



# At a Crossroads

First Results for the 18 to 20-Year-old  
Cohort of the Youth in Transition Survey

## Highlights



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Further results are available in the report: *At a Crossroads: First Results for the 18 to 20-Year-old Cohort of the Youth in Transition Survey*:

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**H**uman capital – having a labour force that possesses the knowledge and skills needed for innovation and productivity growth and that is flexible and adaptable in the face of on-going change – is the cornerstone of success for societies living and working in today’s knowledge-based, globalized environment. Canada’s long-term economic and social potential therefore depends in good measure on how successfully youth navigate school and work transitions. The Youth in Transition Survey (YITS), developed through a partnership between Human Resources Development Canada and Statistics Canada, is a longitudinal survey that was designed to collect a broad range of information on the education and labour market experiences of youth. The first cycle of the YITS for the 18-20-year-old cohort collected data from more than 22,000 youth between January and March 2000.

Youth aged 18-20 are at a crossroads. For many, the transition from school to work is a complex, non-linear process. Given variable pathways, a survey such as the YITS that tracks the progress of youth is a key instrument for identifying the factors that can assist youth in the successful pursuit of their education and employment goals. The second cycle of the YITS, scheduled for early 2002, will collect new information from this same group of youth, tracking their educational and labour market activities over time.

*At a Crossroads* provides a descriptive overview of the first results from the 2000 Youth in Transition Survey for 18-20-year-olds in Canada.

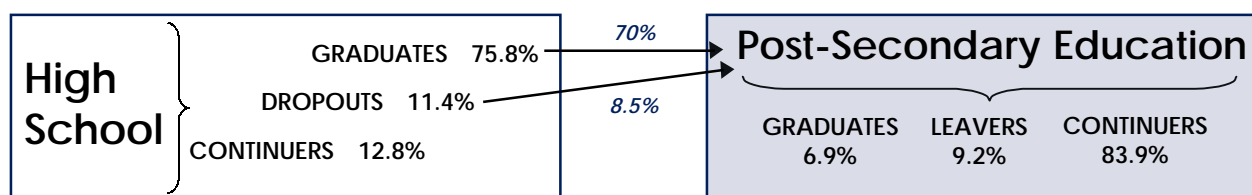
## Highlights

- By the age of 20, the vast majority of Canadian youth (85%, as of December 1999) had graduated from high school.
- About 70% of high school graduates between the ages of 18 and 20 had gone on to post-secondary education.

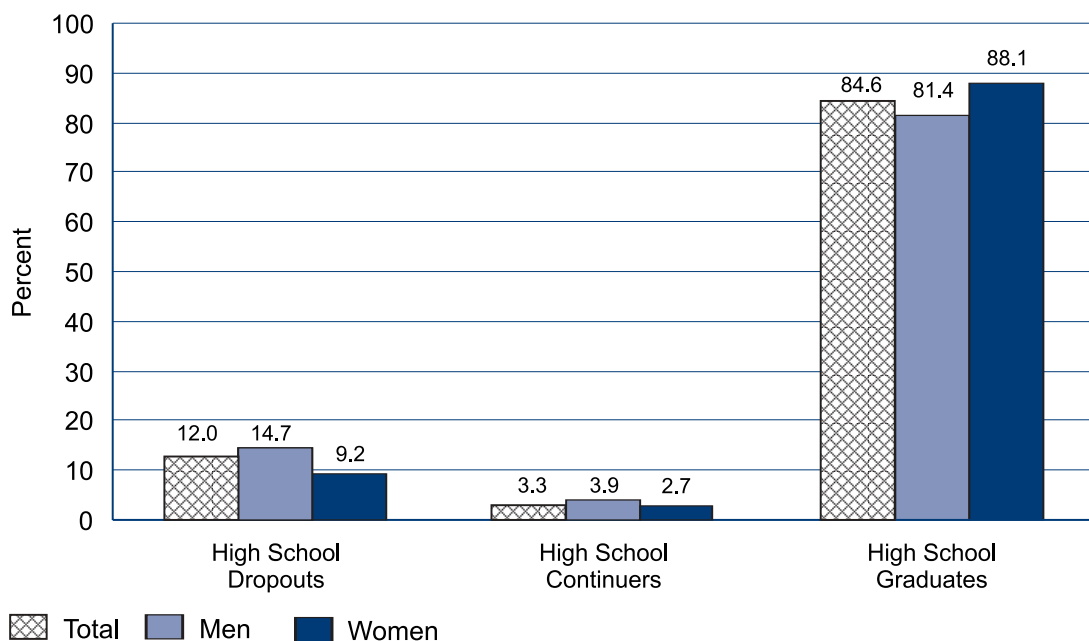
### *Dropping out of high school – Status at age 20*

