



2024 - 2025

SEEDschool REPORT



[TheSeed.ca](https://www.theseed.ca)



WHAT IS SEEDschool?

Transforming perspectives, shaping communities

Seedschool is a program of The Mustard Seed in partnership with Campus Calgary/Open Minds, which provides Calgary teachers the opportunity to move their classes to The Mustard Seed downtown for an entire week of curriculum-based experience. Teachers design and implement a year-long interdisciplinary study that uses the week at The Mustard Seed as a catalyst for learning.

History of Seedschool

The Mustard Seed has long been engaged in intentional student learning experiences. Seedschool evolved out of over 20 years of summer learning programs, and two decades of speaking and teaching in school classrooms. During the 2016-17 school year, The Mustard Seed and Campus Calgary began to dream about initiating a pilot program at The Mustard Seed. After our initial pilot year in 2017-18 with 5 weeks of programming, we are now an official site running 11+ weeks of programming per year.

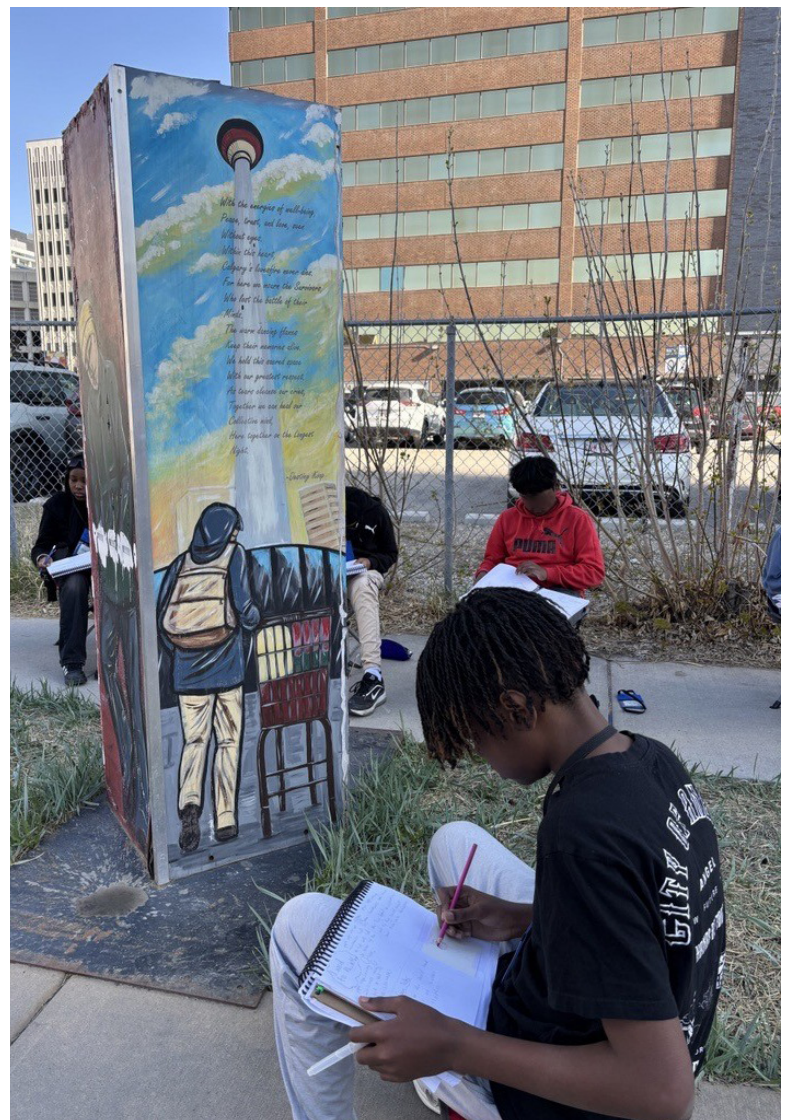
Seedschool engages students with hands-on learning about poverty and homelessness with the goal of challenging them to raise awareness about these issues in their community. Every week is uniquely designed to meet the needs and goals of each class. Students can learn about different design barriers that exist in their community, explore public spaces, learn about food insecurity, and hear from a person with lived experience.

