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# PERSEVERANCE AND ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT FOR FIRST PEOPLES: YOUTH FUSION AS AN INNOVATIVE MODEL

## CONTEXT

Early school-leaving is a major social problem in Quebec. Indeed, 25% of young people still abandon school before the age of 20 with no diploma or qualifications. In addition, 90% of young people from Inuit and Cree communities get their high school diploma in five years (37% in the rest of Quebec) and the absentee rate is especially important: it rates at 27, 6% in the secondary and at 18.7% in the elementary, according to the Cree school Board's 2014-2015 Annual Report.

tors to implement and support projects that motivate at-risk youths to excel creatively, stimulating them to become more involved in their academic success, and instill a sense of belonging at school.

It is the only organization to be present every day of the week throughout the school year, in eight northern villages of Nunavik and nine First Nations communities (Cree, Innu, Mohawk), in addition to having

## OBJECTIVE

Youth Fusion wishes to foster the perseverance and academic success of young people, including those of the First Peoples, through a comprehensive intervention model culturally appropriate and rooted in communities.

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## DESCRIPTION

Youth Fusion is a charitable organization created in 2009 by Gabriel Bran Lopez, a young social entrepreneur, who has chosen to develop a new effective response formula for perseverance throughout Quebec.

The formula is both simple in concept and innovative in its application. Youth Fusion hires university students (or recent graduates) as project coordina-

a unique partnership with the Aboriginal Student Resource Centre from John Abbott College. In the seventeen communities where the organization is present, 31 university students work (30 hours per week from September to June) as project coordinators, in elementary and secondary schools, to implement 30 suitable projects adapted to local contexts (Arts



Youth Fusion also values the importance of creating positive relationships with peers. This is why mentors from the community, high school students, are involved with elementary and high school students or with both, in the same community. This win-win relationship is a rewarding work for mentors and allows young people to have genuine exchanges and a positive outlook on the future. Young people participating in activities are also placed in mentoring and *leadership* situations by conducting activities for younger people in the community. In Waswanipi for instance, the School Engagement project Coordinator proposes a literacy activity in which sixth-grade students read for kindergarten or first grade pupils. In Salluit and Aupaluk, motivated secondary four and five students were also hired as local trainers, to support the work of the project coordinators. This position provides them with a first employment opportunity (an average of five hours per week), in addition to helping them develop many project management skills as in specialized fields (music, video production, etc.). They are inspiring models for youths of their community.

relationship and perception of the educational institution within the communities.

## ASSESSING THE IMPACT OF YOUTH FUSION

The following data refer to two anonymous surveys in spring 2015 using *Survey Monkey* in which respondents participated voluntarily. The first survey

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Statistics are set forth in relation to 218 students as well as 64 staff members who participated in the surveys.

One of university students' objectives is to organize success and academic achievement experiences through various activities and create opportunities to celebrate local talent with extraordinary events, such as: the Salluit Art and Music Festival, the *Leadership* camp and conference, the Robotics Festival, the CLIP short film Festival or local concerts. The whole community can attend young people's performances and parents meet with teachers in a context other than the parent-teacher meetings. Youth Fusion also seeks to bring the school team and community members to know each other better to improve their

was made with students among some 1800 participants in Youth Fusion activities<sup>1</sup> during the 2014–2015 school year, more specifically 218 responding students; the second was administered to the school staff, community members, and other organizations stakeholders, including teachers, principals, behaviour specialists and advisors, namely 64 responding members. The surveys were developed in collaboration with the *Centre de recherche et d'intervention sur la réussite scolaire* (CRIRES—Research and academic achievement Centre), based at Laval University and specializing in the evaluation of educational programs.

Factors promoting school retention used herein are those determined by the *Centre de transfert pour la réussite éducative au Québec* (CTREQ—Transfer

