

One City Schools

2020-2021 Process Evaluation Executive Summary

One City Schools

One City consists of two schools: One City Preschool (OCP) and One City Expeditionary Elementary School (OCEES). OCP is an accredited, independent, 5-Star tuition-based early learning center, and OCEES is a tuition-free public charter school. One City’s mission is to seed a new model of public education that ensures young children are on track to succeed in a college or career preparatory program from birth through high school graduation. The objectives are: 1) breaking the cycle of longstanding achievement and opportunity gaps for children of color and under-resourced children in Wisconsin and across the U.S., and 2) creating a new system of public education that effectively prepares all children to tackle today’s challenges and solve tomorrow’s greatest problems, and to lead successful, happy, and enriching lives.

What We Did

Researchers from the Center for Research on Early Childhood Education (CRECE) and Wisconsin Evaluation Collaborative (WEC) conducted a process evaluation of One City from January 2020 through September 2021. This process evaluation focused on understanding the nature and implementation of One City.

Our data collection included:



Interviews

- 11 Teacher and Staff Interviews (December 2020 – June 2021)
- 5 Family Interviews (August 2021 – September 2021)
- 6 Leadership Staff Interviews (August 2020-June 2021)



Survey Response

- (December 2020 – May 2021)
- 27 Families
 - 10 Staff
 - 14 Teachers



Observations

- (May – June 2021)
- 4 Preschool Observations
 - 10 Elementary Observations



Document Analysis

We analyzed several different One City documents including reports, newsletters, and administrative documents.

What We Recommend

Our evaluation provided a rich understanding of the implementation of One City. One notable feature of One City we observed was the use of high-quality curricula to promote children's academic and lifelong success. Teachers and staff worked to provide safe and stimulating learning environments that fostered children's academic growth, social skills, and independence. Another important feature of One City was its unique, two generation, comprehensive approach to support not only the student, but their whole family. We observed this through the many supports and services One City offered to students and their families, including financial, educational, and social. As with any complex initiative, there are always areas for improvement. Below, we highlight four recommendations.

Our Recommendation

Keep innovating, keep dreaming big

We begin this set of recommendations recognizing that One City has undertaken a critical task of lifting up all children, but particularly Madison's Black children who have been long underserved by our community. In a short time, One City has mapped a plan for success by thinking outside of the box to create a unique set of schools. These schools are vibrant places that exemplify innovation.

Our Recommendation

Provide more staffing support and planning time for teachers

Effective teaching takes energy, planning, and communication. Not all OCP teachers have planning time and substitutes/floors to help in their classroom. The OCP administrators noted concerns about providing a full-day of professional development due to the issues with ratios and schedules. For these reasons, an effort should be made to schedule planning time so that teaching partners can attend together and have a shared understanding of practice. Further, OCEES teachers reported not only of their lack of planning time but also of the impacts of teacher turnover on their work. One City has already taken an important step in reducing turnover by providing professional salaries and benefits to teachers. To retain high-quality staff, every effort should be made to give them the time and space to do the planning and learning that leads to great education.

Our Recommendation

Develop additional processes to obtain family and staff voice in decision-making

One City is a community, 2 schools, and an organizational structure that reflects, in various ways, decision-makers, leaders, staff, and families. Yet, staff and family members do not understand how and by whom decisions are made at One City. We also learned from administrators that there needs to be clarification on who makes the decisions in what areas. For this reason, clarity and transparency is vital so that stakeholders know where they fit into the organizational structure. In addition, across both schools, the principal, CEO, and administrators make decisions about curricula, hiring processes, and concerns brought up by staff. However, parents and teachers have few opportunities to be part of the troubleshooting process or decision-making process. The system needs to have input from the parents and teachers into issues that impact their lives and also to be responsive to the input in a timely manner.

Our Recommendation

Improve communication channels to staff and families

Communication provided both opportunities and challenges. Although OCP offers multiple ways for families to engage and communicate with school community members, safety issues or troubleshooting processes are sometimes not promptly shared with parents. For OCEES, despite multiple ways of communication, some parents expressed that they could communicate with teachers anytime and receive a response, while others wished that communication with One City could be improved.

