Annotated Bibliography

EARLY SCHOOL LEAVING PREVENTION

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Pathways
to Education

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About Pathways to Education Canada
Pathways to Education is a national, charitable organization breaking the cycle of poverty through education. Its award-winning program is creating positive social change by supporting youth living in low-income communities to overcome barriers to education, graduate from high school, and build the foundation for a successful future. Through the collective power of partnerships, Pathways to Education's innovative program is preparing youth for tomorrow.

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Early School Leaving Prevention

Early school leaving refers to leaving high school before satisfying all graduation requirements, i.e. "dropping out". This annotated bibliography presents several seminal publications on early school leaving, including studies that focus on prevention and youth re-engagement.

The aim of this annotated bibliography is not to offer an exhaustive and comprehensive collection of all relevant studies. Instead, we present a modest introduction, designed for those seeking an overview of this complex topic, a refresher, or a resource upon which to build more detailed and nuanced knowledge.

This resource was developed for professionals who support the academic success and positive development of young people living in contexts of risk and disadvantage. This includes professionals who work directly with youth, such as mentors, educators, child and youth workers, social workers, and front-line staff in school-based and out-of-school youth programs. This resource will also be of interest to those who work indirectly with or for youth: youth mentoring program managers, school administrators, or youth researchers.

This bibliography emerged from our own internal research on early school leaving, conducted in the context of program measurement, improvement, and impact assessment efforts. It has helped Pathways to Education Canada better understand this complex field and translate our knowledge into effective programming for youth furthest from opportunities. We share it here in the hopes that it will have similar impact in other youth-serving programs.

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Acker, C., & Rowen, N. (2014). Creating hope, opportunity, and results for disadvantaged youth. Part III. *The Canadian Journal of Career Development*, 13(2), 76–103.

This is the final article in a three-part series about the Pathways to Education program. Parts I and II discussed the background, context, development, challenges, successes, results, and impacts of the Pathways to Education Program. This article focuses on lessons learned. It presents successful practices of the program, program design, and the implications for students, communities, and research.

Among the various lessons discussed are: employing a comprehensive range of supports, focusing on building relationships between the youth and staff, emphasizing program measurement and evaluation, the role of community vs. school-based supports, commitment to social justice, clarity of vision and purpose, long-term commitment to the community and its youth, using action research to develop the program, and building partnerships to create a network of resources and support. The authors conclude with a brief discussion of key challenges and questions going forward.

Alexander, K., Entwisle, D., & Kabbani, N. (2001). The dropout process in life course perspective: Early risk factors at home and school. *Teachers College Record*, 103(5), 760–822.

Using a life course view of dropping out, this paper examines the long-term process of disengaging from school, using data from a sample of youth living in contexts of risk in Baltimore. The researchers explore young people's high school graduation prospects in relation to resources and experiences in the years before high school. The study presents a sociodemographic profile of early leavers, which reveals that high school non-completion rates varied according to different constellations of risk factors. Risk factors and supportive resources are examined in the first grade, grades 2 to 5, grades 6 to 8, and grade 9. There is evidence that academic, parental, and personal resources have a cumulative effect in moderating the risk of early school leaving, and that resources measured early in schooling are almost as predictive of non-completion as those measured later. Young people's behaviours were consequential to non-completion early in the

process. However, student attitudes were not important until much later. The implications of this are discussed, as it is counter to much of the literature on schooling and social inequality.

Allensworth, E. M., & Easton, J. Q. (2007). *What matters for staying on track and graduating in Chicago public high schools.* **Consortium on Chicago School Research at the University of Chicago.**

This research report uses data from Chicago public schools, and builds on earlier research demonstrating an association between failing classes in the first year of high school and leaving early. The report examines various aspects of course performance during grade 9 (such as students' course failures, absences, and overall grades) that are predictive of having a successful first year and, therefore, predictive of whether or not students will complete high school. First, the authors examine how personal and school factors contribute to performance in the first year of high school and how performance is related to graduation. Next, the report demonstrates that course performance data can help identify students that are most likely to graduate and to leave early. Additionally, the utility of various performance indicators is discussed. The report shows that coursework success is more influenced by what students do while they are in high school than by their preparation for high school and their backgrounds. Finally, the authors present evidence that teachers and schools can have an impact on course performance, and offer suggestions for schools and families to prevent teens from leaving school without a diploma.