“My perspective and knowledge of homelessness, poverty, and Calgary as a community has evolved since our work with The Mustard Seed.”

-Seedschool Teacher

“I feel honoured and impacted at how much this has happened and hope to make a difference in my community.”

-Seedschool Student



2024 - 2025 PROGRAM RESULTS

295
STUDENTS
TOOK THE 5-DAY
SEEDSCHOOL
PROGRAM

12
TEACHERS

27
COMMUNITY
EXPERTS

55
INSTRUCTIONAL
DAYS

11
CLASSES

7
SCHOOLS
PARTICIPATED

Seedschool Schedule 2024 - 2025

Week	School	Grade	Focus of Study
October 28-November 1	Dr. Oakley School	7	What does an accessible Canada mean to you?
November 4-8	Bishop Carroll High School	10 - 12	Who is your neighbour?
December 2-6	Father Doucet School	5	In what ways can we share the indescribable gift of Jesus with those in need around us?
January 20-24	Lake Bonavista School	5 & 6	Ask yourself...who tells the stories, who benefits from the stories, and who is missing from the stories?
February 3-7	Lake Bonavista School	5 & 6	Ask yourself...who tells the stories, who benefits from the stories, and who is missing from the stories?
February 18-20 & 24-25	Lake Bonavista School	5 & 6	Ask yourself...who tells the stories, who benefits from the stories, and who is missing from the stories?
March 10-14	St. Brigid School	5	How can living a life of gratitude cultivate empathy toward others?
March 31-April 4	Bowcroft School	5 & 6	What is community and how do I fit into it?
April 7-11	Prairie Sky School	7	How can we cultivate genuine empathy for others in a global community and how can this empathy drive change in ourselves and others?
April 28-May 2	Prairie Sky School	7	How can we cultivate genuine empathy for others in a global community and how can this empathy drive change in ourselves and others?
May 5-9	Prairie Sky School	7	How can we cultivate genuine empathy for others in a global community and how can this empathy drive change in ourselves and others?

PRE SURVEY RESULTS

When asked at the beginning of the school year “what is the one thing you hope to learn at Seedschool?”, participating students primarily expressed a desire to understand the causes and experiences of homelessness, with the goal of challenging misconceptions by hearing a person’s story. Students were not only interested in hearing about how someone experiencing homelessness goes about their day, but were also curious about the supports and resources available for someone without a home—especially at The Mustard Seed. While many students shared concerns around safety, a lack of trust, and negative stereotypes, there was also an overwhelming amount of students who vocalized a desire to help and gain empathy.

Prior to their arrival at Seedschool, participating students held multifaceted views about people experiencing homelessness, often balancing a level of worry and fear with a desire to show empathy. From the responses we received, there was a prevalent theme of students feeling sadness, pity, and sympathy for individuals lacking basic needs, financial stability, and traumatic pasts. Students also shared a desire to help people experiencing homelessness, a desire for societal and government intervention, and held the belief that all people deserve to be treated with respect despite their circumstances. While many students seem to recognize that there are many causes of homelessness, there was still a clear theme of misconceptions and stereotypes related to aggression, substance use, and laziness.

Similar to students’ thoughts on homelessness, respondents primarily view those experiencing poverty with a balance of sadness and empathy. While some students could not articulate the difference between poverty and homelessness, many students were able to recognize that there is a close link. The main distinction shared is that homelessness is associated with a complete lack of shelter, while poverty is understood as a severe financial struggle where someone still has a home, yet other basic needs are not met. Many students also recognized that poverty is a complex social issue and shared a desire to learn how people experiencing poverty can receive help, and how students can offer help. While misconceptions and stereotypes were less pronounced for those experiencing poverty rather than homelessness, we still noticed recurring comments around the concepts of laziness and poor choices as a cause of poverty, indicating that not all students understand the complexities of socioeconomic disadvantages.

