



Cultivating the Arctic's Most Valuable Resource:

An Analysis of the Barriers to High School Completion Among Youth in Nunavut

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From 2001/2 to 2013/14, the average attendance rate in Nunavut high schools was only 60%. Over the same period, only approximately one-third of 18 year olds graduated from high school in Nunavut. These statistics are extremely concerning from an economic and social point of view.

In this report we address the question: what are the key determinants of high school attendance and graduation in Nunavut? In turn, what initiatives and policies are needed to ensure higher rates of high school attendance and completion among Nunavut youth? We address these questions by speaking to Nunavut youth themselves. Our report summarizes the results of a survey conducted with 570 youth from 5 Nunavut communities – Hall Beach, Igloolik, Iqaluit, Kugluktuk and Rankin Inlet. The survey consisted of questions regarding a youth's friends, home life, parents/guardians, school experiences and views on schooling.

We find that a wide range of factors influence the chance that a youth will exit school early. However the quantitatively most important factors leading to dropout risk involve a youth's relationships, especially those with their parents and friends. Below we summarize our findings.

The Influence of Parents

- A youth whose parent graduated from high school is 18% less likely to consider dropping out of school.
- Having a parent with a formal sector job increases the likelihood of graduation by 11%.
 - These effects likely reflect the parent as a role model – if the parent has a high school education and has benefited from this education by obtaining a formal sector job, a child is more likely to perceive the positive benefits of schooling.
 - Our analysis of the in-school sample of youth reveals that a student whose parents encourage them to go to school every day is 27% less likely to miss any days of school and 26% less likely to ever think of dropping out of school.
 - In our out-of-school sample we find that youth who were encouraged to go to school by their parents are 19% less likely to have missed days of school and 14% more likely to have graduated from school.
 - Our qualitative study suggests that sleeping in and staying up late – behaviours

parents can influence - are key reasons for missing school days.

- These findings suggest that the parental mobilization initiatives that are part of the National Inuit Education Strategy are crucial.

The Influence of Friends

- Analysis of the out-of-school sample indicates that a youth is 28% more likely to have missed days of school and 18% more likely to have actually dropped out of high school if they had friends who dropped out of school.



- A student that is a member of a gang is 23% more likely to think about dropping out of school compared to a student that is not a member of a gang.
- Having friends that do drugs or drink alcohol increases dropout risk by 15%. The result that peer effects are important suggests that school-related factors, which are policy amenable, may have large potential impacts on high school attachment.

Impacts of School-related Factors

- Students are 20% less likely to miss days of school if their teacher uses a computer in the classroom.
- A youth is 20% less likely to consider dropping out of school if they participate in school activities such as sports or school council.
- Students that have gone on a school trip see their truancy reduced by 18%
- Failing a grade is associated with a 12% higher chance of dropping out of school and a 20% higher chance of missing days of school. The practice of allowing struggling students to move to the next grade however must be complemented by individual attention to students that are not held back and more resources to support teachers dealing with a variety of needs within the same classroom.
- Not having access to daycare was also cited as an important reason for dropping out. This affirms the importance of ensuring access to daycare for high school-aged parents, through an evaluation of the Young Parents Stay Learning program, the day care subsidy and reasons for why it is being underutilized.



Other Influential Factors

- Our qualitative study indicates that the most common reason cited for dropping out of school was having a baby.
- A youth that has sufficient food to eat, a bed of their own and a quiet place to study is 13% more likely to graduate and 13% less likely to miss days of school. This turns initiatives such as Nutrition North Canada and its needed reform into education policy. It also underscores the need for increased Federal funding for social housing in Nunavut, to address the long list of families waiting for affordable housing. Substance abuse also has an impact on potential/actual school dropout. In the in-school sample, students who reported drinking alcohol or doing drugs

are 16% more likely to miss days of school and 13% more likely to think about dropping out of school, while youth that did drugs during high school are 23% more likely to have missed days of school. Drug use was also one of the top reasons cited for dropping out of high school in our qualitative analysis. This indicates that initiatives to prevent youth from experimenting with drugs and alcohol, counseling and academic support for adolescents and support for parents who may be having trouble getting through to their children would be effective for spurring graduation rates.

- A respondent having a part-time job during school is associated with an 18% greater chance of graduating from high school.
- A youth who spent time on the land while they were in high school is 13% less likely to have dropped out of high school. This likely reflects the value of learning the contemporary practices of one's people and closeness to one's culture. This is thought to be critical to identity formation, which is in turn critical to self-esteem and academic success.

Does a High School Diploma Pay Off?

- We find that high school graduates in Nunavut had a 14% lower unemployment rate relative to non-graduates in the year 2000, and a 9% lower unemployment rate relative to non-graduates in 2005. This advantage was greater in Nunavut relative to the rest of Canada.
- We find that high school graduates all across Canada earn more than their non-graduate counterparts. However high school graduates in Nunavut earn much more on average – they earned 95% more than non-graduates in 2000 and 82% more than non-graduates in 2005.
- These high economic returns to a high school diploma could be incorporated into Aulajaaqtut in grade 9, since the majority of non-graduates appear to leave school in grade 10.

Overall Policy Recommendations

Overall our analysis reveals multiple determinants of high school exit/attachment in Nunavut. The results call for very diverse interventions, ranging from increased parental encouragement, to greater instructional support for struggling students and more computers in the classroom, to increased housing and review of the daycare subsidy. These efforts call for action not just by many Departments within the Government of Nunavut and DEAs, but also the Government of Canada and parents of school-aged Nunavut children.