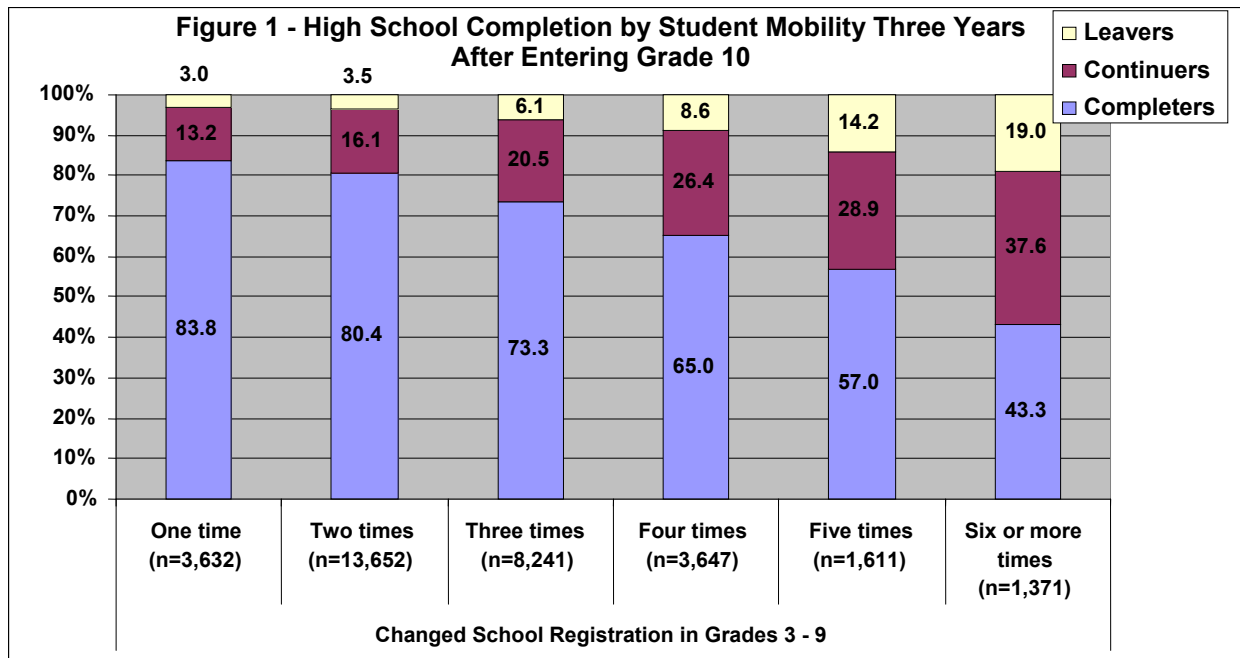


HIGH SCHOOL COMPLETION LONGITUDINAL STUDY

Highlights

Principal Smith was not expecting a visit from Mrs. Jones, the mother of Rachele, a grade five student at Horse Head Nebula Elementary School, but she was in his office waiting impatiently and seemed upset. Principal Smith didn't know why Mrs. Jones was there, but he suspected it was about an apparent personality conflict between the Grade 5 teacher, Ms. Green and Rachele. "Once again," Mrs. Jones began, "Rachele has been insulted by Ms. Green, and I am not going to tolerate this anymore. I have arranged to transfer Rachele to the school down the street." Principal Smith assured Mrs. Jones that if they worked together with Ms. Green and Rachele that any conflict could be resolved, but Mrs. Jones was adamant and insisted on the transfer. Principal Smith intuitively knew this decision was not in the best interests of Rachele, but he did not have any information with which to convince Mrs. Jones to change her mind. However, given the research-based evidence contained in this report, he just might have been able to do so.

The above scenario describes a situation that could well increase the likelihood that Rachele will not complete high school. Research based on extensive Alberta data that tracked over thirty thousand students from third Grade to four years after entering Grade 10 was recently completed by Alberta Education. Along with other factors, this study, clearly demonstrates that the number of school registrations students experience (mobility) increases the probability of them leaving school before graduation (refer to the graph below).



