

New  Brunswick

High School Graduation
The New School Leaving Age

The Findings and Recommendations of
The School Leaving Age Task Force

Student Services
Department of Education
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Table of Contents

| | |
|---|-----------------|
| Foreword by Dennis Cochrane | page <i>ii</i> |
| A Call to Action | page <i>iii</i> |
| Acknowledgments | page <i>iv</i> |
| I. Introduction | page 1 |
| II. More Important Than Before-Graduation from High School | page 2 |
| III. Strategies for Increasing and Sustaining Student Success in New Brunswick Schools | page 4 |
| IV. Coping with the Change: Response of Stakeholders | page 6 |
| V. At Risk of Dropping Out: Barriers to Success in High Schools | page 10 |
| VI. Choosing to Stay: Options for Successful Completion of High School | page 13 |
| VII. Conclusion | page 16 |
| VII. Summary of Recommendations | page 16 |
| References | page 20 |
| Appendix A | page 22 |
| Appendix B | page 23 |
| Appendix C | page 30 |

FOREWORD

Students enrolled in New Brunswick schools will be expected to attend school until they graduate or reach the age of 18 as of July 1st, 1999. From this date forward, an important and significant change will be part of the New Brunswick Public School System.

This change of the school leaving age from age 16 to age 18 reflects the high value New Brunswick citizens place on public school education. Over the past few decades our social and economic expectations have changed. Society now considers graduation from high school a necessity. The importance of graduation is highlighted in the recently released *International Adult Literacy Survey: A New Brunswick Snapshot* report (1998). The report examines New Brunswick literacy levels and concludes that "generally speaking, the higher the education attained, the higher the level of literacy. In New Brunswick, the payoff for graduating from high school is particularly large."

Knowing the facts, the New Brunswick Public School System must do all it can to ensure that its youth graduate from high school. Students must establish themselves as life long learners and educators must help students fulfill the Mission of Public Education in New Brunswick:

To acquire the necessary skills, knowledge, and attributes needed to be a life-long learner, to achieve personal fulfillment and to contribute to a productive, just and democratic society.

I commend the work of the School Leaving Age Task Force members who grappled with this difficult and challenging issue and prepared this report. This document thoroughly examines the implications of the change to 18 years of age and makes recommendations that will ensure a smooth and successful implementation of the change in the compulsory attendance age.

I am confident that the implementation of the new school leaving age of 18 will result in improved learning opportunities and improved support services for all students, especially for those at risk of leaving the public school system prematurely.

Dennis Cochrane
Deputy Minister
New Brunswick Department of Education

A Call to Action¹

(The following is an excerpt from *Effective Strategies for Educating Students in At-Risk Situations*)

It is clear there are many effective strategies for preventing students from dropping out of school before they complete their high school education. These strategies range from nutritional care for infants and parenting training for teenage mothers to alternative schools for middle and high school students who are not doing well in their regular schools. The earlier problems are addressed, the more effective and lasting the results. Students who live in at-risk situations, however, will need special assistance throughout their schooling. A quick fix in preschool or kindergarten cannot overcome the pervasive and continuing problems encountered by so many of our youth today in their homes and in their communities.

Students from at-risk situations are not someone else's responsibility. When the schools fail such children, the schools are failing each one of us. More importantly, we have failed the schools because our priorities do not include designing and supporting schools that are congruent with the needs of those who are supposed to learn in them. We have failed to provide caring schools that nurture and support resiliency; we have failed to provide schools that invite engagement in learning.

We have all heard the following adages:

*It takes a whole village to raise a child.
Give a man a fish and you've fed him for a day;
teach a man to fish and you've fed him for life.*

Education is our collective responsibility. It is time to realize we are a village in a global economy, and all of us share the responsibility for raising our children. It is time to shoulder that responsibility and teach every one of those children to fish in the waters of the 21st century.

¹Duttweiler. *Effective Strategies for Educating Students in At-Risk Situations*. NDPC, 1993. pp.121-122.

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I. Introduction

The School Leaving Age Task Force was created to recommend to the Minister of Education strategies for the successful implementation of the impending July 1, 1999 change in the school leaving age from age 16 to age 18 in the New Brunswick *Education Act*.

The Task Force completed the following tasks in order to fulfill its mandate:

- Identified and reviewed recommended practices and strategies found effective throughout the public school system, both in New Brunswick and elsewhere, that support and motivate students to remain in school until successful completion.
- Identified the implications of the legislation as it impacts on government and organizations whose mandate includes service provision to 16- to 18- year- old youth.
- Identified and examined strategies for retaining potential early school leavers in New Brunswick high schools until graduation.

It should be noted that some members of the Task Force opposed the change in the school leaving age, citing two key reasons. Those who oppose the legislation fear that keeping students in school who want to withdraw before they graduate will create more discipline problems in schools, and that the legislation will be difficult to enforce. They argued that if a 16- or 17- year-old decides to quit school, the education system does not have effective ways of keeping such youth in school. In other words, the legislation "lacks teeth." Most of the Task Force members supported the legislation but recognized the challenges the change presents.

The findings and recommendations of the Task Force are found in this report. In addition to providing direction to the Department of Education and stakeholders, this report will provide useful guidance to educators responsible for students at risk, in particular those over the age of 16, who will be significantly affected by the change in the school leaving age. The *Life After School: A Follow-Up Study of Students Leaving the NB Public School System Without Obtaining a High School Diploma* recently completed by the Department of Education (December 1997), revealed that the majority of school leavers in New Brunswick exit between the ages of 17 and 18.

The Issue

The elimination of the early school leaving age of 16 years is designed to increase the number of youth who complete high school. The completion of high school is presently considered to be the minimum requirement for successful entry into the work force or post-secondary education.

The challenge for New Brunswick educators is to devise and implement strategies to ensure that those who now choose to leave school prematurely will choose to stay in school and graduate. Unless strategies and techniques are implemented to address the needs of this population, the reasons students leave at age 16 will still be present for them at ages 17 and 18. School must therefore become a place of relevancy and personal satisfaction, and offer a positive learning environment. As the result of changes in the New Brunswick *Education Act*, the public education system must now assume an increased responsibility to implement strategies and provide appropriate educational interventions aimed at assisting potential early school leavers to stay in school until they graduate. Strategies aimed at offering secondary students a viable means of completing high school are and will continue to be necessary.

