006). Resourcefulness refers to how proactive, capable, and willing a student is in navigating and accessing resources for support, whereas the sense of academic culture refers to a student's value in learning and becoming a part of the new culture of the institution, including the institution's core values and ethical principles (Lizzio, 2006). By encouraging development of the five senses, institutions will be able to create an environment in which students are more likely to persist. Lizzio's (2006, 2011) university model has been used to create first year college student transition programs to help ease students through the initial adjustment to post-secondary (Coulter et al., 2019). Used as

the foundation for first year student support strategies at Ontario post-secondary institutions such as York University and Sheridan College, the Five Senses Framework provides a holistic approach to student persistence that engages the post-secondary environment as a whole to support students in feeling a sense of connectedness, capability, culture, resourcefulness, and purpose as they transition into post-secondary (Coulter et al., 2019).

### **First-Year Student Intervention Programs**

Utilizing first-year transition and retention frameworks, institutions throughout Canada and the United States have developed support programs to help ease student transition into post-secondary through connection to their institution. Early intervention programs which provide holistic tailored, proactive support, either by student peer leaders or college staff, to incoming students who demonstrated certain demographic characteristics, have been shown to improve student success and persistence through to second year (Barnes et al., 2015). Peer led social group interventions and outreach during the first year of college have been shown to create a greater sense of engagement and connectedness of students to college environments (Mattanah et al., 2010). Targeted instructional approaches, including preparation and instruction on college coursework strategies, can support students who are at-risk and also increase student persistence through to further studies (Heaney & Fisher, 2011). In Heaney and Fisher's case study of a learning community for conditionally admitted students, they found that by creating early interventions and learning strategy supports for students at-risk, the students were more likely to remain in their studies, even though they entered with pre-college characteristics that identified them as at-risk. Early intervention for students appears to be one of the guiding strategies for supporting students at-risk.

While the first year has been shown to impact persistence, the first six weeks or earlier of a student's college experience have been linked with persistence, academic performance, and likelihood of graduation (Woosley & Shepler, 2011). The first few weeks of a student's experience on campus, including both academic and social adjustment, determines not only persistence levels, but also level of involvement, retention, and level of energy a student invests in the institution and their studies (Morrow & Ackermann, 2012). By initiating early and frequent connections with students, institutions are increasing retention rates and student confidence, especially with those who enter the institution with pre-college characteristics that could put them at-risk of not succeeding. Advising is one strategy that can assist students with persistence into post-secondary and throughout their academic experiences.

### **Summary**

The conceptual framework of this research as evident in Figure 2 within Chapter One, consists of four areas of focus: pre-existing student dimensions, educational community context, student experiences, and post-secondary persistence. Pre-existing student dimensions or characteristics of students who participate in the SWAC program indicate that students who may be identified as at-risk possess a multitude of complex and challenging underlying factors which could hinder their studies and progression into post-secondary. While every student is unique, common characteristics of at-risk students' can be seen in personal, family, and school contexts. Since there are many complexities present with students' who are at-risk, educational institutions need to create supports that encourage behavioural, emotional, and cognitive engagement (Fredericks et al., 2004). The social cognitive theory, specifically personal, collective, and proxy agency, must all be considered in SWAC both in the pre-existing student dimensions and in the educational context (Bandura, 2001). Through a unique educational community context, SWAC

students can receive support through collective and proxy agency to support the building of their personal agency.

The educational community context of SWAC is complex. While dual credit programs vary across the United States and Canada, Ontario's dual credit program differs in its primary focus on students identified as at-risk of success (Ministry of Education, 2020). Adoption of adult learning principles in SWAC programs, along with the building of a sense of community within students and staff could create a supportive learning environment. Use of instructional, transactional, transformational, authentic, servant, and inclusive leadership approaches, are demonstrated at multiple levels of the School College Work Initiative hierarchy, and after exploration of each, demonstrate that multiple approaches are needed. Consideration for employee onboarding and training is required for all members of the educational community context, as is an exploration of ongoing program evaluation to measure program effectiveness and goals.

Student experiences in SWAC include the classroom experience and curricular delivery, and student supports. The student Classroom experience and curricular delivery, includes the structure and timing of classes, inclusion of life skills, and maintenance of appropriate levels of academic rigour. Student supports must take into consideration of the pre-existing student dimensions that SWAC students have as they enter the program. Creating a caring, well-structured environment where students receive support, is essential for SWAC, as is inclusion of advising practices to support student development. The educational community context, in conjunction with student experiences, can support post-secondary persistence.

Post-secondary persistence, or the successful entry and completion of program of study, may not be the most appropriate path for SWAC students immediately following the program.

However, through exploration of SWAC programs in terms of first-year transition frameworks, it may be possible to create an environment where students' have the support and experience needed for successful persistence into and through post-secondary education. Through exploration and application of the longitudinal model of drop out (Tinto, 2006), input-environment-output model (Strayhorn, 2008), five senses of student success framework (Lizzio, 2006), and first-year intervention programs, SWAC programs may be able to develop an environment that supports post-secondary persistence.

Having explored the theoretical underpinnings of this research study, including an overview of the conceptual framework that structured this research, what follows is an overview of the research design and methods that were undertaken to complete this research.



## Chapter 3 – Research Design

This chapter will explain the methodology utilized as part of this mixed methods research project. The purpose of this research was to determine the effectiveness of the School Within a College (SWAC) program in preparing students for post-secondary education, and to explore whether or not the program could be made more effective. To determine effectiveness, information was gathered to: profile current SWAC delivery models, determine what supports were being provided to students across SWAC models, evaluate successes and challenges, and determine the effectiveness of each model in preparing students for post-secondary education. An explanation of the quantitative, qualitative, and triangulation methods employed has been provided, followed by an overview of the procedure, sampling decisions, instruments used, ethical considerations, and analysis processes which took place. Through the use of a focus-group, a questionnaire, semi-structured interviews, and government statistics, each research question was examined systematically and through multiple methods. Prior to explaining the process through which this research took place, it was first important to understand the researcher's epistemological and ontological perspective. An overview of the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on this research is then presented, highlighting the necessity to alter data collection, sampling, processes, and the impact on data collected. An explanation of the mixed methods approach utilized is then discussed, showcasing the methodological approach which shaped this research.

There are multiple terms that can be used in research to identify rigour, including validity and reliability in quantitative research, and trustworthiness and credibility in qualitative research. Legitimation is a term used by Onwuegbuzie and Johnson (2006) to replace these varied terms in order to have unified terminology regarding the rigour of mixed methods research. Legitimation

is a term used by both qualitative and quantitative researchers and “involves assessing the trustworthiness of both the qualitative and quantitative data and subsequent interpretations” (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004, p. 22). The term validity is primarily used by quantitative researchers and does not specify whether it focuses on the quality of the data or conclusions. It also has quite a few different definitions which can lead to misinterpretations (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2008). Similarly, the term quality can raise questions of what quality is being analysed (e.g., quality of purpose? data? method of analysis? etc.), which can also lead to controversy and misuse of terms (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2008). As such, the term legitimacy provides an integrated approach that will allow for the evaluation of inferences at multiple levels of the research study, and which provides the integrative approach needed in mixed-methods research (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2008). The data collection section will highlight the tools utilized, including rationale, and advantages and disadvantages of each. An overview of the sample groups will be shown, including the specifics of data collection, and an in-depth section on the data analysis and interpretation of results. Finally, ethical considerations, delimitations, additional limitations, and summary are discussed. Having provided a brief overview of this chapter’s content, it is now important for the reader to have an understanding of the researcher’s paradigmatic orientation in order to better ground the information being presented.

### **Paradigmatic Orientation: Pragmatic**

A researcher’s paradigm, or beliefs and feelings about how knowledge should be gathered and constructed, is important to understanding the lens through which research is conducted and which knowledge is understood (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018). The pragmatic approach puts an “emphasis on the connection between epistemological concerns about the nature of the knowledge that we produce and technical concerns about the methods that we use to generate

that knowledge” (Morgan, 2007, p. 73). Emerging from the work by John Dewey, pragmatism is a philosophy that connects democracy, education, and civil society in an effort to name socially problematic topics and research/work collaboratively for change (Crawford, 2012). Dewey aimed to break down the dualistic idea between realism and idealism, with knowledge understood as assertions that result from taking action and experiencing the outcomes (Morgan, 2014). Pragmatism is “a philosophy of knowledge construction that emphasizes practical solutions to applied research questions and the consequences of inquiry” (Giacobbi et al., 2005, p. 19). Pragmatic researchers appreciate and utilize both qualitative and quantitative research methods, understanding that both approaches have inherent strengths and weaknesses, and that both techniques can be used to better understand social phenomena (Onwuegbuzie & Leech, 2005). Morgan (2014) explains that a researcher’s experiences and beliefs are changed by conscious actions when conducting pragmatic research. Morgan (2014) adds that “both the experiences we bring to research and the changes we hope to produce are context bound, embodied and emotional, and thoroughly social in nature” (p. 7).

As an individual who identifies as a pragmatist, I understand that, through the experience of conducting this research, my beliefs and perspectives were changed by my interactions with the SWAC community, as were their beliefs and perspectives. By utilizing a mixed methods research methodology, I was able to blend techniques from both qualitative and quantitative approaches to better understand the SWAC experience. Beyond methodology, my pragmatic orientation ensured that I worked with others in a democratic process in an effort to work collaboratively to determine ways to make positive change within the SWAC experience.

## **Mixed Methods Methodology**

For this study, Mixed Method Research (MMR) was utilized and can be defined as research that:

combines elements of qualitative and quantitative research approaches (e.g., use of qualitative and quantitative viewpoints, data collection, analysis, inference techniques) for the broad purposes of breadth and depth of understanding and corroboration. (Johnson et al., 2007, p. 123)

There are multiple layers to MMR beyond the method of data collection. MMR involves multiple viewpoints in an effort to create a greater understanding and depth to the research. MMR allows the research to answer questions that could not fully be answered by quantitative or qualitative research alone (Phillips & Davidson, 2009). By combining qualitative and quantitative research, it is possible to better understand the research problem and questions which cannot be answered by one method or the other (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019).

MMR challenges traditional assumptions and boundaries of research by integrating both qualitative and quantitative methods (Phillips & Davidson, 2009). One of the benefits of MMR is that it can be effective when working with both marginalized groups and more formal institutions/funders, creating a connection between theory and practice which can influence change at both micro and macro levels (Perry, 2009; Westhues et al., 2008).

As the purpose of this study was to explore the SWAC experience from all levels of the organization and society, utilizing a MMR approach was important in order to connect with all participants. Mixed Method Research (MMR) aligns with the pragmatic paradigm in that research approaches should be mixed in a way that maximizes the ability to answer research questions (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004). While pragmatism is not the only paradigm which

aligns with MMR, for the purpose of this study, the combination of qualitative and quantitative data provided a more comprehensive picture of the complex SWAC system from multiple perspectives (Creswell et al., 2004; Creswell, 2008).

In terms of research design, MMR takes three basic forms including convergent, explanatory sequential, and exploratory sequential, in addition to other complex design formats (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019; Fetters et al., 2013). Where exploratory designs use qualitative data to inform quantitative data, and explanatory designs use quantitative data to inform qualitative data collection, convergent designs collect information in parallel, with analysis and integration of information occurring after data has been collected (Fetters et al., 2013). Convergent designs are often used to “synthesize complementary qualitative and quantitative results to develop a more complete understanding of a phenomenon, and comparing multiple levels within a system” (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2017, p.77). For the purpose of this study, a convergent design was utilized as the qualitative and quantitative data were collected and analysed simultaneously (Onwuegbuzie & Leech, 2009). It should be noted that while a convergent design as defined by Fetters et al. (2013) was identified as part of this research, mixed methods approaches are not always fully linear in nature (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2017). Creswell and Plano Clark (2017) emphasized that while researchers may have planned a mixed methods design, that they need to be open to emergent needs of the research and to “recognize the importance and value of emergent mixed methods approaches” (p.55). In order to match the needs of this research, multiple methods of data collection were utilized.

As a pragmatist utilizing a convergent MMR approach, it was important to utilize multiple methods that “work” for particular research problems (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019, p. 547). Through the use of multiple methods qualitative and quantitative data collection and data

analysis, a variety of perspectives and information were gathered in order to answer research questions in the most comprehensive way possible. Qualitative research methods has been shown to involve exploring issues or topics in such a way that gives credence to experiences and perspectives to inform practice, education, and outcomes (Behar-Horenstein, 2018). Quantitative methods have been said to aim to determine how outcomes are reached, by looking at a discrete number of variables, to determine if a select number of cases can be expanded to a larger population in order to generalize answers to what or how a particular phenomenon occurs (Borrego et al., 2009). Morse (2018) developed a visualization of how qualitative and quantitative information can be combined in a mixed methods research with QUAL /qual (qualitative) and QUAN/quan (quantitative) shorthand being used to showcase the relationships between data collection (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019). Uppercase or capitalization of each term highlights its level of emphasis in the study with capitalized terms indicating the data collection approach given more importance in the research. For the purpose of this study, a QUAL + quan portrayal was appropriate as qualitative data was utilized as the primary source with the addition of quantitative data throughout the study (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019). Methods of quantitative data collection in this study included a questionnaire and review of government statistics and reports, whereas qualitative data collection included a focus group, semi-structured interviews, and open-ended questionnaire questions, within different levels of the SWAC hierarchy. As can be seen in *Table 1: Alignment of Research Questions with Methods*, an emphasis on qualitative methods was used to answer research questions with quantitative data used to triangulate results and confirm data analysis.

**Table 1***Alignment of Research Questions with Methods*

Research Questions	Qualitative Data		Quantitative Data	
	Ministry Focus Group	Staff Interviews	Staff Questionnaire	Government Statistics
How effective are SWAC programs in supporting at-risk student persistence into post-secondary and can these programs be made more effective?	X	X	X	X
How are SWAC programs being delivered across the province, from student selection to program completion?	X	X	X	
What successes/ challenges are SWAC programs facing in terms of out-of-class experiences and student supports?		X	X	
Are there specific successes/challenges SWAC programs face depending on delivery model?	X	X	X	
Are SWAC programs adequately preparing students for persistence in post-secondary?		X	X	X
What additional leadership factors are needed to enhance the program?	X	X	X	

The process of triangulation aims to achieve “broader, deeper, more comprehensive understanding of what is studied, and that often – or heads at – discrepancies and contradictions in the findings” (Flick, 2018, p. 449). In order to integrate the various perspectives that were gathered through both qualitative and quantitative data collection, triangulation was utilized. Through comparing and contrasting information from different contexts (government statistics, ministry representatives, delivery staff), and using different methods of collecting information (focus groups, interviews, questionnaires, pre-existing statistics), a more comprehensive understanding of how SWAC prepared students for post-secondary education was achieved (Kugelmass, 2003). In the initial research design process, the addition of former students, regional planning team focus groups, and community of practice focus groups were also to be

included in the research methods in an effort to integrate a larger range of contexts and prospective. Unfortunately, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the methods and process of this research study needed to be logistically modified.

### **COVID-19 Pandemic Impact on Research Design & Data Analysis**

In the initial research design of this study, in-person focus groups, interviews, and interviews with former SWAC students were planned in an effort to provide a student perspective on the effectiveness of SWAC programming. In March 2020, Ontario issued a province-wide lockdown in an effort to contain the spread of the novel coronavirus, COVID-19 (Nielsen, 2020, April 24). All provincial elementary schools, high schools, and on-campus access to post-secondary institutions were immediately shut down. As discovered in the findings of this research, the disruption of SWAC programming, especially for students already identified as facing significant barriers to success, caused not only hardship for students, but also staff, educators, and administrators who were supporting these students. The COVID-19 pandemic shut down occurred in the middle of this research study, following ethics approval and the initial focus group with Ministry representatives and at a time when distribution of the questionnaire and interviews was to commence. Research was halted while Ontario post-secondary and secondary schools worked through immediate needs, planning for semester completion, and ensuring students had the resources required for success. The option for in-person interviews was replaced with video-conferencing or phone interview options only. Progression and graduation statistics were significantly skewed for the 2019-2020 academic year as students enrolled in the January – May SWAC program were required either to complete their studies remotely or college and school staff identified ways to save student credit for work completed before the March 2020 shut down (School College Work Initiative, 2020). As a result of this shift, the original second



phase of research process and sampling was altered. Originally, former SWAC students were to be identified by SWAC delivery staff for contact to request participation in this research. Within the original phase two and three of this research, requests for transition statistics housed by each delivery site were to be requested along with any additional feedback tools available for analysis. Due to the abrupt nature of the move to remote work, access to and availability of reports located on campus were not possible. The emergent themes and subthemes identified reflect the impact the COVID-19 pandemic had on delivery staff through the early stages of the pandemic as staff completed the 2019-2020 school year. By ensuring that rigour was maintained throughout, the results of this research retained their integrity throughout each phase of data collection.

### **Rigour in Research**

What follows is an overview of how rigour was achieved throughout this research study. Throughout this research project, the qualitative data were checked for credibility, the quantitative data were reviewed for validity and reliability, and triangulation was used to ensure accuracy in both the qualitative and quantitative data. Finally, legitimation, which “involves assessing the trustworthiness of both the qualitative and quantitative data and subsequent interpretations” (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004, p. 22), was used throughout the research. As previously stated, this research followed a mixed methods approach and, as such, rigour has been explained through the qualitative, quantitative, and triangulation components of this study, followed by an explanation of how legitimation was applied throughout.

### **Qualitative**

Credibility, or determining the accuracy and validity of qualitative data can be achieved through triangulation and external audits (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019). Triangulation, or corroborating information through multiple methods, was conducted within the qualitative data

collected, through both the focus group and interviews, followed by triangulation with the quantitative data, including the questionnaire and government statistics (Williamson, 2005). Inter-coder and interrater reliability were used as external audits on both the transcripts collected through interviews and the final results.

Inter-coder reliability is the measure “of agreement between different coders regarding how the same data should be coded” (O’Connor & Joffe, 2020). To conduct inter-coder reliability in this research, two completed transcripts from interviews, once identifiers were removed, were sent to a colleague who was not involved in the research and who had no previous history or exposure to the dual credit or the SWAC program. The colleague then went through and coded the transcripts. In reviewing the coding conducted through inter-coder reliability, one additional code, “advocacy” was utilized in the iterative thematic coding by the researcher. In the data analysis process below, an explanation of the coding process is provided. For a full list of codes used, please refer to Appendix C – Data Analysis, Code Book.

Interrater reliability is the extent to which two or more individuals agree on results (Fink, 2010). To ensure interrater reliability, the final findings were shared with two colleagues removed from SWAC. By having peers review the results, additional areas of literature to connect findings can be established (Morse, 2018). Due to the results of the interrater reliability, literature related to social justice and supports for students experiencing underlying, pre-existing factors was included.

## **Quantitative**

In quantitative research, both reliability and validity are important when administering a questionnaire or using pre-existing data. Validity is achieved when it is demonstrated that the interpretation of the data matches its intended use (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019). Reliability in

quantitative research refers to the consistency of assessment of results when a testing procedure is reproduced; reliability is needed to build a valid argument in quantitative research (Fan & Randall, 2018). Reliability in quantitative data is met when the instruments (e.g., questionnaire) are clear, procedures of delivery are standardized, and thought is given to participants' experiences when contributing/completing the questionnaire so that respondents clearly understand questions (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019). As discussed in the instrument design section below, the questionnaire was piloted with a select group of participants who had in-depth contextual knowledge to provide suggestions on clarity of the questionnaire used.

### **Triangulation**

Triangulation involves simply considering a research issue from at least two points or perspectives in order to study an issue from a more comprehensive lens (Flick, 2018). The term 'perspectives' refers to different approaches to understanding a topic, whether they be subjective perspectives of individuals or more objective perspectives from an existing data standpoint (Flick, 2018). Triangulation can occur between qualitative methods, between quantitative methods, and between-methods using both qualitative and quantitative methods (Johnson et al., 2007). Between-method triangulation involves combining the methods of qualitative and quantitative data collection to "allow the limitations of each method to be transcended by comparing findings from different perspectives, ensuring a sophisticated rigour" (Williamson, 2005, p. 7). Denzin first coined the term "between-methods triangulation", promoting the use of between-methods triangulation to reduce bias and provide the outcome of convergence, inconsistency, and contradiction (Johnson et al., 2007). Through triangulation, there can be connection or corroboration of results from different data sets (e.g., interviews and questionnaires). Alternately, inconsistencies can be highlighted leading to further understanding

of a concept. Finally, contradiction between qualitative and quantitative data may highlight areas of interest for a researcher to focus on or further explore to illustrate important nuances (Johnson et al., 2007). Throughout all aspects of the qualitative, quantitative, and triangulation components of this research, multiple forms of legitimation were used.

### **Legitimation**

Legitimation is a term used by both qualitative and quantitative researchers and “involves assessing the trustworthiness of both the qualitative and quantitative data and subsequent interpretations” (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004, p. 22). As Onwuegbuzie and Leech (2005) stated, “interpretations of findings are only as good as the data are valid or legitimate” (p. 288). In a convergent, mixed methods research study, it is often suggested that data be tested and analysed separately, and then brought together for analysis of findings (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019). Johnson and Onwuegbuzie (2004) stated that the process of legitimation is a continuum in mixed methods research that occurs throughout the study. Onwuegbuzie and Johnson (2006) defined nine different types of legitimation: sample integration, inside-outside, weakness minimization, sequential, conversion, paradigmatic mixing, commensurability, multiple validities, and political.

Sample integration is when the research makes statistical generalizations from a sample of participants to a larger target population to make meta-inferences (Onwuegbuzie & Johnson, 2006, p.56). Inside-outside legitimation refers to the process of ensuring information is viewed from both an insider perspective, or someone who is a member of the group, and an objective outsider perspective, someone from outside the group (Onwuegbuzie & Johnson, 2006). Weakness minimization is when the researcher designs the study to combine multiple methods that offset the weaknesses of other methods by the strengths of another method, whereas

sequential legitimation is when the research structures the design of the research phases so that the sequence, or order, of the qualitative and quantitative phases of research is reversed (Onwuegbuzie & Johnson, 2006). Conversion legitimation is the extent that conversion of qualitative results to quantifiable inferences, or the adjustment of quantitative data to qualitative meta-inferences, leads to quality data interpretation (Onwuegbuzie et al., 2009). Paradigmatic mixing is how successful the researchers epistemological, ontological, axiological, methodological, and rhetorical beliefs of the qualitative and quantitative approaches are either combined or blended into a useful package (Onwuegbuzie et al., 2009). Commensurability legitimation is the use of an iterative process to switch between reviewing information from a qualitative lens, to a quantitative lens, repeatedly, to offer a third view that combines both qualitative and quantitative perspectives (Onwuegbuzie & Johnson, 2006). Multiple validities are the extent to which all relevant research strategies are used in the research (Onwuegbuzie & Johnson, 2006). The final type of legitimation is political legitimation, or the extent that those who are reading the research value mixed methods research and the inferences that are gained from both the qualitative and quantitative components (Onwuegbuzie et al., 2009).

In this research four types of legitimation were used: sample integration, inside-outside, weakness minimization, and multiple validities. In sample integration, consideration should be given on how individuals and groups are selected in order to make quality inferences to ensure application of meta-inferences can be applied from either qualitative to quantitative information by ensuring consideration be made on how to combine different sets of people to make inferences (Onwuegbuzie & Johnson, 2006). As discussed in the sampling and procedure below, those participants who were involved in the semi-structured interviews, were sampled from the questionnaire, to ensure quality inferences could be made from the qualitative and quantitative

data. Also, discussed in the instrument design section below, similar questions were asked in both the questionnaire and semi-structured interviews to provide the opportunity through the data analysis portion to confirm any sample integration inferences.

Using both peer review, having an outside scholar review, and having a participant review the data, can be an effective strategy for inside-outside legitimation (Onwuegbuzie & Johnson, 2006). In the instrument design and data analysis sections below, examples of both peer and participant review of instruments and data were provided. Described in the instrument design and data analysis sections below, by thoughtfully utilizing a focus group, semi-structured interviews, questionnaire, and government statistics in the research design, the potential weaknesses of each method were compensated with the other approaches. Finally, Onwuegbuzie and Johnson (2006) explained that multiple validity legitimation is present in almost all mixed methods research studies, and as explained above, throughout the qualitative, quantitative, and triangulation portions of this research, multiple validities were addressed. Now that the aspects of rigour that were utilized throughout the design, implementation, and analysis of this research have been explained, the design process that was used to create the research instruments will be presented.

### **Instrument Design**

Both qualitative and quantitative data were gathered using four different instruments to have “a more completed understanding of the research problem results” (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019, p. 551). For this research project, two instruments of qualitative data collection were utilized: a focus group, and semi-structured interviews. Two instruments for gathering quantitative data were also used: collecting data through a questionnaire and using pre-existing government statistics. What follows is an explanation of all four instruments employed through this research, including information on the positives and negatives of the instruments,

and how it was designed in this study. Since it was explained above that this mixed-methods researched used qualitative data as the primary source with the addition of quantitative data, the qualitative instruments are described first in chronological order of the focus group and semi-structured interview, followed by the quantitative instruments used, the questionnaire and government statistics.

### **Focus Group**

Focus groups are semi-structured discussions with small groups that begin with a moderator asking general questions, followed by specific questions, while participants are encouraged to talk and interact with one another (Tong et al., 2007). There are various perspectives on the ideal size of focus groups, ranging from four to twelve participants, and ideal length of one to two hours (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019; Onwuegbuzie et al., 2009). The nature, function, and uses of focus groups can vary depending on a researcher's paradigm and purpose (Kamberelis et al., 2018).

Focus groups are more advantageous when the interaction between members will gain the most information, typically when groups are similar and work well together (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019). There are many additional advantages of using focus groups in that they are economical, efficient, socially orientated, and can generate increased information gathered through interactions with other group members (Onwuegbuzie et al., 2009).

Focus groups are not without their challenges. Some of the challenges with focus groups are associated with the selection of participants, keeping participants on task, duration, and size of focus groups (Onwuegbuzie et al., 2009). Careful thought and planning must be given when inviting participants to join a focus group and to ensure that the appropriate information is gathered, ensuring diversity in perspective (Boateng, 2012; Creswell & Guetterman, 2019;

Onwuegbuzie et al., 2009). Emerging group think, when a cohesive group tries to avoid conflict by all agreeing or avoiding outsider perspectives, can also negatively impact the information gathered in a focus group, and must be taken into consideration when facilitating focus groups (Boateng, 2012).

In this study, one focus group with six members was conducted with the ministry representatives who oversaw all provincial SWAC programs. As the ministry representatives group worked frequently together, both virtually and in person, it allowed for the leveraging of a pre-existing network in an effort to encourage collegiality, familiarity, and solidarity within the group (Kamberelis et al., 2018; Rabiee, 2004). While recruitment for focus groups can often be a challenge, as this research study was being conducted with the support of the School College Work Initiative, the ministry representatives who participated may have benefitted from the results gathered, and so may have had a vested interest in participating. Through conducting a semi-structured focus-group, the six SCWI ministry members' voices were able to be heard. As results were compiled as a whole without attachment to one specific individual, the risk of unwanted identifying factors from being included was minimized.

Composition of questions used in the focus group were created based on an adaptation of the research report entitled *Breaking Down Barriers to Student Success* (Deloitte, 2012). Utilizing a pre-existing research instrument increased inside-outside legitimation as described above in an effort to ensure rigour was maintained throughout. The *Breaking Down Barriers to Student Success* research study focused on analysis of Ontario Colleges support of students at risk of success in achieving academic and career goals (Deloitte, 2012). Interviews within the Deloitte (2012) study were conducted with college representatives, current students, graduates, employers, and government officials. As the topics of the interviews used in the Deloitte (2012)



study were similar to the research being conducted within this study, as were the variety of stakeholders consulted, the interview guides provided a template that was then altered to be specific to this research.

For the focus group with ministry representatives, the college representatives and government officials interview guides were used to compose the focus group questions (Deloitte, 2012). The focus group began with a question asking participants to explain their role and background within the program. Participants were then asked about their experiences with delivery models of SWAC and potential successes and challenges associated. What followed were questions as to the supports and services provided within the SWAC program, and whether participants felt that those supports prepared students for next steps after SWAC. The focus group was then asked to share their successes and challenges in leading from the provincial level, with explanation as to the unmet needs faced in leading the program. Finally, the focus group participants were asked to provide recommendations on what could be done to increase student persistence into post-secondary education following SWAC, and then were provided an open forum for any additional comments. The focus group questions and script can be found in Appendix B, Ministry Representatives Focus Group. The ministry representatives focus group questions were expanded upon for the individual semi-structured interviews.

### **Semi-structured interviews**

Semi-structured interviews provide the opportunity to take advantage of knowledge producing dialogue while also allowing for follow up questions on issues that may arise that are deemed important (Brinkmann, 2018). Contrary to structured interviews, which provide standardized set questions and do not allow deviance from script, semi-structured interviews allow for flexibility and the opportunity to follow up on unexpected topics (Brinkmann, 2018).

While unstructured interviews provide flexibility to allow the interviewees to tell their stories, the lack of purpose and direction would be difficult for more formal institutions/funders to accept, which could impact change at both the macro and micro levels (Perry, 2009). Semi-structured interviews provide a balance between unstructured and structured interviews in allowing the interviewer to clarify and further investigate topics that the participant discusses, while also discussing specific topics related to the research questions (Tong et al., 2007).

Benefits associated with semi-structured interviews include the ability to provide individual, detailed perspectives from participants, and to provide options for participants through the use of open-ended questions, while also allowing for flexibility with the use of an interview guide/structure that can facilitate systematic collection of data (Coll & Chapman, 2000). Through the building of rapport, or relationships, with the interviewee, it is possible to gain insight and knowledge into personal experiences and events, that can help explore the research questions under analysis, and demonstrate the participant's description of their 'lifeworld' or lived experience (Brinkmann, 2018).

