



# Learning to Know

## HIGH-SCHOOL DROPOUT RATE

### WHAT IS IT?

The proportion of Canadians aged 20 to 24 who have not completed high school and are not attending school, according to Statistics Canada's Labour Force Survey. This indicator demonstrates the degree to which young Canadians have a minimum level of education required for the challenges of the adult workplace.

### WHY IS IT IMPORTANT TO LEARNING IN CANADA?

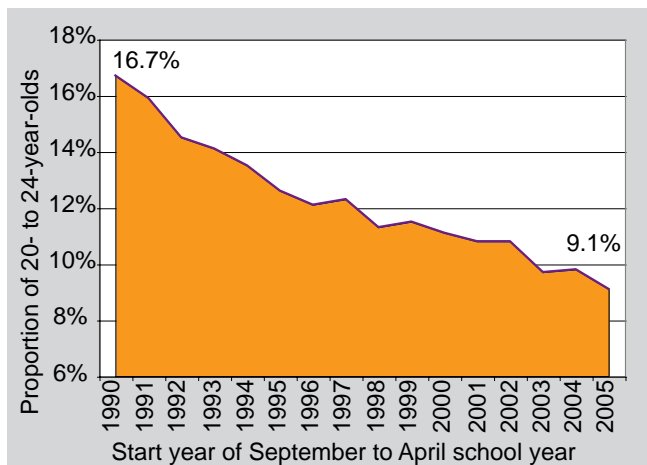
High-school completion benefits individual Canadians and the country as a whole. Research shows that high-school graduates are more easily employable, can choose from a wider selection of jobs and earn more money than those who leave school before getting their diploma.

Research also shows there are health benefits: high-school graduates make fewer visits to physicians and are more aware of what it takes to live a healthy lifestyle.

### CANADA'S HIGH-SCHOOL DROPOUT RATE HAS SIGNIFICANTLY DECLINED OVER THE PAST 15 YEARS

Since the 1990–1991 school year, Canada's high-school dropout rate has decreased by almost 50%. According to Statistics Canada, the rate dropped steadily from nearly 17% to just over 9% in the 2005–2006 school year (see Chart 1).

CHART 1: HIGH-SCHOOL DROPOUT RATE, 20- TO 24-YEAR-OLDS, 1990–1991 TO 2005–2006



Source: Statistics Canada, Labour Force Survey

### YOUNG MEN, YOUTH IN SMALL TOWNS AND RURAL AREAS, MORE LIKELY TO DROP OUT OF HIGH SCHOOL

Despite the significant decline in Canada's high-school dropout rates over the years, some troubling trends remain unchanged. Over the past 15 years, men aged 20 to 24 have shown consistently higher dropout rates than women in the same age range. For example, in the 1990–1991 school year 19% of young men had not completed high school, compared with 14% of young women. In the 2005–2006 school year, the dropout rate for young men was 11%, while the rate for young women was 7%.

According to Statistics Canada's Youth in Transition Survey, male dropouts cited dissatisfaction with school and a desire to enter the labour force as key factors in their decision to leave high school early.

A disparity also exists between the high-school dropout rates for Canada's cities and the rates for small towns and rural communities. During the 2005–2006 school year, the dropout rate for small towns and rural areas was 15%—or nearly double the rate of large cities (see Table 1).

TABLE 1: HIGH-SCHOOL DROPOUT RATE, 20- TO 24-YEAR-OLDS, SCHOOL YEAR AVERAGE FROM 2002-2003 TO 2005-2006

|                           | Total (Average) | Large Cities* | Small towns | Rural areas |
|---------------------------|-----------------|---------------|-------------|-------------|
| Canada                    | 9.5             | 8.5           | 14.9        | 16.6        |
| Newfoundland and Labrador | 8.9             | 6.4           | 11.1        | 13.1        |
| Prince Edward Island      | 8.9             | 7.1           | 11.6        | 11.8        |
| Nova Scotia               | 8.5             | 6.9           | 13.7        | 12.0        |
| New Brunswick             | 9.4             | 7.7           | 11.7        | 12.2        |
| Quebec                    | 11.3            | 10.0          | 19.0        | 18.5        |
| Ontario                   | 8.4             | 7.8           | 13.2        | 14.9        |
| Manitoba                  | 12.6            | 10.5          | 16.5        | 21.0        |
| Saskatchewan              | 10.3            | 8.9           | 11.4        | 16.8        |
| Alberta                   | 11.3            | 9.9           | 17.0        | 21.7        |
| British Columbia          | 7.4             | 6.7           | 12.6        | 17.3        |

\*Census Metropolitan Areas (CMA) and Census Agglomerations (CA)  
Source: Statistics Canada, Labour Force Survey

**FURTHER PROGRESS NEEDED FOR CANADA TO IMPROVE ITS INTERNATIONAL STANDING IN HIGH-SCHOOL COMPLETION**

Recent research shows that Canada’s high-school dropout rate is significantly better than that of the United States, Germany and France. But we still trail nine European countries, including Switzerland, the United Kingdom and the Czech Republic—in fact, Canada’s dropout rate was more than twice that of Norway, which ranked No. 1.<sup>1</sup>

*Despite significant improvements over the last two decades, there remains a significant gap in high-school attainment rates between Aboriginal people and non-Aboriginal people in Canada. In 2001, the proportion of Aboriginal people aged 20 to 24 who had not completed high school was more than 2.5 times higher than non-Aboriginal Canadians.*

*For an examination of the challenges facing Aboriginal learners, please see Chapter 5 from CCL’s 2007 report titled State of Learning in Canada: No Time for Complacency, available at [www.ccl-cca.ca/solr](http://www.ccl-cca.ca/solr).*

TABLE 2: HIGH-SCHOOL DROPOUT RATES BY COUNTRY, 2002

| Country              | Dropout Rates |
|----------------------|---------------|
| Norway (2003)        | 4.6%          |
| Slovak Republic      | 5.5%          |
| Czech Republic       | 5.9%          |
| United Kingdom       | 8.0%          |
| Switzerland          | 8.4%          |
| Poland               | 8.4%          |
| Sweden               | 8.6%          |
| Austria              | 9.9%          |
| Finland              | 10.1%         |
| Canada               | 10.9%         |
| United States (2001) | 12.3%         |
| Germany              | 14.2%         |
| France               | 14.5%         |
| Australia            | 18.5%         |

Source: OECD INES-Network B, Special YALLE data collection. As presented in de Broucker, Patrice. *Without a Paddle: What to do About Canada’s Young Dropouts* (Ottawa: Canadian Policy Research Networks, 2005)

The steady overall decline in dropout rates over the past 15 years implies that young Canadians are placing an increased value on completing high school. Yet dropout rates remain disproportionately high among young Canadian males and youth living in small towns and rural communities. In order to continue our progress in this area, Canada should target these populations of young people with assistance and encouragement.

1 de Broucker, Patrice. *Without a Paddle: What to do about Canada’s Young Dropouts* (Ottawa: Canadian Policy Research Networks, 2005).