II. More Important Than Ever Before—Graduation from High School

N.B. Labour Market Information

The national unemployment rate among youth 15 to 24 years of age is almost double the rate of the population as a whole. In November 1997, the national seasonally adjusted unemployment rate was 9%. During the same month, the unemployment rate for young New Brunswickers was 19.6%, comprising young females at 16.1% and young males at 22.8%.

Youth Employment Information

Information obtained from the Canadian Youth Foundation (CYF) provides some cold, hard facts on youth unemployment in Canada:

- * In the 1990's, 500 000 youth jobs disappeared nationally;
- * Since 1992, adult employment has grown by 1.1 million jobs. During the same time period, youth employment has fallen by more than 100 000 jobs;
- * The proportion of young people who have never held a job doubled in the 1990s from 10% to 20%.

Young people are at different levels of risk in the labour market. The Canadian Youth Foundation has identified three risk categories based on education levels:

high risk: individuals with less than a high school diploma. This group faces an unemployment rate of 22.9%.

medium risk: individuals with high school completion or incomplete postsecondary education. The unemployment rate for this group is 14.7%.

low risk: individuals with a post-secondary degree or diploma.
The unemployment rate for community college graduates is 12.4% and for university graduates is 9%.

Impact of Early School Leavers on New Brunswick Economy/Society

There is strong evidence that the lower the level of academic achievement, the greater is the probability of sustained periods of unemployment and the lower is the anticipated level of income once employment becomes available. Students leaving high school before they have completed their studies are in the high risk group (22.9% according to the Canadian Youth Foundation's definition) of being unemployed within the current labour market. Moreover, the rate of such unemployment will only increase as the number of unskilled jobs declines in both absolute and relative terms.

The youth population in New Brunswick has declined by 19% over the past 10 years while the number of youth on the social assistance caseload has declined by 17%. This means that youth were more likely to be on social assistance in 1996 than they were in 1986. Given this fact, the need to continue efforts to assist youth in successfully accessing the labour market is critical.

The change in the school leaving age is designed to increase the number of youth who successfully complete high school. At the present time, people both inside and outside the school system know very little about this issue. Informing the public about the new school leaving age is necessary for smooth implementation. There is an urgent need to provide information to educators, students, parents, and stakeholders about the impending change and the significance of it. They need to know the reasons for the change, whom the change will affect, how it will affect them, what steps are being taken to implement the change, and when the change will occur.

The Task Force therefore recommends that the Department of Education develop and implement an Information and Awareness Campaign that provides appropriate information to the following groups:

- ***students who will be between the ages of 15 and 18 on July 1, 1999, and their parents or guardians***
- ***educators of students in the age category identified above***
- ***students, parents and guardians, and educators of students under the age of 15 throughout the school system***

And through the services of Communications-New Brunswick:

- ***employers of youth***
- ***provincial, federal government and First Nation employees who provide services to youth in New Brunswick the general public***

III. Strategies for Increasing and Sustaining Student Success in New Brunswick Schools

The first priority of the Task Force was to examine the school-leaving issue as it relates to high school students. However, the Task Force members, recognizing that the most beneficial reform measures are ones that address the underlying systemic causes of a problem, decided to examine the high school issue within the context of how at-risk students' needs are currently addressed throughout the system prior to and during high school.

The document *Life After School: A Follow-up Study of Students Leaving the NB Public School System Without Obtaining a High School Diploma*, indicated that “leavers encountered difficulty early in their academic careers with a significant percentage having to repeat a grade ... the need for help, especially before Grade 7, was obvious in the information collected.”¹ The results of this study further suggested that knowing the school history and background of students' parents, and providing early interventions may contribute to a more successful academic career for the potential school leaver. Thus a strong emphasis needs to be placed on the early years of a child's learning experience if the expectation is that all children will successfully complete school. The Task Force agreed that its recommendations should complement and support early intervention and prevention initiatives of the Department of Education, and bring to the Department's attention additional measures that could bring about long-term improvements throughout the system.

The review of relevant research on early school leaving and the consequent examination of recommended practices for students in at-risk situations indicated that the New Brunswick education system has embraced a wide array of strategies and initiatives recommended for at-risk students. In particular, the Task Force was encouraged by the Early Years Initiative, which promotes literacy development, staff collaboration, developmentally appropriate practice, and flexible ways of organizing classes. The Task Force concluded that New Brunswick is working hard to improve the quality of education for all, including those at risk. Yet, there is still room for improvement and the Task Force has identified the following practices that need strengthening and consistent application throughout the province:

- effective schooling and instructional practices at all levels
- early prevention, screening, and identification of potential early school leavers

¹ Baseline Market Research. **Life After School: A Follow-up Study of Students Leaving the NB Public School System Without Obtaining A High School Diploma.** New Brunswick Department of Education, 1997.p.81.

- early and intensive intervention for at-risk students during the primary years especially those struggling with math and reading
- more effective communication, linkages, and interagency collaboration with groups who serve at-risk students and their families at all levels
- more focussed parent education and parent involvement
- professional development opportunities to extend and improve teachers' skills for meeting the needs of students at risk at all grade levels in all areas of learning
- full implementation of the four components of the Comprehensive and Developmental Guidance Program (Districts began implementation of the four components in 1990 and are currently at various stages of implementation of the model. In order for the program to be truly effective, each component needs to be operational in each school in each district.)

In addition to identifying a need to strengthen the practices listed above, the Task Force found that some of the recommended practices utilized in New Brunswick may be limited to a few districts or schools. (Refer to Appendix B for more information.) This suggests that greater effort has to be made to identify the districts and schools with best practices, share the information with all districts, and urge districts to implement the recommended strategies.

Some of the initiatives for at-risk students that are open to students from all school districts are unable to adequately meet the demand for service and are forced to limit the number of students that they help, for example, the Youth Treatment Program (for conduct-disordered youth) and drug treatment programs.

As well, many individuals with various responsibilities at the Department of Education and in districts and schools take lead roles in devising and providing service for at-risk students. Clearer delineation and co-ordination of responsibilities for at-risk students is warranted. At the school level, the School Improvement Planning process is viewed as an appropriate vehicle for ensuring that best practices are implemented and continually evaluated in terms of their success and benefit.

