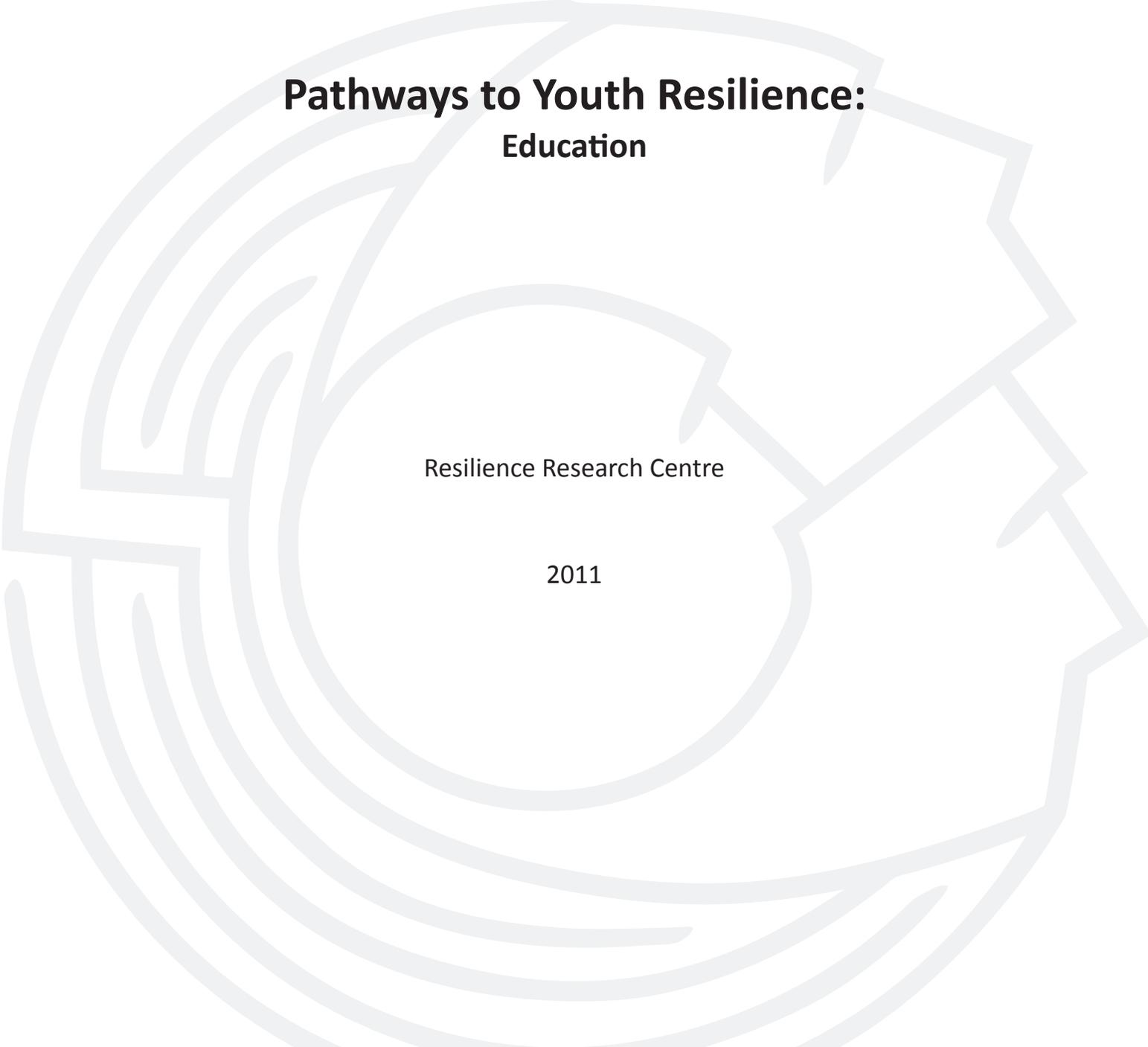




# The Pathways to Resilience Project



## Pathways to Youth Resilience: Education

Resilience Research Centre

2011

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## Education

### Introduction - Defining “at risk” within the context of education

This report discusses the obstacles that at-risk youth face in the context of education, and the services that are available to support their educational success in Nova Scotia, and Labrador. For the purpose of this report and in the context of education the term at-risk refers to youth who are at risk of failing to complete a high school level of education. Factors that contribute to this at risk category could be stresses such as housing and family stressors, poverty and food insecurity, mental health concerns, substance use and pregnancy and parenting, negative self-perceptions, alienated in their schools, and low self-esteem (Farrington, 2006).

### Legislation in Canada

In Canada, education is the sole responsibility of each province or territory. Canada does not have a “federal office of education” or a “national educational policy” and is the only Western national to lack either (Ghosh, 2004: 545). *Canada’s Constitution Act* of 1867, also known as the British North American Act, mandated that: “In and for each province, the legislature may exclusively make Laws in relation to Education” (c. 93). This federal mandate was carried over into *Canada’s Constitution Act* of 1982. The decentralized approach to education has led to provinces and territories to implement different educational curriculums and policies. What this means for youth across Canada is that the educational services and programs they have access to are not uniform across the country. Each province and territory funds, and therefore, determines the programs and services available to at-risk youth. This allows the programs to, “express the geography, history, language, culture, and corresponding specialized needs of the populations served” (Council Ministers of Education, Canada, n.d., par. 3).

