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The Rural Advantage: Rallying Communities Around Our Students

A guide for leading dropout prevention in your small town



The Rural Advantage: Rallying Communities Around Our Students

A guide for leading dropout prevention in your small town

With practical applications from the L'ÉcoRéussite program of Quebec's Chaudière-Appalaches region

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Research and writing by: André Rebeiz

Photography by: Sophie H-Bienvenue

Reviewed by: Dr. Sylvie Roy, Associate Dean of Research at the Werklund School of Education, University of Calgary

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The EdCan Network is the independent national organization with over 75,000 members working tirelessly to ensure that *all* students discover their place, purpose and path.

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à leur enfant, on changerait
le monde.
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I. Executive Summary

About the L'ÉcoRéussite program

What is L'ÉcoRéussite? L'ÉcoRéussite is a partnership that brings together over 20 community organizations working to provide social, educational, and recreational activities and services for disadvantaged families across Quebec's Chaudière-Appalaches region, specifically within the Regional County Municipality of Montmagny. "L'ÉcoRéussite" is a compound word uniting the words "ecosystem" and "success." The former refers to the environment within which a child is raised, including all of the 'systems' – key individuals and groups – that impact his/her development: the child or adolescent themselves, the family in which they are raised, the school they attend, and the community in which they live.¹ The latter refers to the goal to which all of these community partners, who emanate from these four domains, strive towards: the educational success of children and youth. As a whole, this can also be referred to as the "ecosystem approach."

Problem statement: The program emerged as a response to data on student achievement, indicating a 50% success rate on Grade four French-language assessments in 2011.² Data collected by a community social services organization also indicated significant cases of parental negligence, child physical abuse, and poor psychological treatment.³ In line with these indicators and in addition to academic challenges, educators have furthermore outlined student challenges related to bullying, behaviour, and ability to manage emotions, which has led to regular suspensions and removal of students from class. Community organizations have also highlighted low literacy skills among parents, lack of access to books within municipalities and, for some parents, a complete absence of the ability to read and write. Eight municipalities within the region are prioritized within the program's action plans, due to their status as being exceptionally disadvantaged.⁴ This takes the form of low educational attainment, widespread unemployment, and brain drain of the most educated and skilled individuals, which contribute to a cycle of declining and aging populations, school closure, and a scaling back of public services.

Approach and impact: Program activities are offered both inside and outside the classroom and are targeted towards all stages of an individual's early socialization and development, from the ages of 0–24. With this approach, schools and community partners seek to support not only youth and adolescents, but also preschool children and their parents before they enter the K-12 school system, as well as young adults who have dropped out and who have become parents themselves. Key program activities include:

- **The "Bibliomobile" (The Mobile Library):** A home delivery program of curated children's books. A program facilitator visits family homes to provide the collection and lead reading activities with children and their parents.⁵
- **The "Lecture partagée" (Shared Reading) program:** Schools are partnered with early childhood centres to give preschool-aged children the opportunity to read with elementary school-aged students. This facilitates the transition from pre-school to Kindergarten.⁶
- **"Passe-Partout" workshops:** A weekday evening reading workshop bringing together parents and their children. This workshop allows parents to practice engaging reading strategies with their children in a welcoming environment, with the guidance of a literacy facilitator. Additional workshops on parenting strategies and healthy childhood and adolescent development are also provided. The Passe-Partout framework is provided by Quebec's Ministry of Education and is administered by school boards.⁷
- **The "Tente à contes" (The Storytelling Tent):** A camping tent, equipped with a book collection, is setup in schools, community spaces, and at sporting and municipal events – whether indoors or outdoors – to encourage the integration of reading into everyday life.⁸



The ecosystem approach and the variety of activities provided have proven effective in equipping parents with practical know-how as to the educational and parenting practices that can best support their children’s physical, social, cognitive, and psychological development. This approach has also demonstrated links with improved reading and writing scores and student retention such that, by 2016, French-language achievement had risen to 98%.⁹ For rural townships with limited services and activities, the ecosystem approach has moreover demonstrated how limited resources can be leveraged efficiently and effectively through multi-sector partnerships in order to meet children and families’ unique needs.

The selection process

The L’ÉcoRéussite program was selected among 13 program applicants from across Quebec to participate in the EdCan Network’s ‘Innovation that Sticks’ Case Study Program on dropout prevention. An independent panel of scholars specialized in the study and prevention of early school leaving selected the program based on two distinguishing features: its demonstrated ability to mobilize a whole-community approach in support of student retention, and its potential to be adapted to other contexts – especially disadvantaged and rural communities experiencing devitalization. Members of the ‘Innovation that Sticks’ selection committee also found the program to be an example of how the objectives of the **“Programme Famille, école et communauté : réussir ensemble (FECRE)”** (The Family, School and Community Program: Succeeding Together) and the **“Stratégie d’intervention Agir autrement (SIAA)”** (New Solutions Intervention Strategy) of Quebec’s Ministry of Education¹⁰ could be integrated in concrete terms. For these reasons, the L’ÉcoRéussite program was given a \$5,000 contribution courtesy of initiative sponsor State Farm Canada to participate in this case study research process and share good practices with other education leaders across the country.

“Raison d’être” of this case study report for education leaders

From consultation and planning to implementation, this case study research report for education leaders in socio-economically disadvantaged, rural areas demonstrates how one school community was able to concretely implement a theoretical framework for school-family-community partnerships via an ecosystem approach. This report provides step-by-step guidance for creating a similar program as a way to offset the scarring impacts of disadvantage, lack of opportunity, and devitalization on educational outcomes and life chances.¹¹

In 2013, Renée Pinard of the **Centre de transfert pour la réussite éducative du Québec (CTREQ)**, Rollande Deslandes of the Université du Québec à Trois-Rivières (UQAR), and education consultant François Blain published *Cœuréation*: a collection of implementation toolboxes and guidelines that contains steps for implanting school-family-community partnerships via an ecosystem approach. This approach provides the basis for co-constructing action plans with school and community partners to support student success in disadvantaged communities.¹² The L’ÉcoRéussite program represents an experiment of this framework in transferring the research and guidelines provided by the CTREQ from theory into practice. This case study will therefore demonstrate:

1. The key steps undertaken by the guiding team to draw-up and implement an action plan in collaboration with over 20 community organizations to improve the reading, writing, and oral language skills of children ages 0–8 years old across eight rural municipalities.
2. How the guiding team revised and expanded this action plan to reach children, youth, and young adults ages 0–24 years old, in collaboration with over 30 community organizations.

Key recommendations

In learning from the challenges and experiences of the coordinators, educators, and community partners of the L'ÉcoRéussite program, the following guidelines are recommended for crafting a school-family-community partnership via an ecosystem approach:

1. Engage parents

- Visit family homes and develop trust-based relationships with parents.
- Create parent-friendly spaces that allow parents to voice their challenges and learn from each other.
- Demonstrate clear and regular results by ensuring evaluation and visibility of your activities.
- Minimize transportation barriers to allow parents to attend program activities.

2. Engage teaching staff

- Integrate information on the L'ÉcoRéussite program into new teacher orientation programs, and introduce new teachers to the program early on in their roles.
- Maintain the tangibility of your program by involving only a core group of educators in early planning stages.
- Enable relationships between community facilitators and teaching staff by finding opportunities for them to discover shared goals and practices.

