

Causes and Solutions for the High Male Student Dropout Rate in Quebec: A Research Synthesis

Julien Morizio, Educational Leadership, McGill University, Montreal

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Abstract

In this thesis, I explore the reasons behind the persistent high male student dropout rate in Quebec, as well as evidence for approaches to reduce it. To do so, I reviewed and analyzed fifty-eight documents, scholarly articles, and periodicals. Causes include a number of push and pull factors, such as social conditioning brought upon by gender norms and stereotypes, lack of male student engagement and motivation due to irrelevant curriculum materials, school environment and discipline policies, draw to the labour market, the impact of low socioeconomic status, gaps in literacy due to less attention in earlier grades, and lack of positive academic male role models. Research also involved synthesizing the solutions proposed in the literature: intervention programs, more diverse extracurricular activities, supporting student autonomy and the development of a growth mindset, and adopting frameworks where schools work with the community and parents to encourage students academically. These recommendations were built upon in a scholarly discussion, taking into account recent Quebec education policy, to derive solutions relevant to this province. Particular solutions discussed include a large-scale early intervention program that supports literacy, socioemotional skills, and an awareness of gender stereotypes, as well as a modification to the Work-Oriented Training Path so that all high school students interested in working can do so without jeopardizing their education.

Résumé

Dans cette thèse, j'explore les raisons pour le haut taux de décrochage chez les garçons au Québec et comment résoudre ce problème persistant. Pour trouver ce qui cause ce problème, j'ai revu et analysé cinquante-huit documents politiques, articles savants et périodiques. Les causes incluent les facteurs d'attraction et de répulsion suivants : le conditionnement lié aux normes sociales et stéréotypes sexuels, un manque d'engagement et de motivation parmi les garçons causé par des

activités académiques non pertinentes, l'environnement scolaire et les règles de discipline, l'attrance envers le marché du travail, l'impact d'un faible statut socio-économique, des lacunes en lecture et un manque de présence masculine et académique positive. La recherche a aussi inclus une synthétisation des solutions recommandées dans la littérature : mettre en places des programmes d'intervention, offrir davantage d'activités parascolaires, supporter l'autonomie des élèves et le développement d'un « growth mindset » et adopter des cadres sociaux impliquant les écoles, les parents et la communauté pour mieux encourager la scolarité des jeunes. Compte tenu des politiques éducatives récentes au Québec, des ajouts à ces recommandations sont discutés pour arriver à des solutions plus appropriées pour cette province. Ces solutions incluent des programmes d'interventions précoces à grande échelle qui supportent la lecture, les fonctions socio-émotionnelles et la sensibilisation envers les stéréotypes sexuels. Elles incluent également une modification au Parcours de formation axée sur l'emploi pour que celui-ci permette à tous les élèves qui le désirent de poursuivre leurs études au secondaire, tout en étant sur le marché du travail.

Acknowledgements

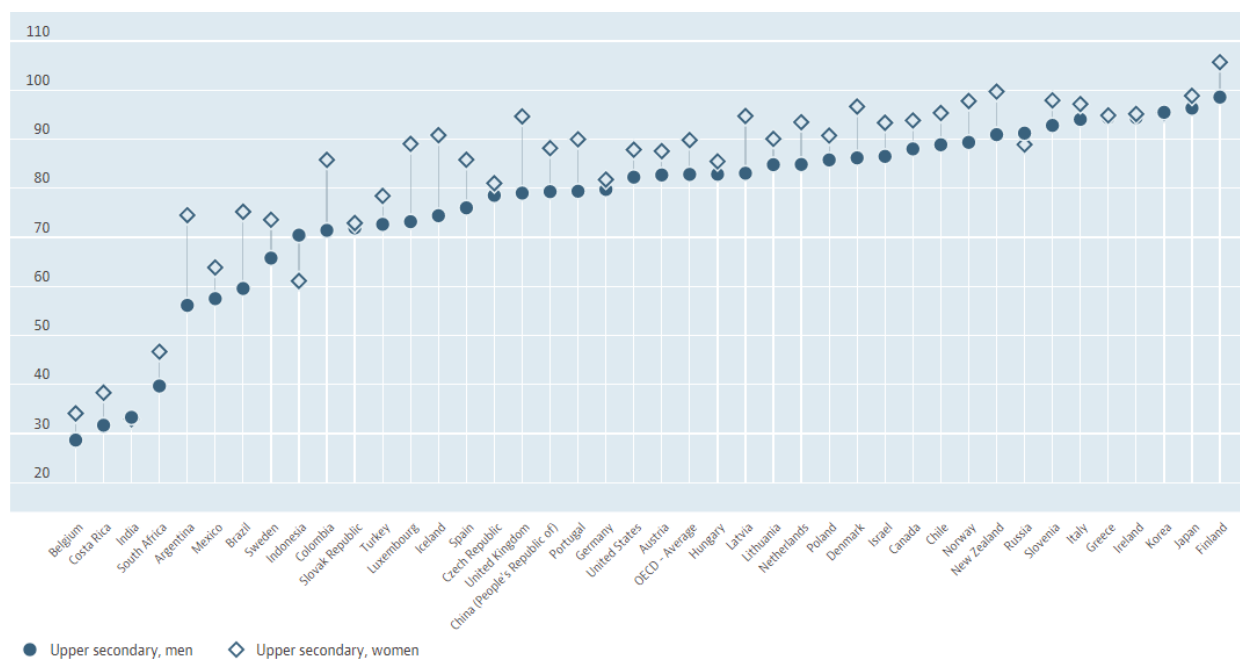
The supervisor for this thesis, Dr. Joseph Levitan, has provided extensive help for every step of its development. He helped narrow the focus of the thesis's subject so that it looked closely at Quebec's male student dropout rate. He also greatly influenced the research question so that it focuses on finding equitable solutions to this issue. The methodology chosen as well as the thesis's overall structure as a concise literature review is a result of his guidance and ongoing feedback.

Introduction

Male students around the world continue to receive their high school diploma at lower rates than their female classmates. This is also true in Canada. According to the latest data, 88% of Canadian men have graduated from an upper secondary program, while the figure is 93.8% for Canadian women (OECD, 2020). The gender gap in graduation rates is largest in the Quebec province, where it is nearly three times as big as the gap in other parts of Canada (Institut du Québec, 2018). This problem is certainly not limited to this country. Male students consistently underperform academically in the vast majority of OECD Member countries.

Secondary graduation rate Upper secondary, men / Upper secondary, women, Percentage, 2017 or latest available

Source: Education at a glance: Graduation and entry rates



OECD (2020), Secondary graduation rate (indicator). doi: 10.1787/b858e05b-en (Accessed on 05 August 2020)

According to currently available data, as of 2017 the average gender gap in graduation rates among OECD Member countries is 7 percentage points, with 89.8% of women and 82.8% of men graduating from comparable upper secondary programs (OECD, 2020). In every country that

participated in the PISA 2018 survey, girls outperformed boys in reading performance by a mean score of 30, with girls scoring an average of 502 and boys scoring an average of 472. The gender difference in performance was most pronounced in reading, which was the area of focus for that year's PISA assessment. For mathematics, boys outperformed girls by a mean score of 5 with an overall mean score of 492. In science, girls achieved a mean score of 490, which was 2 points higher than the boys' mean score (OECD, 2019). The PISA 2018 survey involved assessments for three subject areas (reading, mathematics, and science), with reading being the largest component. It took the form of two-hour computer-based tests. Paper-based assessments were delivered to countries where students could not use computers. School co-ordinators were provided with specific instructions and test administrators were provided with scripts developed by the PISA Consortium to ensure that the surveys were properly implemented (OECD, 2019, p. 249). The PISA Consortium was also responsible for overseeing survey implementations and ensuring quality control.

Looking at Canada in particular and how its students fared in the PISA 2018 survey, girls outperformed boys' mean score in reading of 506 by 29 with a mean score of 535. This difference in reading performance is similar to the overall gender difference in reading scores among OECD Member countries. The difference in reading performance between Canadian male and female students was found to not have improved compared to the PISA 2009 results. The persistence of this difference suggests that boys are still, as they were ten years prior, one full year behind girls in formal schooling (OECD, 2019; Chuy, Nitulescu, & Council of Ministers of Education, Canada, 2013). PISA 2009 also focused on reading and involved two-hour-long test sessions (in booklet form) that were conducted by test administrators trained and employed by the PISA National Centre (OECD, 2010, p. 26).

Within Canada, a greater percentage of girl students graduate in every province, but the gender gap is largest in Quebec. The rate at which Canadian boys, aged 16 to 19, completed a higher cycle of secondary studies in public schools in 2015 was 74%. The rate of 15 to 18-year-old boys who did so in Quebec was 57%, which was the lowest rate in all of Canada (Institut du Québec,

Tableau 1

Réussite d'un programme de cycle supérieur du secondaire dans les écoles publiques, population âgée de 16 à 19 ans (15 à 18 ans au Québec), selon le sexe, Canada et provinces canadiennes, 2015 (%)

	Les deux sexes	Filles	Garçons	Différence garçons-filles (en points de pourcentage)
Nouvelle-Écosse	84	85	84	1
Nouveau-Brunswick	84	86	81	5
Ontario	84	87	82	5
Terre-Neuve-et-Labrador	82	86	79	7
Île-du-Prince-Édouard	80	83	78	5
Canada	77	81	74	7
Colombie-Britannique	77	79	74	5
Manitoba	76	77	75	2
Alberta	75	77	72	5
Saskatchewan	72	75	69	6
Québec	64	71	57	14

Source : Indicateurs de l'éducation au Canada : une perspective internationale 2017, Statistique Canada.

2018). In the province's public education sector, the difference in graduation rates between male and female students is 14 percentage points, almost three times the difference recorded in most other provinces (2018). The provinces closest to Quebec in this regard are Newfoundland and Labrador, along with Prince Edward Island with a difference of 7 percentage points respectively (2018), which is still only half of Quebec's gap. According to the recent report by the Institut du Québec (2018) on dropout and graduation, "seulement un garçon sur deux dans le réseau public francophone peut espérer obtenir son diplôme de fin d'études secondaires en cinq ans" [only one in every two male students in the public French sector can hope to obtain their high school diploma within five years] (p. 3). The high school completion rate for male students, while largely stagnant in the public French sector, has improved overall in the last twenty years. According to the 2014 edition of Education Indicators, the male student dropout rate has been steadily decreasing as well; it went from 28.6% in 2002-2003 to 18.8% in 2012-2013 (MEESR, 2015). Quebec's Ministry of Education (2009) suggested that the reason for this decrease between 2002-2003 and 2007-2008 was due to "the allocation of substantial resources to student retention and student success during this period" (p. 6). However, these promising numbers do not imply that more male students are

receiving high school diplomas. For instance, most of the new certifications that substitute for high school diplomas have been obtained by male students and have “helped to reduce the gender gap slightly” (2015).

