Chapter 10: 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 dropouts 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).

Drop out rates defined

Statistics Canada collects information about the high school drop-out rate through its monthly Labour Force Survey. The drop-out rate 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 and 24 year olds. In other words:
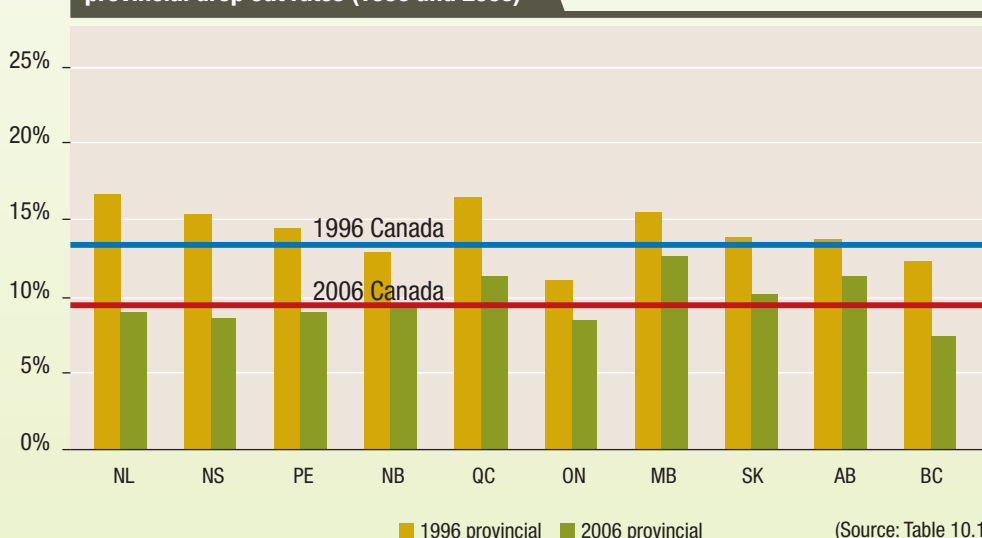
$$\text{Drop-out rate} = \frac{\text{The number of young people (20-24 years old) without a high school diploma and are not attending school}}{\text{All young people between 20 and 24 years of age}}$$

The drop-out rates provided in the following section are primarily based upon data obtained by the 2006 Labour Force Survey and recorded in the *Indicators of Well-Being in Canada* report published by the Human Resources and Social Development Canada in 2008.

Canadian and provincial drop-out rates

Between 1996 and 2006, the drop-out rate has been declining in all provinces across the country. During this time, Newfoundland and Labrador experienced the largest decline in drop-out rates, from 16.7% (the highest in the country) in 1996, to 8.9% in 2006. This decrease of 7.8 percentage points is the largest decline in the country (see *figure 10.1*). Only British Columbia, Ontario and Nova Scotia had lower drop-out rates in 2006.

Figure 10.1: Difference in national and provincial drop out rates (1996 and 2006)

1996 Canada

2006 Canada

■ 1996 provincial   ■ 2006 provincial   (Source: Table 10.1)

The steady decline in the provincial drop-out rate can be clearly seen with the largest decrease occurring between 2000 and 2002. During the late 1990s, the provincial drop-out rate was consistently higher than the Canadian rate. However, by the first few years of the new century, it had dipped below the Canadian rate. This continuing decline ended in 2005 with a one percent increase in 2006 (see *figure 10.2*).

Urban vs. rural

Higher percentages of students in rural regions are more likely to drop out of high school as compared to their urban counterparts. This trend is seen in all provinces across the country. Between 2002/03 and 2005/06, the Canadian drop-out rate for urban areas was 8.8% as compared to 16.8% in rural areas. Across the country, Newfoundland and Labrador had the lowest drop-out rate in urban areas and the third lowest in rural areas. Alberta, Manitoba and Quebec recorded the highest drop-out rates in Canada for both urban and rural students (see *figure 10.3*).