On the basis of these findings and observations the Task Force recommends the following:

- ***Department of Education establish a system (K through Grade 12) for the identification and tracking of students at risk.***
- ***Districts include in their District Education Plans, when appropriate, strategies aimed at addressing the needs of schools' at-risk student populations (including professional development opportunities for teachers)(as outlined in Appendix B).***

- *Schools include in their School Improvement Plans, when appropriate, strategies aimed at addressing the needs of their at-risk student populations (as outlined in Appendix B).*
- *The various departments and agencies that serve potential at-risk students and those currently at risk (i.e. Health and Community Services, Education, Human Resources Development-NB, Solicitor General, Justice, Labour and appropriate non-government agencies) take steps at the zone/regional and school district level to better collaborate and co-ordinate their efforts to serve at-risk youth.*
- *The Department of Education foster increased co-operation with the Department of Health and Community Services, in order to ensure that:*
 - i. *at-risk preschoolers transition successfully from home and preschool or day care to the public school system.*
 - ii. *appropriate early intervention services are continued by the Department of Education for those children who have been identified as being at-risk through the Early Childhood Initiatives.*

IV. Coping with the Change: Response of Stakeholders

Department of Human Resources Development-New Brunswick:

The provision in the *Education Act* to extend the school leaving age is welcomed by the Department of Human Resources Development - New Brunswick because it reinforces the intent behind the Youth Policy which was implemented in September 1995 to support and encourage young people, aged 16 to 20 years inclusive, to remain in or return to school to complete their high school education or to receive further training.

Further to this, the provision may stimulate changes to the delivery of the public school curriculum and support services to better meet the needs of at-risk youth, many of whom are or will be social assistance recipients. Such changes are particularly important at the present time as the Department of Human Resources Development no longer intends to provide the funding for alternative schooling (academic upgrading, literacy programs, etc.) for school leavers under 21 years of age.

The changes to the *Education Act* will not affect the Family Income Security Act or its accompanying regulations. However, HRD-NB currently provides annually to all families with children between the ages of 5 and 16 years a \$50 per child School Supplement to assist with the purchase of school supplies. Families with children aged 16 or older are now required to provide confirmation of attendance at a high school in order to receive the supplement. With the extension of the school leaving age to 18, HRD may be able to remove this requirement for 16- and 17- year-olds, and thus reduce the administrative burden for clients, school administrators and the departmental staff.

The School Leaving Age Task Force recommends that the Department of Human Resources Development - New Brunswick review its administrative procedures governing the delivery of the School Supplement.

Department of Labour:

The Department of Labour has agreed to make consequential amendments to the *Employment Standards Act*.

The Employment Standards Act as it now exists does not allow employers to employ those under the age of sixteen (16)

- for more than six (6) hours on any day
- for more than three (3) hours on any school day
- on any day for a period, which when added to the hours in attendance at school would total more than eight (8) hours altogether
- between 10:00 p.m. and 6:00 a.m.

unless a permit has been issued by the Director of Employment Standards allowing otherwise. A permit may be issued for those aged fourteen (14) and fifteen (15) to be exempt from the restrictions on working hours, provided that the Director is satisfied that there will be no contravention of the *Occupational Health and Safety Act*, that the employment will not prejudice the person's attendance at school or detract from his or her ability to benefit from instruction at school, and that the employment has been approved by the guardian of the child.

In choosing the current legal age of employment (age sixteen), the Department of Labour reasoned that if a student is able to withdraw from school at sixteen (16) then there should be no restriction on the hours during which that person can work. With the increase in the age to eighteen (18), the Department of Labour feels that the same restrictions should be placed on any student under the age of eighteen (18) who wishes to work, with the exception being those youth 16 to 18 who live independently.

The School Leaving Age Task Force recommends that the Employment Standards Act be amended to apply the existing restrictions to employers who wish to employ youths under the age of sixteen (16) on employers who wish to employ youths under eighteen (18), and who have not yet completed high school

It is further recommended that where the employer is seeking to employ the youth during the restricted hours, and where the youth is living independently without a guardian, the requirement that a guardian approve the permit be waived.

Department of the Solicitor General:

The Department of Solicitor General strongly supports education as a foundation of opportunities for personal growth and increased employment potential for youth. This support is reflected in the requirement of mandatory school attendance for all incarcerated young offenders in secure custody and continues to be a frequent condition on Probation Orders for youth who find themselves in conflict with the law. This support will continue regardless of the change in the school leaving age. It is important to understand that the Department of the Solicitor General will not become the provider of education for youth who are not in secure custody. That is, probationers, open custody, and other community-placed individuals will continue to be the responsibility of the Department of Education.

Given the fact that a typical young offender serving a period of incarceration is a 16-year-old male with a Grade 9 education and is approximately two years behind academically, all measures supporting on-going education and thus contributing toward breaking the cycle are applauded.

Labour Force Development Board:

The Board believes that a better-skilled work force is the key to our young adults' future, and that basic education is the starting point to achieve this VM. The Board believes that the need for a highly skilled work force is the reason behind the change in the school leaving age to age 18.

In examining the intent of the new legislation, it is important to consider why youth currently drop out of school. It is the view of the Labour Force Development Board that dropouts often have a bleak view of their job prospects, given the current economic situation, and do not see a link between what they are learning at school and the world of work. The Board asserts that more programs are needed to help youth clearly make the transition from school to work. The current Department of Education Co-operative Education course, the Youth Apprenticeship Program, and other similar initiatives for young people with disabilities are excellent examples of efforts to forge the link between school and work, and should be expanded. The Labour Force Development Board also feels that every young adult should have the opportunity to do at least one work placement while in school. These work experiences can help young people to begin building a career portfolio which can be supplemented with in-class work on identifying one's skills, strengths and goals, such as is prescribed in the Department of Education's newly introduced resource *Linking to the Future: Career and Educational Portfolio Planning*, for students in Grade 6 and up.

In addition, the Board sees a need for increased relevancy of high school courses to the labour market, more creative and flexible ways to achieve credits, more flexible hours of instruction and scheduling of courses, and more initiatives that encourage and welcome older youth to return to high school.

