

Chapter 11: Early School Leavers

While the majority of students who start school continue on to graduate, some do not. Without a high school diploma, a student's post-secondary options will be limited because universities and many college programs require a high school diploma to gain admission. Secondly, high school drop-outs tend to have a much higher unemployment rate, earn less and are more dissatisfied with their job compared to the rest of the population (Hango & de Broucker, 2007, pp. 12-13). This chapter will look at this group of young people. The following sections will explore provincial drop-out rates in relation to the rest of Canada. Over the past ten years, dramatic changes have occurred in the number of Newfoundland and Labrador residents without a high school diploma.

It should be noted that many drop-outs return to school at a later date. A Canadian study reported that about 29% of high school drop-outs between the ages of 20 and 24 later returned to school. Young women were more likely to return to school at a later date. This was the case for approximately 35% of women as compared to 26% of men (Raymond, 2008).

There are two indicators used to describe young people who left school before graduating – the national drop-out rate and the provincial early school leavers' rate. The first section of this chapter will briefly discuss Canadian and provincial drop-out rates. This is followed by an examination of the provincial early school leavers' rate.

Drop-out rate

Statistics Canada uses a standardized formula for calculating national and provincial drop-out rates. This provides the opportunity to compare rates across the country. Statistics Canada uses information from the monthly Labour Force Survey to determine the drop-out rate. It is calculated by dividing the number of young people between 20 and 24 years of age without a high school diploma and not attending school, by the total number of all 20 to 24 year olds. In other words:

$$\text{Drop-out rate} = \frac{\text{The number of young people (20-24 years old) without a high school diploma and not attending school}}{\text{All young people between 20 and 24 years of age}}$$

The drop-out rates provided in the following section are primarily based upon data obtained by the 2010 Labour Force Survey.

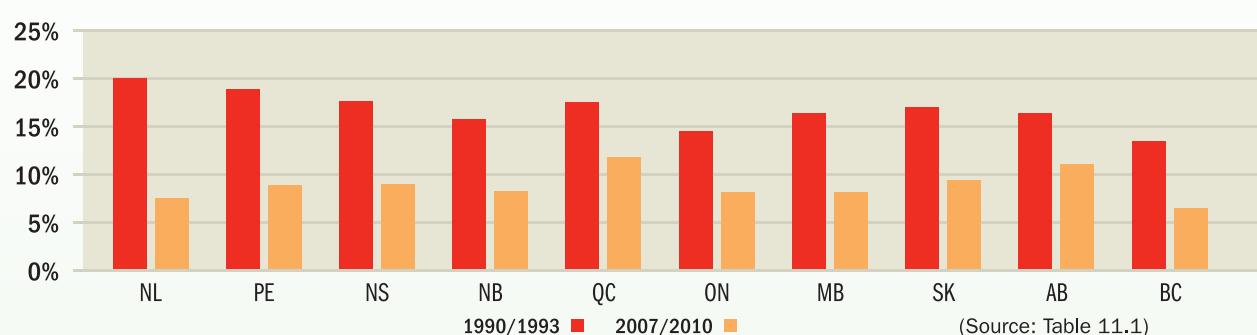
Trends in drop-out rates

The high school drop-out rate fell in all provinces from the early 1990s to the late 2000s. The greatest change in drop-out rates was found in the Atlantic Provinces, where the rate dropped from between 15% to 20% in the early 1990s, to between 9% to 11% in 2000. Since then, the drop-out rates for these provinces has fallen even further (Gilmore, 2010).

Newfoundland and Labrador had the most significant change in drop-out rates over the past 20 years. In 1990/1993, Newfoundland and Labrador had the highest drop-out rate in Canada (19.9%); by 2007/2010, it had one of the lowest (7.4%). Drop-out rates were lowest in British Columbia in 2007/2010, at 6.2% and highest in Quebec, at 11.7%, followed closely by the three Prairie Provinces. These rates were still significantly lower than those prevailing in 1990/1993 (see Figure 11.1).