The gender gap in high school graduation is not a new phenomenon. Since the beginning of compulsory education in 19th Century America, educators have observed the consistent poor performance of a large number of their male students. Policy makers and social commentators have since then struggled with this “boy problem” (Grant, 2004). For over a century, they have struggled to enact effective solutions to this apparent male resistance to the school system, which has seen male students persistently achieve less academically than their female classmates. As Grant (2004) describes, “it was clear that there were powerful communities of boys in city neighborhoods who wholeheartedly resisted the mandate to attend school” (p. 37). As they would back then, boys around the world in large numbers continue to “rebel at being stuck in public school classrooms where they [are] expected to observe polite manners, be deferential to their teachers, and labor for hours on end over boring school subjects” (2004, p. 37). As a result, male students’ academic performance is still suboptimal. I noticed this tendency firsthand wherever I taught in Quebec: in both its public and private schools, English and French sectors, metropolitan areas, and rural communities. Recent education reforms and policies in Quebec have helped reduce the province’s gender gap. In 2002-2003, the male student dropout rate was 12.3 percentage points higher than that of female students. It has since then been reduced to 6.9 percentage points, with nearly one in every five male high school students dropping out in 2012-2013 (MEESR, 2014). While Quebec has observed a steady narrowing in the difference between male and female graduation rates, there are still improvements to be made. Considering the fact that, in 2016, girls’ graduation rate in the overall Quebec education system within five to seven years of secondary

schooling was 11.8 percentage points higher than that of boys, it is evident that the “boy problem” is still relevant in this province (Institut du Québec, 2018).

Tableau 3

Taux de diplomation et de qualification après 5 et 7 ans, cohorte de 2009 suivie jusqu'en 2013-2014 et 2015-2016, Québec

(%)

	T	G	F	Écart F-G (en points de pourcentage)
APRÈS 5 ANS				
Ensemble du Québec	67,4	61,5	73,3	11,8
Réseau public	61,7	55,5	68,3	12,8
Établissements privés	87,6	84,4	90,5	6,1
Langue d'enseignement français	66,7	60,6	72,8	12,2
Langue d'enseignement anglais	76,2	71,2	81,6	10,4
APRÈS 7 ANS				
Ensemble du Québec	80,1	75,8	84,4	8,6
Réseau public	76,5	71,9	81,4	9,5
Établissements privés	93,1	91,1	95,0	3,9
Langue d'enseignement français	79,9	75,5	84,3	8,8
Langue d'enseignement anglais	85,0	81,6	88,9	7,3

Source : Ministère de l'Éducation et de l'Enseignement supérieur du Québec.

This persisting issue calls for an analysis of the high male student dropout rate in Quebec and gives rise to the following questions: Which factors, at the individual, school, community, and government level might be the cause? What does the recent literature put forward as solutions? In a comprehensive scholarly discussion, this thesis will review research from English and French speaking scholars to understand, synthesize, and apply feasible and relevant solutions to the Quebec context.

Methodology

Research for this thesis involved in-depth policy and scholarly review of studies at the school, school board, and government level in Quebec, along with a review of literature relevant to male student dropout from around Canada, the United States, and Europe. The kind of texts used include government reports, books and scholarly articles in the fields of sociology, psychology, gender studies, education, and recent Canadian and Quebec-based periodicals. Since Quebec is a French-speaking province, this research was conducted in both French and English in order to bring the findings and discussion from both sectors together. The key words used when finding relevant texts included but were not limited to the following: dropout, OECD countries, Quebec, boys, high school, secondary, academic success, policy, socioeconomic status, social norms, graduation rate, gender stereotype, and culture.

This research was approached, knowing that treating gender as a binary would not reflect some of the current literature, especially the literature that adopts feminist theories and follows the social theoretic tradition of conflict theory (Chetkovich, 2019). Most of the articles found to be relevant to the research question nonetheless approached gender as only including the two commonly regarded sexes, male and female. To align this thesis's approach with the research findings, it was decided to adopt this binary approach when addressing gender. The students referred to as male or female in the literature forming the basis of this review were either identified as male or female by themselves, by government and school records, or by the authors of these studies. References made to male and female students in the discussion include all students who identify themselves either as male or female. While this approach is not the most inclusive, it reflects the one that is predominantly incorporated in the referenced literature as well as the one used in this area of policy in education.

Deciding which texts to include depended on how recently they were published and how relevant they were to this thesis's research question. When it came to which statistics to refer to, those featured in the most recent reports were included. References to others that were published within the last decade were also made. Furthermore, when it came to which articles and books deemed to provide the most pertinent insight on this issue, mostly those that were published after the year 2005 were selected. Exceptions were made for articles that, while published earlier, elaborate on the causes or solutions found to be relevant to current male student dropout. An additional effort was made to find articles either whose findings are based on studies done in Quebec or that make claims relevant to Western culture and could therefore be generalized to be applicable to Quebec. Overall, thirty studies were selected for inclusion and were analyzed.

Upon reading the fifty-eight articles, reports, and books connected to this issue, thematic analysis was used to retrieve the recurring themes among them. These themes included the following: school vs labor market, stereotypes, motivation, student-teacher relationships, interests, socioeconomic factors, competition, hands-on learning, sports, emotional intelligence, academic achievement, grade retention, statistics, importance of graduation, school environment, literacy, family situation, male role models, peer influence, differentiated instruction, teaching practices, alternative streams, autonomy, STEM education, mindset, academic effort, anxiety, discipline policy, misbehavior, learning difficulties, expectations/aspirations, community/collective effort, substance abuse, disengagement/attention struggles, extracurricular activities, gender gap, intervention programs, and socialization. The findings were then organized according to the most prevalent causes and solutions mentioned in the literature. Through synthesizing the causes and recommended solutions found in the literature, an informed discussion was able to be had regarding which solutions should be implemented while remaining rooted in the findings.

Causes of Male Student Dropout

Many of the reasons that can help explain the high male student dropout rate in Quebec fall under these major causes: stereotype threat, low socioeconomic status, lack of positive male role models, and an obstructive school environment. Each of these environmental influences will impact boys differently. Some influence boys individually, while others may have a more systemic impact on boys' experiences in schools.

For example, stereotypes will affect individual boys' behaviors. By deliberately behaving stereotypically masculine (in the Quebec context), some boys display low academic motivation, are more prone to misbehave in school, are drawn to join the labour market as adolescents, and tend to underachieve in reading and writing (Benkirane, 2009; Orrock & Clark, 2018; Owens, 2016; Stearns & Glennie, 2006; Chuy et al., 2013). Examples of systemic impacts include the trend that boys from low socioeconomic households tend to lack the cultural and social capital necessary to succeed in school (Blaya & Fortin, 2011). Unlike girls in similar situations, boys with a lack of resources receive less parental support as they are expected to be independent earlier on (Serbin, Stack, & Kingdon, 2013). When boys do not have a positive male role model as a reference for themselves, they develop low emotional intelligence and are more susceptible to negative peer influence (Orrock & Clark, 2018; Mutombo & Bienge, 2004; Pelletier & Ministère de l'éducation, 2004). Furthermore, many factors within schools, including discipline policies, grade retention, suboptimal student-teacher relationships, and a culture of obedience, tend to discourage many boys from staying and succeeding in school (Stearns & Glennie, 2006; Owens, 2016; Blaya & Fortin, 2011; Serbin et al., 1990).

Male Stereotype Socialization

As Steele and Aronson (1995) describe it, “stereotype threat is being at risk of confirming, as self-characteristic, a negative stereotype about one’s group” (p. 797). While boys do not form a group generally regarded to be stigmatized, they are still susceptible to the negative stereotypes associated with their group. For instance, it has been found that some boys from an early age adopt behaviors that counter what they consider to be feminine, such as engagement in academics. These tendencies are particularly present among boys from low socioeconomic backgrounds. Many choose to behave as what they judge to be masculine, which tends to be competitive and aggressive (Benkirane, 2009, pp. 31–32). As a result of trying to appear masculine, their motivation to succeed in school drops. Additionally, they acquire an aversion and deficiency in reading and writing and accumulate many delays in learning. By conducting a study using a sample of high school students from Quebec City, Bouchard and St-Amant (2000) found that a student’s academic achievement is lower if they adhere more to gender stereotypes. Out of the sample of girls surveyed, 44% conformed to feminine stereotypes. Out of the male group, who had lower grades than the girls, 88% of them conformed to male stereotypes (2000). This study shows how it is not all boys who buy into masculine stereotypes. However, the amount of those who do is enough to cause for concern due to the negative repercussions it can have on their academic performance.

Boys who strive to be stereotypically masculine associate “effortless achievement with masculinity, and effortful achievement with femininity” (Jackson & Dempster, 2009, p. 345). While fearing to appear feminine and uncool, they pretend not to care about school, keeping their masculine appearance intact. In reality, some of these boys work hard in private in order to still achieve, while making their success look effortless. Self-handicapping is a similar phenomenon, yet the students who self-handicap choose to not work at all, even in hiding. When male students fail by self-handicapping, it is not due to their lack of ability then, but rather because school is

“stupid” and not worth their time. By not trying at all, the negative coping mechanism that is “self-handicapping protects their masculinity, ego, and sense of self-worth” (Orrock & Clark, 2018, p. 1018). Both effortful achievement and self-handicapping help explain why, in the classroom, boys fully or seemingly resist putting effort into schoolwork and learning. If they need help from their teacher, they refuse to ask. Asking for help, like putting in effort, is another way they think they would risk looking feminine. They therefore deprive themselves of many learning opportunities for subjects that do not come as easily to them and further their learning deficits (2018, p. 1017).

The risk of dropping out is closely tied to a student’s level of academic disengagement (Janosz, 2000). It follows that the boys who intentionally disengage from school to maintain their masculinity are likely not to complete their secondary studies. Hardre and Reeve (2003) have found that self-determination, when applied to education, can prevent students from dropping out. This form of motivation consists of “an interest in learning, a valuing of education, and a confidence in personal capabilities” (2003, p. 347). Given the persistent gender gap in academic achievement, it is not surprising that this form of motivation is more present among girls than boys, with the latter typically showing higher external motivation and amotivation (Green-Demers et al., 2008, pp. 866–867). Since boys lack the self-determined academic motivation that girls tend to possess, they have been found to be “more reluctant to do schoolwork, less determined to solve difficult problems, and less productive” (2008, p. 874). Amotivation, similar to learned helplessness and in line with self-handicapping, leads to a lack of self-control, poor concentration, and boredom in the classroom (2008). A study on a large sample of francophone high school students in Canada’s Ottawa–Gatineau region that analysed the relation between academic motivation and gender conducted by Green-Demers et al. (2008) found that “boys felt that they had less capacity or less willingness to invest effort in school tasks than did girls” (p. 874). The

findings from this study, which can be generalized to other parts of Quebec, show the consistent motivation deficit among boys that continues to hinder their academic progress in this province.