Youth Council of New Brunswick:

The provision in the *Education Act* to extend the school leaving age from 16 to 18 puts a focus on the need to define the legal and social responsibility of the state to youth who are over the age of 16 and not living with their parents or a legal guardian, and who are not in the care of the Province. Young people who have left home because of difficult family situations such as alcohol and drug problems, or sexual or physical abuse often find themselves with no place to go, unaware of the services that might be available to them. In some cases no services exist. Those young people, 16 to 18 years of age, and not under the care of the Minister of Health and Community Services prior to their 16th birthday are not provided for under the *Family Services Act*. The unfortunate result of this situation is that these young people are often left to their own resources and fall through the cracks in the system. Desperate circumstances can lead to dangerous forms of exploitation such as prostitution. Given that young people will be now required to remain in school until age 18, it would seem an opportune time for the Province to undertake a review of the legal and social responsibility the state has for youth ages 16 to 18 who are not living at home or with a legal guardian, and who are not under the care of the Province.

The School Leaving Age Task Force therefore recommends that the Government of New Brunswick clearly articulate, in either new or amended social policy legislation, the legal responsibility of the state to youth whose parents or guardians are incapable or fail to carry out their parental role. From this delineation will flow the need for the basic assistance, appropriate essential services, and co-ordination of service delivery.

Learning Disabilities Association of New Brunswick:

The Learning Disabilities Association of New Brunswick (LDANB) supports the change in the school leaving age. LDANB contends that, in order to make the new legislation work over the long term, attention must be given to potential school leavers early in their school careers. Early intervention and prevention is seen by LDANB as an important way to help keep students in school until successful completion. New Brunswick's Early Childhood Initiatives (ECI) identifies children with special needs and plays a crucial role in promoting appropriate interventions from birth to age 5. Increased co-operation among Health and Community Services, Human Resources Development New Brunswick and the Department of Education would ensure that the programs offered through the ECI program prepare young children for entry into the school system, and would allow the school system, in turn, to ensure that appropriate early intervention services continue for those children who have been identified as being at risk through Early Childhood Initiatives.

In addition, LDANB is concerned that children with learning disabilities are not always identified. This lack of identification results in remediation efforts that do not meet the special needs of the learning-disabled student. Without a psycho-educational assessment, it is not possible to delineate the exact nature of the problem, or to plan appropriate

interventions. Studies indicate that early prevention and intervention are most effective before Grade 3. This gives little time to determine that there is a problem, define the difficulty and provide an appropriate response.

The Canadian Council of Social Development (CCSD) has published for the second year "The Progress of Canada's Children," 1997, which summarizes key issues affecting the family and the child. The latest report warns that one third of students with learning disabilities drop out of high school. These students are not prepared to enter the work force, often lacking adequate reading and language skills. The CCSD also reported that 62% of students with learning disabilities were unemployed one year after graduating and that 50% of juvenile offenders, when tested, had previously undetected learning disabilities.

The Washington Summit on Learning Disabilities Research, 1994 indicates that an equal number of girls and boys have learning disabilities. This finding is contrary to the general consensus that learning disabilities occur most frequently in boys: Awareness of this research will lead us to better serve girls with learning disabilities.

The Department of Education's *Resource for Learning Disabled Students: Grades 9 and 10 of the High School Program* and the *Learning Strategies Program, Grade 11-12*, when fully implemented throughout the province, will result in improved strategies for students experiencing difficulty. These initiatives should allay fears expressed by some that the change in the school leaving age could mandate longer years of schooling without increasing academic attainment.

V. At Risk of Dropping Out: Barriers to Success in High Schools

Overall, schools in our province successfully address the needs of their students, including those at risk. Because of this, the vast majority of students in New Brunswick experience success in school and graduate. In the 1995-1996 school year, the graduation rate was 85%. The 15% who exited did so for a variety of reasons, often interrelated. The contributing factors and causes of dropping out of school are well documented (Refer to Appendix A for further information.) The Statistics Canada *Leaving School Report* drew on previous research literature and presented the following drop-out profile:

Many high school non-completers come from low socio-economic backgrounds, from single-parent households, from basic or general academic streams/programs, have failed at least one course during their high school career, work for pay more than 15 hours a week, have low self-esteem, are frustrated learners with short-range rather than long range goals, feel alienated from teachers, peers, and curriculum, and are concrete rather than abstract thinkers. Distinct differences between drop-outs and

graduates are apparent as early as Grade 3, in that drop-outs exhibit academic difficulties and low achievement test scores. By Grade 9, a pattern of failing grades and high absenteeism is evident. There is also agreement that many non-completers have low class attendance rates, exhibit forms of deviant or delinquent behaviour, and in many cases, have been suspended from school at some point.¹

In New Brunswick high schools, the reasons and circumstances that result in students being at risk mirror the profile above. It is speculated that recent and proposed changes in the New Brunswick education system may further increase the number of students who reach the age of 16 and experience frustration because they have not met the requirements for high school graduation. Specifically, the failure to attain English Language Proficiency Assessment and Grades 9 and 10, High School Program competencies may create a roadblock to entry into the graduation years of high school and subsequently high school completion. For those unable to meet one or both of these requirements, the prospect of additional years spent in high school, unsure that they will ever achieve the required learnings, will deter students from graduating.

The pending introduction of a numeracy proficiency requirement will likely create a third roadblock. Furthermore, the support, guidance, and assistance required by at-risk students, which is provided through the delivery models of the Middle Level and Grades 9 and 10 of the High School Programs, will be removed upon entry into the graduation years. Students, having achieved a measure of success as the result of this more supported approach to educating all students, may find they cannot meet the demands of the graduation years without a similar network. As the result of increased difficulty and frustration, these students may swell the ranks of those at risk of leaving school before completion.

Although presently in the discussion stage, a new provincial high school diploma will be introduced which may further exacerbate the frustration experienced by potential early school leavers.

Educators are also confused by two seemingly contradictory messages. Teachers feel they must strive to keep **all** students in school and at the same time practise **zero** tolerance for unacceptable, threatening behaviours. A number of students in the at-risk population are recipients of strong disciplinary action such as lengthy suspensions. It is well known that these students often drop out. When they stay, many continue to have discipline problems. Although they rarely present threatening behaviours, students with learning disabilities often suffer from similar disciplinary actions.