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“I hope Seedschool will help many students to become more aware and empathetic towards homelessness. I was honestly very surprised with the students’ ignorant views. I hope this experience will open their hearts and minds.” - Seedschool Teacher

DR. OAKLEY SCHOOL

Grade 7 students from Dr. Oakley School spent the week examining “what does an accessible Canada mean to you?”. This class looked more in-depth at how public spaces were designed to make all individuals who interact with them feel welcome in any given circumstance. This group of students worked diligently at creating their own public spaces (through a design challenge) that addressed their specific concerns around accessibility for all individuals, no matter what their limitations.

Dr. Oakley students also had the opportunity to meet with their City of Calgary Councillor, Courtney Wallcott and a representative from CanLearn Society. After meeting with these guest speakers, students were able to brainstorm practical ways to show accessibility in terms of learning, mobility, vision, and hearing; with the goal of empowering students to feel like they can be their own advocate. Towards the end of their week, Dr. Oakley students **prepared 32 hygiene kits and 46 snack packs** for the Downtown Community Impact Centre.

When asked in a post-survey “what is one thing you learned at Seedschool that will stick with you?”, students from Dr. Oakley School shared a newfound

understanding and empathy for those experiencing homelessness and poverty. Students shared a deeper appreciation for the difficulty of navigating financial stability, and the vulnerability for anyone to experience a sudden life change. There was also a notable shift in understanding that not all people experiencing homelessness make bad decisions, but that bad things can happen unexpectedly.



“Listening to [a guest with lived experience] also helped [students] understand that everyone has a story and ending up without a home isn’t always a result of poor choices.” - Seedschool Teacher

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“I learned that your life can change a lot in a matter of days”

- Seedschool student

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“I learned that people that are experiencing homelessness are not always making bad decisions but bad things happen to them”

- Seedschool Student

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BISHOP CARROLL HIGH SCHOOL

The grade 11/12 students from Bishop Carroll High School were actively engaged throughout their week, delving into the question “who is my neighbour?”. The students were inspired to start a blanket drive at their school and **collected well over 60 blankets** for The Mustard Seed (a timely donation as they came at the beginning of November when the temperature starts to drop off significantly). During their week onsite, students took part in activities that translated into real-world experiences such as the challenges around finding employment, budgeting on a limited income, and barriers around finding affordable housing in a city like Calgary. These students were particularly keen to reflect and demonstrated their understanding on a variety of topics through thoughtful, detailed, and creative journal entries.

After their week at Seedschool, Bishop Carroll High School was inspired to host a school-wide service project, **collecting care kits** for The Mustard Seed. A Christmas market was also held at the school, **raising \$600** for The Mustard Seed.

When asked in a post-survey “what is one thing you learned at Seedschool that will stick with you?”, students from Bishop Carroll High School demonstrated a shift in perspective and



a deepened understanding of the humanity and individuality of people experiencing homelessness. Responses emphasized using person first language and treating all with respect. Students also highlighted the need for affordable housing, and shared a desire for personal action to make a difference.

“When I first walked into Seedschool, I had no idea what to expect. Now, walking out, I would gladly do this all again in a heartbeat. Even just after the first day, my views entirely changed. One specific thing that really stuck with me this week was that people experiencing homelessness are people. They are humans. They are just like you and I. And humanity as a whole could do a lot better of treating them like that.” -Seedschool Student

“[One thing that will stick with me is] seeing the example and impact of homelessness face-to-face, hearing about how they suffered, being given the opportunity to feel empathy and raise awareness.”

-Seedschool Student

“I know now that no matter what each person has done, or what has led to their situation, at the end of the day they are still human. They were once someone’s baby and just because they may be experiencing this challenge, they are still a person.” -Seedschool Student

FATHER DOUCET SCHOOL

The grade 5 students from Father Doucet School spent their week looking to better understand “in what ways can we share the indescribable gift of Jesus with those in need around us?”. During their week, they took time to notice how hostile design can be used to control the behavior of the humans and animals who interact in various public spaces. They also examined what makes some public spaces more engaging and beneficial for those using them. Students were particularly impressed with how thoughtful the spaces of the Central Library were designed and made everyone who entered feel a sense of belonging and comfort.