Male Developmental Tendencies

With disengagement comes greater learning gaps, allowing for more academic challenges to develop. Students who have learning difficulties have been found to also be the ones more likely to misbehave in the classroom (Blaya & Fortin 2011). According to Owens (2016), “persistent behavior problems, low effort, and low achievement all predict grade retention and dropping out of high school” (p. 239). Blaya and Fortin (2011) conducted a study in Estrie, Quebec, to compare similar factors that lead to dropout. They found that age, aggressive behavior, and attention problems were most associated with the risk of dropping out among Quebec students (2011, p. 16). These findings are aligned with the literature that claims that misbehavior, especially aggressive and impulsive, and lack of attention contribute to why students drop out; “la plupart des élèves à risque de décrochage sont peu engagés dans leurs activités scolaires et sont souvent en conflit avec leurs enseignants” [most students at risk of dropping out are poorly engaged in their school activities and are often in conflict with their teachers] (Blaya, & Fortin, 2011, p. 4). It is not often the case, though, that behavior problems persist throughout childhood and early adolescence. Young children who externalize behavior problems often do so in aggressive ways to gain control and compensate for their undeveloped communication skills (Duncan & Magnuson, 2011, p. 53). As they learn to communicate and self-regulate, they have less of a reason to exhibit hostility and aggression, and therefore behave in ways more acceptable in the classroom. While these aggressive behaviors do not persist for most students, there are some who continue to exhibit them into adulthood. Out of the students who are more aggressive at a young age, Duncan and Magnuson (2011) claim that “boys are more likely to display these ‘life-course-persistent’ patterns of

behavior than girls” (p. 53). It follows that the cohort of “troublemakers” in high school and upper elementary classrooms is often comprised of boys.

Along with adopting the male stereotype of being aggressive, boys have greater difficulty self-regulating. According to Owens (2016), “the contribution of the gender difference in early self-regulation problems and social problems to the gap in schooling is second only to the less protective effects of mothers’ schooling on boys’ attainment” (p. 238). Boys have a harder time, even as they grow into adolescence, to neutralize their aggressive tendencies from childhood. They also have more behavior problems when the act of learning in a school “is based on the ability to sit still for extended periods and learn passively” (2016, p. 239). While students who misbehave generally have a harder time succeeding in school, boys who misbehave receive more negative consequences from their actions than do girls. Owens (2016) claims that “boys’ behaviors have a larger negative effect on achievement compared to the same behaviors in girls” (p. 252). Since boys already invest less academic effort, their motivation continues to decline as their misbehavior in school hinders their achievement. Since their aggressive tendencies are not welcome in the classroom, they may seek to find an environment outside of school where these tendencies are accepted if not encouraged.

Masculine Cultural Patterns in the West

As boys are pushed away from academics, they are pulled into the labor market. While there are many reasons why students drop out of high school, students who do so after grade 9 are found to leave either due to academic reasons or to seek employment (Stearns & Glennie, 2006). Girls are generally pulled out of school for family-related reasons, whether it be family obligations or teen pregnancy (in which case they often continue or soon return to their studies) (2006). For the most part, girls are encouraged to do well in school. Among many immigrant families in

Quebec, daughters tend to perform better than their brothers since they are socialized into believing that they must do what is best for the good of their family; “Cette socialisation façonne un être discipliné, humain, docile et attentif à son entourage” [This socialisation shapes a being that is disciplined, docile, and attentive to their environment] (Mutombo & Bienge, 2004, p. 465). Girls therefore strive to succeed in school to then get a better job upon graduating. The purpose of this aim is to later support a family of their own, but also to support their parents if they are underprivileged. Boys from the same immigrant families, along with those from Quebec families, are socialized into being more “subversif et libertaire” [subversive and libertarian] (2004, p. 466). They therefore leave school at times to seek work out of the need to gain autonomy and because they rebel against their parents’ authority and wish to live alone. These negative tendencies are intensified among boys from low socioeconomic backgrounds since, in these households and the communities that they belong to, boys and men tend to desire freedom more than they value education (2004). More privileged households where both parents are well-educated tend to have value systems that recognize the importance of having an education. Boys from these families therefore tend to develop identities more aligned with those of girls from all socioeconomic backgrounds regarding the value they place on education.

What also happens in low socioeconomic households is that parents encourage their sons to find work to provide for the family (Benkirane, 2007, p. 27), a more systemic issue. Due to the traditional gender norms, these boys “may face greater pressure to accept the identity of worker over that of student” (Stearns & Glennie, 2006, p. 53). They are also attracted to the independence that comes with receiving their own income (2006). Since most boys, not just from low socioeconomic backgrounds, are externally motivated (following the traditionally masculine stereotypes and tendencies of seeking status and money), there then would be the assumption that

they would also want to perform well in school to get better high-paying jobs in the future (Green-Demers et al., 2008). That assumption is false. Whitehead (2003) conducted a study in which he found that boys who adopted the traditional gender tendencies were the least successful in school. Those with high extrinsic motivation and a traditional view of masculinity had low achievement in school and a desire to leave school as soon as possible to join the labor market. Boys who had more liberal views about sex roles performed better, and “these attitudes cut across both social class and intelligence, differentiating between successful and unsuccessful boys within social class groupings” (2003, p. 301). In Quebec, boys learn that they can get good-paying jobs without succeeding in school, which adds another reason not to be academically motivated: “Although boys are not the only ones to benefit from the advantages related to the labour market, girls must invest more than boys in their education to achieve the same results” (Pelletier & Ministère de l'éducation, 2004, p. 9). While the pull on boys to join the labor market can be strong, it would not have as great an effect if boys were not getting pushed away by academic factors.

Boys' learning deficits, related to their disengagement and misbehavior, is compounded by their underachievement in reading and writing. In Canadian schools, it has been found that “boys take longer to learn to read, read less than girls, and experience more difficulty comprehending narrative and expository texts” (Chuy et al., 2013, p. 5). When analyzed more closely as to why that is, one of the main reasons again was that boys can be socialized to see reading as a “feminine” activity – one that they should not engage in (2013). Additionally, it was found that reading engagement among male students was more influenced by their level of interest and the utilitarian purpose of the text (2013). Therefore, boys are more likely to disengage in class when reading, for example, a narrative work of fiction that is of no interest or use to them. Girls, on the other hand, do not have the same limitations and are more likely to read for fun outside of school (2013). They

mostly progress as expected from year to year and have been found to develop a stronger spelling ability than boys before transitioning to high school. Spelling ability is an important skill to develop, since it “may be an indicator of written communication skills, which become increasingly important for academic success as children move into secondary schooling” (Serbin et al., 2013, p. 1343). Boys, falling behind in reading and writing, are less likely to share that success with their female classmates. Due to the prevalence of reading and writing in all areas of education, boys increasingly are at a disadvantage if they choose or are not motivated to improve their literacy skills.

Economic Factors

As already mentioned, the socialisation of boys to behave stereotypically male can have a damaging effect on their academic achievement. This form of socialisation is common and is even more pronounced in low socioeconomic status families. Benkirane (2009) claims that most boys from these families “adoptent ouvertement des comportements de rejet vis-à-vis certaines attitudes qu’ils considèrent efféminées, comme par exemple l’assiduité scolaire” [openly adopt behaviors that reject attitudes that they consider to be effeminate, like school attendance and engagement” (pp. 31-32). In the 1980s, a longitudinal study done in Quebec followed a sample of kindergarten students as they grew into early adulthood. It found that “persistently poor” adolescent boys were 4.19 times more likely than boys who never experienced being poor to repeat a grade” (Livingstone & Weinfeld, 2017, p. 177). Socialisation is one of many reasons why boys from underprivileged backgrounds succeed less in school than the more fortunate. While both underprivileged boys and girls are limited by their lack of resources, the expectations placed on them are different. As is the case in many middle class families as well, parents in low socioeconomic households “seem to expect higher academic performance for girls, whereas boys are encouraged more in the areas of

sports and participation in independent activities outside the home” (Serbin et al., 2013, p. 1334). Additionally, there is usually no significant difference between the amount of parental support that boys and girls receive when they are in elementary school. However, once they transition to high school, boys receive less support from their parents because they are expected to be more independent at this point (Serbin, 2013).

Students from underprivileged backgrounds also do not have the cultural capital necessary to adapt and succeed in the school setting (Blaya & Fortin, 2011). It is the case as well for ethnic minorities whose cultural norms might not match what is expected in schools (2011). The lack of objectified forms of cultural capital (such as books) in impoverished households can hold both girls and boys back from succeeding in school as much as they otherwise would (Dimitriadis & Kamberelis, 2006). Nonetheless, girls are more likely to overcome these limitations. It appears that girls, no matter which family they are from, are more prone to wanting to do well in school. If they are underprivileged, they know they must work even harder in school so that they could increase the wellbeing of their family (Mutombo & Bienge, 2004). In more privileged households, there is the same desire, along with the fact that they do not want their lack of a high school diploma to be another reason for which to be discriminated against. Boys do not have the same concerns. When they are underprivileged, they want to be free and autonomous as soon as possible, and the school environment as well as the household rules could impede that desire (2004). When coming from privileged households, boys may want to perform better academically, but their conditioning into being more aggressive and competitive might make school life more difficult (Mutombo & Bienge, 2004; Benkirane, 2009; Berdahl et al., 2018). Unfortunately, it is also often the case in underprivileged households for there not to be a positive male presence who shares the value of education.

Lack of Positive Role Models

Not having a positive male role model to look up to can be devastating for many boys and can limit their academic achievement and attainment. It has been shown that “boys’ behavioral and cognitive development is more negatively affected than girls’ when they are exposed to home factors like limited or harsh discipline, lack of cognitive stimulation, father’s absence, and family instability” (Owens, 2016, p. 238). A father who openly devalues education to demotivate his son academically “peut facilement le décourager et donc le pousser à décrocher” [can easily discourage him and therefore push him to drop out] (Benkirane, 2009, p. 27). By interviewing a supervisor at Montreal’s Centre de décrochage métropolitain, Benkirane (2009) learned that boys do not handle their parents’ divorce well, especially if their mother gets custody. They also struggle when living with a single mother due to the lack of a male presence. That struggle tends to subside though when the mother is remarried (2009). While a mother’s schooling is known to have a large effect on boys’ academic attainment, the father’s level of education has also been shown to be a major influence. As Serbin et al. (1990) claim, fathers with “high educational attainment produce children of both sexes who have the necessary skills to succeed in the classroom” (p. 625). Serbin et al. (1990) go on to explain that “this reflects family values and modeling by both parents of a behavioral/social style, involving both compliance and social sensitivity toward adults and peers” (p. 625). Looking at Black male students in particular, those who do not have a positive male role model in their lives have difficulty developing a positive racial identity (Levitan & Carr-Chellman, 2018). Orrock and Clark (2018) suggest that being paired with a positive Black role model would allow for “racial identity development, improving mental health, increases self-esteem, and decreases psychological distress for adolescents” (p. 1016). Unfortunately, young boys find

alternative and less beneficial means to fill the void that is left when they do not have a positive male role model in their lives.