¹ Statistics Canada. **Leaving School: Results from a national survey comparing school leavers and high school graduates 18 to 20 years of age.** Government of Canada, 1993. P. 4.

Collectively, all of the above-mentioned roadblocks and issues may offer the at-risk student with few options other than to quit and attempt to enter the work force.

Aboriginal At-Risk Students

The situation with New Brunswick's Aboriginal students is in an even more critical state. Statistics have shown that the majority of Aboriginal students, in comparison with the non-Aboriginal student population, experience major difficulties in New Brunswick public schools. In particular, they experience low academic performance and a two to three times higher drop-out rate. Furthermore, their performance on provincial assessments is unacceptable compared to the general student population. Research indicates that Aboriginal students are marginalized and devalued partly because of their cultural and learning differences. Frequently, difficult family, social, and economic situations of Aboriginal students negatively impact on their chances for success in school. It is clear that the New Brunswick education system, like that of most other provinces in Canada, has a poor record when it comes to meeting the needs of its Aboriginal students. The change in the school leaving age to 18, combined with the problems identified above, has the potential, if not addressed, to make school life even more difficult for Aboriginal youth.

In an attempt to improve the plight of Aboriginal students, the Department of Education recently adopted the following initiatives, which have the potential to be successful, but only if adequately funded and consistently implemented throughout the province:

- adoption of the “Policy Statement on Maliseet and Mi’kmaq Education in New Brunswick”
- negotiation of local tuition agreements with First Nations
- development of District Work Plans on Aboriginal education

Districts must continue to work hard to ensure that programs and services designed to target the educational needs of Maliseet and Mi’kmaq students are culturally sensitive. Below are examples of strategies that can be implemented to make schools more enticing and welcoming for Aboriginal students:

- provision of courses that reflect the Maliseet and Mi’kmaq cultures (e.g. course offerings in Maliseet/Mi’kmaq languages, Native Studies, Maliseet/Mi’kmaq Art)
- development of curriculum materials with Maliseet and Mi’kmaq content
- provide compulsory in-service on Aboriginal culture and education for teachers and administrators where there are significant Maliseet and Mi’kmaq populations
- provision of Aboriginal Awareness events and programs in all public schools for students, teachers, administrators and parents

Provincially funded schools that have implemented strategies found to be effective with their Aboriginal populations are identified in Appendix C. It only makes sense that those responsible for educating New Brunswick's Aboriginal youth take a close look at the practices of these schools and take steps to adopt what is appropriate for New Brunswick.

The Task Force recommends that the Department of Education research, identify and implement effective Aboriginal at-risk and drop-out prevention strategies.

VI. Choosing to Stay: Options for successful completion of high school

Educational environments which directly offer and support success for at-risk students will help them remain in school until successful completion. These students will then be better equipped to face the challenges of immediate entry into the work force. It is therefore urgent and important that efforts be made to retain secondary students at risk of quitting school. These students require strategies that are relevant, actively engage them in learning and recognize their learning needs and inherent potential. A recent study completed by the Department of Education titled *Vocational Education in the Graduation Years: A Time of Transition* asserts that vocational options, because of their relevancy and experiential, hands on approach, help keep potential drop-outs in school. Vocational options, as well as other types of intervention strategies, must assist the at-risk students in becoming productive citizens, must respect them as individuals, and offer opportunities for them to make connections between learning and life.

No one set of strategies or activities will serve all at-risk students. A variety of strategies in various combinations must be utilized to serve the diversity within this population. How and where these strategies are employed will be determined at local levels. Schools within schools, internal/external alternate programming and individualized programs within the context of the general school population are all viable. Regardless of application, the intent of all strategies must be to move students toward educational attainment, re-integration into the regular school system, and successful high school completion.

Research-supported strategies and programming which help to reduce the drop-out rate can be grouped into two broad categories—those which support high school students in general and those which specifically support the potential early school leaver.

General “Retention for Success” Strategies:

Learning and/or Instructional

- academic tutoring
- classroom application of Multiple Intelligences theory
- differentiated instructional strategies
- special needs services

- Learning Disabilities resource documents for classroom teachers
- literacy interventions, courses, programs
- distance education opportunities

Social/Emotional/Behavioural

- advisor-advisee programs
- professional interventions
- in-school suspension programs
- conflict resolution programs
- peer mediation programs
- four components of Comprehensive and Developmental Guidance Program

Employment/Career Development

- career guidance
- employability skill development
- experiential work education
- vocational options
- volunteerism programs/service learning

Specific “Retention for Success” Strategies/Program Components:

Learning/Instructional

- adventure-based programming
- individualized literacy programs
- in-school tutoring/mentoring
- computer-assisted learning programs
- adaptive technology for special needs
- alternate programming
- correspondence courses
- special interest courses (such as Computer Game Design)
- cultural course offerings (i.e. Native Studies)
- carefully selected and trained teachers for at-risk students

Employment and/or Career Development

- credit-based experiential work opportunities (i.e. Co-operative Education, Work Experience)
- vocational options
- Youth Apprenticeship Program
- career guidance
- employability skill development

School Organization/Environment

- flexible time tabling
- reduced course loading
- flexible attendance policy
- flexible class and school dress and department regulations

Interagency/Departmental Collaboration/Support Services

- case management/intervention monitoring
- interdisciplinary team assessment/services
- drug counselling
- day-care programs
- regular and consistent social support services during school hours
- specific transition programming with obtainable goals

The organization of “retention for success” strategies and components will be dictated by the realities, particular circumstances and operating environment of school districts and individual schools. However, consideration of the real needs of students at risk is paramount to the success of any intervention strategy and component organization. Transition planning which takes into account the desires, interests, and abilities of the student, coupled with career exploration, work experience, and other opportunities which link education and training to the world of work, is a critical component for many. Thus, school districts must ensure that at-risk students are provided appropriate programs designed to facilitate their transition planning and their successful transition from school to work and/or further post-secondary training. Students must believe that programming is being designed to meet their needs and that the goal of all involved is to facilitate their successful completion of high school. Respect for the student and his or her individual circumstances requires that choices remain available and that the student actively participates in the program design and periodic review process.