- As of December 1999, the high school dropout rate for 20-year-olds stood at 12%. This compares to a dropout rate of 18% reported in the 1991 School Leavers Survey.
- The Atlantic Provinces in particular showed large average decreases in their dropout rates, which fell from among the highest rates in 1991 to among the lowest by the end of 1999.
- Dropout rates remained high in most jurisdictions for young males compared to young females.
- Some high school dropouts engage in “second chance” educational opportunities – such as completing high school at a later age, or enrolling in post-secondary programs. About 8.5% of 18-20-year-old high school dropouts had participated in post-secondary programs by December 1999.

### Youth in Transition: Education Status of 18-20-Year-olds, December 1999



## By the age of 20, most youth had completed high school, although compared to young women, more young men had dropped out



### *Characteristics of high school dropouts*

- High school graduates were more likely than dropouts to have lived in two-parent families during high school, while dropouts were more likely than graduates to have come from single-parent families.
- Graduates were more likely to have had parents who had completed a post-secondary diploma or university degree; the proportion of dropouts who had parents who had not completed high school was three times that of graduates.
- Dropouts obtained lower grades, on average, than graduates. Male dropouts in particular were more likely to have achieved low grades.
- But not all dropouts obtained low grades. In fact, almost half obtained a B average. Clearly, academic difficulty is not the only reason for dropping out.
- Compared to graduates, dropouts were less engaged in school, both academically and socially. They were less likely to have had close friends who pursued further education past high school and were more likely to have engaged in such behaviors as skipping class, drinking alcohol regularly, and using drugs frequently.
- While school-related reasons dominated the decision to drop out, other factors also played a role – for young men wanting to work was an important factor, as was pregnancy and child rearing in the case of some young women.
- Three-quarters of those who had dropped out later expressed regret over their decision.

### *Working during high school*

- High school graduates were more likely than dropouts to have had a paid job during their last year of high school.

- Dropout rates were lowest for those who worked a moderate number of hours weekly and highest for those who worked the equivalent of full-time hours.
- Male dropouts who worked during high school were most likely to have worked long hours.

### Pathways after high school

- As of December 1999, just over half of all 18-20-year-olds who were no longer in high school were post-secondary students; others had already graduated from a post-secondary institution (e.g., community college or CEGEP); and others had left a post-secondary program before completing it.
- Slightly more than one-quarter of youth no longer in high school had graduated but had not gone on to post-secondary education (PSE); others were high school dropouts that had not gone on to PSE (12%).

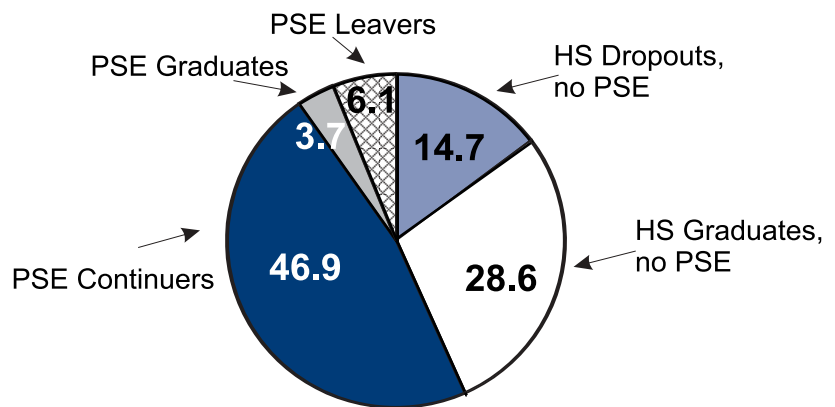
- Higher percentages of young women were either post-secondary continuers or post-secondary graduates compared to young men.
- PSE participants were least likely to have come from single-parent families and were more likely to have lived with both parents while in high school.
- PSE continuers tended to come from families where one or both parents had a university degree.