Without a sense of belonging provided by a positive male role model, boys might seek this need from peer groups, many of whom have negative influences. While some join gangs and engage in delinquent behavior, many are left more impressionable by their peers who reinforce negative gender stereotypes (Mutombo & Bienge, 2004; Pelletier & Ministère de l'éducation, 2004). Other male students could influence those without a positive male role model to believe that it is not “cool” to study, that school is useless, and that good grades can only result from being naturally smart (Pelletier & Ministère de l'éducation, 2004). Apart from the influence from other boys, there is also intimidation for not conforming to male gender stereotypes. Edward (2008) describes how “boys perceived as ‘nerdy’—often those who put more effort into school and were involved in school activities such as band— were more likely to be called ‘gay’ or ‘pussies’” (p. 737). This social dynamic can be found in many schools but is amplified in rural communities, which make up a large part of Quebec (Government of Canada, 2019). Notions of masculine dominance and a distinctive construction of gender and social class appear to be prevalent in rural communities (Edward, 2008). Quebec society is mostly rooted in a rural way of life, with roughly 2.5 million of its 8 million current inhabitants living in major cities, Montreal and Quebec City being the two largest (Government of Canada, 2017). The rest either live in small towns that now qualify as urban or population centers due to having a population of at least 1000. Others are part of census metropolitan areas or census agglomerations due to their close proximity to population centers (Government of Canada, 2011). Despite their new qualifications as urban, it is likely that their culture still features many beliefs and opinions inherited from their rural origins. To counter negative influences from peer groups, it has been hypothesized that more male teachers, being

positive male role models, could achieve this end. Unfortunately, their level of positive impact is uncertain. However, it has been shown that father presence and greater involvement in a boy's life, especially when it comes to promoting reading, can be of great benefit (Pelletier & Ministère de l'éducation, 2004, p. 17). While the peer groups that male students interact with at school can be detrimental, there are other in-school factors that can be as, if not more, devastating.

In-School Factors

As already explained, misconduct is more common among male students and they are heavily penalized for their actions, to the point of discouragement. Discipline policies like zero-tolerance policies can push male students away and keep them from returning to school. Stearns and Glennie (2006) found that, while older students are pulled out of school to join the labor market, younger students in junior years or aged 16 and younger are pushed out due to disciplinary reasons. These are systemic issues that can be addressed through changes in policy. As they suggest, this pattern can “indicate that public schools rid themselves of the misbehaving youngsters as soon as it is legally possible to concentrate on educating more compliant students” (2006, pp. 53-54). It has also been suggested that schools choose to rid themselves of troublesome students as early as they can by suspending or expelling them. Schools would choose this simple tactic over undertaking the challenging task of changing their environment to address and reduce students' misbehavior (2006). While perhaps an easy solution for the school, this tactic is ineffective, as male students' misbehavior tends to increase in response to harsh discipline policies. As Owens (2016) puts it, “boys' behaviors and peer cultures are associated with low performance and exposure to harsh discipline and grade retention, which exacerbates poor behavior, low achievement, and low attainment” (pp. 238-239).

The cycle of disengagement to misbehavior to punishment to even more disengagement and misbehavior persists and leads to grade retention, and boys “seem more negatively affected by being retained a grade” than are girls (Lessard, Poirier, & Fortin, 2010, p. 1637). Blaya and Fortin (2011) point out that a sense of control over one’s academic career and not feeling as though they are acting out of coercion is “primordial” (p. 17), especially for male students. They go on to explain the following:

Or, redoublements et orientations subies dans des classes spécialisées ou de formations professionnelles, sont autant d'éléments qui contribuent à réduire ces sentiments et par conséquent la motivation à apprendre. [Therefore, repeating a grade or policies undertaken in remedial classes or vocational training, are elements that contribute as much to the reduction in these sentiments and, as a result, the motivation to learn.] (p. 17)

Not only do boys tend to be punished more for their misbehavior than are girls, but their “behaviors have a larger negative effect on achievement compared to the same behaviors in girls” (Owens, 2016, p. 252). Additionally, “the same behaviors are more likely to lead to retention for boys than for girls” (2016, p. 252). It follows that boys’ level of academic achievement is more directly tied to their behavior. While discipline policies fail to mitigate misbehavior while at the same time damage the potential for student success, there are other in-school factors that push male students to leave school early.

The relationship between the student and their teacher can influence boys’ academic success, yet studies have shown conflicting results. A study done with a sample of over three thousand high school students in Quebec found that negative perceptions of student-teacher relationships was significantly related to the risk of dropping out for all students. This relation was even more the case for boys, since they tend to have more negative relationships with their teachers

(Lessard et al., 2004). Another study done a few years later in Quebec found that student-teacher relationships were not a determinant factor in predicting how at-risk students were of dropping out. Rather, it supported a known issue which is that “for both boys and girls, students who had a lower satisfaction and lower achievement levels were at higher risk of dropping out of school” (Lessard et al., 2010, p. 1642). However, it remains that since boys make up the bulk of dissatisfied and low achieving students, they make up the bulk of those who are at-risk. Consistent findings do suggest that male students generally feel less support from their teachers (Lietaert et al., 2015). Student disengagement is amplified when they do not have a good relationship with their teacher. Since boys tend to be more disengaged in class, it therefore discourages them even more to stay in school if they do not have positive teacher-student relationships (Blaya & Fortin, 2011). In Quebec, these issues arise a lot in the classes d'accueil which have been criticized as being poorly managed (Benkirane, 2009). Especially in these classrooms,

La mauvaise relation maître/élève présente un risque réel plus élevé de décrochage chez les garçons que les filles et ceci en raison de leur appartenance sociale et de leur isolement dans leur sphère identitaire comparativement aux filles qui ne présentent pas de problèmes potentiels à ce niveau. [The negative student-teacher relationship presents a higher risk of dropping out for boys than girls because of their social belonging and isolation in their identity sphere compared to girls of whom do not present potential problems of this kind.] (2009, p. 55).

Therefore, the rapport or lack thereof between teachers and students, while maybe not having a causal relation with risk of dropout, has the potential to prevent it or let it grow. Furthermore, male students can also have negative perceptions of the school environment in general.

Many scholars have argued that schools generally have an environment that “encourages and rewards behavior that is stereotypically feminine in our culture: “compliance with rules and regulations, and preference for highly structured, adult-oriented activities” (Serbin et al., 1990, p. 615). When their children begin school, parents can “expect that girls will find school a more comfortable place than boys will and expect that their daughters will get better conduct marks than their sons over the early grades” (Entwisle et al., 2007, p. 115). They are aware that their sons might be more prone to misbehave and that they might have more trouble blending in with the school environment and its expectations. As Serbin et al. (1990) explain, “schools may be intolerant of many typically ‘masculine’ behaviors that are encouraged by adults and peers outside of the classroom, such as physically active play, exploration of the environment, and a preference for low levels of adult structure” (p. 615). With gender norms being internalized as expectations, boys can be socialized in a way that makes their behavior less compatible with the school environment than that of girls (Entwisle et al., 2007; Owens, 2016). This disparity is even more the case with boys from low socioeconomic status backgrounds, as “middle-SES parents probably socialize their sons in ways that are more compatible with the student role than do low-SES parents by reading for pleasure or playing board games for fun, for example” (Entwisle et al., 2007, p. 117).

Concluding Remarks

Most of the factors causing male students to leave school prematurely seem to be attributed to social gender prescriptions, which are either promoted at home or enforced by peer groups. These factors are intensified either by the students’ lack of financial resources, cultural capital, or a positive male reference in their lives. Other contributors that make boys more at-risk of dropping out include limited self-regulation, persistent misbehavior, accumulated learning difficulties, and

overall disengagement and dissatisfaction with school. These patterns, however, seem to be symptomatic of how boys are conditioned in Québec and the West. These factors pull male students away from school, with boys thinking that the academic path is just not for them. Motivation to succeed in school is low and seeking work as early as possible would appear to them as being of greater importance. These pull factors can be appeased by measures undertaken by schools. However, the culture of obedience common among most educational organizations for children and adolescents further intensify these factors by pushing many male students away. With discouraging discipline policies, few opportunities to practice autonomy, and mostly neutral or negative relationships with staff, some boys cannot help but feel deterred from continuing their schooling.

While being raised to adopt more liberal views on gender roles would protect many boys from dropping out, it remains that many male students affected by stereotype threats are currently in the Quebec school system. Ultimately, it can only be hoped and maybe encouraged to have families socialize their sons to value education more and develop the necessary tendencies inherent of those who succeed in school. But if there is an institution best positioned as of now to ensure the narrowing of the gender gap in high school graduation, it is the educational institution. Solutions to the problem of male student dropout in Quebec would first and foremost stem from the efforts of this province's schools. They can at once create an environment that is inviting and offers students the socioemotional and academic tools they need to succeed. By joining their efforts with those of families and community members in tackling this issue, schools can further ensure the success of all its students. Fortunately, as much as there are many causes that can account for the high male student dropout rate in Quebec, the literature is full of recommendations that can help reverse this rate for the better.

Recommended Solutions in the Literature

Since this issue stems from the student's home, community, and school, its solutions can be found in the same places. When looking at how schools themselves can help reverse the male student dropout rate, a number of recommendations are put forth in the literature: early intervention programs (Chambers et al., 1998; Ogle et al., 2016), encouraging autonomy and appealing to male students' interests (Benkirane, 2009; Lietaert et al., 2015), teaching emotional intelligence (Goleman, 1998), expanding extracurricular activities (McGee, & Pearman, 2015; Viau, & Poulin, 2015), and helping foster a growth mindset (Tough, 2012). Teacher-training is also important, especially regarding the student-teacher dynamic and sensibilization to gender relations (Benkirane, 2009; Lietaert et al., 2015). Systems models englobing the individual, family, school, and community where all members support and encourage high school completion serve as great guides for how every stakeholder can do their part (Orrock and Clark, 2018). There have been recent examples of community-based strategies in Quebec that have found success using such models (Gordon, 2010). While solving this problem would require effort from community members and societal change over time, schools can lead the way by putting strategies in place today.

Intervention Programs

Early intervention programs can be of great help. As can be observed from the causes of male student dropout, it is rarely the case that students suddenly become at-risk. Influences, behaviors, and beliefs from an early age guide a student's trajectory as they disengage from the classroom, misbehave, accumulate learning difficulties, perform poorly, and ultimately leave before obtaining their diploma. If these negative tendencies are mitigated as soon as possible, then the risk of dropping out is mitigated as well. Early intervention programs can fulfill this purpose.

