

**Cultivating the Arctic's Most Valuable Resource:  
An Analysis of Barriers to High School Completion Among Inuit Youth in Nunavut**

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**Abstract**

Between 2007 and 2010, the three-year average dropout rate among Canadian First Nations people aged 20-24 and living off-reserve was 22.6%, compared with 8.5% for the non-Aboriginal population. The average high school dropout rate for the same age group and time period in the three territories was higher than that of the provinces, with Nunavut's average dropout rate of 50% the highest among all provinces and territories. This paper discusses the results of a survey conducted in 5 Nunavut communities (Hall Beach, Igloolik, Iqaluit, Kugluktuk and Rankin Inlet). The survey consisted of personal interviews with youth currently in high school and individuals that have dropped out of high school. Youth were asked about their school attendance, courses and resources at school, home life, peers and personal wellness. We matched each youth's survey with their academic records in order to gain insight into the determinants of academic success. While the education literature has, qualitatively, identified important mechanisms that can explain early high school exit, our data allows us to quantify the relative importance of the various factors influencing high school dropout rates for youth living in Nunavut. Such a ranking is crucial given that the Nunavut education system is currently in a state of flux; it is balancing the need for a culturally-sensitive curriculum while also attempting to boost academic achievement. We discuss the importance of the findings of our analysis for designing policies to reduce the incidence of high school dropout in Nunavut communities.