These students also **raised \$230 to make 67 snack packs** for the Downtown Community Impact Centre, **as well as making ornaments** to decorate the Common Room for the residents of the 1010 building as the Christmas season approached.

When asked in a post-survey “what is one thing you learned at Seedschool that will stick with you?”, students from Father



Doucet School were able to recognize that every person has a story, and that story may not be what you expect. Students highlighted the importance of empathy, inclusion, and giving back. Furthermore, students gained insight into the resilience often shown by people experiencing homelessness, despite their difficult circumstances.



“One of my students would always shut down in math. This student made no effort to learn the material and would not ask for help. We spent one week at Seedschool, and this student came back with a completely different attitude towards math! This student was not afraid to ask for help or make mistakes. During Parent/Teacher conferences, I talk to the parents, and they said it was The Mustard Seed. The weekend after their Seedschool experience, the student said that they need to live a life of gratitude and has had a different attitude since! I knew this week would be transformational for my students, but I never expected it to translate into something like math.”

This story was shared by the classroom teacher two months after Father Doucet attended Seedschool.

“Taking the time to learn one’s story can change your perspective on how they live their life.”

-Seedschool Parent Volunteer

“I used to think I understood why people go homeless. Now I know that they make mistakes in life and some lose their dignity.” -Seedschool Student

LAKE BONAVISTA SCHOOL

Lake Bonavista School brought 3 classes of grade 5/6 students to explore their question “ask yourself...who tells the stories, who benefits from the stories, and who is missing from the stories?”. Prior to their week at Seedschool, Lake Bonavista organized a donation drive where they were able to donate **approximately 90 stuffed socks, filled with hygiene items**. During their week at Seedschool, students were able to expand their knowledge about basic needs, and what organizations (both big and small) offer support. They explored ways how even as a grade 5/6 student, they can make a difference in their own communities to make sure the basic needs of everyone are met and supported.

Additionally, each class had an opportunity to learn more about the stories of some of The Mustard Seed staff and

those of some clients they have worked with. Students ended the week with sharing part of their own unique story and collaborating to create an art response that wove all students’ stories together.

When asked in a post-survey “what is one thing you learned at Seedschool that will stick with you?”, students from Lake Bonavista School were able to recognize the struggle many people face to meet their basic needs, and how easily one can end up experiencing homelessness. Students developed a deeper understanding of empathy, the importance of eye contact and not making judgments before you get to know a person’s story. They also discovered that many people experiencing homelessness are kind and resilient, and that there is a need for community resources that help people meet their basic needs.



“The experience for me at Seedschool was so eye opening. It is an excellent opportunity to bring more knowledge about homelessness/poverty and how we can help give back. Thank you so much for allowing us to come for the week and be a part of something so amazing! Spread love not hate <3”

-Seedschool Parent Volunteer

“[Seedschool] continued to build my understanding of how to support my students in learning that they can have a positive impact on others/vulnerable populations. Also, gave me better language and approach when teaching about it.”

-Seedschool Teacher

“I learned that just because someone is experiencing poverty or homelessness it doesn’t mean that they don’t deserve to be treated well and that they aren’t really nice people”

-Seedschool Student

ST. BRIGID SCHOOL

The grade 5 students from St. Brigid School came to Seedschool wanting to explore the question, “how can living a life of gratitude cultivate empathy towards others?”. They learned about the importance of public spaces being safe and welcoming for all who use them. As they had the opportunity to visit several spaces, students gathered ideas to create their own designs that reflected an understanding of the importance of these areas for all citizens. The St. Brigid students also learned about issues that are a struggle for many daily, including the challenges of living on a lower income and how this can lead to difficulty around such things as securing food. Their empathy and understanding of these issues led the students to collect food donations from their school community to help support people living in the inner city of Calgary. With these donations, students put together **approximately 130 snack packs**, and also **donated food to the Beltline Fridge**. Prior to their week at Seedschool, students also participated in a community walk fundraiser, Coldest Night of the Year, where they **fundraised \$132** for The Mustard Seed.