Interventions have a greater impact the earlier they are put in place: “Research shows that developmentally appropriate preschool programs are effective in lowering the drop-out and delinquency rates and increasing the employment rates of disadvantaged students” (Chambers et al., 1998, p. 362). For boys in particular, the difficulties they accumulate in school appear to be derived mostly from their misbehavior and low literacy skills. Intervention programs targeting these two shortcomings can prevent them from snowballing into what can ultimately push students out of school. *Success for All* is an example of an intervention program that can improve literacy. This early-intervention program involves school restructuring, intervention as early as pre-kindergarten, the regrouping of students from Grade 1 and 3 based on their literacy skills, and ongoing collaboration between school and the student’s home. When tested by Chambers et al. (1998) in Montreal public schools serving mostly disadvantaged youth, many of whom had learning disabilities, it was found to significantly improve the reading achievement of at-risk children (Chambers et al., 1998). While many studies have shown the positive impact of *Success for All*, others have also come to the conclusion that the program can have adverse effects on student success. Critics claim “that districts with a modicum of curricular sophistication can put together interventions that work better” (Pogrow, 2002, p. 468). Nonetheless, schools can always look to borrow elements from pre-existing intervention programs like *Success for All* when creating their own.

Behavioral interventions can also help, especially for students who are negatively influenced by their peers. Ogle et al. (2016) claim that by targeting behavioral self-concept, these interventions can strengthen academic self-concept and lead to academic improvement. To have the most impact on improving academic self-concept, these interventions can be conducted in “a wider variety of settings (e.g., after school programs) and activities (e.g., sports, music, theater)

where opportunities to leverage specific self-aspects may be even more salient, presenting other untapped opportunities to improve self-concept and, in turn, academic trajectories” (2016, p. 288). Additionally, researchers have suggested that interventions, while more effective at an early age, should still be implemented as the child progresses into secondary education. For example, Green-Demers et al. (2008) have recommended that it would “be advantageous to intervene more actively in more advanced grades and to pay special attention to effort management in boys” (p. 876). Anxiety is another aspect in consideration to be targeted through intervention. Although it has shown to affect boys in particular, it has been linked to grade retention and dropout (Carsley et al., 2017). It should therefore be targeted as well, since while it may not be directly related to why boys drop out, it leads to one of the main causes – grade retention. Effective interventions that have proven to reduce anxiety in adolescence are often mindfulness-based (2017). Therefore, early behavioral and literacy-based interventions could be bolstered with a mindfulness or socioemotional component.

Increasing Engagement in the Classroom

Since male students can crave autonomy, allowing them to practice it in school may prevent them from seeking it in the workforce. Lietart et al. (2015) found that when teachers place an additional focus on supporting student autonomy, boys in particular are less likely to be disengaged in the classroom. As they put it, “by focusing more on autonomy support, the gender gap in engagement may be reduced” (2015, p. 513). The more autonomous the students feel, the more they believe they have control over their academic career (Blaya & Fortin, 2011). They will also be more intrinsically motivated, as this form of motivation is generated “par l’impression de jouir d’une certaine autonomie” [by the impression of possessing a certain autonomy” (2011, p. 17). Intrinsic motivation, once it is fostered among male students, can lead to their better academic

achievement. Whitehead (2003) maintains that it is uncertain whether boys have low academic achievement because they see academic work as incompatible with their understanding of masculinity or because their failure in school “produces feelings of inadequacy which mean that boys learn to avoid academic work because of failure to match up to the masculine mystique” (pp. 306-307). Either way, increasing their intrinsic motivation, meaning “their interest in academic work for its own sake” (2003, pp. 306-307), can help them succeed. Additionally, “encouraging boys to set their own academic goals should reduce gender-role conflict as it moves the emphasis away from ‘matching up to’ other males in favour of more task-orientated assessment on an individual basis” (2003, pp. 306-307). This suggestion from Whitehead (2003) is at odds with other researchers who recommend incorporating more competition in the classroom to engage boys. More competition would stimulate them initially as it feeds into their propensity for external motivation. However, helping them foster the inner motivation that is generally responsible for academic success would have a more enduring positive effect. Supporting student autonomy is therefore crucial and targeting students’ interests as well can further increase their motivation.

As already mentioned, boys are less likely to be engaged if they are not interested in the class activity or what they are learning. Already, Quebec’s male students are less interested and open to school life than girls (Pelletier & Ministère de l’éducation, 2004, p. 12). Girls have been found to make more effort even if the particular subject taught is of no interest to them. That is not the case for boys, who “have difficulty making an effort if their interest level is low and the benefits are not immediate” (2004, p. 12). Therefore, as Benkirane (2009) recommends, “il est essentiel de respecter les choix des garçons, les écouter et investir dans ce qu’ils aiment faire en général” [it is essential to respect the choices of boys, to listen to them and invest in what they like to do in general] (p. 59). The Government of Quebec’s (2017) new *Policy on Educational Success* shows

that the ministry of education is aware of the importance of targeting student's interests. The document reminds not only teachers but educational institutions that it is their responsibility "to provide all students with an educational environment commensurate with their interests, aptitudes and needs by differentiating instruction and offering a broader range of educational options" (p. 25). Whitehead (2003) acknowledges the critical role that teachers and schools have in fostering interest and enjoyment among its students regarding schoolwork. He explains that as the members of educational institutions fully assume these roles, it can have a positive impact on all students' academic success and may be the key "to a reappraisal of what it means to be masculine" (2003, p. 306) for male students who would develop a new appreciation for academics. In this case, for the boys who are pressured to follow gender societal norms and stereotypes, the fact that enjoying school would be a new male gender norm would protect these students from spiraling out of school. There would be no reason for them to fear thinking and saying that school is "fun" or even "cool."

Focus on Mindset and Socioemotional Skills

As already mentioned, self-regulation can be low for all children, yet its low levels persist more among boys as they grow older. That is why, along with the early mindfulness interventions, it is recommended to have emotional intelligence taught in later years as well. The curriculum of emotional intelligence would include knowledge of the self, self-mastery, motivation, empathy, and social aptitudes (Benkirane, 2009; Carsley et al., 2017). Mindfulness education would help students develop "self-efficacy, positive states of mind (e.g., focused attention, productivity, etc.), self-esteem, enhanced social skills, academic performance, and increased persistence" (Carsley et al., 2017, p. 84) – all areas where boys seem to fall short. It has been found that "a child's positive view of him/herself in one subdomain predicts improvement over time in another subdomain" (Ogle et al., 2016, p. 218). It follows that if a student would feel in greater control of their behavior,

that newfound belief would influence them to take greater control over their effort and engagement in the classroom. Education on emotional intelligence would also help boys who adhere to traditional stereotypes counter the characteristic of “emotional restrictedness” they feel the need to possess in order to be considered masculine (Berdahl et al., 2018). According to Goleman (1998), it would be beneficial for boys to learn to implement the new attitudes they would learn through sports and friendship in a school that orients its learners while taking into account the attitudes of each individual. While these skills can be learned in the classroom, they can be implemented and further developed when applied during extracurricular activities, especially due to their social component.

Extracurricular activities offer great opportunities for students to develop their socioemotional skills and improve their perceptions of the school setting. They also help “foster a positive connection toward school which is in turn believed to support the educational attainment process” (Viau, & Poulin, 2015, p. 653). This connection is especially important for male students who feel alienated in school. As Orrock and Clark (2018) explain, participating in extracurricular activities is a way to engage in the school community, and doing so increases “each students’ buy-in to the school community” (p. 1034). Based on their findings from a study involving students from the Laval School Board in Quebec, Viau and Poulin (2015) suggest that participating in extracurricular activities could be particularly important for youth who are from poverty, show problem behavior, and are educationally vulnerable. When schools offer activities after school, they also provide a safe place for students. Many of these students can otherwise find themselves with long durations devoid of adult supervision. As already explained, students whose parents are not present at home can join gangs or participate in various destructive activities with peers once the school day is over. These students would therefore benefit from a multitude of available

activities offered after school, including sports, tutoring, and supervised free play (Orrock & Clark, 2018). Not only would these activities provide them with more positive alternatives to spend their time, but they would also help these students “foster identity exploration, social integration, and the acquisition of social capital” (Viau, & Poulin, 2015, p. 653). These social bonds, preventing potentially negative associations from being formed, can themselves “deter deviant behavior” (2015, p. 653).

Distinct from promoting socioemotional skills through interventions or by offering more extracurricular activities, schools can further help students succeed by helping them develop a growth mindset (Dweck, 2006; Tough, 2012). Studies have shown that stereotype threats can contribute to the gender gap in academic achievement (Good et al., 2003). Some have also suggested that fostering a growth mindset can help counter the negative consequences of these threats (Tough, 2012). While there might not be a clear consensus in the scientific community on whether intelligence is truly malleable, students significantly improve their academic achievement when they believe that intelligence is malleable rather than fixed (Blackwell et al., 2007; Tough, 2012). A study was conducted in Texas to see if making students aware of the malleability of intelligence could prevent stereotype threats from limiting their academic achievement (Good et al., 2003). Before completing a state standardized math test, seventh-grade student participants were mentored by college students who shared different messages with them. These messages were either about awareness of the harms of drugs or about the malleability of intelligence – the growth mindset. The male students who listened to the antidrug message scored an average of around 82% on the math test they completed shortly after. This score was significantly higher compared to the score of 74% that girls received who also listened to the antidrug message. The boys’ average rose to 85% when exposed to the growth mindset message. The three groups of girls

who listened to a version of the growth mindset message before the test scored on average 82%, 85%, and 84%, closing the gender gap entirely (2003). While such studies focus more on assessing the stereotype threat within marginalized groups, they have proven that having a growth mindset can help counter the negative influences of gender stereotypes. Much of the literature has shown this result for female students. More research would need to be done focusing on male students to confirm if learning about the growth mindset can in fact be as effective for them as it is for girls. Until then, based on the current literature, it can be reasonably assumed that it is.

Teacher Training and Approach

Additions to teacher training, whether during their practice or before becoming certified, has been stated to have the potential to help keep schools from pushing male students to drop out. These additions would include sensibilization to gender relations and training centered on the student-teacher dynamic. Benkirane (2009) suggests that Quebec universities should include in education undergraduate programs “un contenu du cours qui les sensibilise à l’influence potentielle du genre dans la relation maître/élèves” [course content that sensibilises to the potential influence of gender in the teacher-student relationship] (p. 69). He goes on to explain that communication and building a rapport with students is necessary in order for teachers to integrate boys in the school setting (2009). While male students are disproportionately subjected to harsh discipline like suspensions and expulsions, the literature has shown uncertainty as to whether implicit biases that teachers have towards boys are part of the reason for this disproportion (Skiba et al., 2014). Lietaert et al. (2015) suggest that practicing teachers should be challenged, through training programs, to reflect upon current research and how it relates to their own methods. They claim that it would be interesting for teachers to learn “that boys’ lower behavioural engagement is related to their lower perceptions of teacher autonomy support and involvement” (2015, p. 512). Upon learning this, it

is hoped that teachers would modify their pedagogical practices to increase their male students' engagement. It would probably be the case that teachers would change their ways in response, since awareness and increased understanding through reflection has been proven to spark change in teachers' behavior in how they approach an issue (Spilt et al., 2012). Training can also involve guidance with what autonomy support entails. Teachers have been shown to learn from practical theoretical frameworks (Lietart et al., 2015). A very useful one is the dialectical framework within self-determination theory. This framework suggests that students hold inner motivational resources and "when teachers find ways to nurture these inner resources, they adopt an autonomy-supportive motivating style" (Reeve, 2006, p. 225).