Interviews are not without their disadvantages. One-on-one interviews have the most time and cost commitment in qualitative research and can be skewed by a "filtered" view through the lens of the interviewer (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019, p. 218). There is the potential for power relationships in the interview to skew results, manipulative dialogue from the interviewer or interviewee, and potential for lack of response due to poor rapport between interviewer and interviewee (Brinkmann, 2018).

Semi-structured interviews were used for this research as they provided:

- Purpose and structure to the conversation in order to gather as much data as possible;
- Description into how the participants would describe their experience in SWAC;

- Lived experience of those working in SWAC; and
- The opportunity for interpretations of meanings with participants and interviewer in order to ensure accuracy and understanding of the participant's perspective. (Brinkmann, 2018)

Through interviewer-interviewee interactions in semi-structured interviews, there was the opportunity to create a social dynamic to build knowledge and understanding of the SWAC program together, in an effective, efficient, and meaningful process (Brinkmann, 2018). For the purpose of this study, the opportunity to follow up on unexpected topics was of particular importance, as there were unexpected challenges or successes that staff experienced which were unknown to the researcher. Within this study, participants were given the choice to participate in web-based video and audio or audio only interviews, or telephone interviews. All participants chose to participate in web-based interviews.

### ***Web-based interviews***

Web-based interviews are interviews that allow for both audio and visual communication, using software such as Microsoft Teams, WebEx, or Skype, to connect over larger geographic distances (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019). Additional benefits of web-based interviews reflect those associated with telephone interviews in that distance, costs, and travel time are removed as obstacles for connecting (Irvine et al., 2012). As per the University of Calgary recommended software, Microsoft Teams was used for web-based interviews, as it provided a secure online space, gave the option of recording meetings, allowed for external to the institution members to join, and provided the option of both video and audio, or audio only (University of Calgary, 2020). By using the Microsoft Teams software, it was possible to record visual and audio connections, thus allowing for body language and facial expressions to be a part of the interview process (Hanna, 2012). Similar to telephone interviews, web-based interviews allowed

participants and the interviewer to control their space and privacy and ensured the comfort of participants (Holt, 2010). Participants also had the choice throughout the interview to remain visible or turn off their cameras in an effort to create additional levels of comfort for participants. In the COVID-19 context, as in-person interviews were not a possibility, use of web-based interviews provided the ideal setting, as all participants had experience using web-based videoconferencing software for both work and personal uses.

Web-based interviews can present unique challenges. Problems with webcams and internet connections impacted some of the interviews (Hanna, 2012). In an effort to overcome these challenges, when scheduling the interviews, the interviewer's phone number was provided at the beginning of each interview. An overview of how to reconnect should there be an internet connection issue was also provided. During one interview, a participant's webcam was not working and so their camera remained off. The interviewer's camera remained visible in an effort to maintain openness, honesty, and rapport with the individual. During another interview, the connection was lost halfway through the interview and so the remainder of the interview was conducted over the phone. As an openness had already been established in the conversation, there was limited impact in the ability to continue an open discussion throughout the remainder of the interview. This also happened to be the final interview conducted. In the COVID-19 context, shared space with family members and other household members could have prevented participants or the interviewer from speaking openly. In an effort to overcome this, participants were provided with the option of scheduling a time that worked best for their personal schedule and were given the option of rescheduling, should there be a better time, in order to provide privacy, space and use of technology. Three participants requested to reschedule interviews the day of, or day before, previously scheduled interviews to a time that provided a more conducive

environment for the interview. The interviewer ensured that she was in a private, dedicated space that was free from outside distractions, and used a personal computer device to avoid issues with sharing technology.

### ***Question Design***

As explained in the focus group question instrument design section, composition of questions used in the semi-structured interviews were created based on an adaptation of the research report entitled *Breaking Down Barriers to Student Success* (Deloitte, 2012). While the focus group utilized the college representatives and government officials interview guides from the Deloitte (2012) study, for the semi-structured interviews the college representatives guide was primarily used as a template for interview questions. As the purpose of this research was to gather information from multiple stakeholders and groups, similar questions were asked between the focus group and the semi-structured interviews.

Two sets of semi-structured interview questions were composed depending on the participants' role within the program: administrators and delivery staff. Both interview groups were asked first to explain their role within SWAC, motivation for taking the position, and what their motivation was for continuing to work within the program. Both interview groups were then asked to describe the delivery models of the SWAC programs in their areas. Each group was then asked to explain what supports and services were offered to students, whether they felt the services and supports provided students the help they needed, and what other services would be beneficial. Semi-structured interview participants in both groups were then asked whether the learning experiences in SWAC differ from traditional high school, whether the learning experience prepared students for post-secondary persistence, and if they had any recommendations for increasing persistence to post-secondary.

In the final section of questions, the focus related to delivery and leadership were altered depending on the participants' role in SWAC. For administrators, questions were asked regarding their overall experience with delivery of SWAC programs in general, their experience leading from a regional/area level, suggestions for improvements needed from different stakeholder levels, and an open forum for comments. Delivery staff were asked in the final section about their experience in delivery of their specific programs, suggestions for improvements needed from different levels of stakeholders, and an open forum for final comments. Copies of both sets of semi-structured interviews can be found in Appendix B – Research Tools, entitled Administrator Semi-Structured Interview Script and Delivery Staff Semi-Structured Interview Script. Adaptations of the questions utilized in the semi-structured interview were also used as part of the questionnaire in order to support sample integration legitimation as explained above within the rigour in research section.

### **Questionnaire**

A questionnaire, or survey, allows a participant to self-report and respond to predetermined open and closed ended questions, either by mail or online, about their attitudes, practices, needs, and beliefs (Tan & Siegel, 2018). For the purpose of this research, a cross-sectional online questionnaire was utilized. Cross-sectional surveys are used to collect data at one point in time to determine behaviours and practices from different groups of respondents that can vary based on position, location, and level of the organization (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019). The online questionnaire used in this research study was administered through Qualtrics, the University of Calgary's secure web-based survey software, that provides built-in processing, and tracking options. A copy of the questionnaire can be found in Appendix B – Research Tools, Questionnaire.

Online questionnaires offer advantages such as data validation (i.e., not allowing text in a numeric response); reports which can be downloaded showcasing results; and can be completed easily and quickly (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019). Collecting hard-copy questionnaires at multiple institutions would be time consuming, costly, and thus would take longer than necessary, whereas online questionnaires can be conducted quickly, securely, and accurately through institutional email addresses and lists (Lefever et al., 2007; Wright, 2005).

Challenges associated with online questionnaires can include low response rates, issues with sampling, spam filters, and limitations in gaining permissions from overarching bodies to target sample participants (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019). There may also be concerns with ensuring targeted groups complete the online questionnaire, or with targeted groups completing the questionnaire truthfully (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019; Lefever et al., 2007; Wright, 2005;). The design of the questionnaire must be carefully considered, as it is a challenging and complex process to design an appropriate questionnaire which, if done poorly, can cause inaccurate or unreliable information to be gathered (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019). In mixed-methods research, the use of surveys or questionnaires allows for multiple methods of collection, as researchers can clarify unclear or complicated results, as well as follow up with other methods, such as interviews, to discover more in-depth information (Tan & Siegel, 2018).

For research on the School Within a College (SWAC) program, an online questionnaire was an ideal option for data collection to gather attitudes and practices of SWAC delivery staff, including program delivery models, successes and challenges, and opportunities for development across the province. The first part of the questionnaire was targeted at gathering the characteristics of participants including their current role, percentage of time spent in SWAC delivery, and years in current position. Questions were then targeted at the previous experience

of participants, including years in previous roles related to the delivery of SWAC. These characteristic details were used as part of the data analysis by sample group as will be described in the data analysis section below.

The second part of the questionnaire was focused on SWAC program delivery descriptions for one program that participants were familiar with. Questions were asked as to the geographic location (urban or rural) and college positioning (main campus or smaller/satellite campus). Questions were then asked regarding the curricular delivery model of the high school credits used in the program, student selection process, length of the program, requirement for time on campus for students, and if there was a specific demographic of the SWAC program. These questions were again used to help group responses as part of the data analysis process as will be described below. The responses to these descriptive questions also provided the context for the participant responses in the following sections of the questionnaire.

The third part of the questionnaire had participants responding to questions regarding the services and supports currently available to students in the program. Finally, in the fourth and final part of the questionnaire, open-ended questions regarding the participants' perspectives on the leadership and delivery of SWAC programs were included. Open-ended questions were targeted at participant perspectives on delivery effectiveness, leadership, successes and challenges, and recommendations for post-secondary persistence. Explained above, some overlap between the semi-structured interview questions and questionnaire was used in an effort to increase sample legitimation. The overlap in semi-structure interview and questionnaire questions also provided opportunities for increased triangulation between results through the data analysis as explained below. The final question of the questionnaire asked for participants to volunteer to take part in a semi-structured interview. For full question details, the questionnaire



can be found in Appendix B – Research Tools, Questionnaire – English Version. Prior to distributing the questionnaire to delivery staff and SWAC administrators, the questionnaire was piloted with the ministry representatives.

### ***Piloting the Questionnaire***

Piloting the questionnaire ensured accurate and consistent information was gathered, and confirmed clarity of questions (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019). The questionnaire was piloted with the ministry representatives to ensure that the questionnaire was comprehensive and clear. Acting as an advisory group, the ministry representatives were able to review the questionnaire with insider knowledge of the potential demographic characteristics of the delivery staff and administrators who would be completing the questionnaire, and as many of them previously held roles as administrators and/or delivery staff, was able to provide the perspective of participants. The ministry representative group also had the option of requesting any relevant additional questions be included which, from their perspective, could potentially impact the findings of this research and support the strength of information gathered. As will be explained in the procedure below, the distribution of the questionnaire was conducted and encouraged by the ministry representatives to their stakeholder groups. Having their involvement in the creation of the tool provided them with the opportunity to not only increase the strength of the instrument, but also gave the ministry representatives a chance to review the instrument before forwarding to their contacts.

After piloting the questionnaire with the ministry representatives, minor changes in wording were requested in particular within the participant characteristics section. For example, there was a suggestion that there may be confusion in the role of “school board monitor” so adding separate options that included “Central Board Office Staff (e.g., special assignment

teachers, consultants, coordinators)” and “Dual Credit Teachers” was suggested and implemented in the questionnaire. The section including questions on student selection was not originally in the questionnaire, however, after feedback from the ministry representatives it was suggested as a potential opportunity for increased information to support data analysis so was added. In the original version of the questionnaire, Métis was accidentally not included in the targeted program delivery option of “First Nations, Métis, or Inuit Students” and so was added.

The largest change in piloting of the questionnaire from the ministry representatives was that in order for them to distribute to their networks, it was a requirement to provide both a French and English version for participants to have the option to complete. A colleague of the researcher who was fluent in French completed a translation of the questionnaire. In order to ensure accuracy in terminology specific to the SWAC program and that the context of the questionnaire did not change in translation, a bilingual staff member from the School College Work Initiative conducted a final review and edit. Comparison between the English version and the French version was utilized as part of the final review and edit of the French version of the questionnaire to ensure the tone and context was maintained in translation.

### **Government Statistics**

In publicly funded programs, data is collected that provides factual information about a population or a group, including numeric and individual information that becomes public record (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019). There are advantages to using existing data sources in that information can be accessed easily, provided that approval for access has been given (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019). In using factual information gathered by another source, the researcher must never assume that, because documents exist, they will be available for research, that the

information will be accurate, or that the information provides an appropriate sampling of the population sample (Bell, 2010; Creswell & Guetterman, 2019).

As a publicly funded entity, School College Work Initiative posts statistics and data collected each year that are available on their website. Information is available on student participation rates, college application rates in the subsequent year to dual credit, completion of dual credit rates, graduation rates from OSSD, and After-SWAC reports (School College Work Initiative, 2018, 2019, 2019a, 2019b). In September 2020, the Ontario College Application System, on behalf of the School College Work Initiative, also released a report entitled *Dual Credit Students and their Transition to College*, highlighting statistics of all dual credit applicants to post-secondary through their website, [ontariocolleges.ca](http://ontariocolleges.ca), for the 2017-2019 application cycles (Ontario Colleges Applications System, 2020). The information from the OCAS report as well as the annual reports published to the SCWI.ca website were used as part of the data analysis as will be explained below. While the statistics that were gathered are typically used to measure or justify government funding allocations, this timely primary source of information provided valuable information (Bell, 2010). Through triangulation with the focus group, questionnaire, and semi-structured interview findings, the statistics provided could be scrutinized for accuracy and ideas extrapolated (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019). As discussed in Chapter Four: Results, the rates of application indicated within the Ontario Colleges Applications System (2020) report, in conjunction with the reports on student participation in SWAC (School College Work Initiative, 2018, 2019, 2019a, 2019b) provided details that informed the impact of the SWAC programs effectiveness in encouraging post-secondary persistence. Now that a description of the instrument design has been provided, it is important to understanding the sampling and sample that took place as part of this research.

## **Sampling and Sample**

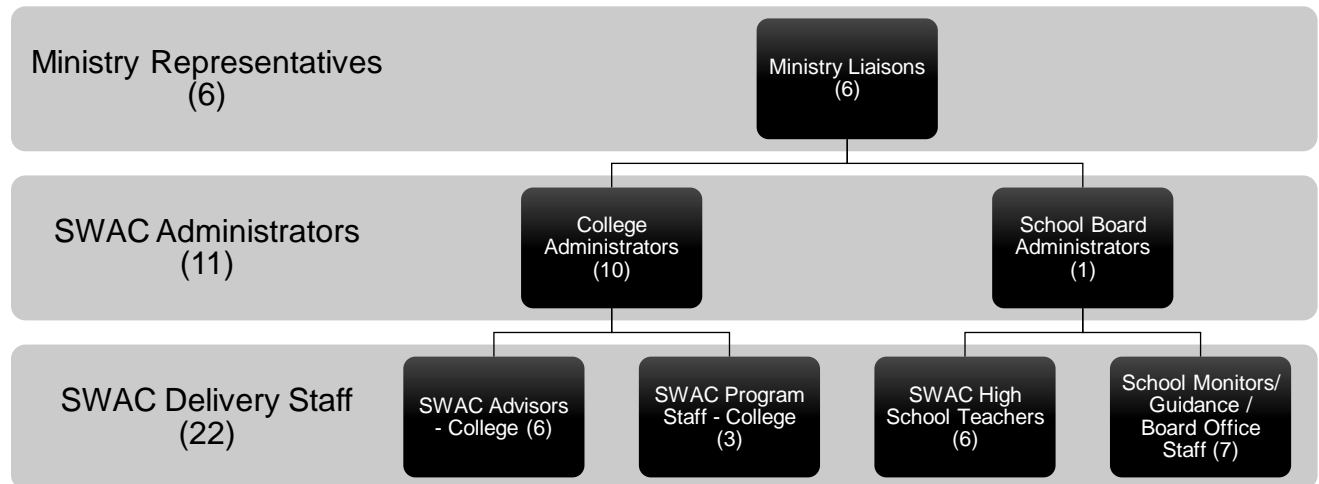
The purpose of this study was to make inferences from the data collected in an effort to understand the effectiveness of the SWAC program in preparing students for post-secondary education towards the aim of creating an ideal model of delivery and, as such, it was important to include purposeful sampling processes (Onwuegbuzie & Collins, 2007). Purposeful sampling is used in qualitative sampling and encourages researchers to “intentionally select individuals and sites to learn or understand the central phenomenon” (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019, p. 206).

In this research project, a stratified, purposeful sampling technique was utilized. In stratified purposeful sampling, a population is divided into different strata or subgroups, and then smaller numbers of cases are studied within each stratum in an effort to describe in detail information that is similar or different across different groups (Teddlie & Yu, 2007). Popular in mixed-methods research, using a stratified purposeful sampling process, the different groups within a population can be studied in order to better answer the research questions (Teddlie & Yu, 2007). The stratified purposive sampling strategy allows for illumination of subgroup characteristics and enhances comparison between groups.

As can be seen in Figure 3 there were a total of 39 participants from multiple subgroups who were targeted as part of this study. Ministry representatives, SWAC administrators, and SWAC delivery staff were all sampled to provide a comprehensive understanding of the differences and similarities between groups.

**Figure 3**

*Research Participants*



Due to the population size and characteristics of each group, simple and criterion sampling were utilized. Simple sampling involves sampling everyone in a population and criterion sampling is sampling a group based on a certain criterion (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019). Utilizing a simple sampling process, all SWAC delivery staff were invited to complete the SWAC Questionnaire. At the end of the questionnaire, delivery staff were asked if they would be willing to participate in a more in-depth, semi-structured interview. Once again, simple sampling was utilized as all participants who indicated a willingness to participate in the semi-structured interview were invited to do so from all staff and administrative roles. What follows is an explanation of each strata population, including clarification of role inclusion as justification for inclusion in this research project.

**School College Work Initiative Ministry Representatives**

SCWI Ministry Representatives oversee the entire SWAC program and the Regional Planning Teams (RPTs). SCWI is overseen by ministry representatives who lead 16 Regional

Planning Teams (RPTs) across the province (School College Work Initiative, 2018). These representatives work as liaisons between the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Training, Colleges, and Universities. Only six Ministry Representatives at the time supported Ontario SWAC programs as part of the ministry sample, and every representative was invited to participate in a focus group and/or an individual, semi-structured interview, thus demonstrating a simple sampling scheme (Onwuegbuzie & Collins, 2007). All six were invited to participate in the ministry focus group and chose to participate.

### **SWAC Administrators**

There are 22 colleges and 90 School Boards who participate in the 16 Regional Planning Teams (RPTs), with 14 RPTs operating SWAC programs across Ontario (School College Work Initiative, 2018). The RPTs are divided geographically across the province so that the unique needs of each area can be governed by a local body. Each RPT leadership team meets monthly to discuss the operations of all SCWI programs and consists of one, or multiple, representatives from each school board, college, and one ministry representative. Ranging in size between approximately 5-15 members, RPT leadership teams typically consist of members of the colleges and school boards who are removed from the in-classroom operations of SWAC, instead focusing on the administration and coordination requirements of programming. RPT teams oversee all SCWI programming including: traditional dual credit, specialist high skilled majors, pre-apprenticeship programs, adult dual credit, special programs and activities, and SWAC.

The chair/co-chairs from all 14 RPTs where SWAC operates were contacted by the researcher with a request to participate and distribute the questionnaire. All chairs were also sent a request to distribute the questionnaire from the ministry representatives. Out of the 22 chairs and co-chairs who have SWAC programs within their areas, 13 are college administrators,

whereas only five are school board representatives. It should be noted that the college administrator category of this research also included those paid through School College Work Initiative as Coordinators, responsible for overseeing the coordination, logistics, finances for the SCWI programming for each RPT. Out of all SWAC Administrators, 11 chose to participate in this research study, consisting of 10 college administrators and one school board administrator.

### **SWAC Delivery Staff**

There were four distinct populations of staff who delivered and supported the SWAC program. Depending on the college location, program staff and college advisors may be involved with SWAC delivery in such a way that they would be able to discuss program delivery effectiveness. At specific SWAC locations, there may be either one or two school board delivery staff who would have first-hand knowledge of the program's success – high school teachers and guidance counsellors/monitors. From those who received the request to participate, 22 chose to participate in this research and represented each of the four different types of delivery staff.

### ***SWAC Advisors – College***

SWAC programs may have a college advisor who provides one-on-one and group support for students. Support can involve career exploration, encouragement of participation in post-secondary, identification of barriers to progression, and providing supports for applications to post-secondary and student loan programs (School College Work Initiative, 2017). SWAC college advisors, otherwise known as After-SWAC advisors often provide advising support for SWAC and Adult-Dual Credit programs and, should a college have additional specialized SWAC programs, support for those targeted SWAC programs. SWAC advisors may also be responsible for other duties associated or in conjunction with SWAC Program Staff. In total, six college advisors chose to participate in this research.

### ***SWAC Program Staff – College***

Program staff are responsible for connecting with the SWAC high school teachers, school board representatives, dual credit college faculty, and the college to ensure all facilities, supplies, and resources are available for students and staff. Program staff may assist with registration, attendance, coordination of supply/food delivery, and may help SWAC students access college services and supports. Program staff may also be involved in the scheduling of workshops and information sessions with other areas of the college (e.g., admissions, registration, financial aid etc.). Three program staff from the college level participated in this study.

### ***SWAC High School Teachers***

SWAC high school teachers work on college campuses, often in isolation, and perform duties such as course delivery and/or credit recovery, track attendance, monitor and provide support for students, and report to school boards on attendance and student concerns. High school teachers are responsible for monitoring students, providing course material and support (either through credit recovery or course delivery), and supporting students with accessing campus or school board supports as needed. Six high school teachers opted to join this research. Many SWAC high school teachers also provide guidance support, either on behalf of guidance and school monitors, or in partnership until school guidance or school monitors can be included in student case conferencing.

### ***School Monitors / Guidance / Board Staff***

All school boards assign a guidance counsellor to each student who participates in SWAC. The guidance counsellor's interaction with SWAC students can vary depending on the school board. Some guidance counsellor's check-in with students regularly on the college campuses, while others do not interact with students outside of initial registration, leaving any



required support up to the SWAC high school teachers and college delivery staff. School board monitors or school board staff are responsible for monitoring attendance and transportation for traditional dual-credit students and may support SWAC students as well. Some school board monitors/board staff act more as guidance check-in for students and more fully support student well-being and access to resources. Some monitors/board staff are responsible for following-up/supporting students in crisis with housing, mental health resources, and food insecurity. Seven school board monitors/staff participated in this research project.

### **Participant Profiles**

Out of the 39 who participated in this research, five participants worked primarily with SWAC programs delivered as part of the Initiative de Jonction Écoles-Collèges-Milieu de Travail (IJECT), the French language schools, colleges, and programs, with the remaining 32 supporting programs in English speaking school boards. As can be seen in Table 2, the majority of participants were employed full-time with SWAC delivery comprising under 59% of their total role.

**Table 2*****Percentage of Current Position is SWAC***

Percentage of Position in SWAC	Number of Participants
Full-Time Employed. SWAC Delivery Between 0-29% of current position	17%
Full-Time Employed. SWAC Delivery 30-59% of current Position	5%
Full-time Employed. SWAC Delivery between 60-100% of current position.	12%
Part-time Employed (24 hours/week or less); SWAC delivery between 30-59% of current position	1%
Part-time Employed (24 hours/week or less); SWAC delivery between 60-100% of current position	4%

The majority of participants (n=14) had been in their SWAC positions between 2-3 years. As can be seen in Table 3, individuals experience in their current position ranged from zero to one years to over 10 years (n=39).

**Table 3*****Years in Current Position***

Years	% of Participants
0-1 years	8%
2-3 years	36%
4-5 years	15%
6-10 years	23%
Over 10 years	18%

The vast majority of participants had experience within the education system prior to their current role (n=29), with only five participants having no previous positions in education before their current role supporting SWAC (see Table 4).

**Table 4*****Previous Experience of Participants***

Previous Experience	% of Participants
High School Teacher	22%
High School Guidance Counsellor	11%
College program staff (e.g., Program support staff)	14%
College administrator (Dean, Associate Dean)	14%
Combination of two or more roles: high school teacher, guidance counsellor, central board staff, high school administrator, college program staff, college student advisor	25%
I did not hold any of these previous positions	14%

Out of the SWAC administrators and delivery staff who participated in this research (n=33), the majority were located at a main/central college campus location (n=26) with a smaller number located at a smaller/satellite campus (n=4). What was not captured accurately on the questionnaire was how many participants supported programs at both a main campus and a smaller satellite campus. However, in the delivery staff interviews, out the 11 participants, six indicated they support programs at both main and satellite campuses. Having now gained an understanding of the participants who were involved in this research study, it would be helpful to have an overall view of the procedure that took place to gather information.

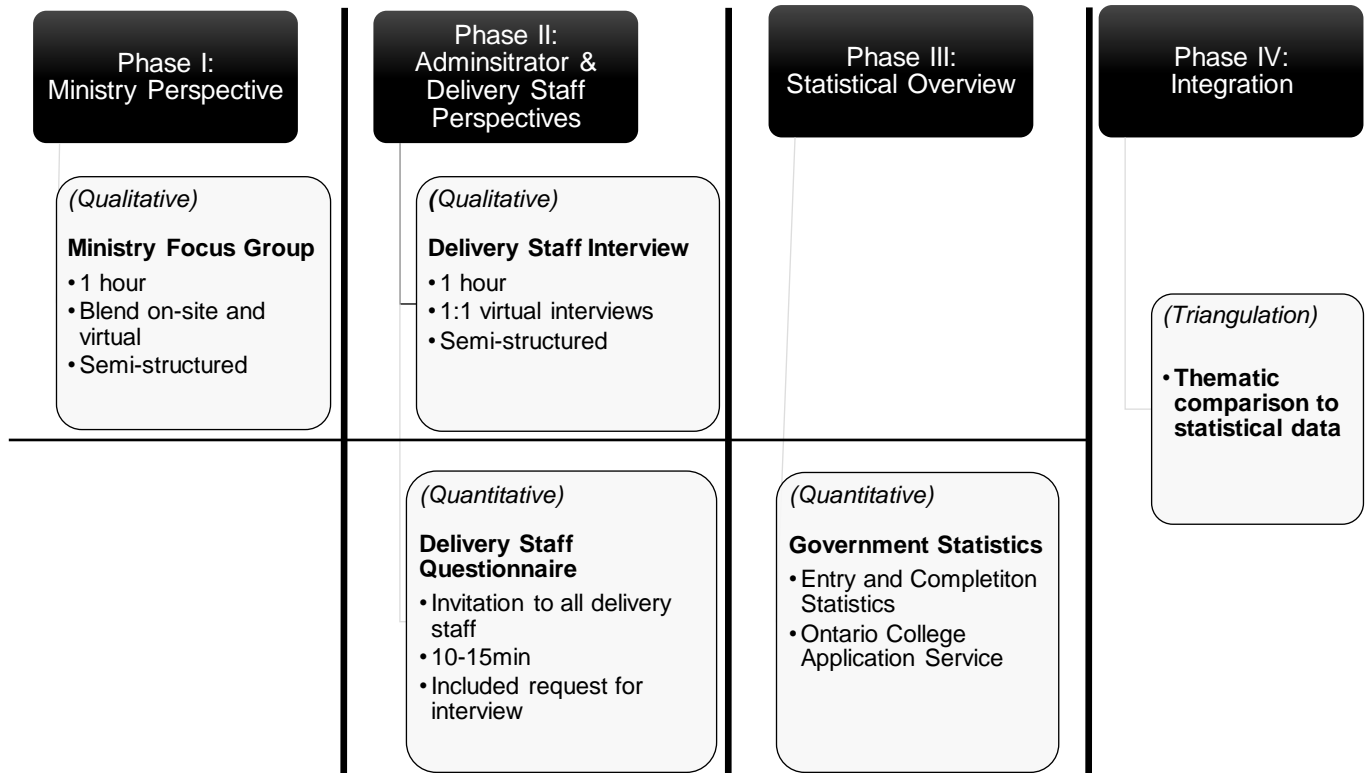
### **Procedure**

As stated above in the mixed-methods research section, this research followed a convergent design, where both quantitative and qualitative data were collected concurrently throughout the research, with analysis and integration happening after data collection. In order to collect information from multiple levels of the SWAC hierarchy, there were four phases to this research as evident in Figure 4. The four phases included gaining information from: the ministry

perspective; administrator and delivery staff perspective; government statistics; and integration of all perspectives through data analysis.

**Figure 4**

*Research Procedure*



**Phase I: Ministry Perspective**

Phase I of this research focused on gaining an overview of the School Within a College program from the ministry perspective by first conducting a focus group with the ministry liaison’s responsible for overseeing the SCWI from a provincial level. A request was sent to one of the ministry representatives known to the researcher from previous employment to schedule a focus group. Prior to scheduling a focus group, the ministry representative requested an initial informational meeting, which was held with three ministry representatives, where the research overview was presented. As explained above, as a pragmatic researcher, it was of utmost importance that the information gathered served a dual purpose to influence change in a

practical, collaborative way, while also meeting the requirements of this doctoral dissertation. By meeting to share the research overview and provide space for clarification on the request, there was also the added benefit of ensuring the ministry representatives would be comfortable sharing the questionnaire with delivery staff as explained below.

Following the informational meeting, the three ministry representatives then shared the researcher's request for participation with all other staff who support SWAC from the provincial leadership level and in doing so, a focus group was scheduled for December 2019. In total six ministry representatives opted to participate in the one-hour semi-structured focus group. Participants had the option of joining in person, at a neutral college campus board room in the Greater Toronto Area, or they could call in through a teleconference. All ministry representatives were asked to complete an informed consent form prior to the focus group and were provided with the option to participate through an individual interview. No focus group member opted for an individual interview. All ministry representatives were sent a copy of the delivery staff questionnaire as explained in piloting the questionnaire in the instrument design section above. A copy of the focus group questions can be found in Appendix B – Research Tools, Ministry Focus Group.

Three participants joined the focus group in person and three called in through the teleconference. Taking into consideration the potential limitations of focus groups and of using web-based platforms as explained above in the instrument design section, actions were taken by the researcher to mitigate limitations. As a practitioner who regularly facilitated focus groups professionally, the researcher throughout made every effort to remain unbiased, listen, and be respectful (Wong, 2008). Strategies were employed to encourage further elaboration as needed and provide all members the opportunity to speak, including those calling in, by using such

phrases as, “Just checking in with the folks on the phone – no pressure, but I want to provide you with the space if you’d like to comment on the current topic”. The final transcript of the focus group was sent to all participants, once identifiers had been removed, with an option to review and remove any remaining identifiers. No remaining identifiers were indicated for removal by focus group participants. Following the focus group, Phase II of the research process began.

## **Phase II: Administrator and Delivery Staff Perspectives**

During Phase II of this research project, both the questionnaire and the semi-structured interviews took place concurrently. Simultaneous collection of information through the questionnaire and delivery staff interviews were scheduled and executed with the aim at soliciting feedback from practitioners in a variety of regions across the province, on the delivery, effectiveness, and leadership of the SWAC program. Interview participants were solicited from completion of the questionnaire.