### Skills

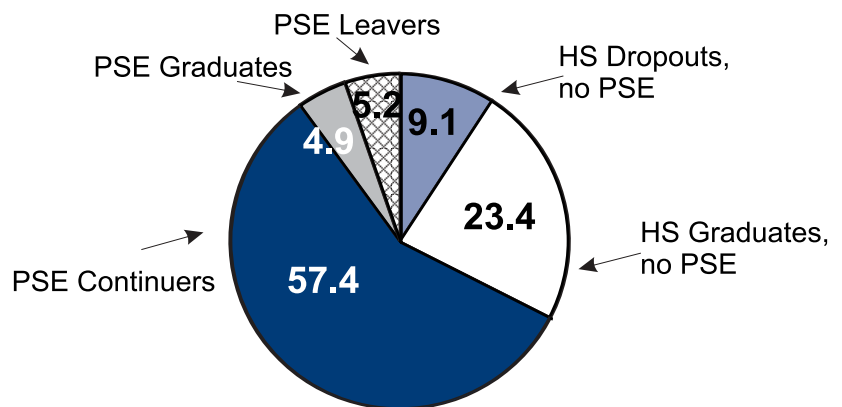
- Youth generally felt most confident about

## Gender Differences in Pathways After High School (%)

### MALES – No Longer in High School



### FEMALES – No Longer in High School



their reading skills and least confident about their math and computer skills. There were clear gender differences: girls tended to rate their reading and writing skills more positively than did boys; boys, in contrast, rated their problem-solving, math and computer skills more highly than did girls.

- Larger proportions of high school dropouts consistently rated their skills as being fair/poor; the largest percentages of youth who rated their skills as being very good/excellent were PSE continuers.
- High school dropouts were less likely than other young people to have been exposed

to career and job-skills courses while in high school.

### *Volunteering*

- Youth generally regarded their volunteer experience positively — over half of those who had volunteered reported that they had learned new skills they could apply to a job.

### *Labour market participation*

- Rates of full-time employment were highest for 18-20-year-olds who had completed a post-secondary program. Though employed, many of the jobs held by high school graduates with no PSE were part-time. The jobless rate (which includes both those who were unemployed and those not in the labour force) was highest for high school dropouts with no PSE.
- Generally, higher percentages of males had full-time jobs; part-time work was more common for females, especially among high school graduates with no PSE.

### *Experiences during first year of post-secondary education*

- Close to half of PSE participants attended a community college or CEGEP in their first year of PSE; about one-third attended university; and the balance attended a range of other non-university post-secondary institutions such as technical, trade or vocational schools, university colleges or private business or training schools.
- PSE participants generally had positive attitudes and relationships during their first post-secondary year. But PSE leavers tended to be much less positive than continuers in terms of their 'fit' academically.

### *Access to post-secondary education*

- Just under half of 18-20-year-olds reported facing barriers to going as far in school as they

would like. About two-thirds of those reporting barriers cited financial barriers.

- Additional barriers reported by high school continuers and dropouts were: not being able to get into the PSE program they wanted or marks that were too low; not enough interest or motivation; and in the case of high school dropouts, wanting to work and needing to care for their own children.
- Students relied on a wide variety of funding sources for PSE. The most common source was earnings from employment. Compared to PSE graduates and leavers, higher percentages of PSE continuers also received money from their parents or partner, from scholarships, awards or prizes, from personal savings and from government-sponsored student loans.
- The percentages who had ever applied for a government-sponsored student loan were highest for PSE participants. Relatively few high school graduates with no PSE, high school continuers or high school dropouts (with no PSE) had ever made such an application.
- Of those who had applied for a government-sponsored student loan, close to 20% of PSE continuers reported that they had been rejected at least once; this fell to 16% of PSE leavers and 13% of PSE graduates.

Today's knowledge-based society presents youth with both opportunities and challenges as they make the transition to the labour market and full adulthood. The challenge for youth is to ensure that the education and labour market choices they make now will allow them to participate fully in the economy and the society of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. That means having the education and skills that are needed and having the ability and flexibility to be able to learn new skills as time goes on.