Teachers can also have a big impact on male students' academic trajectory by showing that they care for their success. Relationships created with school personnel has been shown to improve a student's sense of belonging in the school community, which in turn positively influences their academic success (Orrock & Clark, 2018). Lietaert et al. (2015) explain why a caring teacher can make a difference especially for male students' school experience:

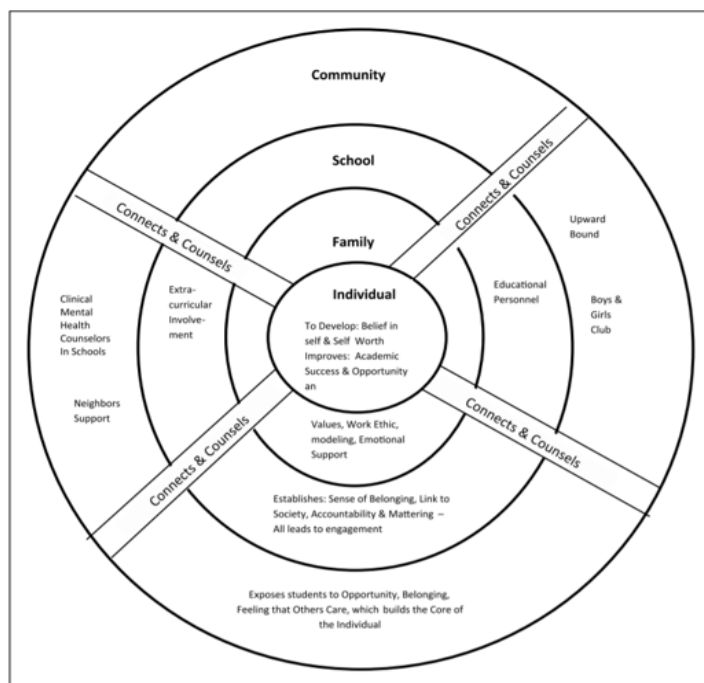
teacher support (i.e., an emotionally warm and caring, low-conflict teacher–student relationship) is considered to be more important for boys' engagement than for girls', because boys are more at risk for academic maladjustment (e.g., lower grades and motivation, deviant classroom behaviour) and consequently have more to gain or to lose from the degree of support that teachers provide. (p. 500)

Teachers who are at once compassionate and have knowledge and pedagogical skills that help students with academics as well as overall development are able to improve their students' confidence and self-concept (Orrock & Clark, 2018). Black students in particular who have struggled "to retain a positive sense of identity and optimism in the face of the challenges [...]"

claimed that caring teachers and community workers were crucial in lifting their self-confidence and motivating them to excel in school” (Livingstone & Weinfeld, 2017, p. 181). While making a bigger difference for boys, supportive teachers contribute to a better learning environment for all students. As more male students feel supported and as though they belong in school, they would be kept from suffering too hard a push away from staying on the academic path. Along with the other in-school recommendations mentioned, boys would feel less of a pull from external factors to leave, and would rather be pulled back into school.

A Supportive Community-Based Framework

Branching outside of the school setting, all members of the student’s community can help prevent male students from dropping out by adopting an ecological systems perspective and understanding the role they play within it. The environments that influence students and how they interact with each other can either encourage or discourage their engagement in school (Orrock & Clark, 2018). Based on their research on the factors that influence the academic success of at-



IFSC systems model (Orrock & Clark, 2018)

risk Black male youth, Orrock and Clark (2018) put forth the *Individual, Family, School, and Community* (IFSC) systems model. This model serves as a guide for counselors and educators to help them understand the different factors at play that can contribute to the success of at-risk students and in turn better help them encourage male student engagement. Realizing this model to its fullest potential would see collaboration between all the environments that the student interacts

with. Every member of each environment would share the common goal of encouraging the student to do well in school. These environments include human service workers, educators, and other adult stakeholders in the student's community. Collaboration among them strengthens the support that the at-risk student feels. Consistent support is crucial, for as they "receive positive and healthy messages across systems, youth are more likely to achieve academically and experience greater general mental health" (2018, p. 1035). To be effective, promoting academic engagement and achievement cannot be limited to the classroom. Success is the presumptive result when support, encouragement, and belonging feature in a child's lived experience, across systems (2018). Especially in at-risk settings, Orrock and Clark (2018) recommend that "state and local districts must talk across professions to develop systems models that will help support and engage youth" (p. 1037). They also recommend that educators and counselors should try to create learning communities within their state and local districts. For the purpose of this paper's research question, it would be optimal if Quebec would encompass a sole learning community based on this model. Due to the large and heterogeneous territory that this province covers, this learning community may have to be broken down by regions who themselves would adopt this model.

Such a model was already adopted in the Saguenay region of Quebec. The region's dropout rates have been cut in half since 1995 when they put the Saguenay Strategy in place (Gordon, 2010). The strategy involved a major collaboration among many community members, "involving everyone from the local chamber of commerce to parent-teacher groups to municipal councillors in concocting a concerted and sustained awareness campaign" (2010) to prevent students from dropping out of school. It has since been replicated in other regions of Quebec. As an example, the *Comité régional pour la valorisation de l'éducation* (CREVALE), formed by several organizations in the Lanaudière region, has been dedicated to promoting education. The committee has led

campaigns and given local businesses certificates for their efforts in encouraging students to graduate from high school (MELS, 2009). Many of the Saguenay strategy's elements were incorporated into Quebec's 2009 action strategy on student retention and success, *I Care About School!*. This action plan called for the collaboration of all stakeholders in promoting the importance of school: "The education community and its partners in civil society, the health sector, community organizations and the business world must also work together to promote the idea that education is essential" (MELS, 2009, p. 5). A provincewide campaign was put in place with the goal of mobilizing the general public so that it shares a common message that "school is essential and the knowledge and culture they acquire there are synonymous with growth, freedom of choice and accomplishment" (2009, p. 16).

I Care About School! (2009) contained a list of concrete actions to be undertaken in Quebec. These actions included asking employers to limit the number of working hours for their young employees, having school boards commit to measures and actions that would lead to the attainment of an 80% graduation rate by 2020, working closely with regional organizations dedicated to student retention, facilitating children's transition from daycare to kindergarten, reducing class sizes, improving the Homework Assistance program, ensuring that the Secondary 1 personnel receives all the necessary information to adequately welcome students with learning delays, increasing the amount of resource teachers, and increasing the number of extracurricular activities. It also hoped to reinforce the *New Approaches, New Solutions* (NANS) intervention strategy put in place in 2002. Quebec's Ministry of Education acknowledged NANS's underwhelming impact, stating that "despite the efforts of schools participating in the *New Approaches, New Solutions* intervention strategy, an examination of the graduation and qualifications rates of the past three years reveals that most of the schools involved in NANS

remain among those with the lowest rates of student retention” (2009). Sean Gordon of *The Globe and Mail* was concerned that the new action plan, *I Care About School!*, would have a similar impact as NANS. In 2010, he wrote that while these strategies were signs of progress, “Quebec politicians have been talking about the dropout problem since the mid-1990s, and it will probably take another decade for the latest comprehensive plan to bear fruit.” This statement proved to be prescient. Nearly a decade after the action plan was put forth, the Quebec Ministry of Education (2017) once again called for the “mobilization of partners and stakeholders in support of educational success” (p. 37) in its *Policy on Educational Success*.

Concluding Remarks

The recommendations found in the literature to help reduce male student dropout may not be as numerous as the causes, but that is perhaps because multiple causes can be addressed with single solutions. As an example, intervention programs, especially if implemented early, can help counter the male developmental patterns known to harm these students’ academic progression. Such interventions would focus on promoting self-regulation and literacy. They would also help diminish the negative effects of male stereotype socialization by increasing awareness of societal gender norms. Along with increasing socioemotional skills, a diverse offering of extracurricular activities would help students buy into the school community and make them feel that they belong in an academic setting. This sense of belonging can be reinforced by school staff who genuinely care for students’ success, and teachers who allow students to practice their autonomy and seek to create interesting lessons to increase their engagement. To help male students counter stereotype threats, schools should try to create a culture centered on the growth mindset. This culture would also champion the importance of hard work, which boys need to adhere to in order to perform as well as their female classmates. Creating this culture alone would be difficult, which is why

schools must work together with families and community stakeholders to support male students to make extra efforts in school. What is found to need more attention is the issue of students leaving school early to join the workforce. While this choice among many male adolescents is one of the major causes for male student dropout, there does not seem to be a clear plan proposed to address it. Such a plan along with an expansion upon the other recommended solutions will be discussed in the following section.

Discussion

Based on the findings from the literature described above, there are amendments to recommendations as well as additional solutions that could be adopted at the school, community, and government level to further lower Quebec's male student dropout rate. These potential solutions follow a systems theory approach similar to Orrock and Clark's (2018) *Individual, Family, School, and Community* systems model. While how boys are socialized before they enter the school system can be an issue, these recommendations do not seek to change how parents raise their children. Many boys currently enrolled in school behave stereotypically male due to how they have already been socialized. These students would increasingly fall behind if their current tendencies were to be ignored. Therefore, the solutions put forward are not meant to encourage these stereotypical tendencies, but rather to make sure that every child is given, as they presently behave, the best chance to succeed in school and to graduate. Change in how children are socialized, while not directly targeted, may result from these recommendations over time. In-school solutions would include early intervention programs, course content centered on students' interests and tendencies, diverse extracurricular activities, and instilling the growth mindset and a culture of hard work. Community-based solutions would include a partnership between academic organizations and families and other stakeholders where all members support students in graduating as well as adopting the growth mindset. At the government level, one solution would involve Quebec's Ministry of Education offering a dual system or alternative pathway where students can work while at the same time be on pace to obtain their high school diploma within five years of secondary studies.

The results from the *Success for All* intervention program, as described by Chambers et al. (1998), prove that students' literacy can be improved through large-scale intervention programs.