Despite implementing a decentralized approach to education, Canada has enacted federal and international policies related to education. These laws and treaties require the adherence and compliance of all of Canada’s provinces and territories. The nation wide laws and treaties that pertain to at-risk youth are: the United Nation’s *Convention on the Right of the Child* (1989), and Canada’s *Indian Act* (1985).

Canada’s ratification of the United Nation’s *Convention on the Right of the Child* (1989) is, perhaps, the sole piece of legislation that directly relates to both educational services and at-risk youth in Canada. The convention obliges Canada to offer youth with any type of disability, such as learning disabilities, antisocial problems, drug and alcohol dependencies education in forms “conducive to the child’s achieving the fullest possible social integration and individual development” (1989, c. 23, s. 3). The convention also ensures that when a child becomes accused and, or convicted of a crime that the child is to be offered, “education and vocational training programmes” throughout their involvement within the justice system (ibid, c. 40, s. 4).

Canada's *Indian Act (1985)* provides federal legislation that is related to at-risk youth who are Status Indians (with the exception of Aboriginals who identify themselves as 'Inuit'). The *Indian Act (1985)* grants the Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development, to become the "superintendent general of Indian affairs" in Canada (s. 3, c. 1). The Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development has the authority to "establish, operate and maintain schools for Indian children" (Indian Act, s. 114, c. 2). This Act places the responsibility of educating Aboriginal youth on the Minister of Indian Affairs, who is to implement and enforce educational programs and services aimed at Aboriginal at-risk youth. These programs and services can be designed and run by, or in accordance with: provincial or territorial governments, public or private school boards, and, or religious or charitable organizations (Indian Act, 1985, s. 114, c. 1).

### Policy in Canada

Since responsibility falls onto each province and territory to write, administer, and enforce it's own educational policies, there is no federal policy on education. However, the Council Ministers of Education, Canada (CMEC), is an "intergovernmental body" of Education Ministers from each province and territory who work together to: "discuss policy issues," "undertake activities, projects, and initiatives in areas of mutual interest," "consult and cooperate with national education organizations and the federal government," and "represent the education interests of the provinces and territories internationally" (CMEC, n.d., par. 1)

In 2008, CMEC ministers introduced *Learn Canada 2020*, a framework to be used by every educational minister to "enhance Canada's education systems, learning opportunities, and overall education outcomes" (CMEC, 2008, p.1). The *Learn Canada 2020* framework sets out eight areas that Education Ministers seek to address.

| Area of Activity                                 | Objective  |
|--|--|
| <i>Literacy</i>                                  | Raise the literacy levels of Canadians (ibid.)   |
| <i>Aboriginal Education</i>                      | Eliminate the gap in academic achievement and graduation rates between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students (ibid.)  |
| <i>Postsecondary Capacity</i>                    | Enhance and stabilize the long-term capacity of postsecondary systems to meet the training and learning needs of all Canadians seeking higher education learning opportunities (ibid.) |
| <i>Education for Sustainable Development</i>     | Raise students' awareness and encourage them to become actively engaged in working for a sustainable society (ibid.)   |
| <i>International and National Representation</i> | Speak effectively and consistently for education and learning in Canada in both pan-Canadian and international settings (ibid.)  |

|  |  |
|--|--|
| <i>Official Languages</i>                                      | Promote and implement support programs for minority-language education and second-language programs that are among the most comprehensive in the world (ibid.) |
| <i>Learning Assessment Programs and Performance Indicators</i> | Support the implementation of national and international learning assessment programs and performance indicators for education systems (ibid.)                 |
| <i>Education Data and Research Strategy</i>                    | Create comprehensive, long- term strategies to collect, analyze, and disseminate nationally and internationally comparable data and research (ibid.)           |

Even though the *Learn Canada 2020* initiative provides a nation wide policy on how to improve education in Canada, it leaves it up to the provincial Education Ministers to decide what programs and services will be used in order to meet CMEC’s eight objectives.

### **Educational Statistics for Canada**

Brockington (2009) from Statistics Canada shows that in 2006/7, Canada had 5,162,363 students enrolled in public and secondary schools. The total average of spending per student was \$10,262 (ibid.) The national graduation rate for high school students in 2006/7 was 71.3% (ibid.) Of all of Canada’s students enrolled in public education in 2006/7, 9.3% of students dropped out of school (Gilmore, 2010). For Aboriginal students living off reservations, the dropout rate was much higher than non-aboriginals at 22.6% (ibid.) In the same time period, Statistics Canada shows that the unemployment rate for dropouts was 15.9% in 2006/7, which by 2009/10, has risen to 23.2% (ibid.) In comparison, the unemployment rate for high school graduates was 11.9% in 2009/10 (ibid.)

