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Executive Summary

Historically, researchers have addressed many important “variables” that affect transitions in quantitative studies. However, there has still been a need to capture the experiences and meanings of the ways in which transitions are enacted currently in schools. The ultimate goal of the study, Fresh Starts/False Starts: Young People in Transition from Elementary to Secondary School has been to capture this enactment.

The study results indicate that in developing programs and strategies to support successful transition the focus is on the social ensemble of people who have specific and collective roles to play in supporting young people and educators. Resources and strategies are needed to be placed at the right place and time as defined by the age, grade and life history of the young person, the readiness of the family of schools to facilitate transition, the engagement of the families and communities and the region of the province. The report details these issues and summarizes the lessons as told from the perspectives of young people, educators and parents.

This report presents the findings from all three Phases of the research project through a three-year ethnographic study designed to examine the processes through which Ontario students make their transition from elementary to secondary school. The study was conducted in three Phases spanning 2007, 2008 and 2009.

Phase I covered the cohort of students, their parents and educators in the elementary school (grade 8) during the 2006/2007 academic year. It also reported on in-depth Individual Interviews with students in grade 8 and a sample of those who had just transitioned into grade 9 in the 2008 academic year. Phase II proceeded with a cohort of students, parents and educators from grade 9 in the 2008/2009 academic year. It also included follow-up Interviews with some of the grade 8 students and new Interviews with a cohort of secondary school students (grades 9 and 10). Phase III included a new cohort of students in Grade 10, their parents and educators. It addressed longer term issues of maintenance and slippage in transition. This report details findings from Phase III, as well as comparisons across the three Phases of the study.

Readers are directed to the Phase I Report Hopes and Fears in the Elementary Years (Tilleczek, Laflamme, Ferguson, Roth Edney et al, 2007) and the Phase II Report Crossing the River to Secondary School (Tilleczek, Laflamme, Ferguson, Roth Edney et al, 2008) for details on the first two waves of the study.

The complete sample for the study was large with a total of 795 people participating in 124 Focus Groups and an additional 130 young people who spoke with us in Individual Interviews.
The research design and tools were created especially for this study to allow for the mapping of the processes of transition and to understand the continuities and discontinuities therein. A complete set of all research tools and ethical consent materials can be found in the accompanying Appendices document. The study was designed to elucidate processes which govern, help and hinder young people as they move from elementary to secondary school. The findings are meant to inform the current Ontario Ministry of Education initiatives relating to Student Success, specifically the transition from elementary to secondary school.

Across the three years of study, the team worked in 37 families of Ontario schools, speaking to students, educators and parents. Qualitative (Focus Groups, Individual Interviews, and Field Notes) and quantitative (Face Sheets) data were collected. We conducted 124 Focus Groups with Youth, Parents and Educators with a total of 795 participants. We also conducted 130 Individual Interviews with young people. This data has provided the ongoing perspectives of young people, educators, and parents. The Focus Groups offered multi-vocal and polyphonic coverage of the risk factors, protective factors and processes in transition in the province of Ontario. The Individual Interviews offered a more in-depth and uni-vocal narrative understanding from a selection of these young people as they moved across and negotiated transitional processes. Our study participants were drawn from across six sites in Ontario: Greater Toronto Area (GTA), Ottawa, Windsor, Sudbury, Thunder Bay, and Kapuskasing/Hearst.
In each of the 124 Focus Groups in the study, participants were asked to begin by filling in a Face Sheet with socio-demographic information and their thoughts and ideas about school and transition. The analysis of the Face Sheet data over the three Phases provides a year by year and cross-year portrait of the influence and perspectives on transition. Young people in risk for a difficult transition were analytically identified. Their stories pointed to the need for a better fit between their goals/life and school, including belonging and elements of fun. Students across the Phases focussed their goals at school in the academic realm but their perspectives on the realities of school and show that transition and schooling are fundamentally social processes. They see the issues of workload as the worst aspect of high school, just as they had contemplated it would be when they were in grade 8. This seems to have come to pass, just as did their notion that social issues could be both risk and protective factors in school. Neither did their feelings change about making a fresh start and gaining new status as another real benefit of high school. The emotional paradox of transition remained stable but altered in interesting ways over the transition. So too did the importance and meaning of friendships. Leaving elementary schools behind for schools that were later found to be “bigger and not better” emerged while at the same time young people also appreciated the extra-curricular aspects of high school.

Qualitative analysis of the Youth Focus Group transcripts revealed a number of important themes from students as they negotiated the transition. These included rich descriptions of the negative features of high schools, their own place at the heart of transitions, and the place of their friends and peers as risk and protective in social and academic matters. The emotional paradox was further detailed as were tensions in the ways that they, their friends, their peers, and their teachers functioned – sometimes as enablers and other times as barriers to transition.

Analysis of the Educator Focus Groups revealed that teachers’ first concerns were those relating to young people going through transition. Their discussions also provided rich detail relating to the enablers and programs which enhanced transition. Face Sheet analysis for educators showed that they continue to find the necessity for a range of people (parents, teachers, principals, etc) to function as a community of helpers in transition. Educators found school boards and schools less helpful. The role of the parents in transition is becoming interesting and complex such that educators name them as important and influential but also report that they are not often a part of transitions programs and strategies.

Parent Focus Groups concentrated on three main concerns and a number of useful recommendations. Like educators, they placed young people at the heart of the process of transition and spoke about their importance in the active negotiation of the process. Parents also provided evidence of their frustration with their place in the transition, knowing that it remains important, wanting to do more and describing the ways in which they can and do support their children in grade 9. They also
detailed many risk factors at high school and made insightful recommendations for facilitating transition and student engagement.

Analysis of the transcripts from the Individual Interviews with youth revealed that young people see themselves in the context of schools, friends and family. In comparison to the Focus Group discussion, the Interview data demonstrated more positive and protective factors and feelings encountered by young people in grade 9. Narrative analysis of the Interview transcripts resulted in the classification of youth into three groups: clear and multiple risk situations, complex resiliencies, and mostly protected and supported. Recognizing the existence of these three groups provides a nuanced understanding of the processes of transition and the possibility of diverse strategies for each. For the young people we spoke with in follow-up Interviews over time, changes in their situational risk were observed. What remained stable was the balancing act that characterizes their lives at school, home, with friends and in the community. The act of keeping these aspects in balance while simultaneously making the transition between schools was met with excitement and trepidation. This proved to be more daunting for some young people whose situations worsened over the transition. For others, there were supports, programs and outreach available which resulted in improvements to their ability to balance things and ultimately to an improvement in their situations (socially, academically or both).

What was amply clear from these participants was that transition from elementary to secondary school is viewed as an important and complex process taking place in early adolescence when many other physical, social and emotional processes are in flux and formation. Thus, discussion of the transition must include the importance of social, emotional and academic aspects. Losing sight of one or the other is unwise and counter to efforts to enhance this critical time for young people. Viewing young people as in transitional tension between being, becoming and belonging offers a useful and productive structure for understanding the study results. This conceptual structure examines the harmony and disharmony that emerges and illustrates how young people are at the core of making nested transitions toward young adulthood.

The report concludes with a summary, and recommendations for young people, parents, educators, schools, and policymakers. It is our intention that these frameworks and suggestions provide both direction and specificity in educational practice, as well as a point of departure for further dialogue, planning, program development and research.
PART 1: INTRODUCTION

The following report presents the results of all three Phases of the study Mapping the Processes of Transition from Elementary to Secondary School. This longitudinal, ethnographic, study has been designed to examine the processes through which Ontario students are moving in making their transition from elementary to secondary school. These processes were studied from the point of view of young people, their educators, and their parents. The study has been designed to assist in providing data for the current Ontario Ministry of Education initiatives targeting Student Success, specifically relating to transition. The Student Success/Learning to 18 (SS/L18) Strategy was designed to meet five inter-related goals focused on the secondary school system:

1. Increase graduation rates and decrease drop-out rates;
2. Support a good outcome for all students;
3. Provide students with new and relevant learning opportunities;
4. Build on students’ strengths and interests; and
5. Provide students with an effective elementary to secondary school transition.

This report details the final goal from the point of view of students, educators and parents and examines how this is related to social, academic and procedural issues. We would like to note that this study took place as the Ontario Ministry of Education launched their Transition Initiative as part of the Student Success Strategy. Thus the Evaluation of the Ontario Ministry of Education’s Student Success / Learning to 18 Strategy: Final Report (CCL, 2008) overlapped our study. This evaluation suggested, among other things, that “schools should eliminate or minimize the difficulties that students face when they make a transition from one level to the next”. While no specific recommendations were made relating to transition in this comprehensive report, there were relevant main messages and evidence that structures and supports are changing which may better assist students in their transition from elementary to secondary school. These included improved communications between secondary schools and their partner elementary schools, the development of student profiles, individual timetabling for students identified as “at-risk” and a multitude of transition activities that were discussed during school visits.

The vast majority of secondary school staff who responded to the CCL (2008) survey stated that their school was making efforts to welcome Grade 9 students, to make them feel that they can succeed in secondary school, and that educators are attempting to monitor how Grade 9 students are transitioning. Furthermore, approximately three-quarters of respondents in the CCL survey agreed that their school was creating individual timetables to build on students’ strengths. Thus, there are some signs that certain structural and procedural issues in the transition are being addressed in Ontario.
This final report discusses an array of these and other issues as arising from our three years of in-depth qualitative data collection and in the context of our review of international literature on the topic. As we have argued in our review of international literature (Tilleczek & Ferguson, 2007), the transition from elementary to secondary school is an important life event that affects different students in different ways. Thus, within a cultural rather than individual context, the term transition has evolved to encompass the myriad of complex trajectories that are taken within, between, and across schools over time. Our concept of transition takes a long view over the life course of young people and attends to the social, academic, emotional and procedural issues involved.

Although variations occur, most students leave elementary school and move into some form of secondary school during early adolescence. This transition has been recognized as a stumbling point for students, particularly for those who are at-risk (Lord et al, 1994; Seidman et al, 1994). The more youth experience “daily hassles” in transition, the more they are set on a path that may lower self expectations, academic efficacy, and prosocial behaviours (Seidman et al, 1994). The movement is commonly associated with dips in academic achievement, lowered self-esteem, and increased social anxiety (Alspaugh, 1998; Eccles et al, 1997; Galton, et al, 2003). As identified in the Early School Leavers Study (2005)\(^2\), an at-risk youth is one who is unlikely to graduate on schedule with the skills and self-confidence necessary to have meaningful options in work, culture, civic affairs, and relationships. Being poor has long been understood to be a critical risk condition for youth across many outcomes and the pervasiveness of the socioeconomic gradient effect in learning outcomes has been documented in detail (Keating and Hertzman, 1999).

Developmentally, early adolescence has been seen as an inopportune time to move from safe and well-known support structures (Eccles et al, 1993; Siedman et al, 1994) and the question remains as to how school transition can initiate a negative or positive trajectory in the lives of youth. How much can we mediate with pedagogy, care, proactive work and school cultures? Are all of the outcomes of transition negative or does the hope of an existing fresh start compel positive changes for young people?

We recognize that all transitions in life present challenges, but this transitional point is specifically difficult because of its placement in the developmental continuum. However, just because this is another transition does not mean there is no place to learn about the specific character of it. Nor does it negate our responsibility in assisting young people through this very critical and highly charged period in their lives.

We argue that transition is therefore best seen as a developmental process which crosses social, academic, and procedural issues over time. Transition entails changes

\(^2\) For complete report see Ferguson, Tilleczek, Boydell, & Rumens (2005)
in school cultures, increased academic demands, rotary systems, and shifts in peer groups which can be difficult to negotiate (Hargreaves, 1990). Researchers and policy makers locate their work in the lives of young people and their educators. In so doing, research focuses on the ways in which risk and protective factors fluctuate over time and intersect individual and cultural factors. Literature on adolescent development suggests the presence of nested transitions (Tilleczek, forthcoming) as follows:

- Transition from childhood to adulthood over the life course
- Transitions along the road to success through schools, communities, and families
- Transitions from elementary to secondary school within these larger transitions
- Transitions are both growth inducing and potential tipping points; both false/fresh starts

This framework opens up discussion to wider issues of the fit between schools, communities, and the lives of young people rather than simply targeting student habits and academics. Many such strategies have been suggested in the literature and are selectively reviewed here.

Three useful organizing principles - being, becoming, and belonging - have emerged as ways to categorize transitions strategies (Tilleczek, in press; Tilleczek, 2008). Young people are in constant motion and tension between being and becoming. They are in process of being themselves in their everyday lives. This includes issues of forging identities through daily negotiations at school, home, community, work, and with friends. As such, they need to be valued for who they are today and to find places to belong. However, young people are also in a state of becoming young adults. They are engaged in the nested transitions. In this cause, teachers become human developers both over the life course and in the everyday lives of youth. They facilitate fundamental social processes of being, becoming and belonging.

Researchers have found that many young people at the threshold of secondary school are hopeful about the potential of their new status, school, friends, and education (Graham & Hill, 2003). Kirkpatrick (2004) has reported that students look forward to this fresh start and are adept at making new friends for positive academic and social purposes. Some students report coping better than expected, enjoying new freedoms, and involvement in extra-curricular activities (Akos, 2004).

A contradiction exists, however, in that many students also express anxiety about the transition. Poor and immigrant youth state that they expected things to be easier than they actually turned out (Graham and Hill, 2003). An emotional paradox exists at this transition point, as it does at many life junctures. Students are both excited and anxious, both doubtful and hopeful. The most pervasive source of anxiety is the loss of status they experience when moving from elementary to secondary school, from being the oldest students to the youngest. This happens precisely the time when they are moving from childhood toward adulthood (Tilleczek, 2006; Graham and Hill, 2003; Hargreaves and Earle, 1990). Drops in self-perception and learner identities
are pervasive (Silverthorn et al, 2005). Given the importance of status to adolescents, the social and academic implications are obvious.

Academic concerns such as homework, pressure to do well, and potential drops in achievement are paramount for students and parents (Akos, 2004). Social concerns such as getting lost, bullying, and making friends (Schumaher, 1998) are prevalent, perceived risks. Beyond the negotiation of the transition, structural problems are imagined and/or experienced by students. Of concern are the size and layout of secondary schools, the timetable, complicated schedules, being bullied, not knowing anyone, getting lost, and having multiple teachers (Graham & Hill, 2001; Schumacher, 1998). The aspect most troubling in relation to school work was the increase in homework (Graham and Hill, 2001). Kirkpatrick (2004) has reported that students often feel that the *honeymoon is over* after the initial adjustment phase to secondary school. At later phases, academic issues take precedence over social and procedural issues, leading students to express dissatisfaction and disappointment.

Seventeen years ago, Hargreaves and Earle (1990) conducted a literature review of the current research of the time, about schooling in the transition years in Ontario. They concluded that “the tragedy of the transition years is not that students experience anxiety on transfer to secondary school. The tragedy is that this anxiety passes so quickly, and that the students adjust so smoothly to the many uncomfortable realities of secondary school life. These realities...can restrict achievement, and depress motivation (especially among the less academic), sowing the seeds for dropout in later years” (p. 214).

Since that time, a good deal of research has been conducted on the risk and protective factors surrounding the transition from elementary to secondary school. Unfortunately, this research has suggested that the tragedy outlined by Hargreaves (1990) has not been fully appreciated. The Early School Leavers Study (2005) has since demonstrated that educators and schools have room to become more proactive, caring, and understanding in order to encourage student success and engagement. Similarly, the transition from elementary to secondary school, as a potential trouble spot for young people, requires further attention at administrative, academic, and social levels. The current Grade 8 to Grade 9 Transition Planning Initiative of the Ontario Ministry of Education is taking a considerable step in this direction. As yet, there has been little research conducted in the Canadian or Ontario context. It is time to take stock of what is already in place and what/how it is working and for whom.

We have therefore designed this process-oriented and temporally based study to examine processes in transition in the province of Ontario. The largest gap in knowledge remains in understanding fully the *meso* level where intersections between culture and individual meet and where we can best begin to appreciate and describe the intersections of daily lives of young people with teachers, friends, peers, and parents. It is at this level where the experience and embodiment of youth culture, schooling, identity and age are played out. While researchers have addressed many
important “variables” that affect transitions in quantitative studies, there has still been a need to capture the meanings and experience of the ways in which transitions are enacted currently in schools. The ultimate goal of this study has been to capture this enactment.

Three Phases of research took place, each with their separate but related objectives.

- Phase I took place in elementary schools in the 2006/07 academic year. The focus was on the grade 8 perspectives about transition, with an eye toward preparation and prospective views.
- Phase II took place in the secondary schools during the 2007/08 academic year however educators from both elementary and secondary school took part in the discussions. The focus was on grade 9 perspectives about transition, including both retrospective and prospective views.
- Phase III took place in the secondary schools during the 2008/09 academic year. The focus of this final Phase of research was on grade 10 perspectives about transition. Issues of maintenance in the year after transition were discussed as were retrospective views.

This report presents the main messages and themes emerging across the entire study with an initial focus on the presentation of Phase III data. Both Phase I and Phase II of the study have culminated in separate reports. Readers are directed to the Phase I Report Hopes and Fears in the Elementary Years (Tilleczek, Laflamme, Ferguson, Roth Edney et al, 2007) and the Phase II Report Crossing the River to Secondary School (Tilleczek, Laflamme, Ferguson, Roth Edney et al, 2008) for details on those specific studies.

This report is presented in eleven main sections as follows: (1) Executive Summary (2) Introduction (3) Research Processes and Methods (4) Youth Focus Group Methods (5) Educator Focus Group Methods (6) Parent Focus Group Methods (7) Individual Interview Methods (8) Interviewing Processes (9) Transcription and Analysis (10) Results and Main Messages, and (11) Summary, Implications and Directions.
PART 2: RESEARCH PROCESSES AND METHODS

Research Tools

The research tools (Focus Group protocols and processes, Interview protocols and processes, and Face Sheets for collection of socio-demographic and survey data) have been created for this study by the research team. They are based on previous work with young people in schools, on standard measures of items, and on the literature (c.f. Tilleczek and Ferguson, 2007; Tilleczek, 2008a; Ferguson et al, 2005). The tools have been created to measure the temporal and dynamic process of transition at multiple levels (micro, meso, and macro). They have also been designed to examine the intersections of risk and protective factors which have been identified in the literature and to focus on gaps in existing knowledge (cf Tilleczek, 2008a; Tilleczek and Ferguson, 2007).

The Face Sheet was distributed to participants in Focus Group sessions. Throughout each Phase of the study we have made slight modifications to the Focus Group protocols. These modifications were informed by our field work and analysis of the data. For example, based on input from the young people in Phase I, we restructured some of the Face Sheet questions and design to make it further developmentally appropriate for Phase II. At the end of Phase II, we once again revised the Face Sheets and Focus Group questions, in order to properly address the fact that students in Phase III were in grade 10. For example, we asked specific questions relating to grade 10 literacy and credit recovery in our last Phase.

Below, we outline our operational definitions, followed by the sampling frame, and the distribution of research tools over the three Phases of study. The entire set of Phase I, II and III tools and ethics consents in both English and French are provided under separate cover in the accompanying Appendices document.

Operational Definitions

Family of Schools

Our definition of families of schools is informed by our Literature Review, Ontario Ministry of Education (EDU) Student Success data, EDU personnel, and district school board personnel. Attempts were made to allow for variation in the definition by board and district.

A family of schools is the grouping of elementary partner schools and their designated secondary school. A complex family of schools is one which includes a
secondary school that draws its incoming population from varying elementary partner schools (K-8 schools, middle schools, catholic schools, etc). Youth from these elementary schools are from diverse social classes, ethnicities, linguistic backgrounds and regions.

A less complex family of schools is one which includes a secondary school and relatively fewer elementary partner schools. The secondary school draws its incoming student population from young people with little variation in social class, ethnicity, school structure, and/or linguistic backgrounds and regions.

Families of schools were selected from within district school boards and neighbourhoods with families of high, low, and mixed social class. We purposively sampled across social class vis-à-vis the whole provincial sample by choosing secondary schools in high, middle, and working class neighbourhoods respectively across the sites.

Transitioning Youth

In Phase I, we sampled youth enrolled in Ontario elementary schools in 2007 in Grade 8 (or in the case of some French schools, Grade 6). These were youth who were deemed to be on the elementary side of the transition and were in preparation for moving into a new school (secondary or intermediate level).

In Phase II, we sampled youth enrolled in Grade 9 in Ontario secondary schools in 2008. These were youth who were deemed to be on the secondary side of the transition and were settling into the first transitional year.

In Phase III, we sampled youth enrolled in Grade 10 in Ontario secondary schools in 2009. These were youth who were deemed to be on the secondary side of the transition and had completed their first transitional year.

At-Risk Youth/Youth in Risk Situations

The definition of risk and at-risk are contested in the literature and in practical applications in research. The definition used at the starting point for this study was “any student who is at-risk of not completing their program of study.” The Ministry of Education has, as one of its goals in their initiative, the accumulation of definitions and measures of “at-risk” that are being currently used across sites and schools. The initiative can help to clarify variations in usage and discussions of the concept for future use.

Our review of international literature (Tilleczek and Ferguson, 2007) provided a discussion on the importance of the concept of students living in risk situations, rather than simply conceptualizing individual students themselves to be the location of risk.
Therefore, we will endeavour to measure the school, family and community risks as well as the student measures (truancy, failing grades, etc) in the “at-risk” concept. We will also attend to the notion of resiliency. For instance, we have reported that:

Transitional issues and challenges are exacerbated for youth at-risk. Many researchers understand risk status as fluctuating over time, based on circumstances and contexts, rather than being a fixed quality. As such, many believe risk is better understood as a point along a continuum (Schonert-Reichl, 2000; Catterall, 1998). Smink and Schargel (2004) prefer to use the term ‘in-risk’ to depict a situation, rather than an individual, and in fact, recommend the use of the phrase ‘students in at-risk situations’.

Periods of transition can increase risk as they necessitate individual and systemic restructuring and adaptive capabilities (Rutter, 1994, acf Schonert-Reichl, 2000). If a child faces multiple negative factors at home, at school, and in the neighbourhood, the effect of these factors is multiplied rather than simply added together, because these conditions interact with and reinforce each other (Werner and Smith, 1992; Schorr, 1989). In situations where a child is vulnerable, the interaction of risk and protective factors determines the course of development. If multiple risk factors accumulate and are not offset by compensating protective factors, healthy development is compromised (Schorr, 1989; Werner and Smith 1992). Garbarino (1990) describes high-risk neighbourhoods as "an ecological conspiracy against children." Poverty increases the likelihood that risk factors in the environment will not be offset by protective factors. Poverty is often a constellation of risk factors that combine to produce "rotten outcomes" (Schorr, 1989).

The concepts of resilience and protective factors are the positive counterparts to vulnerability and risk. Resilient children are children who remain competent despite exposure to misfortune or to stressful events (Werner and Smith, 1992). Caring and support, high expectations, and opportunities for meaningful participation are protective factors for children found in families, schools, and communities (Keating and Hertzman, 1999). One of the key protective factors for children is the availability of consistent adults who provide them with a secure base for the development of trust, autonomy, and initiative (Werner and Smith, 1992). Catterall (1998) suggests a unique and practical signpost in our use of risk and resilience as applied to children and youth. He suggests that risk be assessed as grounded in actual performance rather than assessed by abstract categories relating to various group-level probabilities of failure. In studying grade 8 students over time in the US, he found that those who were doing poorly in school could turn themselves around by Grade 10. Family supports, school responsiveness to student needs, and student involvement in school were shown to be strong predictors of student recovery from low school performance. He goes on to suggest that we should avoid seeing all members of risk groups as necessarily “at-risk” without also seeing the potential for resilience within families and schools. Resilience, therefore, can be experienced in the ways in which families and schools help students to recover from low performance, lack of confidence, and faltering commitments to school.

“One potential response of group labelling is that individual children may be considered at risk who are in fact not at risk; after all, roughly half the students will exceed any group average...In addition, a key proposition supported in the
resilience research is that individuals react differently to their surroundings...in a way, risk may be a positive spark for some children, and a central quest of resilience research has been to discover who really is (or is not) at risk in an adversely predicted group. Another effect...is that through stereotyping, expectations for entire groups may be suppressed with unfortunate educational consequence (Oakes, 1985). Finally, some popular conceptions of risk for children should be challenged because risk by association can translate into guilt by association. In one such view, shortfalls of educational achievement and attainment...are interpreted as deficits of individual effort or will...These general characterizations ignore differences within groups; moreover, they fail to apprehend the qualities of individual lives...and assign responsibilities for risk in broad measure to the affected groups themselves ignoring oppressive and discriminatory conditions...” (Catterall, 1998: p. 305, cited in Tilleczek and Ferguson, 2007)

Given our findings in the review of international literature (Tilleczek and Ferguson, 2007; Tilleczek, 2007) we have sought to attend carefully to the range of risk and protective factors and trajectories of young people in transition. In producing sampling categories of young people, we examined wider issues of the fit between schools, communities, and the lives of young people rather than simply targeting student habits and academic history. We also examined the lived situations of risk/resilience over time. To sample the young people for Focus Groups and Interviews, we used three working categories as follows:

a) **Young people in risk/troubled situations** ("multiple daily hassles") were those with co-occurring, cumulative adversities and intersections at many levels (individual, classroom, home, school, community). For example, they may have had academic difficulties, been highly transient, or placed a low value on school. They may also have experienced negative school cultures (complex *family of schools*, low teacher expectations etc) and social risks (racism, poverty, alienation, neighbourhood troubles, and social isolation from friends). These were young people who may have felt that they did not belong, and may also have described multiple reasons.

b) **Young people with complex resiliencies** were those in obvious risk situations but with real demonstrations for/of potential resilience. These were young people who may have been in category "a" above but who spoke of and demonstrated evidence of competencies, planfulness, negotiation, resistance, etc. The young people may have reported such aspects of resilience through their aspirations, academics, and social lives or within schools and communities. Our Interviews with these young people focused on *HOW* people and systems can make a difference in their lives rather than on dramatic or heroic narratives (cf. Garmezy, 1991) in which the person overcomes all odds on their own).
c) Young people who are mostly protected were those with very little or no apparent risks situations at either cultural or individual levels. They may also demonstrate numerous protective factors (and situations) surrounding them.

One of the benefits of the study is our ability to follow a sample of young people over time. We were able to do so through initial focus groups followed by one or two additional interviews with the same young person over time. This therefore allows us to present results of the shifts and changes in risk/resilience categories for these youth.

Visible Minority Status

‘Visible minority status’ has been operationalized in the study in accordance with its conceptualization in Canada’s Employment Equity Act and 2001 Census. The former defines visible minorities as persons, other than Aboriginal people, who are non-Caucasian in race or non-white in colour (see www.statscan.ca). This definition was selected for the study since it both reflects and informs actual social identification practices regarding those physical attributes deemed socially salient in Canadian society, practices which in turn affect the lived experiences of individuals so identified. We have also added separate questions to identify Aboriginal persons. It should be noted that participant’s personal identifications may sometimes vary from these social ascriptions.

Educator

Educators are those who, during the time of our study, worked within one of our Ontario family of schools (either elementary or secondary). They assumed diverse roles such as teacher, Student Success Teachers, guidance counsellor, educational assistant, and/or administrator. Based on feedback we received from educators, we held a number of cross-panel Focus Groups at the elementary and secondary levels in order to encourage dialogue between elementary and secondary school educators.

Parent/Guardian

The parent or guardian is one who is the parent of an adolescent who has transitioned to an Ontario secondary school from an Ontario elementary school (who was in Grade 8 in 2007, Grade 9 in 2008 and Grade 10 in 2009, as well as grade 6 in certain French-language schools). The parents will be a unique group in each Phase. Since we are focusing on the family of schools as the main unit of analysis, the parents will be those who have children attending the schools within those families of schools. Thus, no attempt was made to directly match the youth sample with a
respective parent sample. The parents may or may not have been the precise parents of the young people in our Focus Groups.

Rural/Urban

We acknowledge the Statistics Canada (2001) position and recommendation on defining rural such that several alternative definitions of “rural” are available. Due to the nature of our research questions, the findings of our Early School Leavers Study regarding the relationship between school leaving and rurality (cf, Tilleczek, 2008; Tilleczek and Cudney, 2008), and our interest in the experiences of youth in varying types of schools in Ontario, we will use the “rural and small town” definition. This refers to individuals in towns or municipalities outside the commuting zone of larger urban centres (with 10,000 or more population). These individuals may be disaggregated into zones according to the degree of influence of a larger urban centre (called census metropolitan area and census agglomeration influenced zones (MIZ). We therefore selected families of schools from rural to urban.

Sampling Rationale

Sampling in qualitative research is different from sampling in quantitative inquiry (Cobb and Hagemaster, 1987). Studies often use samples based on convenience and or the special interests of the researcher. Agar (1980) calls these opportunistic or judgment samples, and indicates that it is not only people, but events and processes that are sampled. Generating valid descriptions and theory from qualitative research requires iterative sampling methods. Sampling was purposive rather than random.

Qualitative research sampling is conceptualized and portrayed in most texts and reports as a single, fixed, step occurring prior to data collection. This conceptualization is incomplete and often misleading. Qualitative sampling is better understood as an ongoing, iterative, theoretically driven process co-occurring with data collection and analysis (LeCompte, 2002). Such iterative or theoretical sampling helps generate an adequate and thorough sample for descriptive studies of groups that do not have clear, fixed boundaries and provides a better basis for theory development. Maximum variation sampling was used wherein the sample of families of schools was selected to provide the broadest possible range of information.

Participants from within these families of schools were selected based on their interest in the study and their willingness to talk about their own experiences (i.e. information-

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Sampling Strategy

We have employed a two-stage sampling strategy:

1. The first step at the beginning of Phase I, was to select families of schools from within regions of interest (GTA, Windsor, Ottawa, Sudbury and area, Thunder Bay and area, and the rural north) based on the need to sample BOTH complex and less complex families and transition processes. This allowed us to reflect the conceivable varieties of transition process at a structural level from across the province.

2. From within these families of schools, we then employed a maximum variation strategy to select individual youth, parents and educators. In the case of the youth, social class background, in-risk status, and academic/social achievement was sampled. This was done with the help of their educators. Parents were chosen to reflect the diversity of parents within the family of schools. Educators were chosen from elementary and secondary panels and represented a range of teachers, counsellors, administrators and Student Success personnel where appropriate.

Youth were sampled for the Focus Groups using a maximum variation strategy. They are variable by gender and in-risk status (social class, academic ability, ethnicity/culture etc). Attempts were made to over-sample in accordance to the demographic trends of students attending the district school boards within each Ontario district. For example, Francophone and Aboriginal youth were sought in the Northern areas (Sudbury and Thunder Bay) and Newcomers/Visible Minority youth were sought in the South (GTA and Ottawa). French-language district school boards were over-sampled in Sudbury, Kapuskasing/Hearst and the GTA. We also attempted to sample youth who have left the French-language system for the English-language system.

The need to adequately represent the diversity found across the province (Francophone, Aboriginal, Newcomers/Visible Minority, and rural/urban) resulted in projected Phase II and III numbers which indicated an overall increase of 18 Focus Groups across all 3 categories of participants. In total over three Phases, we aimed to conduct approximately 129 Focus Groups with Youth (80), Parents (24) and Educators (25). The initial goals for distribution of the Focus Groups per year were as follows:
Proposed Focus Group Numbers per Year

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<td>Eng Fr</td>
<td>English and French Language</td>
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<tr>
<td>Youth</td>
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<td>21 7</td>
<td>14 4</td>
<td>80 Youth Focus Groups</td>
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<tr>
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<td>9 0</td>
<td>8 3</td>
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<tr>
<td>Parents</td>
<td>7 1</td>
<td>4 1</td>
<td>8 3</td>
<td>24 Parent Focus Groups</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sub-Totals</td>
<td>39 12</td>
<td>33 11</td>
<td>26 8</td>
<td>98 English-language/31 French-language</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTALS</td>
<td>51 44</td>
<td>34 11</td>
<td></td>
<td>129 FOCUS GROUPS</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Focus Groups were conducted separately for each group of participants. In the case of educators, we mainly held Focus Groups for elementary educators in Phase I (as well as some separate Focus Groups with secondary educators), mostly cross-panel groups in Phase II and focused primarily on secondary level educators in Phase III.

Within each group of Youth, Parents, and Educators, attempts were made to hear heterogeneous experiences. Our goal was to hear the voices of and report on the experiences of approximately 200-250 students across the province over each of three years (approximately 600-750 students by the end of Phase III).

At the conclusion of our study, we have a total sample size of 124 Focus Groups and 795 participants which has been more than sufficient to provide saturation of themes that emerge from the data (cf. Patton, 1990). Saturation occurs when little or no new information is obtained which pertains to codes or themes. Table 3 details the final numbers per Phase and by site for all Focus Groups and Interviews.

**Ethics/Consent**

In 2007 (prior to the start of Phase I), a proposal for this study was submitted to the Ethics Review Board of The Hospital for Sick Children, and the Research Ethics Board (REB) of Laurentian University. Once approved, it was then submitted to the numerous participating district school boards for their own ethical and research approval. As this is longitudinal study, it was necessary to apply for annual renewal through all REBs throughout each Phase.

At the completion of each Phase, the research team reviewed comments from participants as well as our own field notes to guide us in revising consent forms and/or tools for the upcoming Phase. Thus we were able to ensure our research protocols were developmentally and culturally/linguistically attuned for young people and parents at each grade level. Any changes or modifications to our protocols had to be submitted and approved by the REBs prior to use in the field. At the point of annual renewal, revised documents were attached to renewal applications so they could be reviewed and approved granted.
In Phase I, after REB approvals were obtained, the Project Manager and Research Coordinators, in collaboration with school personnel distributed consent forms to students and reviewed the study goals as well as the role of participants in the Focus Groups. Where possible, this was done in person by the Project Manager who went into schools and made a presentation for youth and educators. When presentations were not possible, the Project Manager and Coordinators spoke at length by telephone to school principals who introduced the study to students and staff. Youth were informed that participation was entirely voluntary and that they could withdraw at any time. Students were asked to bring home Information Letters and consent forms. Those interested in participating returned signed parental consents to their homeroom teacher/principal, as well as signed consent forms from parents/guardians interested in participating in the Parent Focus Groups. Educators interested in participating in the Educator Focus Group were also given consent forms to sign and return to coordinators (See accompanying Appendices document).

Prior to the start of each Focus Group, participants were asked to sign an audio consent form giving permission to have the Focus Group audio recorded, and in some boards parents were asked in the research consent form to consent to their child being audio recorded in the Youth Focus Group and/or Individual Interview. In addition, a consent form (or assent form for youth) was also signed, emphasizing the voluntary and confidential nature of their participation, and the anonymous reporting of study findings. This consent/assent form also outlined the study and its potential risks (See accompanying Appendices document). Although no risks related to this study were anticipated, participants were informed that they may recall feelings, both positive and negative, related to school transition. Any who wished to discuss these feelings would be referred to the Principal Investigator of this study, a registered psychologist, who could broker care for that individual in their community.

**Research Rigor**

As qualitative methods have become more commonplace, the issue of the quality of qualitative research is of special interest (Devers, 1999; Mays and Pope, 2000; Popay, Rogers and Williams, 1998). However, decisions about criteria for appraising qualitative research must take into account the distinctive goals of such research and should be embedded in a broad understanding of qualitative research design and data analysis (Mays and Pope, 2000; Twohig and Putnam, 2002). It has been suggested further that ‘making sense’ of the analysis is aided by considering the methods and techniques as resources rather than as indicators of quality in their own right (Eakin and Mykhalovskiy, 2003).

In this study we use the concept of rigor in two ways: research practice as procedural rigor; and analytic or theoretical rigor. The term rigor commonly refers to the reliability and validity of research in a general sense (Davies and Dodd, 2002). However, we want our qualitative research to be reliable but not in the sense of
replicability over time and across contexts. Rather, we aim for reliability in our data based on consistency and care in the application of research practices, which are reflected in the visibility of our research practices (Fossey et al., 2002). Moreover reliability in our analysis and conclusions are reflected in an open account that remains mindful of the partiality and limits of our research findings. In other words, we conceptualize rigor in terms of attentiveness to research practice vis-à-vis elements of carefulness, respect, honesty, reflection, engagement, awareness, openness and sensitivity to context.

Our group collaborative process and attention to detail in cleaning and reading the data are good examples of such. The Transcription Protocol developed in order to receive and process clean and usable data can be seen in our separate Appendices document. We also developed a system of Identification Codes to protect identities of participants and enable analysis across all data collection points per person.