3. Maintain the engagement of community partners

- Mobilize a Community Organizer specialized in engaging stakeholders across multiple sectors.
- Mobilize a social media and graphic design coordinator to publicize the work of each partner organization, in order to value their efforts and provide visibility.

4. Obtain and secure consistent funding

- Leverage existing resources and practices by encouraging organizations already conducting effective work in the community to join the partnership.
- Seek out recognition opportunities through press, social media, and awards that will allow your program to gain a strong reputation and pave the way for future funding opportunities and partnerships.
- Present the program at education conferences and public forums to widen your network, gain advice on areas of improvement, and strengthen reputation.





Saint-Philémon

8

Saint-Paul



II. The Ecosystem Approach to Student Success

What are school-family-community partnerships?

Partnerships that seek to strengthen ties between schools, families, and communities are based on the idea that community challenges – whether experienced by a whole community or by many individuals within a community – can be addressed more innovatively and effectively through a collective effort versus lone individuals or organizations working in silos, given the ability to share information, resources, and expertise across multiple sectors. This, in turn, gives rise to educational and community service offerings, school pedagogy, and curricula that can meet children’s varied and unique needs. School-family-community partnerships tangibly imply the following:

- Policies that entrench an expectation for school and school leaders to engage and involve families and communities.
- Leadership by schools and school boards that continuously reflects upon and adapts practices, and views parents as leaders of learning.
- Communication methods that are developed and collaborative relationships that are built between school, family, and community.
- Community partnerships that support schools in setting and achieving their goals.
- Evaluation of policies and initiatives that are conducted regularly to ensure that the needs of families and communities are being met.¹³

In other words, schools cannot afford to work in isolation from the families and communities in which students live and grow up.¹⁴

What is the ‘ecosystem approach?’

The ecosystem approach is one way to implement school-family-community partnerships. Concretely, it constitutes a consultation process by which individuals and organizations within a community – such as students, parents, caregivers, early childhood educators, school teachers, education leaders, community organizations, and elected officials – come together as partners in developing a unified action plan to mobilize resources, policies, and practices in support of the common goal of ensuring student retention and success. In other words, this approach involves enveloping a child in support from the entire community to reduce the chances of them falling through the cracks.

More on this topic



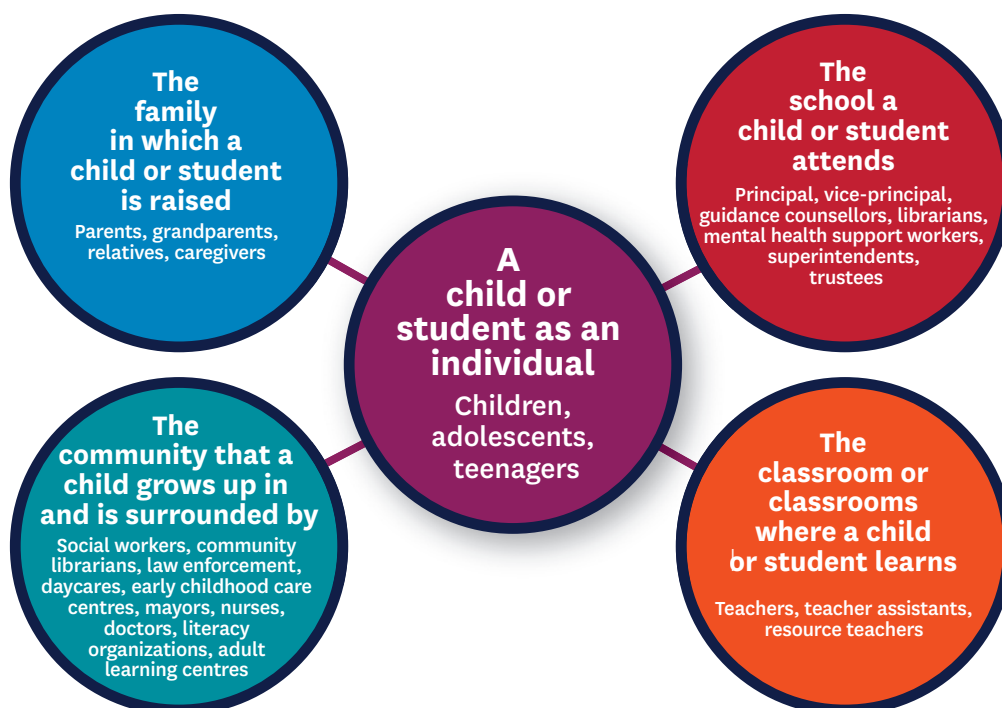
www.edcan.ca/ecoreussite-videos (French only)

The five systems influencing childhood and adolescent development

The ecosystem approach involves mobilizing all individuals who have an impact on a child's or adolescent's development and learning, both inside and outside of school. This approach is based on the interwoven relationships between the ecology – or environment that a child is raised in – as well as the 'systems,' – or groups of individuals – who contribute to the child's or adolescent's development. More specifically, these two elements refer to:

- 1. Systems:** Five key categories constituting the main individuals that contribute to an individual's development from infancy to adulthood.
- 2. Ecology:** An assessment of the quality or state of the relationships between the individuals within these five systems and with their environment, as well as their ability to adapt to new challenges.

Figure 1: *The five systems influencing childhood and adolescent development and school success.*^{15*}



The ecosystem approach therefore considers that there are multiple determinants of student retention and success, and that these systems are interdependent. As underlined in Quebec's "Programme Famille, école et communauté : réussir ensemble (FECRE)"¹⁶ there are a multitude of factors at play, both at the origins of school dropout as well as in terms of responses to it. Therefore, it is ineffective to undertake measures to engage a child in school so long as the child's family, for example – the key individuals in their environment – remain stagnant in their ways of being and doing. In other words, as the ecosystem approach proposes, all five systems need to be engaged collectively in identifying challenges and in doing things differently – whether this be changing parenting practices, teacher practices, school or school district policies, and community service offerings – if they are to effectively target all of the areas of a child's development that influence their chances for school success.

* This list represents only a sample of the many individuals and groups that influence a child's or student's development.

Understanding the protective factors of student retention and success

Given the multitude of factors that influence the child, each system has a role to play within the ecosystem approach, which implies a distribution of the workload among school and community members. The roles of each individual or community organization can be broken down into ‘protective factors’: evidence-based practices and components that support healthy childhood and adolescent development and student retention. These protective factors offset ‘risk factors’: unfavourable conditions – such as poverty – which may be present in a child’s environment and that can heighten the risk of school dropout.¹⁷

Figure 2: Protective factors of student retention and success versus risk factors of dropping out.^{18 19}

