

High School Completion: A Comprehensive Review of Projects Directed Toward Keeping Students in School

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Abstract: *Since 1999, the Alberta Initiative for School Improvement (AISI) has provided funding to provincial school authorities for projects designed to improve student learning and performance. Conducted in three-year cycles, this unique approach has successfully helped to initiate approximately 1,600 grassroots projects led by school districts, teachers, parents, and students across the province. The following comprehensive review examines 18 selected projects selected by Alberta Education (Cycle 2, 2003-2006) as focusing upon high school completion. Based on the project report findings, a number of successful strategies and programs were implemented that targeted students at risk of non-completion. The following discussion will identify the major foci, themes, and strategies arising from those projects.*

Introduction

The 21st Century has ushered in a need for greater technological comprehension, occupational training, and intelligent consumption of global issues. Like most industrialized countries, Canada is a nation that acknowledges these changes and therefore places significant value on education and its means of training future professionals and citizens. The need for a highly-skilled workforce is mounting and shows no sign of decline (Alberta Commission on Learning, 2003; Government of Canada, 2009).

Given the staggering provincial statistics which indicate that approximately 25% of students entering Grade 10 do not complete or graduate from high school with a diploma within five years, we know that the province of Alberta is falling below the national average, and may suffer serious economic, political, and social consequences as we forge further into the 21st Century. Therefore, it was the goal of the Alberta Commission on Learning (ACOL) to have 90% of Alberta's youth complete high school within four years of starting Grade 10 (Alberta Learning, 2008). This sentiment has been reiterated and accepted in the Alberta Learning 2008-2011 Business Plan (Alberta Learning, 2008). The Alberta Commission on Learning (ACOL) has identified several strategies that may help accomplish this goal. Most notably, and pertinent to this discussion, is that there must be greater opportunity to pilot and evaluate new approaches through the Alberta Initiative for School Improvement (AISI). The ACOL recommended that innovative strategies to keep students in school should be considered a top priority for funding, and that all results should be shared for further growth and benefits. Prior

to reporting on the outcomes of Cycle 2 (2003-2006) AISI projects and their potential impact, it is important to examine the factors associated with non-completion.

High School Completion

High school completion is a topic of considerable interest in industrialized countries. The economic and sociocultural health of a nation is often inextricably linked to the importance of education. In a report released by the Centre for the Study of Living Standards (2007), there are significant correlations between educational attainment and labor market outcomes; the labor force participation rate; the employment rate; as well as poverty, crime, and health. Most notably, the negative impact on these linkages is most evident in the absence of high school completion. Typically, high school completion is reported quantitatively. In Alberta and other North American locations, completion status is based on those who complete or graduate from high school with a diploma within a prescribed number of years after entering (Alberta Learning, 2004; Satchwell, 2004). As suggested above, calculations in Alberta begin five years after entering Grade 10. Other methods of calculation in Canada and the United States include using Grade 12 enrollment statistics, bracketing age ranges of graduates, and including students who wrote General Educational Development (GED) exams (Bracey, 2009; Satchwell, 2004; Warren & Halpern-Manners, 2007). Taken together, it is clear that depending upon the method of calculation, it is difficult to ascertain a universally accepted definition of high school completion/graduation, and even more difficult to determine whether

it is increasing or decreasing locally, nationally, or internationally. Nevertheless, it is an urgent social problem in North America, and a genuine area of concern in Alberta.

Factors Associated With Non-Completion

To better understand the factors leading to non-completion, there are several specific factors that must be considered. The main factors identified for further exploration in Alberta include gender, First Nations/Metis/Inuit (FNMI), socioeconomic and regional considerations, as well as student- and school-related issues (Satchwell, 2004).

According to the literature, boys are at the greatest risk of leaving school early (Bushnik, Barr-Telford, & Bussiere, 2004; Satchwell, 2004). Male students are more susceptible to substance abuse, learning/reading disabilities, acting out in school, diagnoses of ADD and ADHD, delinquency, and the effects of poverty and physical abuse, to name a few (Centre for the Study of Living Standards, 2007; Satchwell, 2004). These, and other devastating consequences often cause male students to either fail or to be retained at grade level.

