

LAWS Program Evaluation 2021

Executive Summary

Law in **A**ction
Within
Schools

Program and Research Overview

Program Overview

LAWS is a postsecondary education access program facilitated by the University of Toronto Faculty of Law in partnership with the Osgoode Faculty of Law and the Toronto District School Board (TDSB).

LAWS supports historically and systemically under-served youth (racialized minorities, new immigrants, low-income socioeconomic status youth) in gaining access to postsecondary education, work experience, mentors, and academic support. LAWS aims to improve diversity in the legal profession by removing barriers to entry.

The LAWS Core program is connected to four schools where LAWS offers a unique curriculum, experiential learning opportunities, and after-school tutoring. LAWS also has a Newcomer Program which is designed to support new immigrants in Canada in three additional schools.

Program Structure

Element	Details
Applications	The program is open access - meaning it does not have a grades threshold or similar academic barriers to entry. The exception is at Harbord Collegiate Institute where the program was becoming a magnet program and an application process was implemented. Harbord's neighborhood demographics and student needs changed such that students no longer had the barriers to post-secondary education that LAWS aims to remove.
Short Term Goals	Improve student attendance, grades and engagement in high schools.
Long Term Goals	Improve access to postsecondary education. Improve diversity in the legal profession.
Differentiation of Program	LAWS is unique, and able to differentiate its program from other access programs due to two key factors. Firstly, LAWS focuses on "at-risk" students instead of embedded students who are on track to thrive in postsecondary without assistance. Secondly, the program has the unique ability to partner internally with the schools unlike other third-party programs.
Curriculum	LAWS staff work in coordination with TDSB teachers to provide a law-themed curriculum in high school courses. Grade 10 courses include English, Science, History, Careers and Civics; and grade 11 and 12 courses include Law and English.
Mentorship Opportunities	LAWS partners with law firms and professional organizations to offer 1-1 mentoring for students.
Tutoring	Law students from Osgoode and UofT volunteer to tutor students in selected subjects.
Extracurriculars	Mock trials, field trips to legal institutions, and social activities are some of the out-of-school offerings provided.

Study Goal

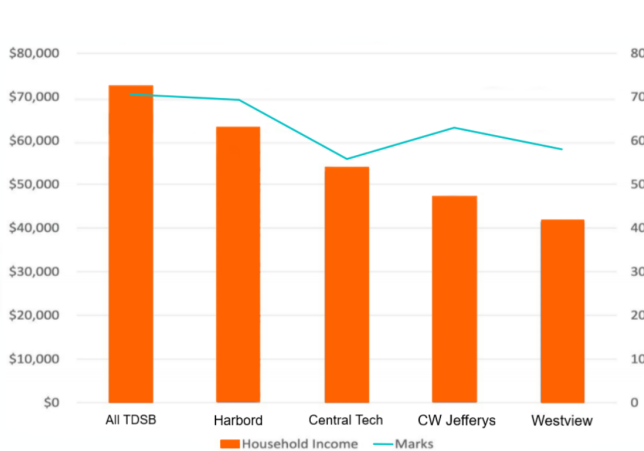
This study asked the following questions:

1. Is the LAWS Program serving a population that faces barriers to post-secondary education?
2. Is the LAWS Core Program successful at meeting its aims of improving academic performance and access?

LAWS Student Demographics

LAWS Actively Serves Students Facing Barriers

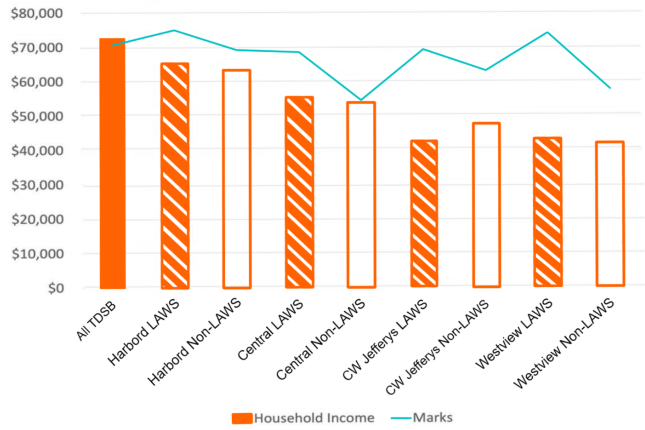
How do the four participating schools compare with the TDSB as a whole?



Students in the LAWS program face greater financial and academic challenges than TDSB as a whole.

The chart on the left demonstrates that students from Central Tech, CW Jefferys, and Westview have much lower household incomes and grades than the TDSB average. Harbord students also have lower grades; however, the difference is marginal compared to the other schools which may point to lesser need for LAWS at Harbord.

Are the students who participate in LAWS similar to students in the same schools who do not participate?

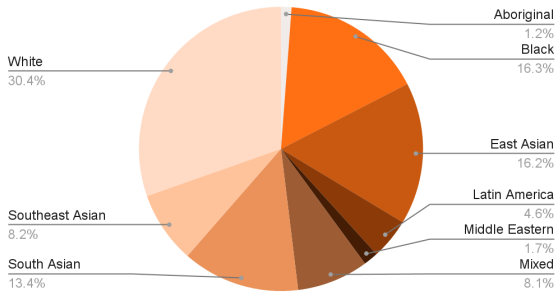


Students participating in LAWS consistently achieve higher grades than non-LAWS students, with Central Tech and Westview representing the most drastic differences in grades.