### ***Questionnaire Procedure***

Within the instrument design section on the questionnaire above, an overview of the process that was taken to create the questionnaire was provided including the piloting of the instrument by ministry representatives. After the ministry focus group, the feedback solicited from the ministry was implemented including the translation of the questionnaire into French. The person translating the questionnaire was delayed in completing the translation and, as such, the distribution of the questionnaire was postponed. While originally the questionnaire was to be sent at the end of January, the final completed questionnaire was not ready until mid-March 2020. With the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic as described above, and, in an effort to solicit accurate and meaningful feedback, questionnaire distribution was postponed until after the immediacy of the COVID-19 pandemic impact on remote learning.

The questionnaire was distributed by the ministry representatives to all Regional Planning Teams (RPTs) by email to SWAC administrators, encouraging participation and distribution to all delivery staff and administrators within their respective teams in May 2020. Requests for participation in the questionnaire were also sent to the Regional Planning Team chairs, as listed on the public SCWI website, directly from the researcher, with a request to distribute within their teams. The researcher also shared the questionnaire with those staff known to her, with a request to distribute to their personal networks of SWAC delivery staff. One former colleague of the researcher shared the link to the questionnaire within an online chat open only to SWAC college advisors. Distribution through known channels alleviated issues with spam filters and was used in an attempt to increase response rates, as indicated above under the questionnaire instrument design section. While there were ethical considerations associated with administering surveys through an overarching body, by requesting participation through multiple mediums, highlighting informed consent, and ensuring confidentiality principles had been met, risks were decreased. More details on the processes that were undertaken to ensure ethical delivery of the questionnaire has been provided later in this chapter.

Prior to completing the questionnaire, participants needed to agree to the informed consent embedded in the first page of the questionnaire. In total, 47 people began the questionnaire, however three did not agree to the informed consent and so did not continue. Average time for completion of the questionnaire, according to the Qualtrics software, was approximately ten to fifteen minutes. Out of the 45 questionnaires that were begun by those who agreed to the terms, 33 submitted some information, two of which were submitted through the French language questionnaire. The final page of the questionnaire asked if the participant would be willing to be contacted for a follow-up in-depth interview and, only if the participant said yes,

was contact information collected. When asked if they would be willing to participate in a follow-up interview, 16 participants agreed. All participants who indicated a willingness to participate in an interview were asked to take part. The questionnaire remained open and available throughout phases II and III, which included the option to participate in the semi-structured interview.

### ***Semi-Structured Interview Procedure***

All 16 individuals who indicated a willingness to participate in an in-depth interview on the questionnaire were contacted by email, with a request to schedule a convenient time to conduct the virtual interview. Out of the 16 invited to participate, 14 replied with a continued willingness to participate and to schedule an interview. Two did not reply. The researcher made two subsequent email attempts and one phone attempt to contact those who indicated a willingness to participate in the questionnaire, but did not reply to the initial emailed request to schedule an interview. Of the remaining 14 who indicated a willingness to participate, two did not arrive for their scheduled interview or respond to the interviewer in follow up email requests, and one asked to be removed due to pressures with work and time constraints. In total, 11 administrators and delivery staff participated in the one-hour semi-structured interview.

Interviews were scheduled according to the participants' availability and were conducted using Microsoft Teams through the University of Calgary. Using the secured system, participants were able to either call in or join through their computers video and audio system. Out of the 11 participants, nine completed interviews with both audio and video whereas two faced technical difficulties, which meant they began with video and then switched to audio only. Both the interviewer and the participants were in secured, private locations, free from distractions, in which to conduct the interviews. Interviews were scheduled over a three-month period, with



flexibility given to participants to reschedule as needed. After reviewing the transcripts and recordings of the initial interviews, alterations to the questions were made for clarity and to provide participants with more open-ended opportunities to discuss the leadership of the program. For those who requested to review transcripts to remove identifiers, final copies of the transcripts were sent, with one month for review and comments. One participant indicated a desire to remove one identifying comment. No other participants responded with requests to alter the final transcripts. The questionnaire and semi-structured interview procedure occurred concurrently with a review of the government statistics available.

### **Phase III: Statistical Overview**

Phase III, the Statistical Overview of this research, involved the review of government statistics publicly made available, including SWAC application, progression and graduation rates, and the application to college statistics, including the use of SCWI funded application vouchers. In the third phase a review of the publicly available entry and completion statistics was made, as well as the use of the Ontario Colleges Applications System (2020) report of dual credit applications.

#### ***Entry and Completion Statistics***

All provincial SWAC programs were responsible for tracking and submitting statistics on incoming SWAC students to SCWI through the Ministry tracking system. As a publicly funded program, entry and completion statistics were posted to the SCWI website, which is publicly available. The Dual Credit at a Glance reports from 2017-2018 and from 2018-2019 were used to review the number of students who enrolled in dual credit programs, the percentage of students identified as disengaged and underachieving, the percentage who had left and returned to studies, the success rate or percentage of dual credits completed, and the number of grade 12 students

who earned their Ontario Secondary School Diploma in the same year, as indicated in *Table 5: 2017-2019 Dual Credit Participation Rates*.

**Table 5**

*2017-2019 Dual Credit Participation Rates*

Students Enrolled in All Dual Credit Programs	2017-2018	2018-2019
All Students	21,346	21,799
% Disengaged and Underachieving Students	80%	83%
% Students Who Had Left School and Returned	10%	11%
% Dual Credits Earned (Success Rate)	91%	91%
Number of Grade 12 Dual Credit Students Who Earned an OSSD in the Same Year	74%	75%

(School College Work Initiative 2018, 2019, 2019a, 2019b)

The After School Within a College reports from 2018-2019 were also reviewed for the total number of students enrolled in SWAC, rates and types of applications to post-secondary education from SWAC, and use of the Ontario Colleges Applications System vouchers (School College Work Initiative, 2019a, 2019b). To analyse the rate of student progression into post-secondary, data was compared to the Ontario Colleges Applications Systems (2020) report on student applications to postsecondary.

***Ontario College Application System Report.***

In September 2020, the Ontario Colleges Applications System (OCAS), on behalf of the School College Work Initiative, released a report entitled *Dual Credit Students and their Transition to College*, highlighting statistics of all dual credit applicants to post-secondary through [www.ontariocolleges.com](http://www.ontariocolleges.com) for the 2017-2019 application cycles (Ontario Colleges Applications System, 2020). The information from the OCAS report as well as the annual reports published to the [www.SCWI.ca](http://www.SCWI.ca) website were used for analysis. While this OCAS report included students from all dual credit programs, from 2017-2019, the majority of students who use a SCWI funded OCAS voucher were primarily SWAC students. The quantitative information in

this report allowed for both a provincial and regional level overview of student applications into Ontario colleges.

#### **Phase IV: Integration**

In Phase IV, Integrated Overview, results from all data collection methods were analysed through triangulation. In the final phase of this research, triangulation of information was conducted by comparing and contrasting the themes gathered through Phases I and II with the completion and progression statistics from Phase III. An overall provincial review was conducted identifying any outlying or contrasting themes from a provincial level, followed by a regional review of the information based on the regions of participants in this research. Since the sample sizes were low for each region, greater emphasis and analysis was placed on the provincial integration of results.

#### **Data Analysis and Interpretation**

In a convergent, mixed-methods study, qualitative and quantitative data is processed separately, and then integrated, with outliers or unique nuances presented separately, dependent on the results of triangulation. As such, the data processing and analysis process that was used for the qualitative, quantitative, and triangulation methods will be described separately.

#### **Qualitative Data Analysis**

Qualitative data processing and analysis followed six steps including: preparing and organizing, initial exploration, coding, representing findings in visuals/narratives, interpret results, and validate findings (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019). Information from each stratum, or data group, was analysed together in groups. Data from focus groups and interviews were inputted into a password-protected Excel spreadsheet, with each column representing a different focus group/interview question and each participant assigned a row with a numeric identifier.

Iterative thematic coding was used to generate themes from participant responses. Iterative thematic coding involved multiple rounds of open coding of results through continuous review (Ziskin et al., 2014). After the initial coding of the focus group and interviews, the open-ended responses to the questions found in the final part of the questionnaire, as described above in the instrument design section, were also coded. After the initial coding of all focus group, interviews, and open-ended responses, a total of 247 codes were identified. A list of the original 247 codes can be found in Appendix C – Data Analysis, Original Qualitative Code Book.

Upon subsequent review of the transcripts, 160 common codes were identified by connecting similar codes. For example, “familiarity with campus”, was combined with “navigating campus”. To limit researcher bias, a fellow researcher reviewed and coded two delivery staff interviews after identifiers had been removed and once the participants had agreed to the final transcript. By using inter-coder reliability (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019), and in reviewing the coding conducted through inter-coder reliability, one additional code, “advocacy” was utilized in the iterative thematic coding by the researcher as described above in the qualitative rigour in research section. Further condensing of code groups was conducted with a final 106 codes used, which can be found in Appendix C – Data Analysis, Final Code Book.

To “quantitize” the qualitative information, codes were transferred to an Excel database by participant identifier (Onwuegbuzie et al., 2009). Each time a code was present, a frequency count of one was entered onto that line in the participant identifier column. In order to reflect the number of participants in the focus group and demonstrate the weight of their responses, the number three was given if the code appeared in the focus group. Totals were gathered for each of the codes with a high of 19 and a low of three.

Through initial and subsequent reading and coding of results, themes and subthemes were highlighted (Aikens et al., 2016). Codes were grouped according to themes based on the weight of that code, by distributing codes in different sheets through Microsoft Excel. The researcher reviewed the codes through several iterations including: reviewing by each sampling group; the participants' number years of experience in current role; and high school credit delivery (credit recovery only, scheduled course delivery, combination of scheduled course delivery and credit recovery). By comparing the themes and subthemes discovered from each data group, similarities and differences in results were identified to determine overarching consistencies and discrepancies throughout the SWAC program. In total 11 general themes were identified including: advocacy/support, community, communication/collaboration, rigour, persistence, flexibility, hiring, SCWI leadership, student barriers, and skills development.

### **Quantitative Data Analysis**

Descriptive analysis is used when a researcher aims to discover the trends and tendencies of participants (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019). Descriptive statistics aim to take large data sets and reduce them into more manageable forms that can then be summarized to show major characteristics of the data (Coleman, 2018). The use of descriptive statistics can provide an informative overview of participants and findings.

The questionnaire and government statistics that were used in this study aimed to gather descriptive information about the effectiveness of SWAC programs and the attitudes towards the successes and challenges in SWAC program delivery. Data collected through the questionnaire was exported to Microsoft Excel where descriptive trends of information was gathered and sorted in order to determine the mean, or average, median, or middle score, and mode of each response (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019). Through use of descriptive statistics, frequency of

responses was highlighted to show trends across the province and demonstrate the highest and lowest frequency of responses, in order to identify areas of strength and development throughout the province (Coleman, 2018).

Frequency rates indicated in the provincial entry and completion statistics from 2017-2019 were also used to review from a provincial and regional level. The information in the Ontario College Application Systems (OCAS) report on behalf of SCWI showcased frequency rates of student application and progression into Ontario colleges provincially and by each college. The rates of applications and enrolment, especially by students using a SCWI voucher, was reviewed. Within the focus group and interviews it was indicated that the majority of students using the SCWI funded voucher were either SWAC or Adult Dual Credit students, connections between participant comments and the statistics led to triangulation in themes within the findings.

### **Triangulation**

Between method-triangulation was used to compare the thematic analysis that was gathered through qualitative data analysis, and the trends that were highlighted through the quantitative data analysis. By combining the four approaches to data collection (focus groups, interviews, questionnaires, and government statistics), it was possible to show the differences in perspectives of the SWAC program from a variety of levels within the organization, thus providing a deeper analysis into the effectiveness, successes, and challenges the program faces (Flick, 2018). As depicted in *Table 6: Top 20 Qualitative Codes with Themes*, there were a final five main themes that arose through triangulation, consisting of: community building, student support and advocacy, multiple facets of persistence, delivery, and leadership.

**Table 6***Top 20 Qualitative Codes with Themes*

<b>Rank</b>	<b>Theme</b>	<b>Codes</b>
1	Community	Sense of community/belonging in classroom, on campus
2	Community	Positive early relationships /encouraging with students
3	Persistence	College integration/collaboration - expectations
4	Support/Advocacy	Need consistent supports during first semester/first year
5	Community	Get familiarity and comfort with campus
6	Persistence	Lack of academic rigor causes disservice and unpreparedness for students
7	Leadership	Greater communication/involvement with/from school boards
8	Community	Safe space for learning (outside high school)
9	Support/Advocacy	Advisor important
10	Support/Advocacy	Basic needs (finance, food, homelessness)
11	Persistence	Gain confidence in self/autonomy
12	Flexibility/Delivery	Life skills/cooking class
13	Support/Advocacy	Connection with community resources
14	Persistence	Students not always ready for PSE
15	Leadership	Seeing student success
16	Leadership	Passion for program
17	Leadership	Continued collaboration with SCWI to brainstorm strategies
18	Persistence	Connecting with college services re: transition to PSE (e.g., financial aid, recruitment etc.)
19	Community	Connection with centres on campus (e.g., First Nations)
20	Leadership	Hiring from within college

A full list of all codes with identified themes can be found in Appendix C – Data Analysis, Final Code Book. In chapters 4 and 5, a presentation of the consistencies, inconsistencies, and contradictions throughout these five themes has been highlighted and explored.

### **Ethical Considerations**

Whenever research is undertaken, there are ethical considerations that must be considered prior to implementation of research. For the purpose of this study, gaining appropriate

permissions, power dynamics, and privacy and sharing of information were the major potential concerns that needed to be considered.

### **Permissions Required**

There were multiple layers of permissions that needed to be gathered prior to implementation of the project. First, as a doctoral student, permission from the University of Calgary Research Ethics Board needed to be achieved prior to collecting data from participants. Permission from the School-College-Work Initiative ministry representatives was then confirmed, as well as approval from the Ontario Multi-College Research Ethics Board. This was started by obtaining approval through the University of Calgary Research Ethics Board and the Ontario Multi-College Research Ethics Review Board. The Ontario Colleges Multi-College Ethics Review Board is a process that was meant to “coordinate ethics reviews among participating colleges with a view to streamlining ethics review for researchers and decreasing workload for Research Ethics Boards” (Sheridan College, n.d.). There are only four colleges in Ontario that do not participate in the Multi-College Ethics Review Board, and none of those college operate SWAC programs (Sheridan College, n.d.; School College Work Initiative, 2017). Following approval from the University of Calgary and the Ontario College Multi-College Ethics Review Board, individual applications for research were submitted to 22 Ontario Colleges where SWAC operated, with approval granted from 19 colleges and no responses from the remaining three college ethics boards. Additionally, 18 of the 19 colleges required additional individual college applications to each of their Research Ethics Boards which we were applied for and obtained. Individuals who chose to participate in the research project were required to complete an informed consent to participate. Those who participated in the focus group or semi-structured interview were also provided with a verbal reminder that participation was voluntary. As part of



the informed consent process, participants had the option of reviewing final transcripts to ensure personal identifiers had been removed. Those who selected the option to review final transcripts were sent copies for review and given a month to submit edits.

### **Power Dynamics**

Zeni (2009) discussed the need to reflect on the power relations within groups, including the power the researcher had, people who have power over the researcher, and the potential to either strengthen or abuse the trusting relationships that were built with participants. While the researcher was now an outsider from the School-College-Work Initiative, they still maintained contacts with RPT and delivery staff and were coming from a position of power within the institution that they worked at. Throughout the process, in order to make participants feel welcome and included, the researcher was consistently mindful of the position they held and made it explicitly clear that participation in the research was voluntary and would not influence future interactions.

Cohen et al. (2007) described the benefits and challenges of sponsored research and highlighted ethical considerations that need to be taken. In completing a sponsored research project there was a risk that the sponsoring agency, in this case SCWI, could dictate: how to conduct the research; suppression of findings; and which findings may be shared (Cohen et al., 2007, p. 74). While the hope of this research project was to provide information to SCWI, there were no monetary incentives exchanged, with only a final report and presentation being delivered, in exchange for access to participants. What SCWI chooses to do with the final report and presentation is up to them as the researcher was no longer employed within SCWI, and thus the influence of future opportunities with the organization were no longer a consideration (Cohen

et al., 2007). In this arms-length research environment, research integrity was maintained with no fear of repercussions.

Finally, power dynamics within focus groups could influence the likelihood of participants openly sharing their perspectives if there are supervisors/managers in the room. To overcome the potential power dynamic concerns, the option to conduct an individual interview to answer the focus group questions was provided to each focus group participant, and each member invited to the ministry focus group was coming from an equal level of power within the organizational structure.

### **Privacy and Confidentiality**

When individuals agreed to participate in this research project, they were made aware of the information that would be gathered and shared. Initial information collected was not shared with other participants or SCWI. Following interviews and the focus group, identifiers were removed from transcripts. In an effort to ensure accuracy and confidentiality, a copy of the notes from the interview/focus group were returned to participants for removal of any identifiers that were missed. With such a small sample group, there was the risk that some identifiers would still be inadvertently shared through description of programming, successes, and challenges. During the questionnaire, focus group, and semi-structured interviews, participants were made aware of the risks and were reminded of their right to refuse to continue at any time. Names of participants were removed from all reports with only the participant's role being used for quotations if necessary (e.g., SWAC College Advisor, SWAC High School Teacher, School Board Representative, etc.). Should the context of the individual be needed, additional information was included. As shown in the Findings chapter, composite pictures of groups as a whole were

provided, rather than one individual, when risk of identification of participants were present (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019).

In the questionnaire, participants electronically agreed that they had read and understood how the information provided would be used and distributed. Should identifiers have been included in questionnaire responses, all attempts at removal were made, however, there is the possibility that inadvertent identifiers remain. Participants were made aware of this risk as part of the informed consent process. At the end of the questionnaire, participants were asked to provide their contact information if they were willing to participate in an interview. The contact information remained separate from participant responses to ensure confidentiality. When exporting to an Excel document for analysis, researcher-created identifiers were assigned to participant respondents to keep the identity confidential (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019). Information collected was stored on a secure computer drive and was password protected. Access to raw data was limited to the researcher and as all interviews were conducted through encrypted, invitation only, web-based sessions through Microsoft Teams, the threat of recordings being available publicly was eliminated.

### **Summary**

Through use of a pragmatic research approach, this mixed-methodology research study was able to highlight successes and challenges in delivery of the SWAC program, leading to an analysis of the effectiveness of leadership of the program. An in-depth overview of the SWAC program was conducted by utilizing qualitative methods, including focus groups and semi-structured interviews, quantitative methods, including a questionnaire and government data, and bringing all data together through triangulation. The use of a distributed sampling process allowed for a cross-hierarchical approach to data collection and provided rich results and

commentary. What follows in Chapter 4 will be a presentation of all research findings which will be used in the subsequent discussion chapter to discuss implications for moving forward.

## Chapter 4 – Results

After extensive analysis of the data gathered in this research, five main themes were identified in relation to the effectiveness of School Within a College (SWAC) programs in preparing students for persistence into post-secondary education (PSE): community building, student support and advocacy, multiple facets of persistence, delivery, and program leadership. The themes identified as prevalent were coalesced to identify these five select themes through coding and analysis of the qualitative and quantitative data. Common codes from the qualitative coding analysis were integrated through iterative thematic coding. Qualitative results were analysed with the review of quantitative results and brought together through triangulation. Results were presented below with the five main themes highlighted and subthemes identified where necessary.

As depicted in Figure 3, in Chapter Three, a total of 39 people participated in this research. The six Ministry Representatives provided feedback through a focus group. All 33 SWAC Administrators and Delivery Staff completed the questionnaire, and those that indicated interest in participating in the interview phase were invited to join. In Chapter 3, a full explanation of the number and selection of participants for interviews was provided, as was the format and structure of the interview process. To remind readers, for the purpose of this research, college administrators included both those in a leadership role at the college and those hired by their Regional Planning Teams (RPTs) to oversee SCWI activities. Throughout this chapter, in an effort to reduce the potential for identifying comments, the term administrator will be used whenever comments from college administrators or a school board administrator are used.

Throughout this chapter, where direct quotes are used from participants, their words will be presented in *italics* to ensure the clarity and voices of the participants are highlighted. Though

this does not follow APA, by using italics, it is anticipated that participants' voices will be easily identifiable and emphasized throughout the results to increase the readability and authenticity of emergent themes. Each of the five overarching themes are presented below in order of the highest frequency of the codes identified and emphasized by participants in their qualitative feedback. The highest emphasized themes throughout this research were 1) the importance of community building, 2) student support and advocacy, 3) multiple facets persistence, 4) delivery, and 5) leadership. These themes have been presented in this order in the following sections.

### **Community Building**

The theme of community building arose in all aspects of this research. The importance of community building and support, for both students and those supporting students, was raised in the majority of interviews and in the focus group. There were two different areas of importance with regards to community building, the first being the importance of building community for SWAC students, and the second being the necessity of building community with SWAC delivery staff. As students are the focus of the SWAC program, community building with students will be presented first.

### **Students**

The focus on creating a welcoming, open environment where students feel they belong and are a part of a community was highlighted in 56% of all participants' comments. In all interviews and the focus group conducted, 100% of participants emphasized the importance of building a sense of community and sense of belonging with students in SWAC classrooms. In many cases, the building of community within the classroom environment surpassed any academic focus, as one teacher stated, "*We focus on community building and creating connections first, academics second... these students need to feel a connection (there has to be a*

*buy in) for school to work for them. That's the missing piece in 'regular' schools".* To help support the building of community and belonging in the SWAC classroom, 53% of participants stated that early positive and encouraging relationships between staff and students were required. In order to help create these early, positive relationships with SWAC students, staff should aim to create an open environment. As one college staff shared, *"A lot of the time students feel really intimidated to talk to us just because we have a title.... if we have a technique with working to get that relationship from the beginning of the term, they won't be as intimidated to speak to us"*. Strong connection and integration into the college environment, including developing familiarity and comfort with the campus, was an important aspect to developing a sense of belonging for SWAC students, according to 53% of participants.

Participants from all levels of SCWI delivery, including ministry liaisons, college administrators, school board staff, teachers, advisors, and program staff, mentioned making efforts to support SWAC students with getting comfortable on campus. This includes *"orientations, when they start at the college, you know, giving them a tour, showing them around campus a little bit, getting logged into the system"*. In the interviews and the focus group, 35% of participants shared that one task which helped to create a sense of belonging for SWAC students was to obtain a student card. *"I think that we could probably globally say the value of that student card is tremendous...the value of actually being part of the college...that gives our students such a boost"*. The student card allowed the SWAC students to, as one participant shared, *"give them an identity, a positive identity...I am a college student"*. This can help students' feel that they belong in the new college environment.

The difference between the high school environment and the college environment itself, lead to the creation of a sense of community for SWAC students. In total, 46% of participants'

stated the SWAC classroom became a safe place for learning outside of the high school environment, which was important for student success. For example, one teacher shared that some students would say upon intake, *“I wanted to leave a toxic environment, or that traditional way of learning wasn’t for me, and I felt like I was being punished for it”*. The teacher went on to say they *“think SWAC did...it did create a sense of community and it was a safer space for students to learn”*. Through the positive early relationships with SWAC students, those delivering SWAC could show students they were in a safe space to learn where they could gain confidence in themselves through autonomy. As one teacher shared:

*The space is different...we tell them that they are going to be treated like adult learners, which is not entirely true, because we still have to monitor their attendance and all those other things...[but] they like that they have more autonomy...[the students] are at the stage where all they want is freedom and they think that school’s oppressive and that we’re out to get them and then they come to this space...and it makes a huge difference because they’ve never been allowed to make those decisions for themselves before.*

Inclusion within the college environment provided SWAC students with the feeling of autonomy and allowed for a more mature learning environment for students.

The importance of having SWAC students integrated into all aspects of the college community was emphasized by 51% of participants. In further exploration of the types of college connections SWAC students needed, 36% of participants stated connection to cultural centres (e.g., First Nations/Indigenous support, LGBTQ2+, etc.) were important for student success and connection to community. As one participant highlighted, *“I think it’s important that we have a great rapport with the [First Nations/Indigenous Support Centre] on campus...they’re very receptive”*. A teacher shared:



*We also have our chaplain right down the hall from us and you know sometimes there's some big outbursts and, I mean, everyone's really good about it and they understand...you know, sometimes [the chaplain] can hear an outburst and they come down to see if they can help or if there's anything they can do.*

The potential inclusion of SWAC students in social events and activities, such as student unions, across the college campus, was mentioned by 10% of participants as t an opportunity for an increase in a sense of community and belonging for students. One administrator however felt the social activities could provide unnecessary distractions. *“Access to the post-secondary environment allows our at-risk students to experience a more mature and independent setting absent of secondary school distractions”*. Regardless of the type of college services they were connected with, all participants highlighted the importance of full inclusion within the college environment to create a sense of community and belonging for SWAC students.

Not only did SWAC create a sense of belonging through the collaboration and integration with college resources, but it also provided students a chance to connect with other students facing similar experiences. For 33% of participants, it was reported that being surrounded by fellow students' facing similar challenges, barriers, or cultural heritage lead to students' feeling like they belong. One advisor shared, *“We have 100% of [students with] complex needs and there is less drama, and we find that they forge more relationships, because they've all come from somewhere and been through stuff, so they do tend to form a community, a relationship”*.

Students were able to connect with each other and share perspectives in a safe space. For example, one participant shared about hearing from students about issues they were facing with isolation during COVID-19 and as a result of the anti-black racism in the media during Spring 2020: *“These conversations happen in our [SWAC] classes all the time but we recognize that*

[students] *might not have circles of people, or friends, or acquaintances that would have those conversations*". By creating a sense of community and belonging with students through early positive relationships with students, and developing a safe space for learning, this teacher was able to bring together SWAC students' facing similar lived experiences to share and learn together.

Coming together as a group to celebrate successes of SWAC students was also an important part of the SWAC experience according to 38% of participants. Celebrating successes including graduation was also seen as important. According to SCWI in 2017-2018, 74% of all dual credit students earned their Ontario Secondary School Diploma in the same year they completed a dual credit, and in 2018-2019, a total of 75% of all students completed their OSSD (School College Work Initiative, 2018, 2019). As one advisor shared, a highlight of their work was seeing students at the beginning of their SWAC semester and then "*celebrating with [them] at the end of their semester and giving them certificates*". Another administrator stated there were "*frustrations*" throughout the year but "*the reward is in June when those students graduate...we can have our celebration of success...and while some [SWAC students] would have [graduated] on their own somehow, but most wouldn't...that's my driving force*". Sentiment from participants indicated that celebrating together as a group at the end of the semester or school year reiterated the sense of community they had with their fellow staff, teachers, and the students.

### **SWAC Delivery Staff**

The importance of community building to create a sense of belonging was evident not only for students, but for the staff, teachers and administrators who worked together to support SWAC students. In the interviews and focus group, when asked what motivated them to work

within the SWAC program, participants ranked seeing student success and working with students to help them as first, but 67% of those interviewed said working together with other delivery staff, administrators, and teachers kept them motivated. One teacher shared that, when originally contemplating joining the program, their final decision for joining the team was because the “[SWAC program] *was just such an incredible team of people that were so student focused...it had reminded me, even though we’re in separate campuses, it reminding me of [a] community*”. All but one participant in the interviews and focus groups, at one point in the discussions, mentioned another colleague, either in the college or school boards, who was supportive, they appreciated working with, and who made their work life better. One advisor said, regarding their motivation to join the SWAC program, they were influenced by *“Having that team approach to support...I think I loved how different it was from just the mainstream dual credit group. I liked that [students] had way more access to those needed supports”*.

The community building between teachers and college staff on-site was an important factor which became evident for course delivery and for staff/teacher support. Out of all participants, 31% emphasised the need for either team teaching with two teachers or more supporting a SWAC program, or the importance of having rotating experts to teach their area of expertise. In speaking of the benefits of team teaching, not only was the importance of subject matter expertise beneficial to students completing specific course work (e.g., English, Math, etc.), but *“The teachers also have a support network...a friend, a person you can share with”*. Teachers who worked without regular teaching partners could feel isolated. Out of all participants, 10% stated that teachers were working alone and isolated and needed additional support as, *“The teacher is often left alone to deal with all [the SWAC] class; therefore, in a crisis situation it could be hard to help the students accordingly”*. The inclusion of the college

advisors and the college coordinators were indicated as an option to help serve as a support network for teachers in program. For one teacher, *“I don’t feel like I’m missing anything other than that comradery of being a part of something...but the college team is excellent. We have an excellent relationship”*. Hosting multiple programs at one campus also helped to create a sense of community with delivery staff and was identified as beneficial by 13% of participants. One participant shared *“Anybody who is tied to SWAC, they have to work well with their college partner and with the school boards”*. There were some reports that when more support members were associated with the program it assisted with the program integrity, as was stated, *“I think the integrity of the program has continued because there is that critical mass of adults supporting that group of students”*. For some participants, the answer of community building among SWAC delivery staff centred around community of practices’.

### ***Community of Practices’***

Many SWAC teachers and college advisors worked in isolation in their roles at their delivery sites and, while they connected with other teachers and staff delivering SWAC on their campuses, there was a desire for increased information sharing between practitioners in their roles. Out of all participants, 21% expressed a desire or appreciation for a community of practice, mentorship between staff in similar roles, or increased information sharing between practitioners.

As one teacher stated:

*I wish there was a way for SWAC teachers to better connect, to create a community to really talk about best practices that’s SWAC, because that’s not traditional pedagogy. It’s very unconventional and we try things, and we innovate, and it would be amazing to learn what other people are doing.*

One participant was a member of a SWAC community of practice and said that it was “*very supportive and beneficial to teachers...which of course trickles down to students because you know [teachers] learn best practices...the sharing of ideas for the SWAC teachers that really [creates] student success*”. One advisor shared there was a need for a community of practice for SWAC advisors and suggested “*Trying to host like conversations at the regional or provincial level for SWAC advisors, I think could be more broadly supported*”. In particular, those who had been working with SWAC for three years or less indicated an interest in increased information sharing or community of practices for their specific roles (teachers, college advisors, college administrators). Those with less than three years’ experience in their roles, mentioned a community of practice, or information sharing, could especially be beneficial in finding the best ways to support and advocate for students. Support and advocacy for students was the second highest emphasized theme that became apparent through this research.