In Canada, First Nations/Metis/Inuit (FNMI) students are perhaps the highest risk population with respect to non-completion. Statistics indicate that only one in five Canadian Aboriginal students who enroll in Grade 8 will receive their high school diploma (Centre for the Study of Living Standards, 2007; Cowley & Easton, 2004; Satchwell, 2004; Statistics Canada, 2003). Given the difficulties in finding employment without a high school diploma, for either Aboriginal or non-Aboriginal peoples, the severity of the situation is exacerbated by secondary social problems such as poverty, substance abuse, rapid population increases, criminal involvement, and racism, to name a few (Centre for the Study of Living Standards, 2007; Satchwell, 2004).

Like many minority and indigenous populations throughout the world, Canadian Aboriginal students feel marginalized within the school setting (McPartland, 1994; Richardson & Blanchett-Cohen, 2000). They report poor relationships with teachers and fellow students, a lack of care and concern, and a perceived expectation of failure (Heffernan, Beaudin, Gunn, & Tailfeathers, 2004; Sinclair, Christenson, Lehr, & Anderson, 2003). These sentiments are coupled with the negative impact of former residential schools on Aboriginal culture and family structure (Neehan, 2005; Witt, 2005/2006).

Low socioeconomic status is strongly correlated to inner-city locations, where the greatest number of early school leavers reside (Centre for the Study of Living Standards, 2007; Schargel & Smink, 2001; Suh, Suh, & Houston, 2007). The location and condition of a student's life can impact the decision to remain in school (Blackmore, 2007). As indicated in the literature, students living in poverty are more likely to drop out (Bushnik et al., 2004; Satchwell, 2004) as are students living in low-income families (Satchwell, 2004; Schargel & Smink, 2001; Suh & Suh, 2007).

Finally, several student- and school-based issues are predictive of non-completion. Poor relationships with teachers, feelings of isolation, behavioral disorders, and achievement-related factors are strong contributors to early school leaving (Satchwell, 2004; Suh et al., 2007). Other factors include poor family structures and support, increased student mobility (South, Haynie, & Bose, 2005), and conduct disorders (Suh & Suh, 2007).

School Retention

Despite the salience of these dropout factors for Alberta students, there is sufficient literature to suggest that student retention can be positively impacted by a culture of community and care. In 2003, Lehr, Hansen, Sinclair, and Christenson reviewed 45 prevention and intervention studies (i.e., conducted between 1983 and 2000) that addressed dropout or school completion. Lehr et al. concluded that successful programs begin with a personal-affective focus (i.e., teaching interpersonal relations, providing individual counseling), with a later shift to an academic focus (i.e., tutoring, specialized courses).

The literature also suggests that dropout rates are diminished where there is a strong school-based commitment to address specific student needs categorized under the headings of home, community, peers, and school (Christenson, Sinclair, Lehr, & Godber, 2001). With respect to home or family life, parents who provide greater academic support, supervision, and educational expectations (Comer, Haynes, Joyner, & Ben-Avie, 1996), positively increase academic engagement. Community involvement and activities also cultivate a greater sense of belonging, accountability, and commitment to the school environment. This is especially important in schools that have a significant number of poor and minority students (McPartland, 1994). Peer influences must also be integrated into a high school completion program as peer pressure and social networks can positively or negatively affect school experiences and expectations to graduate (Sinclair et al., 2003). And finally, the school itself must find ways to enhance students' interest and enthusiasm for school, motivation to learn, and sense of belonging (Christenson & Thurlow, 2004). The student must understand that there is,

Someone who is not going to give up on them or allow them to be distracted from school; that there is someone who knows them and is available to them throughout the school year, the summer, and into the next school year; and that caring adults want them to learn, do the work, attend class regularly, be on time, express frustration constructively, stay in school, and succeed. (p. 38)

Alberta Initiative for School Improvement (AISI)

AISI has provided funding to provincial school authorities for projects designed to improve student learning and performance (<http://education.alberta.ca/aisi>). Conducted in three-year cycles, this unique approach has successfully helped to initiate approximately 1,600 innovative and creative grassroots projects led by school districts, teachers, parents, and students across the province. Each project is tailored to the local needs and circumstances of the school, school district, and community over a three-year period. Moreover, it is based on the principles of flexibility, collaboration, inquiry, reflection, and sustainability. Projects are funded by Alberta Education and are monitored from the Student Improvement Branch (SIB). In order to qualify, detailed project proposals are to be submitted and approved. Project proposals must include such information as a description of the educational issue requiring funding, a plan of proposed project activities, a detailed three-year budget, a list of measures that will assist in data collection, planned methods of data analysis, staffing

