



FACT
SHEET

16

OBTAINING A DIPLOMA BEFORE THE AGE OF 20

1 CONTEXT

The issue of students dropping out of school remains a concern, even if the situation has improved in the last decade and a large majority of Quebecers obtain a first diploma in adulthood. However, reducing the school-dropout rate and the non-completion of diplomas is no simple matter. In fact, there are multiple risk factors that appear at various times during childhood and adolescence.

SOURCE

This fact sheet is a brief summary of the results presented in the following fascicle: DUPÉRÉ, Véronique, Isabelle ARCHAMBAULT, HÉLÈNE DESROSIERS and Virginie NANHOU (2019). "Obtenir un diplôme avant l'âge de 20 ans : une analyse ancrée dans une perspective des parcours de vie", *Étude longitudinale du développement des enfants du Québec (ELDEQ) – De la naissance à l'âge adulte*, [Online], Institut de la statistique du Québec, vol. 9, fascicle 1, p. 1-28. [www.stat.gouv.qc.ca/statistiques/education/diplomation/diplome-avant-20-ans.pdf].

Note that the QLSCD has been following a cohort of children who were born in Québec in 1997-1998.

2 HIGHLIGHTS

Analyses were carried out in order to identify links between factors existing at various periods in young people's lives and obtaining a diploma before the age of 20. The chosen periods are the following: preschool years, first cycle of elementary school, transition from elementary to high school, and secondary 3.

Preschool years

- The results reveal that girls, children whose mothers are immigrants, children from higher socioeconomic backgrounds and children with better knowledge of words and numbers before starting school were more likely to obtain a first diploma before the age of 20. Conversely, children with more symptoms of hyperactivity and inattention in infancy are less likely to obtain a first diploma before the age of 20.

First cycle of elementary school

- Even when taking into account individual and family backgrounds when students start their schooling, performing well academically in the first cycle of elementary school significantly increases the probability of obtaining a diploma before the age of 20.

Transition from elementary to high school, and secondary 3

- Other factors emerging later on in the lives of young people could also impact their school trajectory. For example, children whose parents have high academic aspirations for them and children with high academic engagement during the transition from elementary to high school or in Secondary 3 are more likely to obtain a diploma before the age of 20. Conversely, some externalized behaviours (e.g. aggression or opposition) and, to a lesser degree, attending high school in an underprivileged area, reduce the likelihood of a young person obtaining a diploma before the age of 20.

Among young people born in Québec in 1997–1998 and living in Québec in 2017, 79% obtained their first diploma in seven years or less. The proportion is higher among girls (83%) than boys (74%).



3 OF NOTE

The socioeconomic background seems to have a persistent effect on the likelihood of a child obtaining a diploma or not. Children who have lived in a more socioeconomically advantaged household in early childhood are more likely to obtain a first diploma before the age of 20; this link remains significant at all stages of the school trajectory.

For most of the factors studied, the measurements in Secondary 3 are associated with obtaining a diploma or not, even when taking into account the measurements obtained at earlier stages of the school trajectory. For example, a decrease in academic performance or an increase in externalized behaviours in the second cycle of high school reduces the likelihood of obtaining a diploma before the age of 20, regardless of the student's previous performance or behaviours. In other words, not everything is played out in elementary school or in the transition from elementary to high school.

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4 DEFINITIONS AND MEASUREMENTS

The administrative files of the Ministère de l'Éducation et de l'Enseignement supérieur (MEES) for the school years 2012–2013 to 2016–2017 were used to determine whether or not young people obtained a diploma in seven years or less. The term “diploma” is used here to refer to a Secondary School Diploma (DES), a Diploma of Vocational Studies (DEP), an Attestation of Vocational Specialization (ASP) or an Attestation of Vocational Studies (AEP).

INTERVENTION PATHS

The results suggest that it is important to act early and monitor children throughout their journey when trying to prevent school dropout. This could prevent problematic trajectories from crystallizing over time or difficulties arising later on that would compromise a favourable school trajectory. Furthermore, it seems important not only to propose quality interventions focusing on students and their immediate environment, but also to consider how social policies can contribute to reducing socioeconomic inequalities.