



**Ministère de l'Éducation nationale,
de l'Enseignement supérieur
et de la Recherche**

110, rue de Grenelle - 75357 Paris SP 07

T. 01 55 55 30 10

spresse@education.gouv.fr

www.education.gouv.fr

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FRENCH GOVERNMENT ACTION PLAN TO HALVE SCHOOL DROPOUT

- **In 2012** President François Hollande made tackling the problem of school dropout a priority.
- **The French education ministry** is carrying out a vast programme to prevent teenagers dropping out of school and to help young people without qualifications return to education.
- **In five years** the number of young dropouts has fallen from 136,000 to 110,000

Stated aims

President Hollande made tackling school dropout a priority in 2012, with the aim of halving the number of young early school leavers by 2017 and giving past dropouts a way back into education. Today, France is making progress towards this goal. The French early school leaving rate (9% - source Insee inquiry, DEPP calculations) is 1 point below the Europe 2020 Strategy target (10%) and 2 points below the European average (11%).

Following publication in November 2014 of the assessment of France's anti-dropout strategy ([Évaluation partenariale de la politique de lutte contre le décrochage scolaire](#)), the Ministry of National Education, Higher Education and Research is spearheading a major national campaign against early school leaving under the leadership of the minister, Najat Vallaud-Belkacem.

At the launch of the plan President Hollande promised:

“ Every young person aged 16 to 25 who has left the education system will be able to return, through apprenticeship, internship, work experience – if possible a job. ”

Emphasising one of the plan's main objectives, to give young people a new chance to succeed in education, Prime Minister Manuel Valls said:

“ *The Republic has the fundamental purpose of placing each of our young people in a position of equality in the face of a better future.* ”

He added:

“ *We need to give the admirable idea of a second chance its full place in our system* ”, and obtaining a qualification was “ *The best way of combating unemployment* ”. He praised micro-secondary schools and second chance schools as examples of “ *more flexible educational paths* ” to ensure personalised support for all.

Describing some of the plan's measures Ms Vallaud-Belkacem said:

“ *We will train teachers to detect signs of educational difficulty early, and involve parents in this. Those 15-to-18-year olds at highest risk of dropping out will be offered a personalised, basic training course, under a tutor, still within the school system. They will be able to do a placement in a company to discover the world of work, or community service, to give them time to complete a project and find a suitable educational solution.* ”

Now, a year after the plan's introduction, she says:

“ *The time has come for us to make a first assessment and continue the roll-out.* ”

How we are delivering

Under the slogan *Tous mobilisés pour vaincre le décrochage* – ‘All together to beat school dropout’ – the plan coordinates action between the ministries in charge of education, employment, towns, health, agriculture and overseas departments, together with regional authorities, associations, researchers, and other interested parties including youngsters and their parents. Combined with other education ministry programmes, especially at primary level and in priority education, it has three key themes:

Everyone concerned – schools, national and regional authorities, and parents – is acting together against early school leaving. Awareness activities include:

- a special week, organised by education authorities under the slogan ‘Ensemble on s'accroche!’ (‘Together we hang in here’), to highlight successful initiatives;
- schools and authorities collaborating to devise ‘anti-dropout’ policies;
- parents’ involvement, especially at crucial times when their kids are changing school or choosing their specialist subjects;
- a dedicated helpline for pupils and parents to consult specialised counsellors on alternative education streams and support.

Emphasis on prevention, with measures to identify pupils' problems and find solutions from early childhood education and care onwards – such as:

- specialised training for all staff;
- collaboration between teachers, other educational workers and outside specialists.

A new chance for teenagers who fall behind at school, or have left empty-handed, to gain qualifications. Among measures are:

- a more flexible, module-based education system;
- improved monitoring of pupils during their schooling;
- advice for teens about the world of work and opportunities for work experience;
- setting up innovative remedial education services, such as 'micro-lycées';
- the right for all dropouts to return to initial training, backed by the law
- new initiatives for early school leavers such as voluntary military and civic service, and work
- experience in partnership with the ministry of defence, voluntary associations and public bodies.

Under the government strategy, the number of school dropouts has fallen from 136,000 five years ago to 110,000; and the number of 18-24-year-olds without qualifications has dropped from 620,000 to 494,000. In the past year, 26,000 youngsters have returned to education, and following an inter-ministerial campaign on social networks more than 10,000 have expressed their interest in doing so.

How much does the plan cost?

Dedicated funding is €50 million a year. Against this spending, if the plan saves 10,000 youngsters from leaving education without qualifications France will save €2.3 billion over 40 years, or nearly €60 million a year.

ABOUT SCHOOL DROPOUT

Key figures

110,000 youngsters leave school every year with no practical qualification (down from 136,000 five years ago)

494,000 18-to-24 year-olds are unqualified, out of education and risk unemployment (620,000 five years ago)

€50 million a year is dedicated to fighting early school leaving

€230,000 is the cost of each unqualified youngster throughout his or her life

Every year in France 110,000 teenagers leave school with no qualifications – so nearly 500,000 youngsters aged 18-24 have left the education system with no baccalauréat or vocational certificate, and not much chance of finding a job. They come from all backgrounds and family structures, though children from disadvantaged families predominate; new research¹ reveals regional differences reflect marked social and economic circumstances – dropping out is most common in areas of high unemployment such as those in the north around Amiens, in Corsica and in overseas departments.

Paris, the West and the southern half of France, except for the Mediterranean edge, are among areas least affected. Boys are afflicted more than girls – for every 100 girls who drop out there are 150 boys. Signs are visible early on: one in four primary pupils has difficulties, and 15% of these have ‘severe’ or ‘very severe’ difficulties.

The high dropout rate not only means personal disaster for hundreds of thousands of youngsters but threatens French competitiveness and makes society pay a high price.

The cost of each unqualified young person throughout their life is estimated at €230,000, or nearly €30 billion of debt each year.

Specialised anti-dropout Services

- The Mission de Lutte Contre le Décrochage Scolaire (MLDS) acts to prevent early school leaving, help youngsters back into education to gain qualifications and support them during their studies.
- The SIEI, the Interministerial System of Information Exchanges, identifies early school leavers through cross-referencing national and ministry databases;
- Nationwide monitoring and support offices advise and help early school leavers to return to education or prepare for a working life. They coordinate local education, guidance and youth employment services, such as schools, the MLDS, Centres d’information et d’orientation (COIs), local initiatives, agricultural establishments, the adult education system Greta, youth information bureaux and regional authorities.
- Fo-QualE (Formation Qualification Emploi) networks are a collaboration between the MLDS and COIs to advise and support young people in finding appropriate educational avenues and advice; they are part of the ‘New chance’ networks established in 2012.

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