considerations, student demographics, and the proposed professional development activities. Reports are to be submitted each year of implementation. Upon completion, those projects with medium to high effect sizes on the required measures are selected, thematically categorized, and forwarded to university reviewers. According to SIB, all data on student learning, both baseline and outcomes, were converted to a common scale (e.g., standard score) that permitted comparison of improvement, regardless of the type of measure the school authorities used. As it is commonly known, an effect size expresses the increase or decrease in standard deviation units. For each measure, the baseline and annual result were converted to standardized (z) scores with a mean of zero and a standard deviation of one. The effect size for each measure was determined by the difference between the z scores for the baseline and the actual annual results and then averaged over the measures for each project and weighted by the number of students involved in each measure. These average effect sizes were grouped into five categories: no effect (less than zero or not significant), minimal (.01 to less than 0.2), small (0.2 to 0.3), medium (0.4 to 0.7), and large (0.8 or higher). The following is a comprehensive review of the 18 selected high school completion projects with medium to large effect sizes completed in Cycle 2 (2003-2006).

Method

Upon receipt of the 18 selected projects from Alberta Education’s Student Improvement Branch (SIB), all identifying information was removed. The project reports were then distributed to researchers for a triple blind review. As previously indicated, the projects were initiated and completed during the period identified as Cycle 2 (2003-2006). As determined by SIB, the selected projects had significant effect sizes (i.e., .4 to .8 and higher) on those measures involving student learning (e.g., Provincial Achievement Tests, Diploma examinations, standardized measures, and locally developed measures); student behavior, attitude, and satisfaction; and parent satisfaction.

An exploratory approach was employed for categorical and thematic analysis. The researchers read each project report in search of constructs that represent the major and minor themes. These themes lead to hypotheses about causal linkages regarding project effectiveness. Consequently, reports were also read to determine effectiveness for student outcomes and impact on the school and community as well as project design. Descriptive statistics were also calculated to determine the percentage of projects that fell into each of the major themes.

It should be noted that each of the 18 selected AISI projects were designed using an action research approach. That is, in keeping with the intention of action research, the primary purpose of each project was to increase the education professionals’ practice (Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2007). Professional development, experiential knowledge, and the impact of published research and theories in authentic contexts were the primary foci. As such, over the course of three years each project typically adopted several strategies and approaches with the intention of improving completion rates. For instance, a single project may have included the improvement of attendance rates through incentive systems, as well as the implementation of a program designed

to improve standardized academic achievement scores. Therefore, the results herein are not intended for experimental replication. Rather, they are a review of successful themes and approaches for potentially similar high school completion projects.

Categorical Analysis

Each of the 18 selected high school completion projects can be grouped into one or more categories that best describe the reported purpose and focus/foci of each project (Table 1). Category titles are as follows: *instructional/academic support*, *school retention*, *school-based mentorship*, and *transition*.

Table 1

Categorical Frequencies and Percentages of AISI High School Completion Projects

	Frequency*	Percentage**
Instructional/Academic Support	12	67%
School Retention	7	39%
School-Based Mentorship	6	33%
Transition	3	17%

Note. Total number of projects = 18. Projects could fall into one or more categories.

*Frequency = The number of projects that were classified as falling within this category.

**Percentage = The percentage of projects that were classified as falling within this category.

The category of *instructional/academic support* included projects that reportedly provided specific academic assistance through special course offerings, differentiated instruction, and a desire to raise Provincial Achievement Test scores. Projects characterized as instructional/academic support were committed to providing students with the academic skills and training necessary for graduation.

School retention projects were primarily focused on providing additional assistance to ensure that students remain in school/coursework until graduation. There were several different reported approaches included in this classification, all making attempts to improve the school climate and provide alternative/flexible programming. In doing so, the project reports indicated that they were hopeful that students would experience a sense of belonging, commitment, support, and flexibility with respect to their academic well-being.

Many of the projects were categorized under *school-based mentorship*. By definition, effective mentorship programs clearly demonstrate that each student is provided with a caring environment comprised of mentors who provide emotional, psychological, and

academic support. These projects reported focusing upon the vital personal connection between a caring educator and the student.

