

# Reasons Behind Early School Leaving in France

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## KEYWORDS

France, dropout, dropout prevention, student engagement, youth programming, academic difficulties

## RESEARCH SUMMARY

### DESCRIPTION

In this study, French researchers sought to better understand why youth leave school early. By interviewing a large sample of early school leavers at a collegiate-level academy south of Paris, the authors created a typology of students who do not complete high school. The five student “types” developed through this research help to better understand the challenges that many students face and the motives behind their decisions not to complete high school.

The authors find that while some students are influenced by outside forces, such as the appeal of joining the labour force, the vast majority of students who leave early do so because of academic or social difficulties within their school.

### METHODOLOGY

Using data from the regional Ministry of Education (Direction générale de l'enseignement scolaire), this study examined the reasons youth leave school early. To be included in the sample, each student had to meet the following criteria:

1. Be at least 16 years old;
2. Have left school early without a diploma;
3. Not be registered in a training program;
4. Not have graduated.

The original file from the Ministry of Education consisted of 13,527 names, of which 4,028 agreed to participate in the study. These students were then interviewed. The authors also devised a 91-question survey to understand each student's decision to leave and their personal circumstances at the time. Most of the questions were open-ended. 23 questions were based on the Likert Scale. The authors then compiled the responses, identified correlations between the students' motives for leaving early, and used these correlations to develop the typology.

### KEY FINDINGS

The primary findings in this study consisted of the authors' typology of early high school leavers. The typology includes the following student “types”:

1. Students who experienced significant academic difficulties (28.6% of respondents). This type consists of students who have difficulties keeping up with academic material and whose learning styles do not fit with the teacher's pedagogy. These students will often return to school after dropping out, but then leave again, due to a variety of factors, such as dislike of the teacher, not fitting in well in class, or being afraid of failure.

2. Students classified as discreet dropouts (21.5% of respondents). This type consists of students who drop out due to illness or pregnancy. They enjoy school, but outside forces make it difficult for them to attend.

3. Students attracted to life outside of school (19.6% of respondents). Unlike students from the first group, these students are not necessarily uncomfortable at school or unable to keep up academically. However, they are more attracted to the labour market than continuing their education.

4. Disengaged students (17.1% of respondents). These students find attending class to be uninteresting. They also cite lack of institutional help in getting them motivated as a reason for their departure.

5. Students rejected by the educational institution (13.3% of respondents). This type of early school leaver consists of students who prefer to enter the labour force because they do not feel connected to the school community.

#### WHY THIS MATTERS

While this research provides useful insights into why students choose not to stay in school, caution should be used in any direct application of the findings in other contexts, including Canada. Nonetheless, there is much to be learned from this study. The typology offered here can help schools, educators, and after-school youth-serving programs better understand student motivations and various forces that pull them away from school.

This study highlights the need to listen to and accurately capture student voices in order to understand the challenges that influence high school students to leave without obtaining a diploma. It also suggests that supports like tutoring and mentoring can assist youth in overcoming academic difficulties, and help them understand the benefits of staying in school.

## ABOUT THIS SUMMARY

This research summary explores why students leave school early, without obtaining a diploma. The authors surveyed over 4,000 students and developed a typology that outlines five distinct types of early school leavers. The typology provides insights into forces that influence young people not to complete high school.

#### RECAP

The study found that those who left school early without a diploma did so primarily because of academic difficulty (28.6% of respondents), followed by those with personal problems that made it difficult for them to attend (21.5% of respondents). These results help to better situate how common it is for students to experience difficulties with highly institutionalized environments, schools in particular.

“Dropout prevention policies are hard-pressed to address the core problems that lead to dropping out: the combination of students’ problems with school rules and with their peers, as well as the commonly expressed sentiment, “how does school benefit me?”\*

\*Translation by Pathways to Education Canada

Bernard & Michaut, 2015

#### APA CITATION

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