System	Protective factors	Risk factors
Child/ Student	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Perception of one’s abilities, self-worth, and ability to succeed • Relations with peers • Reading and writing skills • Healthy living behaviours • Coping strategies and problem solving skills²⁰ • Healthy relationships with adults²¹ 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of social skills development (respect for rules, opposition to authority, relations with others)²² • Peers are at-risk of dropping out or have dropped out, or have poor educational aspirations²³ • Lack of self-confidence in ability to succeed in school²⁴ • Low literacy skills create difficulties in other areas of study and is an indicator of risk for dropping out²⁵ • Mental health problems, stress, anxiety, and depression²⁶
Family	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Standard of living • Parent involvement in school • Value placed on education by the family 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of emotional support from parents • Low levels of parental participation in children’s schooling • Parents’ negative perceptions of their children’s ability to succeed • Parents’ lack of educational aspirations for their children • Parents’ negative attitudes toward school²⁷
Class/ classroom	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teachers’ perception and attitudes • Quality of teaching • Collaborative pedagogy • Quality of student-teacher relationships 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Academic difficulties • Lack of interest and motivation in class activities • Class repetition • Conflict between students and teachers • Lack of meaningful student-teacher relationships²⁸
School	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Leadership and guidance • Service offerings for at-risk students • Non-academic service offerings • Professional development 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of adapted learning experiences for students of various backgrounds and with differential needs • Lack of communication between school, family, and community • Lack of additional support for academic and non-academic (such as vocational) pathways • Lack of support for teacher professional development that responds to classroom realities • Low prioritization placed on student retention and monitoring student success²⁹
Community	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Area of residence and neighbourhood • Community engagement in school and presence of educational success initiatives³⁰ • Extra-curricular services for parents and youth 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Children are influenced by their immediate environment; disadvantaged communities present socio-economic challenges, unemployment, and low educational attainment • Lack of accessibility to social services, family services, and extra-curricular services due to geographic distance, space availability, and allocation of resources across a given region³¹

The specific challenges identified, the objectives determined, and the action plans developed by community partners will be different depending not only on the community context at hand, but also on the quantity and diversity of individuals involved, and on whether parents play an active role in the process.

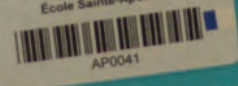


si le loup
revenait

Philippe Roussel
Philippe Jalbert

La suite de
**Si le loup
y était**
200 000 exemplaires
vendus

École Sainte-Apolline



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III. Case Study of the L'ÉcoRéussite Program: Implementing an Ecosystem Action Plan

About the Regional County Municipality of Montmagny

Located in the Chaudière-Appalaches region of Quebec, the activities of L'ÉcoRéussite and its partners serve eight municipalities* within the southern portion of the Regional County Municipality of Montmagny, approximately 100km east of Quebec City on the southern shore of the Saint Lawrence River. As of 2016, the combined total population of all eight municipalities was 4,125,³² of which 22% of residents were between the ages of 0–24 years old.³³

In 2011, these regions were the most disadvantaged and devitalized of the 236 local communities of the Chaudière-Appalaches region. All eight municipalities are considered between “fairly devitalized” and “devitalized,” which presents considerable challenges, including:³⁴

- A continual decrease in population size whereas the Chaudière-Appalaches region as a whole continues to grow, and a larger proportion of residents over the age of 65 with a smaller proportion of youth between 0–17 years-old.
- A higher than average unemployment rate for residents aged 15+, at 55%.³⁵
- A lower than average personal income after taxes, at \$26,427.
- The highest proportion of persons without a high school diploma (49.3% for Montmagny-Sud) and of persons without a certificate, diploma or university degree in the Chaudière-Appalaches region (35%).^{36 37}

In addition, decreases in population and population aging have led to further challenges including school closure and the migration of young people to larger city centres. Two elementary schools have recently closed, and several other primary and secondary schools are at risk of closure. In 2015, one elementary school had an enrolment of 17 students allocated to two multiple-grade classrooms (Grades 1, 2, and 3 students in a single classroom, and Grades 4, 5, and 6 students in a second classroom).³⁸

Devitalization trends in Quebec

Province-wide, devitalization is a phenomenon experienced by numerous Québécois municipalities. According to Bernard Vachon, both rural and urban communities are impacted by devitalization: the process by which a community progressively loses its demographic, social, and economic vitality due to marginalization, exclusion in relation to spaces that are experiencing economic growth, and the impacts of this on local services, resources, and well-being.³⁹

* Four municipalities were targeted from 2011–2013, and another four were added for 2014–2016.

According to 2006 indicators, 152 municipalities were considered devitalized in Quebec.⁴⁰ Key causal factors include low levels of education that fall below the provincial average and lack of local postsecondary institutions, leading young and educated professionals to leave, among other factors.⁴¹ In Canada as a whole, in small towns and rural communities, from 2008 to 2009, the school dropout rate was 16%: a rate that is two times higher than that in urban centres.⁴² In parallel, factors that support *revitalization* include:

- **Networking and collaboration:** In small communities, sharing resources, skills, and contacts can support the success of new revitalization projects and give rise to effective responses to crisis situations.
- **Professional support:** The support of professionals from various sectors – such as local employment centres, health and social service centres, and regional governance agencies – can provide expertise in project development and implementation.
- **Participation-based planning exercises:** Public forums, conferences, surveys, and workshops that are overseen by a guiding coalition can allow revitalization projects to better align with community expectations and needs.⁴³

Founding history of the program

Equipped with this knowledge on the region’s challenges regarding devitalization and disadvantaged families, the links between these conditions and student success, as well as the factors that support community revitalization, the Centre de transfert pour la réussite éducative du Québec (CTREQ), a provincial research-action centre with the mission of promoting innovation and knowledge-sharing in education, approached members of the region’s school leadership and the ABC des Hauts-Plateaux – a community-based literacy organization – with a proposal: to implement and experiment with a pilot program framework adapted to low socio-economic communities. Implemented in 2011, staff of the ABC des Hauts-Plateaux, which already had a partnership with local schools and had been leading literacy activities with parents and children across municipalities for years, had initially begun their journey by applying for grant funding to widen their book collection for their literacy activities. Instead of providing funding, the CTREQ suggested an experiment that, if successful, would raise literacy rates and transform educational and parental practices in the long-term.

Phase One: Improving the literacy skills of children ages 0–8 across 4 municipalities (2011–2016)*

Figure 3: The four stages of planning and implementing an ecosystem partnership.



* Two action plans were developed, each on three-year timelines, from 2011–2013 and 2014–2016.

1. Explore

Developing a community portrait

The framework proposed by the CTREQ called for an analysis of the communities' socio-economic positioning as well as data on student achievement in reading and writing. School principals and district leadership were already aware of their students' low French-language scores, and they were therefore hesitant to engage in a process that would be both time-consuming and place greater burden on teachers. However, CTREQ representatives insisted that this was a fundamental step to the process that would engage the wider community and create a sense of urgency. In addition to collecting these statistics, the plan was to move past test scores toward evaluating perceptions, attitudes, and behaviours around reading, writing, and learning, which could only be achieved through community consultation.

As a starting point, an analysis conducted by "L'aventure 0-5 ans," a family support organization, indicated that, of reported cases they had received:

1. 25% of cases were related to parental negligence, and an additional 15% of cases indicated a serious risk thereof.
2. 15% of cases reported were related to physical abuse, and an additional 15% indicated serious risk of physical abuse.
3. 14% of cases were related to poor psychological treatment.⁴⁴

Furthermore, a province-wide survey on childhood development of Kindergarten-aged children (Enquête québécoise sur le développement des enfants à la maternelle)⁴⁵ provided an additional launching pad by indicating the following: that 25% of children in Montmagny-L'Islet were vulnerable in at least one domain. Such domains include physical health and well-being, social skills, emotional maturity, cognitive and linguistic development, communication skills, and general knowledge. Results compiled in 2009 also indicated that only 50% of fourth-grade students achieved a passing grade in French.⁴⁶

Once preliminary statistics were gathered, the school principal began to envision a solid rationale for the project: if communities were able to come together to equip children ages 0-8 years-old with strong reading skills, they would then have a sturdier first start once they were to begin school.