Centre for Promise: America's Promise Alliance. (2014). *Don't call them dropouts: Understanding the experiences of young people who leave high school before graduation.* **Washington, DC.**

This study investigates the circumstances that prompt youth to leave high school early, what effects leaving high school has on them and their families, why youth return to school, what opportunities youth have to re-engage after leaving school, and what barriers they face along the way. The authors analyzed over 200 interviews and 3,000 surveys to come to four interrelated key findings: 1) It is clusters of factors, rather than a single event, that lead youth to disengage from school; 2) Youth who leave high school are likely to live in toxic environments characterized by

violence, and experience adverse health events or unsupportive school environments; 3) Connectedness to others such as teachers or family members can be both a risk or protective factor, depending on the nature of the relationship; 4) Resilience is necessary for daily coping, but insufficient for longer-term positive development. Thriving requires "consistent support from people and places that combine caring connections with the capacity to help them navigate around obstacles" (Executive Summary, p. 3). Additionally, the report presents five conclusions and five recommendations.

Centre for Promise: America's Promise Alliance. (2015). *Don't quit on me: What young people who left school say about the power of relationships.*

Building upon the "Don't Call Them Dropouts" study (Centre for Promise: America's Promise Alliance, 2014) this report uses young people's perspectives to examine the influence of relationships with peers and adults on staying in, leaving, and returning to high school. The four main findings are: 1) Too many young people are facing too many hurdles to graduation with too little help (seven primary threats to graduation are also discussed in this section); 2) Relationships matter, but their importance to graduation varies by type, source, and intensity of support; 3) Support buffers the effect of adversity on graduation, but young people facing the greatest adversity need more intensive support than family, school, and friends can typically provide; 4) Young people are more likely to graduate if they have access to an anchoring relationship and a web of supportive relationships. The authors present four recommendations for individuals, five recommendations for schools, and five recommendations for communities.

Dupéré, V., Dion, E., Leventhal, T., Archambault, I., Crosnoe, R., & Janosz, M. (2017). High school dropout in proximal context: The triggering role of stressful life events. *Child Development.* **doi:10.1111/cdev.12792.**

This study examines the immediate circumstances which trigger the process of early school leaving. Specifically, it examines if experiencing one or more severe stressors precipitates early school leaving over and above, or in interaction with, existing vulnerabilities, such as low socio-economic status, gender, or

level of parental education. Three groups of Canadian high school students were compared: recent non-completers, matched "at-risk" students who remained in school, and average students. The percentage of each group exposed to mild, moderate, and severe stressors was assessed using questionnaires and interviews. The study found that for students who left school early, the frequency of severe stressors spiked within three months prior to leaving, compared to the other two groups. Recent exposure to severe stressors was strongly associated with early school leaving even after accounting for background characteristics and vulnerabilities. Additionally, stressors not caused by the youth themselves were also associated with early school leaving. The theoretical, practical, and policy implications are discussed.

Dynarski, M., Clarke, L., Cobb, B., Finn, J., Rumberger, R., & Smink, J. (2008). *Dropout prevention: IES practice guide* **(NCEE 2008-4025). Washington, DC, National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance, Institute of Education Sciences, U.S.**

This practice guide presents evidence-based recommendations to reduce non-completion rates, and is intended for use by educators in high schools and middle schools, superintendents, school boards, and policy makers. To develop the recommendations, first the authors gathered and reviewed studies that evaluated the impacts of dropout prevention programs, then identified the key components of individual interventions, and finally identified features which were common to multiple interventions.

