

# Early School Leavers in the Chaudière- Appalaches Region of Quebec

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## KEYWORDS

dropout, Québec, dropout prevention, student voice

## RESEARCH SUMMARY

### DESCRIPTION

This study sought to explore the experiences and reflections of early school leavers, their parents, and youth workers in the Chaudière-Appalaches region of Quebec. Using focus group discussions, the authors attempted to capture the voices of students, parents, and support workers. The authors analyzed these responses in order to provide the local government with better information on how to increase student retention to reduce the dropout rate, which stood at 10.3% for girls, 17.2% for boys and 13.6% overall in 2011 (Institut de la statistique du Québec, 2014).

### METHODOLOGY

The study investigated why some students, in the region of Chaudière-Appalaches, leave school early without obtaining a diploma. The sample included 249 participants from four distinct groups: students still in school, students who left without obtaining a diploma, parents of youth at risk of dropping out, and youth workers in the region. 37 semi-structured focus group discussions were carried out with participants who were grouped together based on age and experience with the school system. For example, a group of former students who left school early was grouped separately from students currently labelled “at-risk” by the authors. Responses were then coded.

### KEY FINDINGS

- Parental and supportive adult relationships were consistently mentioned as being the most significant factors in a decision to stay or leave: “My Dad wanted me to get good marks and find a good job afterwards. He didn’t want me to take the same road as he did. He never graduated high school” (p. 21).\*
- Some students alluded to the support they received through community-based programs with volunteer tutors. They stated that although their parents were supportive, they lacked the ability to help out with their homework. Thus, having capable tutors provided an additional layer of support.

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\* All translations by Pathways to Education Canada

- Many of the responses from students who left early without obtaining a diploma indicated that outside influences, such as working full-time, attracted them away from school: “I waited until I was 16 to go off and work, and it was worth my while. I was 16 and making \$400 a week” (p. 24). The students said that they gradually lost the motivation to be in a classroom and decided to apply themselves outside of school.
- Respondents also shared their thoughts as to what helps keep students in school:
  - » Youth workers and parents emphasized the crucial nature of the teacher-student relationship: “The teacher must be able to engage the students as well as give them a good sense of what it is that they are trying to teach them” (p. 32).
  - » Both youth workers and parents said that establishing clear goals was key to keeping students motivated: “That each student feels that they are competent is very important: they must see that they can succeed. Moreover, if they apply themselves, they can accomplish something” (p. 33).

#### WHY THIS MATTERS

This research provides valuable context to help understand the high school dropout rate in Quebec – one of the highest in Canada. Each young person responds differently to his or her local school environment and this, in turn, affects the decision to stay or leave. It is therefore imperative that educators, policy-makers, and youth-serving organizations gain insight as to why youth leave high school early and come to an understanding of the reasons within the local context. To this end, this study provided a platform for regional youth to share their experiences and offers exactly the type of local insight that may otherwise be difficult to obtain. Lastly, the study shows the benefit of having well-established community programs that provide additional resources for students.

#### RECAP

- Having a support network of positive role models was crucial for youth in this community. This is especially the case if the youth do not respond well to the school environment, which can be difficult to change. Outside resources are therefore important to counteract anything within the school environment that might be having a negative influence.
- Having more than one person or group to approach with questions is also important. The authors suggest: “Parents, family members, and teachers are at the heart of each student’s support network, and therefore their success in school” (p. 22). This speaks to the importance of having

## ABOUT THIS SUMMARY

This study explores some of the factors that contribute to leaving school early in the Chaudières-Appalaches region of Quebec (south of Quebec City). By using focus groups with youth, their parents, and youth workers, the researchers provided a space where students could share their experiences. The results are important for developing dropout prevention strategies not only in Quebec, but also across Canada.

programs in communities where these relationships may be less strong.

These supportive adults or programs can also remind youth who are considering leaving school early of the long-term economic consequences of leaving.

“This work is not yet complete, other studies are necessary in order to better understand student retention. The success of such an undertaking requires the contribution of multiple stakeholders, including each school setting (from preschool to post-secondary), community organizations, regional ministers, and experienced researchers in the field.”

Gendron, Mélançon, Hébert,  
Frenette, & Simard, 2013

#### APA CITATION

Gendron, M., Mélançon, J., Hébert, M-H., Frenette, E., & Simard, D. (2013). *Persévérance scolaire en chaudière-appalaches : Document synthèse tiré du rapport de recherche psca*. Lévis, QC : Université du Québec à Rimouski – Campus de Lévis.

Institut de la statistique du Québec. (2013). *Regard statistique sur la jeunesse : État et évolution de la situation des québécois âgés de 15 à 29 ans 1996 à 2012*. Institut de la statistique du Québec : Québec.