Procedural rigor is traditionally understood within qualitative research as a way of establishing the ‘trustworthiness’ of findings (Erlandson, Harris, Skipper and Allen, 1993). A number of possible criteria are chosen to ensure trustworthiness depending on the purpose of the study and the particular theoretical perspective of the researcher. In this study, emergent findings will be verified using the following criteria: inter-coder reliability through the use of multiple reviewers at all levels of data analysis and the comparison of the transcription process with notes; audit trail through careful field notes and tracking our decision-making, thick description through adequate description of the context and the sample; and, persistent observation through reasonable time. In addition, our use of varied and numerous data collection and analytical methods, including semantic/lexical analysis with Alceste, NVIVO and SPSS, offered opportunities to corroborate findings across different aspects of the study, thus increasing our high level of rigor.

Analytic rigor generalizes from a particular empirical instance to a theoretical one. The analysis and interpretation of the data provides theoretical insights, which possess a sufficient degree of generality to allow projection to other comparable contexts. The researcher should recognize parallels at the conceptual and theoretical level with other research and provide comparability between two contexts in a conceptual rather than statistical manner (Sim, 1998).

The details of our design, sampling, data collection, treatment and analysis were made plain over all Phases and were continuously and reflectively examined by our team for procedural and analytical rigor. The ongoing feedback from young people and the construction of a highly engaged and knowledgeable research team allowed for such iterative and reflective research practice.
PART 3: YOUTH FOCUS GROUP METHODS

Recruiting: Background

Recruiting strategies varied by site and district school board as per the requirements of specific Ethics Reviews and district school boards. Some of the challenges and complexities in recruitment have included having to provide multiple ethics/research reviews at universities and district school boards, as well as gain the approval of individual school principals and the assistance of school personnel. Our renewal has passed The Hospital for Sick Children and Laurentian University Research Ethic Boards for all three of the years it was submitted. We have also undergone intense renewal review by numerous district school boards and as our final step in preparing to re-enter schools each year, obtained support from school principals and Student Success personnel to continue to conduct research with their students.

In Phase I (May-June 2007), our main recruitment challenge was the timing of the ethics approval which unfortunately, coincided with the end of school year, Grade 8 trips, graduations, and the school year wind up. As such, the research team had to work closely with individual school principals in order to ensure the logistics of coming into the schools so late in the year was possible and would not place any extra burdens on teachers or administrators. In some cases, we simply ran out of time in Phase I as the school year ended. Fortunately however, we were able to successfully enter most schools as scheduled and were able to conduct “backfill” groups over the summer and early autumn.

In Phase II (March-June 2008), high school recruitment presented its own complexity with the timing of Focus Groups having to take place after March break but prior to end of school year activities such as Grade 9 field trips, out of town trips, exams, school graduations, and all other school year wind up activities. As with Phase I, the research team worked closely with each school principal and/or contact to ensure the timing of our groups fit in well with that school’s specific schedule and the needs of its teachers, administrators, students and parents.

Our logistical process for Phase III (April-June 2009) was similar to Phase II; however we had the additional challenge of scheduling our Focus Groups even later in the year, as we could not enter into the schools until April, once students had taken the Ontario Secondary School Literacy Test. As we also could not be in the schools any later than mid-May due to Grade 10 field trips, out of town trips, exams, school graduations, and all other school year wind up activities, we had a very short window within which to conduct our groups.
Recruiting: Process

The first step in recruitment for the English-Language schools, was completed in Phase I with the selection of families of schools, done in the following ways for the English-language, southern sites (Greater Toronto Area (GTA), Ottawa and Windsor), Northern sites (Thunder Bay and Sudbury and the rural north):

- **Toronto District School Board (TDSB):** At the request of the Project Manager, the Chair of the ERRC (External Research Review Committee) sent a listing of all the secondary and partner schools, as well as a link to a complete listing of all TDSB schools and addresses. The Project Manager then contacted the Board’s SSL and sought guidance in differentiating between and selecting complex and less complex families of schools.

- **Toronto Catholic District School Board (TCDSB):** The Education Researcher and Superintendent of Student Success supplied the Project Manager with a listing of 3 complex families of schools and 3 less complex families, and indicated which partner schools had the most graduating students going to the receiver high school of that specific family.

- **Peel District School Board:** The Project Manager received the Directions book, which outlines all the families of schools in Peel (elementary and secondary). As well, the district’s Chief of Research and Evaluation and the Superintendent of Alternative Programs provided a number of suggestions regarding which complex and less complex families of schools would be ideally suited to include in our study.

- **Ottawa-Carleton District School Board (OCDSB):** The Research Officer in Ottawa, who oversees research conducted in both the public and separate district school boards, determined the families of schools and informed the Project Manager of her selection.

- **Greater Essex County District School Board (GECDSB):** The Superintendent of Psychological Services selected two families of schools - one complex and one less complex – for participation in the study and informed the Project Manager of his selection.

- **Lakehead District School Board (LDSB) Thunder Bay:** The Student Success Leader (SSL) of the LDSB selected a “best fit” for the families of schools to participate in the study according to the sample design of the research. The SSL selected two schools to participate, one complex youth group and one less complex youth group. The educator group was selected from one complex school with both Grade 8 and 9 educators.

- **Rainbow District School Board (RDSB) Sudbury:** The RDSB SSL provided the Northern Research Coordinator and the Lead Investigator with mapping of the
families of schools within the Sudbury district. From this, the Lead Investigator selected the family of schools to be included in the study. The Sudbury SSL contacted the school principals of the selected schools and follow up was conducted by the Northern Research Coordinator.

- Sudbury and District Catholic School Board (SDCSB) Sudbury: The Superintendent of Education and Pathways to Success Program at the SDCSB granted approval for their schools in Phase II, following the first round of field work in Phase I. At this point, both the elementary and secondary schools were recruited to participate. Contact was made directly by the Northern research Coordinator to Principals, VP’s and SST’s in the selected schools.

The second step in recruiting for English-language Focus Groups was the selection of specific schools. This too was completed, for the most part, in Phase I. In some cases, this selection process was streamlined by a limited choice. For example, in Windsor and Ottawa, we were only presented with one school within a complex family and one within a less complex family with which to work. However, in many other cases, we relied on our sampling strategy to determine how many schools from each designation we required, and the Project Manager began calling school principals to explain the study and garner approval for their school to be one of our study sites. When a principal declined involvement, a second (and sometimes third or fourth) elementary partner school in the same family of schools was selected and that principal was contacted. In some cases, when numerous principals had declined involvement, the Project Manager contacted the Board’s SSL and worked with him/her to obtain a principal’s endorsement. In other cases, the SSL came on board first, and helped to make contact with principals and teachers.

With the northern sample, both SSL’s contacted schools and confirmed participation. For schools located in the GTA, once a principal agreed to participate, the Project Manager made a school visit to review the information with the principal and answer any questions. Then a presentation was made to the grade 8 students and teachers about the study. In one of the larger, more complex schools, it was necessary to return 3 times and speak to the students in smaller groups in order to capture youth interest. Information letters and consent forms were then taken home by students in order to obtain parental permission for them to participate in the Youth Focus Group. For schools in Ottawa and Windsor, the Project Manager spoke by phone to the school principal and then emailed a copy of the presentation, information letters and consent forms. The principals (and guidance counsellor in one case) introduced the study to students and asked teachers to encourage student participation.

Our third recruitment step, which was new in Phases II and III, was to narrow down our selection of families of schools from Phase I in order to maximize the variation in our selection and reduce duplication. This was done through the careful examination of our families of schools as well as the analysis that came out of our Phase I research at each school. In this way we were able to successfully narrow down our families of
schools at each of our sites, while still maintaining a balance between Complex and Less Complex schools.

At the start of Phase II and III, we contacted school principals once again, to remind them about the study and ask for their continued support in facilitating recruitment of young people, educators and parents for our Focus Groups. In Phase I, when an elementary school was approached as a location for our Focus Group, if the principal declined participation, we were often able to select another school in that family. In Phases II and III however, as our families of schools had already been selected and approved in Phase I, we no longer had the same leeway if a school did not wish to participate. Thankfully, in many cases, school principals remembered the study and welcomed us back warmly, either directly helping to recruit participants or asking the SST/Guidance or a classroom teacher to assist us. In other cases however, further assistance was required in order to encourage the participation of specific schools. When this occurred, the situation was usually resolved through the involvement and support of the board’s SSL and in some cases, someone from the Ministry stepping in to request a school’s participation. Finally, in those few cases when we were unable to persuade a principal to allow us back into their school, we returned to our examination of our families of schools and selected a new school linked to one of the elementary partner schools from Phase I.

In the case of each French-language school board, the first recruitment step was to have the French-language Research Coordinator contact each board’s superintendent. Once approval was obtained from that person, she then approached schools earmarked for participation.

- **Conseil scolaire catholique de district des Grandes Rivières (CSCDGR):** In Phase I, two northern rural communities were selected and retained based on specific characteristics. A secondary school belonging to each family of school selected in Phase I was retained, in each community, for Phase II. Both families identified as less complex, but each school displayed a series of defining traits which made its participation in the study extremely valuable, whether it be in its rapport to transportation or language. In each case, SSTs were essential in ensuring student participation and selection, as well as parent and educator selection and participation.

- **Conseil scolaire public du Grand Nord de l’Ontario (CSPGNO):** The Student Success Leader suggested that the French-language Research Coordinator speak with the Superintendent of the district school board to best determine what schools should participate. In Phase I, the Superintendent provided the French-language Coordinator with the district school boards’ family of school definition, helped define a less complex family and then identified an elementary K-6 school for a Focus Group with grade 6 youth, as well as a 7-12 high school for a Focus Group with grade 8 youth. In Phase II, a Focus Group was conducted with grade 9 youth in this same high school; the principal was essential in ensuring student participation and selection.
• 
Conseil scolaire catholique du Nouvel-Ontario (CSCNO): The superintendent identified a less complex family of schools for the French-language Coordinator; she then selected a K-8 elementary school and established contact with this school in Phase I. The French-language Coordinator contacted the principal and with the help of a designated educator, arranged for a Focus Group to be conducted with grade 8 students in Phase I. In Phase II, contact was made directly with the principals of two 7-12 high school by the French-language Coordinator. In both cases, the principal arranged for an SST to work with the French-language Coordinator for selection of youth and arrangements concerning the Phase II Focus Group.

• 
Conseil scolaire de district catholique Centre-Sud (CSDCCS)/Conseil scolaire de district du Centre-Sud-Ouest: In Phase I, two schools, within a complex family of schools, were identified by superintendent for participation, a K-6 school for grade 6 youth and a 7-12 school for grade 8 students. In Phase II, a Focus Group was conducted in this same 7-12 school with grade 9 students; student selection and participation was ensured by the principal.

• 
Conseil des écoles catholiques de langue française du Centre-Est (CECLFCE): In Phase I, once approval was obtained with the help of the district school board’s Research Officer, 2 schools within a complex family of schools were contacted, a K-6 school for Focus Groups grade 6 students and a 7-12 school for a Focus Group with grade 8 students. In the first school, principal and school secretary communicated with French-language Coordinator and organized both Focus Groups; in the second school, the SST was essential in ensuring student selection and participation. The second school participated in Phase II; with the help of SSTs, two Focus Groups were organized: one with grade 9 students, one with educators. A second 7-12 school belonging to this family of schools was approached; once approval was obtained through the board’s Research Officer, an SST worked with the French-language Coordinator to set up a Focus Group with grade 9 students.

For the French Sample, both SSLs (CSDCSO, CSPGNO) helped the French coordinator determine which schools would be best and then provided her with contacts within each school. The French coordinator then proceeded to contact all principals and worked with them to accomplish all initiative-related tasks (handing documents out and retrieving them, selection of participants, etc.). Some boards were contacted and were not able to participate in a specific Phase however, indicated potential interest in future Phases.

Once a school principal had been contacted and permission granted to come into the schools for Focus Groups, the next and fourth step in recruitment was the selection of participants.
In Phase I, with smaller elementary schools, our recruitment strategy began as more random. We invited whoever wanted to participate to participate and looked to school personnel to assist us when necessary. Our goal for Phase II and III was to recruit more purposively by having school principals, guidance counsellors and SSTs identify youth (based on our requirement for diversity), and then ask those specific youth if they would like to participate. When a youth agreed, he/she was sent home with a consent form. Once the consent form was signed by a parent/guardian, the school was able to release to us the child’s name and we were able to have a discussion about the heterogeneity of the sample in order to ensure we had a diverse group of students. Ideally, we asked school personnel to suggest and send home more consents than we needed. In this way, we would have a greater number of students from which to chose and be able to limit the group size and provide our needed maximum variation. Our re-working and developmental attunement of our ethical consents, information letters and research tools facilitated this process.

In some schools this was successful without much further effort and many students returned signed forms quite quickly. In other schools, we worked continuously with school personnel to encourage the selection of additional students and requested that classroom teachers speak to students about the study and encourage their participation. In schools where we had less than 10 youth return signed consent forms, we included all who wished to participate. In schools where greater than 10 students wished to participate, the Project Manager/Research Coordinator worked with the school principal/guidance counsellor to select participants, ensuring that students selected, as much as possible, represented the student population of that grade level in that school. To this end, participants were selected based on a diverse range of features taken from the risk and protective elements in the literature review, including academic ability, school/extra-curricular engagement, gender, visible minority/ethnic status, socio-economic status, and family composition.

For the most part we were able to successfully include a diverse range of students across each of our sites and within each of our families of schools. However, throughout all Phases, recruiting incredibly marginalized young people who are the least engaged with school continued to be a challenge.

**Recruiting: Outcomes**

We conducted a total of 79 youth Focus Groups with 596 grades 8, 9 and 10 young people. According to our original sample frame and rationale (informed by the review of literature), our goal has been to ensure youth representation from key in-risk population categories. Despite the challenges and complexities of reaching the most marginalized of youth, we have successfully ensured a diverse representation of youth from across the province. The Results section of the report outlines the representation and suggests gaps in our sampling goals.
PART 4: EDUCATOR FOCUS GROUP METHODS

Recruiting: Background

In order to capture the experience of grade 8 youth prior to transition, our Phase I aim throughout the months of May and June 2007 was to complete as many Youth Focus Groups as possible prior to the commencement of summer break. We were then able to build on this number and conduct additional Educator Focus Groups in the Fall. In this first Phase, our goal was to speak primarily with elementary level educators, although we did conduct one cross-panel group. In Phase II, we were able to successfully conduct discussions with groups of Grade 8 and 9 Educators, including administrators, counsellors, educational assistants, and Student Success personnel. This unique opportunity for “cross-panel” work yielded interesting discourse and rich data. Finally, in Phase III (the post-transition period), we focused on groups comprised of high school educators in various positions.

It is worth noting that we encountered a tremendous amount of support and interest in the initiative from educators at all levels; many of whom were especially interested in the cross-panel work. We made strong working relationships in our district school boards, which were strengthened over the course of the study.

In Phase II, our aim throughout the months of April, May and June was once again to complete our Youth Focus Groups as our first order of priority to capture the experience of grade 9 youth adjusting to transition. We then focused on cross-panel Educator Focus Groups and were able to successfully work with groups of grade 8 and 9 educators, most of whom expressed enthusiasm and an ongoing interest in being part of our research and learning about and from our results.

In our final Phase, we once again began recruitment with a goal of completing all the Youth Focus Groups as our first order of priority. In this way we could be assured of capturing the experience of grade 10 youth post-transition. Phase III had us meeting our goal throughout the months of May and June, while often simultaneously conducting Educator Focus Groups. These groups were comprised of grade 10 classroom teachers, administrators, counsellors, educational assistants, and Student Success personnel. The strong working relationships developed in Phase I and II, came to bear in Phase III in most district school boards.
Recruiting: Process

As the selection of families of schools was already determined through the process of youth recruitment in Phase I, the goal in recruiting educators was to ensure representation from educators within each family of schools and in Phase II especially, to conduct as many cross-panel Focus Groups as possible. This presented a challenge as most educators were unable to attend groups after school hours and principals were not always easily able to find replacement staff for classroom teachers during the school day. A third challenge was that many educators found it difficult or impossible to meet in any location other than their own school and this hindered cross-panel work with some elementary and secondary school educators, as well as a combination of educators from different schools.

However, many school principals found ways to facilitate staff participation during school hours and were willing to disseminate the information letters and consent forms in order to facilitate the recruitment of educators for our Focus Groups. Others went so far as to contact the principals at the elementary school level and help facilitate our cross-panel efforts. While others still were willing to stay after school hours and educators in these schools followed suit.

In terms of selecting participants, because we were holding Focus Groups at specific schools for educators from that school and their partner elementary school (usually located within close proximity), our numbers never exceeded 10 and we were therefore able to include all who wished to participate.

Recruiting: Outcomes

We conducted a total of 24 Educator Focus Groups with 125 educators from grades 8, 9 and 10.

PART 5: PARENT FOCUS GROUP METHODS

Recruiting: Background

In order to capture the experience of grade 8 youth prior to transition, grade 9 youth during transition and grade 10 youth post-transition, our aim as soon as we entered schools each spring was to complete as many Youth Focus Groups as possible. We then turned our attention to Educator Focus Groups, assuming they too would be near impossible to conduct once exams began and school ended. We correctly assumed we would have greater flexibility in scheduling Parent Focus Groups without interference from school schedules. We worked with school personnel to distribute
consent forms to parents/guardians during the last few months of school and in fact were often able to conduct these groups before summer break. Happily, in the cases where we were not, many parent conveyed their interest in participation and we were able to conduct additional Parent Focus Groups throughout the summer and early Fall.

As recruiting both Educator Focus Groups (especially cross-panel) as well as Parent Groups each present various challenges, our plan was to increase our numbers of Educator Groups in Phase II and concentrate more on Parent Focus Groups in Phase III.

Recruiting: Process

As the selection of families of schools was already determined through the process of youth recruitment in Phase I, the goal in recruiting parents was to ensure a diverse representation within each family of schools. Due to issues of privacy, schools were unable to provide us with names and contact information so we could recruit parents directly. Our main option therefore was to recruit parents through their children or through information letters left at the school. We did this by sending youth home from school with information letters and consent forms for the Parent Focus Group and then asking teachers to encourage youth to bring back their parents’ forms (as well as their own). In addition, some of our schools contacts were willing to call and/or email directly parents with whom they had personal contact and who they thought might participate in our group. As our numbers of respondents were small, we were able to include all who wished to participate.

In our efforts to reach more marginalized parents, we sought and obtained REB approval to recruit parents through the community. We targeted community agencies, libraries, grocery stores and community centres, amongst other locales. Unfortunately, although great attempts were made and we were successful in speaking with some parents from more marginalized backgrounds, we were unable to reach and include as many as we had hoped.

Recruiting: Outcomes

We conducted a total of 21 Parent Focus Groups with 74 parents/guardians of youth in grades 8, 9 and 10. According to our original sample frame and rationale (informed by the review of literature), our goal had been to ensure parent representation from in-risk populations. The challenges and complexities of reaching the most marginalized of parents are detailed further in the Results section of the report, which outlines the representation and suggests gaps in our sampling goals.
PART 6: INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEW METHODS

The research aims of Phase I (the elementary side of the transition) and Phase II (the adjustment side of the transition) were to conduct a series of Focus Groups with students in grade 8 and then grade 9, parents, and educators regarding the trajectories, processes and issues surrounding transition from elementary to secondary school. We also conducted Individual Interviews with a sample of young people who participated in the Focus Groups. This information was sought to fill out our in-depth understanding relating to the HOW? and WHY? of the main trends and issues in transition. As transition is a temporal process and we are exploring the paths that youth traverse, the research is narratively driven. Thus an important element in selecting youth for the Individual Interview was their ability to provide us with rich/detailed ongoing stories over time.

Recruiting: Background

The Research Team worked from a synopsis of the Literature Review to arrive at three categories from which to sample youth for Individual Interviews: (a) in multiple risk situations; (b) complex resiliencies; and (c) little or no apparent risk situation (mostly protected) in Phase I and/or Phase II. Specific Interview participants were then selected across all 6 sites through a 3-step process:

1. After each Focus Group, facilitators made a list of youth clearly identified as being in one of the above noted categories. And thus candidates for an Individual Interview (this was also discussed by the facilitators and note-takers in their field notes)

2. Team members spoke to one another about selections and ensured that our selection of youth represented a comprehensive provincial sample. Face Sheets and verbatim Focus Group transcripts, as well as cohort 1 Interview transcripts were reviewed for support of the choices for each Individual Interview. Once agreement was reached, Interviews were set up and conducted.

Throughout this process, team members continued to be in close contact with one another to ensure maximum variation of our entire sample across the 6 sites, with a goal of over-sampling specific categories of youth (Aboriginal in the north, Francophone in the south).

Once potential youth had been identified for participation in the Interview, the Project Manager/Research Coordinators returned to the Face Sheet and/or cohort 1 Interview data to determine at which secondary school that young person was registered. If a
youth had transferred out of their elementary family of schools, but was still in the same region, they were included in our sample. However, in a number of cases where youth had moved with their families to another city, another young person was selected based on the same criteria. In other words, if a youth had been identified by the research team as having “complex resiliencies”, attempts were made to find another student with that status and the same gender in the same family of schools/district school board.

Our original proposal intended to have three rounds of longitudinal Interviews; cohort I (Grade 8) youth to be interviewed the first time in Phase I, a second time in Phase II and finally a third interview in Phase III. We also planned to interview a cohort of Phase II grade 9 youth twice, first in Phase II and a second and last time in Phase III. Unfortunately, due to timing and budgetary restraints, we were unable to conduct any Phase III interviews. Our Phase II interviews therefore can be examined as stand-alone data, as can the Phase I Interviews, which were not included in our cohort I group of longitudinal interviews.

We do have a strong cohort of 35 longitudinal Youth Interviews. We were able to speak to these young people over a period of 3 years – first in the Phase I grade 8 Youth Focus Groups, the following year when they were mostly in grade 9 for our Phase I interviews, and then again the next year when they were mostly in grade 10 for their Phase II interviews. These interviews have yielded a rich amount of data and allowed us a more personal in-depth view of transition through the pre-transition, adjustment and post-transition Phases.

**Recruiting: Process**

In Phase I, after selecting students and determining which high school they would likely be attending (based on Face Sheet responses), District School Board SSL’s were contacted. Subsequently, they communicated with the appropriate school principals to ensure familiarity with the study and advise them that the Project Manager/Research Coordinator would be calling to set up an interview with selected student(s).

Throughout the Interview process, we were faced with a number of recruiting challenges, including:

- Determining if students selected were still at the same high school
- Tracking down students who had changed schools and sometimes school boards
In most cases, through the help of the SSL, students who changed schools were located at another secondary school. In a small number of cases when students could not be located after numerous attempts, another student was selected, using the same process outlined above.

Once we were able to determine in which school the student was registered, the Project Manager/Research Coordinator made contact with the school principal to ensure they were aware of the Interview stage of the study. Once principals were aware of the study and our requirements for the Interview stage, the Project Manager/Research Coordinators worked closely with school personnel to set up the Interview. This was done by emailing the names of the students we wished to interview and asking school personnel to remind the student about the study and ask if they would like to participate/continue to participate in the follow up Interview. In almost every case, the young person agreed to be interviewed and then, based on their timetables, extra-curricular activities, personal preferences and school schedules, a date and time was selected for the Interview to take place. In some instances where students no longer wished to participate, the team returned to the initial process and selected a new student.

As all Individual Interview participants were under the age of 16, the research team was careful never to directly contact any student. Rather, once principals were informed, phone calls were made to the parent/guardian, explaining that their child had been selected for an Individual Interview. At this time, parents/guardians were reminded about the consent form they signed giving permission for the Interview and assuming their child was still interested, the Interview would take place at their child’s school, during school hours, with the knowledge of the principal. The phone number of the Project Manager/Research Coordinator was provided and parents/guardians were encouraged to call with any questions/concerns. High school principals were then able to speak directly to selected students, ensure they were interested in participating and according to the timetable of each student and school schedule, Interview times and dates were set. Copies of signed Parent for Child consent forms were provided to principals for their records.

In order to prepare for each Interview, the team member conducting the Interview reviewed the Focus Group transcript (highlighting text spoken by the Interview participant), Face Sheet and Field Notes. If a student had already been interviewed, the entire transcript from that Interview, along with any recorded Field Notes was also reviewed. A summary was then made from these materials and our Interview Question Guide was personalized for that specific young person.

Recruiting: Outcomes

The final status to date by Region of our data collection efforts for both Focus Groups and Individual Interviews can be found in Part 9 of this report (Results and Main
Messages). It is worth noting that we attempted to over sample the young people in Phases I and II for Interviews. This is because we expected some attrition over time and also to allow for choice in sampling for the Phase II and III follow-up Interviews, the latter of which never came to fruition.

The interviews were cross-sequenced over the three Phases as follows:

Table 2: Cross-sequencing of Phase I & Phase II Individual Youth Interviews

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Phase 1 cohort</th>
<th>Phase 2 cohort</th>
<th>Totals</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Grade 8/9</td>
<td>Grade 9/10</td>
<td>(35 were followed over 2 years)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Pre-Early Transition)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Phase 1 cohort</strong></td>
<td><strong>Phase 2 cohort</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>52 youth</td>
<td>43 youth</td>
<td>n=43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grade 8</td>
<td>Grade 10</td>
<td>No longitudinal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 English-language</td>
<td>35 English-language</td>
<td>(only interviewed in PII;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9 French-language</td>
<td>8 French-language</td>
<td>there are no Phase III</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grade 9</td>
<td>Grade 10</td>
<td>interviews)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>39 English-language</td>
<td>23 English-language</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0 French-language</td>
<td>0 French-language</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Grade 8: 13 youth</strong></td>
<td><strong>Grade 10: 66 youth</strong></td>
<td><strong>130 youth interviews</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Grade 9: 51 youth</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td>(35 youth were interviewed twice)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**PART 7: INTERVIEWING PROCESSES**

In-depth interviewer training was unnecessary as the majority of interviews were conducted by highly experienced members of the research team. However, we did hold team meetings in which all aspects of the initiative were discussed and training packages were made available. Also, due to numerous Focus Groups across the Greater Toronto Area, a very small number of qualified external interviewers were brought in to facilitate some Focus Groups in the GTA. As such, it was determined that a training session designed to give facilitators and note takers an overview of the initiative and to review their role and responsibilities as well familiarize them with the interviewing tools, was essential at the start of Phase I.
The Lead Investigator and Project Manager developed a Focus Group and individual interview training manual. The training manuals were created to disseminate relevant information about the initiative to facilitators and note takers. The manual was reviewed with the entire research team and revised as per group feedback. The Project Manager also met with all GTA external Focus Group facilitators and note takers in order to review the training manual and answer any questions prior to entry into the field. Most Focus Groups and Interviews in Phase II and III were conducted by internal team members’ however, in the rare instances when an external person was brought in, it was generally someone who had been part of Phase I and was familiar with the study and our Interview Tools. In the one or two instances where new note-takers were brought in, the Project Manager/Research Coordinator provided in-depth training designed to give them an overview of the initiative and to review their role and responsibilities, as well familiarize them with the interviewing tools and the process.

Finally, weekly teleconferences between the Lead Investigator, Project Manager and Northern and French-language Coordinators were ongoing as of April 2007. These continued to be cornerstones of communication and collaboration over the project. During these weekly team meetings, all aspects of the interview process were discussed and in-depth discussions were had about ways in which to improve upon any issues at the forefront. In addition, at the start of every Phase, particularly in the first few weeks in the field, the team was in particularly close contact to determine if the Focus Group/Interview Guidelines and Prompts were working smoothly and to make adjustments where necessary.

PART 8: TRANSCRIPTION AND ANALYSIS

A detailed plan for transcription, coding and analysis was followed. Guidelines and strategies for coding and a Focus Group Codebook, as well as an Individual Youth Interview Codebook were drafted and discussed by the Research Team (See accompanying Appendices document). Weekly or bi-weekly teleconferences with the research investigators, Project Manager and Research Coordinators took place to uptake, code and analyse the transcripts as they came in, and communication through email was ongoing in between conference calls. The fact that our Phase I codebook required only minor changes in Phases II and III – changes which reflected new grade levels and additional questions - is indicative of the strength and validity of the original code book’s themes and sub-themes that emerged from the transcripts.

Our analysis proceeded in two ways to produce the results and main messages for this report.
1. Descriptive Analysis was undertaken for the Face Sheet data for Youth, Parents and Educators. We have input all data in SPSS, cleaned the data and performed these analyses to help describe our three samples. We then performed a wide array of inferential analyses to test for differences and relationships by Region, Gender, and Family of School with variables from three main theoretical clusters as follows: Social (relationships, friends, school atmosphere, affect, emotion, feelings); Academic (grades, school experiences, course choices; programs, curriculum, pedagogy); and Procedural (transitional programs and strategies, school attitudes).

2. Surface and preliminary qualitative analysis of Focus Groups and Interviews were conducted with the help of the computer programs NVIVO and Alceste. In addition, Lexico was used for further analysis of Interviews in Phases I and II. All Focus Groups and Interviews were digitally recorded and transcribed verbatim. Cleaning transcripts consisted of checking that all had proper ethics information on file, that all Identification Codes were correct and corresponded with our Master ID Code List, that these codes were entered into the transcript to demark the speaker, and that all identifying information was removed from the transcripts.

The first analysis of the data was then generated by the computer to detail the implicit “patterns” and provide an estimation of the proportion of data that can be read as belonging to these patterns.

We ran a computer-assisted analysis on the lexical and syntactical components of the verbatim transcripts of Focus Groups and Interviews for three reasons: (1) to address any bias which could have arisen from our code book analysis of the verbatim transcripts; (2) to find out if there were important and meaningful patterns of speaking about transition as seen by the commonality of use of words; and (3) to examine correlations between main ideas about transition as presented for specific populations (Youth, Parent, Educator) in the Focus Groups.

We ran this analysis on each of the sets of English-language and French-language Focus Group and Interview data separately since the two languages have different linguistic components and could not be treated as the same by the software.

The transcripts were also read to demark, by eye and with the assistance of NVIVO software, answers to the main questions posed in the Focus Groups. The Research Team performed a collaborative “read” of the transcripts to decipher these main messages and to begin to mark the codes as per the Code Book (See accompanying Appendices document).
We have followed a process which is an adaptation of a seven-step method for analysis of qualitative data (Diekelmann, 1992). It is worth noting that members of the research team have previous experience successfully conducting such team analysis, including those in different geographical settings (e.g. Tilleczek et al, 2007; Ferguson et al, 2005). The analysis of the transcripts was a process of progressive focusing, whereby understanding of the research problem is refined, detailed descriptions were developed and explanations were considered (cf. Hammersley and Atkinson, 1995; Silverman, 1993) for each of the English-language and French-language interview transcriptions. It is important to note that we also took detailed notes on our impressions, ideas, interesting quotes, etc to be used in the analysis.

To develop main messages and analytical codes, each transcribed interview was read by research team members to obtain an overall understanding. Each team member then examined transcripts for possible themes, and a coding scheme was collectively developed. The Code Book was derived, in its first form, from the literature and based on the array of risk and protective factors at three main levels (cf. Tilleczek, 2008a; Tilleczek and Ferguson, 2007) and our knowledge of the main ideas from the Focus Group data. Each successive draft of the Code Book reflected additions and further details as found in the transcripts. Any disagreements encountered were resolved by returning to the original text and through group discussion.

In Phases I and II each transcript was read and coded by at least two members of the research team. By the end of Phase II evidence indicated strong inter-coder reliability and similar interpretation and implementation of the Codebooks. We therefore had the confidence to move forward and “spot” double-code as opposed to double code each transcript as we had in the earlier Phases. This newer process occurred when one coder would check a transcript that another team member had coded - either by coding the entire document and looking for variances, or by “spot” coding pages throughout the transcript. By Phase III, these “spot” checks highlighted for us the similar ways in which the entire team used the Codebooks and thus solidified our inter-coder reliability and this process.

The main analytical patterns which guide the reading of transcripts are those seen in the Code Book. They relate to risk and protective factors at three main levels of analysis both inside and outside the school (micro, meso and macro). The clusters within which the Focus Group data was organized is as follows:

- Emotions and experiences about transition (general descriptions)
- Influences and roles in transition (number and helpfulness)
- Elementary school cultures (risk and protective factors)
- Secondary school cultures (risk and protective factors)
- Successful and problematic transition (barriers and facilitators)
- Recommendations and strategies for transition
For the purposes of our Focus Group analysis and subsequent descriptions of findings, we have relied on the data to guide us in creating categories of main themes that were discussed by this large number of people. As noted above, these themes are set out in our Codebooks (See accompanying Appendices document). It is important to note however, that while such clear categories are a necessary part of qualitative analysis and an accepted method of conceptualizing such an overwhelmingly large data set (over 12,000 pages of transcripts), in reality themes overlap for our participants, as young people’s lives are multi-layered and complex. But we must try also to separate and exemplify these themes to get to the specifics about how some of these influences (friends, families, teacher, etc) operate. We do so without trying to reduce the complexity too much.

For example, at times, theme distinctions are apparent: the role of parents versus the role of teachers or features of a good versus a bad school. In such examples, one clearly understands the difference between stated themes. In many other cases however, delineations between themes are far more subtle as the categories themselves intersect. Examples of intersecting themes include: views of youth and youth culture; views of self; friends and peers; and enablers to transition. In each of these themes, youth spoke about the impact of friends in their lives and the lives of other students. While these are noted as separate themes for the purpose of analysis, in reality, they play out so closely as to appear to be almost one and the same. Another example is the way in which teachers could operate as both barriers and enablers to the process. While we can and do analyze them separately, it is also noteworthy that many young people see teachers operating as both - simultaneously.

Therefore, in order to analyze our data and present our findings, we have pulled out themes and highlighted them as separate entities. In doing so, we are able to provide clarity and make the complexities and interconnection of such themes comprehensible. It is important to keep in mind that while themes were developed out of the data, they were produced as a means of understanding the data. They are not static, nor should they be understood as independent entities without connection to one another.

The following section outlines the main themes and trends as found in our multiple processes of analysis.
PART 9: RESULTS AND MAIN MESSAGES

This section is structured to present the findings and main themes based on the entire set of study data. However, we first present the Phase III data which has yet to be released. We have structured each section to begin with a description of the sample of the young people, educators and parents who participated in the Focus Groups in Phase III. This includes descriptive statistics and trends from the whole set of Face Sheet data, both English-language and French-language.

Following the Focus Group data from Phase III and its comparisons with Phases I and II, the next sub-section details the computer-assisted textual analysis for the Focus Groups. This data presentation will also begin with Phase III Focus Groups as based on the lexical and morpho-syntactical components of the transcriptions. We compare this data with that for Phases I and II.

Following this we detail the main messages and themes arising from the transcriptions of Focus Groups for Youth, Educators and Parents respectively. Again, for the most part, Phase III data is presented first, followed by comparisons with Phases I and II.

The subsequent sub-section outlines the themes and narratives arising from all Individual Interviews with young people and includes a description of the sample of young people who participated in the Interviews. Interviews were collected for Phase I and II only (not in Phase III). Therefore, the data emerging from Interviews with young people from each Phase and across Phases will be explored.

The final sub-sections of data report on specific issues in transition relating to French-language families of schools.

As detailed in Table 3 below, the 795 Focus Group participants in this study (across all three Phases) took part in 124 Focus Groups. In addition, a total of 130 Interviews were conducted with young people in Phases I and II.