Stakeholder engagement: prioritizing community partners over parents

To bring these statistics to life and to hear from representatives of community organizations across the region, the school principal leading the project and members of the ABC des Hauts-Plateaux made a clear decision to prioritize attracting community partners to take part in consultation meetings, over engaging parents. In their past experience, engaging parents was a persistent challenge that would slow down implementation, for three key reasons:

1. The initial meetings would be more theoretical – such as gathering data and developing an action plan – versus practical – such as taking part in guided reading activities with their children.
2. In a community where many parents experience difficulty reading, it would be challenging and inefficient to involve them in theoretical discussions.
3. For many parents in the community, school was synonymous with failure given their own experiences with disengagement and dropout. Therefore, having them engage with the school system would constitute a longer-term effort.

It was more effective to engage parents in latter consultation meetings after they had seen the program in action, rather than taking the risk of dissuading them with lengthy and process-heavy stakeholder discussions. Therefore, in order to bring community members to the table, three steps were undertaken:

1. **Contacting a Community Organizer:** A Community Organizer with the Centre intégré de santé et de services sociaux de Chaudière-Appalaches (Integrated Health and Social Services Centre of Chaudière-Appalaches), a regional public agency of the province, was called upon to assist with the recruitment process. Specialized in supporting multi-sector and multi-actor projects that target the social determinants of health, Quebec's Ministry of Health and Social Services has in place a strategy and staff who work specifically on this issue in regions across the province.⁴⁷ The Community Organizer was therefore a key resource in leveraging existing networks and bringing partners to the table.
2. **Leveraging social media:** A social media coordinator and graphic designer was commissioned to connect community organizations and create buzz around the launch of the L'ÉcoRéussite program.
3. **Connecting program objectives to school system objectives:** The school principal connected the objectives of the L'ÉcoRéussite program to existing school policy initiatives and committees, including:



- **The continuum of reading:** An outline of reading skills and competencies at various stages of a child's learning used by numerous school districts,⁴⁸ the L'ÉcoRéussite program connects directly to the learning objectives outlined in this continuum. This allows educators to visualize the added-value of the program as it connects to their daily practice.
- **Engaging teaching staff:** Educators on the Personalized Student Services Committee, which includes school social workers, psychoeducators, psychologists, and department heads, were asked to consider the following question: "What are the needs of our students and what should be our priority within our school community?" Gradually and over the course of several committee meetings, educators felt empowered by the idea of creating an action plan influenced by their feedback and experiences. They were also responsible for gathering the opinions of their fellow teaching staff and presenting these to the committee and to the L'ÉcoRéussite partner table.

Hosting the first meeting

The launch meeting consisted of four key steps in developing a long-term community partnership:

1. **Develop a common vision:** As the figure on page 15 demonstrates, teachers' openness to welcoming community members into the classroom was a winning condition in the successful launch of the L'ÉcoRéussite program. Without the buy-in of teachers to the idea of community members entering their classrooms, introducing the program would have been challenging. Nevertheless, school representatives must underline during the *Step 1 Explore Phase* that all partners are equal and have a unique and vital role to play. This is a period for building mutual respect, trust, sharing responsibilities, and distributing information to potential partners.⁴⁹
2. **Understand the ecosystem process:** Explain the four key stages of the ecosystem process: explore, initiate, plan, and implement and evaluate. Underline the mutual benefits that this process provides, including shared resources, a clear portrait of the region's socio-economic standing, and research-based evidence on the effectiveness of collective action: that all five systems of a child's life need to work in conjunction in order to improve life chances.
3. **Introduce the project coordinator or development agent:** Introduce the project coordinator, or development agent, who will be leading the process. In the case of L'ÉcoRéussite, the project coordinator was a member of L'ABC des Hauts-Plateaux, working in close collaboration with a school principal, who was already leading many

literacy projects across the region and who was well-known by community members. The project coordinator is responsible for coordinating and leading meetings, maintaining contact with all partners, and overseeing follow-up on action items.

4. Present a portrait of the region: Present data on the region based on public statistics published by national or provincial statistical collection agencies, as well as school achievement and standardized test scores. This provides a rationale and sense of urgency to intervene. L'ÉcoRéussite's guiding team launched their first meeting by presenting statistics within the following areas:

- Population trends
- High school graduation rates and educational attainment levels
- Employment rates and average household incomes
- Data from family resource centres
- Current community and school service offerings
- Student results across key childhood and adolescent development areas
- Student results across core competencies, such as reading and writing
- Community devitalization indices

Figure 4: All five systems must align their objectives toward a common vision. Teachers are the lynchpins who must buy-in to community involvement in their classrooms.⁵⁰





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Gentil

Feeli Tout & Prou
Une lettre à la fois!

C'est le contraire!

es parents
0 minutes
à transmettre le
live

BEL

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2. Initiate

Hosting the 2nd meeting (+/- several meetings)

- 1. Present a summary on ‘protective factors’:** Provide an overview on the key protective factors that support healthy childhood and adolescent development and educational success, and seize this opportunity to share information on how these factors can reverse lamentable statistics and trends in poverty and devitalization. Underline once more the necessity of collective action in supporting these protective factors.
- 2. Develop a plan and tools for collecting additional data from community organizations:** Collaborate with partners to identify which protective factors are already being supported through existing community initiatives. This would allow the guiding team to identify which activities or existing service offerings could be integrated into the program and reinforced through greater collaboration and follow-up. This is also an opportunity for partners to reflect on any gaps or weak points in current initiatives and to identify how future initiatives could better respond to community challenges. The L'ÉcoRéussite team used the following survey to launch this discussion and collect feedback on the current activities of partner organizations (Figure 5).

Figure 5: Survey used by L'ÉcoRéussite to evaluate current initiatives and gaps in community service offerings.⁵¹

NAME OF PARTNER:	CURRENT INITIATIVES				POSSIBILITY OF FUTURE INITIATIVES TO TARGET THESE FACTORS			
	Strong	Moderate	Poor	None	Strong	Moderate	Poor	None
1. Child/Student								
Perception of own abilities	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Relationship with others	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Reading and writing skills	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Healthy living habits	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
1. Family								
Living environment	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Parent involvement in school	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Importance of schooling within the family	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3. Class/classroom								
Perception and attitude of teachers	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Teaching quality	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Collaborative pedagogy	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Quality of student-teacher relationships	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
4. School								
Guidance and leadership	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Service offerings for at-risk students	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Non-academic service offerings	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Professional development	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
5. Community								
Neighbourhood of residence	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Mobilization on issues of school success	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Extra-curricular services for parents and youth	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Subsequent meetings

1. **Organize and analyze partner organization feedback:** Prior to the meeting, prepare a succinct community portrait that combines community statistics with partners' feedback following reflection activities that took place during previous meetings. At the meetings, present this chart to all partners and make adjustments based on their feedback. The L'ÉcoRéussite partnership prepared the following chart (Figure 6).