There are six recommendations, divided into three categories: diagnostic, targeted interventions, and school-wide interventions. Additionally, the level of evidence for each recommendation is categorized as strong, moderate, or low. The authors also include a checklist for carrying out the recommendations.

The recommendations are to: 1) Utilize data systems that support a realistic diagnosis of the number of students who leave early and that help identify individual students at high risk of leaving early; 2) Assign adult advocates to students at risk of dropping out; 3) Provide academic support and enrichment to improve academic performance; 4) Implement programs to improve students' classroom behaviour and social skills; 5) Personalize the learning environment and instructional process, and 6) Provide rigorous and relevant instruction to better engage students in learning and

provide the skills needed to graduate and to serve them after they leave school.

Tilleczek, K., Ferguson, B., Roth Edney, D., Rummens, A., Boydell, K., & Mueller, M. (2011). A contemporary study with early school leavers: Pathways and social processes of leaving high school. *Canadian Journal of Family and Youth,* **3(1), 1–39.**

This article examines early school leaving in Ontario, Canada, by presenting data from the Ontario Early School Leavers Study (OESLS). The OESLS explored the perspectives of 193 young people who left school prior to graduating, along with the perspectives of 71 parents and educators. This article presents new analyses which illustrate key social processes in early school leaving. It discusses the common aspects, social processes, and pathways to early school leaving for the 193 early leavers.

The findings indicate three pathways to early school leaving: 1) 42% were 'starting from scratch' (i.e. youth who encountered multiple risk situations in various domains), 2) 28% were 'mostly protected' (i.e. youth who had many encounters with protective situations in various domains), and 3) 30% were 'in-between'(i.e. youth who encountered both risk and protective situations and factors at many levels). The article also outlines various risk and protective situations that youth encounter on their pathways to early school leaving or graduation. The risk situations include poverty, low socioeconomic status, the need to take on adult roles, region or community, academic and social disengagement, negative relations with families and/or school personnel, inflexible or unsupportive school structures). Protective situations include the following: supportive families, parents, and teachers; caring, flexible, and proactive schools; self determination.

Wilkins, J., & Bost, L. W. (2015). Dropout prevention in middle and high schools: From research to practice. *Intervention in School and Clinic,* **51(5), 267–275.**

This article presents nine school-based interventions which have shown to be successful in increasing high school graduation rates for students with emotional, behavioural or learning disabilities. This review draws on syntheses of research regarding dropout prevention interventions for students with disabilities. It also offers recommendations for state departments of education, local

education agencies, and schools.

The interventions described are: a) early warning systems, b) mentoring, c) family engagement, d) academic interventions, e) transition to high school, f) student engagement, g) career-focused/vocational curricula, h) interpersonal skills, and i) class/school restructuring. The authors also present various strategies or recommendations for each intervention.

Zaff, J. F., Donlan, A., Gunning, A., Anderson, S. E., McDermott, E., & Sedaca, M. (2016). Factors that promote high school graduation: A review of the literature. *Educational Psychology Review*. **doi: 10.1007/s10648-016-9363-5**

In order to determine factors that promote high school graduation, the authors conducted an extensive review of the literature regarding high school graduation in the United States from the past 25 years. They used a Positive Youth Development framework in combination with ecological systems theories to review 250 journal articles and reports, beginning with identifying risk factors that promote early school leaving, and then using them to identify the positive factors that promote graduation.

This article presents 12 interconnected predictors of graduation and continued enrolment, grouped into five categories based on the most important domains of adolescent life: individual characteristics (intrinsic motivation, school engagement, youth expectations for academic attainment, and having an internal locus of control); relationships with family (parental academic involvement, parent-child connection); relationships with peers (positive peer norms); school environment (positive student-teacher relationships, school-sponsored extracurricular activities, small schools, and career and technical education); and community (participation in community-based out-of-school time programs). The authors also discuss practical implications of their findings.

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