

## 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 annual Labour Force Survey. This indicator demonstrates the degree to which young Canadians possess the minimum level of education needed for the challenges of the adult workplace.

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

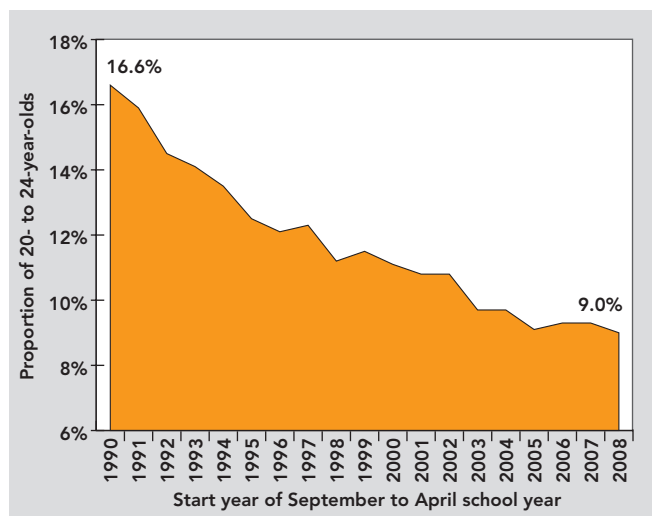
Completing high school benefits the individual and the country as a whole. Research shows that high-school graduates are more employable, have a wider selection of jobs to choose from and earn more money than those who leave school before getting their diploma.

Studies also show that there are potential health benefits: high-school graduates, in general, make fewer visits to physicians and are more knowledgeable about what it takes to live a healthy lifestyle.

### CANADA'S HIGH-SCHOOL DROPOUT RATE HAS SIGNIFICANTLY DECLINED OVER THE PAST 18 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 9% in the 2008–2009 school year (see Chart 1).

**CHART 1:** High-school dropout rate, 20- to 24-year-olds, 1990–1991 to 2008–2009



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 past two decades, some troubling trends remain. Between 1990 and 2008, men aged 20 to 24 have had 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 2008–2009 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 in Canada's cities and the rates for small towns and rural communities. Over the last three years, the average dropout rates for small towns and rural areas were 15% and 16% respectively—which was nearly double the rate of large cities (see Table 1).

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 2006, the proportion of Aboriginal people aged 20 to 24 who had not completed high school was almost three times higher than that of non-Aboriginal Canadians.

Over the past five years CCL has devoted significant time and resources to measuring progress in Aboriginal learning. In 2009, CCL published *The State of Aboriginal Learning in Canada: A Holistic Approach to Measuring Success, the first-ever comprehensive report on the state of learning for First Nations, Inuit and Métis people in Canada*. The report is available at [www.ccl-cca.ca/SAL2009](http://www.ccl-cca.ca/SAL2009).

**TABLE 1: Average high-school dropout rate for 20- to 24-year-olds, from 2006–2007 to 2008–2009 school years**

	Total (average)	Large cities*	Small towns	Rural areas
Canada	9.2%	8.2%	14.7%	15.7%
N.L.	8.0%	6.4%	11.4%	10.1%
P.E.I.	9.4%	8.2%	30%	11.8%
N.S.	9.1%	7%	14.5%	13.6%
N.B.	8.6%	6.8%	9.7%	12.3%
Que.	11.7%	10.6%	16.4%	18.3%
Ont.	8.2%	7.6%	14.7%	12.6%
Man.	12%	9.9%	16.4%	20.8%
Sask.	8.9%	7.8%	12.1%	13.5%
Alta.	10.7%	8.9%	17.1%	22.5%
B.C.	6.4%	5.9%	10.5%	13.2%

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

## CANADA'S HIGH-SCHOOL COMPLETION RATES LAG BEHIND EUROPEAN COUNTRIES

Research shows that Canada's high-school dropout rate is significantly lower than that of the United States, Germany and France. However, we still trail eight European countries, including Finland, the United Kingdom and the Czech Republic—in fact, Canada's dropout rate was more than twice that of Norway, which ranked first.<sup>1</sup>

While most European countries have seen their dropout rate either decrease or hold firm between 2002 and 2004, Switzerland, Austria and the Slovak Republic have seen their dropout rates increase by at least one percentage point.

Canada's steady overall decline in dropout rates since 1990 implies that young Canadians are placing an increased value on completing high school. Yet, as already noted, dropout rates remain disproportionately high among young Canadian males and youth living in small towns and rural communities.

**TABLE 2: High-school dropout rates by country, 2002 and 2004**

Country	Dropout Rates (2002)	Dropout Rates (2004)
Norway	4.6% (2003)	3.7%
Czech Republic	5.9%	6.4%
Poland	8.4%	6.5%
Slovak Republic	5.5%	6.6%
United Kingdom	8.0%	7.3%
Finland	10.1%	9.1%
Sweden	8.6%	9.3%
Switzerland	8.4%	9.4%
Canada	10.9%	9.7%
Austria	9.9%	11.7%
United States	12.8%	12.6%
Germany	14.2%	13.1%
France	14.5%	14.6%
Australia	18.5%	16.9%

Source: OECD, INES-Network B, Transition database 2006, by special request and OECD INES-Network B, special YALLE data collection. As presented in Patrice de Broucker's *Without a Paddle: What to do About Canada's Young Dropouts* (Ottawa: Canadian Policy Research Networks, 2005).

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