What's Next for the One City Schools Evaluation

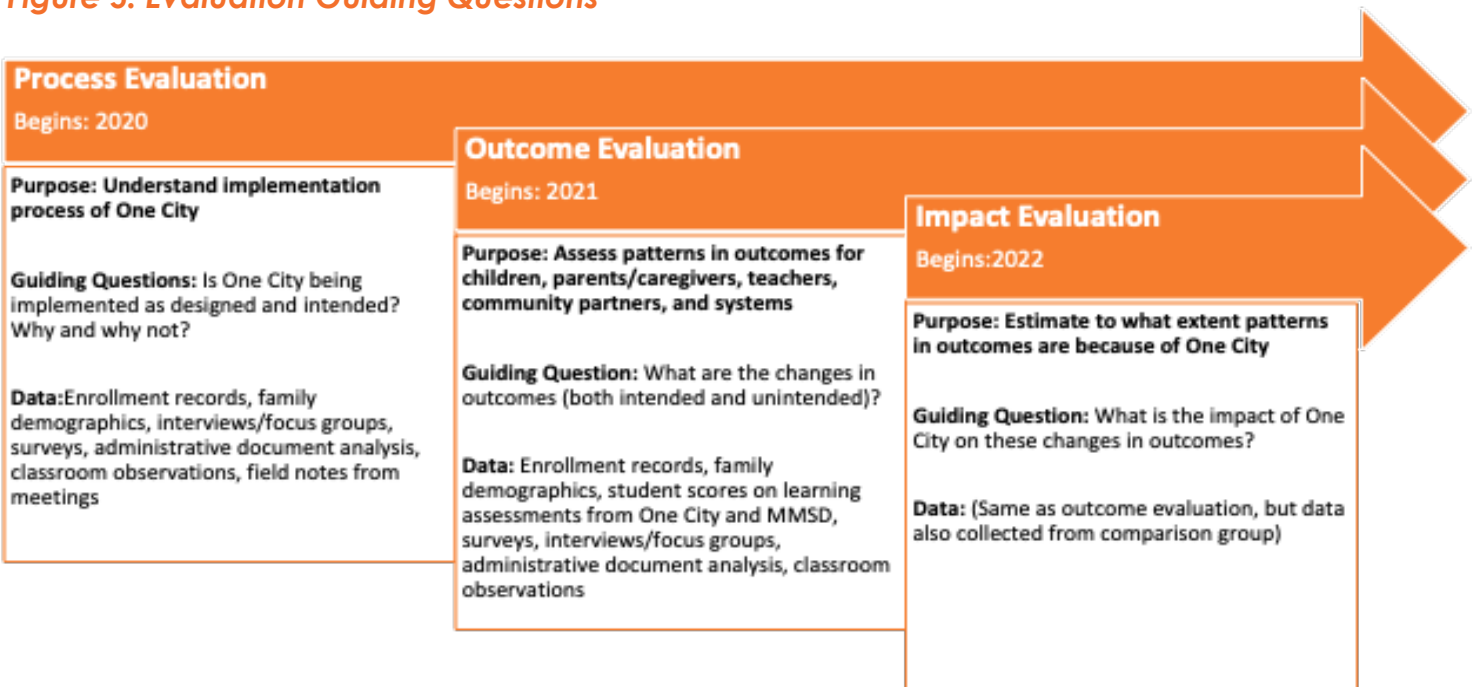
This first phase of the evaluation will be ongoing as we continue to track and understand the implementation of One City Schools over the subsequent years. The next phase that we are currently initiating is the outcome evaluation. This outcome evaluation will be guided by the following question:

When principles are reflected in implementation, what are the changes in outcomes (both intended and unintended) for participating children, families, teachers/staff, and the community?

Figure 5 presents an illustration of the current and future evaluation phases.

Throughout each phase of the evaluation, our goal is to regularly re-examine our evaluation implementation to ensure transparency and responsiveness to One City Schools. For example, we are looking to create new communication processes so that we are more readily informed of changes occurring at One City Schools, and they are more aware of our activities. We continue our commitment to engaging One City families and staff in the evaluation process. We will be developing an abbreviated version of this report that is tailored to be more accessible to a wider audience. We also plan to develop new opportunities for One City families, staff, and community members to be involved in the design and implementation of the evaluation beyond our Evaluation Advisory Group, which is a group consisting of One City staff and families who provide feedback on the evaluation.