When asked in a post-survey “what is one thing you learned at Seedschool that will stick with you?”, students from St. Brigid School learned that homelessness and poverty are



complex issues, and often not a matter of choice. Students gained an understanding of hostile design and its impact, along with the importance of having shelters and community pantries for people to access. A key takeaway for students was the importance of showing empathy and helping others, recognizing that everyone has a story and is deserving of respect.



“I learned that everyone has a different story no matter who or what.”

-Seedschool Student

“I feel bad [for people experiencing homelessness] and I think about being in their shoes and the struggles.”

-Seedschool Student

“This week has really lit a spark in me as an educator.”

-Seedschool Teacher



BOWCROFT SCHOOL

The grade 5/6 students from Bowcroft School came to Seedschool wanting to learn “what is community, and how do I fit into it?”. They explored the services of The Mustard Seed as well as other organizations in the Beltline and Downtown community that provide support to individuals struggling to meet their basic needs, including Elements Mental Health and Good Neighbour, where students **donated hygiene items**. Students completed an extensive exploration of the Central Library and learned about how this public space is a community on its own, supporting all individuals no matter their challenges or struggles.

When asked in a post-survey “what is one thing you learned at Seedschool that will stick with you?”, students from Bowcroft School learned the importance of showing empathy and kindness, recognizing that everyone has



unseen struggles in life and shouldn't be judged until you know their story. Students gained an understanding of poverty, and the difficulties adults make when managing finances. Students also highlighted how many organizations, like Elements Mental Health, Good Neighbour, and The Mustard Seed are dedicated to helping people by meeting their basic needs.

“Everyone is going through something you might not know about so always be kind” that will always stay with me.”

-Seedschool Student

“I think this: everyone is human, even homeless people. So be kind, everyone needs love-they are just people. Respect them as you would any person.”

-Seedschool Student

“Everyone has their own story and should be allowed to ask for help when, and if, they need it.”