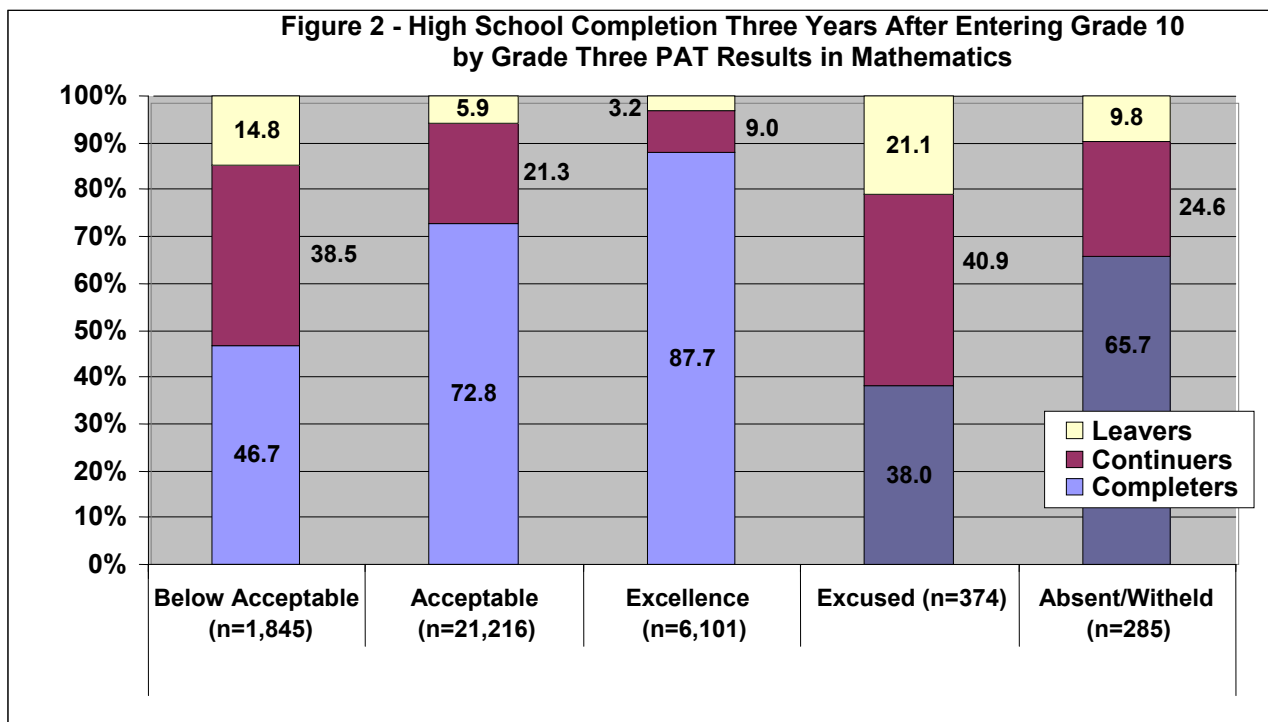
Note: Each total column represents the overall number (100%) of students in a particular mobility category. The sections of the columns are percentages of completers, continuers and leavers within each category.

The purpose of this study, which supports the Alberta High School Completion Initiative, is to better understand the local contexts and factors that may affect high school completion. This information can be used to develop more effective policies and programs directed at helping students complete high school. The study involves a comprehensive analysis of provincial Student Information System data and other data sources (e.g., Statistics Canada 2001 census data).

The findings in this report are based on the cohort of 32,721 Alberta students who started Grade 3 in 1995-96 and entered Grade 10 in 2002-03. These findings can be used by education practitioners who need evidence-based information to support the development of policies and strategies targeting high school completion at a school, jurisdiction or provincial level.

The initial analysis supports the proposition that high school completion is actually a *prolonged process* rather than a single occurrence or event.