Figure 6: Aggregated community portrait used by L'ÉcoRéussite combining key challenges experienced across local municipalities and feedback provided by community partners.⁵²

System	Findings based on qualitative and quantitative data	Findings re: service offerings	Findings re: protective factors
Child/ Student	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Many students begin school without the foundation required to succeed. This presents a risk for all levels of a child's development. • 50% of fourth-grade students achieved a passing grade in French (2009). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There are few universal services for children ages 0–5 years-old, and few extra-curricular services for children ages 6–12 years-old. • There is significant work to be done for families and youth in terms of adopting healthy living practices and behaviours. 	<p>Numerous organizations target this system.</p>
Family	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There were four meetings organized for parents at schools in the past year. 50% of parents were present at the first two meetings, while 0% at the latter two meetings. • There is a belief that books are only to be read and consulted in school. • Less-educated parents experience a cultural difference characterized by discomfort to the school system. • Written communication is not the best strategy for contacting parents. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There are few services for families whether formal or informal, universal or targeted to specific areas. 	<p>Very few organizations target this system. Despite an increasing number of partners who are expanding work into this system, current activities are insufficient.</p>
Class/ classroom	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • New pedagogical practices implemented are promising (2009–2010 school year). • The project “Lire et faire lire” of the ABC des Hauts-Plateaux takes on an intergenerational and community-based approach that is well-received. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Very few community organizations lead activities within classrooms to develop students' reading and writing skills. 	<p>Few organizations target this system, which is currently reserved to the school system.</p>
School	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students read for 30 min. per day at school. • Some students require up to 90 min. travel time to come to school and an additional 90 min. to return home. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Families and children ages 0–4 years-old lack presence in schools. 	<p>After the child/student system, this is the second most popular system targeted by community organizations.</p>
Community	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A high percentage of residents across municipalities have not obtained their high school diploma: St-Paul (50%), Ste-Euphémie (49%), Ste-Apolline (58%), Notre-Dame-du-Rosaire (42%). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There are few extra-curricular services offered within the community, and there is a lack of infrastructure for recreational activities. • There are few services that target multiple systems. • The majority of community and municipal services are universal and do not target specific areas. 	<p>All organizations involved in the ecosystem have designated this system as an area in which they would like to improve their work. All organizations believe they work on community-based initiatives in some way or form.</p>

2. Establish priority issues, choose protective factors for each system, and determine objectives: Prior to subsequent meetings, prepare a second chart that identifies key protective factors that can reverse lamentable trends in community devitalization and student success. Present these protective factors at the partnership meeting, and lead a discussion to develop key objectives linked to each of the five systems. The L'ÉcoRéussite partnership prepared the following chart (Figure 7).

Figure 7: Aggregated chart used by L'ÉcoRéussite that demonstrates the process of shifting from challenges to choosing key protective factors that support healthy childhood and adolescent development and school success. Collective objectives are established to tackle these challenges.⁵³

Objectives based on key findings and protective factors			
	Key findings	Protective factors	Objectives linked to each protective factor
Child/ Student	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Many students begin school without the foundation required to succeed. This presents a risk for all levels of a child's development. 50% of fourth-grade students achieved a passing grade in French (2009). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Perception of one's abilities (self-esteem, self-efficacy, engagement, motivation, perception of talents and life, aspirations). Reading and writing skills (literacy development, attitude towards experiences at school, educational achievement). 	Increase the number of children who read books regularly across the region.
Family	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> There were four meetings organized for parents at schools in the past year. 50% of parents were present at the first two meetings, while 0% at the latter two meetings. There is a belief that books are only to be read and consulted at school. Less-educated parents experience a cultural difference characterized by discomfort to the school system. Written communication is not the best strategy for contacting parents. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Involvement of parents in school (parent-educator collaboration, relationship between parents and the school). Living environment (parental practices, parent-child relationships, educational practices, quality of life offered to children – nutrition, sleep, sports involvement). Importance placed on schooling within the family (overseeing students' class schedule and agenda, homework help, discussions on importance of school with children). 	Families across the region integrate reading and writing into their daily lifestyle practices.
Class/ classroom	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> New pedagogical practices implemented are promising (2009–2010 school year). The project "Lire et faire lire" of the ABC des Hauts-Plateaux takes on an intergenerational and community-based approach that is well-received. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Collaborative/cooperative pedagogy. 	School classrooms integrate children ages 0–4 years-old and their parents via class-based reading activities.
School	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Students read for 30 min. per day at school. Some students require up to 90 min. travel time to come to school and an additional 90 min. to return home. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Service offerings for at-risk students (fundamental skills services, academic support, behavioural support, providing sample career and study pathways). Non-academic service offerings (co-curricular activities, services that build school-family-community relationships or partnerships). 	Schools implement community-led reading activities.
Community	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A high percentage of residents have not obtained their high school diploma across municipalities: St-Paul (50%), Ste-Euphémie (49%), Ste-Apolline (58%), Notre-Dame-du-Rosaire (42%). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Extra-curricular services for parents and youth (social skills development, complementary educational services, parental support for overseeing their children's education). 	Communities improve access to books while emphasizing the importance of reading and writing for community development.

3. Plan

Equipped with the information necessary to respond to collective and individual challenges experienced across municipalities, the guiding team developed a three-year action plan (Figure 8). A majority vote at the partner table approved this action plan during a subsequent consultation meeting.

Figure 8: L'ÉcoRéussite aggregated action plan 2011–2014.⁵⁴

System: Child/Student						
Objective: Increase the development of oral and written language skills of children ages 0–8 years-old.						
Geographical area served: Municipalities of Notre-Dame-du-Rosaire, Sainte-Apolline-de-Patton, Saint-Paul-de-Montminy, and Sainte-Euphémie-sur-Rivière-du-Sud.						
Main finding: Many children enter the school system without the foundation to succeed.						
Protective factor: Reading and writing skills/engagement with reading and writing.						
Sub-system	Desired transformation	Indicators/targets	Evaluation tools	Activities	Lead organization	Timeline
Child/Student	Children read books regularly.	80% of children ages 0–8 years-old read books regularly.	Registration forms, book loan database, attendance, pre- and post-surveys for families, self-evaluations.	(1) Bibliomobile service: Deliver books to family homes and daycares.	L'ABC des Hauts-Plateaux	October-June (visit family homes every two weeks, with monthly visits to daycares)
				(2) Loan books at homework help programs.	L'ABC des Hauts-Plateaux	October-May
				(3) Loan books at Passe-Partout parent workshops and meetings.	Schools	School year: September-June
				(4) Setup the Tente à contes (reading tent) at school and community events.	Schools and L'ABC des Hauts-Plateaux	School year: September-June
Family	Families integrate reading and writing into their lifestyles.	8 monthly workshops for parents and children (2 reading/writing activities per workshop); 1 activity per day of reading/writing at home; 8–12 children in attendance at events; 8 families present at events.	Registration and attendance forms for events, pre- and post-surveys on family daily habits, parent questionnaires to evaluate expectations and levels of satisfaction.	(5) Lead parent-child workshops on engaging reading and writing strategies.	L'ABC des Hauts-Plateaux and Family Resource Centre	Dependent on schedule of Family Resource Centre
				(6) Lead shared writing and reading activities in family homes.	L'ABC des Hauts-Plateaux	October-June
				(7) Lead the program "Lire et écrire à la maison (LÉA)."	Schools and teaching staff	January-May
				(8) Lead interactive storytelling sessions for families.	Library	6 weekly sessions, 6 sessions on weekends