### **Student Support and Advocacy**

Student support and advocacy was identified as a large component of the SWAC program, so it should come as no surprise that topics related to student support and advocacy comprised a large percentage of the findings gathered. In particular, participants highlighted the need for: continued support post-SWAC through the first semester of post-secondary education, the importance of the SWAC college appointed advisor, support for basic needs, connections with community resources, personalized supports, and advocacy for equitable access. According to the SCWI, out of all students enrolled in dual credit programs, 80% in 2017-2018 and 83% in 2018-2019 were identified as disengaged and underachieving (School College Work Initiative, 2018, 2019). Additionally, 10% of students in 2017-2018 and 11% of students in 2018-2019 had previously left school and returned to complete their studies while taking a dual credit. The high

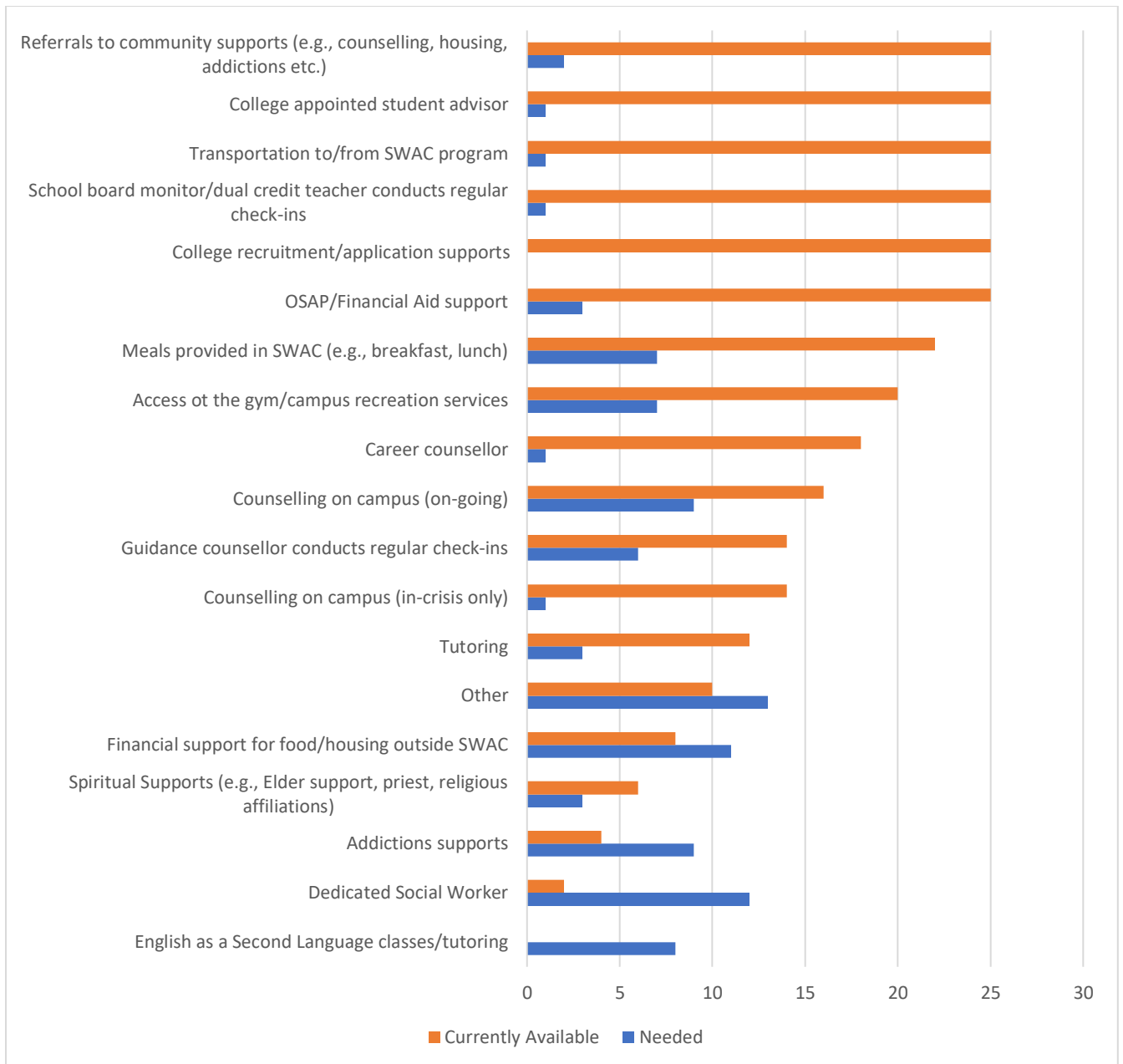
levels of disengaged and underachieving students, as well as the percentage of students who had left school and returned, indicated a high need of student support and advocacy within SWAC. To explore each of these main areas within student support and advocacy, it was first important to understand what services and supports were currently available to SWAC students and which were needed according to participants.

### **Supports Available & Needed**

The SWAC program has built-in supports and services for students; however, the delivery of these supports varied across programs. As depicted in *Table 7: Services and Supports Available/Needed*, referrals to community supports, the college appointed student advisor, transportation to and from SWAC, school board monitor/dual credit teacher check-ins, and college recruitment/application supports were, for the most part, made available consistently across programs. Meal availability in program was available for the majority of programs, however, for those programs where meals were not available, participants identified the need for its inclusion in the program. Variance in supports available and needed for SWAC students appeared, for the most part, to begin with those services and supports provided by college partners including: access to the gym/recreation services, career counselling, counselling on-campus (both ongoing and crisis only). Guidance counselling regular check-ins had the greatest variability in school board provided supports.

**Table 7**

*Services and Supports Available/Needed*



The most frequently identified needed supports included: dedicated social worker, financial supports for food/housing outside of SWAC, ongoing counselling on-campus, addictions support, English as a Second Language classes/tutoring, and other. The other category included items such as funding/bursaries for SWAC students towards post-secondary, accessibility services,

housing and emergency funding, computer devices, and supports for SWAC teachers. Supports for SWAC teachers included administration, in-class teaching support, and teacher mental health. Multiple participants identified that financial support was needed, as highlighted by one administrator: *“Each SWAC cohort should receive a designated budget to address the financial needs of students (i.e., \$10,000) that can be used for emergency housing, food insecurity, payment of fines, etc.”*. Early and supportive access to accessible learning services was also shared in the other category.

Dedicated social worker support was one of the most frequently identified needed supports, through the questionnaire and within the interviews. One teacher in an interview shared, when asked what additional supports would be helpful:

*First and foremost is social work...we’ve tried counselling services which can be really good for an immediate need but... that’s what we [my teaching partner and I] spend a lot of our afternoons doing...But we do need a better solution for social work supports and counselling. I think that would really enhance student outcomes and wellbeing.*

Throughout this research, key areas of importance based on the services available and needed were highlighted. In particular, the need for additional supports post-SWAC, the importance of the college appointed advisor, and a holistic approach focused on basic needs with connections to community resources were identified. Lastly, the emphasis on advocacy on behalf of students was a common theme which arose in relation to student support.

### **Post-SWAC Support**

One common theme in responses from participants around student support was that the SWAC program needed to work to *“make sure [SWAC students] don’t feel suddenly abandoned”* as they entered into their post-secondary journey through post-SWAC support. According to the



Ontario Colleges Applications System (2020), out of all dual credit students between 2017-2019 21,125 students applied to a program through the Ontario Colleges Applications System. Out of all the dual credit applicants, 1,300 students applied using an SCWI voucher, with 54% of students who applied with a voucher enrolling into a post-secondary program (Ontario Colleges Applications System, 2020).

In total, 51% of all participants and 93% of those interviewed, highlighted the need for consistent and additional support for students post-SWAC, especially throughout their first semester or first year in post-secondary education. The majority of SCWI vouchers were used by SWAC and Adult Dual Credit students (School College Work Initiative, 2019b). Many participants stressed that not all students were prepared for post-secondary education directly after SWAC, and so there needed to be long-term continued post-SWAC support. As one advisor said:

*What often happens is students go away and as much as we try to keep in touch they don't.... there has to be another part of the programming that allows for students to still remain in contact somehow or for us to somehow track them...to kind of support them...to say "OK where are you now and is there anything we can support you with" before we just cut contact.*

As shown in the persistence theme, many students' who completed their SWAC program were not always immediately ready for post-secondary education, and so follow-up aftercare or long-term post-SWAC support was identified as important by participants.

All of the participants who were interviewed highlighted the need to provide additional resources, tracking and support for students post-SWAC and throughout the first semester of post-secondary education. One administrator said, "*We need to be able to offer these supports*

*with confidence that students will not be turned away or left to navigate the system alone”*. Out of all participant groups, 90% of the after-SWAC advisors and 60% of college administrators in particular, shared the importance of providing support throughout the first semester or year of post-secondary education to former SWAC students. One participant felt:

*Once they're done high school there's a possibility that we could serve this student population in the actual transition to [College]. I would love for us to just transition that piece for those who would benefit from it...I'd like to do something more in that regard, even the hand off...it's just that formal connection being there.*

Many shared the desire to formally acknowledge the need for post-SWAC support, as many students already returned for support from their SWAC teachers, advisors, or the delivery staff on the college campuses supporting SWAC. As one college administrator stated:

*They come back to [SWAC teacher and SWAC advisor] a lot...I think that the SWAC student advisor should be more hours and it should be dedicated to following SWAC students when they go on to post-secondary. The ones that come back...of course [the advisor is] going to help them, but if they just get frustrated they'll just drop out...so I think that really a position that followed those students even for the first semester...[students] would have a much better chance of staying in postsecondary.*

Post-SWAC, for many participants, seemed to fit well with the college appointed advisor role.

### **College Appointed Advisor**

In Table 7, it was shown that the college appointed student advisor, or After-SWAC advisor, was present in the majority of programs. Participants particularly emphasized the importance and value of the college appointed student advisor. Through 2018-2019, according to the SCWI, across the province there were 2,636 approved SWAC students, with 1,594 of those

students' having had at least one individual conversation with the After-SWAC advisor (School College Work Initiative, 2019a). Advisors ran up to three small group conversations or workshops, with 3,293 student participants on topics relating to college services, applying to college, funding for post-secondary education, and career exploration (School College Work Initiative, 2019a). Of those interviewed or those who participated in the focus group, 80% emphasized the importance and benefit of the advisor. For one administrator:

*[the advisor] is an important ingredient to the college success, or no, let me rephrase, not college success...she works with all our kids...she meets with all of them weekly and sometimes daily...she's on top of her game to make sure our kids have the easiest path forward.*

The passion and dedication of the advisors was mentioned by those who work with them and became evident in what was shared by the advisors themselves. For example, one advisor shared, *"I love these students. I love how much they teach me. I love being able to help them find their own voice so to self-advocate...to believe in themselves, and start to recognize that they are worth something"*. The advisor went on to share,

*The role, it gave me the privilege to not only bear witness to each student story but it also gave me the privilege to remind them, hey, like just embrace your narrative, embrace your story, like all the things that you need to be successful you already have within yourself.*

In particular, through the COVID-19 pandemic, the college appointed advisor was able to provide additional support to students. In total, 13% of participants mentioned specifically the advisors' support through proactive outreach throughout COVID-19, by using either phone call campaigns or other avenues of contact. One administrator shared *"through this pandemic I know*

*I'll get an update from [the advisor] ...that we're having huge success...where it's very much the individual time".* That was a kind of support the teachers were not always able to provide but with the advisor they had the *"flexibility in meeting students where they are [which] is absolutely critical"*.

Among the advisors who were interviewed, all shared that they too felt the role was important, but that they struggled with finding sufficient time to work with students. For one advisor, *"being in a part-time role limited my capacity to support"*, and for another advisor, who also worked part time, they would have found it helpful to have *"another person to help me so that there's more time in the classroom to build those relationships, especially because I am still connecting with those students who are starting college"*. It was also interesting to note that the importance of the advisors' time with students was highlighted by all administrators, school, teachers, and program support staff interviewed. The ability of the college appointed advisor to connect with various parts of the college, community resources and the teachers delivering the program was identified as important in providing a college environment which holistically supported students.

### **Holistic Approach**

The nature of the SWAC program was described as such that many students who entered the program faced multiple barriers to success. Most participants felt that those working within the program were committed to supporting students. As one advisor stated, *"The SWAC program is fairly unique in how committed most people in it are about helping students succeed and recognizing the barriers that these students are often facing"*. Another administrator felt *"people...colleagues of mine...just don't see, don't hear, don't know, and don't want to know what the dynamics behind the students are"*. Regardless of participants' feelings on whether, and

how, students were being supported by delivery staff, many identified that the unique needs of SWAC students required supports beyond the classroom. Out of all participants, 41% put particular emphasis on the lack of basic needs students faced: food, homelessness, finances, and family situations. As one advisor passionately stated:

*Students can't succeed in post-secondary or accessing post-secondary if they're homeless; they can't succeed in doing that if they're battling depression or crippling anxiety...those things really play into how a student performs in the classroom and how a student is able to access and then succeed in postsecondary, so I think recognizing the need...and that those things are the things we really need to tackle first before we can help them succeed in school.*

In order to better support students' facing significant barriers to success, 38% of all participants highlighted the need to provide a personalised, holistic approach that connects SWAC students with services to address what is needed most. One advisor believed:

*In order for us to be more holistic about how we're supporting our students, we need to get to the roots of what is putting them at-risk and I didn't feel the program (pause)... I think we pushed and pushed to get them enrolled and to use those [Ontario Colleges Application System] vouchers but, in a way, we ignored what has landed them here in the first place.*

Barriers to students' success were mentioned by participants throughout the research, with 41% of participants listing basic needs, including food insecurity, homelessness, and financial constraints, as priorities. Additional barriers to success mentioned by participants included family concerns (28%), anxiety/mental health concerns (28%), need for access to learning supports and services (23%), addictions (13%), and students' receiving social assistance or living

independently with lack of support systems (10%). The benefit of the Ontario College Application System voucher, which was paid for by SCWI, was also highlighted as helpful, according to 21% of participants.

Providing adequate support for students' facing significant barriers was a challenge for many, with 75% of those interviewed feeling a sense of helplessness at not being able to do more. For instance, one administrator shared:

*You don't have the ability and the time to ensure they're 100% looked after all the time...I can't be there 24/7 to ensure they make good decisions...so they may not be in a conducive to learning environment but they're fed, they're warm, they're sleeping at night in a bed, but all the rest sucks.... there's just not enough time. There's just so many negatives.*

Similarly, one college advisor said helplessly:

*I'm there to listen but I can't do anything about it really because there wasn't enough support from services on campus to allow for that action step to be taken. It was really just me listening and holding that space for the students but never really any action coming out of it.*

One participant celebrated that their program had a dedicated social work support person to support students and connect with community resources to reduce barriers which “*means that students not only graduate from high school but find a safe place to live, start the path to addiction recovery, gain access to social assistance, and gain personal self-confidence*”.

The ability and resources of the delivery staff supporting SWAC students did not always lend themselves to providing resources to support these barriers to student success, on campus or through resources available to them. Strong connections and referrals to community services and

supports were needed to bridge the gap between SWAC program capabilities and student need. For example, one teacher said:

*It's difficult to not have the capacity to address these concerns in a more direct fashion. Students do not exist in a vacuum where education is the one-size-fits-all method to jumpstarting their future. Students' have competing priorities and we need to build our programming around them, not in place of them, creating new anxieties.*

In Table 7 it was shown that 83% of all participants in programs had referrals to community agencies for services and supports. During the interviews and focus group, 38% of participants emphasized the importance of having strong community connections for student supports. For example, an advisor indicated:

*I work very closely with community agencies, so the health units, CMHA, Elizabeth Fry Society, all the shelters, food banks, etc., the [college] food locker program... We work hard with the community agencies to make sure that we have that kind of wraparound support so where we don't have a physical person [on our staff to help] we are able to connect them with a physical person [from a community agency].*

Strong relationships with providers of community supports outside of school boards and college services was important for participants, as was advocacy for greater support and ability to overcome systemic inequities for SWAC students.

### **Advocacy**

Advocacy for equitable access to education, supports, resources, funding, and provincial recognition was acknowledged as important in 31% of all participants and 60% of those interviewed and in the focus group. Advocacy for the SWAC program itself, through college campuses and at the provincial level, was raised by some participants at all levels of delivery. In

promotion of SWAC provincially, one member of the focus group said of their work advocating for SWAC programs *“we’ve been able to say it to people at higher levels of the Ministry, trust us, this is going to work”* based on information informed by evidence gathered from Regional Planning Teams. Other participants wanted the advocacy of SWAC as another formal option for students. One administrator said *“There should be more funding. If our results are so strong, so quantitatively successful, then we should be promoting [SWAC]...provincially to say these are the core options within the high school system”*. While promotion of the SWAC program as a legitimate option was said to be important, as demonstrated in the delivery theme of this research, delivery considerations of SWAC programs must be protected to ensure SWAC does not *“just become another alternative education site hosted at a college”*. One participant advised that in order for *“long-term viability of the SWAC program”* there should be overarching focus on *“increasing funding, accesses to services, the number of teachers in the classroom, available resources etc.”*. There were also participants who shared examples of advocacy they have taken on behalf of students in the program. For example, one teacher said *“we’ve advocated for students that we know that have the need to be out of the school environment, and allowed them to stay in [SWAC].”*

While advocacy for students within programs was encouraged, some participants focused instead on the systemic inequities students’ face and the need for advocacy and support in overcoming them. As one teacher said, *“These students, who in my view are among the most challenged in the public education system, invariably have many difficulties beyond the classroom...because of the societal issues in addition to the challenges of teaching and learning”*. In particular, teachers and college appointed advisors spoke about systemic inequities



and issues students' faced which needed to be addressed as "*our students are very marginalized*".

An advisor said:

*The barriers that students' experience that make it harder and more difficult for them to access post-secondary education are really deep rooted in systemic inequity, so really these services [SWAC] are kind of Band-Aid productions where we are sort of trying to cover the gaps that have been created by issues like poverty and racism and much deeper broader issues.*

Systemic inequities and advocacy were not mentioned by administrators or ministry representatives.

The services available and needed for SWAC students, the college appointed advisor, a holistic approach to student support, and advocacy at the provincial, local, and societal levels, were all important concepts which arose in this research. Each of these implications for student support were seen as a potential impact on the ability for students to persist through the completion of their SWAC program, but also their ability to persist into and through post-secondary education.

### **The Many Facets Persistence**

The theme of persistence arose throughout this research in a variety of different contexts. There were questions about what aspects of persistence were being focused on. One participant asked, "*When asking about 'supporting student persistence into post-secondary' are you asking about how we transition students into going to post-secondary after SWAC or are you asking about the gaps in being able to support them in their post-secondary credits?*" The majority of participants, when asked about student persistence, centred their responses on persistence into a post-secondary education (PSE) program after SWAC. However, it should be acknowledged that

the concept of persistence within SWAC is a challenging concept. As one focus group participant stated,

*Persistence is a tricky piece to look at for transition into post-secondary because it can easily appear to be the main goal...so it's a question of when we're looking at persistence knowing it's OK not to be ready to go yet... if we're simply measuring how many of them went on to college right away and how many completed... certainly [SCWI] wouldn't want [that] to be the measure of success. It would be, so how did these students' lives change? How are they in a better position than they ever were before... many of these students will say [SWAC] was a life changing experience and the persistence into post-secondary will be a minor thing for some.*

There were three main areas which arose within the theme of persistence: program expectations, student readiness, and rigour. Each will be explored below beginning with program expectations, as over half of the participants identified it as an area of focus.

### **SWAC Program Expectations**

A common theme in participant response was commentary around the integration of the SWAC program and the need for clarity around expectations from all parties on the purpose, goals, and delivery of SWAC. As one administrator said, *"We need to ensure that expectations of what SWAC is, and that should be clear to all involved right from students, parents and educators on both sides"*. In total, 51% of all participants and 90% of those interviewed, or in the focus group, highlighted either the need or importance of college integration, collaboration, and clarity around program expectations. Working with college partners on campus was needed to clarify the program needs, student demographics, and experiences within a SWAC context. One advisor said of their relationship with the college, *"SWAC or SCWI often stuck out a little...it*

*was kind of like a bit of the black sheep of the college world*". The advisor went on to share that the college *"didn't understand the SWAC program expectations"* to encourage students to *"enrol in the college after SWAC graduation"*.

For some participants, progression into PSE was not a focus of program delivery. For example, *"As part of the high school delivery team, our main goal is student graduation from high school. If students move on to college, university or apprenticeship that is icing on the cake"*. For another, *"the school board's goal is sort of pushing students through regardless of whether or not they have the academic ability to succeed in college"*. In contrast, for others, the focus of SWAC was to provide an environment that encouraged transition into PSE, and *"the pathway is always in the forefront"*. Some spoke about the SWAC environment itself creating a focus for persistence into PSE. As one administrator said, *"If the SWAC program can clearly demonstrate that there is enjoyment in learning then it almost sets up for success in moving onto post-secondary"*. The format of the program, according to some participants, created an environment that provided students the space to consider PSE as a viable option because students, *"start getting used to the campus. They become a college student at that point and then, what ends up happening, is they start thinking about their future and then we sit down with them and we look at all the programs that are offered"*.

Persistence for some participants was reliant on the alignment between high school teachers and the dual credit faculty. Out of all participants, 33% shared that if there was misalignment in program expectations and delivery between the high school teachers and dual credit faculty, it impacted the students' ability and readiness to progress into PSE. In particular, student participation in the dual credits within SWAC provided the opportunity for students to experience college expectations, according to 33% of participants.

As one administrator iterated:

*The experience of having a dual credit course is incredible and the students really enjoy the fact that they have the leg up if they decided to go to college, they know, they understand the college systems.... what SWAC is able to do is to help reduce the initial learning curve when they're in a [college program] so that they can actually focus on content.*

However, if students were not ready for PSE, after completing their dual credit courses within SWAC, they would not be able to persist, regardless of the SWAC program and their applications to post-secondary.

Part of a study on Dual Credit student progression to post-secondary education, based on Ontario College Applications between 2017 and 2018, examined students who used an SCWI application voucher, which typically were designated for SWAC or Adult Dual Credit students. There were approximately 1,300 applicants, with 1,250 receiving an offer, which led to 700 enrolments (Ontario Colleges Applications System, 2020). In 2019, there were a total of 972 SWAC students who applied to college or university (School College Work Initiative, 2019). No progression statistics into registered apprenticeship programs were found, which could have more accurately reflected student progression into apprenticeship programs.

Funding for the college appointed advisor and the PSE application vouchers by SCWI demonstrated a focus on supporting students with progression into PSE. However, there were differing opinions from delivery staff as to the use and purpose of the vouchers. For one program staff, *“I think the SWAC program is awesome because it, you know, it pays for their college or university applications...it makes a huge difference”*. Another advisor shared:

*I would often encourage students just to apply [to college] anyways because you don't get penalized for not getting accepted.... I used to give vouchers for students who weren't in a current semester of SWAC but it was like well we've got all these vouchers and we're just going to give them back to the Ministry.*

Others had differing opinions on the use of vouchers and encouraging students to apply for post-secondary. As one administrator indicated:

*Students who may not be ready for college are applying because the OCAS application is paid for under the SWAC funding. Students may get accepted into a college program but aren't ready to be successful and end up getting OSAP or loans or grants and leave the college without a credential and substantial loans.*

Student readiness for post-secondary education was identified as a very important consideration when discussing persistence for SWAC students.

### **Student Readiness for Post-Secondary Education**

One of the comments heard from 38% of all participants and 75% of those interviewed, or in focus groups, was the importance of realizing that not all students were ready for PSE after SWAC. In particular, college administrators' spoke about student readiness for PSE post-SWAC and the need for a different acknowledgement from SCWI on timelines for progression. One teacher stated, "*SCWI could acknowledge that not all SWAC graduates move to PSE quickly. It can take years*". Another administrator stated:

*We're finding through our data [SWAC students] are really not looking at post-secondary...it's not bad, but it's kind of outside of the wish of the SCWI eyes of wanting to move towards that, that they should be interested in post-secondary pathway [but] we find the majority are not there.*

Other participants highlighted the need of colleges to do more around expectations and support for students. One participant questioned: *“Is there more that we could be doing? Is there more the colleges could be doing in terms of attracting SWAC students to postsecondary?”*

Many of those interviewed, and through focus groups, looked at student readiness, or lack of readiness for PSE right after SWAC as something to acknowledge and respect as a good thing. As one administrator believed, *“Persistence means so many things so I think, for our SWAC students, for them to persist once they’ve completed is really recognizing that the journey can be very different for each of the students”*. It was felt, by 26% of participants, that students’ who were motivated or had a goal when they entered the SWAC program would succeed in persisting into PSE. One participant succinctly stated that, regarding PSE, some SWAC students entering the program had the clear goal that *“they’ll pursue it themselves with or without our support”*.

For many, however, the SWAC program itself allowed students to gain confidence in themselves and to gain autonomy in their actions and studies, providing *“the motivation to attend post-secondary, but more importantly it gives [students] the confidence that they CAN be successful”*. According to one administrator, the SWAC program was important because:

*Students have the ability to experience college life first hand, including the diverse learning environment and it gives them a chance to start over in terms of habits, new ways of learning, being independent and responsible and meet new people, and be treated like a college student.*

In fact, 41% of all participants and 63% of interviewees either stated that the program in its current form provided students with the space to be autonomous and gain confidence and/or that even more autonomy needed to be built in. For one teacher, the program itself allowed students to know *“they are completely autonomous with the consistent help of myself and the college*

*coordinator.... they like the flexibility of the schedule...they take one course at a time...once they're finished, they're done and move on to the next course".* In speaking of the benefits of the SWAC program, one teacher shared, "[Students'] *have more confidence in themselves and at the end of the semester, they know they can go on to further learning*". Another participant said, "*The SWAC program is highly effective in helping students become responsible for their own learning while exploring career paths and potential post-secondary steps*". For other participants, more was needed to increase student autonomy, primarily around course rigour. The rigour of the SWAC program provided, for participants, either a greater sense of self and autonomy for students so that PSE became an option, or created an environment that led to a disservice for those considering PSE.

### **Academic Rigour in SWAC**

The importance of academic rigour in SWAC was discussed by 51% of all participants and 93% of all those interviewed, or who participated in the focus group. For some participants, SWAC provided the rigour needed. As shared by one teacher, SWAC, "*helps the students to be prepared and to understand what is expected...SWAC really does help build that sort of scaffolding they need to be ready for [PSE]*". For the majority of participants, however, discussion around rigour was focused on the "*lack of academic rigour currently in both the high school and dual credit courses*" and that the lack of rigour lead to a "*disservice and unpreparedness for students*". As shared by one advisor:

*A challenging aspect of the program is that we often over-accommodate the students with regards to class start times, absences and due dates...we've heard from former students that we should have been more strict with them to truly prepare them for the rigours of post-secondary education.*

Particularly highlighted by 75% of the college appointed advisors and college administrators who participated, the delivery of high school courses and dual credit courses made “*a lot more allowances for students than would ever [have] been made in a real college class*”. In terms of dual credit support, one advisor stated “*The [high school] teachers would sit in on the dual credit college courses.... [the high school teachers] would then be supporting them with getting their homework done for their dual credit courses*”. Another advisor said:

*Depending on the SWAC classroom, maybe they're not pushed or marked the way they need to be for college, so they're not experiencing the level of rigour that's expected at college...that's probably the biggest shocks, is workload...I would hope that in the future, and one of my recommendations would be, having more classes to hold down at the same time versus getting one course done this month, one next month...I think that is a disservice in terms of that transition support because it's not what they're going to be expecting at college.*

In particular, mentioned by both advisors and teachers was the importance of Grade 12 English and that many students were missing their Grade 12. For one teacher, the ability to spend the “*whole class time working on Grade 12 English as a group*” was of benefit since they could all be taught the course together. For another advisor, “*the level of work they're working on so you know a Grade 12 English college level classes, I don't know if it's consistent or if what they're producing is exactly to standard*”. It appeared to many that the level of academic rigour that students were receiving in their SWAC dual credit and high school courses was tied very closely to the method of delivery.



## Delivery

Throughout this research, the type and impact of delivery models was explored through the questionnaire and within the interviews and focus group. There were three areas that were highlighted when discussing delivery of SWAC programs: life skills development, timing, and high school course delivery method. In particular, through the interviews and focus group, participants emphasized the need and benefit of having life skills as part of the SWAC program.

### Life Skills

In total, 41% of all participants and 88% of those interviewed, and who participated in the focus group, discussed the importance of building life skills into the SWAC program. In discussion with participants, life skills seemed to encompass learning strategies, mental health and wellness strategies, cooking, money management, conflict management, and other activities needed to live independently. For one participant, *“we make it about life skills, we talk about learning skills...cultural based courses.... we offer Smart Serve, Safe Food Handling courses so they gain some employability skills with us”*. Life skill development for SWAC students could either be formalized through specific course delivery or informally through the structure of the SWAC program. Formally, many teachers and administrators discussed the inclusion of a General Learning Strategies (GLS) course as part of SWAC where for some *“Our focus is really on mental health and compassion and community”*. Other programs provided space for students to focus on cooking:

*whether they were homeless looking for a place to live...learning to cook those four course meals...that life skill for a lot of them at the beginning of the year when they start cooking if they've never spent any time in the kitchen, but at the end... they leave knowing ok I can make this.*

The high school teachers' delivery of the GLS course provided space for life skill development, but for some it was not enough. As one advisor said, *"I do feel that we could do more on the life skill side of things but it's time that's the problem...where they work on things like taking a trip to the grocery store"* and, while there is *"a dual credit lifestyle management course that does try to introduce them to a lot of those concepts"*, it is not offered each semester. As such, informal inclusion of life skill development throughout the SWAC program was encouraged by the advisor.