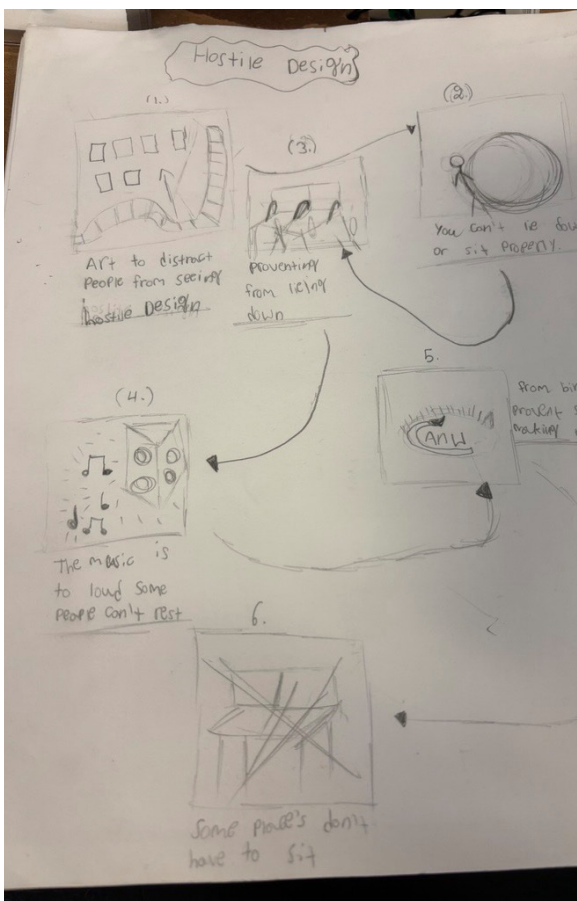
-Seedschool Student

PRAIRIE SKY SCHOOL

While at Seedschool, all 3 classes of grade 7 students at Prairie Sky School learned more about “how can we cultivate genuine empathy for others in a global community and how can this empathy drive change in ourselves and others?”. The students learned more about how stereotypes and prejudice can interfere with one’s ability to be empathetic. Students gained a better understanding of how taxes are collected and how these funds are used to support citizens of all ages. These students also met with their City of Calgary Councillor, Raj Dhaliwal. Councillor Dhaliwal emphasized how the students can use their own empathy to drive change within their own community and how these changes can lead to the betterment of the lives of their own friends and neighbours. During their week of Seedschool, each class visited the Beltline Fridge, where they **donated food** and one class put together **approximately 35 snack packs** for clients of The Mustard Seed.

When asked in a post-survey “what is one thing you learned at Seedschool that will stick with you?”, students from Prairie Sky School demonstrated a transformative shift in their understanding of

homelessness, dismantling harmful stereotypes by realizing people experiencing homelessness are not inherently lazy, dangerous, uneducated, or addicted to substances, but rather individuals with diverse backstories. Students gained empathy by understanding the financial stresses adults face, including managing bills and understanding taxes. They also learned about the impact of hostile design, and how small acts of kindness can make a difference.



“Seedschool has given students first-hand experience and understanding of what life is like for those experiencing homelessness. The experience developed empathy and helped students to connect with ideas outside their normal perspective.”

-Seedschool Teacher

“There are many things people can do to support people experiencing homelessness. These simple things can benefit a lot. I feel that this will stick with me because it shows how such a small thing can help another person.”

-Seedschool Student

“At Seedschool, I learned lots of meaningful lessons that really impacted and changed me for the better. I used to believe that all people experiencing homelessness were dangerous and lazy. These stereotypes are far off from the truth and now I can be more empathetic to those experiencing homelessness.”

-Seedschool Student

SURVEY RESULTS

When asked at the end of their Seedschool week “this is what I think about people experiencing homelessness”, students expressed a profound sense of empathy and a transformed perspective towards those experiencing homelessness. Students developed an understanding of the intersection of trauma, difficult life circumstances, and systemic issues many people experiencing homelessness face. They also recognized that many are actively trying to improve their situations despite facing barriers, and that stereotypes about laziness, addiction, or danger are largely untrue. Many students said they feel deep sadness and desire for change, advocating for more resources and support, and stressing the importance of treating everyone with kindness, respect, and having a non-judgmental attitude. They acknowledged that every person has a unique story, reinforcing that homelessness can happen to anyone and that a simple gesture like a smile or asking for their story can make a difference.

“I’ve realized how important perspective is. This experience has showed me the many facets of homelessness and how there are so many factors that play into someone’s backstory.”

-Seedschool Student

“People experiencing homelessness have different backgrounds, situations, needs, and desires. We shouldn’t generalize them with stereotypes.”

-Seedschool Student

When asked at the end of their Seedschool week “this is what I think about people experiencing poverty”, students demonstrated empathy and understanding, recognizing them as individuals facing immense financial hardship often beyond their control. Students learned that poverty could affect anyone and often stems from systemic issues like insufficient minimum wage, rather than personal failings or poor decisions. Responses showed that students understood how living paycheck-to-paycheck can affect one’s ability to afford basic needs, and that those experiencing poverty are resilient and hard-working individuals striving to maintain stability for themselves and their families. Many felt a strong desire to offer support and resources, emphasizing that people experiencing poverty are “normal people” who deserve respect, kindness, and opportunities to improve their circumstances, rather than judgment or negative stereotypes.

“I think that we as a society should invest more time and resources into them because they are trying their hardest in a system that works against them. I think that they’re the strongest and most resilient people.”

-Seedschool Student

“We don’t realize how many people may be experiencing poverty and how easy it is to become someone who is struggling to make ends meet.”