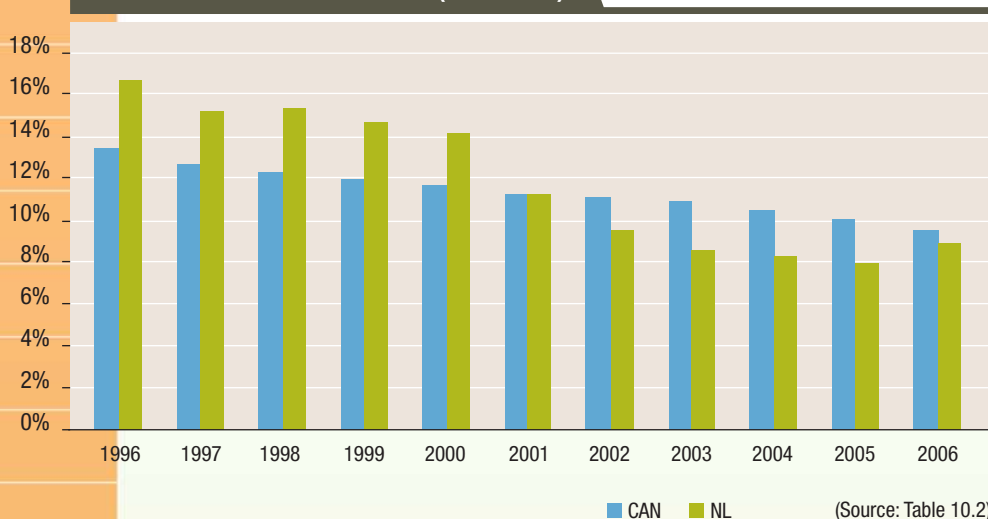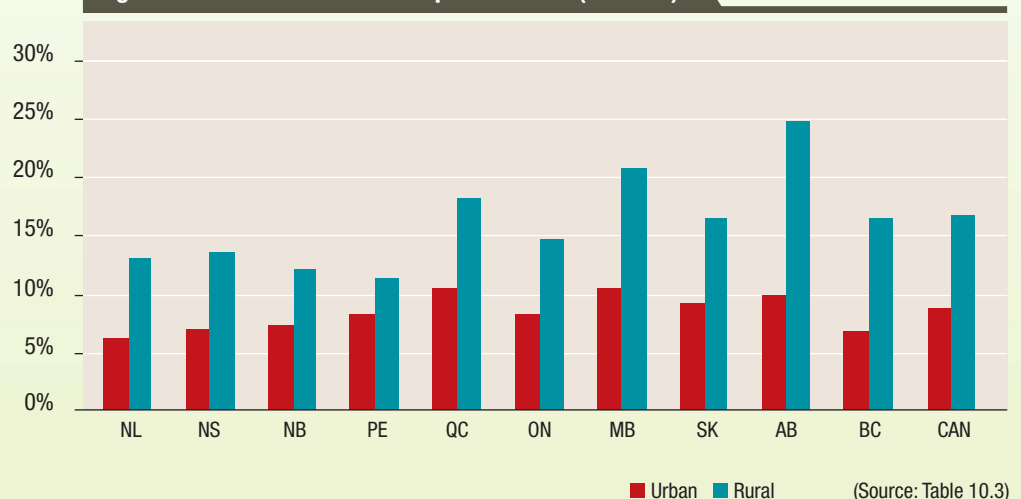**Figure 10.2: Drop out rate in Canada and Newfoundland and Labrador (1996-2006)**

CAN   NL   (Source: Table 10.2)

Figure 10.3: Urban and rural drop-out rates.[10] (2005/06)

Urban   Rural   (Source: Table 10.3)

[10] Data are based on a four-year average for the academic years 2002/03 to 2005/06

Early school leavers

Increasing numbers of students are staying in school until graduation. This is reflected in the province's calculation of early school leavers. The Department of Education uses a slightly different method to calculate this 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. A list of those students in category (ii) is sent to each school and the principal is asked to identify those who have dropped out. (Rate = # dropouts/high school population for the school year in question x 100%). Between 2003/04 and 2005/06, the drop-out rate has averaged about 6.0%. This is slightly lower than that reported by Statistics Canada.