Table 3: Focus Group and Interview Totals by Site: Phase I, II & III
### Youth English-Language Focus Groups

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Site</th>
<th># of Focus Groups</th>
<th># of Participants</th>
<th>Phase I Interviews</th>
<th>Phase II (Cohort I)</th>
<th>Phase II (Cohort II)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>GTA</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>181</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ottawa</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Windsor</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sudbury+</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thunder Bay+</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>SUB-TOTAL</strong></td>
<td><strong>57</strong></td>
<td><strong>430</strong></td>
<td><strong>43</strong></td>
<td><strong>27</strong></td>
<td><strong>35</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Youth French-Language Focus Groups

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Site</th>
<th># of Focus Groups</th>
<th># of Participants</th>
<th>Phase I Interviews</th>
<th>Phase II (Cohort I)</th>
<th>Phase II (Cohort II)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>GTA</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ottawa</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sudbury+</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kapuskasing/ Hearst/Moonbeam</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>SUB-TOTAL</strong></td>
<td><strong>22</strong></td>
<td><strong>166</strong></td>
<td><strong>9</strong></td>
<td><strong>8</strong></td>
<td><strong>8</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### YOUTH TOTAL

<p>| | | | | | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>YOUTH TOTAL</strong></td>
<td><strong>79</strong></td>
<td><strong>596</strong></td>
<td><strong>52</strong></td>
<td><strong>35</strong></td>
<td><strong>43</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Parent English-Language Groups

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Site</th>
<th># of Focus Groups</th>
<th># of Participants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>GTA</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ottawa</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Windsor</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sudbury+</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thunder Bay+</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>SUB-TOTAL</strong></td>
<td><strong>17</strong></td>
<td><strong>57</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Parent French-Language Focus Groups

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Site</th>
<th># of Focus Groups</th>
<th># of Participants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>GTA</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kapuskasing/ Hearst/ Moonbeam</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>SUB-TOTAL</strong></td>
<td><strong>4</strong></td>
<td><strong>17</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### PARENT TOTAL

<p>| | | | | | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>PARENT TOTAL</strong></td>
<td><strong>21</strong></td>
<td><strong>74</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Educator English-Language Focus Groups

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Site</th>
<th># of Focus Groups</th>
<th># of Participants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>GTA</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ottawa</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Windsor</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sudbury+</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thunder Bay+</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>SUB-TOTAL</strong></td>
<td><strong>21</strong></td>
<td><strong>107</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Educator French-Language Focus Groups

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Site</th>
<th># of Focus Groups</th>
<th># of Participants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>GTA</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ottawa</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kapuskasing/ Hearst/ Moonbeam</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>SUB-TOTAL</strong></td>
<td><strong>3</strong></td>
<td><strong>18</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### EDUCATOR TOTAL

<p>| | | | | | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>EDUCATOR TOTAL</strong></td>
<td><strong>24</strong></td>
<td><strong>125</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Sub-totals by Category:
► Youth Focus Groups: 79
  ► Youth participants: 596

► Parent/guardian Focus Groups: 21
  ► Parent/Guardian participants: 74

► Educator Focus Groups: 24
  ► Educator participants: 125

Sub-totals by language:
► English-language Focus Groups: 95
  ► English-language participants: 594
  ► English-language interviews: 105
    o Phase I: 43
    o Phase II: 62 (cohort I - 27/cohort II – 35)

► French-language Focus Groups: 29
  ► French-language participants: 201
  ► French-language interviews: 25
    o Phase I: 9
    o Phase II: 16 (cohort I - 8/cohort II – 8)

TOTALS
❖ TOTAL FOCUS GROUPS: 124
❖ TOTAL FOCUS GROUP PARTICIPANTS: 795
❖ TOTAL INTERVIEWS: 130
  o PHASE I: 52
  o PHASE II: 78 (cohort I – 35/cohort II - 43)

A separate breakdown of the samples for each of the three Phases can be found in the accompanying Appendices document.
Describing the Samples: Youth Face Sheet Data

Youth Sample Description

The following section describes the Youth Focus Group samples for Phases I, II and III and provides points of comparison. A preliminary set of Phase I data has been presented in an earlier report under a separate cover (Tilleczek, Laflamme, Ferguson, Roth Edney et al, 2007; Hopes and Fears in the Elementary Years) and was drawn from a sample of young people in grade 8. The complete Phase II data has also been presented under a separate cover (Tilleczek, Laflamme, Ferguson, Roth Edney et al, 2008; Crossing the River to Secondary School) and drawn from a new sample of young people in grade 9 with whom we had not previously spoken. The Phase III data was then collected from a new sample of participants with a focus on the grade 10 experience.

The only connection between the three samples is that they were drawn from among the 37 families of schools in Ontario that formed the primary sampling frame for the study. The comparisons are therefore meant to reflect continuities or discontinuities in social, emotional, academic and procedural issues across the elementary to secondary transitional point within and across the 37 families of schools in Ontario. This section also provides analyses of selected sets of variables by region, gender and family of school.

The Phase I, II and III Focus Groups held 256, 215, and 125 youth participants respectively. Table 4 shows the breakdown of each sample by language.

Table 4: Youth Participants per Phase by Language

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Language of questionnaire</th>
<th>Phase I (n=256)</th>
<th>Phase I (n=215)</th>
<th>Phase III (n=125)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>English %</td>
<td>68.8</td>
<td>75.8</td>
<td>72.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>French %</td>
<td>31.2</td>
<td>24.2</td>
<td>27.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total %</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>n</td>
<td>256</td>
<td>215</td>
<td>125</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

We started the study in Phase I with 37 families of schools and followed students in 27 of these families of schools in Phase II and 16 in Phase III. In Phase I, 132 students were from complex families of schools and 124 were from less complex families of schools. In Phase II, 108 youth were from schools within complex families of schools and 107 were from schools in less complex families of schools. In Phase III, we spoke to 62 youth from complex families of schools and 63 from less complex families of schools (See Table 5).
Table 5: Youth participants per Phase by Family of School

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Family of schools</th>
<th>Phase</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Phase I</td>
<td>Phase II</td>
<td>Phase III</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Complex</td>
<td>51.6</td>
<td>50.2</td>
<td>49.6</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Less complex</td>
<td>48.4</td>
<td>49.8</td>
<td>50.4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>n</td>
<td>256</td>
<td>215</td>
<td>125</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 6 shows the slight change in gender composition of Focus group participants across the three Phases.

Table 6: Youth Participants per Phase by Gender

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Phase</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Phase I</td>
<td>Phase II</td>
<td>Phase III</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>57.4</td>
<td>50.0</td>
<td>43.2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>42.6</td>
<td>50.0</td>
<td>56.0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>n</td>
<td>256</td>
<td>215</td>
<td>125</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 7 shows the fluctuations across all three Phases for young people who were born in and outside of Canada.

Table 7: Youth Participants per Phase by Place of Birth

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Place of birth</th>
<th>Phase</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Phase I</td>
<td>Phase II</td>
<td>Phase III</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outside Canada</td>
<td>15.2</td>
<td>17.2</td>
<td>14.5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inside Canada</td>
<td>84.8</td>
<td>80.0</td>
<td>85.5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>n</td>
<td>256</td>
<td>215</td>
<td>125</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The current age ranges for the entire group of young people over the three Phases was 10 years to 17 years. In Phase I, the youth ranged from 10-15 years with the younger group being mainly from the grade 6 cohort in French-language schools. In Phase II the age range was 14 to 16 years. In Phase III the age range was 15-17 years. Table 8 provides the ranges, mode and mean ages for each of the three Phases.
In summary, the preceding 5 tables provide the general socio-demographic variables for our Youth Focus Group samples over the three Phases of study. These tables demonstrate that the samples in each Phase are reflective of the young people in grades 8, 9 and 10 respectively. The language, gender and family of school proportions remained similar across the 3 phases of the study.

**Family Composition and Socioeconomic Status**

Family composition in Phase I was recorded by asking students to report who lived with them in their home. In Phase I, the majority of young people reported living with their mother (n=245; 95.7%) and father (n=191; 74.6%) in their main home. Moreover, 127 (49.6%) lived with a sister and 138 (53.9%) lived with a brother in their main home. Only 8 (3.1%) individuals reported living with a step-mother in their main home and 19 (7.4%) with a step-father.

Family composition questions in Phase II yielded 205 responses for home A and 44 responses for home B (in Phases II and III home A and home B were allowable in this question since many young people have more than one home). In Phase II, 21.5% of the sample provided responses for a second home. In home A the most frequent response was mother with 177 (86.3%) responses followed by father with 136 (60.3%) responses. These responses were followed by siblings (sisters=129 and brothers=131). Other responses were “step-mother,” “male guardian”, “step-father,” “other person” and “half-brother”. In home B, the most frequent response was “father” with 25 (56.8%) responses and then “mother” with 7 (15.9%) responses.

In Phase III, the responses to the family composition question yielded 123 (98.4%) responses for home A and 21 (20.2%) responses for home B. In home A the most frequent response was mother (n=102; 83.9%) followed by father (n=86; 69.9%). These were followed by siblings (sisters=67; 54.5% and brothers=68; 55.3%). Other responses were “step-mother,” and “step-father”. In home B, the most frequent response was “father” with 10 (47.6%) responses and then “mother” with 7 (33.3%) responses.
To summarize, across all three Phases, the majority of youth in our sample, were living at home with both their mother and father.

In Phase I, the subjective notions of socioeconomic status as rated by the youth was relatively high with 60% (n=169) stating that they felt that they “had enough money” as compared to other youth, 20% (n=50) stating that they had “lots of money” and 3% (n=8) stating that they did “not have enough” money compared to other youth. This subjective measure concurred with that of the level of education of their mothers and fathers, which was also relatively high compared to the Canadian average in Phase I. For instance, the educational levels of the mothers and fathers was quite high with 75% and 69% respectively holding college or university level degrees/diplomas.

In Phase II, the subjective notions of socioeconomic status as rated by the youth was also relatively high such that 64.7% (n=134) stated that they felt that they either agreed or strongly agreed that “compared to my classmates, I feel richer”. It is worth noting, however, that 83.4% also suggested that they disagree or strongly disagree that “they felt poorer” compared to their classmates. This subjective measure concurs with that of the level of education of their mothers and fathers, which is also relatively high compared to the Canadian average. For instance, the youth reported educational levels for their mothers and fathers as relatively high with 64.1% and 57.2% respectively reporting to hold college or university level degrees/diplomas. A further 28.0% of mothers and 32.3% of fathers were reported to have obtained high school education or less.

In Phase III, the subjective notions of socioeconomic status as rated by the youth was such that 31.9% (n=37) stated that they felt that they either agreed or strongly agreed that “compared to my classmates, I feel richer”. On the other hand, it is interesting to note that there were also 83.5% (n=96) of the Phase III youth who disagreed or strongly disagreed that “compared to my classmate I feel poorer.” In Phase III, the level of education of young people’s mothers and fathers holding university of college level degrees/diplomas was 67.0% and 66.7% respectively. A further 30.4% of mothers and 26.4% of fathers were reported to have obtained high school education or less. This distribution reflects the fact that we have attempted to represent students who were from a range of social classes in our Focus Groups.

It is interesting to note that in Phase II there were no significant correlations noted between parental socioeconomic status and young people’s perceptions of socioeconomic status⁴. This means that the perception of “feeling richer” or “feeling poorer” in relation to their classmates was reported regardless of the actual

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⁴ Correlation for “feel richer” with mother’s education is r_S = .04 (p = .63); with father’s education is r_S = .02 (p = .85). Correlation for “feel poorer” with mother’s education is r_S = .04 (p = .59); with father’s education is r_S = .06 (p = .47). No Cramér’s V was significant for any of the associations between the two perceptions (“feel richer” or “feel poorer”) and parental (mother’s or father’s) profession.
educational and occupational status of mother and/or father. However, in Phase III when we correlate the subjective socioeconomic status with parental social class, we find an interesting (yet weak) inferable correlation suggesting that the higher the education of the mother the less the young people agreed with feeling “richer, compared to their classmates”\(^5\) Our findings suggest that overall, young people’s perception of SES is not closely related to our best estimates of family SES, including parental professions. In other words, young people’s best guesses about how much or how little their parents’ earn, has little connection to their actual household income, but rather to the complex ways in which they perceive their economic situation in comparison to that of their peers. It is this social comparison that can adversely impact their transition, regardless of their actual socio-economic status.

School Choices, Programs and Grades

In each Phase, we asked the young people to provide the most important things that influenced their decision about which high school to go to. The grouping and influences were the same in each Phase with students most often citing some set of courses/program, social, familial and location as the most important influences. The only difference was the order of importance with which they listed them, such that in Phase I the students cited location, followed by courses, followed by social and then family. In Phase II, this order was social, family, location and courses. In Phase III, the constellation is the same but the order was social, location, courses and family. It is worth noting that the high school students placed social influences before all others. It appears that by Phase III, concerns about location and school choice had been resolved.

In Phase II, the young people in grade 9 were asked to indicate (yes or no) the programs of study in which they were currently enrolled in their high school (see Table 9). The most frequently attended was the academic program and the least frequently attended was the IB program. A good number of students (n=89) had opted for applied programs. Very few students were enrolled in a special education program. French Immersion attracted less than 20% of the sample. Students were also attending “other” programs including enriched, IBT, gifted, sports program and Franco-Défi. Please note that these programs are not necessarily mutually exclusive. For example, one student may be registered in Academic, Applied and Other courses (See Table 9).

\(^5\) Correlation for “feel richer” with mother’s education is \(r_5=-.19\) (\(p<.05\)); with father’s education is \(r_5=-.25\) (\(p<.05\)). Correlation for “feel poorer” with mother’s education is \(r_5=.17\) (\(p=.08\)); with father’s education is \(r_5=.16\) (\(p=.10\)). Cramér’s V tended to be not significant for any of the associations between the two perceptions (“feel richer” or “feel poorer”) and parental (mother's or father's) profession.
Table 9: Phase II (Grade 9) percentages of students in programs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Program</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>Total (n)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>English as second language (ESL)</td>
<td>23.7</td>
<td>76.3</td>
<td>100.0 (207)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>French Immersion*</td>
<td>16.2</td>
<td>83.8</td>
<td>100.0 (204)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Special Education</td>
<td>11.2</td>
<td>88.8</td>
<td>100.0 (205)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic</td>
<td>65.9</td>
<td>34.1</td>
<td>100.0 (208)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Applied</td>
<td>44.3</td>
<td>55.7</td>
<td>100.0 (201)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>International Baccalaureate (IB)</td>
<td>6.7</td>
<td>93.3</td>
<td>100.0 (194)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>9.8</td>
<td>89.2</td>
<td>100.0 (204)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note: This question has been asked of all students but is useful only for the English-language sample.

In Phase III, the young people in grade 10 were also asked to indicate (by yes or no) the programs of study in which they were enrolled in the academic year in either first or second semester (see Table 10). The most frequently attended was the academic program and the least frequently attended was the IB program. A good number of students had also opted for applied programs. Very few students were enrolled in a special education program or the IB program. French Immersion attracted only 16% of the sample. Students were attending “other” programs were enriched, grade 11 classes, credit recovery, open classes (classes that are neither academic nor applied, such as gym), science, music, and gifted (See Table 10).

Table 10: Phase III (Grade 10) percentages of students in programs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Program</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>Total (n)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>English as second language (ESL)</td>
<td>25.2</td>
<td>74.8</td>
<td>100.0 (119)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>French Immersion*</td>
<td>16.0</td>
<td>84.0</td>
<td>100.0 (119)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Special Education</td>
<td>8.4</td>
<td>91.6</td>
<td>100.0 (119)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic</td>
<td>74.0</td>
<td>26.0</td>
<td>100.0 (123)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Applied</td>
<td>36.4</td>
<td>63.6</td>
<td>100.0 (118)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>International Baccalaureate (IB)</td>
<td>5.5</td>
<td>94.5</td>
<td>100.0 (110)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>16.0</td>
<td>84.0</td>
<td>100.0 (125)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note: This question has been asked of all students but is useful only for the English-language sample.

In Phase I, grade 8 students provided their average school grades at the time of the Focus Group by writing both their raw grade average and by checking the Ministry of Education Level on a scale of 1 to 4. The raw average grade for the Phase I sample was 79.5%.
In Phase II, students also provided their average school grades at the time of the Phase II Focus Group by writing both their raw grade average and by checking the Ministry of Education Level on a scale of 1 to 4. The mean raw grade average for the sample of young people was 77.6%. In Phase III we asked students more detailed information about their grades and changes across time. They reported average grades in grade 8, grade 9 (first and second semester) and grade 10 (first and second semester) as reported in Table 11.

In Phase III we also asked young people to explain any changes in their grades from grade 8 to 10. For those who answered the question (n=97), six of them had grades that went up and five reported no change in their grades. For the six students with increased grades, they attributed their success to wanting to meet future goals and/or studying more seriously. The rest of respondents (n=86) had lower grades over the transition. We observed groups of responses that were more frequent such as academic difficulty (n=26), self (n=25), self at risk (n=21) and courses (n=12). There were fewer students who suggested each of the following reasons: transition to new school (n=2), social reasons (n=5), workload (n=4) and lack of effort (n=3).

Table 11: Student grades in school across three Phases

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Phase I</th>
<th>Phase II</th>
<th>Phase III</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Average at school so far this year</td>
<td>Average at school so far this year</td>
<td>Overall average in Grade 9 1st semester</td>
<td>Overall average in Grade 10 1st semester</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mode</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Median</td>
<td>80.0</td>
<td>80.0</td>
<td>78.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>79.5</td>
<td>77.6</td>
<td>78.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Standard deviation</td>
<td>8.21</td>
<td>10.24</td>
<td>10.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>n</td>
<td>164</td>
<td>144</td>
<td>91</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

We then ran an analysis of variance for grades by region for each Phase.\(^6\) In Phase I, we found an inferable difference by region such that the highest average is for the GTA (82.7%) and the lowest is for Sudbury (76.2%) with a significant difference between these two. All other means are to be considered to be equal. In Phase II, there were no inferable differences for grades by region. In Phase III we used the overall average in grade 10 in the second semester in the analysis and found an inferable difference such that the lowest average was for Sudbury (60.17%) and the highest is for Thunder Bay (86.3%) the second highest was for Ottawa (81.9%) and

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\(^6\) Phase I - \(F_{(4,125)}=2.90;p<.05\); Phase II - \(F_{(5,138)}=1.27;p=.28\); Phase III - \(F_{(6,85)}=3.79;p<.01\).
there was a significant difference between GTA and Sudbury and between Ottawa and Sudbury. All others are considered to be equal.

Students were also asked what they considered to be good grades in each Phase. In Phase I, the students reported a range of open-ended answers such as “trying your best” (n=7) “overall doing well” (n=2), “personal response” (n=6) which accounted for a total of 8.0% of the responses. All others are between C and A+ (65-100%). The A range accounted for 65.9% of responses, the B range for 22.9% responses and the C range for (3.2%) of responses.

In Phase II, a range of responses were offered to “good grades”, including 14 open-ended answers (“trying your best” n=4; “passing” n=5; and other personal responses n=5). After eliminating these open-ended responses, the range of answers from A+ to C was observed. Almost one-half (53.3%) of the young people stated that A- or A+ were “good grades”. A further 42.8% stated that B or B+ were “good grades” with the remaining (3.8%) stating C as “good grades.” It is worth noting that the vast majority of students in grade 9 state that 70% was not considered by them to be a “good grade”.

In Phase III, there was one student who answered “not failing” while all other student responses were included in the range from C to A+ (60-100%). Three students suggested good grades to be between 60 and 65%. Most (66.9%) of the young people stated that A- or A+ were “good grades”. A further 28.8% stated that B or B+ were “good grades” with the remaining (3.3%) stating C as “good grades.” It is worth noting again that the vast majority of students in grade 10 state that 70% was not considered by them to be a “good grade”.

In Phase III we additionally asked young people what accounted for “good grades” in each year across the transition. We tested these with three separate correlations. There was a positive correlation for the groups such that if students thought that high grades were good grades in grade 8 then they remained with this perception into grades 9 and 10. These estimations of good grades were correlated for the three Phases. Specifically, grades 8 and 9 were related ($r_{tau-b}=-.57; p<.001$), grades 8 and 10 were related ($r_{tau-b}=-.50; p<.001$) and grades 9 and 10 were related ($r_{tau-b}=-.61; p<.001$). However, it should be noted that these relationships also suggest that these perceptions of “good grades” did change over time for some individuals. But, in general, students remained of the impression that grades below 70% were not good.

In summary, these are somewhat consistent perceptions as to what constitutes “good grades” across the transition. However, an interesting finding emerges when correlating student perceptions of “good grades” with their actual average grades at school in that we observed a relatively strong and negative correlation in both Phase I ($r_{tau-b}=-.45; p<.001$) and Phase II ($r_{tau-b}=-.48; p<.001$). This means that in the grade 8 and 9 samples, there was a trend toward a situation where the higher the student estimation of what accounts for “good grades”, the lower were the actual grades they
achieved in school. In Phase III, the trend is similar between the overall average in grade 10 (second semester) and the estimation of “good grades” such that a negative correlation ($r_{tau-b}=-.35;P<.001$) was found although it is not quite as strong. Overall, there is a tendency for students with lower achievement levels to set higher standards for good grades.

In each Phase we analyzed the data for any differences in perception of “good grades” according to gender, family of schools and region. For gender we observed no significant difference in the expectations of good grades for any Phase I, II or III sample. Similarly, we observed no inferable differences for either family of schools or for region.

We asked the grade 10 students in Phase III for descriptive answers relating to the Ontario Secondary School Literacy Test. Only five students answered that they had not completed the test. A large majority the students who had written the test felt confident about it. Most of the students (95.8%) felt that they had passed the test and 89.9% of the students thought that they were well prepared. Having said this, we cannot say that this is due to their school curriculum. To the question: “does the literacy test fit with your English class?” 28.6% said “no”. The test was not difficult for most (91.7%) students but that does not mean that it was easy. Indeed, 67.2% answered “no” to the question “did you find the test easy?”. So, for the majority it was neither hard nor easy for them.

**Influences of Families and Friends**

In Phases II and III we asked students to rate three items relating to their parents’ knowledge of their school work, extra-curricular activities and time spent with friends. We did not ask this question on the Phase I Face Sheet and therefore have no data to report for Phase I. For Phases II and III the scale on which the young people rated these items was 1=“never”, 2= “sometimes”, 3=“most of the time”, and 4=“always.”

For Phase II ($\bar{x}=3.06$) and Phase III ($\bar{x}=3.04$), means were similar on the item relating to parents know how I am doing with school work. This denotes that the young people are under the impression that parents know “most of the time” how they are doing with their school work and this is continuous between grades 9 and 10. An average of 3 indicates that parents know “most of the time” how their sons and daughters are doing with their school work.

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7 Gender: Phase I $\chi^2 (4)=.63$; p=.96; Phase II $\chi^2 (4)=5.35$; p=.25; Phase III $\chi^2 (4)=6.75$; p=.15.
8 Family of School: Phase I $\chi^2 (4)=4.49$; p=.34; Phase II $\chi^2 (4)=4.95$; p=.29; Phase III $1\chi^2 (4)=2.01$; p=.73.
9 Region: Phase I $\chi^2 (16)=25.18$; p=.07; Phase II $\chi^2 (20)=15.06$; p=.77; Phase III $\chi^2 (20)=22.26$; p=.33.
In neither Phase II nor Phase III did we observe an inferable difference by gender.\textsuperscript{10} Similarly, we observed no inferable difference in either Phase II or Phase III for family of schools\textsuperscript{11} such that for both complex and less complex families of schools the mean is just above 3.0. This again reflects a tendency to keep parents informed about school work. There was no interaction for Phase II and Phase III.

We did observe an inferable difference in Phase II for region\textsuperscript{12} such that Kapuskasing/Hearst ($\bar{x}$=3.61) shows the highest means followed by Thunder Bay ($\bar{x}$=3.23), GTA ($\bar{x}$=3.04) and Ottawa ($\bar{x}$=3.03). The means were lower than 3.0 in Sudbury ($\bar{x}$=2.88) and Windsor ($\bar{x}$=2.74). The post-hoc tests distinguished Kapuskasing/Hearst from all of the other regions except Thunder Bay. As well, the post-hoc tests distinguished Windsor from Thunder Bay. Therefore, across all regions, parents were rated as informed about school work “most of the time” except in Kapuskasing/Hearst and Thunder Bay where they are “always” informed. In Phase III the means are similar as for those in Phase II smaller sample size makes the differences not significant.\textsuperscript{13}

The Face Sheet then asked Phase II and III students to suggest good ways for schools to communicate with their parents about their school progress. From Phase II to Phase III results are consistent in the sense that means are very similar and the order is the same. As reported above, parents were generally well informed about school work. Students moderately agreed that phone calls ($\bar{x}$ Phase II=2.57; $\bar{x}$ Phase III =2.58), letters in the mail ($\bar{x}$ Phase II=2.27; $\bar{x}$ Phase III =2.18), emails ($\bar{x}$ Phase II=2.47; $\bar{x}$ Phase III =2.38) and parent-teacher meetings ($\bar{x}$ Phase II=2.94; $\bar{x}$ Phase III =2.88), ($\bar{x}$ =2.94) were good ways to ensure communication with parents.

None of these means were significantly different by gender, region and/or family of schools in Phase II\textsuperscript{14}. In Phase III there is only one unimportant inferable difference by gender\textsuperscript{15}. The fact that these means are between 2.0 and 3.0 indicate that there is no ideal type of communication between schools and parents from the student’s point of view. It seems that the students rated the best way to maintain

\begin{footnotesize}
\textsuperscript{10} Phase II $F_{(1;187)}=.48$; $p=.49$; Phase III $F_{(1;113)}=1.97$; $p=.16$.
\textsuperscript{11} Phase II $F_{(1;187)}=.40$; $p=.53$; Phase III $F_{(1;113)}=.98$; $p=.33$.
\textsuperscript{12} $F_{(5;187)}=2.69$; $p<.05$.
\textsuperscript{13} $F_{(5;111)}=1.20$; $p<.32$.
\textsuperscript{14} Phone call: gender: $F_{(1;185)}=0.76$; $p=.38$; family of school: $F_{(1;185)}=.14$; $p=.71$; region: $F_{(5;185)}=.27$; $p=.93$. Letters in the mail: gender: $F_{(1;181)}=0.32$; $p=.57$; family of school: $F_{(1;181)}=.58$; $p=.45$; region: $F_{(5;181)}=2.15$; $p=.06$. Emails: gender: $F_{(1;185)}=1.26$; $p=.26$; family of school: $F_{(1;185)}=2.78$; $p=.10$; region: $F_{(5;185)}=2.08$; $p=.07$. Parent-teacher meetings: gender: $F_{(1;183)}=0.19$; $p=.67$; family of school: $F_{(1;183)}=.02$; $p=.88$; region: $F_{(5;183)}=.49$; $p=.78$.
\textsuperscript{15} Phone call: gender: $F_{(1;111)}=.63$; $p=.43$; family of school: $F_{(1;111)}=.41$; $p=.52$; region: $F_{(5;109)}=.62$; $p=.69$. Letters in the mail: gender: $F_{(1;110)}=5.14$; $p<.05$; family of school: $F_{(1;110)}=.37$; $p=.55$; region: $F_{(5;108)}=.55$; $p=.74$. Emails: gender: $F_{(1;106)}=1.57$; $p=.21$; family of school: $F_{(1;106)}=.71$; $p=.40$; region: $F_{(5;104)}=1.21$; $p=.31$. Parent-teacher meetings: gender: $F_{(1;110)}=1.55$; $p=.22$; family of school: $F_{(1;110)}=.03$; $p=.87$; region: $F_{(5;108)}=1.08$; $p=.38$.
\end{footnotesize}
communication is through parent-teacher meetings. In Phase II twenty-one students provided additional suggestions to the list which emphasized the importance of direct and face-to-face communication between educators and parents. In Phases II and III, 21 and 18 students respectively provided “other” suggestions and the most frequent responses related to the need for face-to-face communication between educators and parents.

The Face Sheet also asked students to rate their parent’s knowledge with their extra-curricular activities. The average for the whole group was 2.95 in Phase II and 2.97 in Phase III again suggesting that parents remain informed “most of the time. The ANOVA did not find any inferable differences by gender, family of schools or region in Phase II or III.

Students were also asked to rate their parent’s knowledge of what they do with their friends. The average for the whole group in Phase II was 2.75 and in Phase III was 2.89 suggesting again that parents remain in the know “most of the time” about what is happening with friends. No differences were observed according to gender in Phase II but in Phase III the average for the mean for females (3.14) is a bit higher than the one for males (2.57). In Phase II and III there were no inferable differences for family of schools. There was a difference when we tested for this item and region in Phase II such that Kapuskasing/Hearst (x̄ =3.44) had the highest mean with all other regions being similar (2.72≤x̄≤3.00). But, there were no inferable differences for region in Phase III.

If we examine the trends across the items relating to parental knowledge we note that parents are informed “most of the time” but not to the same extent across school work, extra-curricular activities and friends. Indeed, the closer we get to friends, or the further away we move from school related activities, the more reluctant young people are to let their parents know about their activities. In Phase II, averages were significantly different across these domains with school (x̄ =3.07) being the highest, followed by extra-curricular activities (x̄ =2.95). However, in Phase III this trend remains the same but becomes less marked as averages went from school (x̄ =3.03) to extra-curricular activities (x̄ =2.96) to friends (x̄ =2.88) with differences becoming non-significant across the domains.

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16 Phase II F(1,185)=.04; p=.84; Phase III F(1,112)=2.93; p=.09.
17 Phase II F(1,185)<.01; p=.99. Phase III F(1,112)=.30; p=.59.
18 Phase II F(5,185)=1.20; p=.31. in Phase III (5,110)=.19; p=.97.
19 F(1,182)=2.90; p=.09.
20 F(1,112)=14.67; p<.001.
21 Phase II F(1,182)=1.12; p=.29. Phase III F(1,112)=.48; p=.49.
22 F(5,182)=2.39; p<.05.
23 F(5,110)=1.76; p=.13.
24 F_G-G (1.92;383.07)=10.81; p<.001. Post-hoc tests revealed inferable differences between the 3 means.
25 F_G-G (1.76;200.94)=1.76; p=.18.
Importance of Education

The Face Sheet also asked students to rate the importance of a high school education to themselves, their parents and their friends. We asked this of students in each Phase who then answered that a high school education was “not at all”, “not very”, “a bit” or “very” important” to each party. In Phase I, II and III means on these items show homogeneity of responses such that males, females, complex and less complex families of schools tended to be similar (see Table 9, 10 and 11). Also the fact that all means are greater than 3.0 suggests that the students themselves and their parents strongly value high school education. This is also true for their friends but at a lesser level. There were no inferable differences between genders or family of schools except for two small exceptions by gender. In both Phases II and III we can see that the girls look for the company of friends who value education a bit more than do boys (See Tables, 12, 13 and 14).

Table 12: Phase I Means for variables relating to importance of high school education by gender and family of school

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Importance of high school for:</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Family of Schools</th>
<th>Interaction Effect</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Complex</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Me</td>
<td>3.91</td>
<td>3.85</td>
<td>3.86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>test</td>
<td>F(1,201)=1.23; no</td>
<td>F(1,201)=0.11; no</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My parents</td>
<td>3.93</td>
<td>3.90</td>
<td>3.95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>test</td>
<td>F(1,201)=0.49; no</td>
<td>F(1,201)=1.93; no</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My friends</td>
<td>3.28</td>
<td>3.35</td>
<td>3.42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>test</td>
<td>F(1,198)=0.51; no</td>
<td>F(1,198)=2.87; no</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Table 13: Phase II Means for variables relating to importance of high school education by gender and family of school

Analysis of variance for 2 factors. If \( p < .05 \), then the answer is yes.

(1=not at all important and 4=very important)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Importance of high school for:</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Family of Schools</th>
<th>Interaction Effect</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Complex Less Complex</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Me</td>
<td>( \bar{x} )</td>
<td>3.79</td>
<td>3.85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>test</td>
<td>( F_{(1,204)}=0.75; ) no</td>
<td>( F_{(1,204)}=0.27; ) no</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My parents</td>
<td>( \bar{x} )</td>
<td>3.91</td>
<td>3.90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>test</td>
<td>( F_{(1,205)}=0.03; ) no</td>
<td>( F_{(1,205)}=0.04; ) no</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My friends</td>
<td>( \bar{x} )</td>
<td>3.17</td>
<td>3.45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>test</td>
<td>( F_{(1,202)}=6.30; ) yes</td>
<td>( F_{(1,202)}=2.52; ) no</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Table 14: Phase III Means for variables relating to importance of high school education by gender and family of school

Analysis of variance for 2 factors. If \( p < .05 \), then the answer is yes.

(1=not at all important and 4=very important)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Importance of high school for:</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Family of Schools</th>
<th>Interaction Effect</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Complex Less Complex</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Me</td>
<td>( \bar{x} )</td>
<td>3.75</td>
<td>3.96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>test</td>
<td>( F_{(1,117)}=5.37; ) yes</td>
<td>( F_{(1,117)}=0.04; ) no</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My parents</td>
<td>( \bar{x} )</td>
<td>3.88</td>
<td>3.96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>test</td>
<td>( F_{(1,118)}=1.78; ) no</td>
<td>( F_{(1,118)}=0.36; ) no</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My friends</td>
<td>( \bar{x} )</td>
<td>3.27</td>
<td>3.53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>test</td>
<td>( F_{(1,115)}=3.12; ) no</td>
<td>( F_{(1,115)}=0.50; ) no</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Unexpectedly, the correlations between the opinions of the students in rating the importance of education for themselves and for their friends is only 0.29 in Phase I, 0.28 in Phase II, and 0.26 in Phase III. These weak but positive correlations suggest that the more education is valued by the student, the more they rate their friends to also value it. But, there are several exceptions which show that students are aware that their friends do not necessarily value education as highly as they do.

These three items relating to the importance of education were also rated for region in each Phase. However, there was some exception to the test that would be positive for the North but the results are not consistent over the Phases. In addition, the differences are so weak as to suggest that they are less an effect of the factor (region) than of the result, due to the way in which we have chosen the sample. What is important is that there are no inferable differences between regions. Any differences that do appear tell us that self and parents have higher means than friends across all regions. Indeed, if we test for differences in mean ratings of the importance of education for students, parents and friends, we find that in Phase II and Phase III there are significant differences such that self and parents are indeed higher rated than friends.

Young people were also asked on the Face Sheet in Phases II and III to rate how often their friends encouraged them to do well in school. The overall averages are reported below, in Table 15.

Table 15: Descriptive statistics for “my friends encourage me to do well at school”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Phase II</th>
<th>Phase III</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>2.75</td>
<td>2.83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Standard Deviation</td>
<td>.88</td>
<td>.87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>n</td>
<td>215</td>
<td>115</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: (1=never; 4=always)

In Phase II there were no inferable differences by family of schools or region but there was a difference by gender. In this case, the mean for males (\(\bar{x}=2.55\)) was lower than for females (\(\bar{x}=2.95\)) which suggests that young women, more than young men, feel that their friends are more actively supporting their school work. A similar trend occurred in Phase III such that no inferable differences were found by family of schools, or region but there was a difference for gender. Again, the mean

---

26 \(p<.01\) for each Phase.
27 \(F_{G-G}(1.56;317.21)=82.62; p<.001\).
28 \(F_{G-G}(1.65;196.55)=33.04; p<.001\).
29 Phase II Family of School \(F(1;184)=1.27; p=.26\); Region \(F(5;184)=.96; p=.44\); Gender \(F(1;182)=4.62; p<.05\).
30 Phase III Family of School \(F(1;111)=.42; p=.52\); Region \(F(5;109)=.99; p=.43\); Gender \(F(1;111)=7.00; p<.01\).
for males ($\bar{x} = 2.60$) was lower than for females ($\bar{x} = 3.02$) which suggests once again, that young women, more than young men, believe friends to be actively supporting their school work.

**Happiness at school**

In Phase I we asked students to rate their happiness in school by answering “yes” or “no” and providing open-ended reasons for their answer. Eighty-one percent of youth (n=158) who answered the question in Phase I stated that they were currently happy in their elementary schools, and an additional 7% (n=13) stated that they were both happy and not happy.

In Phases II and III we re-worded the question to be more sensitive to their emotions, with scales offering ranges from “never”, to “sometimes”, to “most of the time”, and “always”. We see a similar result with only a small proportion of students (3.9% in Phase II, and 4.4% in Phase III) answering that they are “never” happy at school.

The majority of the young people felt some happiness at school which is reflected in the mean of 2.92 in Phase II and 3.04 Phase III for the overall groups (with no difference by gender\(^{31}\), family of schools\(^{32}\) or region\(^{33}\)). Our new scale shows a nuance to the trend. The evidence indicates that students are happy most of the time, albeit with some concerns.

**Youth Attendance in High School**

Young people in Phases II and III were asked if they had “missed” or “cut” classes in grade 9 or 10. We also asked the Phase III students in grade 10 if this had changed for them over the last year and their reasons for any change.

In Phases II and III respectively, nearly three-quarters of the students (72.7%; n=152) (71.2%; n=118) reported that they had done so. They were then asked “how often” they missed school with responses ranging from “once or twice” (Phase II 52.3%; Phase III 49.4%), to “a bunch of times” (Phase II 34.0%; Phase III 36.8%), to “a lot of times” (Phase II 13.7%; Phase III 13.8%).

The students then listed the reasons for missing class in open-ended responses. Of those who had missed school so far, almost all of them provided a written reason for

\[^{31}\text{Phase II: } F_{(1;185)}=0.04; p=.85; \text{ Phase III: } F_{(1;110)}=0.82; p=.39.\]
\[^{32}\text{Phase II: } F_{(1;185)}=0.02; p=.89; \text{ Phase III: } F_{(1;110)}=1.49; p=.22.\]
\[^{33}\text{Phase II: } F_{(5;185)}=0.30; p=.91; \text{ Phase III: } F_{(5;108)}=0.30; p=.92.\]
doing so (See Table 16). We notice that the constellation of reasons for missing school remain approximately the same over the two Phases but their frequencies change to suggest that skipping classes in grade 9 seems to be replaced by workload and school activities/clubs in grade 10. We also noticed that there were more young people with more reasons for missing school in Phase II than there were in Phase III. It is interesting to note that grade 10 students miss or skip class with less frequency than do students in grade 9.