Figure 8: Continued

Sub-system	Desired transformation	Indicators/targets	Evaluation tools	Activities	Lead organization	Timeline
Class/ classroom	Classes integrate children ages 0–4 years-old and their parents in class-based reading activities.	50% of parents visit the classroom at least 2 times/year; all daycares visit the school at least 2 times/year; 1 reading activity per month/school.	Focus group discussions with parents and daycare representatives; teacher and facilitator questionnaires; attendance sheets.	(9) Shared reading: 6–8 year-olds read to 0–5 year-olds in class.	Schools and teaching staff	December-May (monthly visits)
School	Schools implement community-led reading activities.	Number/type/frequency of activities led, clientele reached, number of participants, number of partners involved.	Evaluation forms, compilation sheets on attendance and frequency of activities.	(10) Reading activities on Saturdays at the elementary school.	Elementary school and L'ABC des Hauts-Plateaux	September-June (monthly)
				(11) High school and Adult Education Centre students read to primary school children.	L'ABC des Hauts-Plateaux	2 visits per class/year
	Schools develop a collaboration model to facilitate school entry.	All parents submit a questionnaire on their child's behaviour and characteristics to primary school teachers prior to the start of school.	Compilation of number of questionnaires taken and submitted.	(12) Distribute questionnaire using "Passage à l'école" template.	Schools and teaching staff	Distribution in March, parent meetings in April
Community	The community recognizes the importance of reading and writing for community development.	All library coordinators and elected officials are convened collectively and regularly for meetings; yearly public/town hall meetings.	Meeting minutes, municipal policy proposals and outcomes.	(13) Lead information activities on the workings of local committees and municipal councils in relation to reading/writing.	L'ÉcoRéussite and the Local Development Council	Throughout the year
	The community improves access to books.	4 activities/year led by each municipality; 1 reading/writing activity led per week at sporting arenas; reading/writing activities led by inter-municipal recreation centres; 16 partners have increased access to and availability of books.	Meeting minutes, compilation of activities led, attendance sheets, number of books added to collection and distributed, number of books read, number of internal and external partners.	(14) Lead reading/writing activities across the four municipalities.	Local Development Council and the four municipalities	To be determined
				(15) Integrate reading/writing activities into inter-municipal recreational activities.	Family Resource Centre and Appalaches Regional Park	Throughout the year
				(16) Collect and distribute books for 0–8 year-olds.	Family Resource Centre	May
				(17) Lead reading/writing activities during sporting events.	Family Resource Centre and Appalaches Regional Park	Preparation in June, implementation from June-August

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4. Implement and Evaluate

Follow-up

The guiding team conducts regular follow-up to verify that partner organizations are meeting the objectives outlined in the action plan. This includes verifying timeline milestones, reviewing and adjusting timelines each school year, and setting aside time during meetings for partners to share their results. The latter is documented on paper and transmitted electronically by the coordinator to all partners to ensure accountability. This also allows the guiding team to overcome any reservations they may have about conducting follow-up with their fellow colleagues.

Develop a communications plan

In order to ensure that partners feel recognized in their work, the guiding team undertakes the following measures to communicate their progress:

- Sharing success stories with students, families, educators, and the wider community.

- Developing aggregated action plans and information documents that can be distributed or posted as flyers in community centres, schools, libraries, and other public spaces.
- Mobilizing the social media and graphic design coordinator to share photos, videos, and success stories across online platforms, including municipal websites.

Adjust action plan

The action plan undergoes multiple changes in response to realities experienced on the ground. When goals come to be unrealistic in practice, the action plan is adjusted. Inversely, when goals are achieved, the action plan is adjusted to heighten objectives.

Assess partnership dynamics

The team regularly assesses partnership dynamics using anonymous surveys as well as by dedicating time to discussing challenges and disagreements during regular meetings (Figure 9).

Figure 9: Survey used by the L'ÉcoRéussite team to assess partner satisfaction.⁵⁵

What is your level of satisfaction toward the following?					
	Not at all	A little bit	A fair bit	A lot	Enormously
I appreciated the meeting					
The meeting room was adequate					
The documentation provided was pertinent					
The facilitation of the meeting incited my participation					
I had the opportunity to express myself as I wished					
Discussions took place in a respectful atmosphere					
The schedule and length of the meeting was appropriate to the content and nature of the discussions					
I appreciated the presentations that took place in the morning					
Overall, I was satisfied with the meeting					
I felt I was an important contributor to student retention and educational success in Montmagny-Sud					
Do you have other comments or suggestions?					



Phase Two: Widening the scope to target individuals ages 0–24 years-old to transform teaching and parenting practices (2017–2020)

In order to strengthen their impact, the guiding team expanded its target population as of the 2017 school year to target children, youth, and young adults ages 0–24 years-old. In this way, the program seeks to raise the educational success not only of children before they enter the school system, but also of adolescents who are on the verge of dropping out, as well as of young adults who have already dropped out and who have little prospect for obtaining sustainable employment and educational certification. This action plan, set on a timeline of three years from 2017–2020, comprises 19 desired transformations and 34 measures to achieve them, and has widened its subject focus toward building social skills among students and parental strategies among families. With nearly 30 partners involved in the partnership since the first action plan was developed in 2011, the guiding team mobilized several tools to efficiently gather the perspectives and ideas of a much larger partnership pool.

Developing a second community portrait

A meeting was held to consult with community and identify key challenges experienced by community members from all five systems. The ABC des Hauts-Plateaux then developed a survey on the basis of the challenges identified, requesting parents to evaluate, on a scale of 1–5, the importance they inferred toward various statements related to student success. This would allow for the most pressing challenges to be identified and prioritized. As the following short-form version of the survey demonstrates, the statements were organized according to each of the systems, with “school” and “class” grouped under a single category (Figure 10).

Analyzing the data

The data from this survey was then analyzed and compiled into a chart (Figure 11). Subsequent meetings were held to select appropriate protective factors and craft common objectives in relation to each of the five systems.

Determining and dividing roles

In order to divide tasks among a larger partnership pool, an additional survey was distributed, requesting partners to indicate their preference of intervention, which included the following:

- As an integral collaborator within the partnership.
- For other stages within the ecosystem process.
- Selecting priority issues and identifying key objectives.
- Determining desired transformations within the community and activities to achieve these transformations.
- Selecting evaluation indicators, targets, and tools.⁵⁷

Figure 10: Aggregated survey used by L'ÉcoRéussite to assess community priorities.⁵⁶

What level of importance do you give to each of the following statements?					
	Not at all important	A little bit important	Fairly important	Important	Very important
System 1: Child/student					
Youth 0–24 years-old have poor social skills (respect, communication, conflict resolution, bullying, confidence, and self-affirmation).					
Youth possess very little general culture.					
Youth do not have access to local support services that meet their needs.					
Youth experience challenges related to drug and alcohol consumption.					
System 2: Family					
Families lack specialized community services and resources.					
Families lack information on nutrition and food safety.					
Parents have low levels of education.					
System 3: School					
Schools are at risk of closure.					
There is a lack of personalized services for students experiencing particular learning challenges.					
Lack of information on local work, entrepreneurship, and independent work opportunities pushes youth to leave the region.					
System 4: Community					
There is a lack of volunteers to lead municipal activities, and residents engage increasingly less in their community.					
There is a lack of local activities and services for youth and families, and existing services are scarcely leveraged (e.g. local shops/businesses).					
Communication challenges: There is a lack of knowledge on available local activities and services.					