-Seedschool Student

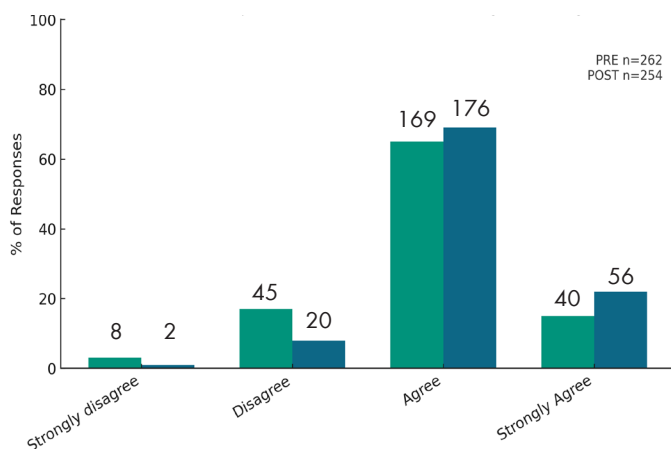
“A week ago I would have said someone that maybe didn’t go to school or get proper education. Now I know poverty can happen to anyone and budgeting can be very difficult and overall being able to afford basic needs.”

-Seedschool Student

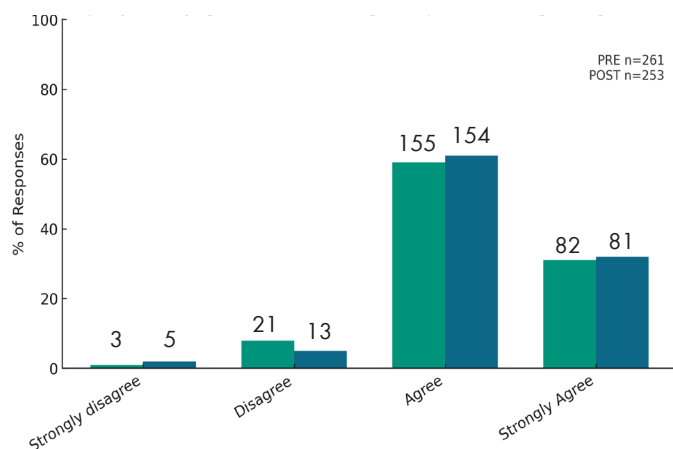
SURVEY RESULTS

PRE POST

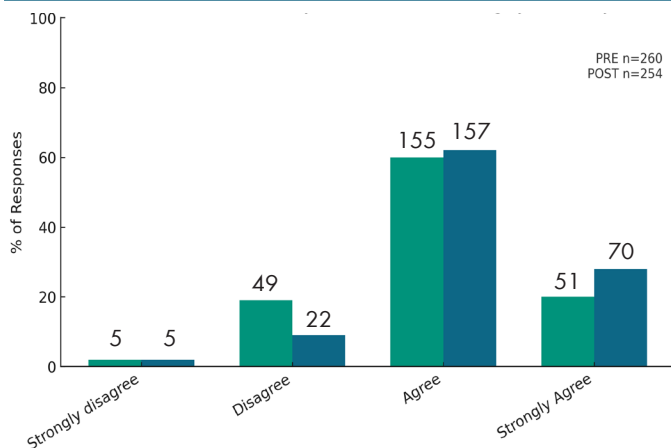
Q4 | I feel empowered to make a difference in my community.



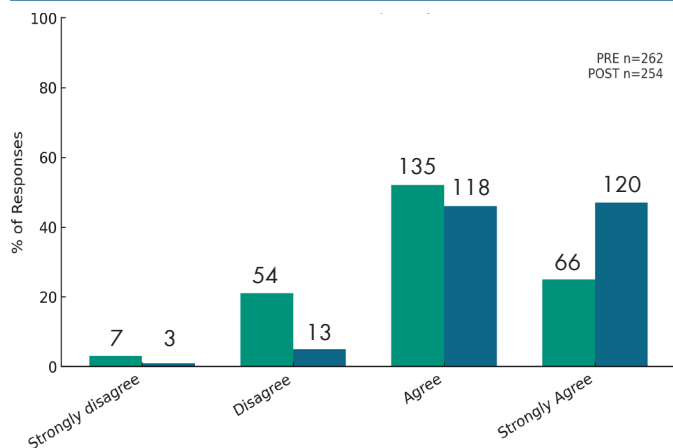
Q5 | I demonstrate empathy (identifying with or understanding the experience, feelings, thoughts, or attitudes of another).