Table 16: Main reasons for missing or cutting class by Phase

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Order of reasons</th>
<th>Reasons</th>
<th>Phase II (n=152)</th>
<th>Phase III (n=118)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1st main reason</td>
<td>Skipped out</td>
<td>35.5%</td>
<td>15.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sick</td>
<td>19.7%</td>
<td>21.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Appointments</td>
<td>12.5%</td>
<td>6.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>School/sports/clubs</td>
<td>7.9%</td>
<td>4.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Friends</td>
<td>5.3%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Tests/workload</td>
<td>5.3%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2nd main reason</td>
<td>Skipped out</td>
<td>35.6%</td>
<td>7.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Appointments</td>
<td>11.9%</td>
<td>4.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sick</td>
<td>10.2%</td>
<td>2.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Tests/workload</td>
<td>10.2%</td>
<td>2.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Vacations</td>
<td>10.2</td>
<td>1.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>School/sports/clubs</td>
<td>11.5%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3rd main reason</td>
<td>Skipped out</td>
<td>43.8%</td>
<td>1.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sick</td>
<td>18.8%</td>
<td>0.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Appointments</td>
<td>18.8%</td>
<td>0.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>School/sports/clubs</td>
<td>5.3%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

We also asked the students in Grade 10 if there has been a change in the amount that they missed or cut classes. Thirty percent (n=31) of those who responded to this question in the grade 10 Youth Focus Groups stated that there had been a change. Of these, the changes were either for the better or worse. Positive responses were “self”, “future goals”, “improved classes”, “more serious, “not as sick this year.” Negative responses were “academic problems”, “bored”, or “don’t care”.

We then treated this variable as ordinal with three values “once or twice”, “a bunch of times” and “a lot of times”. We then added a fourth value “0” to include all students who had never missed school and correlated the variable with all the statements from the Face Sheet questions relating to how they feel at school. On the nine correlations for these items, only one was inferable in Phase II which was my school is a place where I often feel bored. The correlation was low and positive (Kendall’s tau-b=.27; p<.001) which suggests a weak relationship such that the more the students feel bored, the more likely they are to miss school. In Phase III, the only inferable
correlation was for *my school is a place where I feel popular* (Kendall’s tau-b=.18; p<.05) which is also feeble, indicating that only a slight suggestion that the most popular students might tend to miss or cut the most classes.

We then did the same in associating this variable about missing school with the statements relating to teacher ratings in Phases II and III. Only two of seven of these correlations were inferable in grade 9 (Phase II). These were for *in general my teachers help me learn* and *in general my teachers are available to talk to outside class*. Even if inferable, these correlations are weak (respectively Kendall’s tau-bs are -.16 and -.13; and ps<.05); they are also negative. This suggests that the more helpful or available the teachers, the less likely the students were to miss school. This trend was somewhat similar for grade 10 (Phase III) such that there is one inferable difference on the item *my teachers give me extra help if I need it* (Kendall’s tau-bs -.23;p<.01). This is positive suggesting again that the more the teachers are prepared to provide extra help, the less often the students miss school.

We then did the same analysis with the nine items relating to student ratings of their schools; no correlations were significant in Phase II. In Phase III there was only one which is in the same spirit as the findings above. In this case the *supports for students having trouble* was negatively associated with missing school (Kendall’s tau-bs -.17;p<.05).

There was also no link found between “happiness at school” and student’s missing of school for either Phase II or Phase III. The most important conclusion arising from these tested relationships is the fact that there was normally no significant correlation between the items relating to how they feel at school, or about their ratings of teachers, or about their ratings of schools with their missing or cutting classes. It could be that truancy is relatively normalized in grades 9 and 10. But, in any case, most students do not miss school very often and have good reasons for doing so when they do.

To examine this at a deeper level we selected only those students in grade 10 who had missed school “a lot of times” (n=12). These responses reflected social issues in the lives of students such as sickness, family issues, emotional issues, funerals, peer pressure etc. The only exception in the list is *skipping out* which was also frequent and in itself reflects the occurrence of a developing philosophy such that it is no longer “abnormal” to miss school for this group of students. This group of students had many interconnected social issues to deal with and the more acceptable reasons for missing school seem to open a gateway to truancy for less acceptable reasons. For these students, the socially accepted reasons for missing school were very present in their lives.

In grade 9 (Phase II) those who missed school “a lot of times” (n=21) gave reasons that tend to be less numerous. *Skipping out* was the main motive but the events of life such as sickness, friends, family etc were also important reasons to miss school.
The data in this section suggests that the grade 9 milieu is being used by students to try out the behaviour of skipping school as they have come from elementary schools in which many felt that they were treated as “babies”. In grade 10, however, this attitude tends to be no longer sufficient in itself, so students gave many other reasons for missing school.

Young people understand school attendance to be a necessity. Regardless of how they feel, they recognize that they must attend. Going to school and attending classes is viewed as normal, however, so is “skipping” class occasionally. Missing classes appears to be a normative experience, especially in grade 9 where it is more common and frequent.

**Youth Ratings of Self, Friends and School by Gender and Family of Schools**

In the Face Sheet for Phases I, II, and III, we asked students to compare themselves to their classmates on seven items relating to perceptions about their personal characteristics. The one exception is the Phase I Face Sheet did not include *I feel fatter* or *I feel thinner*. Table 17 reports the means for each Phase on each of these items. When we compare with Phase I, II and III we see very few changes over time. The means also suggest that the students tend to be somewhat critical of themselves in relation to their classmates (the means are not close to 1.0). However, when it comes to desired characteristics (*I feel grown up* or *I feel more responsible*) they tend to be less critical of themselves.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Phase I</th>
<th>Phase II</th>
<th>Phase III</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Compared to my classmates...</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I look taller</td>
<td>2.51</td>
<td>2.53</td>
<td>2.42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I look shorter</td>
<td>2.18</td>
<td>2.18</td>
<td>2.16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I look younger</td>
<td>2.10</td>
<td>2.15</td>
<td>2.14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I look older</td>
<td>2.66</td>
<td>2.58</td>
<td>2.57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I feel I am good looking</td>
<td>2.71</td>
<td>2.72</td>
<td>2.71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I feel more grown up</td>
<td>2.98</td>
<td>2.96</td>
<td>2.83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I feel more responsible</td>
<td>3.20</td>
<td>3.10</td>
<td>3.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I look fatter</td>
<td></td>
<td>1.97</td>
<td>1.98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I look thinner</td>
<td></td>
<td>2.29</td>
<td>2.33</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
We then analyzed the data to examine differences on these items by gender and family of schools (See Tables 18, 19 and 20). In Phase I, the elementary school girls were a bit more critical of themselves in relation to their classmates regarding height and being good looking.

In Phase II, six tests for gender differences were found to have unequal means. For three of these six items, the average was higher for males than females, these were: *I feel I look taller; I look thinner; I feel I am good looking*. It is important to note that even though there were inferable differences by gender, none of these differences were large. For example, the mean differences ranged from 0.28 (*I feel more grown up*) to 0.48 (*I feel I look taller*). For three additional items the mean was higher for females than for males. These were *I feel I look shorter and I feel I look fatter and I feel I am more grown up*. Again, it is important to note that the differences were small. It is interesting to note that for physical traits and perceptions relating to adult status (for example, *looking taller and feeling grown up*) the means are somewhat higher for all students in grade 9. This means that the young people tend to think positively about themselves, but with some reservations.

In Phase III, there were four inferable differences with the males feeling that they *look taller* while the females felt that compared to their classmates they *looked fatter, more grown up and more responsible* than the males. We can conclude that there are no changes over time and there are more differences by gender than family of school. Even when there are differences, they are not large and when this is by gender (except for height) females are more critical of their physical selves than males, but also tend to see themselves as more serious and grown up than males.
### Table 18: Means for variables relating to perception of personal characteristics compared to classmates by gender and family of school

**Phase I**

Analysis of variance for 2 factors. If \( p < .05 \), then the answer is yes.  
(1=Strongly disagree and 4= Strongly agree)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Compared to my classmates...</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Family of Schools</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I look taller</td>
<td>2.67</td>
<td>2.38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>test</td>
<td>( F_{(1;166)}=3.26; ) no</td>
<td>( F_{(1;166)}=.15; ) no</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I look shorter</td>
<td>1.97</td>
<td>2.35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>test</td>
<td>( F_{(1;169)}=5.02; ) yes</td>
<td>( F_{(1;169)}=.64; ) no</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I look younger</td>
<td>2.15</td>
<td>2.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>test</td>
<td>( F_{(1;168)}=.47; ) no</td>
<td>( F_{(1;168)}=.01; ) no</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I look older</td>
<td>2.64</td>
<td>2.67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>test</td>
<td>( F_{(1;164)}=.04; ) no</td>
<td>( F_{(1;164)}=.31; ) no</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am good-looking</td>
<td>2.89</td>
<td>2.58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>test</td>
<td>( F_{(1;157)}=5.66; ) yes</td>
<td>( F_{(1;157)}=.17; ) no</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I feel more grown up</td>
<td>2.91</td>
<td>3.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>test</td>
<td>( F_{(1;169)}=1.34; ) no</td>
<td>( F_{(1;169)}=2.13; ) no</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I feel more responsible</td>
<td>3.08</td>
<td>3.28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>test</td>
<td>( F_{(1;170)}=3.14; ) no</td>
<td>( F_{(1;170)}=.01; ) no</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 19: Means for variables relating to perception of personal characteristics compared to classmates by gender and family of school

Phase II

Analysis of variance for 2 factors. If p<.05, then the answer is yes.
(1=Strongly disagree and 4= Strongly agree)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Compared to my classmates...</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Family of Schools</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Complex</td>
<td>Less Complex</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I look taller</td>
<td>2.77</td>
<td>2.29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2.49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2.57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>test F(1;206)=16.03; yes</td>
<td></td>
<td>F(1;206)=.79; no</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I look shorter</td>
<td>2.03</td>
<td>2.32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2.22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2.14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>test F(1;204)=5.51; yes</td>
<td></td>
<td>F(1;204)=.60; no</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I look younger</td>
<td>2.10</td>
<td>2.20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2.14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2.16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>test F(1;203)=.78; no</td>
<td></td>
<td>F(1;203)=.01; no</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I look older</td>
<td>2.67</td>
<td>2.49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2.58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2.58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>test F(1;208)=2.52; no</td>
<td></td>
<td>F(1;208)=.04; no</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I look fatter</td>
<td>1.83</td>
<td>2.11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1.90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>test F(1;199)=5.98; yes</td>
<td></td>
<td>F(1;199)=1.67; no</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I look thinner</td>
<td>2.49</td>
<td>2.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2.21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2.37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>test F(1;200)=13.64; yes</td>
<td></td>
<td>F(1;200)=2.52; no</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am good-looking</td>
<td>2.90</td>
<td>2.54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2.70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2.74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>test F(1;190)=10.02; yes</td>
<td></td>
<td>F(1;190)=.29; no</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I feel more grown up</td>
<td>3.10</td>
<td>2.82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2.96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2.96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>test F(1;202)=8.22; yes</td>
<td></td>
<td>F(1;202)=.04; no</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I feel more responsible</td>
<td>3.15</td>
<td>3.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3.13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>test F(1;204)=1.49; no</td>
<td></td>
<td>F(1;204)=.43; no</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 20: Means for variables relating to perception of personal characteristics compared to classmates by gender and family of school

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Compared to my classmates...</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Family of Schools</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Complex</td>
<td>Less Complex</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I look taller</td>
<td>2.63</td>
<td>2.26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2.47</td>
<td>2.37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>test F(1;117)=5.16; yes</td>
<td>F(1;117)=.04; no</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I look shorter</td>
<td>1.98</td>
<td>2.29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2.15</td>
<td>2.17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>test F(1;117)=3.33; no</td>
<td>F(1;117)=.07; no</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I look younger</td>
<td>2.24</td>
<td>2.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2.20</td>
<td>2.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>test F(1;111)=1.42; no</td>
<td>F(1;111)=.96; no</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I look older</td>
<td>2.47</td>
<td>2.65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2.53</td>
<td>2.62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>test F(1;110)=1.22; no</td>
<td>F(1;110)=.45; no</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I look fatter</td>
<td>1.90</td>
<td>2.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2.11</td>
<td>1.84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>test F(1;116)=1.23; yes</td>
<td>F(1;116)=3.84; no</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I look thinner</td>
<td>2.48</td>
<td>2.22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2.24</td>
<td>2.43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>test F(1;116)=3.64; no</td>
<td>F(1;116)=1.99; no</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am good-looking</td>
<td>2.73</td>
<td>2.70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2.84</td>
<td>2.57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>test F(1;107)=.01; no</td>
<td>F(1;107)=4.60; yes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I feel more grown up</td>
<td>2.76</td>
<td>2.88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2.94</td>
<td>2.71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>test F(1;113)=1.08; yes</td>
<td>F(1;113)=3.05; no</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I feel more responsible</td>
<td>2.86</td>
<td>3.13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3.10</td>
<td>2.91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>test F(1;109)=4.61; yes</td>
<td>F(1;113)=2.26; no</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The Face Sheets also asked students to rate how important their friends were to them in class, during the school day and after school/on weekends (See Table 21). These means are higher than 3 for almost all of the items and across the three Phases. Clearly friends were rated as extremely important in all circumstances to these young
people but (1) we see that they are somewhat less important in class than outside of it and (2) that the importance of friends decreases slightly over the three Phases. As they prepare for going to high school, friends are the most important.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Phase I</th>
<th>Phase II</th>
<th>Phase III</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>My friends are important to me...</td>
<td>3.36</td>
<td>3.42</td>
<td>3.31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>After school and on weekends</td>
<td>3.67</td>
<td>3.44</td>
<td>3.35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>During the school day</td>
<td>3.09</td>
<td>3.14</td>
<td>2.89</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The analyses of variances show only one inferable difference in Phase II for gender for the importance of friends during the school day. The mean is a bit higher for females than for males. If the mean is close to 4 this tells us that friends are strongly important.

Similarly, the Phase I and III data demonstrated no differences by gender or family of school. This finding of no differences between gender and family of school over the three Phases signifies how much the importance of friends are less a characteristic of individuals than of the population of young people as a whole. Friends are a primary and continuous element of the transition and only start to diminish slightly once the transition is realized. Friends can make transition easier. The data indicates that transition is a social rather than an individual process.

The Face Sheet then asked students in each Phase to rate, on nine items, their perceptions of school and how they feel there. Table 22 illustrates the general means for each Phase on these items. Over the Phases, the trends in the data are generally the same. We see a small increase for I feel lonely and I feel bored from Phase I to Phase III, though we see positive trends for students liking them, feeling a sense of belonging and feeling safe.
Table 22: Means for variables relating to perception of schools across three Phases
(1=strongly disagree and 4=strongly agree)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Phase I</th>
<th>Phase II</th>
<th>Phase III</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>My school is a place where...</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I make friends easily</td>
<td>3.17</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I feel awkward and out of place</td>
<td>1.65</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I feel like an outsider (left out)</td>
<td>1.53</td>
<td>1.67</td>
<td>1.70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I feel like I belong</td>
<td>3.02</td>
<td>3.02</td>
<td>2.99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I feel lonely</td>
<td>1.55</td>
<td>1.69</td>
<td>1.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I feel popular</td>
<td>2.67</td>
<td>2.57</td>
<td>2.51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other students seem to like me</td>
<td>3.06</td>
<td>3.05</td>
<td>2.98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I like to go</td>
<td>2.95</td>
<td>2.74</td>
<td>2.82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I often feel bored</td>
<td>2.33</td>
<td>2.56</td>
<td>2.66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I get bullied</td>
<td></td>
<td>1.58</td>
<td>1.49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I feel safe</td>
<td>3.03</td>
<td>3.02</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Across the three Phases, the means are remarkably similar (See Table 23). Out of the 54 tests for differences of means, there were only 4 according to gender and 2 according to family of schools. And, all of these are slight. The influence of family of schools appears only in Phase II for the statement other students seem to like me and I often feel bored and in both cases the mean rating was higher in the schools from complex families of schools than in the schools from less complex families. There were 2 differences according to gender in Phase I (I feel awkward and out of place and I feel lonely) and 2 in Phase III (I feel like an outsider (left out) and I like to go). None of them was repeated over the Phases. In Phase I females tend more than males to feel awkward; males more than females to feel lonely. In Phase III, females tend more than males to feel like an outsider and tend more than males to like to go to school. This means that the major pattern is the non-difference between genders and families of schools over the transition. That said, it is useful to note that gender does influence young people in different ways over the course of transition and thus should be taken into account.
The Face Sheets then asked young people for information on ratings of their teachers on items such as helping me learn and caring about me. In Phase I we also asked students to rate how well teachers were doing on giving information about high school and helping with high school decisions. The general means on these items over three Phases are reported in Table 24. What is strikingly evident is the consistency of the means, as they are always close to 3. This reveals that these young people appreciate teachers, but with room for improvement. This reveals also that there are consistencies in these findings over time which means that the spirit of the way in which students evaluate their relationships with their teachers stays the same over the transition. This suggests that from elementary to secondary school there remains a distance which is maintained in their relationships. We should notice specifically that some elementary teachers are not rated very positively in providing high school information and decision making assistance in grade 8.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Phase I</th>
<th>Phase II</th>
<th>Phase III</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>My school is a place where...</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I make friends easily</td>
<td>=</td>
<td>=</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I feel awkward and out of place</td>
<td>F+</td>
<td>=</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I feel like an outsider (left out)</td>
<td>=</td>
<td>=</td>
<td>=</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I feel like I belong</td>
<td>=</td>
<td>=</td>
<td>=</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I feel lonely</td>
<td>M+</td>
<td>=</td>
<td>=</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I feel popular</td>
<td>=</td>
<td>=</td>
<td>=</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other students seem to like me</td>
<td>=</td>
<td>=</td>
<td>C+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I like to go</td>
<td>=</td>
<td>=</td>
<td>F+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I often feel bored</td>
<td>=</td>
<td>=</td>
<td>C+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I get bullied</td>
<td></td>
<td>=</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I feel safe</td>
<td></td>
<td>=</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 23: Tests for differences of means for variables relating to perception of school across the three Phases by gender and family of schools

(1=strongly disagree and 4=strongly agree)

(For gender, F: female and M: male; for family of schools, C: complex and LC: less complex)
### Table 24: Means for variables relating to teacher ratings by students across the three Phases

(Phase I: 1=not good at all and 4=very good)
(Phase II and III: 1=strongly disagree and 4=strongly agree)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Phase I</th>
<th>Phase II</th>
<th>Phase III</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>In general my teachers support my learning</td>
<td>3.12</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>give information on high school</td>
<td>2.98</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>help make high school decisions</td>
<td>2.84</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>easy to talk to</td>
<td>2.92</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>care about my friends</td>
<td>2.89</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>are good teachers</td>
<td>3.14</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>care about me</td>
<td>2.98</td>
<td>2.87</td>
<td>2.94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>let my friends work with me in class</td>
<td>2.68</td>
<td>2.67</td>
<td>2.88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>make learning fun</td>
<td>2.71</td>
<td>2.69</td>
<td>2.63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>are available to talk to outside class</td>
<td></td>
<td>2.91</td>
<td>3.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>help me learn</td>
<td>3.09</td>
<td>3.06</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>encourage me to do well in school</td>
<td>3.15</td>
<td>3.20</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>give me extra help if I need it</td>
<td>3.17</td>
<td>3.16</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Table 25: Means for variables relating to teacher ratings by students across the three Phases

(Phase I: 1=not good at all and 4=very good)
(Phase II and III: 1=strongly disagree and 4=strongly agree)

(For gender, F: female and M: male; for family of schools, C: complex and LC: less complex)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Phase I</th>
<th>Phase II</th>
<th>Phase III</th>
<th>gender</th>
<th>family of school</th>
<th>gender</th>
<th>family of school</th>
<th>gender</th>
<th>family of school</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>In general my teachers support my learning</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>give information on high school</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>help make high school decisions</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>easy to talk to</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>care about my friends</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>are good teachers</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>care about me</td>
<td>F+</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>let my friends work with me in class</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>make learning fun</td>
<td>F+</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>help me learn</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>are available to talk to outside class</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>encourage me to do well in school</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>give me extra help if I need it</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Among the 46 tests for differences in means, 9 were positive. All of these positive results are for gender. In Phase I females provided more favourable ratings of their teachers. In Phase II it was the males who were more favourable. In Phase III we see again that females provide the most positive ratings. As young people go from grade 8 to grade 10, boys and girls appreciate their teachers differently. The fact that none of these differences appear for family of schools suggests that there is no difference in the ways that young people from complex or less complex schools see their teachers.

After having rated their teachers, the young people in each Phase were then asked to rate their schools on nine items (See Table 26). These means are always close to 3 (from above). As we have seen before, this tells us that students tend to appreciate their schools but with room for improvement. But, the means on these items in Phase I show some interesting results. For example, there is a bit of an increase over Phases I (elementary) and II (grade 9) for the ratings of building size, class size, supporting course choices, access to extra-curricular activities, open areas to hang out in, and support for students having trouble in school. Additionally, there was a small decrease over Phases for school attitude/spirit and safety. In general, these findings suggest that the young people in grade 9 seemed to better appreciate these items than did students who were in elementary school in Phase I. These results are maintained in Phase III but very slightly. Any change (however slight) in the means is that occurring between Phases I and II suggesting that young people appreciate much of what high school has to offer them, although they would prefer better school spirit/attitude and safety.

| Table 26: Means for variables relating to school ratings across the three Phases |
|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|
| Variable         | Phase I         | Phase II        | Phase III       |
| Rate your high school for: |                  |                  |                  |
| Building size   | 2.70            | 2.94            | 2.98            |
| Class size      | 2.81            | 2.94            | 3.04            |
| School attitude/spirit | 3.00            | 2.84            | 2.83            |
| Supporting course choices | 2.71            | 2.97            | 3.03            |
| Safety          | 3.11            | 2.90            | 2.96            |
| Using fair tests | 2.89            | 2.96            | 2.89            |
| Student access to extra-curricular activities | 2.98            | 3.21            | 3.19            |
| Open areas for students to "hang out" | 2.56            | 2.95            | 2.87            |
| Support for students having trouble in school | 2.88            | 3.12            | 3.21            |
In both Phases II and III, of the 18 statistical tests run by gender and family of schools, only two tests indicated inferable differences. Both of them were for the same item; *open areas for students to hang out* in which case males tended to appreciate the areas a little bit more than females. These areas were also a bit more highly rated in schools from less complex families than those from complex families of schools. In general, there was no real difference between gender and family of schools on these items. But, it is worth noting that all means for these nine items are close to 3 which reflect the moderate liking of schools by these young people. However, this trend that we notice in *open areas for students to hang out* for family of schools draws our attention given the magnitude of the difference. Indeed, the difference goes from 0.19 in Phase II to 0.53 in Phase III. We can conclude that there is something endearing about the way in which less complex families of schools provide open areas for students, especially for males, even though the effect is small.

In Phase I we observed three inferable differences in the elementary school sample, two by gender and one by family of school. In the case of gender differences, females were more appreciative than males of their class sizes and support for course choices. The young people in less complex families of schools better appreciated the size of their school building than did those in complex families of schools.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Phase I</th>
<th>Phase II</th>
<th>Phase III</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rate your school for...</td>
<td>gender</td>
<td>family of school</td>
<td>gender</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Building size</td>
<td>=</td>
<td>LC+</td>
<td>=</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Class size</td>
<td>F+</td>
<td>=</td>
<td>=</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School attitude/spirit</td>
<td>=</td>
<td>=</td>
<td>=</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supporting course choices</td>
<td>F+</td>
<td>=</td>
<td>=</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Safety</td>
<td>=</td>
<td>=</td>
<td>=</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Using fair tests</td>
<td>=</td>
<td>=</td>
<td>=</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student access to extra-curricular activities</td>
<td>=</td>
<td>=</td>
<td>=</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Open areas for students to &quot;hang out&quot;</td>
<td>=</td>
<td>=</td>
<td>M+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support for students having trouble in school</td>
<td>=</td>
<td>=</td>
<td>=</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The Face Sheets in Phase I asked students to rate (from *not at all* to *very*) how culturally/racially/linguistically/ diverse were the students and teachers at their elementary schools. The mean ratings for student diversity (\( \bar{X} = 3.08 \)) showed an inferable difference by family of school such that there was a little more diversity in
complex than less complex. There were no differences in the ratings for diversity of staff.

The Face Sheets in Phases II and III also asked students to rate their school’s diversity although we reworded the question and asked about four aspects of cultural diversity to make it more comprehensible. In these four items, we noted two inferable differences for family of school in Phase II on: *kids in your school from each other* and *teachers in your school from you*. In each case the mean is slightly higher for ratings in schools from complex families. We also noted one inferable difference for gender on *teachers in your school from other kids* where females scored a bit higher than males (See Table 28). There were no inferable differences in Phase III.

It is worth noting that no means in Phase II or III were higher than 2.65 for any item but none were lower than 2.16. This suggests that students observe some diversity without emphasizing it too much.

### Table 28: Means for variables relating to cultural diversity in school by gender and family of school

#### Phase II

Analysis of variance for 2 factors. If p<.05, then the answer is yes. (1=Strongly disagree and 4=Strongly agree)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>When it comes to things like race, religion and language how different are...</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Family of Schools</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>kids in your school from you?</td>
<td>$\bar{x}$</td>
<td>2.33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>test</td>
<td>$F_{(1;202)}=0.25$; no</td>
<td>$F_{(1;202)}=1.04$; no</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>kids in your school from each other?</td>
<td>$\bar{x}$</td>
<td>2.23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>test</td>
<td>$F_{(1;201)}=1.59$; no</td>
<td>$F_{(1;201)}=4.14$; yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>teachers in your school from you?</td>
<td>$\bar{x}$</td>
<td>2.27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>test</td>
<td>$F_{(1;205)}=3.74$; no</td>
<td>$F_{(1;205)}=4.29$; yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>teachers in your school from other kids?</td>
<td>$\bar{x}$</td>
<td>2.18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>test</td>
<td>$F_{(1;201)}=7.49$; yes</td>
<td>$F_{(1;201)}=2.69$; no</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Youth Ratings of Self, Friends and School by Region

The 6 provincial regions of Ontario covered in the study were the GTA, Ottawa, Windsor, Sudbury/Manitoulin, Thunder Bay and Kapuskasing/Hearst. An analysis using one-way ANOVAs was run for each Phase to test differences in youth ratings by family of school and region. It should be noted that the sample size in Phase III for Thunder Bay and Kapuskasing/Hearst was quite small and we will therefore proceed with caution in the use and interpretation of the data.

There were no inferable differences for any Phases by region for any of the 11 items relating to perceptions of physical characteristics (*I look taller, I look shorter*, etc). However, when it came to rating their friends, there were some interesting differences.

In Phase I there is a difference by region for the item *how important are your friends in class with your learning*. It is for Sudbury that we see the lowest mean ($\bar{x} = 2.75$) and the highest is in Ottawa ($\bar{x} = 3.41$). In Phase II there was a difference by region for this same item *how important are your friends in class with your learning*. In this case, the means were higher for Windsor, Sudbury, Thunder Bay, Kapuskasing/Hearst and Ottawa ($3.06 \leq \bar{x} \leq 3.39$) than they were for the GTA ($\bar{x} = 2.91$). Young people in the GTA suggested that, on average, their friends were less important to their classroom learning than did young people in the other regions. We see no inferable differences in the Phase III data on these items. There are no patterns across the Phases, only statistical events with no consistency. And, these events do not reflect any important inequalities.

Of the nine items relating to the youth rating of schools, there were differences in each Phase. In Phase I there was only one inferable difference for *my school is a place where I feel like I belong*. Means are all between 2.79 and 3.39. This is the only difference and is not repeated in any other item and the difference is not high.

In Phase II, we see differences across regions for three items (*my school is a place where I feel like an outsider, feel lonely, and I feel bored*). In the case of *feeling like an outsider*, all means were lower than 2 which implied that these young people do not tend to feel like outsiders at school. The highest means were found in Ottawa ($\bar{x} = 1.96$), GTA ($\bar{x} = 1.76$), and in Sudbury ($\bar{x} = 1.75$). LSD post-hoc tests distinguished GTA and Ottawa from Windsor, Thunder Bay and Kapuskasing/Hearst ($1.32 \leq \bar{x} \leq 1.47$) and Sudbury from Windsor. This suggests that young people felt less like outsiders at school if they lived in Windsor, Kapuskasing/Hearst and Thunder Bay.

---

34 $F_{(4,242)} = 4.47; p < .01$.
35 $F_{(5,201)} = 2.76; p < .05$.
36 $F_{(4,246)} = 2.99; p < .05$.
37 $F_{(5,201)} = 3.53; p < .01$. 
than they did particularly in the GTA and Ottawa and (to less an extent, but as well as) Sudbury.

There were also differences by region in the case of the ratings for feeling lonely.\textsuperscript{38} where all averages were lower than 2. The GTA (\(\bar{x} = 1.82\)) and Ottawa (\(\bar{x} = 1.84\)) had the highest means and differed from Thunder Bay (\(\bar{x} = 1.50\)) and Kapuskasing/Hearst (\(\bar{x} = 1.29\)) where we observed the two lowest means. Even if loneliness at school is not a strong feeling among these young people (all averages being lower than 2), it is in Kapuskasing/Hearst and Thunder Bay that it was the least observed.

Finally, there were differences observed on the item relating to feeling bored.\textsuperscript{39} While none of the averages were above 2.77 on this item, the analyses revealed three means between 2.77 and 2.68, these are Thunder Bay (\(\bar{x} = 2.70\)), Windsor (\(\bar{x} = 2.71\)) and the GTA (\(\bar{x} = 2.68\)). There was one mean much lower than all others in Kapuskasing/Hearst (\(\bar{x} = 2.00\)) and two averages in-between: Sudbury (\(\bar{x} = 2.45\)); and Ottawa (\(\bar{x} = 2.35\)).

In Phase III, we observe no consistency in these trends and only one was inferable (\textit{my school is a place where I feel lonely}). The inconsistency was tested with Kendall's W wherein the 9 statements were correlated to the level of 0.53. This shows that if the significant analysis of variance for \textit{I feel lonely} was not just an anomaly we would observe that the test would be positive for more than one item.

Grade 9 is so new of an experience, that it is a focal point for difference. The shift from elementary to secondary depends a good deal on the preparation of the students. And this preparation depends again on the milieu in which the school is situated and on the polices that govern and are applied in the schools. This can explain why there are so many differences by region in Phase II. But the evolution within the secondary school itself (from grade 9 to grade 10) is more generalized and evens out because the students and schools adjust within a system that has assimilated them. The practices of school have leveled out between grades 9 and 10. The implication is that that we need to put resources at the right place at the right time. For example we need resources in place before transition (grade 8) as well as after transition (grade 9), and into the adjustment period (grade 10). These resources should be region specific, as our findings indicate that different issues are important in different regions. Provincial attempts at facilitating transition are so far not taking hold as regional differences can still be seen.

The young people also rated 7 items relating to their educators. There were no differences on these items by region for Phases II and III suggesting that region had no effect on the way that young people rate their teachers in grade 9 and 10.

\textsuperscript{38} F(5;198)=2.80;p<.05.
\textsuperscript{39} F(5;201)=3.27;p<.01.
However, in Phase I we see differences by region that adhere to a clear pattern. On all of the items the means are lower in Ottawa and higher for Windsor which shows that youth participants in Ottawa were more doubtful about their educators.

Moreover, region did have an effect on the way in which students rated their schools in Phase I and II, but by Phase III we tend to see these differences even out once more and nearly disappear again for items on school ratings. In Phase I, on the nine items relating to school ratings, there were six observed inferable differences on the following items: class size, school attitude/spirit, support for course choices, access to extra-curricular activities, and support for students having trouble. The pattern is such that the students in Windsor always rated these aspects of school the highest while Sudbury and Thunder Bay are often the lowest. Thunder Bay was the lowest for school climate, class size and support for course choices. Sudbury was the lowest for safety, extra-curricular activities and support for students having trouble at school.

On the nine items relating to school ratings, there were six observed inferable differences in Phase II on the following items: building size, class size, school attitude/spirit, safety, open areas for students to hang out and support for students in trouble. A first, quick glance at these means shows that in every case, Kapuskasing/Hearst have the highest average ratings and GTA the lowest. The only exception to this trend was for class size where the lowest average rating was in Ottawa. Between the highest and the lowest averages the differences range from .49 to .75. These differences are not necessarily large but they do require interpretation. The observation can be made that satisfaction with school tended to be a little bit greater in Kapuskasing/Hearst than in the GTA. All post-hoc tests confirmed this observation except for the item relating to class size where Kapuskasing/Hearst differed from Ottawa. On the item support for students having trouble, Kapuskasing/Hearst ($\bar{x}=3.72$) is distinct from all the other regions ($2.97 \leq \bar{x} \leq 3.21$) with an average significantly higher than all others. For the item relating to school attitude/spirit, GTA ($\bar{x}=2.51$) differs from all of the other regions with a significantly lower average than all other regions ($2.90 \leq \bar{x} \leq 3.28$).

---

40 Among all of the 9 items, $219 \leq df \leq 225$ for the individuals, $2.82 \leq F \leq 6.93$, $p<.05$.
41 $F(4;221)=4.64; p<.01$.
42 $F(4;226)=5.05; p<.01$.
43 $F(4;179)=4.60; p<.01$.
44 $F(4;222)=7.21; p<.001$.
45 $F(4;219)=2.87; p<.05$.
46 $F(4;219)=5.07; p<.01$.
47 $F(5;201)=4.92; p<.001$.
48 $F(5;203)=2.63; p<.05$.
49 $F(5;202)=5.32; p<.001$.
50 $F(5;201)=2.58; p<.05$.
51 $F(5;204)=2.99; p<.05$.
52 $F(5;202)=4.19; p<.001$. 
There were two additional items in Phase I and four additional items in Phases II and III relating to the level of diversity in schools. In Phase I, both of the items show inferable differences such that Windsor, followed by the GTA, has the highest diversity in both cases and the lowest was in Thunder Bay\(^{53}\). In Phase II, only one item was different by region. This item was the diversity of the kids in the school from you\(^ {54}\); with all regions (2.21 ≤ \(\bar{x}\) ≤ 2.43) being equal according to post-hoc tests except Kapuskasing/Hearst ( \(\bar{x} = 1.67\) ) which differed from the five other regions.

In Phase III, there were no differences on diversity of teachers in the school. On the other three items, there were inferable differences such that for diversity of the kids in the school from you\(^ {55}\) and diversity in your school from each other\(^ {56}\) the lowest mean is Sudbury’s ( \(\bar{x} = 1.91\) and 1.87 respectively). In the case of the diversity of kids from you, GTA shows the highest mean ( \(\bar{x} = 2.59\) ) and it is followed by Ottawa ( \(\bar{x} = 2.32\) ). For the item of the diversity of the kids from each other, GTA ( \(\bar{x} = 2.51\) ) and Windsor ( \(\bar{x} = 2.53\) ) show the strongest means. For the final statement relating to the diversity of teachers from the students\(^ {57}\), the highest mean is GTA ( \(\bar{x} = 2.68\) ) and the lowest belongs to Sudbury ( \(\bar{x} = 2.00\) ) and Thunder Bay ( \(\bar{x} = 2.00\) ).

**Youth “In-Risk” Situations for Difficult Transition**

In each of the three Phases, we attempted to find factors that helped to best characterize the important indicators which place students in risk situations for a difficult transition. This was accomplished by selecting the range of variables from “social” “academic” and “school culture” constellations from the Face Sheet and which were also known to us from our literature review as relating to risk factors in transition from elementary to secondary school. These included the following variables:

- family moves, school relocations, socioeconomic status, subjective measures of socioeconomic status (feeling richer/poorer), gender, academic achievement, levels of truancy, family of schools, school ratings (nine items), teacher ratings (seven items).\(^ {58}\)

---

\(^{53}\) Diversity of students: \(F_{(4;219)}=12.69; p<.001\); Diversity of teachers and staff: \(F_{(4;217)}=6.24; p<.001\).

\(^{54}\) \(F_{(5;200)}=2.36; p<.05\).

\(^{55}\) \(F_{(5;113)}=2.55; p<.05\).

\(^{56}\) \(F_{(5;114)}=2.84; p<.05\).

\(^{57}\) \(F_{(5;114)}=2.51; p<.05\).

\(^{58}\) We treated the parent’s education variable (originally ordinal) as an interval variable by inserting them into the analysis. In treating them as interval we increased the possibility of discovering this variable as having a significant influence on the dependent variables. We are therefore giving more chance to the theory being tested.
We then checked for the relation of these “in-risk” situation variables on the young people’s subjective ratings of how they feel at school (my school is a place where... I feel like an outsider, feel lonely, feel bored) and ratings of feeling happy at school. These four variables were treated as virtual indicators of young people’s being at risk for (or currently in process of) having a difficult transition. The less they felt that they belonged, were engaged and happy at school, the more problematic the transition was interpreted to be.

For Phase I, Table 29 shows that our first indicator (my school is a place where I feel like an outsider) varies according to 1 factor only: father’s level of education. Considering the direction of the scales, we see that students are more likely to feel like outsiders when their father’s level of education decreases. This factor explains the only 4% variance in the feeling of being an outsider for the students in grade 8.