In 2008, the Canadian Council on Learning published their study on literacy rates in Canada. The data from their report shows that approximately 36% of Canadians aged 16-25 possess low literacy skills (Canadian Council on Learning, 2008, p. 18). The report goes on to show that approximately 79% of Canadian teens and adults who have not completed high school possess low literacy comprehension skills (Canadian Council on Learning, 2008, p. 21). The Canadian Council on Learning provides examples on what low literacy skills means in the context of their report: “individuals...may, for example, be unable to determine from a package label the correct amount of medicine to give to a child” (ibid, p.10). In addition, low literacy skills may also “make it hard to conquer challenges such as learning new job skills” (ibid.)

## Nova Scotia

### Legal Framework

In Nova Scotia the provision of education services are regulated by Nova Scotia's Education Act. The Act mandates to provide the education programs and services to enable students to "acquire the knowledge, skills and attitudes needed to contribute to a healthy society and a prosperous and sustainable economy" (Nova Scotia, 1995-96, 1995-96, c. 1, s. 2). The Act discusses how parents, students, and teachers each have a role in securing the success of youth in the education system. Specifically, the Act details the right and responsibility of students to participate fully in learning opportunities and contributes to an orderly and safe learning environment (ibid.)

Some articles within the Act that directly relate to at-risk youth include:

- Student conduct
  - o "Where a student in a class is persistently disobedient or defiant or acts in a manner likely to affect injuriously the proper conduct of the class or the welfare or education of other students in the class, the teacher of the class may require the student to leave the class and shall refer the student to the principal." 1995-96, c. 1, s. 121 .
  - o "Where a student enrolled in a public school is persistently disobedient or defiant or conducts himself or herself in a manner likely to affect injuriously the proper conduct of the school or the welfare or education of other students enrolled in the school, the principal, or the person in charge of the school, may suspend the student for a period of not more than five school days." 1995-96, c. 1, s. 122.
  - o "Extended suspension is available at the principal's discretion." 1995-96, c. 124.
  - o "Alternative education arrangements should be made in consultation with the students parents for suspensions longer than 5 days." 1995-96, c. 126
- Home school
  - o "A student may be educated at home by parents if they are registered with the Minister of Education and reports progress as prescribed by the regulation." 1995-96, c. 128
- Private school
  - o "A student may attend a private school that meets provincial standards." 1995-96, c. 130
- Mi'kmaq education
  - o "School boards will provide and implement programs to promote Mi'kmaq education, including history, language, heritage, culture, traditions and the contribution to society of the Mi'kmaq." 1995-95, c. 137
- African Canadian education
  - o "School boards will provide and implement programs to promote African-Canadian education, including history, language, heritage, culture, traditions and the contribution to society of the African people." 1995-96, c. 139

## Policy

### ***Challenges Identified by NS Dept. of Education***

The Nova Scotia Department of Education identified a number of goals to fill service needs and has listed programs, resources and supports that target each of those goals.

| Goal   | Programs, resources and supports  |
|--|---|
| Responsive and flexible learning environment   | Increase enrolment in online classes.   |
| Improve reading and writing skills   | Reading recovery (terminated June 2011).  |
| Support students to make more effective career decisions   | Increase co-op opportunities by:<br>Providing Options and Opportunities program.<br>Increasing awareness of and access to pathways to post-secondary destinations.<br>Providing opportunities to improve career development and education decision-making.<br>Increasing access to Building Futures for Youth Program.<br>Enacting the Parents as Career Coaches Program.<br>Providing comprehensive Guidance and Counselling Services. |
| Better educated Nova Scotians  | Increase graduation rate by:<br>Providing comprehensive Guidance and Counselling services<br>Schools Plus<br>Achievement Gap Initiative<br>Racial Equity Policy   |
| Improve access to post-secondary education through improved funding and program delivery of Nova Scotia student assistance | Increase the value and number of grants awarded to under represented groups   |

## Delivery

### ***Options and opportunities***

Options and opportunities (O2) is a high-school program that offers selected students hands-on learning experiences. The program aims to prepare students for successful transition from high school to the work force or a post-secondary education program. In the 2010-2011 academic year there were 1,600 students involved in the program in 47 high schools (Province of Nova Scotia, 2009).

O2 selects students who require re-engagement with their school, achievement of their academic potential, direction and support in developing career/life pathway, and are prepared to commit to a new learning approach.

Schools organize the O2 program around one or more of the following career paths and provides cooperative education opportunities in each:

- Arts, Culture, and Recreation
- Business Education
- Health and Human Services
- Hospitality and Tourism
- Information Technology
- Trades and Technologies

### ***Building Futures for Youth Program***

The Building Futures for Youth program was designed to give high school students enrolled in O2 an opportunity to safely explore a career in Nova Scotia's construction industry. The program is available to students throughout Nova Scotia. Students receive training in the areas of construction safety, plumbing, electrical and carpentry.

### ***Individual Program Plan***

The Individual Program Plan (IPP) is an individualized plan that is to “developed and implemented for every student for whom the provincial curriculum outcomes are not applicable and/or attainable” (Nova Scotia Department of Education, 2008, 31). Youth who are eligible for the IPP are those students who exhibit limited behavioural or social skills, who require alternative educational strategies, equipment (ie. specialized educational software), and/or resources (ie. a resource teacher) in order to learn and retain information.