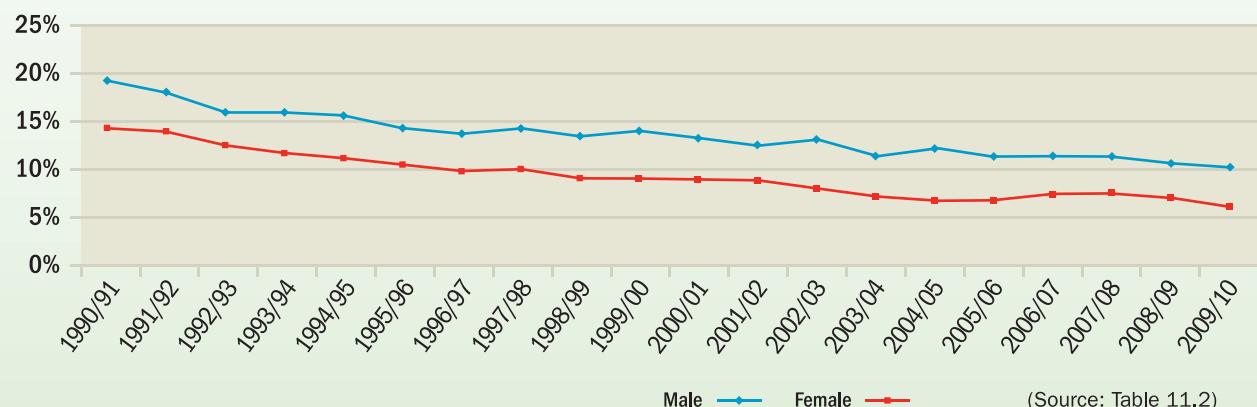
The male drop-out rate is consistently higher than the female rate across the country (see Figure 11.2). For example, in 2009/10, 10.3% of men and 6.6% of women had dropped out of high school. However, these rates were down significantly from 1990/1991, when 19.2% of men and 14.0% of women had dropped out of high school. The gap between the drop-out rates of men and women narrowed slightly over time, moving from 5.2% in 1990/1991 to 3.7% in 2009/2010, as the share of men dropping out fell faster over this period (Gilmore, 2010).

Figure 11.1: Provincial drop-out rates (1990/1993 and 2007/2010)



(Source: Table 11.1)

Figure 11.2: Gender differences in national drop-out rate (1990/91-2009/10)



(Source: Table 11.2)

The provincial early school leavers rate

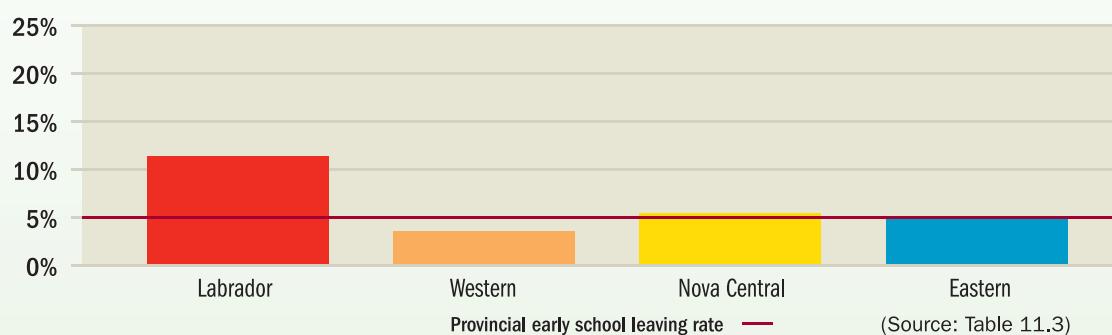
In Newfoundland and Labrador, the Department of Education calculates the early school leavers rate. Once a school registers a student for a high school course, that student is captured in the high school certification system. The student is then tracked until he/she either (i) graduates, or (ii) does not show up in a subsequent year on the high school certification system. Names of students who do not show up in a subsequent year are sent back to each school for administrators to identify the current status of each student. Those students are identified in one of three categories – Dropped out, Unknown and Other – and are counted as the early school leavers for that particular year. The early school leaving rate is calculated based on the following equation:

$$\text{Early School Leaving Rate} = \frac{\text{# confirmed drop-outs}}{\text{high school population for the school year in question}} \times 100\%$$

Provincial early school leavers (2008/09)⁷

Provincially, the early school leavers rate was 5.2% in 2008/09. Of the 20,313 high school students in the province, 1,050 (or 5.2%) students had dropped out of high school in that year. The Labrador district experienced the highest (11.3%) early school leavers rate in the province and the lowest (3.5%) was found in the Western district. There were similar rates found in both the Nova Central and Eastern school districts (see Figure 11.3).

Figure 11.3: Provincial early school leavers (2008/09)



⁷ Data for 2009/10 was unavailable at the time of printing

Trends in the early school leavers rate (2005/06-2008/09)

Provincially, there has been little variation in the early school leavers rate between 2005/06 and 2008/09. During this time, the rate hovered around 5.0% (see Figure 11.4a). This rate stability was also seen in the Western, Nova Central and Eastern school districts where there was a 2% or less difference between the highest and lowest rates between 2005/06 and 2008/09. Labrador experienced the highest early school leavers rate in the province for each of the four years (ranging between 7.6% and 11.3%). On the other hand, the Western district tended to experience the lowest rates in the province, ranging between 3.5% and 4.7% (see Figure 11.4b).

Figure 11.4: Trends in early school leavers' rate (2005/06-2008/09)