The Task Force therefore recommends that:

- ***a dedicated budget be assigned for at-risk students to provide an appropriate level of support for the implementation of the General and Specific “Retention for Success” Strategies and Components***
- ***Department of Education focus attention on how to best serve districts’ at-risk populations and on the findings and implications of the Life After School report (in particular the issues of attendance and program offerings for returning drop-outs) by holding focus groups throughout the province or by hosting an event such as a provincial forum***

- *Department of Education ensure that the “Suggestions for Future Directions” found in the Department of Education (1997) document Vocational Education in the Graduation Years: A Time of Transition are addressed*
- *Department of Education in partnership with the Department of Human Resources Development-NB explore opportunities for the provision of academic upgrading for at-risk youth*
- *districts take steps to ensure that at-risk students have access to the four components of the Comprehensive and Developmental Guidance Program and that each at-risk student has an opportunity to participate in the transition planning process and experiential work-based and employability skill development programs*

VII. CONCLUSION

As a society, we cannot afford to dismiss the very real challenges that some of our youth face. The premature entry of students into today's rapidly changing world of work will have far-reaching implications for both the individual and society. The change in the early school leaving age is an attempt to better prepare youth for the challenges of the future. However, additional time in school will not result in increased success unless an environment is created in which the student can be successful and therefore be more apt to persevere. The Task Force urges that its recommendations be approved in order to ensure that schools, in collaboration with stakeholders, are able to structure the learning environment for success for all students including those at risk of dropping out.

VIII. SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

The School Leaving Age Task Force was established to make recommendations to the Minister of Education for the successful implementation of the change in the school leaving age from age 16 to age 18 scheduled to occur on July 1, 1999 as stated in the *Education Act*. The recommendations that have been stated throughout this document are organized in two sections: recommendations for action by the Department of Education and recommendations which are suggested for consideration by the New Brunswick government's Interdepartmental Committee on Youth. Following each recommendation the page number where the recommendation can be found in the body of the text is in parentheses.

Recommendations for the Department of Education:

Department:

1. *Develop and implement an Information and Awareness Campaign that provides appropriate information to the following groups (p.3):*
 - *students who will be between the ages of 15 and 18 on July 1, 1999, and their parents or guardians*
 - *educators of students in the age category identified above students, parents and guardians, and educators of students under the age of 15 throughout the school system*

And through the services of Communications-New Brunswick:

 - *a employers of youth*
 - *provincial, federal government and First Nation employees who provide services to youth in New Brunswick the general public*
2. *Establish a system (K through Grade 12) for the identification and tracking of students at risk. (p.5)*
3. *Research, identify and implement effective Aboriginal at-risk and drop-out prevention strategies. (p.13)*
4. *Assign a dedicated budget for at-risk students to provide an appropriate level of support for the implementation of the General and Specific "Retention for Success" Strategies and Components. (p. 15)*
5. *Focus attention on how to best serve districts' at-risk populations and on the findings and implications of the Life After School report (in particular the issues of school attendance and program offerings for returning drop-outs) by hosting an event such as a provincial forum or by holding focus groups throughout the province. (p.15)*
6. *Ensure that the "Suggestions for Future Directions" found in the Department of Education document Vocational Education in the Graduation Years: A Time o Transition (December 1997) are addressed. (p. 16)*

Districts:

7. *Include in District Education Plans, when appropriate, strategies (including professional development opportunities for teachers) aimed at addressing the needs of schools' at-risk student populations (as outlined in Appendix B). (p.5)*

8. *Take steps to ensure that at-risk students have access to the four components of the Comprehensive and Developmental Guidance Program and that each at-risk student has an opportunity to participate in the transition planning process and experiential work-based and employability skill-development programs. (p. 16)*

Schools:

9. *Include in School Improvement Plans, when appropriate, strategies aimed at addressing the needs of schools' at-risk student populations (as outlined in Appendix B). (p. 5)*

Recommendations for Consideration by the Interdepartmental Committee on Youth:

1. Human Resources Development-New Brunswick:

It is recommended by the School Leaving Task Force that the Department of Human Resources Development - New Brunswick review its administrative procedures governing the delivery of the School Supplement. (p. 7)

2. Department of Labour.

It is recommended by the School Leaving Age Task Force that the Employment Standards Act be amended to apply the existing restrictions on employers who wish to employ youths under eighteen (18), and who have not yet completed high school. (p. 7)

It is further recommended that where the employer is seeking to employ the youth during the restricted hours, and where the youth is living independently without a guardian, the requirement that a guardian approve the permit be waived. (p. 7)

3. Provincial Government:

It is recommended by the School Leaving Age Task Force that the Government of New Brunswick clearly articulate, in either new or amended social policy legislation, the legal responsibility of the state to youth whose parents or guardians are incapable or fail to carry out their parental role. From this delineation will flow the need for the basic assistance, appropriate essential services, and co-ordination of service delivery. (p.9)

4. Interdepartmental -Interagency co-operation and relations:

Early school leaving is commonly the result of students not experiencing learning success in combination with personal, social, or economic problems. Some potential early school leavers have problems that are well beyond the capacity of schools to deal with effectively. Therefore it is recommended that:

- a. steps be taken at the zone/regional and school district level to better collaborate and co-ordinate the efforts of the various departments and agencies that serve potential at-risk students and those currently at risk (i.e. Health and Community Services, Education, Human Resources Development-NB, Solicitor General, Justice, Labour, and appropriate non-government agencies). (p. 6)*
- b. increased cooperation between Health and Community Services and the Department of Education be fostered in order to ensure that (p. 6):*
 - i. at-risk preschoolers transition successfully from home and preschool or day care to the public school system*
 - ii. appropriate early intervention services are continued by the Department of Education for those children who have been identified as being at risk through the Early Childhood Initiatives*
- c. Human Resources Development-New Brunswick and Education explore opportunities to form partnerships for the provision of academic upgrading for at-risk youth. (p. 16)*

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Appendix A: Situations That Place Students At Risk¹

Family Related

low socio-economic status
dysfunctional home life
no parent involvement
low parental expectations
non-English speaking home
ineffective parenting/abuse
high mobility

Community Related

lack of community support services or response lack of community support for schools
high incidences of criminal activities lack of school/community linkages

Student Related

poor school attitude
low ability level
attendance/truancy
behaviour/discipline problems
pregnancy
substance abuse
poor peer relationships
non-participation
friends have dropped out
illness/disabilities
Low self-esteem/self-efficacy

School Related

conflict between home/school culture
ineffective discipline system
lack of adequate counselling
negative school climate
lack of relevant curriculum
passive instructional strategies
inappropriate use of technology
disregard of student learning styles
retentions/suspensions
low expectations

¹ Duttweiler, Patricia. **Effective Strategies for Educating Students in At-Risk Situations.** National Dropout Prevention Center, 1995. P.7-8.