Finally, several projects were designed to assist students in transitioning into postsecondary education and/or their career. The reported focus was upon meeting eligibility requirements, making suitable career choices, and finding pathway opportunities. This category was entitled *transition*.

Thematic Analysis

The five main themes derived from the project reports were instructional modifications/support, alternative programming, social/psychological support, professional development, and parental/home involvement (Table 2). Themes were ascertained on the basis of being influential foci (i.e., area(s) of success, influence, and primary importance), as reported in the project reports.

Table 2

Main Theme Frequencies and Percentages of AISI High School Completion Projects

	Frequency*	Percentage**
Instructional Modifications	12	67%
Alternative Programming	10	56%
Social/Psychological Support	10	56%
Professional Development	7	39%
Parental/Home Environment	6	33%

Note. Total number of projects = 18. Projects could fall into one or more themes.

*Frequency = The number of projects that were classified as exhibiting this theme.

**Percentage = The percentage of projects that were classified as exhibiting this theme.

Instructional Modifications. The most predominant theme of the projects was instructional modifications. Differentiated learning, the adoption of more effective and diverse learning strategies, one-on-one/small group support, motivational strategies, and the targeting of subject specific needs were the most frequently identified modification methods. Their primary purpose was to supplement basic classroom instruction and provide specific methods of support for students at risk. Several projects employed differentiated learning in order to assist students approach the curriculum in personally meaningful ways. Assessment methods, learning materials, and classroom experiences were tailored to the needs of the students.

A number of projects adopted effective and diverse learning strategies such as brain-based learning strategies, accommodating

multiple intelligences, and using advanced technology in the classroom. According to the reports, both current and research-supported strategies were carefully selected, practiced, and deployed. It was frequently stated that traditional methods of instruction had failed to be successful with at-risk students. Therefore, alternative strategies were implemented.

Many project reports highlighted the benefits associated with one-on-one or small group instruction. Having peers and attentive adults work directly with students provided both academic and psychological support for those at risk. Additionally, attempts to target domain specific difficulties were frequently reported. Many students in jeopardy of leaving school early typically have historical difficulties with one or more academic subjects, most notably language and/or mathematics. Several projects made explicit attempts to identify and remedy such difficulties with additional programming, coaching/mentoring, and tutorials. Successes were reported in the following comments:

New and innovative ways to assess student writing were set up with the focus on the student becoming more aware of (his/her) errors and how to avoid them. Students reviewed returned assignments, checked teacher comments and correction symbols to determine the most frequent writing errors and wrote specific goals for improvement. Each student developed personal goals for improvement in consultation with the teacher.

Models for support (learning centers, homework hotel, classroom support, smaller class sizes, math clubs, homework lunch clubs, classroom workshops, classroom teacher professional development and support) helped mitigate the effects of learned helplessness in some students.

Alternative Programming. Over half of the projects reported the importance of providing *alternative programming* to ensure completion. Students who were identified as at risk, below average, or who had already dropped out were provided with alternative opportunities to complete the necessary course work for graduation. Typically, this involved student learning centres, online academic programs, or career incentive programs.

Student centres were created in several schools to provide additional instructional support, individualized academic assistance, a safe and caring environment in which to work, and a source for finding internal and external sources of mental and financial aid. According to those projects that utilized centres, students responded positively with such comments as: "The Student Centre is an influential part of our school. It has continued to provide help and assistance to me and my peers. It has helped me form superior study habits and organizational skills." Teachers and administration articulated similar sentiments as they noted the importance of centres within the school and community: "Most of my students are non-academics and many have special needs. The Student Centre has been the best support system I have had the opportunity to work with. It is an essential part of my courses."

Online programming and course completion offerings were also commonly implemented. In providing this source of alternative programming, students were able to complete graduation require-

ments with greater flexibility and creativity. Students could either take courses offered through their own school or school division, or enroll in externally based programs. This type of programming was most suitable for those students who found regular attendance challenging, were working full- or part-time, or who needed to pick up missed courses.

Career incentive programs were created to help students understand the opportunities available to them after graduation. Post-secondary requirements, career counseling, and career choices were highlighted by way of programs offered through the school or external bodies, or through supplementary information found in student centres. While many of the projects provided crucial information for transitioning into a post-graduation life, one project focused upon an alternative arts-based program connection with the community. In a most poignant comment they wrote: "Students that came and became involved in these projects would turn up for rehearsal on days when they did not know where they would stay that night. Performances and practice became more important than finding drugs or some of the necessities of life."