### ***Youth Pathways and Transitions***

The Youth Pathways and Transitions (YPT) is a school that is designed to identify the learning needs of students who exhibit serious social, behavioural, and/or learning disabilities. The school provides these youth with a positive learning experience to help them transition into a mainstream school environment. YPT creates programming based on the youths learning style, communication ability, socio-emotional difficulties, behavioural issues and identified strengths and weaknesses.

YPT operates with a staff complement of:

- Department Head
- Four Academic Teachers
- Psychologist
- Social Worker

Youth are referred to YPT are made by their school principal and the YPT department head. Where possible both parents/guardians and students are involved in a discussion of why the student was referred to YPT and a commitment is sought to design and support a program which will transition the student to school.

### ***Halifax Youth Attendance Centre (HYAC)***

The HYAC program is program designed to meet the needs of high-risk youth who are currently serving court orders and who live within the Halifax Regional Municipality. The program offers up to a maximum of 20 youth, structured group and individual programs and services aimed at variety of issues facing at-risk as well as a day school for youth to attend. HYAC is a service administered by the Justice Department of Nova Scotia, however, the Justice Department and Department of Education work in conjunction with one another to provide specialized education programs to youth attending HYAC.

### ***Centre 24-7***

Similar to HYAC, the Centre 24-7 is an alternative education program offered to youth within the Nova Scotia Youth Facility (a prison for youth) and youth who are deemed to be at-risk and who “have been unable to function in the Annapolis Valley Regional School Board” (Nova Scotia Department of Justice, 2010, par. 1). Centre 24-7 is designed to offer special programming to meet the varying educational and interpersonal needs of at-risk through small class sizes and individualized programming. The goal of the program is to encourage youth to achieve academic success, reintegration into the school system, and the ability for students to deal with their interpersonal issues.

### ***Parents as Career Coaches***

The Parents as a Career Coach program is designed to help parents:

- Engage in productive career discussions with their children.
- Better understand today's labour market and the skills youths need to succeed.
- Access career websites and other resources to explore education and work options.
- Help youth discover their interests and skills, which will assist them in exploring career choices.

The Department of Labour and Workforce Development offers the program at no charge to parents and guardians of high school students across Nova Scotia. This program equips parents to better support their children in making informed and successful education and career choices.

### ***Flexible Learning and Education Centres***

The mission of the Flexible Learning and Education Centres (FLEC) serves students aged 16 and older who wish to gain high school credits outside the mainstream high school environment. There are three campuses within the Halifax region and night school classes are offered at Citadel High School.

FLEC served approximately 650 students in 2009/10. Approximately 16% of the students are racially visible and several identify with the gay, lesbian, bi-sexual, or transgender community in metro. Over 50% of students are also employed while attending school. Approximately 28% of the FLEC student population is adult learners over the age of 21, with the median adult age being 24.

### ***Correspondence and Online Learning***

Students in grades 7-12 may enrol in correspondence courses to continue their education when they have been removed from their school under the school's discipline code, to complete graduation requirements, or to take the place of summer school courses. The student or the student's parent/legal guardian is responsible for all expenses related to the taking of correspondence courses.

### ***Reading Recovery (discontinued June 2011)***

The Reading Recovery program has the goal of reducing the number of first-grade students who have difficulty learning to read and write, thereby reducing the cost of these students to the educational system.

The Reading Recovery program is a short-term intervention incorporating one-to-one tutoring as a supplement to classroom teaching. Students receive a half-hour lesson each school day for 12 to 20 weeks with a specially trained Reading Recovery teacher. As soon as students can meet grade-level expectations and demonstrate that they can continue to work independently in the classroom, their lessons are discontinued, and new students begin individual instruction.

### ***New Early Reading Intervention Program (commences September 2011)***

The Reading Recovery program has been discontinued by the Department of Education and will be replaced by a new early reading intervention program that targets students from grade Primary to grade 3. Like Reading Recovery, there will be some one-on-one support, but the focus will be on small groups within the classroom.

### ***Private Education Services***

Private education services are available to students who are able to pay for it. There are a number of educational supports available throughout Nova Scotia. Some of these supports include:

- Sylvan learning centre
- Oxford learning
- SpellRead
- Nova Read Clinic
- Bridgeway Academy

### ***Pathways to Education***

The Pathways to Education program is a charitable program that helps low income youth graduate from high school and enrol into post secondary education. The Pathways Program provides youth with after school tutoring, mentoring, and financial assistance they require to enter into university. As of right now, there is only one Pathways to Education program operating in Nova Scotia which is located in the community of Spryfield. The program is open to any youth who reside within the Spryfield area.

### ***Empathic***

The Empathic program is an educational service that is offered to Mi'kmaq children who attend Eskasoni Elementary School located in the Eskasoni First Nations reserve on Cape Breton Island. The Empathic program is offered through the collaboration of the Eskasoni School Board and the Educational Program Innovations Charity Society (EPIC). The Empathic program is a behavioural-based program that focuses on teaching child how identify, deal with, and cope with their emotions, as well as other people's emotions and behaviours. Classroom teachers at Eskasoni Elementary administer the lessons from the Empathic program in sixty-minute sessions once or twice a week, and the lessons are offered in both English and Mi'kmaq.