***Appendix B:
Recommended Approaches: Practices that Promote School Success among
At-Risk Students***

I. Effective Schooling:

A. Recommended Practices

The literature on effective schools shows that they are successful with all students, including those at-risk of failing or dropping out. They foster a school climate and environment that helps students in at-risk situations experience success. Such schools are effective with at-risk students because of

- vigorous instructional leadership
- a principal who makes clear, consistent, and fair decisions
- an emphasis on discipline and a safe and orderly environment
- instructional practices that emphasize basic skills and academic achievement
- collegiality among teachers in support of student achievement
- teachers with high expectations that **all** students can and will learn

Effective schools deliver a high-quality education to their students right from the start. They **mediate**. This is the process of ensuring that all students acquire -- the first time around -- the skills they need to function effectively both in school and the world outside of school. In other words, **mediation** ensures that remediation will not be necessary.

Characteristics of effective teachers of at-risk students:

- They believe that all students can learn and that they must find the most effective way to teach them. These teachers are persistent; their attitude clearly communicates to the students that they can learn and will learn.
- They are equipped with the knowledge and skills to be effective with at-risk students. They are given and take advantage of professional development opportunities to learn appropriate skills.
- They plan, organize and use instructional time effectively.
- They find the correct place to begin instruction, determine students' learning strengths, weaknesses, and then adjust instruction for each child accordingly.
- They collaborate with other teachers to meet the needs of at-risk students. Teaming often requires a great deal of innovation on the part of both teachers and administrators.
- They employ cooperative learning.

- They communicate closely with parents, celebrating successes and working in partnership to solve problems.
- They use effective classroom management skills and strategies. Behavioural expectations are clearly delineated and communicated to both students and parents. With students who often misbehave, the effective teacher searches for the underlying reason and seeks help to develop appropriate intervention strategies.

B. Effective Schooling in New Brunswick:

These are some of the DOE initiatives that promote and support effective schooling practices in New Brunswick:

School Improvement Planning

Positive Learning Environment Policy

Policy 701

Comprehensive Developmental Guidance and Health

Literacy and Numeracy Initiatives

Early Years Initiatives, Middle School Program, Grades 9 and 10 of the High School Program

II. Prevention and Early Intervention

A. Recommended Practices

Common sense tells us that the best way to solve a problem is to prevent it. If that is not possible, then address it early and quickly before it gets out of hand. Clearly, the best way to keep students happy and productive in school is to prevent or intervene early in situations and events that cause disillusionment, dissatisfaction and unhappiness. Prevention includes those actions taken which anticipate, forestall, or deal with cognitive, social or personal problems before they irreparably impair a student's ability to perform successfully. Prevention strategies are designed to "level the playing field", help students at risk enter the school system ready to learn and develop resiliency. Resiliency is the ability to withstand, adjust to and recover from risk, stress, or adverse environments or circumstances. Research has identified resiliency as necessary for at-risk children to survive and achieve success.

Quality Early Childhood Education. Early intervention is vital to effective prevention. Intervention at the middle or high school levels is often too late for many students. The most effective means of reducing the number of drop-outs is to provide the best possible classroom instruction from the beginning. Intensive efforts over a period of years, including birth to age three, preschool and kindergarten programs, can ensure children enter first grade with good language development, cognitive skills, and a positive self-concept regardless of family background or personal characteristics. Since parents are their children's first teachers, they need to be involved in their child's early schooling experiences that include preventative health and nutrition components.

Developing Socially Responsible Behaviour. Safe and orderly school climates are required for successful student learning. Students need to learn and practise acceptable social and emotional behaviours just as they learn and practise academic knowledge and skills such as, punctuality and personal appearance. In the primary years, it is important that time is spent teaching social and ethical behaviours and classroom management to children as well as developing group cohesiveness and caring.

Non-Graded Primary Schools. Research indicates flexible age groupings during the primary years and the use of developmentally appropriate strategies provide effective support for at-risk children in the system.

Linking Social Services to Schools. A case-management approach for at-risk students and families that cuts across several human services systems to ensure clients receive appropriate services, treatment, care and opportunities has proven successful. Educational leaders and decision makers are urged to form interagency services co-ordinating boards.

B. Early Intervention and Prevention in New Brunswick

These are some of the early intervention and prevention initiatives that came to the attention of the Task Force. Some are available province-wide while others are limited to particular districts or schools.

Province-Wide:

Department of Education Provincial Kindergarten Program

Early Years Initiative

Grade 3 Literacy Assessment

Grade 3 Mathematics Assessment (to be implemented)

Middle Level Language Proficiency Assessment

Programs and Services provided by New Brunswick Department of Health and Community Services:

- Early Childhood Initiatives
- Support Services to Education
- Public Health Nursing Services
- Child Protection
- Paediatric Rehabilitation Services
- Special Needs services and funding
- Portage Drug Treatment Program and Services
- Youth Treatment Centre (for conduct-disordered children)

Services provided by Atlantic Provinces Special Education Authority

Services provided by Department of Human Resources and Development-New Brunswick:

- Case Management
- Income Support
- Child Care Assistance
- Youth Futures

Probationary services: New Brunswick Department of the Solicitor General

District and/or school:

Early Intervention for Literacy Skills: Reading Recovery; First Steps

Skills for Growing

Talents Unlimited

Focus

Engage

Engage at Work

Homework Hotlines

Business Partnerships

Mentoring Programs

Tutoring Programs

Scribes for learning disabled students

Peer Helping/Peer Tutoring Programs

Peer Mediation

Guidance and Counselling Services

Comprehensive and Developmental Guidance Program:

- Guidance Curriculum
- Individualized Planning
- Responsive Services
- System Support

Breakfast and Hot Lunch Programs

Behaviour Programs: Conflict Resolution; Anger Management

School-based problem-solving teams such as Teacher Assistant Teams (TAT); Student

Services Assistant Teams (SSAT)

Systematic Training for Effective Teaching (STET) (for behaviour/classroom management)

Advisor/Advisee programs

III. Parent Education and Parent Involvement

A. Recommended Practices

The most influential curriculum in students' lives is the curriculum of the home. Successful schools who work with at-risk students involve parents and respond to the qualities, needs and characteristics of the parents of those children. They meet parents' needs by responding to their literacy level, preferred language, daily commitments and responsibilities, and the comfort level of parent involvement.