Table 29: Multiple regression for variables whose influence appeared to be significant on the dependent variable
My school is a place where I feel like an outsider
Phase I
(Explained Variance (R^2) and standardized coefficient (β))
(for the dependent variable, Likert scale: 1=strongly disagree and 4=strongly agree)
(for father’s education: 1=university and 5=elementary)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Selected independent variables</th>
<th>β</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>p&lt;.05</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Father’s level of education</td>
<td>.21</td>
<td>5.49</td>
<td>yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total R^2=.04</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 30 shows that our second virtual indicator (my school is a place where I feel lonely) varies according to 2 factors. Considering the direction of the scales for the factors, we can see that the higher the student appreciation for open areas at school, the lonelier the student feels and that loneliness is somewhat greater for males than females. However, these 2 variables explain only 8% of their feeling of loneliness at school.

Table 30: Multiple regression for variables whose influence appeared to be significant on the dependent variable
My school is a place where I feel lonely
Phase I
(Explained Variance (R^2) and standardized coefficient (β))
(for the dependent variable, Likert scale: 1=strongly disagree and 4=strongly agree)
(for school ratings, Likert scale: 1=not good at all and 4=very good)
(for gender, 0=female and 1=male)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Selected independent variables</th>
<th>β</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>p&lt;.05</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rating school for open areas</td>
<td>-.25</td>
<td>5.48</td>
<td>yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>-.18</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total R^2=.08</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 31 shows that the third virtual indicator (*my school is a place where I often feel bored*) varied by four factors. Three of them are school ratings and we note that the more the students appreciate the size of the class, building size and school ethos, the less they feel bored. The other factor has to do with performance: the higher the academic average, the less school appears to be boring to students. These three variables explain 22% of the feeling of boredom.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 31: Multiple regression for variables whose influence appeared to be significant on the dependent variable</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>My school is a place where I often feel bored</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Phase I</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Explained Variance ($R^2$) and standardized coefficient ($\beta$))</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(for the dependent variable, Likert scale: 1=strongly disagree and 4=strongly agree)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(for school ratings, Likert scale: 1=not good at all and 4=very good)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Selected independent variables</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rating school for class size</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average at school so far this year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rating school for building size</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rating school for attitude/spirit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total $R^2$=.22</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 32 presents results on the fourth indicator: happiness. In the Face Sheet for Phase I, the variable was not a proposition with a Likert scale as it was in the other two Phases. It was a question: *Would you say that you are happy at school?* There were two possible answers in the questionnaire: (1) yes, (2) no. Since some students checked both answers, a third category has been created: (3) yes and no. This variable is nominal. To examine the influence of independent variables on it, we ran a discriminant analysis and observed that 3 variables were significantly determining: teacher rating for *caring about you*, rating of school about *class size*, and rating of school about its *attitude/spirit*. Canonical correlation was found to be .44. To be able to compare the results on happiness in Phase I with those of the two other Phases, we recoded the question’s answers so that we go from happiness to non-happiness, from yes to no. The yes and no option then becomes an intermediate value and we have a 3 level scale that we treat as interval. We consequently ran a multiple regression analysis and four independent variables were selected as significant. Two of the variables had also been detected by the discriminant analysis: *rating of school for attitude/spirit* and *rating of school for class size*. Therefore, there is consistency between the two analyses. The two other variables were *father’s level of education* and *teacher rating for letting your friends work with you in class*. Students in Phase I are more likely to be happy at school when their father’s level of education decreases, when they like school’s climate and class size, and when their teachers allow them to
work with their friends in class. In grade 8, these four factors explain 25% of the variance of happiness.

### Table 32: Multiple regression for variables whose influence appeared to be significant on the dependent variable

**Would you say that you are happy at school?**

**Phase I**

(Explained Variance (R²) and standardized coefficient (β))

(for the dependent variable, scale: 1=no, 2=yes and no and 3=yes)

(for school and teachers ratings, Likert scale: 1=not good at all and 4=very good)

(for father's education: 1=university and 5=elementary)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Selected independent variables</th>
<th>β</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>p&lt;.05</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Father's level of education</td>
<td>.20</td>
<td>9.96</td>
<td>yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rating school for attitude/spirit</td>
<td>.25</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rating teachers for letting your friends work with you in class</td>
<td>.26</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rating school for class size</td>
<td>.17</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total R²=.25</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In these four Phase I analyses, we explain very little of the two emotions *feeling like an outsider* and *feeling lonely*, respectively 8% and 4%. Our variables were more explanatory in relation with the two other emotions *feeling bored* and *feeling happy*. The explained variances reached 22% and 25%, but not more than that. Family socio-economic status has a slight influence, but most of the variables have to do with student’s evaluation of school and teachers. The way the students feel at school depends on what the school and its teachers have to offer, specifically on the dialectic of relations between the school and students and the teachers and students. But it does not seem to be enough to understand the whole phenomenon of feelings associated with school. Other factors intervene, and these have to do with the complexity of students’ social histories.

We ran the same sets of analysis relating to students in risk for a difficult transition for Phase II. Table 33 shows that our first indicator (*my school is a place where I feel like an outsider*) varies according to five factors. For two of them the correlation is negative (*in general my teachers help to learn*) and (*rating school for support for students having trouble*). This means that the less young people agree that their teachers help them to learn and the less they feel that their school is supportive of students having trouble, the more they feel like an outsider. For three more of the factors the link is positive. Students are more likely to feel like an outsider: (1) if they appreciate the size of their schools; (2) the poorer they feel; and (3) the more they feel the school provides open areas to hang out. This suggests that it may be more difficult to feel like an outsider in a smaller school. These five factors explain 39% of the variance in the feeling of being an outsider.
Table 33: Multiple regression for variables whose influence appeared to be significant on the dependent variable

*My school is a place where I feel like an outsider*

Phase II

(Explained Variance ($R^2$) and standardized coefficient ($\beta$))

(for the dependent variable, Likert scale: 1=strongly disagree and 4=strongly agree)

(for teachers ratings, Likert scale: 1=strongly disagree and 4=strongly agree)

(for school ratings, Likert scale: 1=not good at all and 4=very good)

(for the comparison with school mates, Likert scale: 1=strongly disagree and 4=strongly agree)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Selected independent variables</th>
<th>$\beta$</th>
<th>$F$</th>
<th>p&lt;.05</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rating teachers for helping me to learn</td>
<td>-.29</td>
<td>8.99</td>
<td>yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rating school for building size</td>
<td>.40</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Compared to my school mates I feel poorer</td>
<td>.22</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rating school for support for students having trouble</td>
<td>-.39</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rating school for open areas for students to hang out</td>
<td>.33</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total $R^2$.39</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 34 shows that our second virtual indicator (*my school is a place where I feel lonely*) varies according to three factors. The more times they tended to miss classes and the more they appreciated the size of their schools, the more the young people were likely to feel lonely. The less they felt that their school provided supports for students in trouble, the more they felt lonely. These three factors explained 21% of the variance in the indicator.

Table 34: Multiple regression for variables whose influence appeared to be significant on the dependent variable

*My school is a place where I feel lonely*

Phase II

(Explained Variance ($R^2$) and standardized coefficient ($\beta$))

(for the dependent variable, Likert scale: 1=strongly disagree and 4=strongly agree)

(for school ratings, Likert scale: 1=not good at all and 4=very good)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Selected independent variables</th>
<th>$\beta$</th>
<th>$F$</th>
<th>p&lt;.05</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>How many times missed/cut classes</td>
<td>.29</td>
<td>6.35</td>
<td>yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rating school for support for students having trouble</td>
<td>-.32</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rating school for building size</td>
<td>.29</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total $R^2$.21</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 35 shows that our third virtual indicator (*my school is a place where I often feel bored*) varied by three factors. The relation was positive with two factors; how many times missed/cut classes and rating school access for extra-curricular activities. The
more the young people tended to miss/cut classes and the more they appreciated their school access to extra-curricular activities, the more they felt bored. The relation was negative with one factor; the less the young person felt that their teachers were available to talk to outside the class, the more they felt bored.

Table 35: Multiple regression for variables whose influence appeared to be significant on the dependent variable

*My school is a place where I often feel bored*

**Phase II**

(Explained Variance (R²) and standardized coefficient (β))

(for the dependent variable, Likert scale: 1=strongly disagree and 4=strongly agree)

(for teachers ratings, Likert scale: 1=strongly disagree and 4=strongly agree)

(for school ratings, Likert scale: 1=not good at all and 4=very good)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Selected independent variables</th>
<th>β</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>p&lt;.05</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>How many times missed/cut classes</td>
<td>.42</td>
<td>9.01</td>
<td>yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rating teachers for availability to talk to outside class</td>
<td>-.29</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rating school for access to extra-curricular activities</td>
<td>.23</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total R²=.27</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 36 shows that our virtual indicator (*I am happy at school*) varied by three factors, all of them being in a positive direction with the indicator. The more young people think that their teachers make learning fun, the more they appreciate the attitude or spirit of the school, and the higher their grades, the happier they are at school.

Table 36: Multiple regression for variables whose influence appeared to be significant on the dependent variable

*I am happy at school*

**Phase II**

(Explained Variance (R²) and standardized coefficient (β))

(for the dependent variable, Likert scale: 1=never disagree and 4=always)

(for teachers ratings, Likert scale: 1=strongly disagree and 4=strongly agree)

(for school ratings, Likert scale: 1=not good at all and 4=very good)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Selected independent variables</th>
<th>β</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>p&lt;.05</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Teachers rating for making learning fun</td>
<td>.32</td>
<td>7.96</td>
<td>yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average grades at school so far this year</td>
<td>.27</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rating school for attitude/spirit</td>
<td>.21</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total R²=.25</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
These four analyses on Phase II reveal the importance of the influence of school 7 times and the influence of the teacher 3 times. It seems that the support and availability of educators is a determinant of a positive transitional state. Surprisingly, it seems that for some students, the more their school provides open areas and extra-curricular activities the more it can be problematic; the reason likely being that it also becomes possible for them to be excluded. We should also mention that no objective measures of social class were revealed to be significant and yet the subjective indicator “I feel poorer” appeared only once and this was the only socio-demographic factor which was significant. This means that school and educator factors nearly eliminated other factors from our risk indicator.

However we did observe some intuitively understandable results such that the more students miss school the more they feel lonely and bored at school; similarly, the better their grades and the better the school spirit, the more frequent was student happiness at school. We also noted that the explained variances ranged from 21% to 39%. Of course several other factors can therefore influence the virtual indicators of transition which is revealed by the fact at least 60% of the variances remained unexplained. But, this proportion of explained variances is not negligible and simply emphasizes the importance of the student-educator relationships and school resources. The Focus Group and Interview data helped to shed light on the remaining unexplained variances, factors and processes.

We then ran this same set of analysis for Phase III data. In Phase III, for the first indicator (my school is a place where I feel like an outsider), the analysis of variance detected only one independent variable which was the ability from the students’ point of view for teachers to make learning fun. The variable explained 9% of the emotion: the more young people think that their teachers make learning fun, the less they feel like outsiders (See Table 37).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 37: Multiple regression for variables whose influence appeared to be significant on the dependent variable</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>My school is a place where I feel like an outsider</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phase III</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Explained Variance (R²) and standardized coefficient (β))</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(for the dependent variable, Likert scale: 1=strongly disagree and 4=strongly agree)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(for teachers ratings, Likert scale: 1=strongly disagree and 4=strongly agree)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Selected independent variables</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers rating for making learning fun</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>β</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>p&lt;.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>.30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total R²=.09</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 38 shows that our second virtual indicator (My school is a place where I feel lonely) was determined by 1 factor. This variable is the school spirit. The relation is negative in the sense that when the students tend to appreciate their school climate,
they disagree with the proposition that says they feel lonely. The school ethos explains 13% of the emotion variations.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 38: Multiple regression for variables whose influence appeared to be significant on the dependent variable</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>My school is a place where I feel lonely</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Phase III</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Explained Variance ($R^2$) and standardized coefficient ($\beta$))</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(for the dependent variable, Likert scale: 1=strongly disagree and 4=strongly agree)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(for school ratings, Likert scale: 1=not good at all and 4=very good)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Selected independent variables</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rating school for attitude/spirit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$\beta$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-.36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$F$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11.21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$p&lt;.05$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total $R^2=.13$</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 39 shows that a third virtual indicator (*my school is a place where I often feel bored*) varied by 4 factors: overall average in Grade 10 (1st semester), rating of school for spirit, rating teachers for providing help in learning, and rating school for supporting course choices. The correlations are as follows: (1) the greater the academic performance; (2) the more appreciative of school climate; (3) the more helpful the teachers; and (4) the more supportive the school about course choices, the less students feel bored at school, and thus 36% of the variance was so explained.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 39: Multiple regression for variables whose influence appeared to be significant on the dependent variable</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>My school is a place where I often feel bored</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Phase III</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Explained Variance ($R^2$) and standardized coefficient ($\beta$))</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(for the dependent variable, Likert scale: 1=strongly disagree and 4=strongly agree)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(for school ratings, Likert scale: 1=not good at all and 4=very good)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(for teachers ratings, Likert scale: 1=strongly disagree and 4=strongly agree)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Selected independent variables</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overall average in Grade 10 1st semester</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$\beta$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-.41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$F$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$p&lt;.05$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rating school for attitude/spirit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$\beta$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-.23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rating teachers for help to learn</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$\beta$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-.40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rating school for support for course choices</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$\beta$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-.31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total $R^2=.36$</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The last indicator is *I am happy at school*. The analysis of variance finds 3 predictors for the emotion and shows that the higher the students’ average, the more they feel
that their teachers make learning fun and the richer they feel compared to classmates, the happier they are. These factors explained 23% of the feeling of happiness (See Table 40).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 40: Multiple regression for variables whose influence appeared to be significant on the dependent variable</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I am happy at school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phase III</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Explained Variance ($R^2$) and standardized coefficient ($\beta$))</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(for the dependent variable Likert scales: 1=never and 4=always)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(for teacher ratings and subjective social class rating, Likert scales: 1=strongly disagree and 4=strongly agree)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(for school ratings Likert scales: 1=not good at all and 4=very good)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Selected independent variables</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overall average in Grade 10 1st semester</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rating teachers for making learning fun</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Compared to my classmates, I feel richer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total $R^2$=.23</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In these four Phase III analyses, explained variance oscillated between .09 and .36. It was higher for feeling bored and feeling happy, these emotions being less symbolically charged than feeling like an outsider or feeling lonely. A socioeconomic factor appears only once, and it is subjective; it influences happiness. All other independent variables have to do with school: climate, grades, school help, teachers help, and teachers making learning fun. All of these factors are important from a statistical point of view. But semantically, they are parts of correlations, they are bidirectional events. If you have good grades, you like school; but if you like school, you have good grades. If teachers make learning fun, you are happy; but if you are happy, you are more likely to feel that your teachers make learning fun. This is a matter of perception, a system in which the institutions, teachers and students all play a role. And all these roles are not sufficient to make student’s life at school happy, because other factors are also involved.

In summary, our analyses on youth in risk for a difficult transition specified four indicators of a difficult transition: *I feel like an outsider, I feel lonely, I feel bored at school,* and ratings of *feeling happy at school.* We have searched for variables that are associated with these indicators in each of the three Phases. In order to do so, we have run selective multiple regression analyses. These twelve analyses have revealed some important elements.

Only a handful of all the independent variables that have been inserted in the analyses appeared to have a significant influence. Socio-economic ones have little or no effect. Most of the determinant variables are absolutely related to daily school life.
Students’ opinion seems to be constructed by the way they perceive their class size, their school climate, their school size, their teachers ability to make learning fun, their teacher’s willingness to talk to them after class, their school extracurricular activities, their school support if they have trouble, their school open areas for hanging out, and their teachers help in learning. This clearly means that the better you perceive your school to be, the better you feel at school. The feeling is based on what school has to offer, but it depends as well on itself, since it necessarily has an influence on the way school is perceived. The appearance of grades in the correlation is symptomatic of the phenomenon: the better your grades, the happier you are at school; but the happier you are at school, the better your grades. We are dealing with multilateral events, not with a causal logic.

To enhance the student experience of transition, we must facilitate the whole and complex relation between the students and the numerous components of the school, not the simply the school itself. Facilitating the everyday experiences in classrooms and schools is necessary but not sufficient to make the transition better. It is important to keep in mind that the explained variance of the four indicators by all these variables is never higher than 39%, which means that several other factors have an impact on them. The Focus Group and Interview data help to illuminate some of these influences and how they operate in the lives of young people in transition.

In Phase I, the grade 8 students most wanted their teachers to let them work with their friends in class. When this happened the students were most happy at school. In Phase II, missing or cutting class is correlated with loneliness and feeling bored at school. Phase III grade 10 students noted the importance of the school providing support for course choices as relating their level of happiness at school. These findings indicate how the young people's needs changed over the course of transition and how important it is to pay attention to trends in truancy for grade 9 students- to prevent the “normalized” urge to miss and cut classes. We should note that educators ratings of their schools (as presented below) shows that that supports for students who are missing school are less than optimal over the course of transition.

Youth Relocation and Changing Schools

In each of the three Phases we asked young people how often they had changed schools and moved in their life. In Phase I, the most frequent response from the elementary students was that they had never moved (n=53; 20.9%). However, another 43 (17.0%) had moved once, 35 (13.8%) had moved twice, 34 (13.4%) had moved three times, 24 (9.5%) had moved four times and 22 (8.7%) had move five times. The rest of the group had moved more than five times (42; 16.6%). Of these, one student also reported to have moved 27 times. Of the students in Phase I, 89 (42.6%) had never changed schools. There were 23 (11.0%) students who had changed schools more than 3 times and 13 (6.2%) had changed schools more than
five times. No differences were found by gender, family of schools or region for changing schools\textsuperscript{59} or for the number of times they had moved in their lives.\textsuperscript{60}

We then wished to see if student moves or school changes were correlated with feelings about school, ratings of teachers, ratings of schools and happiness. Three associations were revealed between the number of time the students had changed schools, on the one hand, and school emotions: feeling like an outsider\textsuperscript{61}, feeling popular\textsuperscript{62}, and feeling like belonging\textsuperscript{63}, on the other hand. These correlations show that the more students have changed elementary schools, the more they tend to feel like outsiders, the less they tend to feel popular or to belong at school (though, these 3 relations are weak).

Another significant item was for teacher rating for support for learning\textsuperscript{64} such that the more they moved, the more highly they tend to rate teacher support for learning. We did not observe any other significant correlations. This means that changing of schools or moving does not greatly impact on the way young people feel in their school, the way they rate their schools or the way they rate their teachers. But, it does have some influence on their feelings related to school. The correlation between the number of moves and of changes of school was .41 (Kendall’s tau-b)\textsuperscript{65}. The more you move, the more you changed school. But because it is only of .41, this means that young people can move without changing schools or change schools without moving.

In Phase II only 9% (n=19) of the young people had never moved between schools. Of these young people 16 were in English-language schools and 3 in French-language schools. There were 72 young people (34.3%) who reported having changed schools more than three times and 14.3% more than 5 times.

The Face Sheet also asked the Phase II students how many times they had moved over the course of their life. The answers ranged from 0 to 20 times, but only 19.5% of the students had moved more than 5 times; 52.7% had moved less than three times. The Face Sheet also asked how often the young people had changed schools. The answers ranged from 0 to >5 times with 85.7% of the students having changed schools less than 6 times. It is worth noting that 19 students (9.0%) reported never having changed schools. We have recoded the variable relating to the number of moves so that values from “6-20” became one value; “more than 5 times” in order to make more comparable this with the variable relating to changing schools. The

\textsuperscript{59} Gender : F\textsubscript{(1,205)}=.83; p=.37; family of school: F\textsubscript{(1,205)}=.56; p=.46; region: F\textsubscript{(4,204)}=.71; p=.59.
\textsuperscript{60} Gender: F\textsubscript{(1,249)}=2.26; p=.13; family of school: F\textsubscript{(1,249)}<.01; p=.96; region: F\textsubscript{(4,248)}=.78; p=.54.
\textsuperscript{61} Kendall’s tau-b=.12; p<.05.
\textsuperscript{62} Kendall’s tau-b=.19; p<.05.
\textsuperscript{63} Kendall’s tau-b=.14; p<.05.
\textsuperscript{64} Kendall’s tau-b=.14; p<.05.
\textsuperscript{65} p<.001.
correlation between these two variables is moderate and positive\textsuperscript{66}. This means that the trend is that the more the students moved, the more they changed schools but it is not because they change schools that they moved. Students do not necessarily need to move to change schools.

To be consistent with the previous analysis, we then tested to see if there was a relationship between these two variables and gender, region and family of schools. There were no inferable differences such that means did not ever vary according to these independent variables.\textsuperscript{67} The means for moving or changing schools were the same without consideration for gender, region or family of schools. Therefore, mobility was similar across all regions.

We then wished to see if student moves or school changes were correlated with feelings about school, ratings of teachers, ratings of schools and happiness. We did not observe any significant correlations for any of these items. This means that changing of schools or moving did not impact on the way young people felt in their school, the way they rate their schools or the way they rate their teachers. Neither did they impact on their feelings of happiness at school. They did not even impact on their grades at school.

As in Phase I, we did observe one weak and positive correlation (Kendall’s tau-b=.15; p<.05) which in Phase II was between students missing/cutting classes and the number of moves they had made over their life. The more they moved, the greater the number of times they missed/cut classes. We similarly observed a weak and positive correlation (Kendall’s tau-b=.12; p<.05) for number of school changes and missing/cutting classes. Again, this means that the more they changed schools, the more likely they are to miss classes.

We also asked how often they had moved in their life in Phase III. The most frequent response from the grade 10 students was that they had never moved (n=31; 25.6%). However, another 30 (24.8%) had moved once, 19 (15.7%) had moved twice, 16 (13.2%) had moved three times, 10 (8.3%) had moved four times and 5 (4.1%) had moved five times. The rest of the group had moved more than 5 times (10; 7.3%). Of these, one student also reported to have moved 13 times. Between the 2 variables, the correlation was .37. As in Phases I and II, it was positive and relatively feeble: the more you move the more you change schools, but you can also change schools without moving and vice versa. Moves for the grade 10 students were slightly related to cutting or missing classes\textsuperscript{68} but this was not so with changes of schools.\textsuperscript{69}

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{itemize}
\item[66] Kendall’s tau-b=.48; p<.001.
\item[67] Means for times moved: gender: \(F_{(1,183)}=.59\); p=.45; family of school: \(F_{(1,183)}=.31\); p=.58; region: \(F_{(5,183)}=1.40\); p=.23. Means for school changes: gender: \(F_{(1,188)}<.01\); p=.95; family of school: \(F_{(5,188)}=.07\); p=.80; region: \(F_{(5,188)}=.83\); p=.53.
\item[68] Kendall’s tau-b=.20; p<.01.
\item[69] Kendall’s tau-b=.08; p=.30.
\end{itemize}
\end{footnotesize}
Of the students in Phase III, only 9 (7.2%) had never changed schools. Most students had changed schools at least once. Given that they were now in grade 10, this is not surprising. Several have changed twice (n=29; 24.8%) or three times (n=34; 29.1%). There were 24 (20.5%) students who had changed schools more than 3 times and 4 (3.4%) had changed schools more than five times. Gender, family of schools and region have no impact on either moves\textsuperscript{70} or changes of school\textsuperscript{71}.

Numerous correlations have been calculated between moves and changes of schools, on one side, and feeling about schools, ratings of teachers and ratings of schools, on the other. Only two appeared to be inferable, both according to moves. One was with my school is a place where I often feel bored\textsuperscript{72} and the other was with teachers rating for letting friends work with me in class\textsuperscript{73}. Both correlations are weak and anomalous so it is preferable to treat them more as accidents than important phenomena.

**The Emotional Paradox of Transition for Youth**

In each of the three Phases, we provided the young people with a sheet which depicted a range of emotions as illustrated by human faces and asked them to circle any or all that characterized their current feelings about their transition into high school. The analysis of this data shows the presence of an emotional paradox that continues over grade 8, grade 9 and grade 10. While the character and range of emotions has shifted over time, the presence of the fact of the paradox remains stable.

In Phase I, the 256 young people circled, on average, 5.01 faces (s=2.26), which indicates that the transition is not a process that produces easily captured emotions. The young people in grade 8 (Phase I), demonstrated an emotional paradox of feelings about transition on their Face Sheets, just as in they did in their Focus Group discussions. When they were asked to list how they were currently feeling about the prospect of going to high school, 65% of the students first noted happy or positive feelings, while only 33% noted anxious or negative feelings. For those who listed a second emotion, 53% wrote a happy or positive one. The majority of students, who listed more than one response, demonstrated an emotional paradox by noting both positive and negative feelings.

Seven emotions seemed to reflect the students’ experience in Phase I more than others (See Table 41). First there was happiness and hope about making the transition to high school. Then there was anxiety and fear which may have been

\textsuperscript{70} Gender: \(F_{(1;117)}=.<01; p=.93;\) family of school: \(F_{(1;117)}=.02; p=.88;\) region: \(F_{(5;115)}=1.35; p=.25.\)

\textsuperscript{71} Gender: \(F_{(1;112)}=.<.01; p=.98;\) family of school: \(F_{(1;112)}=3.26; p=.07;\) region: \(F_{(5;111)}=1.01; p=.42.\)

\textsuperscript{72} Kendall’s tau-b=.22; \(p<.01.\)

\textsuperscript{73} Kendall’s tau-b=-.26; \(p<.01.\)
fuelled by the unknown. Next were confidence, confusion and embarrassment; while they were confident in some respects, it was not because they felt complete certainty. It is important to note that these seven emotions dominated and coexisted in the responses of students in Phase I.

In Phase II, the 215 young people in grade 9 were again asked to talk about their feelings regarding their transition into high school by circling as many faces as they wanted on our Face Sheet “sheet of emotions”. On average, the young people in Phase II circled 4.16 faces (s=2.20). In Phase II, while we see some similarities, there are also some important differences (See Table 41). For instance, happiness remained the dominant emotion. While both hope and confidence were also often circled, confidence was more prominent and hope less prominent for students in Phase II than in Phase I. Anxiety and fear remained an important part of the grade 9 students’ emotional paradox but less so than the year before. As may be expected, feelings of caution and embarrassment about transition were rated with less frequency, although caution was certainly still an important part of Phase II response set. Frustration should also be noticed in the grade 9 responses, as should the fact that it seemed to be more important part of the emotional set than it was in Phase I.

The results from Phases I and II suggest the emotional complexity surrounding the processes of transition from elementary to secondary school. This complexity and paradox remain, even though certain emotional elements shift in their relative importance for the groups.

In Phase III (Table 41), students circled an average of 3.77 faces (s=2.71). The most identified one was happy (61.3%) and it was followed in a descending order by faces representing confidence (56.5%), hope (32.3%), boredom (28.2%), frustration (27.4%), anxiety (23.4%), and confusion (22.6%). All others were below 20%. The 3 most dominant ones were positive, the others, if their percentage is over 20%, are considered to be negative.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Emotion Circled</th>
<th>Phase I (n=228)</th>
<th>Phase II (210≤n≤211)</th>
<th>Phase III (n=124)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Happy</td>
<td>Yes 72.7</td>
<td>Yes 75.8</td>
<td>Yes 61.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Confident</td>
<td>46.7</td>
<td>53.6</td>
<td>56.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hopeful</td>
<td>44.9</td>
<td>41.0</td>
<td>32.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ecstatic</td>
<td>28.6</td>
<td>15.6</td>
<td>10.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Suspicious</td>
<td>14.7</td>
<td>14.2</td>
<td>11.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cautious</td>
<td>26.5</td>
<td>19.4</td>
<td>12.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bored</td>
<td>8.6</td>
<td>28.4</td>
<td>28.2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 41: Faces expressing emotions reflecting the student’s feelings about the transition to secondary school circled or not circled
From Phase I to Phase III, the average number of circled faces diminished from 5.01 to 4.16 and 3.77. In opposition, the standard deviation increased from 2.26 in Phase I, to 2.71 in Phase III. This means that the emotional system became less complex in general over time but, at the same time, more specific to individuals than to the whole group.

The situation as a whole has changed. Among the positive feelings like happy, confident, hopeful and ecstatic, we note 3 diminutions of the proportions; there is an increase only for being confident (from 46.7% to 56.5%). If students, two years after transition, are less numerous in circling happy, hopeful and ecstatic, they are more numerous in indicating confidence.

Emotions are less specific to transition two years after grade 8. In Phase I, there were four emotions over 40%; in Phase III, there are only two. In many ways it is a sign of healthy adaptation to secondary school, of particularisation of the students' histories, a de-dramatization of the transition through becoming a post-transition individual. These trends are reflected by the proportions of emotions expressed from Phase I to Phase III. Percentages, indeed, augment for bored, overwhelmed, disgusted, angry, enragèd, frustrated, and depressed. But, they diminish for suspicious, cautious, confused, anxious, hysterical, frightened, sad, lonely, and embarrassed. Less variability in student responses from Phase I to Phase III reflects a more grounded school experience, which is understandable as students move from pre-transition in grade 8 to transition adjustment in grade 10.

By the beginning of the last year the transition is no more a real emotional concern but the students in grade 10 have a different set of feelings related to transition are less intense. Transition is most emotionally laden in grades 8 and 9 and the implication is that focus of the emotional issues in transition should be most pointed at this juncture.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Emotion</th>
<th>Phase I</th>
<th>Phase II</th>
<th>Phase III</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Confused</td>
<td>28.6</td>
<td>31.8</td>
<td>22.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anxious</td>
<td>57.1</td>
<td>39.8</td>
<td>23.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overwhelmed</td>
<td>13.1</td>
<td>18.5</td>
<td>17.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hysterical</td>
<td>5.3</td>
<td>3.8</td>
<td>4.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disgusted</td>
<td>2.0</td>
<td>2.4</td>
<td>8.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frightened</td>
<td>29.0</td>
<td>14.7</td>
<td>7.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Angry</td>
<td>2.0</td>
<td>7.1</td>
<td>10.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enraged</td>
<td>1.6</td>
<td>2.4</td>
<td>3.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frustrated</td>
<td>9.8</td>
<td>17.5</td>
<td>27.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Depressed</td>
<td>5.3</td>
<td>9.5</td>
<td>12.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sad</td>
<td>16.3</td>
<td>5.2</td>
<td>8.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lonely</td>
<td>10.2</td>
<td>4.3</td>
<td>7.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Embarrassed</td>
<td>24.1</td>
<td>9.5</td>
<td>11.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Youth Perceptions about and Participation in Activities

We asked the young people to list their “healthy and unhealthy” activities that they engage in every week in open-ended responses on the Face Sheet. In Phase I, we reported that the most frequently stated healthy behaviour, as listed first out of three by 171 young people (68%), was physical activity in sports or fitness. This was followed by good nutrition (n=44; 18%). This trend in reporting was also reflected in the Phase II responses. Virtually all of the students in grade 9 (Phase II) reported “physical activity in sports or fitness” as a healthy activity that they did every week. In addition, half of the students reported “good nutrition” as a healthy activity in which they engaged every week. By Phase III, the grade 10 cohort provided similar responses. Over three-quarters (n=91; 75.8%) reported “physical activity in sports/fitness” as the most frequent of their first of three responses and an additional 15.2% (n=19) reported nutrition.

The unhealthy behaviours listed in Phase I (elementary school) were; eating bad/junk food, sitting in front of screens (games, video and TV), and avoiding fitness. In Phase II the responses were exactly the same such that “bad nutrition” was mentioned by 112 students and “too much technology” was mentioned by 110 students. This did not change much by Phase III where almost half (n=56; 49.1%) of the grade 10 cohort responded that “bad nutrition” was their most frequent unhealthy activity. This was followed by “too much technology” (n=33; 28.9%) and “bad habits” (n=9; 7.9%).

We asked student to list the teams/clubs and/or activities. The young people in Phase I were highly involved in sports and physical activities with over 83% (n=184) of them providing indication of some form of school participation in team or individual sport. This was echoed in the Phase I Focus Group discussion with many of the young people hoping to stay in or join sports and teams as they move into high school. In Phase II we see that only 47.9% of the whole sample reported participating in sports and activities at school. The most frequent was “team sports” followed by (with much less frequency) “social clubs”. It is also worth noting that 77 students (31.8%) responded that they were doing “nothing” or no school activities. This was also true in Phase III where 30.6% (n=34) were not involved in any activities. However, overall participation was higher in grade 10 than grade 9 with 74% of the sample in “team sports” and 30.7% in “social clubs”.

We also asked the students in grade 10 to list their activities from grade 7/8, grade 9 and grade 10. If we analyze only the first instance of their answers we see that the most frequent in grade 7/8 was team sports with 70.1% (n=82) having participated with social clubs and “none” following with 11.1% (n=13) each. However, when in grade 9, these same students were still most frequently involved in team sports but the proportion had dropped to 43.9% (n=50) of them and “none” becomes next most frequent with 31.6% (n=36) doing nothing in grade 9. Their current participation in
grade 10, in the first instance, remained most often in team sports (43.2%; n=48) followed by “none” (30.6%; n=34) and social clubs (13.5%; n=15).

Clearly, there is room to broaden the range of school activities for young people as they move into high school. The drop in participation is set against the background of young people hoping for more teams and clubs as they enter high school and their appreciation for extra-curricular activities as necessary social events. Even if available, however, there is a group of students who are consistently not participating.

**Goals and Opinions about School and Transition**

We asked students in each Phase to list up to three main goals that they had set for themselves at school this year. In each Phase the most frequent responses were by far relating to academics. In Phase I, school was seen as place for learning; the young people knew it, and their goals reflected that. Considerations such as extra-curricular activities, self-discovery and social aspects of school were relatively rare responses for this question in Phase I. They rely on school to meet their academic goals and also hope to see these goals assisted by social means.

In Phase II, students mentioned up to three separate goals they had set for grade 9 with 147 students mentioning only one main goal and only 16 students mentioning three goals. Grades were a goal per se for 108 students and the first goal for 93 students. The second most frequent was furthering education mentioned by 77 students and doing well was mentioned by 44 students. In Phase III, the data is very similar with 115 students mentioning only one goal; grades being the most frequent (n=82; 73%). The other two most frequent response also reflect academic goals; “doing well” and “furthering education” (n=12; 10.4% in each case). We also asked the students in grade 10 to speak about their goals for the following year, grade 11. There is little change in these responses with the most frequent being “grades”, “furthering education” and “doing well” in turn.

Given the importance of academic achievement as the main educational goal for students across the transition, the “best” and “worst’ things about going to/being in high school are of also interest in how school can best help them reach these goals. We asked these open-ended questions to students in each Phase (See Table 42).
Table 42: The Three “Best” and “Worst” Aspects of High School by Phase

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Phase I About going into high school</th>
<th>Phase II About being in high school</th>
<th>Phase III About being in high school</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. Fresh start</td>
<td>2. Getting older/status</td>
<td>2. Getting older/status</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In Phase I, the “best things” about going to high school were listed as social/friends, followed by a new mature status/fresh start, followed by extra-curricular activities. The “worst things” were listed as potential social problems and pressures including bullying, followed by heavy work load, followed by leaving elementary school behind. The order of the answers for Phases II and III are somewhat different. Students in grade 9 indicated up to four items for the “worst parts” of being in high school with 170 having mentioned only one worst aspect. Twenty-six students could not indicate any “worst aspect” of high school and wrote “nothing” on the Face Sheet. The most frequently mentioned of the “worst elements” of being in high school was “workload” (n=106), followed by “social issues” (n=32) and the school being “bigger but not better” than elementary school (n=31), “bullying” (n=10) and “peer pressure” (n=10), and being late and lost (n=9). If we combine the social pressures, social issues and bullying, the “social” category equals 52 responses. This is still lower than workload which was the second most frequent concern in Phase I and has become the most frequent in Phase II and Phase III. In Phase III, the students in grade 10 mirrored those in grade 9 and additionally mentioned troubling social aspects and the fact that their school is bigger, but not better than elementary school.

Students in Phase II mentioned up to four best things about being in high school with social/friends being the most frequent (n=132), followed by getting older/growing up (n=50), extra-curricular activities (n=28), course selections/courses (n=19), and “fresh start” (n=15). In general, many expectations of the young people in Phase I were met as they moved into high school in Phase II. The responses for Phase III were once again the same as for Phase II.