### **Statistics**

Statistics Canada reveals that in 2006/7 there were 138,661 students enrolled in the Nova Scotian education system, spending on average \$9,404 per student (Brockington, 2009). The graduation rate for high school students in Nova Scotia in 2006/7 was 80.1% (ibid.) On average, 5,200 youth dropped out of high school from 2007 to 2010 in Nova Scotia (Gilmore, 2010). This drop out rate of 8.6% has increased from the 6.1% drop out rate that the Nova Scotia Department of Education reported in 2005/6 (ibid.; Nova Scotia Department of Education, n.d.)

The average class size in elementary schools in Nova Scotia in 2005/6 was 22.4 students per classroom (ibid.) The average class size in junior high schools during the same time period in Nova Scotia was 24.9 students per classroom. Nova Scotia high schools averaged 23.7 students per classroom in 2005/6 (ibid.) However the ratio of students to teachers in Nova Scotia during 2005/6 was 15.1 students per teacher, which decreased to 14.4 students per teacher in 2006/7 (Brockington, 2009).

### **Cost of Services - Government Spending**

The major sources of funding for Nova Scotia's Department of Education comes from five areas: provincial funding, federal funding, municipal grants, board revenues, and school generated funds. The Nova Scotia Department of Education allocates funding to each School Board based on: school administration and instruction costs (such as teachers' salaries), special education costs (such as alternative education programs like YPT), regional board management costs (such as Superintendent salaries, human resources services, financial services, etc.), property service costs (such as building maintenance costs, power, heating, cleaning services, etc.) and student transportation costs (Nova Scotia Regional School Boards, 2004).

The Nova Scotia Department of Education's 2005-2006 Statistical Summary provides a breakdown of how much money the five major funders provides to the Nova Scotia Department of Education, and how the Department of Education spends that money.

In 2005/6, the Nova Scotia Department of Education’s revenue was \$1.018 billion. The majority of that revenue coming from funding provided by the provincial government (75.4%) and municipal grants (17.7%). In contrast, federal funding (1.1%), board revenues (2.2%), and school generated funds (3.6%) only make up a small portion of the total funding.

| Revenues                    | 2005/6 Funding (in dollars) | Percentage of Total Funding |
|-----------------------------|-----------------------------|-----------------------------|
| The Province of Nova Scotia | \$767,509,760               | 75.4%                       |
| Government of Canada        | \$11,179,581                | 1.1%                        |
| Municipal Grants            | \$180,083,160               | 17.7%                       |
| Board Revenues              | \$22,164,105                | 2.2%                        |
| School Generated Funds      | \$37,034,557                | 3.6%                        |

(Nova Scotia Department of Education, n.d., p. 43)

The Nova Scotia Department of Education’s 2005-2006 Statistical Summary also provides a breakdown of how the \$1.018 billion was spent. School administration and instruction costs for 2005/6 was 60.1% of the total budget. Spending on special education costs in the same time period was 12.1% of the total budget.

| Expenditures                          | 2005/6 (in dollars) | Percentage of Total Expenditures |
|---------------------------------------|---------------------|----------------------------------|
| School Administration and Instruction | \$608,023,538       | 60.1%                            |
| Special Education                     | \$121,966,542       | 12.1%                            |
| Regional Board Management             | \$22,630,499        | 2.2%                             |
| Property Service                      | \$130,899,582       | 12.9%                            |
| Student Transportation                | \$54,626,642        | 5.4%                             |
| School Generated Funds                | \$35,825,721        | 3.5%                             |
| Other Expenditures                    | \$37,360,769        | 3.7%                             |

(*ibid.*)

## Labrador

### Legal Framework

In Newfoundland and Labrador, provincial responsibility for educational services is a legislative directive of the *Executive Council Act (1995)*. This edict confers the “powers, functions and duties...includ[ing] the supervision, control and direction of all matters relating to education” onto the provincial government of Newfoundland and Labrador (Newfoundland and Labrador Department of Education, 2008, p. 31). This means that the Department of Education of Newfoundland and Labrador is legally obligated to take on the responsibilities of providing educational services to the population. The mandate for the

Newfoundland and Labrador Department of Education is to “maintain an education system for the people of Newfoundland and Labrador which is of high quality, safe and affordable”(Newfoundland and Labrador Department of Education, 2010, p. 1).

Unlike Nova Scotia’s Education Act, Newfoundland and Labrador’s *Executive Council Act/Education Act (1995)* does not contain any articles directly related to at-risk youth. Section 7 (1), (2) of the Schools Act grants parents to home school their children, pending approval from a school board director (1997 cS-12.2 s6). In terms of administering special education programs, according to Schools Act (1997), it is the duty of the school boards to “ensure that policies and guidelines issued by the minister relating to special education for students are followed in schools under its jurisdiction” (1997 cS-12.2 s75). Disciplining and correcting disruptive behavior occurring on school grounds are dictated by the policies mandated by each regional School District (ibid.) School Districts in Newfoundland and Labrador develop and implement standards of behaviour for students, and define what is acceptable behaviour, what is not, and how these behaviours are to be disciplined. In Labrador, the Labrador District School Board has proscribed the following actions:

- harassment, intimidation and violence;
- discrimination based on economic status, race, colour, national or ethnic origin, language group; religion, gender, sexual orientation, age or ability;
- dissemination of hate propaganda including hate literature;
- use of, possession of, or providing to others, harmful and/or illegal substances;
- theft or intentional property damage;
- any behaviour that threatens the health or safety of any person (e.g., arson, bomb threats and tampering with safety equipment such as fire alarms);
- accusations involving falsehood or malicious intent; and
- any other behaviour which contravenes the Criminal Code of Canada (Labrador School Board, 2008, p. 9).