Figure 5: Evaluation Guiding Questions



Appendix A. Evaluation Methods

Guiding Frameworks

One City Evaluation is guided by two frameworks: Culturally Responsive Evaluation (CRE) and Principles-Focused Evaluation. These two frameworks guided the evaluation design, questions, and analysis.

Culturally Responsive Evaluation (CRE)

The CRE framework assumes culture is central to the evaluation process. Culture influences how individuals and organizations identify and position themselves in relationship to one another and the initiative, as well as perspectives on what is meaningful and who is in a position to “know” about the implementation and impact of that initiative. Therefore, it is critical to make explicit and reflect upon the ways cultural identities and contexts impact evaluation design, data collection and analysis, and the use of findings.

Principles-Guided Evaluation Framework

Principles-focused evaluation requires the use of principles as a compass to help orient that evaluation. Principles inform and guide decisions and choices. Initiatives, programs, and change efforts of all kinds base what they do and why they do it on principles – either explicitly or implicitly. Principles-focused evaluation examines (1) whether principles are clear, meaningful, and actionable, and if so, (2) whether they are actually being followed, and, if so, (3) whether they are leading to desired results.

Guiding Evaluation Questions for Process Evaluation

The following questions guided the examination of One City Schools implementation process:

1. What are the common principles guiding One City?
2. How are these principles meaningful to all involved?
3. Are these principles being reflected in the implementation of One City?

We used both quantitative and qualitative methods. Below is a description of the different data we collected for this report.

Quantitative Methods

Survey: We sent out a survey to families, staff, and teachers at One City. The survey was sent out from December 2020 through May 2021. The survey focused on asking about their experiences and opinions on their satisfaction with support, professional development, opportunities to voice concerns, safety during the pandemic, implementation of EL education, and Anji Play. The survey had 51 respondents in total: 27 families, ten staff, and 14 teachers who completed the survey.

Qualitative Methods

Family Interviews or Focus Group interviews (Appendix B): We asked families if they would like to do an individual interview or a focus group. There was only one focus group, and the rest of the interviews were individual interviews. In total, we interviewed five families. The interviews focused on families' experiences at One City, their child's learning experience at One City, and how they have supported their family.

Teacher and Staff individual or focus group interviews (Appendix C): We also asked teachers and staff if they would like to do an interview or a focus group. We had one focus group with teachers and staff, and the rest of the interviews were individual interviews. We interviewed a total of 11 teachers and staff.

We had three separate protocols for teachers and staff. One protocol was for preschool teachers and assistant teachers. The second protocol was for elementary teachers and assistant teachers. The last protocol was for staff members who provide student, community, health, or facilities support at One City (for example, speech and language pathologists, social workers, special education coordinators, student support specialists, chefs, nurses, and facilities managers).

We asked preschool teachers to share their experiences at One City, the support One City provides to teachers and assistant teachers, decision-making, and Anji Play curriculum.

For elementary teachers, we asked teachers to share their experiences at One City, support One City provides, decision making, principles that guide One City, and EL curriculum.

We asked staff to share their experiences at One City, principles that guide One City, support One City provides, and changes to their job role.

Leadership Interviews (Appendix D): We interviewed leadership team members twice. The first interview focused on learning about the structure and history of One City. Meanwhile, the second round of interviews focused on their experiences, support, and training for EL and Anji Play.

Preschool & Elementary Observations (Appendix E): We also did instructional observations in the preschool and elementary schools in the spring of 2021. The goal of the observations was to see how the principles of One City played out in the classroom and observe Anji Play and the EL curriculum.

Documents: We collected documents that One City shared. Documents included CREW news, Family Newsletters, re-opening plans, open house, and FAST information.

Data Analyzed

The data analysis included both inductive and deductive approaches. Inductive methods refer to approaching data without the influence of prior knowledge on how the data is analyzed. Deductive takes on the guidance of prior knowledge and theory to analyze and make meaning of the data. We used the process evaluation questions for the deductive approach to creating a code tree that guided the analysis. We analyzed the data using MaxQDA software, and as we coded the data following the code tree, we also added new inductive codes. After coding the data through the themes, we created memos to further analyze each parent code and their subthemes.