We also asked the students in each Phase to write down the three top responses to what is good/bad about their school. In Phase I we asked them two separate questions: What is good/bad about your elementary school? What is (may be) good/bad about high school? Tables 43 and 44 show the range of responses for each question from Phase I participants.
Table 43: The top three “good” features of elementary school for Phase I

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>%</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friends</td>
<td>23.5</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other students/classmates</td>
<td>8.8</td>
<td>25.8</td>
<td>4.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sports, arts, music, trips</td>
<td>20.6</td>
<td>29.0</td>
<td>16.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good pedagogy and teaching</td>
<td>17.6</td>
<td>12.9</td>
<td>24.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers are nice and caring</td>
<td>8.8</td>
<td>16.1</td>
<td>20.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Freedom and fun</td>
<td>5.9</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>4.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Belonging, nice people</td>
<td>5.9</td>
<td>6.5</td>
<td>12.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good academic programs</td>
<td>5.9</td>
<td>3.2</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School spirit</td>
<td>2.9</td>
<td>6.5</td>
<td>12.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School building itself</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>8.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 44: The top three “bad” features of elementary school for Phase I

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>%</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other students and classmates</td>
<td>20.0</td>
<td>21.4</td>
<td>10.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bullying and violence</td>
<td>25.7</td>
<td>10.7</td>
<td>10.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physical environment/funding</td>
<td>28.6</td>
<td>32.1</td>
<td>31.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pedagogy and teaching</td>
<td>20.0</td>
<td>25.0</td>
<td>31.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>3.6</td>
<td>5.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bad courses and programs</td>
<td>2.9</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>10.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poor school spirit</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School building itself</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>8.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 45 and 46 show a comparison of the top answer for the “good” and “bad” features of high school across Phases I, II and III. It should be noted that in Phase I, no students mentioned academic programs in their top choice of “good” features of high school. However, 29% of young people mentioned these features as their second top “good” feature. It is also worth noting that the Phase III participants added “administrators” with teachers in their categorizations of negative aspects of high school.
Table 45: The top “good” feature of high school across three Phases

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Phase I %</th>
<th>Phase II %</th>
<th>Phase III %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Friends/classmates</td>
<td>18.7</td>
<td>40.4</td>
<td>33.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sports, arts, music, trips</td>
<td>25.0</td>
<td>13.5</td>
<td>13.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good pedagogy and teaching</td>
<td>15.6</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers are nice and caring</td>
<td>9.4</td>
<td>12.0</td>
<td>16.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Freedom and fun (growing up)</td>
<td>3.1</td>
<td>4.8</td>
<td>1.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Belonging, nice people, support</td>
<td>6.3</td>
<td>2.4</td>
<td>1.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good academic programs/ courses</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>14.4</td>
<td>18.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School building and environment</td>
<td>9.4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School structure, rules, hours</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>7.7</td>
<td>12.2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 46: The top “bad” feature of high school across three Phases

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Phase I %</th>
<th>Phase II %</th>
<th>Phase III %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Other students and classmates</td>
<td>6.5</td>
<td>8.8</td>
<td>23.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bullying and violence</td>
<td>41.9</td>
<td>10.9</td>
<td>1.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drugs/alcohol/pressure</td>
<td>32.3</td>
<td>10.4</td>
<td>10.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Workload</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>12.4</td>
<td>5.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers (administrators)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>19.7</td>
<td>23.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bad courses and programs</td>
<td>3.2</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>2.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School structure (hours, rules, location)</td>
<td>6.5</td>
<td>24.7</td>
<td>18.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Big change</td>
<td>3.2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sports and extra-curricular</td>
<td>4.7</td>
<td>2.7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nothing</td>
<td>3.2</td>
<td>0.5</td>
<td>1.8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In summary, students in all Phases of transition focussed their goals at school in the academic rather than the social realm. However, when it comes to their perspectives on the realities of high school, they see the issues of workload as the worst aspect of high school just as they had contemplated it would be when they were in grade 8. This seems to have come to pass in high school, just as did their notion that social issues would be a problematic aspect of high school. However,
young people also named the social/friend aspects of school as the very best and among the top good thing about it and this did not change over the transition. Neither did their feelings change about making a fresh start and gaining new status as another real benefit of high school. It should also be noted that leaving elementary school behind for schools that were later found to be “bigger and not better” is a theme that emerged in their responses to the worst aspects of high school. Students also appreciated the extra-curricular aspects of high school but named social pressures and bullying as bad aspects.

In Phase III, we also asked the students in grade 10 to reflect on the process of transition from their vantage point. Many of them (61.4%; n=70) said that they did not feel that students are still adjusting to transition in grade 10. This can be contrasted to the responses of their parents and educators (reported below) who were much more likely to feel the transition was ongoing in grade 10. The reasons the young people provided for their response were that they had already settled in, knew what to expect and that the adjustment was limited to grade 9 whereas now it was easier. Of the 37.7% that said that they did feel that there was an ongoing adjustment in grade 10, their reasons included the process of social adjustments of these adolescent years and the notion that there is ongoing “self-discovery” in becoming more mature. A small number also mentioned their ongoing academic adjustments which were being made in grade 10.

We also asked these young people in Grade 10 about the top three things students needed to make a successful transition to high school. Table 47 shows that there are social, self, academic and school constellations that were reported by the students with the self, social and homework aspects being most frequent.

Table 47: Young People rating top three things students need for a successful transition

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>First (n=111)</th>
<th>Second (n=102)</th>
<th>Third (n=76)</th>
<th>Totals</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Self (courage, humour, honesty, managing time, etc)</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>111</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social/friends</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Homework</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Families</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Welcoming and supportive place</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academics/grade</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Describing the Samples: Educator Face Sheet Data

In Phase I, we heard from 33 educators across 9 Focus Group and in Phase II we heard from 68 educators across 11 Focus Groups. Of the 68 educators in Phase II, 47 (69.1%) were from complex and 21 (30.9%) from less complex families of schools. In Phase III we heard from 24 educators in 4 Focus Groups (11 less complex and 13 complex families of schools).

In Phase I, the majority of educators were female (67%, n=23) which is the same as Phase II (72.1%, n=49). In Phase III the gender was more evenly split with 50% female (n=12).

Phase I educators ranged in terms of age from 20-61 years with the largest group (31%) falling in the 41-50 year age category. In Phase II, the educators ranged in terms of their current age from 20 to 60 years with 70.6% between 31 and 50 years of age. There were no educators in the 61+ age group. The youngest group (ages 20-30 years) is composed entirely of women. The proportion of men in the older group (ages 50-60 years) is higher than the proportion of women (31.6% compared to 16.3%). In Phase III the mode for age is 31-40 years (n=12) with the next most frequent being 21-30 (n=5) and the rest are between 41-60 years. One person did not provide their age.

The largest percentage (33.8%) of the educators were grade 8 teachers (n=23). The next most frequent were grade 9 teachers (23.9%; n=16) followed by guidance counsellors (20.9%; n=14). Others in the sample were principals (n=4), Student Success teachers (n=6), and “others” (n=3). This can be compared to the sample in Phase I where most educators were teachers (n=25), with only a few principals (n=5) and guidance counsellors (n=2). Virtually all of the educators (94.1%; n=64) in Phase II had a Bachelor of Education degree. In addition, close to one half of the educators (n=31, 45.6%) reported that they have honours degrees. In Phase III, the sample consisted mainly of high school teachers (n=15) with the rest of the participants being vice principals (n=2), Student Success Leaders (n=2) and guidance counsellors (n=3). Two of the participants did not provide their role.

In Phase I, the educators taught in schools which ranged from 132 to 1200 students with an average enrolment of 552.56 students (s=310.43). In Phase II, the educators taught in schools which ranged from 140 to 2400 students with an average enrolment of 785.6 students (s=541.1); 23 of the educators taught in schools with 1100 students or more, and 6 in schools with 300 students or less. In Phase III the educators were coming from schools that ranged in size from 800 to 1500 students with an average enrolment of 1174.52 (s=221.2). It should be noted that since this data is derived from Focus Groups, duplications in school size could be influenced by the fact that more than one educator from the same school attended a Focus Group.
In Phase I, the educators ranged widely in terms of the time they had been in their roles from 2 years to 33 years with an mean of 14.37 years (s=9.71). Educators reported that they were currently teaching in a variety of programs including English as a Second Language program (n=13), or French Immersion program (n=5), or teaching Special Education (n=16), vocational program (n=7), and other (n=4).

In Phase II, the educators also ranged widely in terms of their time they had been in their roles from 3 years to 38 years with an mean of 14.1 years (s=8.68). Educators reported that they were currently teaching in a variety of programs including English as a Second Language program (n=9), or French Immersion program (n=6), or teaching Special Education (n=27), academic (n=26), applied (n=22), and IB (n=4).

In Phase III, the educators also ranged widely in terms of their time they had been in their roles from 2 years to 39 years with an mean of 11.83 years (s=10.43). Educators reported that they were currently teaching in a variety of programs including English as a Second Language program (n=5), or French Immersion program (n=2), or teaching Special Education (n=13), academic (n=15), applied (n=14), and IB (n=1) and other (n=3).

**Educator Ratings of Influences on Transition**

Educators in each of the Phases rated the importance of 13 influences on the transition to high school, just as the parents did. In Phase III, averages for these items were almost always higher for educators than for parents. Averages for items ranged from 2.46 to 3.67. To begin with, there were only 4 items rated by educators with means less than 3.0 (middle school principals=2.96, community agencies=2.46, Ministry of Education=2.46, and Board of Education=2.71). We can conclude that all items seem to be considered to be more important to educators than to parents. Five means for educators were over 3.5: high school teachers (\( \bar{x} =3.54 \)), high school guidance counsellors (\( \bar{x} =3.58 \)), parents (\( \bar{x} =3.65 \)), youth themselves (\( \bar{x} =3.67 \)), fellow students (\( \bar{x} =3.54 \)).

We must note that both parents and educators agreed that fellow students are very important but parents seemed to value friends less than they valued fellow students. Educators’ mean difference between these 2 categories was much smaller (fellow students =3.54 and friends=3.25) than parents’ (fellow students=3.21 and friends=2.64). This shows us that the means with regards to friends is .61 higher than for parents. If all of these influences are more important for educators, it is also true that the sets are similar in that organizations are of less value for both educators and parents. The youth themselves and parents are also highly considered, with precedence always given to people over organizations.
As we did for parents, we then ran a factor analysis\textsuperscript{74} to see if it was possible to associate these items in Phase III. This analysis found four factors which together explained 80.91% of the initial variance on the items. The first factor\textsuperscript{75} for educators is quite notable as it combines the importance of youth themselves (.82), parents (.86), high school teachers (.79) high school guidance counsellors (.78). This factor tells us that there is a combination of the person in transition and the highly symbolic and present individuals that surround the youth.

The second factor\textsuperscript{76} goes back to elementary/middle school and shows the importance of elementary/middle school counsellors (.94), elementary/middle school teachers (.83) and community agencies (.68) The third factor\textsuperscript{77} specifies two different groups of individuals – principals (elementary/middle =.73, high school =.84) the second group is the friends (friends =.75 and fellow students =.61). The fourth factor shows the importance of the Ministry of Education (.87) and Board of Education (.95).

If we compare parents and educators in Phase III on these factor analyses, we see that they combine the factors in different ways. For example they are similar in the that both indicate four factors, they both relate the Ministry and the Board of Education, and they both associate fellow students and friends. There are differences such that parents combine counsellors across the panels and they rate them as the most significant factor whereas from the educator’s point of view the most significant factor are counsellors from high school as well as high school teachers, parents and the young person in transition. They are also different in the sense that from parent’s point of view, fellow students and friends are statistically in the same category, one in which they also include themselves. But, from the educator’s point of view, fellow students and friends are combined with principals.

Educators in Phase II also rated the importance of these 13 influences on the transition from grade 8 to 9 just as parents did. Averages for these items were consistently higher for educators than for parents. To begin with, there were only 2 items rated by educators with means less than 3.0 (community agencies=2.69 and Ministry of Education=2.82) compared to 7 items rated under 3.0 by parents. We can conclude that all items seem to be considered to be more important to educators for facilitating transition. Five means are over 3.5: high school teachers (\(\bar{x} =3.70\)), elementary/middle school teachers (\(\bar{x} =3.76\), high school guidance counsellors (\(\bar{x} =3.78\)), parents (\(\bar{x} =3.79\), and youth themselves (\(\bar{x} =3.81\)). For both parents and

\textsuperscript{74} Although we understand that sample sizes are small, we still chose to look for statistical reasons to check the stability of our explanation based on means .We left to the program the decision about the number of factors by considering an Eigenvalue of 1.

\textsuperscript{75} Eigenvalue 3.95; % of variance=30.38.

\textsuperscript{76} Eigenvalue 2.14; % of variance=16.48.

\textsuperscript{77} Eigenvalue 1.89; % of variance=14.56.
educators, the young people themselves were the most important influence for a good transition.

As we did for parents in Phase II, we then ran a factor analysis\(^{78}\) to see if it was possible to associate these items. This analysis found four factors which together explained 69.9% of the initial variance on the items. This suggests that the educator’s opinions are more difficult to aggregate than are parents’ where we found only three factors and that educator’s opinions contain more variability than did the parent’s opinions where the explained variance of the factors was 81.6%. The first factor\(^{79}\) for educators is quite notable as it combines the importance of fellow students (.87) and friends (.89).

The second factor\(^{80}\) is the importance of elementary/middle school teachers (.89), high school teachers (.85), and high school guidance counsellor (.66). It should be noted that in the first two factors parents have a role (.56 and .47 respectively). The third factor\(^{81}\) relates to Ministry of Education (.85) and Board of Education (.86). The fourth factor\(^{82}\) is related to the principals in elementary/middle school (.82) and to the high school principal (.89). We must also note that youth themselves do not ever have a significant loading in the educator factor analysis. This can be compared to the more central place of young people in the parental factor analysis.

It can be concluded that this factor analysis reveals that educator understanding of the transition process is more compartmentalized than that of parents. Each of the factors for the educators contains less information. This reflects the fact that educators see the process of transition as less complex than do parents. This is reflected by the difference in the size of the explained variances of the factor analyses. It could be that parents, in having to deal with the complex lives of their children, are more likely to view transition issues as complex. They are not as easily able to separate school-specific information as educators since they are involved in their child’s life in a more comprehensive way overall. This is emphasized in the factor analysis of the parents, in that one factor points to the real importance of both parent and child as critical to the process of transition. In the educator’s factor analysis the young people themselves never figure as very important.

In Phase II, the results were similar to Phase I but with more variations. For instance, institutions still appear to be “not so important” or “not at all important” for a greater number, of educators in Phase II. For example, community agencies, district boards of education, and the Ministry of Education in Phase I were 33%, 24% and 35% respectively, in Phase II they are 44.8%, 26.9% and 39.4% rating them as “not

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\(^{78}\) We left to the program the decision about the number of factors by considering an Eigenvalue of 1.

\(^{79}\) Eigenvalue 3.95; % of variance=30.38.

\(^{80}\) Eigenvalue 2.14; % of variance=16.48.

\(^{81}\) Eigenvalue 1.89; % of variance=14.56.

\(^{82}\) Eigenvalue 1.11; % of variance=8.51.
important” or “not at all important.” Also, friends still appear to be “not important” or “not at all important” for several educators (Phase I=30% and Phase II=27.3%). In Phase I, educator’s ratings of the importance of other people (teacher, principals, guidance counsellors, parents, fellow students and youth) showed little variation such that the vast majority (over 94% in each case) of educators found them to be either “important” or “very important”). In Phase II these other people are still mostly rated at “important” or “very important” but in some cases the other 2 categories “not so important and “not at all important” drain a good number of responses: principals in elementary/middle school (16.9%) and high school principals (12.3%).

Just as we proceeded in Phase II, we also ran a factor analysis for Phase I educators on the ratings of the important elements of transition. If we compare the educator’s factor analyses across Phases, we see that in both we have four factors. In Phase II (69.9%) the explained variance of the initial data was smaller than in Phase I (77.0%). This means that it was more difficult for educators in Phase II to group the information. It needs to be kept in mind that the Phase II the sample held more educators who were teaching at the high school level. Some factors, even if not in the same order, were similar across Phases. The fourth factor in Phase I and the first in Phase II reveal the importance of friends in transition. The first factor in Phase I and the third in Phase II integrate data related to institutions. The second factor in Phase I and also in Phase II assembles information about educators. The two remaining factors do not have the same content. In Phase I, this final factor was pointing to parents and youth whereas in Phase II the final factor related to principals.

In each of Phases I, II and III we grouped the regions into larger and smaller cities and ran t-tests on the set of items relating to the importance of the transition. One statistically significant result in Phase I was found for the rating of the importance of the Ministry of Education in the transition by region. When regions were re-coded into larger urban centres (GTA and Ottawa) and smaller cities (Sudbury, Windsor and Thunder Bay), those in the larger urban centres rated the Ministry to be of more importance (mean=3.2) than did those in smaller cities (mean=2.5) (t=-2.092; df=31; p<5 %). In Phase II we found no significant differences for any of the items.

**Educator Ratings of Schools**

The educators in each Phase were also then asked to rate 11 elements of secondary school culture as “not good at all”, “not so good”, “good” or “very good” (see Table 45). While we cannot test for the differences in these means since they come from different sets of data, we can still observe that in general the means are quite similar across the Phases. The lowest is always for support for students who are not attending school. There are also two differences which attract attention, one for open areas for students to hang out and the other for communication with families. In both cases, the mean is lower in Phase II than in Phase I and then it gets higher in Phase III. For communication with families the mean changes are easily
understandable such that the educators in Phase II feel that they are less successful in communicating with parents of grade 9 students than they are with parents of grade 8 students. In the case of open areas for students to hang out, it seems that educators in Phase II show less satisfaction than do those in Phase I. There are steady increases in mean ratings over the three Phases for student academic outcomes, extra-curricular activities and supports for student who are failing. These areas show constant improvement across the transition from the point of view of the Educators.

Table 48: Mean ratings by educators for school items in Phase I and Phase II

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>How would you rate your school in terms of:</th>
<th>Phase I</th>
<th>Phase II</th>
<th>Phase III</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Size of student body</td>
<td>3.06</td>
<td>2.98</td>
<td>3.21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>.76</td>
<td>.78</td>
<td>.51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Class size</td>
<td>2.82</td>
<td>2.68</td>
<td>3.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>.81</td>
<td>.93</td>
<td>.28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School atmosphere</td>
<td>3.28</td>
<td>3.12</td>
<td>3.17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>.77</td>
<td>.77</td>
<td>.64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Safety</td>
<td>3.24</td>
<td>3.29</td>
<td>3.33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>.75</td>
<td>.52</td>
<td>.57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student academic outcomes</td>
<td>2.88</td>
<td>3.03</td>
<td>3.29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>.66</td>
<td>.66</td>
<td>.55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extra-curricular activities</td>
<td>3.31</td>
<td>3.49</td>
<td>3.70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>.90</td>
<td>.62</td>
<td>.56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Open areas for students to hang out</td>
<td>3.10</td>
<td>2.56</td>
<td>2.83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>.77</td>
<td>.93</td>
<td>.76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication with families</td>
<td>3.19</td>
<td>2.86</td>
<td>3.13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>.75</td>
<td>.64</td>
<td>.54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supports for students who are failing</td>
<td>2.91</td>
<td>3.00</td>
<td>3.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>.77</td>
<td>.82</td>
<td>.59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supports for students involved in</td>
<td>2.88</td>
<td>2.71</td>
<td>3.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>inappropriate behaviours</td>
<td>.96</td>
<td>.77</td>
<td>.86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supports for students who are not</td>
<td>2.56</td>
<td>2.38</td>
<td>2.54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>attending regularly</td>
<td>1.01</td>
<td>.81</td>
<td>.93</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Given that non-attendance at school, support for student academic outcomes, and support for students at risk are integral components of the Ontario Ministry of Education transition initiatives, these results require further scrutiny and probing. In the case of Phase I data, the small sample for educators forced us to recode the region variable into two categories; larger urban centres (GTA/Ottawa) and other smaller cities (Sudbury, Thunder Bay, Windsor, Kapuskasing/Hearst). We performed this recoding so as not to lose information. We then remained consistent in reporting this recoded regional variable for Phase II and III data. We then ran ANOVAs for educator’s ratings of schools for Phase I, II and III and in each case we tested for family of schools and our new regional variable83.

83 Caution must be used when interpreting the results of the ANOVA since the sample sizes were small.
Table 49 shows that in Phase I the main effect for family of schools was inferable for five out of eleven items and the averages were a little bit higher for complex than for less complex for all of these five items. These are size of student body, safety, extra-curricular activities, open areas to hang out, and communication with families. The main effects for size of community was inferable on eight out of eleven items; size of student body, school atmosphere, safety, extra-curricular activities, communication with families, support for students who are failing, support for students with inappropriate behaviour and supports for students not attending regularly. In every case, the GTA/Ottawa educators rated these items more favourably.

Table 50 shows that the Phase II main effects for family of schools was only inferable on one item, open areas for students to hang out, which was rated more positively for educators in less complex families of schools. As well we observed only one main effect for the size of the community for size of student body with satisfactions being a bit lower for those in GTA/Ottawa.

Table 51 shows that in Phase III the main effect for family of schools was inferable on two items; support for students at academic risk, and support for students not attending regularly. In both cases the average is higher for less complex families of schools. As well, we observed two main effects for the size of the community for academic outcomes and access to extracurricular activities where the average in both cases is higher in small cities. The general conclusion is that there are no differences across the Phases that are worth singling out.
**Table 49: Means for variables relating to high school ratings by family of schools and size of community**

*Phase I*

Analysis of variance for 2 factors. If p<.05, then the answer is yes.

(1=Not good at all and 4=very good)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>How would you rate your school in terms of:</th>
<th>Family of Schools</th>
<th>Size of Community</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Complex</td>
<td>Less Complex</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Size of student body</td>
<td>~</td>
<td>3.13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>test</td>
<td>$F_{(1,28)}=6.03$; yes</td>
<td>$F_{(1,28)}=11.66$; yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Class size</td>
<td>~</td>
<td>2.67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>test</td>
<td>$F_{(1,29)}=1.86$; no</td>
<td>$F_{(1,29)}=0.59$; no</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School atmosphere</td>
<td>~</td>
<td>3.30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>test</td>
<td>$F_{(1,28)}=2.78$; no</td>
<td>$F_{(1,28)}=12.60$; yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Safety</td>
<td>~</td>
<td>3.29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>test</td>
<td>$F_{(1,29)}=7.30$; yes</td>
<td>$F_{(1,29)}=14.22$; yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student academic outcomes</td>
<td>~</td>
<td>2.83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>test</td>
<td>$F_{(1,28)}=0.49$; no</td>
<td>$F_{(1,28)}=3.08$; no</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extra-curricular activities</td>
<td>~</td>
<td>3.35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>test</td>
<td>$F_{(1,28)}=4.64$; yes</td>
<td>$F_{(1,28)}=15.94$; yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Open areas for students to hang out</td>
<td>~</td>
<td>3.29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>test</td>
<td>$F_{(1,25)}=6.93$; yes</td>
<td>$F_{(1,25)}=3.30$; no</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication with families</td>
<td>~</td>
<td>3.27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>test</td>
<td>$F_{(1,27)}=7.84$; yes</td>
<td>$F_{(1,27)}=15.48$; yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support for students who are failing</td>
<td>~</td>
<td>2.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>test</td>
<td>$F_{(1,29)}=0.17$; no</td>
<td>$F_{(1,29)}=11.35$; yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supports for students involved in inappropriate behaviour</td>
<td>~</td>
<td>2.79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>test</td>
<td>$F_{(1,29)}=1.51$; no</td>
<td>$F_{(1,29)}=19.07$; yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supports for students not attending regularly</td>
<td>~</td>
<td>2.33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>test</td>
<td>$F_{(1,28)}=1.58$; no</td>
<td>$F_{(1,28)}=5.73$; yes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 50: Means for variables relating to high school ratings by family of schools and size of community

Phase II

Analysis of variance for 2 factors. If p<.05, then the answer is yes.

(1=Not good at all and 4=very good)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>How would you rate your school in terms of:</th>
<th>Family of Schools</th>
<th>Size of Community</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Complex Less Complex GTA/ Ottawa Other</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Size of student body</td>
<td>( \bar{x} )</td>
<td>2.81 3.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>test</td>
<td>( F_{(1,45)}=0.33; ) no</td>
<td>( F_{(1,45)}=9.53; ) yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Class size</td>
<td>( \bar{x} )</td>
<td>2.70 2.30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>test</td>
<td>( F_{(1,49)}=1.88; ) no</td>
<td>( F_{(1,49)}=.14; ) no</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School atmosphere</td>
<td>( \bar{x} )</td>
<td>3.06 3.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>test</td>
<td>( F_{(1,49)}=.03; ) no</td>
<td>( F_{(1,28)}=.47; ) no</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Safety</td>
<td>( \bar{x} )</td>
<td>3.18 3.45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>test</td>
<td>( F_{(1,49)}=3.12; ) no</td>
<td>( F_{(1,49)}=.11; ) no</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student academic outcomes</td>
<td>( \bar{x} )</td>
<td>3.09 3.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>test</td>
<td>( F_{(1,48)}=0.02; ) no</td>
<td>( F_{(1,48)}=1.42; ) no</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extra-curricular activities</td>
<td>( \bar{x} )</td>
<td>3.58 3.45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>test</td>
<td>( F_{(1,49)}=.21; ) no</td>
<td>( F_{(1,49)}=.50; ) no</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Open areas for students to hang out</td>
<td>( \bar{x} )</td>
<td>2.30 2.95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>test</td>
<td>( F_{(1,49)}=7.91; ) yes</td>
<td>( F_{(1,49)}=1.19; ) no</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication with families</td>
<td>( \bar{x} )</td>
<td>2.78 3.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>test</td>
<td>( F_{(1,48)}=1.88; ) no</td>
<td>( F_{(1,48)}&lt;.01; ) no</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support for students who are failing</td>
<td>( \bar{x} )</td>
<td>3.00 3.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>test</td>
<td>( F_{(1,48)}=.25; ) no</td>
<td>( F_{(1,48)}=2.00; ) no</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supports for students involved in inappropriate behaviour</td>
<td>( \bar{x} )</td>
<td>2.63 2.65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>test</td>
<td>( F_{(1,48)}=.46; ) no</td>
<td>( F_{(1,48)}=2.41; ) no</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supports for students not attending regularly</td>
<td>( \bar{x} )</td>
<td>2.42 2.45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>test</td>
<td>( F_{(1,47)}=.61; ) no</td>
<td>( F_{(1,47)}=3.44; ) no</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 51: Means for variables relating to high school ratings by family of schools and size of community

Phase III

Analysis of variance for 2 factors. If $p<.05$, then the answer is yes.

(1=Not good at all and 4=very good)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>How would you rate your school in terms of:</th>
<th>Family of Schools</th>
<th>Size of Community</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Complex (Less</td>
<td>GTA/ Ottowa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Complex)</td>
<td>Other</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Size of student body</td>
<td>$\bar{x}$</td>
<td>3.38 3.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>test $F_{(1,20)}$</td>
<td>$=4.21; no$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>$F_{(1,20)}$</td>
<td>$=.01; no$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Class size</td>
<td>$\bar{x}$</td>
<td>3.15 3.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>test $F_{(1,20)}$</td>
<td>$=1.68; no$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>$F_{(1,20)}$</td>
<td>$=1.01; no$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School atmosphere</td>
<td>$\bar{x}$</td>
<td>3.00 3.36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>test $F_{(1,20)}$</td>
<td>$=2.06; no$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>$F_{(1,20)}$</td>
<td>$=.51; no$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Safety</td>
<td>$\bar{x}$</td>
<td>3.15 3.55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>test $F_{(1,20)}$</td>
<td>$=3.96; no$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>$F_{(1,20)}$</td>
<td>$=2.72; no$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student academic outcomes</td>
<td>$\bar{x}$</td>
<td>3.15 3.45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>test $F_{(1,20)}$</td>
<td>$=2.71; no$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>$F_{(1,20)}$</td>
<td>$=4.94; yes$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extra-curricular activities</td>
<td>$\bar{x}$</td>
<td>3.67 3.73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>test $F_{(1,19)}$</td>
<td>$=.28; no$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>$F_{(1,19)}$</td>
<td>$=4.42; yes$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Open areas for students to hang out</td>
<td>$\bar{x}$</td>
<td>2.62 3.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>test $F_{(1,20)}$</td>
<td>$=2.15; no$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>$F_{(1,20)}$</td>
<td>$=.14; no$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication with families</td>
<td>$\bar{x}$</td>
<td>3.08 3.18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>test $F_{(1,20)}$</td>
<td>$=.16; no$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>$F_{(1,20)}$</td>
<td>$=1.00; no$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support for students who are failing</td>
<td>$\bar{x}$</td>
<td>3.23 3.82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>test $F_{(1,20)}$</td>
<td>$=6.80; yes$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>$F_{(1,20)}$</td>
<td>$=.25; no$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supports for students involved in inappropriate behaviour</td>
<td>$\bar{x}$</td>
<td>2.85 3.27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>test $F_{(1,20)}$</td>
<td>$=1.28; no$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>$F_{(1,20)}$</td>
<td>$=.44; no$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supports for students not attending regularly</td>
<td>$\bar{x}$</td>
<td>2.08 3.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>test $F_{(1,20)}$</td>
<td>$=10.99; yes$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>$F_{(1,20)}$</td>
<td>$=.14; no$</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Open-ended Responses

The educators in the Phase II and III Focus Groups were asked to provide listings of transition programs and strategies that they currently had available in their schools. Educators in Phase II listed 222 and in Phase III listed 71 different transition programs and strategies ranging from those that were parent focused to those that were focused on educators and students (See Tables 52 and 53). Programs were seen to be those which suggested longer term attempts to ease transition and would continue throughout the year. Strategies were seen to be those suggesting more focussed shorter term and/or one time transition events. These current programs and strategies relating to students and educators were further categorized as those happening in elementary schools, secondary schools or across the panels.

It should be noted that one-time orientation sessions (n=67) were the most frequently mentioned kind of current strategy in Phase II, especially as relating to having elementary students visit the secondary schools in some capacity. This trend remained consistent in Phase III with 34 responses relating to such onetime orientation sessions. It is also worth noting that cross-panel strategies were the second most frequent in Phase II but these kinds of initiatives were seen to decline significantly in the schools of the Phase III Educators schools.

Table 52: Phase II: Currently implemented transition strategies and programs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Programs and Strategies</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Examples</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Orientation session: (elementary students to secondary schools)</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>BBQs, carnivals, school visits, orientation and sports nights, shadow day, welcome day</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Orientation session: (secondary students and educators to elementary schools)</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>secondary school students visits to feeder schools, school bands visit feeder schools</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Orientation session: Grade 9 first day strategies</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>grade 9 assembly, sports and games, first day for grade 9s only</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Programs in secondary school</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>programs for: those at-risk of early leaving, literacy/numeracy, Special Education, mentor, homework club, peer tutors/leaders,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strategies at high school</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>trades day/skilled trades, Student Success Teams in high school, credit recovery, caring adults, strength-based time tables</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Programs in elementary School</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>differentiated learning, grade 6, 7 or 8 programs relating to transition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strategies across panels</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>student profiles, meetings, links between families of schools,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Partnerships with community agencies</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Science centre, use of social services</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others specific programs and strategies</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>TAG, DARE, ESP, YES, Walking the path, Get Set, Transition magazines to students, TRF, francophone placements</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 53: Phase III: Currently implemented transition strategies and programs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Programs and Strategies</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Examples</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Orientation session: (elementary students to secondary schools)</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>BBQs, carnivals, school visits, orientation nights, shadow day, sports nights, welcome day</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Orientation session: (secondary students and educators to elementary schools)</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>secondary school students/educators visits to feeder schools, school bands visit feeder schools</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Orientation session: Grade 9 first day strategies</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>welcome day/Gr 9 greeting day</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Programs in secondary school</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>programs for those at-risk of early leaving, literacy/numeracy programs, Special Education programs, homework club, peer tutors/leaders, mentor programs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strategies at high school</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>trades day/skilled trades, Student Success Teams in high school, credit recovery, caring adults, strength-based time tables</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strategies across panels</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>meetings, links between families of schools,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other specific programs and strategies</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>LST</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Educators were then asked to list the transition programs and strategies that they did not yet have but would like to see implemented at their schools. There were at total of 80 responses in Phase II (See Table 54) and 12 in Phase III (See Table 52). The responses were categorized in a similar manner as those relating to the transition programs already in place; orientation sessions, programs and strategies in secondary school, programs and strategies in elementary school, cross-panel strategies, and others. It is worth noting that there were only 5 requests for additional outreach to parents in Phase II even though the above information showed that parental programs were not as yet very frequent in schools. This was also the case for community agencies such that even though there were only two responses exemplifying transition strategies with community partners, no educators made additional requests to work with community agencies.
Table 54: Transition strategies and programs that educators would like to see implemented in their schools in Phase II.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Programs and Strategies</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Examples</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Orientation session: (elementary students to secondary schools)</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>more demonstration/orientation sessions, shadow programs, lab days for students to visit high school, more fun days</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Orientation session: (secondary students and educators to elementary schools)</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>presentations and discussion with grade 8 students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Orientation session: Grade 9 first day strategies</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>more money and time devoted to fun at beginning of year, put someone in charge of this task of orientation, grade 9 day, I week of orientation in Sept.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Programs in secondary school</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>daily homerooms, peer/twin mentors, more programs for in-risk students, programs for newcomers to Canada, role playing for risk taking activities for students, more sports and extra-curricular, de-semester literacy/numeracy courses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strategies at high school</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>assure strength-based time tables, ISST days as a given, teacher training in transition, buddy systems, grade 9 leaders, Aboriginal counsellors, more communication of transition policies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Programs in elementary School</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>more practical programs to get ready for grade 9, elementary guidance, self-exploration programs for grade 7 and 8, offer different programs at elementary level (academic, applied etc), create middle schools</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strategies across panels</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>more opportunities to visit high schools, more cross-panel meetings, more communication between teachers across panels, counsellor to track students from K-9, better sharing of student profiles, better placing of students needed, curriculum sharing, more supportive teachers at both levels, grade 9 students create promotional material for elementary schools</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Partnerships with community agencies</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>none mentioned</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others specific programs and strategies</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>more opportunities for other programs such as FLY, Aboriginal programs</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 55: Transition strategies and programs that educators would like to see implemented in their schools in Phase III

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Programs and Strategies</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Examples</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Orientation session: (elementary students to secondary schools)</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>individual pathway night</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Orientation session: (secondary students and educators to elementary schools)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>None provided</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Orientation session: Grade 9 first day strategies</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>None provided</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Programs in secondary school</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>peer mentors, GSA, music, programs common with Gr 8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strategies at high school</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>buddy system, careers in Gr 9, colleges visit Gr 9, Gr 9 teachers collaborate, keep up existing strategies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Programs in elementary school</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>reach ahead courses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strategies across panels</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>more interaction/communication between Gr 8s and HS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other specific programs and strategies</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>practice tests</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Finally, in Phase III we also asked Educators a number of Grade 10 specific questions relating to the literacy test and transition from their vantage point. The vast majority (91.7%) of educators in Phase III felt that young people were still adjusting to the transition in Grade 10. Responses which echoed those of the parents were provided suggesting that the reasons were mainly in the social and developmental realms such as they are still in a process of social development and adjusting the challenge of balancing their development, social issues and academic realities of school.

Almost all of the educators (n=22; 91.7%) reported that the students had completed the Grade 10 Literacy Test with the same number stating that they were prepared for it and 90% saying that the students did not find it to be a difficult test. A smaller number (n=16; 72%) felt that the test fit well with the English program in grade 10.

Educators in Phase III were also asked how important (on a 5 point scale with 1=least effective and 5=most effective) they thought credit recovery is as a method of keeping students on track to graduation and how effective they felt credit recovery
has been for students in grade 10. The mean importance of credit recovery for keeping students on track to graduation was 3.48 (s=1.16). The mean effectiveness of credit recovery 3.45 (s=1.10). They then provided their lists, just as did parents, of the “top three things” that students need to make a successful transition (See Table 56).

Table 56: Educator Suggestions of Top 3 Things Students need for Successful Transition

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>First (n=22)</th>
<th>Second (n=22)</th>
<th>Third (n=22)</th>
<th>Totals</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Family support/involvement (support; caring adult; parent involvement; genetics; home life)</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Programs in high school (appropriate programming/placement; organization/time management; school support programs; intervention/transition programs)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social/peers</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self (attitude; desire to do well; self confidence; engagement/commitment; interest)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Orientation (prior comfort with coming to school; Gr 8 visit HS; Impression of HS before coming; knowledge of routines; information; Elem prep for HS)</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers/teacher empathy</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strategies in high school (flexibility; activities/program for entire school; school culture; stop passing students through; instructional practice)</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Demonstrated academic success (previous success at school; student work; student success)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other (tougher expectations, good communication)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The following sections of the report now provide the detailed textual and descriptive analyses as arising from the Focus Group and Interview transcriptions. In this analysis, we begin to recognize the quality and detail of the trends and responses we have provided here from the Face Sheet data for Youth, Educators and Parents. Before moving onto the hows and whys and the details of the Focus Group and Interview analyses in NVIVO, we present the general trends and findings from the Focus Groups and Interviews as offered by our syntactical and lexical examination of these sets of data.
Describing the Samples: Parent Face Sheet Data

We heard from a total of 74 parents (57 English and 17 French-language) in 21 Focus Groups over the three Phases. Tables 57 and 58 show that the majority of the parent samples were women across three Phases and of those who provided their age, they fell mainly in the 41-50 age range.