If Labrador students violate the code of conduct then school administrators can correct the behaviour. The Labrador School Board’s *Safe and Caring Schools District Policy* (2008, p. 9) however, does not clarify if the remediation can occur through means other than suspension or expulsion.

## **Policy**

### ***Challenges Identified by Newfoundland and Labrador Dept. of Education***

The Newfoundland and Labrador Department of Education in its *2009-2010 Annual Report* identified a number of goals to fill service needs for at-risk youth and has listed programs, resources and supports that target each of those goals.

| Goal                                    | Programs, resources and supports   |
|---|--|
| Increase Access to Education Resources  | Reducing Poverty: An Action Plan for Newfoundland and Labrador.<br>Youth Retention and Attraction Strategy: Skills Task Force.<br><br>Eliminating interest on student loans.                                 |
| Enhance education system                | Healthy Students Healthy Schools.<br>Student Support Services.<br>Violence Prevention Initiative.<br>Excellence in Mathematics.<br>Futures in Skilled Trades and Technology.<br><br>Northern Strategic Plan. |
| Enhance post-secondary education system | Enhancing public post-secondary infrastructure at select sites in Labrador.  |

## Delivery

### ***Reducing Poverty: An Action Plan for Newfoundland and Labrador***

The Reducing Poverty strategy that the Newfoundland and Labrador government enacted in 2006 is a multi-department initiative “designed to help those groups most vulnerable to long-term poverty” (Newfoundland and Labrador Department of Education, 2010, p. 7). These ‘groups’ that have been identified in the program as being vulnerable to long-term poverty such as “families led by single mothers...persons with disabilities, and Aboriginal people” (ibid.) The role that the Newfoundland and Labrador Department of Education plays in this program is to provide free textbooks to students, update and distribute school food guidelines, and initiating the Futures in Skilled Trades and Technology program in 85 high schools (ibid: pp. 7-8). In addition, the Reducing Poverty strategy initiated a measure that makes the Newfoundland and Labrador provincial government responsible for paying the interest on provincial student loans, students however, still have to pay off the principal.

### ***Youth Retention and Attraction Strategy: Skills Task Force***

The Youth Retention and Attraction Strategy is an initiative of Newfoundland and Labrador provincial government to convince students to work in the province once they have completed school. The programs and policies associated with the Youth Retention and Attraction Strategy were, in part, a result of the collaboration between government officials and the youth representatives of Newfoundland and Labrador. This collaboration intended to identify and solve the issues that typically force youth to emigrate to other provinces for post secondary education and/or employment. The *Skills Task Force* program was developed to provide youth in high schools with apprenticeship and skill building programs. Some of the issues related to at-risk youth that the program were resolved by:

- establishing a curriculum and standards unit to support improvements in apprentice completion rates;
- the ongoing development of study and examination guides to support apprentices through to successful examinations;
- providing additional supports for program evaluations for all apprenticeship programs through the accreditation program;
- developing individual learning plans for those who had not traditionally participated in the apprenticeship program to provide credit for prior work experience and training to reach certification;
- eliminating apprenticeship registration and exam writing fees;
- introducing a youth apprenticeship program that provides scholarships to high school graduates enrolling in apprenticeship directly from high school;
- introducing new initiatives with two union groups to promote participation of women in skilled trades, including the Office of Women in Apprenticeship opened through a contract with the Carpenters Union and another contract issued to the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers to support hiring of women in electrical trades. (Newfoundland and Labrador Department of Human Resources, Labour and Employment, 2009, p. 23).

### ***Healthy Students Healthy Schools***

The Healthy Students Healthy Schools is a program aimed at increasing nutrition and health in students by offering healthier menu items at school cafeterias. This program has seen older cafeteria equipment be replaced with \$1.5 million worth of new equipment that is “more suitable for the preparation of healthy foods” (Newfoundland and Labrador Department of Education, 2010, p. 12).

### ***Student Support Services***

Student Support Services are a wide range of services that are offered to students who are disabled and/or who possess exceptionalities that require specialized programming. Students who are eligible for these services most related to at-risk youth are students who have emotional, mental health, behavioural, and learning disorders.

### ***Excellence in Mathematics***

The Excellence in Mathematics program is a program aimed at improving the math curriculum in schools to improve students’ competency in mathematics. The \$3.6 million funds spent on the program in 2009-10 went to employing “25 numeracy support teachers, [facilitating] professional development opportunities, [producing] an information brochure for the parents of primary school children, and the purchase of new math text books for Grades 3, 6 and 9” (Newfoundland and Labrador Department of Education, 2010, p. 13). The program also facilitated a Math Promotional Campaign that funded math-related activities such as “competitions, showcases, math fairs, and family nights to encourage positive attitudes about mathematics” (ibid.)

