

## DRAFT CSBA DISCUSSION PAPER

### KEY CONTRIBUTING FACTORS TO HIGH SCHOOL COMPLETION RATES

This paper will summarize key factors that are consistent among high school drop-outs, for example literacy skills, employment, socioeconomic status, as well as those that are gender specific.

The factor that stands out as the most important indicator of success is reading literacy. It has a strong impact on high school completion even after taking into account all the other above mentioned factors (2).

Canada's drop-out rate has been on the decline. Since 1990-1991, Canada's drop out rate has fallen from 16.7% to 9.8% (7).

Regardless of this impressive decline, almost 1 in 10 Canadian students do not

graduate from high school. Furthermore, Canada's provincial governments measure completion rates differently, usually measuring completion in four years: which often takes drop out rates to 15% of not 25% in some regions.

No matter the measurement issue, the provincial member associations of the Canadian School Boards Association consider this serious issue but most of all, believe we can improve completion rates.

We first targeted the identification of factors that are consistent among drop-outs.

Successive papers will address tactics and best practices.

#### LITERACY

- According to Statistics Canada, literacy scores of Canadian drop-outs are significantly lower than those of students who complete high school (1).
- Male graduates have an average literacy score of 271.3 compared to male drop-outs who scored an average score of 238.8 (1).
- Female graduates scored an average score of 275.3 while drop-outs scored an average of 236.4 (1).<sup>1</sup>
- Statistics Canada research has shown that students who had low literacy scores at age 15 were more likely to have dropped out by age 19. (2)
- This Youth in Transition survey gave students a reading proficiency score ranging from 1 to 5. Almost all of the students with a reading proficiency level of 4 or 5 graduated from high school by age 19. (2)

- As reading proficiency scores decreased so did the percentage of students who graduated. (2)
- 87% of students with level 3 reading proficiency graduated. (2)
- This decreased to 77% of students with level 2 proficiency and 67% of students with level 1. (2)

#### EMPLOYMENT

- Students who worked between 1 and 20 hours / week were the least likely to drop out. (3)
- Students who worked more than 30 hours / week were 4 times more likely to drop out than those working 1-20 hours.
- Students who did not work at all were 1.5 times more likely to drop-out. (3)
- 44% of drop-outs who worked more than 30 hours a week stated wanting to work or wanting to earn money as their reason for dropping out. (3)

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<sup>1</sup> These scores are taken from the Survey of Literacy Skills used in Daily Activities (LSUDA) in 1989. The LSUDA literacy scores range from 0-500 with students who scored below 160 considered fundamentally illiterate (1).

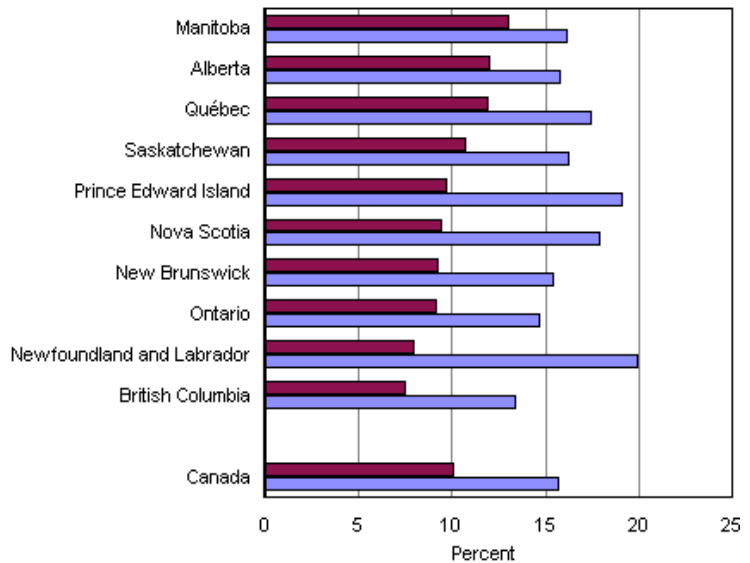
**SOCIO-ECONOMIC FACTORS AND PARENT’S EDUCATION**

- Students from low income households were more likely to drop out (4).
- 25% of students whose parents dropped out do not complete (6).
- 14.0% of students whose parents completed high school but ended their schooling there do not complete. (6)
- 7.7% of student’s whose parents graduated have some post-secondary education. (6)
- 7.4% of students whose parents graduated from a post secondary institution do not complete. (6)
- Parents of graduates have 2.4 - 2.9 more years of schooling than those of drop-outs (1).

**REGIONAL DIFFERENCES**

16.4% of rural students do not complete high school compared to 9.2% of students in metropolitan areas. This is especially evident in rural Quebec and Alberta where 20% of 20-24 year olds have not completed high school (7).<sup>2</sup>

*Graph on the right = High School Drop outs as a % of all 20-24 year olds*



**LANGUAGE**

- 16.7% of those who spoke French as a first language did not graduate
- 18.2 of those who spoke another language (6) dropped out

**GENDER**

- 16.9% of males drop out vs 9.3% of females (6).
- Young men are more likely to cite work as their reason for leaving.
- Young women are more likely to cite personal / family reasons ie: pregnancy or childcare. (4)

**REFERENCES**

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3. “Relationship between working while in high school and dropping out” The Daily May 26, 2003.
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5. “Youth in Transition Survey” The Daily, January 23, 2002.
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<sup>2</sup> Quebec has a different school system and has a disproportionately high rate of students who go straight to college without a gap in between(6). Quebec has a lower proportion of students who only receive a high school diploma - 9.5%