Informally, life skill development, for many participants, took on many forms. For one advisor, the workshops that were delivered allowed SWAC students' *"to get educated in other ways of dealing with their stress...to learn about empathy and being able to use their words during conflict"*. For 31% of participants, building in experiential learning opportunities and field trips into learning provided opportunities for less structured life skills learning. As one teacher indicated, *"We try to incorporate more experiential learning opportunities for students.... we try and integrate their credit recovery into that"*. Many spoke about adding fun elements into their programs *"we try really hard to make it fun and inviting there so they would do crafts or colouring or mindfulness activities"*. Field trips and experiential learning activities served more of a purpose than providing a fun outlet for students though, because *"it's not just to understand more about like history or geography but also just learning how to use the transportation system differently"*. Life skills could also be built into how students receive support, as an advisor explained:

*At the beginning, I'm very much hands-on but towards the end I'm expecting them to make their appointments to make connections with me and reach out to financial aid on*

*their own with support...they're feeling a bit more empowered to do those things.... that gradual release should be at all stages of SWAC.*

In addition to the development of life skills and the desire for there to be experiential learning opportunities, many participants had differing opinions on the best timing and method of the delivery of high school credits. For many participants, the timing of the SWAC program varied significantly.

### **Timing**

SWAC programs varied in length, consisting of one semester programs, two semesters, or both options. For 43% of programs, SWAC was delivered in one semester, either with a September or a January/February start. Another 30% of SWAC programs operated in two semesters from September – May/June. For the remaining programs, the length of the SWAC program varied. For one, the length of program *“can be one or two semesters depending on student’s number of dual credits and eligibility to remain in program”*. However, for another, one or two semesters was possible *“depending on what [students’] need to graduate”*. For others, the length of time in SWAC *“may vary depending on the needs of the student. All formats are available: Condensed summer session (4 weeks), One semester (early September or early January), Two or more semesters”*.

In terms of the time of day that SWAC programs operated, 83% of programs expected students to arrive between 8am-11:30am, while 13% of programs had arrival times between 11:45am-1:45pm. Only one program had an afternoon start time between 2-4:30pm. One participant in the interviews identified that there was a SWAC program they supported that had an evening start time. However, *“the downside of that is that [all staff] are done work at 4:30 so we adjusted the student advisor position that they stayed till 5:00-5:30pm”*. Another said *“It*

*didn't matter whether they were AM or PM. It was a struggle to get back to their school or come from their school.... so we switched to an all-day model". This participant found the all-day model provided "that flexibility to offer another full credit... to cater to the students need".*

The length of the day on campus varied along with the number of days per week students were on campus. For some, the method of delivery was not as important as the days per week students were expected on campus and number of dual credits they were taking. *"Both deliveries are really good so it's hard to say.... with the four days a week and two dual credits the consistency is good, the routine is very good for them, but it might be a little too much to begin with for some".* In 66%, of programs surveyed, students were required to attend campus four to five times per week; with 36% expecting students to attend for half days and 30% of programs expecting students to be on campus for the full day. Several programs, 20% in total, expected students to be on campus two to three days per week; with 10% of programs requiring half days (4 hours or less/day), and another 10% of programs requiring full days. Finally, the remaining programs varied dependent on student needs. A half day, for the purpose of this research, was indicated as 4 hours or less per day of required on campus time for any of dual credit, cooperative education, course delivery or course recovery. Course delivery while students were in SWAC programs varied throughout respondents as did opinions as to the effectiveness of each.

### **Course Delivery Method**

According to the questionnaire, 60% of programs operated through a combination of credit recovery and scheduled course delivery, with two dual credit courses. In contrast, 17% of programs had scheduled course delivery with one dual credit college course. A further 10% of locations ran programs that were either combined credit recovery with scheduled course delivery

and one dual credit course, or, credit recovery only along with two or three dual credit courses. Opinions on the most effective delivery model, in terms of credit delivery, varied. As one administrator shared, those teachers who did a bit of both, credit delivery with credit recovery, *“probably got the best attendance”*. Many of the participants agreed, with 40% of those interviewed stating that having a mixture of credit delivery and credit recovery options was ideal. There were 30% of participants who felt that course delivery should be credit recovery only. One administrator shared, *“I think it’s about creating choice... credit recovery might be a really strong model for who we are to be serving in this SWAC population”*. Two advisors had the opposing beliefs, emphasizing the need for high school teachers to focus on *“actual teaching”*, or course delivery, rather than credit recovery.

For credit delivery of courses, participants highlighted the need to have teachers able to teach courses related to their speciality or to have team teaching which is when two teachers are attached to a program. As was explored when discussing the importance for teachers to have a sense of community above, team teaching could also provide SWAC students with additional expertise and support. When asked about successful delivery models, one administrator shared that the two-teacher classroom was successful because:

*Amongst those two teachers you’ve got three to four different areas of expertise, like English, Math, Science etc. ....so even though we’re doing independent study... the expertise of that teacher is in that room, so I think that works best...and now I’m going to defend the teachers, I mean if you’re a Science or English teacher and a student comes to you with a Grade 12 Math problem, is it realistic that you can be expected to have the answers?*

If team teaching were not possible, 30% of interviewees suggested either adding tutors for students or “*maybe we have like rotating experts in certain subject matters that best supports students to ensure that their work is to standard*”. According to 26% of participants, teachers were feeling pressure to ensure content was delivered and course materials covered. For some participants, the pressure of course delivery could be alleviated by the addition of a cooperative education option that could support students and would not necessarily require delivery of course material. Cooperative education provides students with the opportunity to gain high school credits through either full-time or part-time employment either in a position found with assistance from the school board, or a position a student finds themselves (Ministry of Education, 2018).

Upon further exploration of delivery models, and opinions of delivery models in the interviews, there were 38% of participants who highlighted that one or more of the programs they support had a combination of cooperative education and dual credit courses. The inclusion of cooperative education was not an option on the questionnaire and had it been included as an option could have elicited additional responses within this category. Those who participated in programs that combined cooperative education with dual credit courses highlighted the importance of flexibility and the necessity of such a model for those students who needed to work, and/or needed to work within a non-traditional school schedule. As one administrator stated:

[Cooperative education] *seems to be a big hit too for those students who are working evenings and afternoons. They can actually keep their jobs and run credits that way, so for an 18-year old, who maybe has to support a family or to support themselves...that's a successful trait for the program.*

In particular, cooperative education options, according to 21% of participants, were important for those students interested in skilled trades or apprenticeship options after high school. As one administrator shared, melding credit recovery with cooperative education and dual credit options for students:

*Gets the criteria for being in SWAC if they are within reach of graduation...the last two months is virtually full-time cooperative education...many of these students are not looking at post-secondary – they've gained some skills now to get employment in their area.*

Whether courses were delivered by cooperative education, credit delivery, credit recovery, or a mixture of all, what was felt to be important to many participants was the need for flexibility in course delivery options.

A common trend that arose, particularly through the interviews and focus group, was to highlight the benefit of maintaining flexibility in SWAC course delivery. Providing tailored options for students was particularly important for high school teachers, ministry representatives and administrators. As one participant shared, *“I think the individual programming, the tailored programming...one of the biggest factors is independence”*. One teacher gave the example of students' balancing responsibilities at home. *“We offer them a flexible timetable”* so the student can take classes as needed, *“put in his time... then go home and work because we've met the ministry expectations”*. Flexibility in course delivery options for students was identified as helpful for student success. However, as will be discussed in the next theme on SWAC program leadership, consistency in program structure had mixed reactions from participants.

## **Program Leadership**

A uniting theme that connected all previous themes of community, student support and advocacy, persistence, and delivery, was the SWAC program leadership. After analysis of the findings from this research, three main areas of program leadership were identified: program oversight, staff onboarding, and program evaluation. Each of these aspects of the SWAC program leadership impacted and were embedded within each of the previous themes. To begin with, commentary on the SWAC program oversight by school boards and SCWI, as discussed by participants, has been presented.

### **Oversight**

SWAC program oversight occurred at multiple levels: the School College Work Initiative (SCWI) Ministry level, regionally in the form of Regional Planning Teams (RPTs), school boards, colleges, and finally, program delivery staff overseeing day-to-day delivery. The theme of program delivery has previously been discussed in this chapter, and focused on the day-to-day delivery oversight.

College oversight of SWAC programs was discussed previously in the persistence theme, where 51% of participants highlighted the need for colleges to encourage integration, access to services and supports, and clarification of program expectations. Colleges in general need to be *“truly on board....to recognize the importance of SWAC and SCWI’s impact, not only on individual students, but on many ways on the bottom line of the college”*. While colleges have been discussed previously in these findings, the leadership of SWAC from a school board perspective also needed to be highlighted.



## ***School Boards***

Out of all participants, 49% stated greater communication and involvement of the school boards was necessary for SWAC programs. Connections between the SWAC programs and school boards were identified as something which varied significantly between participants. For example, an advisor shared, *“I find that there is sometimes a disconnect between the school board and the students. Sometimes it feels as if the school boards have abandoned [students].* For another administrator, *“The board really, to be really blunt, don’t look after SWAC.... [they] don’t do a good job...it’s not something that [they] spend a lot of time on”*. For some, the staff and teacher support oversight from school boards needed addressing, as one teacher reported:

*I can’t stress enough how much SWAC teachers need more support and less criticism from their school boards/home schools. It takes a special person to be an effective SWAC teacher and the job is unlike “normal” teaching. The school board needs to recognize this and act accordingly.*

Of particular interest, was the importance some participants placed on *“ensuring that we don’t burn [SWAC] teachers out because it is a high stress environment”*. Support for teachers, for one, *“does not mean move the teacher to a different position when they are burnt out. It means support them so they don’t burn out”*.

In total, 18% of all participants said specifically that students and staff felt *“abandoned”* by school boards. In terms of school board oversight in providing supports and services, as showcased in the support and advocacy theme, 46% of programs have guidance counsellor regular check-ins, whereas 20% indicated guidance check-ins were needed. There were some participants who were satisfied with school board oversight and support. One teacher shared:

*I feel like our board and our administrators in our board all embrace SWAC... everyone's on the same page when it comes to our SWAC program, so the principals and the superintendents and the consultants...I feel blessed in that regard...I don't feel isolated at all. I feel like I'm supported and that's amazing.*

Another teacher shared that they appreciated the autonomy their program had and the trust the school board provided to them in running their program *"I really appreciate that our principal was willing to gamble with us – that's amazing"*. For some participants, the oversight of both the school boards and SCWI created a challenge, as 18% of participants said there was a challenge balancing the school board and SCWI requirements. At times *"school boards say we need something [for students] ... but it's not meeting what SCWI is expecting... it is not SCWI's responsibility to fund outside their parameters or expectations"*.

### ***School College Work Initiative (SCWI)***

Oversight and facilitation of support by SCWI, in general, was seen as favourable among participants. In total, 36% of participants indicated the need for continued collaboration with SCWI to brainstorm strategies and support students. The collaborative nature of leadership and oversight of SWAC by SCWI was evident. A ministry participant indicated *"it's all about leading from within, it's not about leadership from on high...SCWI in general has been a grassroots movement"*.

In total, 25% of all administrators and delivery staff specifically commented on the good work SCWI and those that oversee the programs were doing. One administrator shared that the ministry representatives associated with SCWI:

*are always thinking about change for the benefit of our students. I look at our provincial leadership and it is unbelievable. There is all the supports and all the training*

*opportunities available...they're providing everything so there should be no excuses for us not to be able to deliver the expectations of SCWI.*

While overall SWAC program participants were positive about the leadership provided by the SCWI, the goals of SCWI did not always align with program delivery within SWAC. SCWI ministry representatives shared “*we're being more supportive or facilitating... I don't see us doing much directing*” and that SCWI was “*able to fund risk*” while allowing for flexibility within that funding. Some participants felt the lack of structure and consistency to be a challenge. The lack of formalized structure in SCWI oversight of the program was raised as a concern by 33% of participants who indicated that there was a lack of consistency in delivery between teachers, boards, colleges, and RPTs. One administrator shared, “*we really don't lead SWAC from a regional level. That's the challenge...it's very much college by college, board by board, so I think there's an opportunity regionally and provincially to look at how SWAC models work*”. Another administrator suggested SCWI “*revisit expectations based on policy and present best practices in a criteria check-list format*”. A high school teacher recognized that there are pros and cons to a lack of structure but noted “*There's virtually nothing in policy... other than you must be taking at least one dual credit course and at least one secondary credit, and beyond that you know it's pretty much design your program the way you see fit*”.

To enhance collaboration and consistency between programs, 26% of participants suggested that the sharing of activities, resources, or student places/seats across boards would be beneficial. As one participant suggested, “*Maybe boards can share seats in [SWAC] programs like they do in dual credits/OYAP, so if a board only has a credit recovery program but another board has a full credit delivery, we can choose the program that best suits the needs of our*

*students*". Regarding the lack of student places available in SWAC, one participant stated, "we need more seats to offer" to promote SWAC as a "core option within the high school system".

One way SCWI worked to support collaboration among the SWAC program delivery participants was through their annual symposium which supports teachers, college professors, school board monitors/guidance, regional planning team members, school board, and college administrators. The annual symposium hosted by SCWI was seen as a success and helpful for 31% of all participants. Said one participant:

*To find out what's happening elsewhere with different models... SCWI does a good role in that...the symposium gives you the opportunity to face-to-face network... those are incredibly valuable experiences where people can network and meet because that's where a lot of new ideas come from.*

One teacher explained, "the symposium environment provided the venue for sharing...so people can see what's out there and share their programs and that can really help for best practices".

While the symposium was noted as beneficial, additional information sharing and training was seen as needed throughout the year for effective onboarding of new staff and program evaluation.

### **Employee Onboarding**

As a reminder for readers, employee onboarding involves the conscious effort to make a new employee feel like a productive member of an organization with a foundation created for a long-term relationship with the company or organization (Hillman, 2010). Onboarding of staff, teachers, and administrators who oversaw SWAC was a popular topic throughout this research. Onboarding new staff, teachers, and administrators to support SWAC was seen as an ongoing process. In total, 21% of participants spoke of the high rate of turnover within the SWAC program. For one administrator who saw turnover as a benefit, "turnover is important – I'm able

to sort of offer some of the... maybe it's the wisdom and strategies... for other programs". For many of the administrators who participated in this research, however, turnover in conjunction with SCWI activities can be a challenge:

*The challenge is that there are so many things going on within SCWI programming overall whether it be OYAP, dual credit, adult dual credit, SWAC activities, forums, mentoring, workshops and so on and there's such a rate of turnover... it gets so the challenge I feel is... there's really important work to get people so that they feel they have a foundation under them... [and with] the rate of transition and turnover within this program [it] is challenging.*

With the frequent staff turnover in the programs, it was identified as important to understand qualities and motivators for new staff to be successful. One constant throughout the research at all levels, was seeing that student success resonated with participants' as their main motivation for joining and continuing to work within the SWAC program. In total, 38% of all participants and 93% of those who participated in the interviews and focus group, placed student success as one of their main contributing factors for being a part of the SWAC program:

*Seeing the growth in students from when they first start the program to when they finish is the most rewarding aspect... on an administrative level, being able to show the institution the value in supporting these students/program by showcasing the strong conversion rates to PSE is a success.*

When recruiting new staff to support SWAC programs, it was identified that ensuring incoming staff placed student success at the forefront is important because, as one participant shared, "You would never be able to hire a teacher to do all of the things that a dual credit teacher does in one of those programs for students now". Teaching within the SWAC program was "unlike 'normal'

*teaching” and so passion for the SWAC program, and/or a passion for working with or helping students facing barriers to succeed, motivated 36% of all participants and 93% of those interviewed, or in a focus group, to begin working with the SWAC program. One advisor explained: “seeing students pass through those barriers and hurdles and enter college and continue to be successful because I played a very small role in helping make that possible...that’s why I continue and why I will for a long time to come”.*

Hiring from within either the colleges or school boards appeared to be a trend in recruitment of new SWAC staff and administrators. Prior to their current role within SWAC, many participants had previous experience working within the education system including having previous experience as:

- 25% were a combination of high school teachers, guidance, school board office staff, college program staff, college student advisor;
- 22% were high school teachers;
- 14% were college program staff (e.g., program support, admissions, recruitment);
- 14% were college administration (e.g., Dean, Associate Dean); and
- 11% were high school guidance.

Only 14% of all participants had no previous experience working within the education system, however, what was not captured in the questionnaire was whether they had experience in supporting youth or adults facing barriers to success.

Regarding onboarding, one administrator shared that *“we’ve learned from some is the purposeful staffing of the dual credit teacher”*. There needs to be a *“right fit in terms of the teacher of the program...the success of the program is heavily reliant on the future and the approach that that teacher has at his or her disposal”*. For one administrator, they have *“more*

*success when the [dual credit] faculty are appointed by the SCWI person at the college rather than when the different faculties' provide the instructors from each of their departments".* The consideration for hiring for participants was ensuring there was a background in understanding the unique needs of SWAC students.

To support the unique needs of SWAC students, 18% of participants indicated that either hiring or being hired as someone with experience in social work, addictions, mental health, or parole was important for SWAC teachers and/or the college appointed advisor. When speaking of bringing on the advisor, one administrator celebrated “[the advisor] *has a lot of experience working with high needs clients, possibly volatile clients*”. Another teacher shared that the experience the advisor brought from working with those facing poverty and in crisis meant that the advisor was “*really good at supporting the social emotional needs of the students*”. One advisor shared their lack of experience working with students with high needs and transition to PSE became a challenge: “*I spent a lot of time Googling with students who would ask me questions*”. Training and support for onboarding new staff, teachers, faculty, and administrators working with SWAC students was something identified as needing further attention by participants.

Training and support for staff, faculty or teachers working with SWAC students was identified as important for 21% of participants. As one advisor stated:

*Sometimes people that walk into a position like this don't know and they don't have a lot of experience dealing with high school students... they really need that extra support and guidance... being able to have that extra training or extra tool would, I think, help everybody.*

As was discussed above, when speaking about persistence, training for teachers, dual credit faculty and other staff on the program expectations could be beneficial. One administrator suggested it would be good

*For SCWI to be offering sessions for new to SCWI in the last 12 months... or if you've been in the programming for more than four years... just creating options for people who have been here longer...people are trying to just do operationally all that they need to do as well as the ongoing reflection and analysis and review.*

Initiatives such as the annual symposium, which was mentioned above, was seen as an option to support new staff. However, some participants felt greater community connections would support with training and onboarding. As discussed in the community building theme, out of all participants, 21% expressed a desire or appreciation for a community of practice, mentorship between staff in similar roles, or increased information sharing between practitioners. Sharing of information across practitioners could also lead to enhanced data collection and program evaluation.

### **Program Evaluation**

Throughout this research, a common trend was for participants to share their appreciation that this research was being conducted. As one participant shared, *"I'm just really loving that you're doing this work because it's really nice to hear that people are paying attention and want to give voice to the SWAC program"*. In total, 31% of all participants would like to see enhancements to data collection on SWAC. Opinions on what enhanced data collection could be used for varied. For some, *"looking at SWAC on a deeper level"* would help *"ensure long-term viability of the SWAC program by increasing funding, access to services, the number of teachers in the classroom, available resources, etc."*. Enhanced program evaluation and support, was



identified by 15% of participants, as a way to focus on “*quality over quantity in SWAC programs*”. To assist with ensuring a quality program, one participant shared, “*I think we could be using qualitative and quantitative things like attendance, assignment completion grade, resourceful ability to seek out support.... a lot more could be recognized for the student to see how we measure*”. Another participant shared an example:

*We need to slow down and celebrate that [students] showed up you know X amount of times over the semester, someone who has had trouble attending a traditional high school environment and they would have a track record of being absent all the time and now they're here all the time... they've showed up every day...and even if at the end of the day they aren't in a position to apply [to PSE] just still celebrating...we get too wrapped up in the vouchers and numbers that we're reporting back.*

For other participants, greater enhancement of data collection could help SWAC practitioners improve their practice and support of students: “*enhance data collection so there is a triangulation of data to allow specific SWAC programs to improve their practice*”.

One method of program evaluation which could support practice improvement identified was to ensure student voices were heard. In particular, 31% shared that more student input on program delivery, evaluation and assessment is needed. As one participant said:

*We need to have students be kind of at the forefront of the programming, if that makes sense, they need to have more say in what is happening with the programming because it is them at the end of the day that's being affected and I think it's really just at a bare minimum right now.*

It was suggested SWAC programs should “*ask students what they need on an ongoing basis and adjust programming to suit this appropriately, if feasible*”. Both during and post-SWAC

connections with students were identified as needed, with 15% of participants stating that contact tracking and support was needed post-SWAC. Enhanced program evaluation, oversight, and onboarding was seen as a potential support for ensuring SWAC is “*not just another Alt-Ed program*”. For 26% of participants, the distinction of SWAC as its own unique program was necessary and important for continued program success.

### **Summary**

Throughout this chapter, the five main themes which became apparent through this research have been presented. First and foremost, the need to build community within the SWAC program for students was of utmost importance for participants. Alongside building community for students, the delivery staff who facilitate SWAC programs also needed to have a sense of community and belonging in order to effectively support students. One method for building community amongst SWAC delivery staff suggested was to create communities of practices. Secondly, the theme of student support and advocacy was presented. After highlighting the current supports available and identified as needed, the research showed that of particular need is post-SWAC support for students through their first semester or first year of post-secondary education. In terms of support, the college-appointed SWAC advisor was shown to be particularly important, as was the need for a holistic approach to student support and continued advocacy for students, and the SWAC program in general. Thirdly, the theme of multiple facets of persistence was presented. The concept of persistence was shown to have different meanings for participants which tied with the need for program expectations to be clarified for all stakeholders. Student readiness for post-secondary education as well as the rigour of the program and courses were all shown to be connected to student persistence. Delivery of the SWAC program was the fourth theme examined, with particular emphasis on the need for SWAC to

build in life skills development and consider the timing of the program itself. Course delivery models were then explored which led into the fifth and final theme of this research, which was program leadership. Program leadership included the topics of program oversight from school boards and SCWI, as well as employee onboarding considerations for hiring and training. Finally, program evaluation and assessment were explored as it related to ensuring the progression and success of the SWAC program. Having explored the top themes and concepts found within the results of this research, a discussion has been presented next around how these themes related to the literature and best practices research. Connecting the findings with the literature on theoretical and best practice approaches provided the foundation needed for the final recommendations of this research.

## Chapter 5 – Discussion

The purpose of this study was to examine the leadership and delivery of Ontario School Within a College programs effectiveness in preparing students for persistence into post-secondary education (PSE) to determine if an ideal model of delivery could be created. Five main themes emerged through triangulation after review of the qualitative and quantitative results: a) community building, b) student support and advocacy, c) multiple facets of persistence, d) delivery, and e) program leadership. The SWAC conceptual framework for this research as described above in Chapter one, based on Terenzini and Reason's Comprehensive Model of Influence on Student Learning and Persistence (Reason, 2009), can be summarized in five overarching categories: a) pre-existing student dimensions, b) the overall educational context, c) SWAC program context, d) student experiences, including classroom, curricular, and out-of-class experiences; and e) post-secondary persistence. Through analysis of the findings in conjunction with the conceptual framework and supporting literature, the following five key findings were made:

1. **Educational Community Context:** Building a sense of community within SWAC impacted the overall experience for students and delivery staff. It was shown that attention to building community amongst students and delivery staff should be given to increase success and persistence and improve SWAC delivery. Program expectations should also be clarified for students entering SWAC, delivery staff, and administrators.
2. **Pre-existing Student Dimensions and Support:** Pre-existing student dimensions dictated the need for a holistic approach to student support and advocacy, provided through out-of-classroom supports, such as the college-appointed advisor for SWAC students.

3. **Post-secondary Persistence:** It was determined that post-secondary persistence, while dependent on SWAC student readiness, could be increased through interactions with school boards and colleges, and support throughout the first year of PSE.
4. **Classroom Experience and Curricular Delivery:** The delivery of the SWAC program, in terms of classroom structure and curricular delivery, required an emphasis on adult learning principles, including a focus on life skill development, and while ensuring a continued attention to academic rigour.
5. **Leadership and Evaluation:** Program leadership and oversight impacted the overall SWAC experience for students, delivery staff and administrators. Attention to staff and administrator onboarding and increased program evaluation for SWAC was shown as needed.

Throughout this chapter a discussion which united the previously explored theories and literature, and the findings found through this research has been presented. To begin, as community building was identified as the top theme in the qualitative data analysis, the community context has been given.

### **Community Context**

Building a sense of community for both students and staff supporting students impacted the overall SWAC experience for both students and delivery staff. The SWAC program context, both from a student's perspective and those supporting SWAC programs, varied across the province of Ontario. What did not vary was the necessity to create a sense of belonging for both students and delivery staff within the SWAC program. Berry (2019) and Rovai (2002), in their research of post-secondary students, emphasized that a student's sense of community within the classroom and on their college campus was central to student engagement and satisfaction.

Though SWAC was not a post-secondary program, the results of this study concluded that a sense of community had an impact on staff satisfaction and engagement with the program. Klem & Connell (2004) found that both students and teachers emphasized a teacher's ability to create a caring, well-structured learning environment directly impacted the level of student engagement. While this research was unable to solicit student feedback, delivery staff and administrators, including teachers who participated, clearly articulated the necessity of creating a welcoming, caring, supportive space for students. Kouzes and Posner (2019) recommended that building trust was a foundation for leaders to transform others. Based on the findings of this research, trust and a caring environment were important, not necessarily to transform students based on a pre-set end goal, but rather to provide an environment for students to create the conditions needed for their personal success.

In alignment with the work by Booker (2016), Petrillo et al. (2016), and Tinto (2006), SWAC delivery staff strived to create environments where students felt a sense of belonging through being accepted, valued, included, encouraged, and supported. This environment was created both by peers in the classroom as well as the staff and faculty teaching them academically. SWAC programs aligned more with the work of Lizzio (2006) and Coulter et al. (2019) whose approach to post-secondary student transition was to encourage students to gain a sense of culture and connectedness with their new environment, while maintaining connections to cultural identities. The first few weeks of a student's experience in SWAC, academically, socially, and through the college environment, could impact the persistence, involvement, and energy a student brought to their experience as Morrow & Ackermann (2012) claimed for traditional first semester college students. Teachers and advisors in this research indicated the importance of respect for student autonomy and voice, and the essential need for teachers and

delivery staff to create meaningful, authentic relationships with students. MacNeil (2006) and Walumbwa et al. (2007) both stated that authenticity of support and guidance was directly linked to satisfaction and performance of students.

It was not just the relationship with teachers and delivery staff, including advisors, that impacted a student's sense of community and belonging in SWAC. Evident in the findings of this research, and supported by Reason's (2009) work, the ability to connect with fellow students was extremely important. Dugan and Komives (2010), Guiffrida (2006), Liou et al. (2016), and Strayhorn (2008) all determined in their research that the importance of socio-cultural conversations with peers, conversations about differences, and opportunities for gaining cultural wealth, were important for ensuring an inclusive approach to leadership. This research aligned with Dugan and Komives (2010) in emphasizing the need to facilitate the space for socio-cultured conversations. It was shown that SWAC teachers were having a transformative effect in the learning of students by providing a safe space for learning and growth. The SWAC teachers' ability to create space for discussion around student lives and interests is in alignment with the National Research Council (2012) conclusions that educators should connect topics to students' personal lives and interests, engaging students by drawing attention to the knowledge and skills they develop through collaborative discussions rather than grades and scores. Unlike Tinto's (2006) encouragement for students' to break free of their cultural associations and identities and embrace the new learning environment culture, the experiences of teachers and advisors in SWAC aligned more with Guiffrida (2006), Dugan and Komives (2010) and Strayhorn (2008), who all encouraged peer interaction, cultural continuations, and connections with cultural groups as benefiting student success. Additionally, by ensuring there was opportunity to celebrate successes of students with fellow students, and also with the teachers and staff who supported

students in succeeding, SWAC staff experienced similar feelings as those found by Whitley (2014) in their work on supporting educational success of Aboriginal students. Similar to Whitley's (2014) work, the passion and dedication of teachers and delivery staff directly linked to the degree of celebration and success SWAC students faced.

SWAC delivery staff, including teachers and advisors, demonstrated a passion for working with students within the SWAC program. Holloway and Salinitri (2010) may have only studied teacher candidate experiences; however, their research, which highlighted the feelings of mutual respect and appreciation for what staff can learn from students, was evident in the results of this research with SWAC delivery staff. Contrary to Nairz-Wirth and Feldmann (2017) findings that found teachers attributed dropout to family and personal problems, SWAC delivery staff more closely aligned with Holloway and Salinitri (2010) who stated that when engaged in meaningful relationships with students, teachers were able to identify institutional systems of power that were attributing to student success. Interestingly, delivery staff also embedded skills associated with academic advising principles, such as creating and emphasizing the need for strong relationships between students and staff and the goal of putting the needs of students' first, to support their development and performance as described by Barbuto et al. (2009) and Russell et al. (2004).

SWAC delivery staff demonstrated through their comments their hope, optimism and confidence in their students' ability to succeed, and consistently placing student needs first, all of which align with Avolio and Gardner (2005) as well as Greenleaf (2016) theories on servant and authentic leadership. In addition to authentic and servant leadership approaches, SWAC delivery staff and administrators actively utilized instructional leadership approaches. One example of the instructional leadership approach, put forward by Marks and Printy (2003), could be seen in the



collaboration of delivery sites on the development of curriculum delivery, instruction, assessment, and holistic support provision for students. In order to prevent a transactional or transformational leadership approach, as presented by Judge and Piccolo (2004), this research concluded that students entering the program, parents, delivery staff, and administrators must have a shared understanding and expectation of the purpose and goals of the SWAC program. In particular, when teachers felt isolated or alone, when they were not capable or did not have the knowledge expertise to teach certain credits, or if SWAC programs felt like the “*black sheep*” of the college, programs and staff tended to shift to a focus on numbers, outcomes, graduation rates, rather than focus on student success. Instead, when delivery staff and administrators felt that they had a collective agency, or a shared belief in their collective power to produce results (Bandura, 2001), delivery staff and administrators were more likely to feel capable of supporting students. As stated by Eib and Miller (2006), having teachers and advisors simply working in proximity to another staff did not necessarily enhance collegiality. Nurturing interactions and relationships with colleagues needed to be developed, as well as a shared belief in their collective power to implement change for students.