Social/Psychological Support. This was a prevalent theme in over half of the AISI high school completion reports. Many projects recognized the importance of a safe and caring environment when assisting students toward graduation. It was noted that the connection a student feels toward their academic community, teachers, and peers is critical when deciding whether to remain in school or to drop out. In response, counseling supports, cross-cultural awareness initiatives, and mentorship programs were frequently established.

Counseling supports ranged from the provision of links to the community for additional psychological assistance, to helping students identify and adopt adaptive emotional/psychological approaches. According to the project reports, such inclusions were well received and successful:

When students arrived, they took part in a sharing circle and developed an understanding of respect, consensus and cooperation in decision making through drama, games, and exercises. . . . The games in the circle of trust building worked really well. We were amazed that 70 people doing group building games together could do so well. Community was built in places that were extremely difficult before.

Several projects were strongly committed to enhancing cross-cultural awareness within their school(s) and community. For many minority populations, the feeling of isolation is a leading cause of early school leaving. By identifying the contributions and inherent strengths of each culture, at-risk students and their peers were able to create an inclusive academic environment:

Integration of Aboriginal perspective, content and resources into curriculum and instruction and the use of Elders, Aboriginal storytellers, role models, guest speakers. . . allowed students to see their culture reflected in the curriculum. This increased the pride in the Aboriginal population and understanding in the non-Aboriginal population.

Mentorship programs were often established with the intention of assisting at-risk students with academic and socio-emotional issues. Teachers modeled effective academic strategies and were available advocates and counselors. Comments included: "(They) boosted students' self-esteem by helping them become more independent and responsible for their own learning; students learned to self-advocate and became more self-aware, confident and responsible learners." And "It was pleasing to see the number of students actively participating in the Mentorship Program. Some real gains were made in getting students to complete course work and indeed in just staying connected to the school itself."

Professional Development. Another major theme emanating from the project reports concerned *professional development*. For many of the high school completion projects, the primary focus, and reported source(s) of success, was the professional development component. The training, workshops, and seminars that teachers and administrations received were critical for the establishment and maintenance of a three-year project, as well as for future sustainability. Professional development also aided in building collaboration and commitment amongst teachers and schools. The comments found within the reports attest to these sentiments: "Professional development gives educators a gift that cannot be taken away after the . . . AISI project no longer exists," and "The overall outcome of our focused and directed PD was that teachers had a larger repertoire of strategies to keep more 'at-risk' students at the school site which in turn contributed to more appropriate instruction and hence improved student learning and achievement."

Parental/Home Environment. The final major theme arising from the project reports concerned *parental/home environment*. Many of the high school completion projects made overt attempts to forge adaptive links to the home life of at-risk students, as well as incorporate the positive influences of parents and guardians. It was often stated, and always understood that in order for students to understand the importance of education, parents must be active participants, advocates, and mentors. To this end, communication strategies and partnerships were the most commonly reported methods of collaboration. They included Parent Advisory Councils, Web sites, newsletters, and "open door" policies, to name a few.

For those projects that successfully incorporated parental involvement, support was evident. For instance: "We received enormous positive feedback from parents as their children had never been recognized before for their academics, citizenship, or school involvement" and "Parental support remained a critical factor for the success of the Student Centre. Communication between parents and schools was imperative for a positive relationship to exist and for this program to flourish."

Tabulations Concerning Summary Outcomes

Based on the Summary section of the project reports, tabulations were calculated for the headings "What worked well" (see Table 3) and "What did not work well" (see Table 4). The most frequently occurring responses were categorized and tabulated.

Table 3

“What Worked Well” Frequencies and Percentages

	Frequency*	Percentage**
Staff were supportive/committed to the project	9	50 %
Students were given a second chance/good psychological support	7	39 %
The flexibility of the program/flexibility for instruction	6	33 %
The program was successful/implementation was successful	6	33 %
The success of the professional development activities/focus	5	28 %
Students were better able to transition into the next level of school/into a career	4	22 %
The project created hope for the future	4	22 %

Note: Total number of projects = 18; Projects could report one or more themes.

*Frequency = The number of projects that reported this theme.