### ***Futures in Skilled Trades and Technology***

A product of the Youth Retention and Attraction Strategy, the Futures in Skilled Trades and Technology designed to encourage and offer high school students the opportunity to learn a variety of trade skills. The program is offered in 85 schools in Newfoundland and Labrador, including schools that are small and in remote locations in the province. Some courses offered in this program are administered via a long distance e-learning program.

### ***Centre for Distance Learning and Innovation***

The Centre for Distance Learning and Innovation program is a program that is focused on delivering distance education services, such as e-learning, to youth living in remote areas in Newfoundland and Labrador.

### ***Northern Strategic Plan***

The Northern Strategic Plan is provincial and federal initiative to “establish social and economic priorities that will enable strategic decision making by Government for the benefit of Labradorians and the province, as a whole” (Newfoundland and Labrador, 2007, p. 5). For education, this has resulted in the allocation of funds with the purpose of improving early childhood education. This is done by “making child care more affordable for families; supporting training and other measures to attract more people to the field rural and under serviced areas; supporting the inclusion of children with special needs; and improving quality and developmental opportunities for children” (ibid, pp. 33-34).

### ***Enhancing public post-secondary infrastructure at select sites in Labrador***

The province of Newfoundland and Labrador and the federal government have various post-secondary institutions in Labrador. In total, \$22.1 million has been spent constructing The College of the North Atlantic in Labrador City.

### ***Statistics***

According to the Newfoundland and Labrador Department of Education’s Annual Report (2010, p. 6), there were 69,665 students enrolled in primary and secondary schools in Newfoundland and Labrador. The most recent data on graduation rates from Newfoundland and Labrador high schools is from 2006/7, Statistics Canada measured the graduation rate to be 77.2% (Brockington, 2009). The average student teacher ratio for schools in Newfoundland and Labrador in 2006/7 was 13.0 students per teacher. In addition, in 2006/7 the Newfoundland and Labrador provincial government spent on average, \$9,213 dollars per student (ibid.) The most recent statistics on literacy rates in Newfoundland and Labrador indicate that in 2003, 40% youth aged 16-25 possessed low literacy comprehension skills (Literacy Newfoundland and Labrador, 2011). Finally, averaging for the years between 2007 and 2010, 7.4% of students from Newfoundland and Labrador dropped out of school (Gilmore, 2010).

### **Cost of Services - Government Spending**

The government of Newfoundland and Labrador in 2009/10 spent \$1,286,384,600 on education, which made up 19.2% of the provincial budget (Newfoundland and Labrador, 2009, pp. vi, x). Of the \$1,286,384,600 spent on education, \$838,229,200 was spent on primary and secondary school related expenses, totaling 65.2% of the education budget (ibid, pp. 5, 178). The Newfoundland and Labrador Department of Education spent the following amounts on programs related to at-risk youth as revealed in the 2009 Provincial Budget. The Department of Education spent \$9,789,100 on school supplies that are provided to students, typically at-risk students, free of charge (ibid, p. 183). A total of \$966,400 was spent on Student Support Services, which are services that are aimed at “special needs children” (ibid, p. 186). In addition \$559,000 was spent on services for visually and, or hearing impaired administered by the Atlantic Provinces Special Education Authority as well as \$1,308,200 on the Newfoundland School for the Deaf (ibid.) For students in remote sites, the province of Newfoundland and Labrador spent \$6,685,100 on the Centre for Distance Learning and Innovation program; a program aimed at delivering educational services through distance learning and e-learning approaches (ibid, p. 188). Finally the Early Childhood Education program (part of the Northern Strategic Plan) received \$700,900 in funding from the provincial government (ibid, p. 189).

### **Discussion**

Alternative education programs for at-risk youth are typically aimed at students who have mental, emotional, social, and learning disorders (Tobin & Sprauge, 1999). Students who possess one or more of these disorders generally require specialized educational curriculums to help them succeed in school (ibid.) In order to help facilitate an effective learning environment for at-risk youth, alternative education programs utilize smaller class sizes, a highly structured classroom management strategy, implementing a positive reinforcement approach instead of a punitive approach when dealing students, providing students with adult mentors within the educational system, and using specialized instructional strategies such as tutoring and direct instruction (ibid.) Curriculums in alternative education programs are more expansive than the traditional curriculums offered in the public school systems. In addition to educating students in traditional courses such as math and English, alternative education programs include courses that teach at-risk youth how to act and react in different social situations (ibid.) General examples of these courses include courses on anger management, and conflict resolution. In addition, alternative education programs also provide programs aimed at the parents of at-risk youth. These programs are intended to provide parents with the necessary tools to help encourage their child(ern)’s participation in the program (ibid.)