This analysis involved examining one-on-one relationships between high school completion outcomes and each of the variables that can potentially affect these outcomes. For example, the data empirically illustrate the key importance of early school years (e.g., Grade 3) for student success at the secondary level (see the graph below). The data also illustrate the challenges associated with being an English as a Second Language (ESL) and/or special educational needs student, especially if those needs are only diagnosed later at junior high.



Note: Each total column represents the overall number (100%) of students in a particular achievement or absence category. The sections within each column are percentages of completers, continuers and leavers.

Subsequent analysis involving all variables that could affect high school completion (multiple regression) demonstrated that high school completion is a remarkably complex and *dynamic* process. For example, depending on the stage of the high school completion process, students may require substantially different types of supports to meet their specific needs. This analysis resulted in identifying the following significant predictors for high school completion outcomes *three years after entering Grade 10* (see also the table below):

Factors increasing likelihood of high school completion

- academic achievement
- gifted coding
- gender – female
- students attending rural high schools or schools in small urban communities under 25,000
- average family income
- average total years of mother’s education
- average percent of families in owned dwelling

Factors decreasing likelihood of high school completion

- student mobility – cumulative number of changed school registrations prior to entering Grade 10
- student mobility – district/school change incident(s) after starting Grade 10
- special needs coding
- larger jurisdiction size
- schools proximity to economically expanding (oil) regions
- schools proximity to colleges
- average percent of lone parent families.

Unanticipated findings

Analysis of the data on students who continued into the *fourth year after entering Grade 10* resulted in an unanticipated finding. Many of the above variables did not contribute to predicting the probability of high school completion at this stage. In addition, one of the student mobility variables (moving jurisdictions-schools during senior high years) changed the association with high school completion from negative to positive. This surprising finding could be attributed to students seeking more specialized programs more finely attuned to their unique learning needs.

These unanticipated findings argue for conducting data collection and analysis that specifically address high school completion for students who require extra time to complete. This may be an important starting point for developing evidence-based differentiated approaches to older students who try to complete high school after Grade 12. Further evidence should be generated to uncover the key factors that may enhance high school completion at these later stages.

The findings outlined in this report have clear and practical implications for focused policy development and interagency interventions at a school, jurisdiction or system level. The full report discusses policy implications resulting from the study and provides suggestions for future research and practice to improve high school completion. For example, consideration should be given to more comprehensively tracking students’ progress using variables that affect high school completion at different stages of their schooling. Such a tracking system would alert

jurisdictions how to best support students in completing high school. A complete copy of this study may be obtained on Alberta Education website.

Model of Predictors of High School Completion (Multiple Regression Analysis)*

HSC Predictors	3yrs after Gr. 10	4yrs after Gr. 10
PAT – Math 9	↑	↑
PAT - Math 9 - did not write	↓	↓
Mobility: N of changed registrations in Grades 3-9	↓	-
Mobility: Jurisdictions/schools changes in senior-high	↓	↑
Special needs: Severe codes in Grades 3-9	↓	-
Special needs: Mild/moderate in Grades 3-9	↓	↓
Special needs: Mild/moderate in Grades 7-9 only	↓	↓
Special needs: Mild/moderate in Grades 3-6 only	↓	-
Gifted in Grades 3-9	↑	-
ESL: any ESL codes assigned in Grades 3-9	-	↑
Gender (female)	↑	-
Avg. years of teaching experience per teacher	-	-
Grade range	-	-
School size – total student population	-	-
Jurisdiction size – total student population	↓	↓
Rural schools /schools in small (under 25,000) urban locales	↑	-
Proximity to the booming oil production regions	↓	-
Direct proximity to colleges (in the same community)	↓	-
Direct proximity to universities (in the same community)	-	-
Average family income	↑	-
Average % of families in owned dwellings	↑	-
Average total years of mother’s education	↑	↑
Average percent of lone parent families	↓	-

*Blue (up) arrows represent statistically significant positive associations and red (down) arrows represent statistically significant negative associations.