The need for supportive communities for SWAC delivery staff was highlighted throughout this research. Though their research, focused on college and university faculty, Eib and Miller (2006) and Li et al. (2009) emphasized, in particular, the need to create communities with shared knowledge, an increased sense of belonging, and spaces built to reduce feelings of isolation in teaching and program delivery. Supported by Kong (2018) and Li et al.’s (2009) work describing the benefits of communities of practice, both teachers and college advisors highlighted the need for communities of practice to improve teaching, interaction, and community amongst practitioners. If provided the ability to connect with colleagues, Holloway

and Salinitri's (2010) work suggested that teachers and advisors could experience greater success in holistic provision of the SWAC program, since it was such a unique approach to teaching and support. Kong's (2018) work suggested that providing teachers and advisors with the space to share, encourage one another, and create meaningful relationships with other practitioners, could help increase the retention and experiences for staff. Salinitri (2005) suggested a similar model could increase student retention. By building a sense of community for students within the SWAC program, and for SWAC delivery staff supporting students, this research indicated that there would be the potential to not only increase the multiple facets of student persistence, but also impact program delivery and leadership, which in turn may impact approaches to student support and advocacy.

### **Pre-Existing Student Dimensions and Support**

Pre-existing student dimensions dictated the need for a holistic approach to student supports and advocacy provided through out-of-classroom supports, such as the college-appointed advisor. As evidenced by multiple researchers, the personal, family, and school factors that led students to participate in programs such as SWAC, placed them at higher risk of dropping out (Dupéré et al., 2018; Finnie & Qiu, 2008; Fortin et al., 2006; Wotherspoon & Schiessel, 2001). Hesserer and Parette (2002), in their study of at-risk college and university students, stated that the many negative experiences students have in their high schools prior to joining PSE, as well as the frequent lack of family support or personal expectation for educational success, dictated the need to provide holistic, welcoming, and supportive environments for students. The unique nature of SWAC in balancing high school and post-secondary learning environments meant that while the research conducted by Dupéré et al. (2018), Finnie and Qiu (2008), Fortin et al. (2006), Heisserer and Parette (2002), and

Wotherspoon and Schissel (2001), appeared to be able to be applied to the findings of this research, further exploration of student perspectives and experiences would be needed to make a direct application of theory. In alignment with research on the characteristics that lead to higher rates of dropout, according to delivery staff and administrators, students in SWAC often had conflicting priorities, including family obligations, financial concerns, full-time employment, or were facing ongoing chronic difficulties, all of which dictated the need for holistic, flexible and targeted supports (Dupéré et al., 2018; Fortin et al., 2006; Parker et al., 2004). Fortin et al. (2006) conducted research in Quebec on high school drop-out rates, and their research, along with Public Safety Canada (2012) stated that Indigenous students and those from historically under-represented groups were less likely to graduate. Though the research conducted by Fortin et al. (2006) was limited in its application to the Quebec learning environment, the research conducted by Public Safety Canada (2012), aligned with the results from this research in programs with targeted supports for students who self-identity as part of the Indigenous community.

In order to provide targeted, holistic support for SWAC students, additional resources, such as social work support, were identified as needed. Self-efficacy, or the belief a person has that they can produce desired results based on their actions, as defined by Bandura (2013), appeared to be represented in the findings of this research. Benight and Bandura (2004) indicated that self-efficacy can impact persistence, especially for those who have suffered a traumatic event. While the research conducted by Benight and Bandura (2004) indicated perceptions of self-efficacy was needed for those who had suffered a traumatic event, they did not appear to compare their results to a test group who had not suffered traumatic events. Within this research, it was shown that students' may not necessarily have suffered a traumatic event, however, most if not all of SWAC students were seen to be facing mental health issues, feeling overwhelmed,

and/or anxiety as confirmed by delivery staff and administrators. The teachers in Whitley's (2014) study on supporting success for Indigenous students provided similar narratives as SWAC delivery staff in that they understood the need to provide space for students to increase their self-worth and celebrate successes. Both the participants in Whitley (2014) and SWAC delivery staff were spending significant time counselling and connecting with student emotional and psychological needs. SWAC delivery staff suggested increased training and support was needed in order to support the mental, physical, and personal development of students, which was consistent with the proposals of Barry et al. (2013), Kratt (2018), and Quillinan et al., (2019). Though Pulimeno et al. (2020) suggested that teachers be trained as health promoters with the skills needed to support all areas of student wellness, SWAC delivery staff instead emphasized, especially due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the need for additional specially trained personnel in the form of social workers. Bandura (2001), Chickering and Gamson (1999), and Savitz-Romer et al. (2009) all agreed that students' can be positively influenced if they have created a significant relationship with a person in an educational setting. Holloway and Salinitri (2010) concluded that those who foster strong relationships of support with their students, where mutual respect and appreciation was present, and where a mentoring type of relationship existed, could increase attendance, student persistence, and student satisfaction. While there still remained a need to provide social worker or counselling supports, it was indicated that the college-appointed advisor could be leveraged to provide the mentoring and supportive relationship SWAC students require.

The importance and influence of the college-appointed advisor in SWAC became evident throughout this research. Aspects of servant leadership, as described by Coetzer et al. (2017), Judge and Piccolo (2004), Greenleaf (2016) and van Dierendonck (2011), can be described as a

need for leaders to focus on putting the needs of others first, remain confident, hopeful, and optimistic, and focus on the higher order intrinsic needs of others. Within this research, the description of servant leadership appeared to be most evident in delivery staff, such as teachers and the college appointed advisor. Unlike the principles of self-actualization and leader-follower relationship that van Dierendonck (2011) synthesized were required for servant leadership, the SWAC advisor's role aligned more with the Kuhn et al. (2006) advising continuum. In such a continuum, the advisor's role was to offer information for students within the context of their needs, values, goals, and personal situations, thus creating a collaborative process where students and advisors worked together to develop and realize educational, career and personal goals. Barbuto et al. (2009), in their conceptualization of advising with the leadership model, highlighted similar findings to what SWAC delivery staff shared in this research in that those staff who created ongoing relationships with their students, through informal and formal connections, appeared to have gained the respect and connection of their students. The principles of intrusive advising, described by Schwebel et al. (2008) and Thomas (2017) included mandatory, proactive advising, in which advisors got to the heart of what was causing students' issues, supported them in recommending appropriate interactions, and thus increased their motivation for academic success. By providing targeted support for students' pre-existing dimensions as they enter and progress through SWAC, there was the potential to influence greater post-secondary persistence.

### **Post-secondary Persistence**

The findings of this research indicated that post-secondary persistence, while dependent on SWAC student readiness, can also be increased through interactions with school boards and colleges, academic rigour, and support throughout the first year of post-secondary education.

While the concept of persistence varied for some members of this study, primarily the focus of participants was on post-secondary persistence. Knowles et al. (2012), Merriam (2001), and Parkin and Baldwin (2009) determined, for adult learners to persist from one year to the next through to program completion, students' must first have an intrinsic desire and need to learn, and be ready to learn. The context for SWAC differed from that of most research on post-secondary persistence, however, what remained the same was that SWAC students were not always at a stage where they had the desire for a direct post-secondary pathway immediately following high school. Similar to adult learning theory, students have a readiness for learning, which for some could take time after SWAC concluded. As stated throughout this research, students lack of persistence into post-secondary directly following SWAC was not always a bad thing as many students chose to return to studies in the future (Grayson & Grayson, 2003; Morrow & Ackermann, 2012; Reason, 2009). The research conducted by Bandura (2013) and Benight and Bandura (2004) demonstrated that high school experiences and family contexts can have an impact on students' self-efficacy to succeed at that point in time, and that postponing pursuit of post-secondary may be a better path for some students. SWAC students may not have been ready for direct entry into PSE immediately following their high school completion, but that did not mean that they would never persist into a post-secondary program. Finnie and Qiu (2008), in their longitudinal Canadian study on persistence in PSE for low-income students, determined that non-traditional pathway students, like SWAC students, often took breaks and move in and out of post-secondary based on multiple factors. The experience students had with their secondary schools and the colleges in which their SWAC programs resided could have influenced the ultimate likelihood of students' persisting into post-secondary, whether immediately or in the future.

As concluded by Knesting (2008), the relationship SWAC programs had with both school boards and colleges could either positively or negatively have impacted students' willingness to persist into post-secondary. Aligned with the work by Fredericks et al. (2004) and Hallinger (2003), together all levels of the SWAC delivery must promote a positive learning environment that provided behavioural engagement (e.g., academic, social, extracurricular activities) and emotional engagement (e.g., positive relationships with teachers and classmates, ties to the institution). Foundational to Lizzio's (2006) five senses of success framework, and aligned with the first-year transitional model utilized by Coulter et al. (2019), was the requirement of students to feel a sense of connectedness and association to their college culture. SWAC programs that had close relationships with colleges, including participation in student events, access to facilities, and in which students' felt a sense of connection and belonging to the campus culture, demonstrated that students were more engaged and may be more likely to return to PSE.

The relationships, or lack thereof, between SWAC programs and the school boards impacted the feelings of support that both students and delivery staff felt in supporting students, which could, in part, affect the learning environment. The learning environment's impact on persistence was highlighted in multiple persistence and first year transition theories including Lizzio (2006), Reason (2009), Strayhorn (2008) and Tinto (2006). As concluded by multiple theories on persistence, the environment in which SWAC students learned, including the culture, organization, peer environment, and support from teachers and staff, could have affected the likelihood of a student persisting beyond their secondary school diploma (Lizzio, 2006; Reason, 2009; Strayhorn, 2008; Tinto, 2006). Extending support for SWAC students into their first semester or first year of PSE was shown as an opportunity for consideration in order to increase student persistence into post-secondary.

Morrow and Ackermann (2012) concluded that the first few weeks of a student's experience on campus, including both academic and social adjustment, determined not only persistence levels, but also level of involvement, retention, and level of energy a student invested in the institution and their studies. Corroborated in the findings of this research, and Tinto's (2006) research, early and ongoing integration and interaction between SWAC students and the PSE they pursue should be encouraged and developed through ongoing support, either by the college advisor or another trusted member of the college community. Barnes et al. (2015) and Finnie and Qiu (2008) in their research found that the longer a student can remain engaged and supported with the learning environment, the less likely they are to drop out and, as such, early intervention and prevention programs that provided holistic, tailored, and proactive supports could improve student success and persistence. Many SWAC delivery staff shared that their ongoing relationships with students encouraged students to return to seek support, encouragement, and guidance in their subsequent semesters in post-secondary or in the future when deciding to pursue further education, if they did not progress directly from SWAC. Once again highlighted by multiple theories on persistence and student transition to PSE, either having college staff or peer support for early integration and support, as well as foundational ongoing support systems in place for students who enter directly from high school to PSE or for those students who return after taking some time off, would be beneficial for students (Parkin & Baldwin, 2009; Tinto, 2006; Reason, 2009). Peer-to-peer or college supportive proactive engagement within the first semester has been shown to create a greater sense of connectedness, belonging, engagement, capability, and resourcefulness in students by multiple researchers (Coulter et al., 2019; Lizzio, 2006; Mattanah et al., 2010; Thomas, 2007). SWAC teachers and advisors indicated that students returned regularly for support after leaving SWAC and so a



dedicated support system that engages students' through their first year would not only benefit students currently enrolled in that post-secondary institution, but also former SWAC students considering enrolment for the future. The experience SWAC students had in their classroom and curricular delivery was also shown as a potential impact to the likelihood of persistence into post-secondary.

### **Classroom and Curricular Delivery**

Based on this research, it was determined that the delivery of the SWAC program, in terms of classroom structure and curricular delivery, should emphasize adult learning principles, including a focus on life skill development, while maintaining an emphasis on academic rigour. According to Knowles et al. (2012), there were six core adult learning principles which guided the success of adult learning including: a need to know or student's desire to learn; learner self-concept (self-directed); learner's experiences; readiness to learn (life tasks); problem-centred orientation to learning; and an internal motivation to learn (p. 141). As previously discussed, a student's readiness to learn impacts their likelihood of post-secondary persistence, but it also impacts the likelihood that they will continue through SWAC to complete their secondary school diploma. Merriam (2001) and Reason (2009) both stated that the characteristics a student brings to their learning also impacted their education and may influence the type of courses and length of program a student will be involved in. Cooperative education options, where students could gain high school credits through paid employment, were seen to be of importance within SWAC programs. Cooperative education was shown to lend credence to the problem-centred orientation to learning of many students, and their requirement to complete high school credits while providing a livelihood for themselves or their families, described by Knowles et al. (2012). The combination of course delivery and credit recovery used by the majority of SWAC programs

provided students with the flexibility to take control of their learning, gain self-organization skills, foster collaboration, and develop further individual agency and identity development. All of these characteristics of SWAC learning were important considerations for self-directed learning, according to Hennis et al. (2017) and Merriam and Bierema (2014). Since self-directed learning is not ideal for all students, the combination of individual credit recovery and credit delivery favoured by the majority of participants in this research, as well as the additional support teachers provided students when they were completing credit recovery work, demonstrated that SWAC teachers were adapting practices according to student need as promoted by Merriam and Bierema (2014). Principles of inclusive leadership described by Hallinger (2003) and Rayner (2009) could also be applied to the SWAC context. By including students in decision making surrounding their academic plans, through choice of dual credit course, cooperative education, or courses required to take, SWAC delivery staff and administrators were providing an inclusive learning community that created a positive learning environment for SWAC students. SWAC delivery staff in this study, similar to the statements issued by Klem and Connell (2004), articulated the belief that the ability to create caring, well-structured learning environments, could directly impact the level of engagement a student had. Targeted instructional approaches, including preparation and instruction on college coursework strategies, could support students who were at-risk and also increased student persistence, according to Heaney and Fisher (2011). The findings of this research aligned with the belief that incorporating life skills into SWAC curriculum helped further develop the skills students need to succeed.

Building life skill development into SWAC programs was clearly indicated as an area that should be emphasized within SWAC. In particular, the topics put forward by Gould and Carson

(2008), including learning strategies, mental health and wellness strategies, cooking, money management, conflict management, and any other desirable competencies, should be built into programs or needed to be further expanded. Life skill development as indicated in research is of utmost importance in the 21<sup>st</sup> century and, along with problem-centric learning, were principles of adult learning (Knowles et al., 2012; National Research Council, 2012). Increasing life skill development within SWAC was of importance as students required cognitive, intrapersonal, and interpersonal skills to successfully support themselves upon graduation according to the National Research Council (2012) and Rubenson et al. (2007). Since many students who participated in SWAC did not have the informal learning opportunities, such as family or community structures described by Quillinan et al. (2019) and Rubenson et al. (2007), it was even more important that the SWAC learning environment provided practical strategies that were meaningful for students (Quillinan et al., 2019; Rubenson et al., 2007). Life skill development should be incorporated into SWAC programs but not at the expense of academic rigour.

As indicated in this research, the vast majority of participants emphasized the importance of maintaining academic rigour in SWAC programs. Highlighted by the work by Savitz-Romer et al. (2009) and Wyatt et al. (2011), high school academic rigour can be an important factor in college success and is essential for students to meet the demands of 21<sup>st</sup> century life and careers. The majority of this study's participants, especially advisors and administrators, highlighted the lack of academic rigour currently in SWAC which could have significantly impacted SWAC student preparedness for further post-secondary learning. Wyse and Soneral (2017) argued that lack of academic rigour could mean that students were missing the experience of the level of high order thinking required at post-secondary levels of learning. While Wyatt et al. (2011) argued that rigour in high school courses can lead to positive persistence into post-secondary, the

difficulty level or rigour of college academics is not only related to academics. Campbell et al. (2018) instead defined rigour as “deep inquiry-based and equity-based learning that sufficiently challenges and encourages all students to achieve their full potential including both academic and broader development” (p. 12). Since SWAC programs combined high school and college level academics through dual credits, a fine balance needed to exist between supporting students in successful completion of credits while also maintaining the level of rigour needed to provide accurate representation of post-secondary studies. Pathways to College, an American organization, associated academic rigour with ensuring course completion signifies student mastery of content; ensuring English and Math is taught throughout high school; study acquisition of skills, knowledge, and habits leading to college success; constructive and consistent feedback; and inclusion of challenging courses for students (Savitz-Romer et al., 2009). Through this research study, it was evident advisors and administrators, in particular, were questioning whether the high school and dual credit courses students were completing in SWAC demonstrated mastery, acquisition of skills, habits and knowledge, and whether there was consistent and constructive feedback throughout. There were some in this research who suggested that the holistic development of the student that provided self-development could be considered as a component of rigour as defined by Campbell et al. (2018). However, the large number of participants’ who indicated concerns with the lack of academic rigour within SWAC indicated that increased focus on leadership and evaluation of the SWAC program is needed.

### **Leadership and Evaluation**

Program leadership and oversight impacted the overall SWAC experience for students, delivery staff and administrators. It has been argued that leadership practices and approaches could have a direct impact on student outcomes in educational settings (Robinson et al., 2008;

Waters et al., 2003). In particular, with SWAC, leadership and oversight was shown to significantly impact the ability of delivery staff to provide programming. Supported by components of instructional leadership put forward by Hallinger (2003), together, all levels of the SWAC hierarchy defined and created the mission of SWAC, managed the program, and promoted a positive learning environment through their interactions with each other and the students' they serve. In programs where there was disconnect between students, teachers, school boards, college advisors, colleges, administrators, or SCWI, the sense of community and shared focus on student success was lost. Uniting components of instructional and transformational leadership, including strong foundations of trust, respect, and support between SWAC delivery staff, it was shown that it may be possible that SWAC programs can be able to be delivered in a shared approach where creativity and calculated risk for program development could be undertaken (Hallinger, 2003; Kouzes & Posner, 2019; Marks & Printy, 2003; Rego et al., 2011). Eisner (2015) suggested that when all members come together collectively with a shared understanding of the expectations, outcomes, and purpose of a program, it was possible to conceive, launch, and participate in a model where there is shared ownership. Evident by the findings in this research that there is a lack of shared understanding of the SWAC program goals and expectations, it highlighted that as Eisner (2015) suggested, there is not a fully shared ownership of SWAC delivery currently between school boards and colleges.

Multiple researchers have clearly shown that dual credit programs, in general, promoted greater secondary school academic success, engagement on post-secondary campuses, employment potential, and workforce engagement (Andrews, 2000; Bragg et al., 2006; Borovilos, 2015; Christian, 2016; Colleges Ontario, 2006; Kim & Bragg, 2008; Jones, 2014; Watt-Malcolm, 2011; Whitaker, 2011). However, as found by Irving (2017), many of the

concerns raised through this study can be linked to organizational support and implementation of programming rather than concerns of the SWAC program itself. SWAC programming was a shared program which called for all those in positions of responsibility to actively come together to define the program's mission, manage the program, and promote a positive learning climate for both students and those supporting students (Hallinger, 2003; Marks & Printy, 2003; Robinson et al., 2008). Attention needed to be given to onboarding practices of new staff to ensure that the foundation of trust was built among new members, existing staff, and administrators who are a part of SWAC.

Throughout this research, the high rate of turnover of staff was raised as a concern, especially with administrators. Selden and Sowa (2015) in their research focused on volunteers in high emotional impact positions found that, where there are positions with increased levels of stress, and where roles are reliant on strong relationships, there can be high rates of staff turnover. The findings of this research, though focused on SWAC delivery staff, does emulate roles that require high levels of stress and strong student/staff relationships and so Selden and Sowa's (2015) research could be applied. While it is true that the first weeks of a student's experience on campus, including both academic and social adjustment, determined not only persistence levels, but also level of involvement, retention, and level of energy a student invests in the institution and their studies (Morrow & Ackermann, 2012), the same could also be said of staff engagement and support in their first few weeks of employment. Snyder and Crane (2016) suggested that there be a good onboarding program in place that focused on the quality of relationships between co-workers, administrators, college staff, and school boards, which could lead to a higher likelihood that staff will continue. Should the suggestions put forward by Snyder and Crane (2016) be taken by organizations implementing new or operating pre-existing SWAC

programs, there could be opportunities for staff retention. Li et al. (2009) and Snyder and Crane (2016) also suggested a formal succession planning and onboarding process that focused on easing the transition of new members to the team, supported socialization with existing team members, shared knowledge, and created a sense of belonging among all staff members. Shared knowledge between all SWAC delivery staff was shown as important, not only for onboarding of new staff or administrators, but also for continued program evaluation.

While SCWI oversight was generally seen as favourable, greater connection and involvement between school boards was desired as was the need to continue collaborating with SCWI to provide feedback and evaluation. Greater evaluation of the SWAC program from all levels was desired. Aligned with Reimer's (2014) suggestion, input from SWAC delivery staff and students could positively impact the adjustment of policies and procedures. Some participants suggested that SCWI followed more of a transactional leadership process as suggested by Judge and Piccolo (2004), where the program had a focus on numbers, outcomes, and targets. In order for all levels of the SWAC hierarchy to feel heard in defining and creating the mission for SWAC, it was indicated that greater inclusion and connection is needed to evaluate program success and delivery (Hallinger, 2003). In particular, participants in this research emphasized the need for increased attention to student feedback when determining program direction. Though focused on the long-term success of school principals, Cieminski's (2018) strategies could be applied to the administration of SWAC:

- Be mindful of the workload to keep the work engaging and meaningful;
- Provide differentiated support, especially for newer administrators;
- Foster a collaborative culture among principals; and
- Build and maintain supportive relationships. (p. 36)

Through thoughtful, ongoing communications between all levels of the SWAC hierarchy, it was determined that greater program evaluation can occur which would, in turn, lead to increased student support and success.

### **Summary**

In combining the findings of this research and the conceptual framework and literature which guided this research, five key findings were identified. The importance of building a sense of community for students within their SWAC classroom and campus context was essential for overall success. Perhaps just as important, was building a sense of community with delivery staff supporting SWAC students, including opportunities for shared knowledge and connection with other practitioners. The pre-existing dimensions that SWAC students brought with them to the program dictated the need for a holistic approach to student supports. By ensuring that there were resources and staff available to support the multi-faceted needs of students, SWAC students could gain a well-rounded support network. The college appointed advisor, in conjunction with other SWAC delivery staff, was shown as someone who provided the link to supports and services students' may need. Post-secondary persistence of SWAC students, while influenced by their entry characteristics, was also dependent on the students' readiness for post-secondary. Interactions with school boards and colleges could have impacted the likelihood of student persistence into post-secondary, but it was suggested that ongoing support through the first semester or first year of a student's post-secondary experience could increase SWAC student persistence into post-secondary. The delivery of the SWAC program, in terms of the classroom structure and curriculum delivery, it was determined, should have a focus on adult learning principles. Those programs that embraced adult learning principles in their delivery of courses, through a combination of credit delivery and credit recovery, appeared to have the most success



for students. It was recommended that SWAC programs should aim to include life skill development in their programming to ensure students were prepared for living and working in the 21<sup>st</sup> century; however, life skill development should not impact academic rigour. Greater focus should be placed on academic rigour in high school and dual credit courses that SWAC students participated in. Increased program evaluation could support the evaluation of academic rigour. Program leadership and oversight impacted the SWAC experience for students, delivery staff, and administrators. Attention should be placed, it was determined, on developing an onboarding and succession process that can support new and existing staff. In conjunction with increased program evaluation from all levels of SWAC, it was suggested that additional opportunities for program development could be achieved. Having discussed the findings discovered throughout this research in alignment with the existing research, in the final chapter, recommendations for the SWAC program have been presented as well as suggestions for future research.

## Chapter 6 – Conclusion

In this final chapter, a brief overview of the key findings from this research on the effectiveness of School Within a College (SWAC) dual credit programs in preparing students for persistence into post-secondary education (PSE) is presented along with a suggested model of delivery for SWAC programs. This new model highlights six key areas of focus including: a student-centric philosophy; employing a collective approach; a focus on adult learning principles; a holistic student experience and support system; an increased focus on onboarding, training, and development; and continuous evaluation. All levels of SWAC delivery have a role to play to ensure these six key areas of focus are implemented in order to benefit students. It is hoped, should other educational institutions outside of Ontario choose to implement an in-depth program targeted at high school students facing significant barriers to success, that this proposed model can be used as a foundation for planning, implementation, and decision making. The proposed model also aims to support the enhancement of pre-existing Ontario SWAC programs. In addition to this new model, a brief discussion of the limitations of this research is provided. The implications for future research are highlighted, including opportunities for how this study can influence considerations for pre-existing theories, including the Comprehensive Model of Student Influence (Reason, 2009), leadership theory with student support, instructional leadership, and first year transition models. This model represents the pragmatic solution to problems of practice that emerged from this research.

### Overview of Research Project & Findings

As stated in Chapter One, the overarching research question which guided this project was: *How effective are School Within a College (SWAC) programs in promoting student persistence into post-secondary education and can these SWAC programs be made more*

*effective?* To answer this overarching question, an exploration of how SWAC programs were being delivered across Ontario was conducted, exploring the successes and challenges within and external to the classroom. Depending on the delivery model, various successes and challenges were identified, which provided insights into whether students were being adequately prepared to persist with their learning journey into and through post-secondary education (PSE). Based on the information gathered, leadership factors were identified as required for SWAC program enhancements. Utilizing a mixed-methods approach, multiple stakeholders at all levels of the School College Work Initiative (SCWI), the overarching body which delivers SWAC, were consulted. Through a ministry liaison focus group, delivery staff questionnaire, semi-structured interviews, a review of publicly available government statistics, including progression reports and college applications, and triangulation between all data points, five main findings were found: the importance of building a sense of community; student support and advocacy; persistence; program delivery; and leadership and evaluation.

### **Community Building**

The first major theme identified was the importance of building a sense of community. Both students and delivery staff, who supported students, required a sense of belonging which could be gained through early establishment of positive relationships. By creating safe spaces for learning and support, students could connect with other students facing similar barriers to success or who had similar cultural experiences, which could promote a sense of community and opportunities to celebrate successes. For delivery staff, engaging in student-centric approaches was highlighted as imperative, as well as creating a sense of community with other support personnel to ensure their overall success in supporting students. The use of communities of practice to provide opportunities for sharing knowledge, mutual support, strategies for teaching

and assessment, and strategies for supporting SWAC students were found to be useful for delivery staff.

### **Student Support and Advocacy**

Second, student support and advocacy were identified by all levels of the SCWI hierarchy as an important aspect of the SWAC program. Supports and services available to SWAC students varied across the province, with the biggest lack of supports being social work, financial means for food and housing, and counselling and mental health supports. Continued support for SWAC students into their first year of post-secondary programs was identified as essential for continued student persistence into post-secondary. The college-appointed advisor played an important role in providing students ongoing support while students were enrolled in SWAC, but they were also identified as ideally suited for providing ongoing student support into the first semester of the next post-secondary program students undertook. A holistic approach was required for SWAC students as they faced multiple barriers to success, and wraparound support was required from resources within the colleges, school boards, and external communities for increased student persistence with their learning journey and ultimate success.

### **Persistence**

Third, the concept of “persistence” varied across stakeholders in the findings of this research. For example, college appointed advisors and administrators identified persistence as relating to students’ movement into and through PSE, while many of the teachers and school boards focused instead on completion of their high school credits. Lack of clarity in program goals and expectations was seen to have potentially led to a lack of consensus regarding what persistence means within SWAC. Alignment between college and school board expectations was recommended to provide a cohesive process required to increase student readiness and

progression into post-secondary education (PSE). Emphasized by all stakeholder levels was the importance of recognizing that not all students were immediately ready for PSE, and so there needed to be supports in place to provide to students who return after graduation or at some point in the future, when they feel ready for that next step into PSE. Another significantly important factor in student persistence into PSE was the need for consistent academic rigour in delivery of courses, in terms of number of courses taken at once, assessment at the appropriate level whether that be the secondary credits or post-secondary courses, and adherence to course deadlines.

### **Program Delivery**

Fourth, delivery of SWAC programs varied across the province. Integrating life skills, either formally or informally, into the delivery of SWAC programs was identified as necessary. The timing of delivery of SWAC programs varied across the province; however, the need to work within delivery timings that worked alongside the students' other responsibilities, such as supporting families, jobs, childcare, and so on, was shown as consistent. A combination of credit delivery, the traditional teaching model of instructors delivering course content synchronously with the whole class, and credit recovery, where students are independently completing course work from a variety of courses needed for graduation with support from teachers as needed, seemed to be the most common delivery format across the province. It was seen as important to have teachers in place with varied discipline expertise to provide student support for courses, as it was difficult for teachers to teach well and expertly across a range of disciplines. Team teaching, or having multiple teachers supporting a SWAC group, was identified as the best way to provide support to students and teachers, as well as ensuring a variety of subject specific expertise was present.

## **Leadership**

Fifth, the leadership and oversight of SWAC was found to be important. The need for SWAC programs to be fully integrated into the college campuses where they resided was found to be important; however, just as integral, was the ongoing support and participation of the school boards in SWAC programs. The support and oversight provided by SCWI was perceived positively, and there was a desire for further collaboration across the province. A desire for increased opportunities to share knowledge of best practices, teaching strategies, and approaches to student supports was highlighted as an opportunity for future training and partnerships.