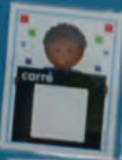
Figure 11: Results from the community survey with protective factors and objectives included in order to address priority issues.⁵⁷

Priority findings and needs identified by community members					
System	Priority findings from survey	Importance (/5)	Summary of priority findings	Associated protective factors	Objectives
Youth 0–5 years-old 6–12 years-old 13–17 years-old 18–24 years-old	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Youth 0–24 years old lack social skills (respect, communication, conflict resolution, bullying, self-confidence). 	4.38	<p>Youth 0–24 years old lack social skills (respect, communication, conflict resolution, bullying, self-confidence).</p>	<p>Social development: strategies to adapt social attitudes and behaviour/ coping mechanisms.</p>	<p>Reinforce social skills of youth ages 0–24 years-old.</p>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Certain youth experience bullying. 	4.35			
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Certain youth have substance abuse problems. 	4.35			
Family	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Families lack services and specialized community resources. 	4.13	<p>Parents lack guidance and tools on parenting good practices.</p>	<p>Parental education attitudes and practices: parent engagement and guidance on good practices in parenting.</p>	<p>Improve parents' ability to solve problems in their role as parents.</p>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The majority of reported cases received by community organizations is linked to negligence. 	4.38			
School	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lack of services for students with special needs or challenges. 	4.36	<p>Many youth struggle along their academic journeys.</p>	<p>School leadership and management: support students in need of extra and personalized support.</p>	<p>Adapt teaching methods to meet students' unique needs and challenges.</p>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Co-curricular service offerings are diminishing due to lack of resources. 	4.20			
Community	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Communities have a lot of attractions and natural sites that could be developed and leveraged to spur community development and revitalization (through job creation, mutual aid, repurposing community spaces, revitalizing nature sites, etc.). 	4.25	<p>Community resources are under-used.</p>	<p>Community mobilization: quality and accessibility of community resources and services.</p>	<p>Heighten inter-municipal engagement among community members.</p>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lack of recreational activities and neighbourhood services for families and youth; existing services are minimally used. 	4.20			



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IV. Conclusion: Challenges and Good Practices

Improving the educational outcomes and life chances of disadvantaged children, youth, and families is a community-wide challenge that requires a whole-community, whole-ecosystem approach. As the L'ÉcoRéussite program demonstrates, factors such as existing community services and activities, unique socio-economic conditions, and community resources will impact the type of ecosystem that is created. School-family-community partnerships founded on an ecosystem approach, however, are capable of pooling together existing resources, skills, and expertise to reinforce current initiatives and give rise to new endeavours in spite of challenges and shortcomings in current community and school service offerings. Through engaging a wide variety of individuals, all five systems influencing the development and school success of a child or adolescent can be reached. In order to do this, the objectives of the partnership must align with school district policies and strategies, and teachers must buy-in to the idea of receiving community members in their classrooms. Trust-based relationships must also be developed with parents, who will be receptive to new ways of educating and parenting so long as results on their children's learning and engagement are tangible. While building a long-term partnership is a demanding process, each collaborator to the partnership has a specific role to play, therefore allowing the community to achieve large goals and reinforce student retention. Overall, there is no one-size-fits-all recipe for creating an ecosystem partnership. However, as the L'ÉcoRéussite program demonstrates, the ecosystem framework provides a solid foundation on which unique and community-adapted partnerships can come to fruition.

In learning from the challenges and experiences of the coordinators, educators, and community partners of the L'ÉcoRéussite program, the following guidelines are recommended for crafting and maintaining a school-family-community partnership via an ecosystem approach:

Recommendation 1: Engage parents

Involving parents in the L'ÉcoRéussite program relies on a constant commitment to minimizing the geographic barriers that rurality can pose, and on shifting from a strategy of simply inviting parents to events toward approaching them directly while demonstrating tangible results for their children. However, involving parents in partnership consultation meetings is a challenge that has yet to be overcome by the guiding team.

- **Visit family homes:** The Bibliomobile, a book delivery and loan service, is a key activity of L'ÉcoRéussite that allows community members to build affective relationships with families. In addition to delivering books to family homes, a coordinator on the ground also reads to children in their homes in the presence of their parents. Gradually once trust is built, the coordinator introduces parents to other activities offered by L'ÉcoRéussite, including the possibility to take part in consultation meetings.
- **Create parent-friendly spaces:** Partners made a collective commitment to ensuring their spaces of activity were welcoming to parents. A key practice undertaken is refraining from telling parents how to parent, which is often ill-received. Instead, they focus on creating spaces where parents can congregate, network, and share their challenges and parenting approaches. Once trust is built and a safe environment is established, it became easier for the guiding team to achieve parental buy-in for attending parental strategy workshops and family reading activities. Overall, learning from other parents has proven more effective than prescribing practices.

- **Demonstrate clear results:** L'ÉcoRéussite relies on demonstrating impact as a means of engaging parents. The results of all activities are documented and shared, reading and writing scores have elevated since the program was launched, and L'ÉcoRéussite is regularly present at municipal events. For instance, at almost all community festivals and sporting events, a reading tent is setup where children can listen to stories and browse books. The program relies on delivering results and on maintaining a consistent presence in order to gain parental engagement and support. In addition, the program's action plan includes specific initiatives to engage parents, including reaching out to families who do not have Internet access, and hosting workshops and parent coffee clubs.
- **Minimize transportation barriers:** The L'ÉcoRéussite program is implanted in a rural and remote region with vast distances between services, especially health and social services which tend to be centralized in higher density neighbourhoods. With a major portion of the program's partner organizations emanating from these two sectors, it is a challenge for parents to attend activities due to distance, time constraints, and lack of access to vehicles. To remedy this challenge, the team organizes carpooling services where possible and especially for major events. The end goal is to establish a permanent form of collective transportation, although funding remains a barrier.

Recommendation 2: Engage teaching staff

Without openness on the part of teachers to allow community members to lead activities within their classrooms, the majority of L'ÉcoRéussite's action plan would have been difficult to implement. Furthermore, high teacher turnover rates across the school district, due in part to the communities' remoteness, have led to a change in teaching staff from year-to-year. This has compelled the team to constantly renew efforts that stimulate teacher buy-in.

- **Integrate information on the L'ÉcoRéussite program into new teacher orientation programs:** New teachers are introduced and involved in the L'ÉcoRéussite program through information sessions and informal discussions, where they are presented with concrete examples and data on how the program's activities have impacted student engagement and achievement. In cases of high teacher turnover, it is important to repeat this process regularly as new teachers enter the school system. In the case of L'ÉcoRéussite, an introduction to the program is typically made during the month of October, on or around the first partnership meeting of the school year.
- **Keep it tangible and concrete:** At the early conception stages of the program, limit the number of teachers involved in conducting a community analysis or socio-economic portrait. This process can be long and theoretical, and is not the best way to engage teachers. Instead, the guiding team engaged a core group of educators – including guidance counsellors, school psychologists, and department heads – who were responsible for gathering the opinions of their colleagues and presenting these at committee meetings.
- **Enable relationships between community facilitators and teaching staff:** As new community organizations enter into the partnership, or as individual facilitators change roles in their careers, invite new faces into the school to meet with teachers. Alternatively, invite teachers to take part in activities within the community – at sporting arenas, community centres, family resource centres, municipal libraries, and so on – where they can see the work of community members in action and gain acquaintance. These steps are equally important to undertake when new teachers enter the school system.