Since reading and writing are the things that male students struggle with the most, adopting large-scale early intervention programs like *Success for All* would be a potential solution to the male student dropout rate. Unfortunately, in Quebec, “there is no equivalent to either Title 1 or other special funding that exist for disadvantaged children in the United States” (1998, p. 364). The funding for programs like these therefore would have to come from “general operating funds, augmented by research grants and a special grant from Quebec's Ministry of Education” (1998, p. 364). If schools are unable to afford these programs, there are certain components they could adopt from them that could still benefit the students in need. First, as already discussed, the sooner the intervention is implemented, the better (1998). While later interventions might be necessary, early ones are crucial as they can prevent behavioral or learning difficulties from ever being developed and would therefore have longer lasting positive effects. They would be preventative rather than reactionary. Next, reading interventions that pair struggling students with students from later grades can be a very beneficial addition as such a strategy “has been shown to increase reading achievement” (1998, p. 362). A mentor relationship can ensue from such pairings and many studies show the benefits of such a relationship, especially for students with learning difficulties (Orrock & Clark, 2018). Furthermore, the Family Support Team, which includes the principal, facilitator, home-room teacher, reading teacher, tutor, and a social worker, can be assembled without it being a part of a large-scale program. Creating teams like this one is important. They enable constructive communication between the school and the home as both parties work on strategies that can help the family overcome any problems it or the student is facing. Learning Support Team (LST) meetings and others alike currently held in Quebec schools serve a similar goal. What they can borrow from the *Success for All* program is to have the child present at these meetings, which is often not the case. The presence of the student at these meetings can make a difference, as it

involves them in the process of developing strategies to become more successful in school. It also helps them develop accountability for their actions.

Early intervention programs preventing learning delays would have a more positive impact if they would also include a self-regulation component. They would therefore serve to prevent student misbehavior as well, putting students in a better position to progress academically from year to year. Such an early intervention program would be particularly beneficial for male students, since their misbehavior has become more associated with their academic shortcomings than that of their female classmates (Owens, 2016). Boys also tend to receive forms of punishment for their misbehavior that are damaging to their academic outcomes. There is essentially a snowball effect that occurs: boys misbehave, they get suspended or are put in detention, miss class time, fall behind, maybe repeat a grade, become increasingly disengaged and unmotivated, and then drop out of school. Hence male students' ability to self-regulate at the beginning of their schooling helps predict their chances of later graduating from high school. Early intervention programs that solely focus on literacy may therefore not be enough. Such an intervention program would be bolstered by including a form of behavior management. It would also save resources otherwise needed for future interventions since it would facilitate classroom management as the students grow older. Regardless of whether or not an intervention program of this sort would be put in place, disciplinary protocols in response to negative behaviors should not include measures that make students fall behind in their education.

Early intervention would also benefit from involving a mindfulness component and a discussion on gender stereotypes. It would be important to make students aware of gender stereotypes at an early age, since "there is a statistical association between resistance to gender stereotypes and greater achievement" (Bouchard, & St-Amant, 2000, p. 281) in school. One way

that male students can resist conforming to stereotypes is by critically thinking about gender. As Bouchard and St-Amant (2000) explain, “critical thinking leads one not to accept without due scrutiny associations between a specific characteristic and one's sex” (pp. 282-283). An early intervention program which would involve promoting literacy and behavior management skills would therefore also benefit greatly by including critical discussions about gender relations, or at least presenting the stereotypes to make the students aware that they adopt them. Without proper leadership and coordination, the implementation of a large-scale intervention program would not be successful. What is becoming more and more evident is that solving the issue of dropout requires a collective effort from the community, teachers, and school leadership. That might not cost much money, but rather willingness to collaborate and change. Adopting a large-scale program would also involve school restructuring, additional responsibilities from teachers, and additional teacher training for it to be done effectively. Regardless of whether an intervention program of this kind would be adopted by schools, it alone cannot reduce the male student dropout rate as much as possible.

Teaching practices and course content can be adapted to better appeal to all students' interests and stimulate more engagement. As previously mentioned, it is particularly the case for male students that their achievement is tied to their level of interest (Pelletier & Ministère de l'éducation, 2004). All students benefit from opportunities for autonomy as well (Lietaert et al., 2015). With teachers encouraging student autonomy and maintaining a fair distribution of the support they give, all students would perform better, with boys more so compared to how they did previously since autonomy has been tied to higher levels of engagement among them (2015). Pedagogical practices would be more student-centered in this case. Since class activities would involve more autonomy from students, it would also develop their responsibility and self-efficacy

(Levitan & Johnson, 2020; Levitan, 2018). Since these activities would be of greater interest to them, boys would be more involved and motivated in the classroom (Chuy et al., 2013). The more relevant and stimulating the material would be, the more engaged the students would be and they would therefore not be as inclined to misbehave. This new classroom dynamic would save a lot of energy from teachers as they would need to dedicate less of their resources to classroom management and rather could focus more on teaching and learning. Questions arise though as to how the content is decided upon (Levitan & Johnson, 2020). Just because the content is interesting, that does not mean that it is suitable according to the aims of the Quebec Education Program. While more rewarding, these more interesting and engaging lessons may also be more work for teachers regarding planning. That is unless Quebec's Ministry of Education develops a bank of these activities at least as models for teachers to refer to.

Schools should also offer a variety of extracurricular activities after school. Besides offering a stable environment for all students, afterschool activities help students foster a positive association with school, improve their engagement with the school community, and help them build social capital (Orrock, & Clark, 2018; Viau, & Poulin, 2015). They have been proven to be linked to better mental health, stronger civic engagement, higher academic achievement, and the improvement of one's self-concept (Viau, & Poulin, 2015). However, the key is for schools to diversify the kinds of activities it offers since it is the exposure to the wide range of socialization experiences that help identity exploration and promote positive development within students (2015). If the focus becomes too concentrated in one area, a student might lose the benefits. For example, being too sports-focused can lead to "lower levels of prosocial beliefs and social responsibility in emerging adulthood compared with the combination portfolios" (Viau, & Poulin, 2015, p. 661) involving a wider range of activities, from student council to art clubs. Individual

sports can foster an unhealthy dose of competition as well and be very isolating, going counter to the sense of belonging hoped to be acquired by participants. Team sports are more appropriate, but they too are met with criticism. As an example, Lesko (2012) claims that “athletics and masculinizing school firmly legitimate the reign of white hegemonic masculinity, with its dominance of girls, students of color, and less-masculine boys” (p. 171). Competition, while motivating, can be debilitating and isolating. Therefore, sports can still be a valued option as an extracurricular activity if its form of competition were to be grounded in a form of cooperation, becoming a collective behavior known as “coopetition” (McGee, & Pearman, 2015). Coopetition would make participants in team sports do their best for the good of the team. Educators should try to bring this blending of competition and cooperation into the classroom, where “it can become a powerful vehicle to increase student motivation, heighten a sense of classroom community, and increase overall class performance” (2015, p. 536).

Furthermore, every school’s educational project could include fostering a culture of hard work and growth mindset as one of the objectives selected for improving student success (Education Act: 37). A consistent finding is that boys do not put much effort into their schoolwork. They do so by being influenced to display “effortless achievement,” a stereotypical trait of masculinity (Orrock & Clark, 2018). They believe that working hard is for girls, and since there is no room for overlap among gender norms, boys must do the opposite of working hard to avoid feeling feminine or appearing feminine to their peers (Whitehead, 2003). Would it not then help to have class discussions about success stories that mention the hard work people had to do to gain their success? It could be that the stories currently favored in many English Language Arts classes are more centered on the theme of perseverance, overcoming obstacles, and succeeding against poor odds. What about the stories that involve people in more relatable situations accomplishing

great things simply due to hard work? They are not as sensational, yet they are probably as if not even more important for influencing character. They can also be based on the students' interests. For example, if male students in a class are interested in sports, as they often are, then reading books on sports figures like Kobe Bryant – successful athletes who were known for their strong work ethic – would be at once engaging and influential. The choice of book would serve a dual purpose as it would improve students' literacy as well as make them feel more in control of their academic success. Teachers can also use dual-purpose instruction, “deliberately working explicit talk about character strengths into every lesson” (Tough, 2012, p. 98). They could do so to promote the importance of having a growth mindset, encouraging students to believe that their qualities can be improved through their efforts (Dweck, 2006).

The more students believe in the malleability of their strengths, the better chance they have of overcoming the myth of “effortless achievement.” It has been shown that explicitly sharing the message that “intelligence is not a finite endowment, but rather an expandable capacity that increases with mental work” (Good et al., 2003, p. 97) can have this effect. This message has the ability to make an impact if it comes from a mentor or someone that students share a positive relationship with. If it comes from someone else, then the students would probably not be as receptive to the message. Therefore, if teachers wish to impart the message of growth mindset, they must ensure to build a good rapport with their students first (Mendler, 2000). Schools can support the development of the growth mindset among their student body by making test retakes an option and scheduling study hall sessions afterschool where students are encouraged to ask their teachers for help. During orientation sessions or at the beginning of every term, students can be asked to create their own academic goals. Such individual goal orientation would greatly increase the intrinsic motivation of boys to perform better in school as it calls for their autonomy

(Whitehead, 2003). Adding these policies to a school's education project would entail modifications, such as restructuring the day schedule and teacher duties to effectively incorporate study hall sessions. It would also require the cooperation and collaboration from all staff, which stems from a clear mission set by the school's leadership team.

Following a systems model similar to Orrock and Clark's IFSC, schools can form a closer partnership with parents, businesses, and other community members to encourage students to complete high school. This encouragement must be exemplified by a supportive school staff devoted to student success. Students respond well to caring teachers and are more likely to succeed if they hold positive relationships with them. School staff can incorporate Noddings's ethic of care in their practice, where "caring involves a connection between the carer and the cared-for and a degree of reciprocity; that is to say that both gain from the encounter in different ways and both give" (Smith, 2020). This effort on the part of teachers would not need additional resources as Noddings's work is already a part of university curriculum for teachers. However, school staff may need a reminder from the school's leadership team when given talks on the school's values as a learning organization. Also, family support is critical for students' success as it allows for their "appropriate social, emotional, and identity development" (Orrock, & Clark, 2018, p. 1034). Schools should therefore form trusting and transparent partnerships with parents.

This partnership can be formed by schools holding orientation sessions with parents where they share how together they can best support the child through their studies. Collaboration and ongoing communication about the child's success could be even more necessary for students who are at risk of dropping out. Schools should also offer suggestions to parents as to routines they can set at home to better position their child to achieve academically. As an example, Centennial Academy in Montreal – a high school with a 90% graduation rate after five years of study – states

that it relies “on parents to provide their child with acceptance, limit-setting, guidance, and structure at home” (Centennial Academy, 2019). It offers suggestions to parents, including the following: limiting time on social media or playing video games to less than one hour a day, setting specific time intervals for homework, encouraging at least four hours of physical activity per week, and avoiding screen time one hour before bed so that the child can have the proper sleep needed to learn the following day. These efforts can begin to undo the negative influence that family structure and parental income can have on student success (Ambert & Saucier, 1984; Livingstone & Weinfeld, 2017). The damaging effects of negative influence from parents who have not completed high school, or the instability and lack of resources in either single-parent or extended family households, can be abated if those responsible for nurturing, supporting and guiding their child at home form a team with the school (2017). Unfortunately, those who have such responsibilities may be absent from some students’ lives. To support these students, schools should also reach out to the community at large, with assistance from government.