The lack of consistency in the delivery of SWAC programs across the province and within each Regional Planning Team, or regional area, was identified as a challenge with calls for greater consistency in delivery guidelines and criteria. Sharing of resources and knowledge, within and across regional areas, was identified as a strategy that could support SWAC program delivery. Attention to hiring practices, including thoughtful hiring of staff with previous relevant experience and a student-centric philosophy, was indicated as necessary, as was ongoing staff support through their delivery sites and colleagues. Increased and ongoing opportunities for sharing of best practices, teaching and assessment strategies, and supports was requested. The final point related to delivery was the necessity and value of continuous and ongoing program evaluation at all levels of SWAC delivery, with significant focus on students' perspectives.

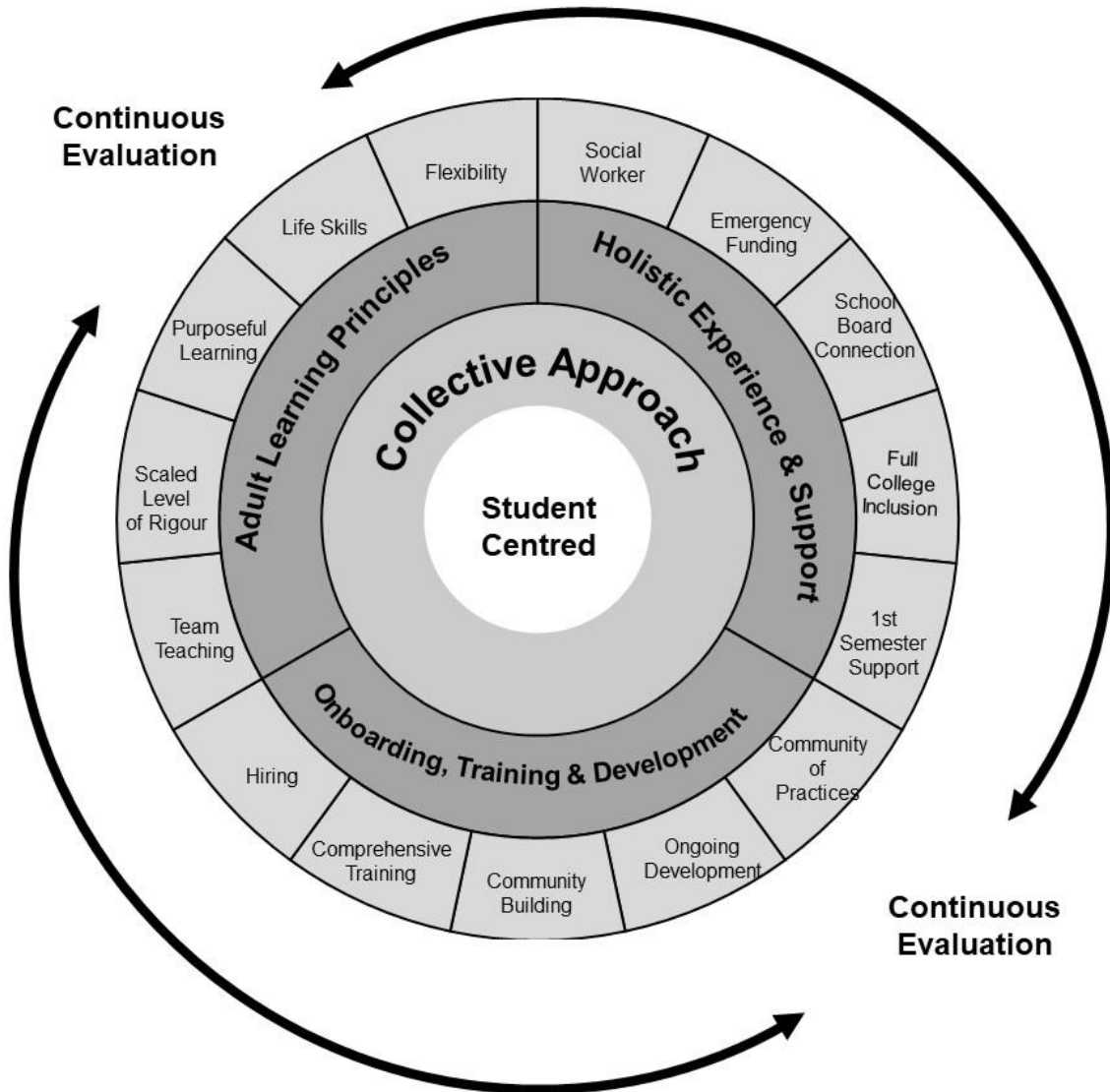
Having summarized the five major findings found within this research, including: community building, student support and advocacy, persistence, delivery, and program leadership, there will now be an explanation of how these findings can inform best practices. What follows is an explanation of a proposed model for SWAC delivery based on best practices and the findings of this research.

### **Recommended SWAC Delivery Model**

Based upon the five major findings explained above, a new model for SWAC delivery, as showcased in Figure 5, has been proposed, with the aim to address a number of key issues that emerged from this research. There are two purposes behind this proposed model: (a) to provide a model should other educational institutions wish to implement an alternative pathway to success for disenfranchised students; and (b) to provide opportunities for pre-existing models of delivery, such as the Ontario SWAC program to improve. As demonstrated in the findings of this research, consistency in program delivery and perceived goals and expectations varied in focus within the Ontario program. This model, if implemented, would provide a consistent approach for other educational institutions looking to implement, or could provide a baseline of measurement for pre-existing programs. Recommendations for actions that could be taken to implement this model have been identified by the use of bullet points. As explained in the final recommendation listed below, the following proposed SWAC delivery model, if implemented in other areas outside of Ontario, could only be successful if all levels of leadership commit to its implementation.

**Figure 5**

*Proposed SWAC Delivery Model*



In this new model, there are six main components which include: student-centredness; collective approach; adult learning principles; holistic experience and support; onboarding, training, and development; and continuous evaluation. Each of these components are explained



in the following sections as they relate to a general explanation, importance, purpose, stakeholder involvement, and recommendations.

### **Student-Centred**

This model places students and student centredness as the central focus of a program aimed at high school completion and post-secondary persistence, like SWAC, and recommends.

- All levels of the governance, including students, delivery staff, administrators, regions, and ministry governing bodies, should place the needs of students first.

This means all decisions, planning, and delivery of SWAC programs need to be student centric to ensure effectiveness. Placing the student success at the centre of the guiding principles of SWAC programming is necessary to ensure that all functioning of SWAC programming aligns.

Focusing on what is best for students, regardless of whether that be future PSE, graduation from high school, development of life skills, or increased resilience and feelings of support, must always be the guiding principle by which all decisions are made. Upon student selection for entry into the program, students should be provided with autonomy and voice to create a personalized learning and support plan while in the program. Using a student-centred approach is also important to the other pillars of this new model including: adult learning principles, holistic experience and support, integrated community of care, and staff onboarding, training, and development. While a student-centred approach is integral, sharing a collective approach to delivery is just as essential for successful program implementation with this model.

### **Collective Approach**

A collective approach to a dual credit program is one wherein all levels of the governance group collaborate to ensure consistent, effective programming is delivered. From all levels of governance groups including ministries of education and advanced training, geographical

regions, delivery sites, including both the school boards and colleges, and external community partners, a collective, shared approach to program principles must be maintained.

### ***Guiding Principles***

- Guiding principles, which include baseline criteria for dual credit program delivery, must be created and shared between all levels of a governance group.

While it is important for each program delivery site to be able to maintain some sense of autonomy in delivery, there needs to be a set of guiding principles, including a baseline checklist of criteria for standards of delivery. Since this program differs from traditional dual-credit programming, a unique set of provincial standards of “practice” criteria for program delivery would enable greater consistency within and across different regional areas and delivery sites. The guiding principles should clearly articulate program goals, values, and expectations. These guiding principles and base criteria would provide greater opportunity for routine evaluation and development, as well as a shared approach to the review and refinement of the program.

### ***Shared Resources***

- Resources, such as student places, teaching resources, and student support resources, should be shared across school boards and colleges in the delivery of the program.

Within each regional area, available funding for program places and teaching resources should be shared. By sharing places and resources between boards and colleges, collective support can be provided to both students and delivery staff. Student support resources, such as college appointed advisors, could be shared across regional areas where delivery sites are distributed across a large geographical area. A collective approach to resources would enable program staff to provide a holistic experience for students, improve staff hiring, training, and ongoing professional

development opportunities, and promote the use of adult learning principles across all levels of programming.

### **Adult Learning Principles**

As explained by Knowles et al. (2012), there are six core adult learning principles: a need to know or students' desire to learn; learner self-concept (self-directed); learners' experiences; readiness to learn (life tasks); problem-centred orientation to learning; and an internal motivation to learn (p. 141). While students are responsible for their internal motivation and desire to learn, there are five recommended areas in which programs should focus on adult learning principles. The five areas of recommended focus which fall within adult learning principles include: flexibility, life skill development, purposeful learning, a scaled level of rigour, and team teaching.

#### ***Flexibility***

- Flexibility in program delivery, length, timing, and course inclusion is required to provide customizable programming based on student need.

Each student should be able to have an individualized approach to courses, timing, and length of program depending on their pre-existing characteristics and needs. When structuring a student's learning and support plan, delivery staff should work with the student to determine credit delivery options, including experiential learning opportunities outside the classroom. Work-integrated learning, such as the Ontario cooperative education model, which allows students to complete high school credits while employed, should be explored. Determining the length of time the student plans to remain in the program, and any customized supports required should also be dependent on the individual student. As student experiences continue to evolve

throughout their time in SWAC, flexibility in student support and planning will be necessary to ensure the student's goals are met throughout SWAC.

### ***Life Skill Development***

- Life skill development needs to be embedded in both formal and informal learning within the program.

Life skill development such as personal wellness, resiliency, nutrition, money management, time management, and autonomy should be incorporated into course credits, either college level dual credit and/or high school credits, and should be integrated into course delivery and support.

Delivery staff including teachers, college faculty members, advisors, and other supporting staff should work with students to develop life skills needed for success outside of the classroom in all interactions. Building student development of life skills into support models and teaching will prepare students for future independent success.

### ***Purposeful Learning***

- Students should guide the purpose and goal of their learning, including credit selection and delivery options, such as experiential learning.

As students enter the program, the purpose and expectations for program completion should be clarified with the student. Dependent on the student's life experiences and requirements, every effort should be made to ensure flexibility in programming delivery that meets the student's purpose. Experiential learning options, such as cooperative education models, that allow students to gain an income while completing high school credits should be explored, as well as an overview of which high school credits are most suitable, and which dual credit course options are aligned with the student's future career goals.

### ***Scaled Levels of Rigour***

- The program should ensure a gradual, scaled increase of academic rigour to scaffold learning and effectively prepare students for future studies and life demands.

By the end of a student's time in the program, they should be effectively prepared for education at the college level. Academic rigour should be scaffolded, that is, gradually increased in complexity and challenge, including assessments, workload, deadlines, as well as increased levels of student autonomy in learning and support. All program delivery staff, including teachers, faculty members, advisors, and professional staff should gradually increase student autonomy in their interactions with students to further prepare for PSE and life demands.

### ***Team Teaching***

- Team teaching should be used whenever possible to provide students' the academic support needed for success, and to provide teachers support in program delivery.

Having at least two high school teachers supporting one program cohort provides students' the necessary expertise for support when completing course work. Team teaching also provides teachers with a partner to support students and each other. When planning these programs, school boards and regional areas should consider either assigning multiple teachers to one cohort or scheduling multiple programs at the same campus and times, so two teachers' can holistically support all students in the program and their colleagues' in terms of sharing resources, lesson planning, assessment creation and so on. Whenever possible, matching teachers who are new to teaching in this alternative model with experienced teachers at delivery sites is encouraged, to foster peer coaching and support.

## **Holistic Student Experience & Support**

As showcased in Figure 5, there are five areas of focus that promote a holistic, supportive, program experience for students including: providing social work resources, emergency funding, strong connections with school board, full inclusion in the college, and ongoing support through the first semester of PSE. Related to these foci are a number of recommendations.

### ***Social Worker and Coordination of Supports***

- A social worker should be linked with each program to provide regular, ongoing support, especially mental health counselling and referrals.

Program students' have multiple needs that cannot be met by delivery staff alone. Dedicated social worker support is recommended to provide students with ongoing, regular support, in particular around mental health concerns. Regular access to counselling and guidance from a social worker would provide program students' the support they need while also allowing other delivery staff to focus on their areas of expertise/support. Additional referrals and connection to external supports, such as, emergency housing, addictions support, spiritual resources, and legal advice, could also be facilitated or coordinated by a dedicated social worker. When clarifying the program's guiding principles and shared resources through a collective approach, it should be determined which group or groups (ministry, region, school board, college) is responsible for providing the dedicated social worker. The dedicated social worker should not replace the college appointed advisor. The college appointed advisor can work alongside the social worker, high school teachers, and college faculty in the coordination of student support.

### ***Emergency Fund***

- An emergency fund should be made available to each delivery site to be used for emergency food, housing, and other student supports.

Each delivery site should have access to an emergency fund which could be used as interim supports for students' food, shelter, or other services as needed. Delivery staff from both school boards and colleges supporting students should be able to access these funds on behalf of students, at their discretion. An allocation should be made available each semester so that students' who find themselves in crisis can apply for additional assistance for food, shelter, or other necessities such as transportation, or medicines and so on. To ensure equitable access to the emergency funds, delivery sites from across a centralized region could each share access to a centralized emergency fund as, depending on the delivery sites, needs and expense levels may vary.

### ***Maintain School Board Communication and Linkage***

- School boards should maintain regular connection with students and teachers.

Regular check-ins by school board staff, either guidance or school monitors, should be maintained throughout a students' time in SWAC. Students' should be made to feel that they have the option to belong to both their school board and the college in which they are attending. High school teachers' delivering the program should also feel supported through regular connections with their school boards and the college. In order to fully embody the dual nature of SWAC programs, students should be made to feel that they belong both within their school board and at the college in which they are studying, through regular interactions with school board staff. Invitations to school board events, such as high school graduation, should be an option open to program students.

### ***Full College Integration***

- SWAC students should be fully included in the college campuses where they study and should be treated as traditional college students.

Colleges should create an experience for program students that mirrors that of “traditional” college students. Program students should have full access to services, supports, resources, and social activities within the college. By creating an environment where program participants are treated as traditional college students, there is a greater likelihood that, if the student wishes to pursue PSE, they will do so at the campus where they already feel connected and have experienced a positive relationship with their community. Additionally, students will have experienced the benefits of being associated with a college and so will be more likely to want to continue their learning journey with that community.

### ***First Semester PSE Support***

- Support needs to be provided for SWAC students into the first semester of PSE by the college-appointed advisor.

The college-appointed advisor for these programs should be funded to provide ongoing support for students within the program and subsequently throughout their first semester of PSE. Regular check-ins and opportunities for connections should continue until the end of the student’s first semester, and periodic check-ins after this initial timeframe, if needed. The college-appointed advisor should also be provided the time and resources needed to re-establish a relationship with students’ who leave the program and return to pursue their PSE studies at a later date. This would mean that a tracking system would need to be established to flag when a program student re-enters the college. The college advisor should be able to support these returning students through the application, acceptance, and first semester of their PSE program. Through appropriate



onboarding, training, and professional development, advisors' will be able to effectively support the needs of students.

### **Onboarding, Training, and Professional Development**

The onboarding, training, and professional development of all members of the governance hierarchy who support these programs is an area that requires additional focus. As identified in Figure 5, there are five areas of recommended attention related to hiring, onboarding and professional development of program staff such as teachers, college faculty, advisors, administrators, and supporting staff, including: thoughtful hiring, comprehensive training, community building, ongoing professional development, and communities of practice.

#### ***Thoughtful Hiring Practices***

- Careful consideration needs to be taken to ensure that “qualified” staff are hired to support program students.

At all levels of program delivery and administration, careful consideration should be taken to ensure those hired are qualified, that is, they possess a student-centred approach. Without a student-focused mind-set, regardless of staff/faculty member skills and academic qualifications, the collective goals of the program cannot be met. Those staff who interact with students on a daily basis, such as high school teachers, college professors, and advisors, should ideally be hired with relevant previous experience. In particular, hiring individuals with previous employment experience working with youth facing barriers, providing mental health support, or experience in either the college or high school education system is preferred. Consideration of previous experience delivering SWAC or similar programs should also be taken into account when hiring administrators at the college and school board levels to oversee these programs. By hiring staff

with relevant experience, an increased amount of initial training provided to staff can focus on program guiding principles.

### ***Initial Training for New Staff***

- Comprehensive training should be provided to all new hires regarding program guiding principles, student demographics, adult learning principles, and holistic support.

Regardless of a new staff or faculty member's experience, comprehensive training should be provided which ensures new members of the program follow the guiding principles of the program. Typical student demographics and experiences for the hired geographic region should also be covered, ensuring that all members are aware of the needs of students' and methods of providing a holistic support system. Principles of adult learning should be covered with all new staff members so that they can integrate these principles into routine practices, including teaching, support, and decision making.

### ***Community Building at Delivery Sites***

- Community building between school board and college staff at each delivery site is needed.

As both college and school board staff work in conjunction at each site, open communication and strong relationships are needed to promote a cohesive, holistic approach to student success.

While community building between staff is needed upon hiring, it is also important to facilitate ongoing relationship-building throughout the school year. Administrators from both colleges and school boards should work with each delivery site to provide dedicated time for teachers, school board staff, college professors, advisors, and staff to collaborate and work together to create a unified approach to holistic student supports.

### ***Ongoing Professional Development and Training***

- Ongoing professional development and training opportunities regarding best practices, student supports, and teaching and learning methods should be provided.

All members of program delivery, regardless of length of employment, should be provided with additional opportunities for professional development and training. Professional development and training opportunities surrounding best practices, program guidelines, student supports, teaching and learning methodology, mental health supports, and any other area identified by program staff through communities of practice and information sharing should be offered.

Training opportunities targeted at different levels of program delivery, such as administrators, teachers, advisors, college faculty and so on, should be offered throughout the academic year.

Targeted training should also be provided based on length of employment; for example, initial training on program guiding principles could be offered to new staff, whereas training around enhancing program delivery based on guiding principles could be offered to experienced staff.

Regardless of program staff current employment role, training opportunities should be open to all members of program delivery, as it was previously recommended that consideration for hiring for positions should be given to those with previous experience in program delivery. Opening training opportunities to all members of the program can also provide opportunities for thoughtful succession planning for various roles within SWAC delivery. Training should be provided throughout the academic and calendar year rather than one annual opportunity.

### ***Initiate Communities of Practice***

- Communities of practice should be created for all positions involved in SWAC delivery across the entire program.

Creating program wide communities of practice, at a provincial level, would enable members from across regions to work collectively to enhance program delivery. Through sharing of best practices, pedagogies, experiences in delivery, and current challenges, practitioners from across the province can support each other in their own process of continuous evaluation and development of practice. Large scale communities of practice can also encourage practitioners to engage in reflective praxis in an effort to continually evaluate approaches to program delivery.

### **Continuous Evaluation**

At all stages of SWAC planning, decision making, and delivery there is a need for continuous evaluation and development. All members should continuously evaluate and adjust delivery of their practice according to changing resources, policies, and student needs.

#### ***Student Feedback Needs to be Solicited***

- Student feedback needs to be solicited and included in all levels of SWAC evaluation. Increased focus on student feedback and engagement is required for evaluation of delivery and outcomes of SWAC programs. Student perspectives on program delivery, coordination, and supports need to be gathered continuously and used as the pillar by which decisions and program change occurs. Gathering feedback from students throughout the program, on exit, and subsequent post-program feedback three, six, and twelve months after program completion, should be collected and shared with all levels of program delivery.

#### ***Emphasize Both Qualitative and Quantitative Feedback***

- Equal emphasis should be placed on qualitative and quantitative feedback. Both qualitative and quantitative evaluation methods should be used at all levels of SWAC delivery and should be given equal weight during evaluation. Increased emphasis on student stories and feedback is essential, as is soliciting similar narratives from delivery staff, regional

members, and ministry partners. Through collective feedback from all levels of program delivery, continuous development and redevelopment of program delivery can occur.

### **Regionally Responsive Leadership**

Regions, or communities, interested in implementing the proposed model for SWAC delivery, as described above, must include all six main components: student-centredness; collective approach; adult learning principles; holistic experience and support; onboarding, training, and professional development; and continuous evaluation. Each of these six components require all levels and stakeholders involved in program delivery to work together collectively. By placing students at the centre of all planning and decision making, all other stakeholders will be able to create a program that provides a legitimate alternative pathway to success for disengaged students. The stakeholder groups in each community who would take the lead on implementing and leading program development would depend on the student characteristics of each area. For example, should a school board or community group wish to create a similar program specifically for Indigenous youth, elders and community leaders may take on a greater role in leading program implementation. In other regional areas, local post-secondary institutions may wish to spearhead campus programming and be able to engage school boards and community groups. Regardless of which stakeholder group begins to enact each of the recommended actions above, only through a collective approach can there be successful implementation of adult learning principles, holistic experiences and supports, and effective onboarding, training and professional development. To ensure long-term success of SWAC programs, continuous evaluation must be conducted with a focus on student feedback and a combination of qualitative and quantitative feedback from all levels of SWAC delivery.

## **Limitations of Research**

Limitations of research has been defined as characteristics of the design and methodology that impacted or influenced the interpretations of the findings from research, created unexpected challenges, or situations in which constraints impacted the study that were outside the researcher's control (Price & Murnan, 2004). In this research, the biggest impact was the COVID-19 pandemic. The COVID-19 pandemic significantly impacted this research as the most important stakeholder in this research was no longer able to be included: the students. Past and current student feedback was not able to be solicited as part of this research which could have altered and enriched the findings. Additionally, the shift to online delivery and remote support of students due to the COVID-19 pandemic may have also influenced the number of delivery staff and administrators who would have been willing to participate in other circumstances. The increased workload caused by the pandemic, including adapting materials and supports to remote, could have influenced the willingness of individuals to complete the questionnaire and the follow-up interview. As participation in this research was not to the extent desired, certain unique models of SWAC delivery were not included such as English as a Second Language, French Language programs, and Adult SWAC programs. Additionally, the quantitative data available for the 2019-2020 academic year was skewed due to adjustments made for COVID and thus was not included in this research.

## **Implications for Theory and Future Research**

The findings in this research indicated that the Comprehensive Model of influence on Student Learning and Persistence proposed by Terenzini and Reason could be expanded to include the experiences of staff and teachers/faculty supporting students (Reason, 2009). While the organizational context and college experience were identified as components of Terenzini and

Reason's model, the findings of this research indicated the experiences of teachers and staff have a greater impact on student persistence than originally conceptualized (Reason, 2009; Terenzini & Reason, 2005).

Further exploration of the connection between leadership approaches and student support, at both the high school and post-secondary level, could also be explored, especially when working with students' facing significant barriers to success. While Barbuto et al. (2009) reconceptualised academic advising using a variety of leadership models, further research into the implications of using different leadership approaches in teaching and learning could be considered. Similarly, instructional leadership research tends to focus on administrators, such as principals and deans, however, as evidenced by the SWAC program, educators at all levels may be demonstrating instructional leadership practices and represent unique opportunities for future research.

While there has been significant research conducted within dual-credit programs, there appears to be a lack of research connecting dual credit learning environments and their potential for implications on post-secondary transition theories. Much of the research on first-year transition theory is still based on the transitional theories first put forward by Tinto (1993). Exploration of student transition theory and persistence theories that explore the considerations of students enrolled in dual-credit programs could provide additional opportunities for theoretical development on student supports, and first-year learning environments. Further focus on the student experience within similar programs could also be explored.

Future research targeted at current and past SWAC students is also suggested. Soliciting student feedback on all aspects of SWAC delivery could greatly influence whether the proposed SWAC delivery model presented in this research resonates with students. A longitudinal study of

students who complete SWAC would also provide further indications as to whether SWAC does in fact encourage persistence into post-secondary education, skilled trades, or career progression. Should the proposed model of delivery be implemented, further research could be conducted with students, delivery staff, administrators, and ministry representatives to determine the impact of the proposed model. Further analysis of the progression of students into skilled trades and apprenticeship is also encouraged as currently there are no provincial progression statistics for students from SWAC into apprenticeship.

### **Summary**

The purpose of this research study was to determine the effectiveness of SWAC programs in promoting persistence into post-secondary and exploring opportunities for how these programs could be made more effective with the intent of creating a proposed model of delivery. The five main findings discovered in this research, community building, student support and advocacy, persistence, delivery, and program leadership and oversight, indicated the areas that needed further focus to increase program effectiveness. Described above in the proposed SWAC delivery model, a collective approach that emphasizes student-centredness at its foundation is required for all aspects of SWAC. By focusing on adult learning principles, holistic student experience and supports, and thoughtful onboarding, training and professional development, the guiding values and principles of SWAC can be maintained. Finally, through continuous evaluation and development, SWAC will be able to remain student-focused and meet the needs of all members through its program delivery.



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# Appendix A – Selection Criteria for Admission to Dual Credit Programs

Dual credit programs are for students who fall into one of the three following categories:

- students in the primary target group – those who face significant challenges in completing the requirements for graduation, or who left school before graduating, because they are disengaged and not meeting their full academic potential, but who have shown evidence of the potential to succeed in college or an apprenticeship;
- students in Specialist High Skills Major (SHSM) programs;
- students in the Ontario Youth Apprenticeship Program (OYAP).

Entry into dual credit programs is guided by relevant staff, overseen by the school principal. Students may indicate their interest in a dual credit program on their course selection form, or they may be recommended for the program by school staff. Staff evaluate a student's suitability for the program on the basis of the criteria listed below, as well as criteria specific to the college program.

## **Students Who Are Disengaged and Who Are Not Reaching Their Full Academic Potential**

Suitability is determined on the basis of one or more of the following:

- the student's level of interest in the program (e.g., as demonstrated by submission of an application)
  - a review of the student's OSR and credit counselling summary
  - an interview with the student
  - recommendations of teachers
  - discussion among relevant staff, overseen by the school principal, regarding the options that provide the best fit with the student's interests, strengths, and needs
- Dual Credit Programs: Policy and Program Requirements

Staff may find the following helpful in determining which students are most likely to benefit from the program.

### ***Evidence that a student has the potential to succeed.***

The student

- has completed most or all compulsory credits
- can potentially graduate within one year (e.g., already has 22 or more credits), if provided with support;
- demonstrates that issues that were previously preventing success have been or are being addressed;
- demonstrates interest in and commitment to the dual credit program;
- is motivated to improve skills and work habits;
- demonstrates evidence of independent learning skills;
- demonstrates an appropriate maturity level;

- demonstrates the potential to develop skills such as critical thinking, communication, innovation, creativity, collaboration, and entrepreneurship;
- if the student previously left school and then returned, demonstrates progress in courses in the first semester, making it possible to start a dual credit program in the second semester;
- demonstrates progress, maturity, motivation, suitable interpersonal skills, and/or skills in activities outside the school setting.

*For success in dual credit college courses, the student should:*

- have had some success in college preparation courses.

*For success in Level 1 apprenticeship in-school programs, the student should:*

- have a strong interest in a specific trade;
- have related work or volunteer experience;
- have had success in a cooperative education program.

***Evidence that a student is disengaged***

The student:

- has had numerous absences;
- has previously dropped out or is at-risk of dropping out;
- is out of school and is reluctant to return, for non-academic reasons;
- displays a lack of involvement or engagement in school or community activities;
- sees little connection between secondary school and their preferred future;
- lacks confidence in their ability to succeed;
- is unsure of their pathway beyond secondary school;
- has a limited understanding of career options.

***Evidence that a student is not reaching their full academic potential***

The student:

- has fewer credits than average for their grade and is therefore not on track to graduate on time;
- is older than other students in their grade;
- was making progress earlier, but progress has slowed;
- is demonstrating a decline in achievement over time

(Ministry of Education, 2020, pp. 29-31)

# Appendix B – Research Tools

## Ministry Representatives Focus Group

(Adapted from Deloitte, 2012)

I am very interested in your story, told in the way that works best for you, so my questions are open-ended. Of course, some of your questions could lead me to ask for a bit more detail

1. Please introduce yourself and your role in SWAC.
2. Are there any particular delivery models that stand out as particularly successful with supporting SWAC students? How so?
  - a. Are there any models that you think pose challenges to supporting SWAC students? How so?
3. What supports and services (e.g., tutoring, career counsellor, college advisor, school board monitor, guidance counsellor etc.) are provided to help students prepare for their next steps after SWAC?
  - a. Do you feel the supports/services available provide the help students need?
  - b. What other supports/services would be helpful?
4. What successes do you experience in leading SWAC programs from the provincial level?
  - a. What challenges?
5. What specific gaps or unmet needs does you face in leading SWAC delivery?
  - a. Why are they not being met? (e.g., funding, mandates, etc.)
  - b. What should be done to address these unmet needs?
6. What recommendations would you make to increase student persistence into post-secondary after SWAC?
7. Do you have any final comments that were have not been covered?

Thank you for your participation. If you indicated you wanted a copy of the executive summary, I will send it to your email. Thank you again!

## **Administrator Semi-Structured Interview Script**

(Adapted from Deloitte, 2012)

I am very interested in your story, told in the way that works best for you, so my questions are open-ended. Of course, some of your responses could lead me to ask for a bit more detail

### **Motivation**

- Please explain your role within SWAC.
- Why did you decide to work within SWAC?
- What motivates you to continue working within SWAC?

### **Programs**

- Can you please describe what delivery models of SWAC delivery are offered in your area (e.g., 3 day/5 day/ summer / adult/ ESL, 1 / 2 dual credit course etc.)?
- What supports and services (e.g., tutoring, career counsellor, college advisor, school board monitor, guidance counsellor etc.) are provided to help students prepare for their next steps after SWAC?
  - Do you feel the supports/services available provide the help students need?
- What other supports/services would be helpful?

### **High School-College – Persistence**

- Do you think that the learning experience in SWAC helps prepare students for further college/university? Why/why not?
- What recommendations would you make to increase student persistence into post-secondary after SWAC?