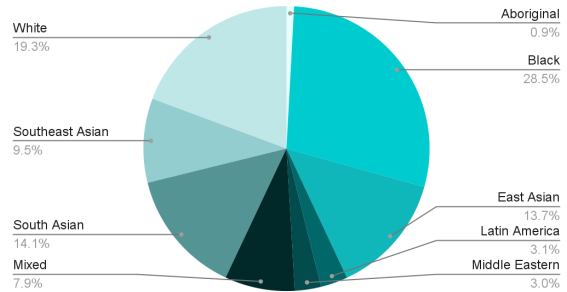
While the median household income for LAWS and non-LAWS students is similar, all participating schools still reflect a lower household income than the TSDB average.

Racial diversity of students in LAWS compared to non-LAWS students:

LAWS Students



Non-LAWS Students



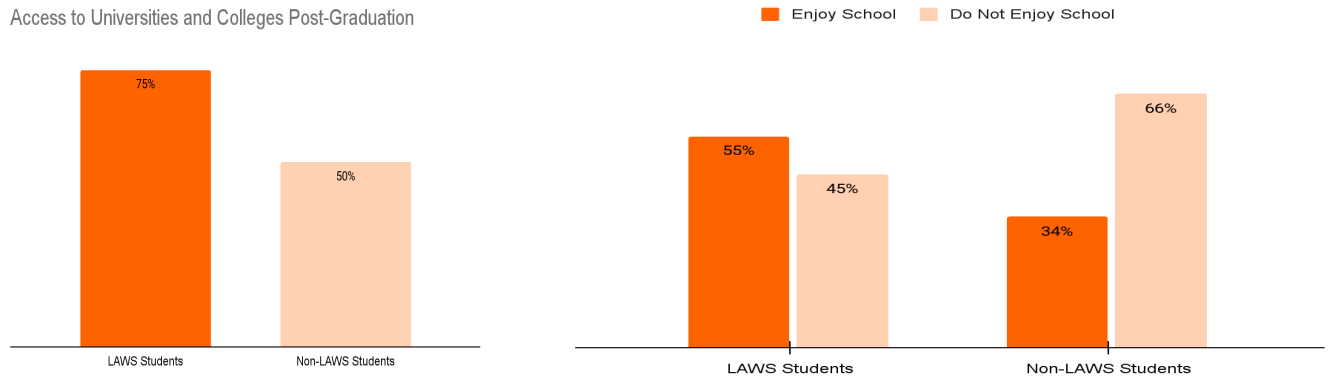
The LAWS Program successfully serves students from a number of racial backgrounds to achieve its goal of improving access to postsecondary education and legal career pathways.

Students in the LAWS Program are representative of the general population of non-LAWS students from their schools.

Successful Program Results

LAWS Improves Academic Performance and Access

Access to Universities and Colleges Post-Graduation



Students in the LAWS Program achieve significantly higher grades and greater access to post-secondary education than non-LAWS students in the four participating schools, and general TDSB students. The overall rate of LAWS students who planned on attending postsecondary institutions was 75.88%. In comparison, 49.60% of non-LAWS students at their schools, and 63.96% of TDSB students reported plans to attend postsecondary schools.

Additionally, another factor that can impact student attendance, participation, and academic performance is whether students enjoy school. Over 55% of LAWS students reported enjoying school all the time. In comparison, only 34% of non-LAWS students in their cohort reported the same.

Other Academic Participation and Performance

LAWS students outperform non-LAWS students on the Ontario Secondary School Literacy Test and have greater rates of attendance, entry into academic streams, graduation, and post-secondary education access.

School	Group	N	OSSLT % Successful	Confirmed College or University in Ontario	Academic Stream	Absent 11 or More Days	Graduated or 30+ Credits
Harbord	LAWS	147	94.6%	76.8%	100.0%	7.2%	89.3%
	Non-LAWS	3140	86.1%	68.8%	91.7%	12.4%	82.0%
Central	LAWS	314	92.0%	68.0%	84.0%	12.0%	82.0%
	Non-LAWS	2915	44.0%	28.5%	33.5%	34.6%	54.6%
CW Jefferys	LAWS	32	71.9%	71.9%	90.6%	6.2%	87.5%
	Non-LAWS	2202	61.6%	64.8%	74.0%	12.4%	75.2%
Westview	LAWS	62	91.9%	83.8%	88.7%	1.6%	91.9%
	Non-LAWS	3318	33.9%	41.7%	36.5%	27.8%	52.5%

Study Conclusion

LAWS is connected to greater improvement in grades and access to post-secondary education. The program has identified a key gap in the postsecondary education and legal pathway pipeline and helps bridge it by creating engaging, practical, and experiential programming.

In the future, the program can continue to build on its strengths by looking to address more barriers that students face along with race and socio-economic issues (e.g., disabilities). As the program grows, creating more formal curriculum or learning activities could assist in broadening the reach beyond the current four participating high schools.

Specifically, the internship opportunities provided to LAWS students are a vital part of what makes the program unique and impactful. It is recommended that the existing emphasis on mentorship and community continue to be highlighted.