If fostered in schools alone, a culture of hard work and growth mindset would have limited impact on students’ academic achievement. Orrock and Clark (2018) have explained how support, encouragement, and belonging need to be present across the systems that a child interacts with in order for the child to succeed (p. 1037). Here is where the successful Saguenay Strategy from 1995 can inform school policy. Besides forming partnerships with parents, schools and school boards and service centers would need to collaborate with the local chamber of commerce and municipal councillors. In working together, these bodies can work towards promoting hard work and the growth mindset, along with the importance of graduating from high school. They can do so with awareness campaigns as they did in Saguenay. Today, these campaigns may even have a greater influence due to the reach of social media. Hopefully, this concerted effort can lead to dropout

rates being reduced twofold in all of Quebec as it did in Saguenay (Gordon, 2020). The input from students should be sought when designing these campaigns so that they can be relevant and have an optimal impact. While it would be favorable to have all members of the community agree with the message from the campaigns, there may be some with differing opinions. The promotion of having a growth mindset should always include a mention that it is based on the latest research. In Quebec's *I Care About School!* action strategy, local employers are "asked to make a social commitment to hire graduates or qualified employees and to support a balance between work and study for employees who wish to continue their education" (Ministère de l'Éducation, du Loisir et du Sport, 2009, p. 16). Making this work-school balance the responsibility of employers and employees can risk making it become an involuntary imbalance in the long run, especially given the pull that the labor market can have on male students. If an actual program were put in place that works this balance into an established schedule, then it is more likely that this work-school balance would ensue.

Here is where Quebec's Ministry of Education has made progress and can even make a greater difference. With the high dropout rates coming into the 21st century, the ministry recognized the need to differentiate the learning paths offered so that more students can complete high school. It was in this context that the Work-Oriented Training Path (WOTP) was created. While students could choose to study in the General Education Path and Applied General Education Path, the WOTP with its two learning options – prework training and training for a semiskilled trade – was and still is only available for students with learning difficulties. While the former two paths lead to a high school diploma, the latter leads to a certification (Ministère de l'Éducation, du Loisir et du Sport, 2008). This limitation is unfortunate, for it offers many adaptations to the traditional education path that can neutralize the push and pull factors that make

many male students drop out. One of these adaptations is to the academic schedule, with time shared between being in school, learning the core academic subjects, and being in the workforce, completing a work placement. As explained on LEARN Quebec, “experience students gain in the work force is an important part of the learning process and helps reinforce academic skills in a real-world context” (2020). Imagine how motivating that would be for male students who are known to have their engagement tied to the utilitarian purpose of what they learn. As the two programs are currently offered within the WOTP, a research report published in 2012 by Rousseau et al. found that the graduation rate for the 1-year Training for a Semiskilled Trade program varied from 43% to 100% depending on the school and that it ranged from 15% to 43% for the 3-year Pre-Work Training program. The gender gap in obtention of a certificate is smaller than in the general sector, with a slightly greater proportion of girls at 52% obtaining it compared to 46% of boys registered in the WOTP (2012). While the WOTP helps improve the graduation rate for students with learning difficulties, it or a similar path has the potential to do the same for all students if it were to be available as an option for them.

Following a structure similar to the WOTP, an additional path that provides opportunities for experience in the labor market while completing secondary studies could prevent male students from leaving school prematurely to join the workforce (Benkirane, 2009). Such paths are already offered as programs in other parts of Canada. For example, Ontario offers the Cooperative Education program designed to “*engage* all students” (2018, p. 8). This program, available to all grade 11 and 12 students of at least 16 years of age, provides a structured way for students to get work experience in the field while also earning the academic credits necessary to obtain their high school diploma. Recognizing that “some students identify their career interests at an earlier age and are ready to learn and practice their future trade while still in high school” (Government of

Alberta, 2020), Alberta's Ministry of Advanced Education offers the Registered Apprenticeship Program (RAP) to full-time high school students as of Grade 10. In this program, the school, student, and approved employer establish a schedule where the student can take the necessary courses to obtain their diploma, while accumulating credits toward their apprenticeship. Manitoba as well offers a similar option: the High School Apprenticeship Program (HSAP). Any student who has completed Grade 9 can enter this program and earn more than minimum wage as well as credits toward high school graduation from part-time trade work while attending classes (River East Transcona School Division, 2017). Such learn and earn programs are not available to students in Quebec. Besides the WOTP, the closest thing offered in the province are Work-Study programs where students can undertake paid internships. Unfortunately, these programs are only offered at the CEGEP and university level.

Many students would benefit if a form of the Work-Study program were offered in high school. Rather than slightly reduce the male student dropout rate as new certifications have done (Ministère de l'Éducation, 2015), such a program could increase graduation and future opportunities as it would offer high school diplomas rather than more limiting equivalents. At the same time, it can offer students valuable and motivating experience in their field of choice. The incorporation of this additional path would call for a relatively drastic change in the education model in Quebec. However, this path would share many similarities with the WOTP, so it would not have to change much of the province's existing system, besides of course being available to all students. This model is also present in other Canadian provinces, so Quebec can refer to these as a reference. While most of the existing programs require participants to be at least 16 years old, making it available to younger students in Quebec may need to be considered. Since the legal age of leaving school in this province is 16, students who would be attracted to this program might

find it more convenient to leave school altogether at this age to work full-time. By offering this program at an earlier age, students can get acquainted with this work-study balance and pursue it until they graduate. Another option would be to extend the age of compulsory school attendance to 17 or 18, in which case all students would be able to participate in these programs for at least one year. This consideration is aligned with Quebec’s *Policy on Educational Success* (2017) which describes the following course of action for ongoing intervention:

“Study the possibility of extending the age of compulsory school attendance from 16 to 18, or until the student has obtained a first diploma or qualification, by offering educational paths that meet their needs, particularly in training for qualifications” (p. 41)

This new academic pathway would not mean the annulment of the WOTP, but rather an expansion upon its current model. There may be a worry that normalizing joining the workforce while in high school might change a culture that values education. The risk, however, is low. Students who come from families that prioritize education are already more likely to succeed in school and would not need this program to increase their chances of graduating. On the other hand, those who would have been at risk in the past would now see school as compatible with their personal goals. This province-wide program would therefore not cause a displacement in its inhabitants’ values, but rather a reinvestment and appreciation from *all* in a school system that recognizes *everyone’s* interests and life goals.

Conclusion

As this thesis explains, there are many push and pull factors described in the literature that have contributed to the persistent high male student dropout rate in Quebec. Many of these are brought upon by how boys are socialized and pressured into adhering to male stereotypes. Boys tend to be reluctant to put in the effort needed to succeed academically. As a result, they make few academic achievements and are unmotivated, becoming more prone to misbehaving in the classroom. This cycle of disengagement, low academic achievement, and misbehavior worsens as, over time, they accumulate learning gaps, especially in reading and writing. Boys caught in this cycle become increasingly at risk of leaving school as they grow older and the idea of joining the workforce has a stronger pull. These risks are intensified when the child comes from a low socioeconomic background or if he grows up without a positive male role model. Besides lacking the support, cultural capital, and socioemotional health that otherwise would facilitate academic success, these boys are more likely to seek a sense of belonging from a peer group, regardless of how bad its influence may be. Inadvertently, and some have argued intentionally, schools push male students to leave prematurely. The culture of obedience is not met favorably by many male students, who in turn develop negative relationships with the school staff and are heavily penalized by discipline policies. These policies, along with grade retention, severely damage the students' motivation to stay and achieve enough in school to obtain their high school diploma.

Brought forth in the literature were also recommendations that would help counter these push and pull factors. One solution would be a change in school culture where students would be given more of an opportunity to practice their autonomy. Additionally, early and ongoing interventions have been recommended. These interventions would either target literacy, socioemotional skills, or self-regulation. It is also recommended that teachers be trained to ensure

positive teacher-student relationships and be made aware of the role of gender in this dynamic. Furthermore, much of the literature supports the need for more and varied offerings of extracurricular activities in schools. The literature also supports the need for having the community work together, or at least be aware of each member's responsibility, to support students to stay and succeed in school.

These recommendations were expanded upon in the discussion in part to consolidate the findings as well as to make them more applicable to Quebec. For the early intervention programs, schools and their students would benefit most from one that helps improve literacy, behavior-management, and includes a discussion on gender stereotypes. To increase male student engagement and motivation, teachers can adopt a form of pedagogy that supports student autonomy. They can also try as much as possible to incorporate students' interests into class content. If possible, schools should offer a wide range of extracurricular activities, while encouraging a form of competition in sports that focuses on collaboration among teammates to make each other better. Schools could also try their best to create a culture of hard work and help their students foster a growth mindset. To effectively promote this culture, schools should behave as close partners with parents and other community members to ensure that everyone shares the responsibility and fulfills their roles in encouraging students to complete high school. The WOTP also has great potential in Quebec, where it can be built upon to offer all students a fulfilling learning experience that motivates them to continue their studies until and possibly even after they obtain their high school diploma. When making these recommendations, none were ever put forward where they would only benefit male students. Every considered solution that would reduce the male student dropout rate had to involve methods that could help all students succeed. Due to the gender gap in high school completion, it follows that the measures suggested would have an

overall greater net effect on the academic success of male students, while still having a positive effect on female students' success.

The issue of boys dropping out of Quebec schools at a far higher rate than girls has persisted over the past decades. Many studies have been dedicated to explaining it, and policies have been enacted to address it. Unfortunately, it remains an issue and risks being accepted as a regularity within Quebec. In the recent *Policy on Educational Success* (2017), the Ministère de l'Éducation et de l'Enseignement supérieur acknowledges that albeit that “more boys than girls eventually drop out of school [...] it is important to take action to prevent girls and young women from dropping out of school” (p. 13). The reasoning behind this call to action is that “girls and women who drop out of school find themselves in a more socioeconomically precarious position than their male counterparts” (2017, p. 13). With the literature suggesting that dropping out of school leads to more than socioeconomic repercussions – such as malintegration into society, delinquency, and depression (Pelletier & Ministère de l'éducation, 2004; Blaya & Fortin 2011) – it remains that it would be preferable to ensure that as many students, both male and female, succeed in school as much as possible. While the Quebec government currently focuses more on female student retention, it would be in the province's best interest not to neglect the retention of their male classmates.

If successful, the model adopted in Quebec to increase the male graduation rate could easily be adopted in other Canadian provinces. It can help reduce the national gap in academic achievement between male and female students. At the same time, it can potentially improve gender relations, as it promotes a healthy discussion and awareness of gender stereotypes (Bouchard & St-Amant, 2000). Furthermore, if they wish, this framework can be adapted to the cultures of different countries for them to achieve similar ends.

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