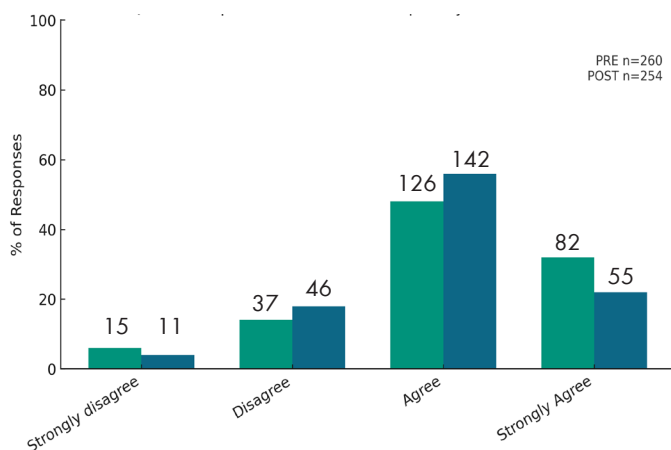
Q6 | I feel connected to my school and the wider Calgary community.



Q7 | I understand what causes poverty and homelessness.



Q8 | I feel inspired to learn more about poverty and homelessness.



EXPERTS

Alnasir Rawji

Beltline Neighbourhood Fridge: Nate Cordery

Calgary Arts Development: Alex Lingnau

Calgary Food Bank: Leanna Heckel

Calgary Municipal Land Corporation: Filip Jaworski,
Joanna Pesta

Calgary Youth Justice Society: Danae Pritchard

CanLearn Society: Laura Godfrey

Chris B.

City of Calgary: Councillor Courtney Walcott, Councillor
Raj Dhaliwal

Elements Calgary Mental Health Centre: Maria Ochitwa,
Sara Sibrian

Good Neighbour YYC: Alice Lam

Kelvin P.

Leon B.

The Mustard Seed: Abselom E., Autumn S., Bill N.,
Caleb B., Camille H., Curt G., Eric M., Shannon E.,
Tania H., Toni B., Trudi M.

PARTNERS

Campus Calgary/ Open Minds: Jennifer Meredith, Natasha
McKay, Marta Albertin

SPONSORS:

Adrian Burns Family Foundation

BMO Financial Group

*"Thank you for EVERYTHING! It was an
unforgettable experience."*

-Seedschool Teacher

*"I can't shut my brain off after this week, the words
from [one of the guest speakers]: 'what will
your legacy be?' really stuck with me. What can
we do now to support those in our
immediate community?"*

-Seedschool Teacher

*"What a beautiful display of HOPE in teaching this
young generation of the stories that are
part of a bigger story towards change, second
chances, transformation, growth, and
spreading love to make a difference in people's lives.
Thank you so much to the teams and staff
involved. Excellent curriculum and such touching
stories shared. Thank you <3"*

-Seedschool Parent Volunteer

CONCLUSION

Seedschool continues to consistently provide students and adults alike with the opportunity to learn from diverse groups of people. For many students, a week of Seedschool provides them with a chance to see parts of downtown they never have before, and to learn from people from different walks of life and career paths. Seedschool helps students feel empowered to make a difference in their community as they grow in understanding. Many Seedschool classes are inspired to host fundraisers, clothing drives, food drives, or conduct research projects to further their learning and impact their communities. Overall, Seedschool is a critical program in Calgary and leaves participants with a new-found sense of perspective, empathy, compassion, and ambition to make changes in our city so everyone can feel welcome and included.

*"We (students and teachers) see the importance and value
of this week. The impact is indescribable...bigger than we know."*

-Seedschool Teacher

The Mustard Seed

Hope Grows Here.



TheSeed.ca