Parental involvement programs that target parent/teacher co-operation and focus on the achievement of specific educational goals show the greatest learning effects. Every effective prevention program contains innovative components of parent involvement. It is suggested that teachers and administrators reflect on the quality and benefits of the types of parental involvement activities by asking the following:

- Are the activities helping teachers and parents speak with one voice on academic matters?
- Are the activities helping focus more student time on academic learning tasks?
- Are the activities helping the teacher/student accomplish academic objectives?

B. Parent Involvement and Parent Education in New Brunswick:

These are some of the opportunities for parent involvement and education that came to the attention of the Task Force:

Province-Wide:

Parent/Teacher Conferences

Individualized Educational Program case conferences

Home and School Associations

Provincial Advocacy Groups such as

- New Brunswick Association for Community Living
- Learning Disabilities Association of New Brunswick
- Autism Association

School Parent Advisory Committees

District Parent Advisory Committees

Provincial Board of Education

District and/or School:

-“Meet the Teacher” events

-Special events and/or fundraisers that cater to families such as fun days, bazaars, carnivals

-Program Information/Education Sessions

-Systematic Training for Effective Parenting (Behaviour Management/Discipline Program)

-Teen Parenting Courses and Day-Care Programs (Fredericton High and McNaughton Science and Technology Centre)

-Parent Volunteer Programs such as reading with and/or to struggling readers; assisting in school libraries; playground, cafeteria supervision; breakfast/hot lunch programs; mentoring, tutoring, guest speaking.

IV. Instructional Strategies/Initiatives for Students in At-risk Situations

A. Recommended Practices

Instruction is effective when concepts and content are presented in a variety of ways, is interactive and students are required to use several modalities. Students who receive good instruction are given the appropriate tools to complete learning tasks. Often, with the at-risk student, that entails helping students learn how to learn. Teachers cannot assume that at-risk students are able to outline, listen, or organize materials and information. These skills may need to be taught. The effective teacher uses instructional strategies that propel and sustain students' involvement in the learning process. Motivation is critically important. Abilities and skills are useless without the desire to use them. The use of techniques, strategies, or programs that hook the learner can help achieve involvement and facilitate the successful completion of desired learning.

B. Instructional Initiatives, Strategies and Programs to help students at risk in New Brunswick

These are some of the initiatives that came to the attention of the Task Force:

Province-Wide:

Professional development opportunities provided by the Department of Education (voluntary teacher participation):

- Co-operative Learning
- Multi-level or Differentiated Instruction
- Transition Planning
- Learning Styles
- Multiple Intelligences

Excellence in Education Tutoring, Enhancement, Enrichment, Learning Disabled, Behavioural Programs (Department of Education funding allotments given to each school district)

Instructional practices of Middle School and Grades 9 and 10 of the High School Programs

Literacy

The New Brunswick Department of Education 1995 *Literacy: Acquisition and Enhancement K-12* pamphlet outlines recommended practices for the development of literacy skills. The following literacy programs are listed as being available province-wide:

- Frameworks
- First Steps
- Reading Tutor 120

- Atlantic Canada English Language Arts Curriculum K-3, 4-6,6-8.
- Reading Styles (Professional Development offered through DOE Summer Institutes)

In addition, the Department of Education recently implemented the “Resources for Learning Disabled Students: High School Foundation Program” and is currently pilot testing “Learning Strategies Program, Grade 11-12” and “Resources for Native Studies: Language Arts, Grades 9 and 10 of the High School Program.” The latter resource is intended to provide all students in the Foundations program with the opportunity to explore the literature produced by Aboriginal authors in general and Maliseet/Mi’kmaq writers in particular.

Mathematics

The Foundation for the Atlantic Canada Mathematics Curriculum (APEF) has developed guiding principles for the instruction of mathematics which constitute best practices. Numeracy and mathematics programs that reflect best practices have been introduced at the elementary level (K to Grade 5) and are currently being developed for the middle and high school years.

Appendix C:

Provincially Funded Schools with Effective Aboriginal At-Risk and Dropout Prevention Strategies

JOE DUQUETTE HIGH SCHOOL

This is an Aboriginally managed high school in Saskatoon and was established under the jurisdiction of a separate school board. It has strong cultural programming, and there is a culture camp at the end of each year. A language component is also included in the curriculum. **Joe Duquette School** is operating at maximum capacity.

CHILDREN OF THE EARTH HIGH SCHOOL

This is a high school in Winnipeg School Division 1. In its few years of existence, it has grown rapidly. The school offers a strong cultural core as well as specific support programs that are provincially funded. Students from **Children of the Earth** who appeared before the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Affairs spoke about the school with commitment and with enthusiasm about completing their high school education.

ILE-A-LA-CROSSE SCHOOL

This school in northern Saskatchewan is operated by a board composed of local people. It offers education from junior kindergarten to Grade 12. Métis values, history and culture are an integral part of all subject areas, and Michif is taught as a language credit. The school building houses a day-care facility, dental clinic, and public library, and the gym and classrooms are used in the evenings for public events.

SPIRIT RISING SCHOOL

This school was established by school district 39 in Vancouver, British Columbia. The core curriculum includes Native history, culture, lifestyle and philosophy. The school's objective is to weave Native culture into a program which aims to develop academic skills, enhance awareness of Native culture and the local community, and encourage social and personal growth.