Table 57: Parent Participants per Phase by Gender

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Phase I</th>
<th>Phase II</th>
<th>Phase III</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>84.5%</td>
<td>76.2%</td>
<td>80.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>15.4%</td>
<td>23.8%</td>
<td>20.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>n</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The parental incomes show a distribution across levels and Phases (See Table 59). We were a bit more successful in Phase III in engaging parental participants from lower income levels, however there were only 6 with family incomes below 40K per year.

Table 58: Parent Participants per Phase by Age

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age Range</th>
<th>Phase I</th>
<th>Phase II</th>
<th>Phase III</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>30-40</td>
<td>26.9%</td>
<td>14.3%</td>
<td>20.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>41-50</td>
<td>50.0%</td>
<td>61.9%</td>
<td>50.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>51-61</td>
<td>23.1%</td>
<td>23.8%</td>
<td>2.00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>n</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 59: Parent Participants per Phase by Income

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Income Range</th>
<th>Phase I</th>
<th>Phase II</th>
<th>Phase III</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>10-19,999</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20-29,999</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30-39,999</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40-49,999</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50-59,999</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>60-69,999</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>70-79,999</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>80-89,999</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>90-99,999</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>100,000 or more</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The majority of the parents were living with their child on a full-time basis in each Phase at the time of the Focus Group (Phase I, n=25; Phase II, n=19; Phase III, n=24). Table 60 shows the distribution of gender for their child in transition in each of the three Phases. Phase III had the most evenly distributed child gender distribution.

Table 60: Parental Responses to Gender of Child in Transition by Phase

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender of child in transition</th>
<th>Phase I</th>
<th>Phase II</th>
<th>Phase III</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Female (daughter)</td>
<td>27.5%</td>
<td>58.8%</td>
<td>46.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male (son)</td>
<td>62.5%</td>
<td>41.2%</td>
<td>54.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>n</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Ratings of Schools and Transitional Influences**

In Phase I, we reported that the vast majority of parents rated most of their child’s current elementary school culture as “good” or “very good” suggesting a generally positive view of these schools. For example, in ascending order, the 27 parents in Phase I positively rated safety (n=27), school attitude/spirit (n=27), school size (n=26), access to extra-curricular activities (n=24), academic outcomes (n=23), communication with families (n=21), class size (n=21), support for students involved in risk behaviour (n=21), support for students who are often truant (n=21), open areas for students to hang out in (n=19), and support for students at academic risk (n=18).

In Phase II, we again asked parents to rate their child’s school on 11 items on a 4 point scale ranging from “badly”, to “not so good”, to “good”, to “very good”. Similar to the Phase I results, the Phase II results show that parents in general ranked their child’s high schools positively as “good” or “very good”. Nevertheless they are sometimes critical of the high schools. The means on the 11 items ranged from 2.79 to 3.19 with five items falling below a mean of 3.0 which implies that these ratings fall into the area of “good”. These items were rating for open areas to hang out ($\bar{x} = 2.95$), grades and rates of rates of graduation ($\bar{x} = 2.90$), rating school for support for students who are failing ($\bar{x} = 2.89$)), support for student who are acting out ($\bar{x} = 2.82$), and support for students who are missing school ($\bar{x} = 2.79$).

In Phase III, we again asked parents to rate their child’s school on the 11 items on a 4 point scale ranging from “badly”, to “not so good”, to “good”, to “very good”. All means were over 3.0 which suggest that they are rating the schools as “good.” They range from 3.05 to 3.33 so even if they are in the area of “good”, there are some concerns. The standard deviations range from .55 to .57 which tells us that in some cases there are some important variations in these rating according to individuals.
If we compare this data with the responses offered by the youth in Phase II, we notice that there are 6 comparable items on both Face Sheets. For one of these items (open areas to hang out), the means for both groups are exactly the same ($\bar{x} = 2.95$ in each case). On two other items, the parents were more critical than were the young people (access to extra-curricular activities ($\bar{x}_{parents} = 3.05$; $\bar{x}_{youth} = 3.21$) and support for students who are failing ($\bar{x}_{parents} = 2.88$; $\bar{x}_{youth} = 3.12$). On the three additional items the young people were more critical than were their parents; class size ($\bar{x}_{parents} = 3.09$; $\bar{x}_{youth} = 2.94$), school atmosphere ($\bar{x}_{parents} = 3.10$; $\bar{x}_{youth} = 2.84$), and safety ($\bar{x}_{parents} = 3.19$; $\bar{x}_{youth} = 2.90$). The differences in these means are always small and there does not appear to be clear categories of distinction for these differences. Thus, parents and young people were rating the high schools (grade 9) quite similarly.

Does this comparison hold between young people and parents in Phase III? The means suggest that there is some similarity in the trend and in general the youth ratings across all 7 scales in Phase III were a bit lower for students than for parents. These differences range from .03 to .37. The three most important mean differences are for school size (.29), school atmosphere (.31) and safety (.37). There is never a huge difference between parents and youth ratings but it seems that students in Phase III were a little bit more critical than parents about schools.

**Influences on Transition**

The Face Sheet also asked parents to rate the importance of 13 influences on the transition from grade 8 to 9. In Phase I we reported that there was little variation in the ratings over the range of influences, such that the majority (over 84% in each case) of parents in Phase I rated most people (teachers, principals, guidance counsellors, parents, youth, classmates and friends of youth) as” important” or “very important”. They rated the importance of District Boards of Education and Ministry of Education positively (88% and 79% respectively). One interesting outlier was “community agencies” which received only 60% positive ratings. Also, it is worth noting that “friends” received the third lowest positive response even though 84% of parents agreed to their importance for transition, they were seen as less important than teachers and parents.

In Phase II, the parents were again asked to rate the importance of these 13 influences on their child’s transition into high school. For these parents with children in grade 9, we see very similar patterns in the ratings such that the “important” and “very important” were pre-eminent. When we examine the mean ratings for Phase II parental responses, we find 7 items that were rated lower than 3.0; these are in ascending order of importance, high school principals ($\bar{x} = 2.20$), the Board of Education ($\bar{x} = 2.31$), community agencies ($\bar{x} = 2.24$), the Ministry of Education ($\bar{x} = 2.30$), elementary/school principals ($\bar{x} = 2.68$), elementary/middle school
counsellors ($\bar{x}=2.76$) and friends of young people ($\bar{x}=2.82$). The teachers in both elementary ($\bar{x}=3.18$), and secondary school ($\bar{x}=3.2$) were rated as very important with means over 3.0 in each case. We observed 2 means over 3.5 which are the importance of youth themselves ($\bar{x}=3.71$) and parents ($\bar{x}=3.64$). These statistics reveal that everything seems at some point to be important but parents tend to see that successful transition depends beyond everything on the young person, then parents, then teachers. Their Focus Group discussions concur, and will be discussed in detail in a later section.

In Phase III, the parents were again (for the third time) asked to rate the importance of these 13 influences on their child’s transition into high school for the third time. When we examine the mean ratings from the parents in grade 10, we find that averages range from 2.00 to 3.65. When it comes to school personnel the averages are always higher than 2.88. This suggests that parents find all of these people to be important in helping with the transition for their child with some diversity. The means ranged from elementary/middle school counsellors ($\bar{x}=2.89$) to high school teachers ($\bar{x}=3.41$).

The highest mean is for parents themselves with the average up to 3.65 with the lowest standard deviation of .49. This suggests that parents are very important with no differences between them on this question. According to parents, the second most important individuals are the youth themselves ($\bar{x}=3.59$, standard deviation=.59).

The third set of interesting information is that from the parent’s point of view their child’s fellow students (3.21) are more important to the transition than are their child’s friends (2.64). However, the mean rating for friends has a standard deviation of 1.18 that means that all parents do not feel this way and that there is an important diversity in their answers to this question. The last set of information is about organizations where the average never goes higher than 2.48. The conclusion is that **people** are the most important to transition for parents and the very most important of these people are the parents and their children.

We then ran a factor analysis on Phase II data to detect any statistical reasons to group these parental ratings about the importance of people in transition. This factor analysis generated three factors that together explain up to 81.6% of the original variances in the items. The first factor groups items such as high school principals (.70), fellow students (.69), friends of young people (.69), community agencies (.88), Ministry of Education (.87) and Board of Education (.87). The second factor relates to items about school and youth themselves: elementary/middle

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84 Although we understand that small sample sizes are small, we still chose to look for statistical reasons to check the stability of our explanation based on means.
85 We left to the program the decision about the number of factors by considering an Eigenvalue of 1.
86 Eigenvalue 7.39; % of variance=32.94.
87 Eigenvalue 1.76; % of variance=13.56.
principals (.87), elementary/middle teachers (.72), elementary/middle counsellors (.81), high school counsellors (.71), and youth themselves (.82). The third factor\(^{88}\) has to do with high school teachers (.91) and parents (.90). The important point to be noticed here is that this analysis shows that there are three distinct areas of influence on which the successful transition depends. The first is made of others being mainly institutions and more distant people, the second being the school (mainly elementary school and the student him or herself). The third being made up of parents themselves and secondary school teachers.

We ran a similar factor analysis in Phase III, which generated four factors\(^{89}\) which together explain up to 77.0% of the original variances in the items. The first factor\(^{90}\) is related to counsellors in elementary (.91) and high school (.91). We also see the importance of high school principals (.50). The second factor\(^{91}\) has to do with parents (.73), fellow students (.84) and friends (.89). The third factor\(^{92}\) is related to organizations such as community agencies (.62) Ministry of Education (.71) and Board of Education (.91). The fourth factor\(^{93}\) is for the youth themselves (.81), elementary teachers (.78), high school teachers (.57) and elementary principals (.51). We notice that when we described the data with means, we arrived at four sets of information and this factor analysis confirms these intuitive classifications for school personnel. But, it also forces recognition of counsellors as a significant group in their own right – which was not reflected by the means only. The factor analysis forces a similar recognition of the youth themselves and helps us to associate the youth with their teachers (elementary and middle school). The conclusion, according to the factor analysis, is that school personnel are not a group that stand on its own, but rather a grouping that includes young people as well. This again reinforces the notion of a constellation or community of important people (community of helpers) around and with young people that are necessary for transition.

It is interesting to note that we have no strong factor in the second analysis (Phase III) as we had in Phase II (grade 9) where the results point to the importance of a smaller number of people who are important in transition. In Phase II the first factor is more complex. In Phase III there is no such complex factor and categories are more divided around types of individuals and organizations. The more you progress in the school system the less the school itself is determining since life for young people in grade 10 becomes bigger than the school transition – by getting older and from moving from grade 8 to grade 10 the young people change their point of view on several items and become more responsibly connected to larger range of concerns. Thus, school and transition become less determining of life and they deal with school

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88 Eigenvalue 1.45; % of variance=11.15.
89 We left to the program the decision about the number of factors by considering an Eigenvalue of 1
90 Eigenvalue 3.94; % of variance=22.42
91 Eigenvalue 2.92; % of variance=20.58
92 Eigenvalue 1.84; % of variance=17.23
93 Eigenvalue 1.30; % of variance=16.75
as a system. School is making young people more similar and assimilated over time but at the same time their lives are becoming more complex.

Open-ended Responses from Parents

The Face Sheet also asked two open-ended questions of the parents in Phases II and III. The first one was to have them list the things that their child’s high school may have done better to assist with the transition.

In Phase II, 18 parents provided a first response to this question and 7 of them suggested that high school could provide orientation activities that would be helpful such as teacher welcoming, orientation days, open houses, and/or grade 8 visitation day. Four parents suggested that the high schools had already done a good job with the transition and 2 others suggested further culturally appropriate classes for grade 9.

In Phase III, the parents of grade 10 students make similar suggestions. Six of them wanted to see more orientation activities and 7 of them already felt that the high schools had done a good job. Other Phase III responses included a wish to see more social belonging activities such as “buddy systems” and “building a stronger sense of community” (n=4). One parent also mentioned the need for credit recovery and another for long term future planning for grade 10 students.

The second open-ended question asked parents to list ways in which schools could do better to keep them engaged in their child’s learning. In Phase II, 15 responses were provided with the most frequent being to “invite them” to continue their support and to provide information, letters and messages home (n=5 responses each). Other ideas offered by the parents were face-to-face meetings such as a parent’s day or parent councils. In Phase III, 36 responses were offered by parents with the most frequent being communication: either face-to-face (n=10) such as through open houses, meetings, volunteer opportunities and more open invitation on parent councils; or sending ongoing communications home (n=10) with newsletters, emails, phone calls, and reports. Other suggestions included trying to be more fun and creative with parent engagement (n=1) and getting parents involved with the school work itself (n=3).

In Phase III, parents answered three additional open ended questions to reflect on the transition. The first was to ask parents what they could themselves do to differently to help their child with transition from elementary to secondary school. In Phase III, the parents provided 23 responses to this question with the most frequent being “no” they did not feel that there was more they could do (n=10). Of those who did suggest a further role for parents, these included becoming more involved with parent orientations, parent councils and school work (n=8).
They then stated whether they thought students were still adjusting to transition in grade 10. Over half (58.3%, N=14) said “yes” they felt that their son/daughter was still adjusting to transition in grade 10. The reasons they provided were mainly in the social and developmental realms such as they are still in a process of development in physical (puberty) and social ways, and are learning to adjust to peer pressures and social identity issues while becoming independent. Others suggest that their sons and daughters were still coming to see the importance of education and still adjusting to managing high school and work load.

Finally, the parents of grade 10 students listed the top three things that students need to have a successful transition. Table 61 shows that they still see family support as primary with orientations and communications also frequently suggested.

### Table 61: Parent Suggestions of Top 3 Things Students need for a Successful Transition

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>First (n=24)</th>
<th>Second (n=22)</th>
<th>Third (n=17)</th>
<th>Totals</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Family / support</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Orientation (visit from school, orientation day/teacher orientations, good introduction to school/welcome camp, a classroom to begin orientation)</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self (focus/priorities/goals, organization skills, self-confidence, no fear of mistakes/failure, good study habits, self-esteem)</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers (HS and Elementary)</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adjustment period (well established routines; get used to changing teachers, doing more homework, being more independent)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Courses (more info on courses, course on learning strategies, more class work and less individual projects, more choices)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preparation (general HS knowledge, solid middle school program, preparation in Gr 8)</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other (extracurricular, show school spirit)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In Phase III, we also asked parents a number of additional grade 10 specific questions relating to the literacy test and their child’s programs and academic successes. Ninety-two percent (n=23) of the parents said that their child had completed the test and of those, 15 felt that they were ready for it and 16 felt that the test fit well with the grade 10 English program. Eighteen (81.8%) of the parents
who responded to the question relating to difficulty of the test said that their child did not find the test to be hard and another 11 parents said that nor did they find it easy.

We also asked parents if they had seen any change in grades over the transition for their sons and daughters. The parents provided means for the question such that the grade 8=81.9% (s=5.30), grade 9=80.2% (s=7.53) and grade 10=78.7% (s=13.9). For those who grades went down, parents suggested problems with social issues (peers and distractions) and academic struggles (loss of interest and quality of instruction). The suggestions relating to those higher grades were supportive educators and classmates providing good ethos for learning.

Textual Analysis of Focus Groups and Interviews

We ran a computer-assisted analysis on the lexical and syntactical components of the verbatim transcripts of Interviews and Focus Groups for three reasons: (1) to address any bias which might arise from our code book analysis of the verbatim transcripts; (2) to find out if there were important and meaningful patterns of thinking about transition as seen by the commonality of use of words; and (3) to examine correlations between main ideas about transition as presented for specific populations (youth, parent, educator) in the Focus Groups.

Initially, this type of statistical analysis of textual data aims to establish what is specific to individuals or groups. Something is specific to an entity if it appears more or less often. For instance, a term or a set of words can characterize a group because it is used either more or less by that group. At the next level, this type of statistical analysis of textual data can help us to observe how much a lexicon tends to be correlated. For example, by observing words or combinations of words, the analysis will indicate that some of these words go together to form a class. At the final level, the analysis will establish the distance between the observations. For example, if a word is specific to a group, it distances it from other groups or if some words appear together, they will be distant from some other words in the same situation. Words such as prepositions (à and de, in French, or at and of, in English) are specific to nothing; in a scatterplot, they will be in the centre of the distribution of words or groups defined by their lexicon. If a class has nothing in common with another, in that it does not share any vocabulary with other classes, it is distant from them. Therefore in observing the classifications and the factor analyses (as shown in the Figures below), we illustrate both the proximity and the distance between words, classes of words, and groups (youths, parents, and educators; region).

We ran the analyses on each of the sets of English-language and French-language Interview and Focus Group data separately since the two languages have different linguistic components and could not be treated as the same by the software. To realize such analyses, we used the program Alceste.
It should be noted that as *Alceste* is a French software (with different languages dictionaries built in), the Figures are produced with French-language headings regardless of whether the data fed into the program was English or French. So for example, for Figure 1, the titles for the 4 classifications are in French, but the data itself is English data. Similarly in Figure 2, the words illustrated are in the English-language, but the graph utilizes the French word for axis (axe).

This section will proceed by first presenting Phase I and II youth Interview analyses for English-language data and then for French-language data. (There were no interviews with students in Phase III.) In the second part of this section, analyses of the Focus Groups will be presented: Phases I, II and III will be separately illustrated for both English and French textual data and an internal comparison will be made between the Phases. In each of these analyses, *Alceste* will be requested to take into account three variables: the region in which the Focus Group was conducted; the status of the participants (Youth, Educator, Parent); and the type of family of schools from which the participants were drawn (complex or less complex). Thirdly, to offer a global view on the data, this section will show two large analyses, one for English-language data, the other one for French-language. In these analyses, ‘Phase’ will become a variable like ‘region’, ‘status’ and ‘family of school’. Phase is used here as a variable to examine the influence on time on the findings. By producing all of these analyses, we ensure that we examine every Phase individually, so that we do not lose any important characteristic of the different Phases; however, we still can provide an overview of the whole data, so that we can verify if the particular analysis is related to the general one. Finally, we will present some interesting and important vocabulary distinctions that arose from these transcriptions with the help of the program *Lexico*.

1. Youth Interviews
   1.1. English-language Interviews
      1.1.1. English-language Interviews: Phase I

In Phase I, there were 934 pages of transcription from the forty-three English-language Youth Interviews. *Alceste* identified 327,721 forms, which were reduced to 5,364 distinct forms. Three classes were created and only 15.54% of the initial corpus was omitted from the analysis (see Figure 1).
The first class was large and covered 58.06% of the original corpus and 68.74% of the analyzable portion. Its vocabulary was fairly restricted making the class easily definable. The class contained terms that associate the transition to secondary school with social relationships, specifically friendships: people+ (162), feel (140), talk+ (140), say (110), friend+ (95), new+ (74), kid+ (68) and group+ (58). Class 2 included words such as dad+ (233), mom+ (232), day+ (206), home+ (179), live+ (176), bus (165), walk+ (163) and house+ (102). Hence it was a composite of everyday concerns and feelings about the family feelings and covered 13.75% of the total data. Class 3 was made up 12.65% of the original corpus and dealt with school; its vocabulary consists of the following terms: French (342), math (320), English (292), science+ (290), geography (234), test+ (233), art+ (196), classes (122) and subject+ (119).

These three classes in the Phase I English-language Youth Interviews had a very dense intersection zone (see Figure 2). However, classes 2 and 3 were independent. We can therefore say that while the social relationship discourse was very high in density, and while it clearly existed as a separate entity, it nevertheless also moved into family-related statements and school-related statements. On the other hand, it is also safe to say that family-related matters could not be reduced to concerns about friendships or school. Similarly, although school and friendship have much in common, they are nonetheless also distinct in the discussion.
Figure 2. Phase I Factor Analysis of Correspondences for English-language Interviews (Alceste): Presented through Cartesian Coordinates

NB: variables have been designed and therefore presented in French
1.1.2. English-language Interviews: Phase II

The analysis of Phase II English-language sixty-one Interviews with young people absorbed 76% of the whole content of the interviews from the cleaned document of 578,766 words from 1,818 pages of text. Six classes were distinguished from this classification process (see Figure 3).

Figure 3. Analyzed class size for Phase II English-language Interviews (*Alceste*)

The first class (10.81%) shows concerns relating to problems and negative behaviour at school with words such as drug (222), fight+ (208), people (190), bullying (133), and pressure (130). The second class (14.98%) relates to school and education including programs of study and requirements which the school has asked from the student. The most prominent words are math (571), science (509), taking (500), test (369), mark (248), exam (193), and write (192). The third class (13.48 %) can be seen to relate to discussion about a normal day at school with words such as day (624), lunch (607), go (461), eat (451), home (380), and usually (351). The fourth
class (17.17%) refers to two separate semantics relating to school. The first is a retrospective evaluation of the past and the second is a description of the current situation. The first one held words such as were (534), did (442), elementary (355), was (269), eight (267). For the other semantic the dominant words were grade (619), high+ (505), and nine (483), and school+ (448). The fifth class (11.89%) referred to a category where ideas were expressed about what has to be done and how it can be done or under what circumstances it can be done to provide help and guidance in life. This included words such as help (903), could (407), life (379), guidance (335), important (322), anything (292), and make (247). The final class (7.31%) related to family and others with words such as mom (566), dad (413), she (400), him (339), sister (321), her (290), he (274), my (244), his (236), and house (220).

The analysis separated sets of information in the English-language Interview data but made obvious that these sets also have much in common (see Figure 4). For instance, it produced different groups of school information but did not disconnect these groups. Moreover, the information about school was not disconnected from that relating to family, behavior or a typical day at school. The analysis therefore reiterates the complexity and interconnections inherent in the process of transition as discussed by the young people in the English-language interviews. These tensions and interconnections are taken up in the later NVIVO analysis of the Interviews. The Interview data can also be seen to divide into nodes of discussion relating to being and becoming. Classes 1, 2, 3 and 6 described experiences of being in the present and the remaining classes address discussion referring to issues in becoming someone new (retrospective, current and prospective).
1.1.3. English-language Interviews: Comparison between Phases I and II

In the Phase I English-language Interviews, the information was less distinguishable such that we found only 3 classes in the data compared to 6 in Phase II. The Cartesian plane revealed more autonomous semantics. With these highly separate classes, we still saw 85% of the information being integrated into the analysis. Progressing across the transition seems to have led so far to more interconnected discussions about the complex process. This suggests that the experience of having made the transition is also making the ideas and discussions clearer in Phase II. Moreover, the Phase II data shows categorizations and tensions in discussions about
transition around *being* and *becoming*. These, as well as issues in *belonging*, will be further explicated in the NVIVO thematic analysis.

1.2. French-language Interviews
1.2.1. French-language Interviews: Phase I

There were nine interviews with francophone students. The transcripts total 157 pages. *Alceste* identified 54,966 forms, which can be reduced to 2,668 distinct forms. Analysis of the francophone interviews revealed four classes, which omitted 28.35% of the original information (see Figure 5).

**Figure 5. Analyzed class size for Phase I French-language Interviews (Alceste)**

Class 1 covered 26.03% of the total dataset and 36.33% of the processed material. It is strongly associated with Toronto (341) or the complex school family (160); it is more female (21) than male. Its lexicon consists of the following terms: *exemple*+ (34), *vrai*+ (31), *influence*+ (27), *autre*+ (25), *français* (23), *pression*+ (20),
important+ (19) and academique+ (18). It contained indications of thoughts about bad influences, the importance of maintaining the academic dimension of school, and harmful outside pressures. The vocabulary of class 2 was mostly family-related – parent+ (146), sœur+ (89), frere+ (64), mere (55) and famille+ (52) – but it also contains contribuent (299), aident (95) and transition (128). Class 2 included only 5.24% of the original corpus and 7.31% of the analyzed part. Class 3 covered 8.46% of the initial dataset and 11.80% of the processed material. The common denominator is school. Its vocabulary consists of terms such as traitent (122), enseignent (106), salle+ (83), matiere+ (76) and enseignant+ (65). The class contains many statements about exasperation with the way teachers treat the students like “babies”, and the desire to move on to high school to get away from this attitude. Class 4 was large, making up 31.94% of the entire corpus and 44.57% of the analyzed portion. It relates primarily to Hearst/Moonbeam (108) and the less complex family of school (103); Ottawa (46) was correlated as well. It dealt with everyday concerns and the search for fun: petit+ (37), diner+ (30), bien+ (28), temps (26), heure+ (25), fun (24), devoir+ (18) and rire+ (18).

As in the other analyses, there is a tight core at the centre of the discourse. In this case, it is formed by the two largest classes, which are also the most restricted classes. At the root of the discourse on the transition to high school is discussion of possible influences and everyday concerns associated with the need to have fun. Connected to these statements, though there is no alienation, is a discussion about family and school (see Figure 6).
1.2.2. French-language Interviews: Phase II

The analysis of Phase sixteen II French-language Interviews with young people absorbed 69% of the whole content of the interviews from the cleaned document of 117,287 words, which can be reduced to 4,298 forms. Three classes were distinguished from this classification process, one of which contains almost 40% of the information (See Figure 7).
The first class (21.85%) refers to transition, with words such as *secondaire* (268), *neuvième* (166), *huitième* (72), *préparer* (66), *peur* (65), *intermédiaire* (60), *expérience* (59), *négatif* (56), *positif* (55), *élémentaire* (54), *changement* (47). This vocabulary reveals that we are really in the heart of the transition process: youth speak of preparing, of changing, of fears. The second class (39.20%) is much larger and is more semantically diverse than the other two. It is significantly associated with the GTA. There is no dominant theme in this class; many words refer to school, but not in a way that allows for the extraction of a specific semantic category. In this class, we find words like *science* (62), *heure* (54), *math* (45), *temps* (45), *maison* (43), *devoir* (43), *théorie* (38), *semaine* (30), *anglais* (28), *français* (27), *cours* (26). This class deals with a mixture of themes relating to school and to other aspects of a student’s life. The third class (8.37%), much smaller than the other two, relates to life and, more specifically, to the intimate world or environment of youth. In fact the word “vie” (life), which is first in this class, has the highest chi-square (575) of the whole classification. Other words that appear are: *important* (262), *famille* (227), *aider* (180), *ami* (134), *faciliter* (131), *améliorer* (119), *personne* (96), *gens* (66), *agréable* (58), *souhait* (50). The vocabulary illustrates preoccupations concerning the life of the individual: it speaks of those who are part of it, of elements of meaning, of aspirations.
The analysis separated sets of information from the French-language Interview data into three classes. Although distinct, these sets share some things in common, as their intersection reveals. But, what is more noticeable than what they share is what separates them. The first class is relatively autonomous, while the second has very little autonomy. The third class is very distinct and independent from the other two. If we examine the vocabulary contained within each class, the noticeable autonomy of the third class does not seem so surprising: the first class deals mostly with transition, while the second deals with a plurality of themes, but most of which are related to school in some way and the third class refers to the individual’s personal life. It is therefore logical that the second class be much more connected to the other two and that the third class be quite distinct (see Figure 8).

Figure 8. Phase II Factor Analysis of Correspondences for French-language Interviews (Alceste): Presented through Cartesian Coordinates
1.2.3. French-language Interviews: Comparison between Phases I and II

When we compare Interview analyses for Phases I and II, the first thing we notice is the recurrence across Phases of many themes. In Phase I, the analyses presented four classes: one, rather eclectic, dealing with indications or thoughts about bad influences, the importance of maintaining the academic dimension, and harmful outside pressures; a second in which the vocabulary was mostly family-related; a third dealing with school; and a fourth which spoke of everyday concerns and the search for fun. In Phase II, three classes emerged: the first spoke of transition; the second, more diverse, spoke of many things and perhaps a little more specifically of school; and the last class focused on life and youth's personal relationships and environment. In both Phases, youth's vocabulary reveals preoccupations surrounding family, school and everyday life. In Phase II, bad influences and harmful outside pressures are no longer a part of students' main concerns. As they move into high school, youth still reflect on school and on their personal lives; but they also speak of the changes they are experiencing and as these transformations take place, the fears associated with them are less and less a part of their representations, of their semantics.

1.3. Conclusion on the Interviews

These 2 analyses of the sets of Interviews reveal that in general Anglophone and Francophone concerns are similar even if they are not built exactly the same way in the discussion of the young people. We see that however it is constructed; questions about school, family and life expectations are dominant. We see the importance of friends everywhere. Transition is a very significant rite de passage in life and emotions for both linguistic groups are intense during this period. Because it is so significant, experiences and emotions are heightened for youth.

2. Focus Groups

2.1. English-language Focus Groups

2.1.1. English-language Focus Groups: Phase I

In Phase I, the English-language Focus Groups with Youth, Parents, and Educators covered 520 pages of text, contained a total of 206,614 forms, 4,835 of which were distinct forms. The analysis considered 63.59% of the available information, discarding the remaining 36.41%. Three classes were created (See Figure 9).
Class 1 included 29.58% of the corpus elements, or 46.52% of the material processed and gathered concerns about school as such: class (140), test+ (109), teacher+ (78), math (67), learn (44), how students are treated [treat+ (57)] and dress codes [wear (45)]. Class 2 contained 8.43% of the corpus, or 13.26% of the information processed and was primarily characteristic of Thunder Bay (257) and Sudbury (452), including topics such as travelling to school [bus (66)], Catholic schools [catholic (77)] and home [house+ (107)]. Class 3 included 25.58% of the available information, or 40.22% of the data analyzed and applied mainly to the GTA (186). Vocabulary in this Class consisted of the following terms: school+ (348), elementary (119), friend+ (82), pressure+ (68), parent+ (62), transition+ (62), move+ (55), help+ (75).

While the statements in these classes had some connection to specific regions, they were also fairly wide-ranging. It is clear from Figure 10 that while it is true that the statements in class 3 about friends, pressure and transition were from Toronto, they
were also generalizable. The class that encompasses the most space is class 2, which is paradoxically the smallest class, containing only 13.26% of the analyzed discourse. This indicates that there are great distances between the terms that define the class’s contents. Thus, when the English-language students in Phase I discussed transition in the Focus Groups: (1) they talked about academic requirements as they coincide with evaluations, learning and regulations; (2) they talked about the school system and relations with their friends or parents; and (3) they expressed issues relating to travelling to school, such as increased distance and a change in the mode of transportation for example, longer bus ride or taking the subway (See Figure 10).

Figure 10. Phase I: Factors Analysis of Correspondences for English-language Focus Groups (Alceste): Presented through Cartesian Coordinates
2.1.2. English-language Focus Groups: Phase II

The analysis took into consideration 73% of the whole content of the Focus Groups (there was only 27% of the whole content that was not classified). This is quite powerful given that the final cleaned English-language Focus Group document contained 459,670 words across 1,285 pages of text. This analysis generated 8 classes (See Figure 11).

Figure 11. Analyzed class size for Phase II English-language Focus Groups (Alceste)

The first class (13.06%) has to do with discussions around helping with life, help and guidance in transition and attempting to actively meet goals. Chi-squares are high for words such as help (819), could (504), life (338), important (330), make (323), and guidance (277). In this first classification the youth, educators and parents discuss the importance of help and guidance in transition. The second classification (9.88%) has to do with time, sequence and evolution in progressing through secondary education. This is made in connection to other types of information which involve becoming such as progressing over time is “being something new or becoming a new being”, feeling or getting older, better/worse etc. The Chi-squares are dominant for words like year (511), finish (229), grade+ (206), high (184), new (179) different (167), best
(145) worst (139), old+ (62), feel (60). The third class (13.67%) deals with things to do with being such as experiencing a normal school day and organization of time in a normal day. For example, day (607), lunch (585), morning (341), minute (303) wake (283) were frequently mentioned. The fourth class (10.36%) of the original data and contains words relating to behaviour and problematic relationships with others encountered while being at school such as people (211), fight (201), drug (123), bullying (83), friendly (83) and pressure (82). The fifth class (7.60%) relates to discussion about the everyday being and work in the classroom, assessment and pedagogy. For example, assign+ (808), test+ (689), grade+ (378), quizzes (332). The sixth class (7.30%) contains vocabulary which relates mostly to being in the family such as mom (571), dad (379), sister (286), house (207), and brother (158). The seventh class (5.69%) relates to courses and programs of study at secondary school; the most predominant set of words include taking (1,167), applied (850), semester (794), academic (743), and another set of predominant word including subjects or courses such as English (629), math (535), science (480) and history (381). The final class in the English-language Focus Group data from Phase II refers to retrospective elements and evaluations of transition. These words include did (1074), useful (845), prepare (618), found (536), welcome (417), helpful (358), transition (302), and was (293).

This analysis was made up to 8 classes. This suggests that it has been possible for Alceste to reveal 8 sets in which information was interconnected and which were easily conceptualized. However, these classes are not entirely separate and they all overlap and have common intersections (see Figure 12). The need for help relates to progress in educational program or curriculum and with family relationships. It is because these young people are now in high school that they have a more realistic sense of what high school is that they spoke to us about transition in more sophisticated ways. The classes can be seen to relate to discussions and tensions surrounding being and becoming such that classes 1,3 and 8 refer to becoming and trajectories in transition and the remaining classes refer to descriptive discussion relating to being in the present in schools and families (See Figure 12).
2.1.3. English-language Focus Groups: Phase III

In Phase III, there were 815 pages of transcription from the twenty-three English-language Focus Groups. Alceste identified 309,547 forms which were reduced to 6,615 distinct forms. Only 57% of the original document can be taken into consideration, but the analysis generates not less than six classes (See Figure 13).
The first class gathers 8.82% of the initial data. The content is particularly associated with parents (634) and Sudbury (248). Vocabulary has to do with communication [send (181), email+ (117), phone+ (89), call (71), communica+ (59)] and problems related to school [wait+ (85), report+ (84), attend+ (69), today (65), direct+ (58), principal+ (44), counsel (43), unfortunate+ (42), suspension+ (42)]. The second class integrates 12.61% of available information. The lexicon deals with school subjects and work: math+ (277), English (239), class+ (223), applied (183), fail+ (182), course+ (164), grade+ (151), take (150), teach. (141), test+ (88), work+ (52); it mainly belongs to educators (114). The third class collects 7.06% of the whole textual data. Again, it is mostly related to educators (365) who express the importance of students’ continued commitment and the place of a good environment towards a successful transition: transition+ (380), successful+ (173), engage+ (158), import+ (154), sort+ (123), think (112), student+ (104), social+ (97), kid+ (73), involve+ (63), academically (55), population (55), parent+ (54), help+ (50). The fourth one describes 8.17% of the discussions that took place during the Phase III Focus Groups. It emphasises youth’s (166) point of view. Here, the most important chi-square is for friend+ (237); the second one is for sport+ (177) and the rest is a mix of eclectic
terms in which relationships play a significant role: team+ (149), settle+ (134),
confident+ (129), meet. (123), anybody (11), people+ (99), new+ (92), decision+ (89),
happ+ (89), school+ (85). The fifth class, even though it is not big, is the
largest of the classifications with 14.64% of inclusion of the initial content. Again, it is
distinctive of young people (388). Students talk about what troubles them: pressure+
(209), girl+ (206), drug+ (206), differ+ (174), people+ (147), term+ (142), treat+
(136), notice+ (120), drink. (118), and bully+ (111). The last class is the smallest
one; it includes 5.37% of the whole of the transcriptions. It is about daily matters and
questions: hour+ (339), lunch (255), mom (176), bus (150), weekend+ (148), job+
(146), clean+ (143, morning+ (125), food+ (98), allow+ (93); this vocabulary is used
above all by youth (85), but it is not exclusive to them.

These six classes are highly interconnected. The sixth one shows some autonomy,
which means that everyday concerns are not specific to school. But the five others are
highly associated. Communication, school work, individual commitment, friendship,
and school trouble have an existence of their own and this is what the classification
reveals; but at the same time it demonstrates that these specific words are not really
separable in the mind of parents, educators and young people when they talk about
school transition. This is also true for everyday life discourse, but at another level (See
Figure 14).
2.1.4. English-language Focus Groups: Global analysis across all three Phases

We have presented three separate analyses for the English-language Focus Groups, one for each of the Phases. In all of them, we have asked the program to search for differences and similarities according to region, family of school, and respondent status. By doing so, we have been able to compare explicitly the three Phases. Now, we describe the results of an analysis that incorporates the textual data from all of the
three Phases, the Phase becoming a variable like others. This analysis took into consideration the transcripts arising from a total of 79 Focus Groups. In doing so, *Alceste* analyzed a document of 2,669 pages. It observed 1,026,984 forms that it reduced to 11,535 distinct ones. It was capable of analyzing up to 84% of this data in creating seven classes (See Figure 15).