**Percentage = The percentage of projects that reported this theme.

Table 4

“What Did Not Work Well” Frequencies and Percentages

	Frequency*	Percentage**
Parents were not involved enough/did not communicate enough	13	72 %
Staff/school commitment was not strong/too much staff turnaround	10	56 %
It was difficult keeping students in school/on track	8	44 %
The time commitment was too great/the time limits were too tight	7	39 %
Collecting data was difficult/not always appropriate to the project design	4	22 %

Note: Total number of projects = 18; Projects could report one or more themes.

*Frequency = The number of projects that reported this theme.

**Percentage = The percentage of projects that reported this theme.

The most commonly reported reason for a project's success concerned the level of commitment and support amongst the staff and administration. It was recognized that a project of such duration and magnitude could only be undertaken where there is school-based and districtwide backing. Also commonly reported was the recognition that project success was found within the students themselves. By being given appropriate psychological supports and opportunities for a second chance, student outcomes were positive. Other commonly reported reasons for project success involved the flexibility of the program structure as well as instructional approaches; the ease and success of project implementation; the gains experienced from professional development activities; the ease of transition for students going on to the next level of education or career; and the creation of an optimistic future for at-risk students.

With respect to the reported reasons concerning what did not work well, the most common response was that parents were neither as involved nor as communicative as hoped. Many projects made concerted efforts to involve parents. While some were successful in their attempts, many reported falling short of anticipated parental involvement. This same sentiment was echoed in the second highest reported reason. Although some projects stated that what worked best in their project was staff commitment, many reported that it was lacking. Specifically, it was often indicated that this was partially due to staff turnaround and attrition. Other commonly reported reasons for a project not working well included problems associated with keeping students in school and on track academically and psychologically; the time commitments associated with a large scale project as well as completion deadlines; and the difficulties associated with the selection of appropriate data instruments and the subsequent analyses of outcomes.

Conclusion

According to the literature, high school completion is impacted by several critical factors. Gender, First Nations/Metis/Inuit (FNMI) issues, socioeconomic and regional considerations, and student- and school-based issues both individually and collectively influence whether a student decides to leave school early, or to continue until meeting the requirements for graduation (Satchwell, 2004). While these factors are formidable, they can be mediated through careful prevention and intervention strategies. There is sufficient evidence in the literature to suggest that by attending to the social/psychological needs of each student (i.e., developing strong interpersonal connections between students, peers, teachers, and parents; providing counseling services; creating mentorship programs and alliances), and then shifting toward academic needs (i.e., tutoring services, flexible programming, differentiated instruction), early school leaving may be prevented (Christenson et al., 2001; Lehr et al, 2003).

Upon review of the 18 selected projects, many either attended to social/psychological issues prior to academic issues, or placed more emphasis on social/psychological issues as compared to academic issues. Of those that focused more heavily on academic issues, there was still considerable attention directed toward social/psychological issues. Therefore, it appears that all of the 18 projects from Cycle 2 were aligned with the literature regarding prevention and intervention. However, this was not the case with respect to several of the factors associated with early school leaving.

Although the literature states that male students tend to be at higher risk for early school leaving, no project tailored their program toward this at-risk population. Nor did any project focus upon female students. While such a focus may not have been warranted by any of the projects for Cycle 2, it may be a consideration for future projects.

Similarly, for First Nations, Metis, and Inuit (FNMI) students, there was only one selected project that focused exclusively on an Aboriginal population. A few studies made mention of Aboriginal issues and the importance of cultural awareness within the school, but it was not a primary focus. Given the statistics regarding non-completion by Aboriginal students, there is no question that more projects focusing upon Aboriginal student retention need to be created, supported, and deployed.

Finally, while there is evidence to suggest that it is never too late to address the risk factors associated with early leaving, there should be an even greater focus on elementary school students (Edmondson & White, 1998; Entwisle, 1990; Suh & Suh, 2007). Several of the projects cited population parameters beginning in kindergarten, but there was little data derived from, or reporting of, students younger than Grade 10.

Overall, the 18 selected Cycle 2 projects regarding high school completion were designed, deployed, and reported with the utmost integrity. The project reports clearly exhibited the dedication and commitment of teachers, staff, and administrators in Alberta schools. While the gains were not always as significant as the project coordinators had hoped, they were critical first steps toward future outcomes. The knowledge, skills, and strategies acquired through Cycle 2 will likely have an impact for many years. As the literature suggests, early school leaving is a process, not an event. The same can be said for reversing this formidable trend.

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