### **Delivery Models/Leaderships**

- Are there any particular delivery models that stand out as particularly successful with supporting SWAC students? How so?
  - Are there any models that you think pose challenges to supporting SWAC students? How so?
- What successes do you experience in leading SWAC programs from the regional level?
  - What challenges?
- What specific gaps or unmet needs does you face in leading SWAC delivery?
  - Why are they not being met? (e.g., funding, mandates, etc.)
- Considering your experiences, what should be done to address these unmet needs?
  - by your institution?
  - SCWI?
  - Other community/government groups?
- Do you have any final comments that were have not been covered?

Thank you for your participation. If you indicated you wanted a copy of the executive summary, I will send it to your email. Thank you again!



## **Delivery Staff Semi-Structured Interview Script**

(Adapted from Deloitte, 2012)

I am very interested in your story, told in the way that works best for you, so my questions are open-ended. Of course, some of your responses could lead me to ask for a bit more detail

### **Motivation**

1. Please explain your role within SWAC.
2. Why did you decide to work within SWAC?
3. What motivates you to continue working within SWAC?

### **Program Overview**

4. Can you please describe how SWAC is delivered in the program(s) you work closest with?
5. What supports and services (e.g., tutoring, career counsellor, college advisor, school board monitor, guidance counsellor etc.) are provided to help students prepare for their next steps after SWAC?
  - a. Do you feel the supports/services available provide the help students need?
  - b. What other supports/services would be helpful?

### **High School vs. College - Persistence**

6. In your opinion, how is the learning experience in SWAC different from that in traditional high school (e.g., how information was taught, assignments, teachers, professors etc.)?
7. Do you think that the learning experience in SWAC helps prepare students for further college/university? Why/why not?
8. What recommendations would you make to increase student persistence into post-secondary after SWAC?

### **Delivery Models/ Leadership**

1. Are there any particular approaches to either program delivery or supports/services that stand out to you as particularly innovative/successful with supporting SWAC students?
2. What specific gaps or unmet needs do you face in meeting the needs of students in your delivery of SWAC programs?
  - a. Why are they not being met? (e.g., funding, mandates, etc.)
  - b. What should be done to address these unmet needs
    - i. by your institution?
    - ii. SCWI?
    - iii. Other groups?
3. Considering your experiences, what suggestions do you have for SWAC program:
  - a. leadership and administration?
  - b. delivery?
4. Do you have any final comments that were have not been covered?

Thank you for your participation. If you indicated you wanted a copy of the executive summary, I will send it to your email. Thank you again!

## Questionnaire – English Version

# Exploring the Effectiveness of Various Delivery Models Within Ontario School Within a College (SWAC)

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Start of Block: Default Question Block

Q40



**Q1 Purpose of the Study** The purpose of this study is to determine whether the leadership and delivery of the Ontario School Within a College (SWAC) program effectively prepares students for persistence into and through post-secondary. This study aims to explore how effective the various SWAC delivery models are, as well as what successes and challenges these models experience and encounter in their provision of appropriate programming for students. The information gathered in this study will be used to determine if any leadership factors or program enhancements can be proposed to improve student entry and success in college/university.

Primary Research Question: *How effective are School Within a College (SWAC) programs in promoting student persistence into post-secondary education and can these SWAC programs be made more effective?*

By exploring the above research question, it will be possible to gain a better understanding of how the SWAC program is currently being delivered, while also providing SCWI, Regional Planning Teams, and SWAC delivery staff with information on potential avenues for the future development and enhancement of program delivery. It will also provide insights into students' perceptions of the impact of the program and its influence on their study trajectories and success.

**Informed Consent Statement** The University of Calgary Conjoint Faculties Research Ethics Board has approved this research study. If you have any concerns about the way you've been treated as a participant, please contact the Research Ethics Analyst, Research Services Office, University of Calgary at (403) 220-4283 or (403) 220-8640; email [cfreb@ucalgary.ca](mailto:cfreb@ucalgary.ca). You are invited to participate in this questionnaire; however, it is important to note that participation in this study is entirely **voluntary and confidentiality is assured**. This means that **all study data will be reported in an anonymized format and no personally identifying information** will be

included in study reports. You may refuse to participate in the study altogether or may withdraw from the study at any time without any penalty. Should you agree to participate initially in the online questionnaire, but subsequently choose to withdraw, questionnaire data will not be able to be withdrawn due to the aggregated nature of the data set. Individual comments will be quoted in presentations and publications only if there is no risk of identifying the individuals and universities involved. These data will be used to inform the scholarly community about the demands of the deanship, as well as, leadership development programming. The research team including: Anne Coulter, EdD Candidate (anne.coulter1@ucalgary.ca or 519-939-2506) and Dr. Shelleyann Scott (sscott@ucalgary.ca or 403-220-5694) are the only individuals who will have access to the confidential data now or in the future. The questionnaire data will be available through the Quartrics website whereupon these data will be transferred to Anne Coulter's computer. The computer is password protected and located in a secured office. Raw data will be kept for two years beyond the final completion of the study and then will be destroyed.

**What Happens to the Information I Provide?** Participation is completely voluntary and confidential. You are free to discontinue participation at any time during the study, however, questionnaire data submitted will not be able to be withdrawn from the study due to the aggregated nature of the data set. No one except the researcher team will be allowed to see the raw data and there will be no identifiers associated with your data. Study findings will be summarized for any scholarly presentation or publication of results. Study data will be kept in a locked office only accessible by the researchers. Raw data will be kept for two years beyond the final completion of the study and then will be destroyed. Questionnaire data will not be able to be withdrawn due to the aggregated nature of the data set.

**What Type of Personal Information Will be Collected?** No personal identifying information will be collected in the online questionnaire phase for the purpose of reporting. All participants shall remain anonymous in the published report of this study. Any reference to individual responses during reporting will be done so using a pseudonym. Should you agree to participate in this study, you will be asked to provide demographic information such as: your age, gender, academic level, highest qualification, years of experience, geographic location of program (e.g., urban/rural). However, all study data will be reported in an anonymous format and no personally identifying information will be included in study reports. Confidentiality is assured. After the questionnaire has been concluded, participants will be asked if they would be willing to take part in a follow-up interview. Participation in the interview stage of data collection is completely optional. Should a participant agree to participate in the interview stage, they will be asked to enter their name, work email, and work phone number. Personal information gathered will be used solely for the purpose of data collection. No names or contact information will be used in the final reporting of results.

**Are there Risks or Benefits if I Participate?** Potential Risk: Risks associated with participation in this study of the SWAC program are no more than what participants encounter in their daily experiences as staff in the school/college setting. Although it is impossible to guarantee absolutely that readers of reports of the study will not be able to identify individual study participants or their institutions, every attempt will be made to respect the privacy of study participants. That is, information will be reported in a summary form, rather than attributed to specific individuals. Also, the actual words of respondents will only be used when the identity of the author cannot be readily determined and when the words convey meaning in a particularly

useful way. If anyone should determine your identity based on published or presented reports of the study, it is possible that they may perceive you more positively or negatively because of your views or involvement in the study. However, the risk for the adult participants is no more than what they encounter in the everyday context of their involvement in education.

Benefits: By participating in this research, you will be provided with the opportunity to share current delivery successes, challenges, and suggestions in a safe and receptive space. Through sharing best practices, you will be able to identify successful outcomes and processes that you have helped implement for students as well as areas that need to be addressed to improve successful participation in SWAC. You will also be contributing to a larger report that can be used by SCWI to further evaluate and improves processes and delivery. There are possible benefits that may accrue to you because of your participation in the study. For example, you may become more aware of your own beliefs and delivery practices as a result of articulating them. There will be direct benefits to the scholarly community in better understanding the pros and cons of the SWAC program and associated delivery approaches. Findings will provide valuable information to government policymakers, educators, students, and college administrators that will inform the programming of SWAC programs. The benefits likely outweigh any potential risks. The feeling of satisfaction of 'being heard' and their sense of altruistic support for future students in the SWAC program will likely leave these participants feeling positive and enthusiastic about their participation.

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Q3 I have read the above information. If you do not agree and select "I do not agree" you will immediately be exited to the final "Thank you page". By selecting "I agree" you will be indicating agreement to participate and will advance into the questionnaire questions:

- I agree (1)
  
- I do not agree (2)

Q35 Which of the following best describes your current role in delivery School Within a College (SWAC) programs?

- High school teacher (1)
  - High school guidance counsellor (2)
  - School board monitor (3)
  - School board administrator (e.g., Superintendent, principal, vice principal) (4)
  - Central Board Office Staff (e.g., special assignment teachers, consultants, coordinators)
  - College faculty (5)
  - College student advisor (6)
  - College program staff (e.g., program support staff) (7)
  - College administrator (e.g., Dean, Associate Dean, Director) (8)
  - Other: (10) \_\_\_\_\_
-

Q8 Please select the best description of your current employment status and the approximate time you spend working with SWAC programs.

- Full-time Employed. SWAC Delivery between 60-100% of current position. (1)
  - Full-time Employed. SWAC Delivery between 30-59% of current position (2)
  - Full-time Employed; SWAC Delivery between 0-29% of current position. (3)
  - Part-time Employed (24 hours/week or less); SWAC delivery between 60-100% of current position (4)
  - Part-time Employed (24 hours/week or less); SWAC delivery between 30-59% of current position (5)
  - Part-time Employed (24 hours/week or less); SWAC delivery between 0-29% of current position (6)
-

Q5 How many years have you been in your current position?

0-1 years (1)

2-3 years (2)

4-5 years (3)

6-10 years (4)

Over 10 years (5)

---

Q6 Previous to your current position, did you hold any of the following positions? Check all that apply.

- High School Teacher (1)
- High School Guidance Counsellor (2)
- School board monitor (3)
- School board administrator (e.g., Superintendent, principle, vice principle) (4)
- College faculty (5)
- College program staff (e.g., Program support staff) (6)
- College student advisor (7)
- College administrator (Dean, Associate Dean) (8)
- I did not hold any of these previous positions (9)

End of Block: Block 1

---

Start of Block: Block 2

Q9 **SWAC Program Delivery Description** We would like to get a sense of the successes and challenges you face in the SWAC program(s) you help deliver. For the purpose of this questionnaire, we would like you to describe **ONE SWAC program** that you are very familiar with.

-----



Q33 Which of the following best describes the geographical location of the SWAC program?

Urban setting (1)

Rural community (2)

---

Q34 Where is the SWAC program you work with located within the college associated?

Main/Central campus location (1)

Smaller/Satellite campus (2)

---

Q11 Please select the high school credit delivery model that best describes the SWAC program.

- Credit recovery only with one dual credit college course (1)
  - Credit recovery only with two or three dual credit college courses (2)
  - Combined credit recovery & scheduled course delivery with one dual credit college course (3)
  - Combined credit recovery & scheduled course delivery with two dual credit college courses (4)
  - Scheduled course delivery with one dual credit college course (5)
  - Scheduled course delivery with two dual credit college courses (6)
  - Other (Please explain) (7) \_\_\_\_\_
-

Q14 How are students recommended/referred to be participants in the SWAC program (check all that apply)?

- Recommended by Student Success Team (1)
  - Recommended by board staff (e.g., social worker, truancy officer) (2)
  - Referred by friend/former SWAC student (3)
  - Recommended by school administrator (5)
  - Other (Please explain) (4) \_\_\_\_\_
- 

Q15 When **initially** accepted to SWAC, how long are students expected to be part of the program?

- One semester (September start) (1)
  - One semester (January/February start) (2)
  - Two semesters (September - May/June) (3)
  - Condensed Summer Session (2 weeks) (4)
  - Condensed Summer Session (4 weeks) (5)
  - Other, please specify (6) \_\_\_\_\_
-

Q16 How often are students required to be on campus/in the SWAC program?

- Two/three days per week, full day (5+ hours/day) (1)
  - Two/three days per week, half day (4 hours or less/day) (2)
  - Four/five days per week, full day (5+ hours/day) (3)
  - Four/five days per week, half day (4 hours or less/day) (4)
  - Only for scheduled college credits (5)
  - Other (please explain) (6) \_\_\_\_\_
- 

Q17 What time of day are students meant to **arrive** for their SWAC program?

- Morning (8am-11:30am) (1)
  - Mid-day (11:45-1:45pm) (2)
  - Afternoon (2:00-4:30pm) (3)
  - Evening (4:45-7pm) (4)
  - Depends on college course schedule (students only attend for college courses) (5)
-

Q18 Is this SWAC program delivered to one specific demographic/group?

No (1)

Adult SWAC program (2)

English as a Second Language (ESL) (3)

First Nations, Métis or Inuit Students (4)

Francophone (5)

Other (6) \_\_\_\_\_



Q19 Please select all the supports/services that you are aware of that **currently** are available to support students while registered in SWAC.

- Guidance counsellor conducts regular check-ins (1)
- School board monitor/dual credit teacher conducts regular check-ins (2)
- Transportation to/from SWAC program (3)
- Financial support for food/housing outside SWAC (4)
- Career counsellor (5)
- College appointed student advisor (6)
- College recruitment/application supports (7)
- OSAP/Financial aid support (8)
- Access to the gym/campus recreation services (9)
- Tutoring (10)
- Meals provided in SWAC (e.g., breakfast, lunch) (11)
- Counselling on campus (ongoing) (12)
- Counselling on campus (in-crisis only) (13)

- Addictions supports (14)
- Spiritual supports (e.g., Elder support, priest, religious affiliations) (15)
- Referrals to community supports (e.g., counselling, housing, addictions, etc.) (16)
- English as a Second Language classes/tutoring (17)
- Other (18) \_\_\_\_\_
- Other (19)

Q21 Are there any additional services/supports that are **not available** that you think should be made available for SWAC students?

- Guidance counsellor conducts regular check-ins (1)
- School board monitor/dual credit teacher conducts regular check-ins (2)
- Transportation to/from SWAC program (3)
- Financial support for food/housing outside SWAC (4)
- Career counsellor (5)
- College appointed student advisor (6)
- College recruitment/application supports (7)
- OSAP/Financial aid support (8)
- Access to the gym/campus recreation services (9)
- Tutoring (10)
- Meals provided in SWAC (e.g., breakfast, lunch) (11)
- Counselling on campus (ongoing) (12)
- Counselling on campus (in-crisis only) (13)



- Addictions supports (14)
  - Spiritual supports (e.g., Elder support, priest, religious affiliations) (15)
  - Referrals to community supports (e.g., counselling, housing, addictions, etc.) (16)
  - English as a Second Language classes/tutoring (17)
  - Other (18) \_\_\_\_\_
  - Other (19)
- 

Q22 Do you feel this program delivery is effective for helping prepare SWAC students for success in post-secondary? Please explain.

Q23 We would now like to hear, in your own words, your perspectives on the leadership and delivery of SWAC programs in helping prepare students for persisting into post-secondary.

---

Q36 What successes do you personally experience in leading SWAC program delivery?

---

Q24 What specific gaps or unmet needs do you face in supporting student persistence into post-secondary in your delivery of SWAC programs?

---

Q26 What should be done to address those unmet needs?

---

Q27 What recommendations would you make to increase student persistence into post-secondary after SWAC?

---

Q28 Any final comments/perspectives that have not been covered?

---

Q29 Follow-Up Interview In addition to this questionnaire, we are inviting select SWAC staff to share your insights into the delivery and leadership of Ontario School Within a College (SWAC) program and your thoughts on the effectiveness of SWAC in preparing students for persistence into and through post-secondary. Your insights on delivery of the SWAC program you are involved closest with will help us better understand the successes and challenges of SWAC programs. The interview will take approximately one hour. Participation in the interview stage of data collection is completely optional. Personal information gathered will be used solely for the purpose of data collection. No names or contact information will be used in the final reporting of results. Only those selected to participate in a follow-up interview will be contacted. Selection will be based on ensuring a representative sample of SWAC delivery models, locations, and leadership levels are met.

**\*\*Please note, interviews will be conducted in English.\*\***

Q32 Are you interested in participating in a follow-up interview as part of this study?

Yes (1)

No (2)

---

Q39 Thank you for your interest in participating in a follow-up interview. We will contact you should you be selected to participate in a follow-up interview. Please note that personal information collected below will be used only to contact selected participants for interviews and will not be used in the final reporting of results. **\*\*Please note, interviews will be conducted in English.\*\***

Please provide your contact information below.

Name (1) \_\_\_\_\_

Work Phone Number (2) \_\_\_\_\_

Work Email Address (3) \_\_\_\_\_

# Appendix C – Data Analysis

## Original Qualitative Code Book

Sense of community in classroom, on campus	Mental health concerns
Greater communication/involvement with/from school boards	Need an after-after SWAC advisor for 1st semester students
Advisor important	enhance data collection to help SWAC programs improve their practice
Positive/Encouraging Relationships with Students	Symposium a success/helpful
Get familiarity and comfort with campus	Food in program
Safe space for learning (outside HS)	Hiring with guidance experience/alt ed
Life skills/cooking class	Family concerns
Gain confidence in self/autonomy	Homelessness
Students not always ready for PSE	Social worker/counsellor needed
Connecting with college services re: transition to PSE (e.g. Financial aid, recruitment etc.)	Build in field trips/guest speakers
Connection with centres on campus (e.g., First Nation)	Lack of academic rigor causes disservice and Un-preparedness for students
Financial concerns	More student input on program delivery/evaluation/alterations; listen to student stories
Helps students navigate campus	hiring with social worker/addictions/mental health/parole experience
Need supports during first semester/first year	Passion for program
Sense of belonging on PS campus	Feeling sense of helplessness - how can help without resources?/want to do more
Continued collaboration with SCWI to brainstorm strategies	Need another advisor/more time with advisor
develop early positive relationships between students and college	Feel abandoned by school boards
Hiring from within college	encouraged by teacher
Working together to support - advisors, SCWI, teachers, etc.	Team teaching (2 teachers)
Dependant on alignment between HS teachers and dc faculty	Focus on finishing HS credits
Students get taste of college expectations	Success dependent on teachers understanding of students / willingness to help
Disconnect between SWAC students and college - promote integration	More information sharing between practitioners
Greater Integration connection with colleges	Sharing seats/activities/resources across boards
Celebrating successes	Support for staff and faculty with no exp. working with HS students/dc students
Connection with community resources	SWAC needs to be more than a standard Alternative Education program
Personalized supports/program	SCWI doing good
Seeing student success	
Food insecurity	

Co-op w/Dual Credit  
board HS teachers as advocates  
Building sense of empowerment in students  
Passion working with at-risk students  
Students feel sense of belonging (at college; in class)  
Poverty  
surrounded by fellow students facing similar challenges  
Courses not transferring - grades of HS course (English) not at level grade reflects  
Holistic approach needed (support for outside classroom/root causes)  
Students who are motivated/have a goal will succeed  
Maturity/Adult  
Advocate for equitable access (provincial) - education, ow, OSAP  
Community of Practice (needed/in place)  
Contact and tracking and support needed post-SWAC  
Financial program targeted to specific needs of SWAC students needed  
Handbook/guidance/training on how to advise/support students  
Hiring process for faculty/teachers/staff  
2 dual credits/ semester  
Dual Credit w/High school classes - credit recovery  
Dual Credit w/High school classes - teaching in class and credit recovery  
Multiple programs at one campus  
COVID - call campaign  
Mentorship with staff/advisors/teachers  
Vouchers  
Addictions  
Anxiety  
Racism/Marginalization  
Systemic inequities  
Environment - being on campus  
Grade 12 English taught to all (challenge?)  
Teachers feeling pressure for content delivery

Turnover of staff/faculty/teachers  
Disconnect between level of support in SWAC and college  
Students continue to come back for help  
awareness of student demographics within college - build expectations  
Focus on quality over quantity in SWAC programs  
Should have rotating experts/teaching areas  
Lack of consistency between delivery (by board, RPT, models etc.)  
Flexibility / ability to try new things  
Flexibility  
Different models by different boards at same college  
Large programs (high numbers of students)  
Advisor joins in out of class experiences - creates non-formal space for relationships  
Overwhelmed  
Students on OW/Living independently having OSAP challenges  
Teacher alone - needs staff support (e.g., student in crisis)  
Fun activities (e.g., crafts, colouring, mini golf, ropes course)  
General education courses as dc  
students motivated to complete can take a lot of courses to complete  
flexible scheduling  
Summer  
Need to ease students into workload  
SWAC specific orientation needed  
Lack of manpower to set up student supports  
challenge balance SCWI/school board needs  
3 days HS/ 2 days dual credit  
Come to campus 4 days/week  
Morning, Afternoon or Full Day  
Multiple campuses  
One high school credit at a time  
One semester program  
Two semesters  
Field trips

Right fit	Team teaching - 2 HS teachers
Set the tone with students re: supports on campus	Morning
Wanting to help/make a difference	Access to services and supports re: learning and wellness (counselling, al, library etc.)
Workshops - one time	Access to gym
Lack of gradual release of responsibility to students in course work	Experienced SWAC teachers
Increased number of students graduating and applying	Learn student's story
Soliciting student feedback on delivery preference	Main campus - surrounded by community supports
Students working at own pace	Peer mentorships with college students
Same room/building comfort - centre of campus	Peer Tutoring with college students
Coop	Reduce student fear by connecting with AL early
1 HS class at a time not accurate reflection of college workload	Boundaries of advisor
Lack of academic rigor	college deposit
push to complete credits asap	Contract work
Increased life skills education needed/timing of life skills course	Didn't know about SWAC pre-start
Programming outdated - need to evolve/continuous change	Dividing time between students
SWAC classrooms not always pushing students the way they need for college	Lack of time in classroom
Skilled Trades/Apprenticeship	More drop-in support needed
Challenge no consistency in delivery	Need to connect with accessible learning before attending college
Cross RPT scheduling to align and connect for PD	Split role (e.g., program support/advisor; coordinator/program support)
Full-time staffing	Housing supports needed
Increased connection with community partners	Life skills support needed
Provincial advising structure	"actual teaching"
Teachers not teaching area of expertise	combination of teaching and credit recovery = best attendance
More funding	Drop in support times
Access to programming/resources	Dual credit choice: college success
Connection to OYAP/Trades	HS teacher sits in on dc to support students
Indigenous Focus	Shifting timing to share same dedicated space
interview process for acceptance to program	Timing of delivery of life skills course
Morning & Afternoon	flex course/ministry/program outcome criteria
Regional Campus - small community	Attendance - students don't show
Students choose dc	ESL Support needed
	No mandatory attendance
	with HS courses one at a time, students not always putting in effort

Need to teach how to be competent online learners  
Get to experience learning management software  
Scholarships/Bursaries (needed or in place)  
Address large class sizes  
Encourage consistency in teaching level  
Listen to front-line staff for program evaluation  
SCWI black sheep of the college  
Greater community connections needed  
awareness of SWAC/dc within education system  
1 dual credit course/semester  
Adult  
Approx. 20-24 students/class  
Classroom close to staff/advisor offices  
Clean slate - start new in program  
Complete as many HS credits as possible  
Dedicated classroom space  
Dual Credit w/High school classes - taught only (catholic)  
Evening  
General electives for dc courses  
Intake form  
5-6 credits/semester  
Challenge registering from HS  
Empathy and conflict management skills  
Gradual release of responsibility to student when working with advisor  
Having social worker available for mental health crisis  
Integrating spiritual supports  
Mindfulness workshop  
Stress management skills at beginning of term  
Student conduct workshop and support  
Students apply to college even if uninterested  
Transportation  
Trust  
FT and PT Advisor  
Wellness

Advisor only resource for transition to post-secondary  
Increased focus on goal setting and development needed  
Need more methods for motivating students/keeping them motivated  
Students intimidated to talk to staff (titles)  
Lack of access to campus services/supports  
Pressured to apply/not ready for college  
Dual credit choice: college success @ end of SWAC time  
Expected and required attendance  
Indigenous connecting with heritage  
Smaller class size \*>30  
Turnover in teachers  
Afternoon class  
timing of dc classes in week  
Credit recovery  
dc on same two days  
Focus on wellness mental health  
Experiential learning  
Completed courses not at quality of Grade 12 credits  
More attention to building time management skills  
Need to be working on HS credits for more than 2-3 hours/day - time on course  
teachers just trying to get students through dc  
2 dc at once too much  
No teacher checks on delivery/quality of teaching  
IEP  
Schedule - getting back to home campus  
More student autonomy needed  
More support connecting accessible learning  
Need to be firm  
HS class size too big  
mentorship between college students and SWAC students  
Feel guilty leaving role  
Social networking

## Final Code Book

Theme	Code
Community	Sense of community/belonging in classroom, on campus
Community	Positive early relationships /encouraging with students
Persistence	College Integration/Collaboration - Expectations
Support/Advocacy	Need Consistent supports during first semester/first year
Community	Get familiarity and comfort with campus
Persistence	Lack of academic rigor causes disservice and unpreparedness for students
Leadership	Greater communication/involvement with/from school boards
Community	Safe space for learning (outside hs)
Support/Advocacy	Advisor important
Support/Advocacy	Basic Needs (Finance, food, homelessness)
Persistence	Gain confidence in self/autonomy
Flexibility/Delivery	Life skills/cooking class
Support/Advocacy	Connection with community resources
Persistence	Students not always ready for pse
Leadership	Seeing student success
leadership	Passion for program
Leadership	Continued collaboration with SCWI to brainstorm strategies
Persistence	Connecting with college services re: transition to pse (e.g. Financial aid, recruitment etc.)
Community	Connection with centres on campus (e.g., First Nation)
Leadership	Hiring from within college
Leadership	Lack of consistency between delivery (by board, rpt, models, teachers etc.)
Community	Working together to support - advisors, scwi, teachers, etc.
Persistence	Dependent on alignment between hs teachers and dc faculty
Persistence	Students get taste of college expectations
Community	surrounded by fellow students facing similar challenges / heritage
Community	Team teaching (2 teachers) - Important/Needed/In Place - Teaching Areas
Persistence	Success dependent on teachers understanding of students / willingness to help
Leadership	enhance data collection to help SWAC programs improve their practice
Leadership	Symposium a success/helpful
Leadership	More student input on program delivery/evaluation/alterations; listen to student stories
support/Advocacy	Personalized supports/program
Flexibility/Delivery	Build in field trips/guest speakers/experiential learning



Support/Advocacy	Advocate for equitable access (provincial) - education, ow, osap
Community	Celebrating successes
Support/Advocacy	Family concerns
Support/Advocacy	Food in program
Support/Advocacy	Social worker/counsellor needed
Leadership	Hiring with guidance experience/alt ed
Support/Advocacy	Anxiety / Overwhelmed
Flexibility/Delivery	Flexibility in program / ability to try new things
Persistence	Students who are motivated/have a goal will succeed
Leadership	Sharing seats/activities/resources across boards
Flexibility/Delivery	Teachers feeling pressure for content delivery
Leadership	Hiring process for faculty/teachers/staff
Leadership	SWAC needs to be more than a standard Alternative Education program
Leadership	SCWI doing good
Support/Advocacy	Mental health concerns
Support/Advocacy	Access to services and supports re: learning and wellness (counselling, al, library etc.)
Support/Advocacy	board HS teachers as advocates
Leadership	Support for staff and faculty with no exp. working with HS students/dc students
Support/Advocacy	Feeling sense of helplessness - how can help without resources? /want to do more
Support/Advocacy	Financial program targeted to specific needs of SWAC students needed
Community	More information sharing between practitioners / Community of Practices/Mentor
Support/Advocacy	Racism/Marginalization
Flexibility/Delivery	Skilled Trades/Apprenticeship
Support/Advocacy	Systemic inequities
Support/Advocacy	Vouchers
Leadership	Turnover of staff/faculty/teachers
Leadership	hiring with social worker/addictions/mental health/parole experience
Flexibility/Delivery	Summer
Leadership	Feel abandoned by school boards
Support/Advocacy	Need another advisor/more time with advisor
Support/Advocacy	Holistic approach needed (support for outside classroom/root causes)
Persistence	Focus on finishing HS credits
Leadership	challenge balance scwi/school board needs
Flexibility/Delivery	Co-op w/Dual Credit
Leadership	Contact and tracking and support needed post-swac
Leadership	Focus on quality over quantity in swac programs
Flexibility/Delivery	Dual Credit w/High school classes - teaching in class and credit recovery

Flexibility/Delivery	Dual Credit Choice/ General education courses as dc
Leadership	Full-time staffing
Leadership	Mentorship with staff/advisors/teachers
Flexibility/Delivery	2 dual credits/ semester
Support/Advocacy	Addictions
Community	Multiple programs at one campus
Flexibility/Delivery	Dual Credit w/High school classes - credit recovery
Support/Advocacy	COVID - call campaign
Support/Advocacy	Students continue to come back for help
Flexibility/Delivery	Full Day
Support/Advocacy	Students on OW/Living independently having OSAP challenges
Community	Teacher alone - needs staff support (e.g., student in crisis)
Flexibility/Delivery	Large programs (high numbers of students)
Flexibility/Delivery	Multiple campuses
Flexibility/Delivery	Students working at own pace
Leadership	Lack of manpower to set up student supports
Flexibility/Delivery	Fun activities (e.g., crafts, colouring, mini golf, ropes course)
Support/Advocacy	Advisor joins in out of class experiences - creates non-formal space for relationships
Support/Advocacy	SWAC specific orientation needed
Support/Advocacy	Workshops - one time
Support/Advocacy	Peer mentorships/ tutoring with college students
Support/Advocacy	More drop-in support needed
Flexibility/Delivery	3 days HS/ 2 days dual credit
Flexibility/Delivery	Come to campus 4 days/week
Flexibility/Delivery	One high school credit at a time
Flexibility/Delivery	One semester program
Flexibility/Delivery	Two semesters
Leadership	interview process for acceptance to program
Leadership	Programming outdated - need to evolve/continuous change
Leadership	Cross RPT scheduling to align and connect for PD
Leadership	Provincial advising structure
Leadership	More funding
Persistence	Increased number of students graduating and applying
Flexibility/Delivery	Online Learning importance/LMS
Support/Advocacy	ESL Support needed
Support/Advocacy	Early Connection to Accessible Learning/IEP