More on this topic



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Recommendation 3: Maintain the engagement of community partners

In addition to attracting community organizations to become partners, it is challenging to sustain their commitment in the long-term.

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Mobilize your Community Organizer: In Quebec, Community Organizers are readily available to assist in facilitating partnerships among health and social service-related organizations or programs, due to a strategic plan implemented by the Ministry of Health and Social Services. Within Quebec, the first step would be to **consult a local Centre intégré de santé et de services sociaux (CISSS) or a Centre intégré universitaire de santé et de services sociaux (CIUSSS) according to your location.**⁵⁸ Within other jurisdictions, verify whether such a service is offered, or whether it is possible to engage a social worker specialized in community organizing. These professionals are skilled and experienced in emphasizing and reiterating the mutual benefits of community partnerships throughout the lifetime of an initiative.
- Mobilize a social media and graphic design coordinator:** Numerous organizations and municipal offices across L'ÉcoRéussite's eight municipalities were already contracting the same individual to lead their social media campaigns and graphic design needs. It therefore made sense to have the same individual lead L'ÉcoRéussite's own promotional activities. This professional's work coincided directly with work that was already being done, such as keeping up-to-date with and promoting municipal and community-run events through digital media and print publications. This individual was also invited to participate in consultation and planning meetings, and was able to assist in translating discussions on the theoretical foundations of the program into more accessible and simplified language. This was especially useful in engaging individuals with little background on educational terminology and concepts, and for community members and parents with low literacy skills.

Recommendation 4: Obtain and secure consistent funding

- Leverage existing resources and practices:** The guiding team targets its efforts to existing activities that are already being conducted by community organizations. Fundamentally, the ecosystem approach relies on regrouping efforts that are already being conducted by community organizations, and reinforcing their impact through creating community-wide action plans with specific objectives, targets, evaluation tools, and timelines. Sub-partnerships within the ecosystem allow for existing initiatives to be expanded. For example, instead of creating a program from scratch that prepares pre-school aged children to enter the school system, partners were able to identify that elementary schools already had in place a “reading buddy” program where older students would read to younger students. The partnership allowed for early childhood centres to team-up with teachers so that children ages 0–5 could visit elementary schools and be read to by older students. Another example is the sub-partnership between the Adult Education Centre and the Fine Motor Skills Development Centre. Instead of beginning a new afterschool program where parents could have their children supervised while they attended adult education classes, these two centres coordinated their programming schedules so that children could work on their fine motor skills while parents upgraded their education.

- Seek out recognition opportunities:** The guiding team and social media coordinator are constantly on the lookout for ways to promote the program publicly through press, social media, awards, and presentations at education conferences. Rather than target grantees specifically, they have focused their efforts on building awareness and a reputation for the program publicly. This has allowed the program to receive numerous recognitions, including awards from the Federation of Quebec School Boards and Quebec’s Ministry of Education. The lead principal was also selected as “Recipient of the Year” for a 2016 recognition by Le Soleil/Radio-Canada. Funding opportunities subsequently followed suit, and a stronger public reputation has allowed for stronger grant applications.
- Present the program at education conferences and public forums:** The guiding team regularly presents on the ecosystem approach at education conferences. To date, four presentations have been given to future school principals and district directors within the framework of training programs such as the Formation initiale à la direction d’établissements d’éducation (FIDEE). Seizing opportunities to share their program approach and widen their network has opened doors to new ideas and prospective partners and funders.



For More Information:

Sylvain Tremblay

Directeur des écoles primaires intégrées De la Colline/Sainte-Apolline et de l'école secondaire à Saint-Paul-de-Montminy
sylvain.tremblay@cscotesud.qc.ca

Nadia Phaneuf

Coordonnatrice de L'ÉcoRéussite
ecoreussite@gmail.com



V. Endnotes and Further Reading

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- ⁵ For more information on the “Bibliomobile” service, please see:
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L’ABC des Hauts-Plateaux. **“Lecture partagée.”** (Available in French only).
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- ¹⁹ For more information on the determinants of student retention, please see: Partenaires pour la réussite éducative en Chaudière-Appalaches (2013). Fiches pratiques sur **Les déterminants de la persévérance scolaire**. Accompaniment to **Pour agir efficacement sur les déterminants de la persévérance scolaire et de la réussite éducative**. Réunir Réussir : agir ensemble pour la réussite éducative. (Available in French only).
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- ²¹ Ibid. Fiche 3 : Association avec des pairs; Fiche 7 : Sentiment dépressif; Fiche 12 : Relation maître-élèves.
- ²² Ibid. Fiche 2 : Valorisation de l'éducation et encadrement parental.
- ²³ Ibid. Fiche 3 : Association avec des pairs.
- ²⁴ Ibid. Fiche 8 : Estime de soi.
- ²⁵ Ibid. Fiche 9 : Rendement scolaire en lecture, écriture et mathématiques.
- ²⁶ Ibid. Fiche 7 : Sentiment dépressif.
- ²⁷ Ibid. Fiche 1 : Valorisation de l'éducation et encadrement parental.
- ²⁸ Ibid. Fiche 12 : Relation maître-élèves.
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- ³⁰ Data provided by Le centre de transfert pour la réussite éducative du Québec (2011).
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- ⁴⁵ See: Institut de la statistique du Québec (2012). *Enquête québécoise sur le développement des enfants à la maternelle 2012 – Portrait statistique pour le Québec et ses régions*. Gouvernement du Québec, 43-53. Data specific to Montmagny-L'Islet provided by Sylvain Tremblay.
- ⁴⁶ Data provided by École intégrée de la Colline/Sainte-Apolline (2009).
- ⁴⁷ See: Ministère de la Santé et des Services sociaux (2017). *Le soutien à l'action intersectorielle favorable à la santé – Stratégie ministérielle*, 36 pages.
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VI. Partners of the L'ÉcoRéussite Program

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- Le programme Passe-Partout
- Le CLD / MRC de Montmagny
- The eight municipalities within the southern portion of the Regional County Municipality of Montmagny:
 - Sainte-Apolline-de-Patton
 - Saint-Paul-de-Montminy
 - Notre-Dame-du-Rosaire
 - Sainte-Euphémie-sur-Rivière-du-Sud
 - Saint-Just-de-Bretenière
 - Saint-Fabien-de-Panet
 - Sainte-Lucie-de-Beaugard
 - Lac-Frontière
- Le Centre d'entraide familiale de la MRC de Montmagny
- L'ABC des Hauts Plateaux
- Le Carrefour jeunesse emploi de la MRC de Montmagny
- La Maison des jeunes des Frontières du Sud
- Action jeunesse Côte-Sud
- Le Parc des Appalaches
- Le service des loisirs du Parc régional des Appalaches
- La Corporation de développement Communautaire Ici Montmagny-L'Islet
- Garderies en milieu familial
- Bibliothèques municipales
- Le Centre intégré de santé et services sociaux Chaudière-Appalaches
- Regroupement L'Aventure 0-5 ans
- Commission scolaire de la Côte-du-Sud
- La Caisse populaire du Parc régionale des Appalaches
- Businesses and employers:
 - Le Bistreau d'Érable
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