For at-risk youth in Canada, federal policy and legislation is non-existent. To put it simply, at-risk youth's rights to education are not entrenched within the Canadian Constitution (1982) nor the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. The United Nation's *Convention on the Right of the Child* (1989) does force Canada to offer educational programs to at-risk youth "in a manner conducive to the child's achieving the fullest possible social integration and individual development," but this is an international treaty, and international treaties can be withdrawn from at any time (1989, c. 23, s. 13). If this were to happen, this would leave at-risk youth in Canada without the right to have educational programs tailored to their needs.

The lack of federal policy and legislation on education makes at-risk youth vulnerable in another way as well. Since it is the responsibility of each province and territory to fund education programs this means that Canada's smaller and less economically privileged provinces and territories may not be able to finance multiple and, or expensive education programs for at-risk youth. The problem of inadequate funding is a reality that the members of the Newfoundland and Labrador Department of Education have to deal with as the province of Newfoundland and Labrador is one of Canada's less economically privileged provinces, helping prevent the province from being able to offer a variety of services to at-risk youth. The Federal Government can, and does however, fund education-based programs for at-risk youth. Most recently the Harper Government provided \$20 million in funding to the Pathways to Education program, a charitable organization dedicated to helping low income youth graduate high school and to enroll into university (Pathways to Education, 2011). However as of right now, the Pathways to Education organization only operates in eleven communities in three provinces making these federally funded services only available to some at-risk youth. Making services available to youth residing in a certain location is a problem that has transcended federal services and has been evident in the services offered by the Nova Scotian, and Newfoundland and Labrador governments.

The educational supports in both provinces exhibits an uneven distribution of funding for at-risk programming. Rural communities that are located away from large urban centers get less funding, and offer less programs to support at-risk youth in the education system. Statistics indicate that rural youth may need more programming to help them stay in school; in 2007 to 2010, 15.5% of rural youth dropped out of high school versus 7.9% of urban youth (Gilmore, 2010). Yet despite these numbers, most of the services available to at-risk youth in the education system in both provinces are made available to those youth who live, and around the capital cities of each province (Halifax is the capital city of Nova Scotia, and Saint John's is the capital city of Newfoundland and Labrador.) There are a few educational supports that are designed for at-risk youth who live in rural communities in Nova Scotia, but these programs are often offered within youth correctional facilities. The documents collected for this report did not indicate that there were any services offered to at-risk youth in rural communities within the traditional school system. The Newfoundland and Labrador Department of Education is currently making attempts to offer

services to youth living in remote locations in Labrador by investing in e-learning programs. However, it is unclear whether this technology will be used to address the issues of at-risk youth. The lack of services that at-risk youth living in rural communities often forces youth to choose between leaving home in order to get help, or to stay at home and to continue on with their education with little-to-no support.

For those youth living within the Halifax Regional Municipality, there are various alternative education programs that operate under some, or all of the tenets used by effective alternative education programs mentioned previously. However, there are only a few education-based programs aimed at specifically addressing the needs of at-risk youth in school, aside from the Individual Program Plans that are available to all youth in Nova Scotia. The Youth Pathways and Transitions program is a program aimed at tailoring education strategies for at-youths' learning style, ability, socio-emotional difficulties, behavioural issues and identified strengths. The only other education program available to youth who have behavioural and/or mental disabilities in the Halifax Regional Municipality is the Halifax Youth Attendance Centre (HYAC). HYAC is a service offered by the Nova Scotia Department of Justice but works with the assistance from the Nova Scotia Department of Education. HYAC provides high-risk youth who are currently under a court order with specialized and highly structured groups and individual educational programs. Yet, as just previously stated in the report, the only way youth can enrol in HYAC is if they are involved with the Nova Scotia Justice Department.

The Newfoundland and Labrador Department of Education does presents different services and programs to entice at-risk youth to remain involved in the public and post secondary school system. Access to education is becoming easier for those youth living in rural and remote sites thanks to the investment in distance education and e-learning programs. The provincial government also compensates fees such as textbooks for youth who come from low socio-economic backgrounds, allowing them to attend school with the necessary supplies. High schools in Newfoundland and Labrador also offer students courses for developing several trade skills, allowing students to gain easier access to trade schools and, or gain easier access to employment opportunities after they graduate. Finally, students who exhibit emotional, mental health, behavioural, and learning disorders are able to received specialized educational programming. Yet, the fact remains that there are very few, if any, services available to at-risk to help them manage their problems and encourage resilient actions. In addition, it is unclear what educational services are offered to youth who are in prison or who are under court orders. Unlike Nova Scotia where the Halifax Youth Attendance Centre and Centre 24-7 are available to such youth, Newfoundland and Labrador does not appear to offer these specialized services. Most educational supports seem to be directed to youth who are currently attending public schools; there does not seem to be services available to youth who do not wish to, or cannot attend public schools. To be better able to address the needs of at-risk youth, the programs offered must become more widely diversified inside and outside the parameters of the school.

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## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS



Resilience  
Research  
Centre

School of Social Work, Dalhousie University  
6420 Coburg Rd, Halifax, NS,  
Mailing Address:  
1459 Oxford Street  
Halifax, NS,  
B3H 4R2  
Tel: 902 494 3050  
Fax: 902 494 6709  
rrc@dal.ca  
[www.resilienceresearch.org](http://www.resilienceresearch.org)