**Figure 15. Analyzed class size for Phases I, II, and III English-language Focus Groups (*Alceste*)**

The first class captures 14.89% of the total document. It reports on academic questions: math+ (763), applie+ (547), English (363), course+ (363), subject+ (304), science+ (297), semester+ (267), academ+ (263), teach. (244), fail+ (157), university+ (156), credit+ (155), test+ (139), French+ (136). This vocabulary is particularly inherent to educators (126). The second class seizes 12.15% of the original data. The vocabulary is characteristic of young people (588) and relates to relationships. The top word is friend+ with a chi-square of 380. There are terms related to family: sister+ (333), brother+ (225), cousin+ (143), sibling+ (120); several others define kinds of relationship: settle+ (173), helpful (153), advice (143), influence+ (142). The third class seizes 10.62% on the transcriptions. The educators
(883) are highly sensitive to its lexicon referring to transition: transition+ (272), student+ (199), successful+ (197), risk+ (192), educate+ (153), place+ (138), social+ (136), success (134), support+ (122), perspective+ (98), and need (95). The fourth class gathers 12.83% of the document. The vocabulary inhabits young people’s (364) minds and discussions. It refers to social preoccupations and problems: girl+ (489), drug+ (460), bully+ (384), drink (315), sex (286), pressure+ (277), boy+ (275), people+ (269), and treat+ (251). The fifth class integrates 8.60% of the textual data. It revolves around guidance and the vocabulary is frequently used by educators (402): guidance+ (546), student+ (269), counsellor+ (204), counsellor+ (198), meeting+ (179), involve+ (174), meet (156), council+ (145), and inform+ (109). The sixth class collects 7.06% of the data. The lexicon is connected to the parents. It is about youth and life: child+ (354), son+ (220), daughter+ (219), engage+ (127), hope+ (109), neighbourhood+ (89). The seventh and final class counts for 17.51% of the transcript. It is about everyday life at school: lunch (304), wear (287), eat (175), minute+ (164), detention+ (133), gym (131), uniform+ (124), yell+ (122), bad+ (119), suspend+ (113), shirt+ (106), office (104), write (104), cafeteria+ (103), money (95). This vocabulary appears more often in youth’s (513) sentences.

All of these classes communicate closely. In fact, they appear to be different topics of the same kind of communication and discussion. This can be clearly seen in Figure 16. Overlapping can be seen to be the rule for these classes.
Figure 16. Phases I, II, and III: Factors Analysis of Correspondences for the English-language Focus Groups (Alceste): Presented through Cartesian Coordinates
2.1.5. **English-language Focus Groups: Comparison between Phases I, II and III**

If we compare the Focus Group analyses for Phases I, II and III, several interesting interpretations emerge. In Phase I, the analysis showed only 2 classifications referring to school but there were 5 referring to school in Phase II and 4 in Phase III. Having been through the experience of transitioning, the information in Phases II and III became easier for youth, educators and parents to make distinctions about. For instance, in Phase I, school, friends and pressures made up one class; in Phase II they are three separate categories and in Phase III they make up four separate categories.

Even though information became more distinguishable in Phases II and III, there were also overlaps between these different classes. These overlaps show that there are connections not only within the categories in Phase II and even more in Phase III, but also between the categories. This is probably why these processes are less distinguishable in Phase I than in Phase II and III. We should also report that this finding could relate to the fact that we did not ever see significant specific differences for the Focus Group content in Phase II for gender, region or group (parents, educators or youth). But, in Phase I, we reported that regions had an influence on the structure of the data. This may suggest a move toward homogeneity of experiences in transition between elementary and secondary school.

This analytical direction was again explored in Phase III and showed that group and region were significant to the structure of the data. For Sudbury, the lexicon is mainly about communication. There was also a lexicon specific to groups (especially educators and youth). Between Phases II and Phase III there are interesting and specific findings. For example, a class of discourse becomes more and more semantically specific to young people. We see the data distinguished by youth (twice), parents (once) and educators (once) as dominant but not exclusive in sets of words. This suggests that groups crystallize the semantics in Phase III. The general analysis across the three Phases confirms this important distinction of vocabulary according to groups. In moving from Phase I to II to III, gender still did not discriminate the perceptions, region did so slightly and groups were most notable.

2.2. **French-language Focus Groups**

2.2.1. French-language Focus Groups: Phase I

The twelve Phase I French-language Focus Groups of parents and youth (there were no educators) generated 296 pages of transcription. *Alceste* counted 91,368 forms, 3,635 of which were distinct forms. The analysis created six classes, which omitted only 26.68% of the information in the corpus (See Figure 17).
Figure 17. Analyzed class size for Phases I French-language Focus Groups (Alceste)

Class 1 was the largest, covering 22.90% of the initial corpus and 31.29% of the processed portion. It clearly dealt with family relations: sœur+ (111), frère+ (84), parent (71), mere (50). There were also allusions to friends [ami+ (46)], and the concept of help was recurrent [aident (59); aide+ (54)]. Class 2, which included 15.70% of the entire corpus, referred to peur+ (45), pression+ (29) and drogue+ (22). It is associated to some extent with the Kapuskasing/Hearst region.

Class 3 was about school, with a vocabulary consisting of the following terms: classe+ (49), apprennent (44), professeur+ (43), code (41) and corridor+ (32). It includes 6.47% of the initial corpus and 8.83% of the analyzed corpus. Class 4 contained 9.22% of the complete dataset and 12.58% of the processed data. Its lexicon reflected an awareness of change in the education system and, more generally, in life: année (181), sixième+ (132), huitième (121), traite+ (132), été (96), élève (82), maintenant (56), mature+ (48), septième (38). Class 5 contains 11.38% of the raw material and 15.52% of the processed material. It deals with bilingualism. The vocabulary is obvious: anglais (306), française+ (272), langue+ (254), francophone+
(230), français (228). Class 6 includes words used by the facilitators: feuille, onglet, page, etiquette, jaune.

On the basis of the discussions in the Phase I Focus Groups, when francophones think about the transition from elementary to secondary school, (1) they think of their family and friends; (2) they fear the pressures that might drive them to undesirable behaviours; (3) they think of the practical aspects of going to school; (4) they think of change in various forms; and (5) they reflect on language. These topics are identifiable in themselves, but they are also difficult to dissociate (See Figure 18). Classes 5 and 6 are, of course, somewhat independent from the rest, though class 6 is excluded from the analysis. Yet even class 5 has much in common with the other classes. For example, while it is true that there is a discourse on language, or relationships, or progression and maturity, what is said in each analytic class overlaps with the statements in the other classes.
Figure 18. Phase I: Factors Analysis of Correspondences for the French-language Focus Groups (Alceste): Presented through Cartesian Coordinates
2.2.2. French-language Focus Groups: Phase II

The analysis of the eleven Phase II Focus Group with French-language parents, educators and young people absorbed 67.42% of the whole content of the interviews from the cleaned document of 116,746 words from 368 pages of cleaned verbatim text. Four classes were distinguished from this classification process for French-language Focus Group which means that a relatively important component of information cannot be integrated in the analyses (See Figure 19).

Figure 19. Analyzed class size for Phases II French-language Focus Groups (Alceste)

The first class (17.20%) was a point of view on the elementary years and what is needed to realize a good transition. The significant vocabulary includes words like eleve (174), septieme (145), sixieme (63), façon (61), huitieme (58), transition (50), orientation (46), besoin (34). The second class (11.25%) focused on the high school years and their consequences for the future; we find in this class a glossary of words like annee (146), neuvieme (117), applique (98), theorie (83), universite (83), carrier
The third class (13.55%) combined terms that reflects concerns for Francophones in their schools; terms are unequivocal: français (712), anglais (586), langue (309), francophone (227), Anglophone (189), école (108), bilingue (97), diplôme (95), avantage (82). The last class (25.42) discussed important activities that parallel school work: sport (62), devoir (61), personne (57), monde (54), temps (43), rire (41), aimer (34), jouer (32), ami (29.)

The four classes have common intersections (See Figure 20). These are easily understandable when we realize that they all have to do with school, directly or indirectly. But the class that presents specific preoccupations for Francophones shows an area which is relatively detached from the strong sectors of compact interconnections.
Figure 20. Phase II Factor Analysis of Correspondences for French-language Focus Groups (Alceste): Presented through Cartesian Coordinates
2.2.3. French-language Focus Groups: Phase III

For the six Phase III French-language Focus Groups with youth and parents, the transcription covers 321 pages. Alceste indicates 60,171 forms which can be reduced to 3,323 distinct ones. It produces four classes after having been able to take into account 64% of the textual data (See Figure 21).

Figure 21. Analyzed class size for Phases III French-language Focus Groups (Alceste)

The first class gathers 13.95% of the whole data, 21.83% of the analyzable one. Discourse is mainly parents’ (201) and it is more common in Toronto (165) and in complex family of school (165). It is very eclectic: rire+ (124), enf+ant (87), petit+ (68), garçon+ (57), autobus (55), parent+ (48), role+ (48), fille+ (41), problem< (29), scolarisation (25), âge+ (24), rencontrer+ (22) et métro+ (22). The second class contains 6.91% of the document’s information. It is typical of Ottawa (232) and, at a lesser level, of youth (47). The content is about school obligations and the
derived attitudes: projet+ (143), prof+ (119), semaine+ (110), temps (102), stress+ (68), ger+er (66), particip+er (62), semestre+ (60), test+ (57), dîner+ (50), travaux (50), examen+ (50). The third class includes 15.21% of the transcriptions. It deals with the school system but, overall, in terms of language: anglais+ (229), français+ (225), langue+ (105), francophon+ (94), anglophone+ (74), ecole+ (63), facteur+ (51), systeme (51), cote+ (48), catholique (34), avantage+ (29). The last class is the largest one: 27.84% of the initial data, 43.56% of the analyzed. The lexicon is significant in less complex family of school (74), for youth (74), and in Sudbury (56) as well as rural north (33). It is difficult to define because it is about affection [aim+er (35), fun (22), sentir (13)], education [annee+ (28), secondaire+ (22), dixieme (21), neuvieme (15)], help [aid+er (17)], and attitude [positif (14), oblig+er (14), chang+er (14)].

Inside and outside school orientations are connected and do not stand completely on their own, as seen in the first three classes. This is also true of the importance of bilingualism. The fourth class is a reflection of the way these young people and parents are representing the transition process for themselves (See Figure 22). This tells us that for Phase II Francophone youth and parents, thinking about transition from this vantage point leads to very eclectic understandings of the process of transition.
Figure 22. Phase III Factor Analysis of Correspondences for French-language Focus Groups (Alceste): Presented through Cartesian Coordinates
2.2.4. French-language Focus Groups: Global analysis across all three Phases

As we did for the English-language Focus Groups analyses, after having separated results for each Phase, we now present a global analysis in which “Phase” becomes a variable among others.

The total of twenty-nine French-language transcriptions produced a 933-page document in which Alceste found a total of 291,137 forms among which 7,278 were distinct. Six classes can be generated which include 79% of the transcriptions (See Figure 23).

Figure 23. Analyzed class size for Phases I, II, and III French-language Focus Groups (Alceste)

The first class holds 15.52% of the transcriptions. Its lexicon is particularly representative of parents (1232); it is common for rural north (130), Phase III (130) and, at a lesser degree, complex families of schools (64). Individuals tend to make use of past tenses: était (220), avait (86), ai (85). Time markers are frequent [vingt-
quatre (172), ans (128), trois (118), quinze (85)] as well as reference to school performance [appliqué+ (108), cent+ (89), pourcent+ (74), soixante (74)]. People talk mostly about others and their position with regards to them: elle+ (136), enfant+ (103), moi+ (102), fille+ (94), lui (83), garçon+ (78). The second class is the largest one: 23.87% of the original content, 30.31% of the treated one. Some modalities are determinant at different levels: youth (912), Sudbury (140), less complex families of schools (132), Ottawa (50). The generic second person is usual: tu (169), toi (85), te (48). This is a way for young people to talk about themselves in including others. Vocabulary is heterogeneous, referring to freedom [choose. (131), peux (65), liberté+ (62)], affection [aime+ (80), fun (73), trouve+ (66)], values [bonne+ (77), sport+ (62), mauvaise+ (45)], social problems [pression+ (74)], and school obligation [devoir+ (62), classe+ (58), art+ (47)]. The third class includes 8.61% of the corpus. In it, youth (257) and Phase I play a significant role, and so does Sudbury (58) but at another level. This class is about relationship with others [soeur+ (527), frere+ (372), ma (343), aident (341), mon (212), ami+ (195), mere (154), aide+ (135), toi (123), pere (108), cousin+ (105)] and emotion [peur+ (123), ajuster (115), hate+ (98), nerveux (66)]. The fourth class gathers 9.48% of the transcription. It is about language questions and the benefit of bilingualism: française+ (1178), anglais (1016), français (888), langue+ (821), anglaise+ (615), francophone+ (483), diplôme (453), anglophone+ (399), avantage+ (367), obtenir (326), ecole+ (305), and bilingue+ (261). The fifth class gets 6.51% of the initial content. Here is expressed what the research Focus Group Facilitators have said: feuille+ (874), page+ (552), etiquette (400), jaune (356), questionnaire+ (313). The sixth and last class covers 14.76% of the French-language Focus Groups. The discourse is characteristic of educators (1228), but it is also significant for Phase II (163), complex families of schools (117), parents (92), and Toronto (64). It is about transition, students’ transition: septième (256), élève+ (246), transition+ (201), leur+ (138), jeune+ (128), sixième+ (106), ils (103), arrivent (95), ont (94), sont (92), niveau (81), réussir+ (79), camp (76), stratégie+ (74), and peuvent (73).

The fifth class is quite independent from others (See Figure 24): it is not about transition, it is the language that was used to invite the participants to talk about it; it does not reflect the respondent opinion, but the interviewer words. The fourth class shows some autonomy as well: it is about the advantage of being bilingual; this advantage is related to transition, but not in an absolute way. The four other classes are strongly interconnected: talking about transition is (1) expressing ideas on time sequence, (2) having an eclectic discourse about freedom, values, social problems and obligations, expressed in a general fashion, (3) talking about relationships and emotions, and (4) having opinion about transition per se. These four semantics have relative autonomy but cannot be completely separated in the mind of Francophone who have a position on the topic.

Figure 24. Phases I, II, and III: Factors Analysis of Correspondences for the French-language Focus Groups (Alceste): Presented through Cartesian Coordinates
2.2.5. French-language Focus Groups: Comparison between Phases I, II and III

If we compare the French-language Focus Group analyses for Phases I, II and III several interesting interpretations emerge. In Phase I, the analysis produced six classes, one of which was omitted from the analysis. These classes revealed that when Francophones think about the transition from elementary to secondary school, (1) they think of their family and friends; (2) they fear the pressures that might drive them to undesirable behaviours; (3) they think of the practical aspects of going to
school; (4) they think of change in various forms; and (5) they reflect on language. These classes shared a strong center of common intersections, with class 5 being somewhat independent from the rest.

In Phase II, the analysis produced four classes: the first class was a point of view on the elementary years and what was needed to realize a good transition; the second focused on the high school years and its consequences for the future; the third combined terms that reflect concerns for Francophones in their schools; and the last class discussed activities that parallel school work. The classes are closely interconnected; the first and second class, which deals with elementary and high school are especially close. All of these classes deal with school in some way, whether directly or indirectly.

In Phase II, school seems to be at the core of students’ lives, whether in the form of retrospection or projection. If we compare these findings with those of Phase I, we can conclude that there has been a shift in preoccupations: in Phase I, school was only part of the reflection, family and friends occupying most of youth’s vocabulary. We also found a lexicon around pressure, one concerning change, one dealing with language. Youth’s considerations were then much more eclectic, much more diverse. As they enter high school, their focus on school and on the future becomes apparent; the fears seem to have faded and changed. Reflections on language remain, but in a way that is now integrated, that is now part of their reality rather than an external element on which to reflect.

As we move from Phase I through Phase III the number of distinguishable classes moves from 6 to 4 (in each of Phase II and III). This means that over time, it is more difficult for young Francophones to separate out their ideas about transition. We start to see this in Phase II where, for instance, language does not by itself constitute a lexicon. We see it even more in Phase III, but in a different way. For example, two of the classes are very eclectic which shows that as young people move through school their ideas become more impossible to divide. Even the third class is a nexus of school and language preoccupations. Only one classification relating to school was narrow.

In Phase III we see clearly that family of school, region and group play a role especially in class one and two (the more eclectic classes). There were no such findings in Phase II and Phase I. As we move over time we get to a less divisible psyche about transition. All of that which has to furnish a student’s mind about transition is obvious as they always speak about the topics of family, language and school. From Phase II to Phase III we have the same number of classes but a different interconnection of the same ideas.

The general analysis also showed a common observation of the findings that were presented in the separate Phase by Phase analyses and lends credence to them. Six classes were generated and some lexicons were specific to Phases. For example the
language and school correlation also remained in the general analysis as a classification of its own.

2.3 Focus Group Conclusion – English and French

There were some similarities and differences in the Focus Groups that are of note. For example, the young people in both English-language and French-language groups approached their discussion of transition in more complex and eclectic ways than did the young people in Phases I and II. This is not to say that the grade 8 and 9 discussions are not rich and varied; just that there is something that is occurring over time as young people acculturate to high school and begin to integrate their experiences across any neatly defined categories. Their experiences are more integrated into their whole lives. However, for the French-language youth, this complexity always contains the persistent element of language. The issues surrounding language remained an obvious concern for Francophone youth in transition even if they discussed them in different ways over time. The implication is that transition cannot be separated from an awareness of matters of Francophonie and language.

In analysis of both French-language and English-language data, the independent variables (region, group and Phase) played some part in structuring the data. But, they did so differently for each of the data sets. For French-language participants, there was more similarity than difference in the way that youth, parents and educators spoke about the transition but region played a part. This directs one to the need to understand the transitional issues differently in the GTA and northern Ontario. The Anglophone participants were more divided from each other (youth, parents and educators) in their discussion of transition and the elements of importance in the process. The variable “group” remained the most significant in distinguishing the structure of the English data. This trend is echoed in the more detailed NVIVO analysis of Focus Groups to follow.

2.4. General Conclusion on Interviews and Focus Groups

A final word on the French-language and English-language Alceste analysis is warranted. When we look at both the French-language Focus Group and the French-language Interview analyses with Alceste and compare it with the English-language analyses, the first thing we can point out is the fact that the French-language data is always composed of fewer categories. But, if there are fewer categories in the French-language analyses, there is not less information. All the themes found in the English-language analyses are present in the French-language: concerns regarding school, drugs, behaviour, future, career, family, for example, are just as much a part of the French-language lexicon as they are a part of the English lexicon. The difference is
that in the French-language data, they are less dissociable or detachable from one another.

But if the English classes overlap less, they are still very much interconnected and, therefore, not independent. This reveals, finally, that French-language and English-language participants have a different way of organizing the similar information. The second thing to point out is that the French-language Focus Groups present a class which focuses on the status of minority language. This vocabulary cannot appear in the English-language Focus Groups, since it was not a direct question that Anglophones were invited to reflect on; and it did not appear in the Interviews.

**Lexical and Syntactical Analysis with *Lexico***

We also ran analysis in Phase II (just as we had done in Phase I) using *Lexico* on the interview data for English-language and French-language samples. These analyses allowed us to delve further into the specific lexical and morpho-syntactical classifications of the Interviews. Just as in Phase I, the Phase II students’ thoughts about the transition from elementary to secondary school centered on a threefold theme of social and friendship issues and the paradox of hope and fear. The social theme of friends recurred more often than the other two. In order to illustrate the phenomena, we created three concept clusters in both the English and French languages. We linked each concept to a vocabulary that was sufficiently similar semantically to avoid missing any of the concept’s occurrences in the transcript. In the concept friends (amis), for example, we included all forms and derivatives of the word “amis” (ami, amis, amies, amitie, amities), and we added the anglicism “social” when it related to friendships. For the concept fear (peur), we pulled together all forms and derivatives of the word “peur” as well as the words inquietude (worry), anxiete (anxiety), nervosite (nervousness), mefiance (suspicion) and crainte (apprehension). The concept hope (espoir) was built around forms and derivatives of the words espoir, esperance (expectation), hate (eagerness), excitation (excitement), envie (yearning) and desir (desire).

In English, the concept Friend was composed of the forms and derivatives of the words friends and social. The concept Fear included the forms and derivatives of fear, of course, but also anxiety, nervous, afraid and scare. The concept Hope consisted of the forms and derivatives of hope, expect and wish. We programmed *Lexico* to construct a graph of the relative frequency of those concepts in the interview corpora, both English-language and French-language, and we had it analyze the results by region.

In both Phase I and II, the graphs were conclusive (See Figures 25 and 26), and highly illustrative. First, if we compare them by language we can see that their structure is essentially the same, which means that Francophones and Anglophones
use the vocabulary of the three themes with similar frequency and that the similarity is not really affected by regions. Second, we see that friendship terminology predominates by a wide margin. Third, we observe that the frequencies for the hope and fear terminologies are close.

Figure 25. Phase II: Relative Frequency Distribution of the Friendship, Hope and Fear Terminologies in the English-language Interviews by Region

Figure 25 legend
- Blue line = Friends
- Red line = Fear
- Green line = Hope

Figure 26. Phase I: Relative Frequency Distribution of the Friendship, Hope and Fear Terminologies in the English-language Interviews by Region
Figure 26 legend
Blue line = Friends
Red line = Fear
Green line = Hope

Figure 27. Phase II: Relative Frequency Distribution of the Friendship, Hope and Fear Terminologies in the French-language Interviews by Region
Figure 27 legend
Blue line = Amis (friends)
Red line = Peur (fear)
Green line = Espoir (hope)

Figure 28. Phase I: Relative Frequency Distribution of the Friendship, Hope and Fear Terminologies in the French-language Interviews by Region
It is interesting to note the small movements between and within these concepts over time although never did their order of importance change. In Phase III, we are only able to present the trends with Focus Group data as we did not conduct any interviews. It is noteworthy that the young people in grade 10 (Phase III) still claim the importance of friends, although this diminishes somewhat from Phase I and II.
Interviews. The relative absence and near disappearance of fear is also worth noting in the Phase III Focus Groups (See Figure 29 and 30).

Figure 29. Phase III: Relative Frequency Distribution of the Friendship, Hope and Fear Terminologies in the English-language Focus Groups by Region

Figure 29 legend
Blue line = Friends
Red line = Fear
Green line = Hope

Figure 30. Phase III: Relative Frequency Distribution of the Friendship, Hope and Fear Terminologies in the French-language Focus Groups by Region
Figure 25 legend
Blue line = Amis (friends)
Red line = Peur (fear)
Green line = Espoir (hope)
Main Messages and Themes in Focus Group Data

In total, we have spoken with **596 Youth** in 57 English-language Focus Groups and 22 French-language Focus Groups. These 596 youth participants have provided rich descriptive data to round out their Face Sheet data which was collected in every Focus Group. In addition, we have spoken with a total (English-language and French-language) of **74 Parents** in 21 Focus Groups and **125 Educators** in 24 Focus Groups. This section of the report provides in-depth description of the main themes and discussion as arising from all of these participants with differentiations by group (Youth, Parent, and Educator).

As noted earlier in the analysis section of the report, themes presented as emerging out of Focus Groups were produced as a means of understanding this data. They are not static or separate, nor should they be understood as independent entities without connection to one another. Young people in transition have lives that are multi-layered and complex. Subsequently, themes raised in our Focus Groups were often overlapping and interconnected. It is therefore helpful to understand our defined themes as analytical categories, rather than fixed actualities. Moreover, readers will see that while we have attempted some reduction of the themes to provide specific examples of, for instance, how teachers or friends influence transition, these are not always reducible ideas. We therefore notice that many of the quotes speak simultaneously about more than one theme as this is the way in which participants spoke about transition.

The Focus Group discussions were designed to track the social, academic and procedural processes arising as students move from elementary to secondary schools. The Focus Group discussions have an ear to the continuities and discontinuities in transition and the details relating to risk and protective factors that are encountered and negotiated.

The Phase III data will be presented first. It focuses on the discussions of the experiences and feelings relating to having made the first crossing into Ontario secondary schools and issues surrounding the continuation of transition into grade 10.

Across all Focus Groups with Youth, Parents and Educators, we gathered a total of 11,619 coded textual discussion segments and approximately over 5,500 pages of transcriptions. Sub-totals will be presented in each subsection to provide a context for the interpretations as provided.

It is worth noting that each of the study sites was differentiated by independent ID number codes. Thus, the reader can see that the examples of verbatim quotes provided are drawn from across the sites and include both languages. Each group’s Focus Group discussions will be examined in turn and Phases can easily be identified by the use of one, two or three dollar signs ($) in front of participant ID codes to signify Phase I ($), Phase II ($$) and Phase III ($$$). While sites are not specifically
identified, the reader can note when quotes are presented from different sites based on the first number following the dollar ($) signs. In such a way it is easy to observe the range of sites and Phases highlighted through the verbatim quotes.

Phase III data is presented first in each case, followed by a comparison of that arising in Phases I and II. The 174 Phase III Focus Group participants were drawn from 29 Focus Groups as seen in Table 62.

Table 62: Phase III Focus Group Numbers by Site

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Youth English-Language Focus Groups</th>
<th>Site</th>
<th># of Focus Groups</th>
<th># of Participants</th>
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<tr>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sudbury+</td>
<td>3</td>
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<tr>
<td>Thunder Bay+</td>
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<th># of Participants</th>
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<th># of Participants</th>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sudbury+</td>
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<td>6</td>
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<tr>
<td>Thunder Bay+</td>
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<td>Hearst</td>
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<td>5</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sudbury+</td>
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<td>7</td>
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<tr>
<td>EDUCATOR ENGLISH-LANGUAGE SUB-TOTAL</td>
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<td>24</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

| YOUTH TOTAL                            | 17         | 125               |

| PARENT TOTAL                           | 8          | 25                |

| EDUCATOR TOTAL                         | 4          | 24                |
Youth Focus Groups

Phase III: Most Frequent Focus Group Themes for Youth

It’s like high school are your prime suffering years, in that you can get through these and you’re probably fine Facilitator. But what makes it suffering? Just the age I guess, I mean it’s a roller coaster and you know, one of the questions you asked me was ‘what’s your goal for this year?’ and I said ‘Well to get to July without suffering any permanent emotional damage’. Because, you know I enjoy it here, but I mean, I think emotional damage is great – I’m all for emotional damage – but what I mean by that is like, you know, you’re supposed to sort of find yourself and grow, and how you are supposed to do that is by being bombarded with challenges all the time. High school for me, I’m not even looking at the academic portion, I’m looking at everything else, and everything else is kind of straining you, and it’s a challenge all the time, and it’s great cos after those four years of, as I said, prime suffering, then if you’ve found yourself, you’ve found yourself. All it is, is a great big learning experience. Sure you learn things academically, you learn things socially, you take it all, and frankly it’s really exciting learning all this stuff. It’s just a great place to develop your character. Like, six months ago, your values, your morals, your prospects dramatically change, and I’m sure in a year half the crap that I advocate today I won’t believe in.

From a teenagers point of view I think that like a lot of teenagers like they have like this wide open space just to like, and that’s like the Phase where you make a lot of mistakes and you get caught for things... Then, and then they’re just learning from their mistakes like knowing what’s right and what’s wrong.
As these two Phase III quotes demonstrate, the Youth Focus Group data is extremely rich and descriptive. The protocols clearly allowed for, and facilitated, the discussion relating to multiple issues, problems, strategies, recommendations and descriptions of transition from elementary to secondary school. The 7 most frequently discussed themes emerging from the 17 Phase III Youth Focus Groups with 125 young people in grade 10 are as follows:

1. Views of Self - 229 text segments
2. Views of Youth and Youth Culture - 227 text segments
3. Influence and Role of Friends/Peers in Transition/Schooling - 181 text segments
4. Inter-Relation of Barriers/Enablers to Transition - 180 text segments
5. Effective Strategies for Transition/Engagement - 178 text segments
6. Features of a Good High School - 163 text segments
7. Features of Bad High School - 151 text segments

For the purpose of the report, we will focus on the most frequently used segments, realizing that the other themes are still laden with information, and in many cases are discussed in other sub-sections of the report (i.e. effective strategies, barriers and enablers). In addition, we realize that the number of text segments do not vary much from theme to theme, however for purposes of providing focus and within the scale of this report, we will consistently provide details only about the top three.

The **most frequent theme** discussed by the young people in the Phase III, grade 10 Focus Groups was **views of self** which generated 229 text segments and 55 pages of text. This text focussed on their insightful and paradoxical views of themselves as high school students and part of youth culture. From these segments, we examined closely the text which we marked as “the most quotable” (66 segments) since these were the segments which were found to fully encapsulate the meanings of the themes and the collective voices of the speakers.

This examination revealed that the students in grade 10 saw themselves exposed to both risk and protective influences in the context of their daily school and community lives. They were strong and protective of themselves and their goals when they learned to avoid risky behaviours and in being able to choose friends that were helpful to their social and academic goals. These kinds of positive issues were most often discussed in relation to the process of seeing themselves maturing, changing and growing up as they moved across the transition years.
Examples:

$$$1YC2EE219A: I think we’ve changed a lot since grade nine. Like I hate to say it, but I’m not the same person I was when I came to this school. Facilitator: Can you give some examples? $$$1YC2EE219A: I don’t know. I guess I’m more open to people. I can go out and I can meet new people without them exactly coming up to me and it used to be the totally opposite way. Like I’d be the guy who’d sit in the back, and now I’ll run up to people I don’t know and like ‘Let’s be friends’.

$$$2YC2EE276B. When I was in grade nine I... thought that if I took applied courses, I’m going to be a bum, I’m not going to get a good job later on. Then I heard, I saw some people making fun of people who were in applied classes, and I found that pressure too. Facilitator. Okay, so are you taking any applied now? $$$2YC2EE276B. Yes I’m taking a few now. Like I feel more comfortable because teachers help us too cos they tell us like in college, if you get all our applied courses you can go to college and still get a good job. And that comforts us more, and more people are taking applied cos they’d rather get like an eighty-five in applied than a sixty in academic.

$$$3YC2EE252A. Well responsibility...I think I’m actually realizing what I really need to do, and I just feel like I can take more stuff on. I’m doing the Student council, Band council, the Year Book.

$$$4YC2EA130A. Yes. I got a job and then I kind of see myself more mature. I try to organize my time more wisely now and I’ve grown up a lot more... I care about what I do and everything. I can think about what I’m doing. Like if I’m going out somewhere and I know it’s not right, I’ll think about it.

$$$1YL2EE268E: It’s worse to be in grade nine. It’s worse. Like in grade eight I was the shy, scared one. In grade nine I was the one getting in a lot of trouble trying to fit in, but in grade ten it’s just like I really don’t care what you have to say I’m just going to do something that helps in a way, like I’ve been through that, I’ve seen that, I’ve done that, like seriously, take it from someone who has experienced it. Don’t do it. Cause it’s just like hey, I’ve gone through the worst of it to the best, cause you know in grade nine you are at the bottom like you’re at the bottom of the chain. It’s just like you’re open to anything, you’re easily molded into what a group wants.

$$$1YC2FF149A : ... chaque année au secondaire c’est différent niveaux de responsabilité. Le plus que tu montes, et tu deviens plus âgé, le plus de responsabilités que tu as, sauf que tu as plus de liberté. Alors ce serait l’âge. Je pense que lorsque tu es arrivé en 11e, il faut vraiment... tu sais, comme, la réalité, il faut vraiment faire le plus possible à l’école, parce que ça va te bénéficier plus tard dans la vie, puis la 12e année c’est juste... finalement fini tout avec des bonnes marques, entre dans une université ou un collège, puis tu as fini. Mais ça c’est comme, il faut s’assurer de bien faire pour gagner à la fin, parce que, comme 10e et 9e c’est important, mais ça c’est juste comme introduction au secondaire, et puis... et pour le travail, pour avoir ce que tu veux.
$3YC2EE254A: ... I was so bad last year. I was really bad. I wasn’t listening at all, I would run away from home, I’d get drunk every weekend, I’d you know, whatever. And now I’m passing all my classes, I’ve been passing all my classes, I don’t mess around with school, I come home when I’m supposed to.

$4YC2EE137B: In grade nine when I first got to high school I skipped like quite a few times and like, I did some bad things, and got caught smoking a lot and everything like that. But in grade ten I just realized why am I skipping? It’s always so boring when you skip, like there’s nothing to do. You just go and sit around somewhere, but in grade ten now I’ve been trying a lot harder to get my marks up and do good, and I haven’t skipped in a while. I’m doing better than I was in grade nine.

$6YL1FF138A: Bien j’aime plus cela que l’élémentaire parce que tu peux, tu as plus de responsabilités. Tu as plus le choix de toi même. À l’élémentaire, tu es obligé de suivre cela et c’est déjà tout planifié pour toi mais là, rendu ici, bien, c’est toi qui décide. Si tu ne le fais pas comme il faut, bien c’est ton problème.

However, school and youth cultures also provided many challenges and pitfalls to young people who also simultaneously saw themselves as having the potential to influence one another towards risk. Especially as relating to finding the right friends, balancing their social, work and academic lives and avoiding tempting and risky behaviours in a ‘super-charged life’. The young people openly discussed these challenges and risk situations in which they placed themselves at the centre. They provided evidence of an emerging sense of confidence in negotiating the risks and challenges that arose.

Examples:

$1YC1EE226B: I feel like, cause I have like two younger brothers and stuff. One’s in grade nine he just came to grade nine now, I feel like I have to like, teach him stuff. $1YC1EE226B: When I feel like he’s smart enough, why do I have to teach him? So they kind of like put that responsibility on me. And ever since like, I turned grade ten and how I like, I get, like I have a job and stuff they feel like sometimes... I should support my brothers, like if they ask me for something I should get it for them. So they kind of like put more responsibility on me. Facilitator: Okay, and is that a good thing or a bad thing? $1YC1EE226B: Sometimes it’s a bad thing when they ask too much. But then sometimes it’s a good thing cause I’m like earning my brothers’ respect. Cause like because he’s taller than me... like he’s probably like six and I’m like five seven or something and so when I buy something he kind of respects me more, and ya.

$1YL1EE232C: In grade nine math, Mr. S he didn’t, I tried to get help and he still didn’t help me.... I think it’s also me though. I like to blame it on him, but I think it’s also my attitude, I could have done more but so could he, so we’re both at fault, looking back on it now.
$2$YCEEB Participant: I never had homework in middle school – I’m like one of those top students. I already know everything before it’s taught, and in grade nine it was pretty much the same thing. But this year I had to learn as well, like in my grade eleven course I have to learn and do my homework, so that’s a lot harder… Cos I feel like I’ve just been lazy, and now I’ve got to catch up to actually be able to learn, cos my brain hasn’t been able to process that.

$1$YC2FF149A : Je pense que, lorsqu’un élève regarde à un autre élève, tu juges cette personne, et je pense que c’est la même chose pour le professeur. S’il te voit en classe en train de parler, si tu ne viens pas en classe, il va déjà penser « ok, cette personne est stupide, si elle ne remet pas le prochain travail, ce n’est pas moi qui va courir après. » Animatrice : Oui. $1$YC2FF149A : Mais, si tu es très gentil, tu dis « bonjour, comment ça va? » tu es très amical avec le professeur, je pense que le professeur va penser « ah, cette personne est une bonne personne, une bonne élève, alors je vais l’aider plus à réussir. » Animatrice: Oui. Donc ça dépend vraiment de l’attitude de la personne. $1$YC2FF149A : Je pense que oui.

$1$YL1EE235C: Oh, recently I’ve been, there’s been a lot of cars chasing us around L- and it’s kind of hard to explain… We’ll just be walking home and cars will like follow us guys. Like there’s a lot of incidences where people have been robbed from different areas, cos they think we’re in a rich area so they always come to L- looking for kids to mug and stuff.

Given their frequent discussion of the place of self in the context of school and youth culture, it is not surprising that the second most frequent theme discussed by the young people in the Phase III, grade 10 Focus Groups was views about youth and youth culture. This theme generated 227 text segments in 71 pages of text. This text focussed on their views of the important ways in which youth culture crosses into school and friendship spheres. The young people spoke directly to the ongoing importance of friends and peers both inside and outsides school. These influences work as both risk and protective factors. Here we present examples from this text marked as the most quotable (69 segments) since these were the segments which were found to fully encapsulate the meanings of the theme and the collective voices of the speakers.

The modern youth culture was seen to create risk situations insofar as there was pressure to conform or juggle too many responsibilities with work, school, activities and friends and/or to be excluded or segregated along social class or peer group lines.

Examples:

$1$YC1EE231B: I play two musical instruments and it’s really annoying cause I have lessons once a week and my parents make me practice every single day. So by the time I’m done my homework, by the time I practice, it, if I have sports to play also then I have no, no free time. And it’s, it can get really annoying. Sometimes I can’t sleep enough and ya, and I’m usually like half asleep every day. $1$YC2EE225B: That’s why god invented coffee.
Ya, it’s like everybody has their own way of dressing. But if you pass through a certain group in the hallway and you’re not dressed the way they think you should be it’s just like, the whispering starts talking and everybody else starts judging you because of what you’re wearing. Retarded.

Facilitator: Do you guys find that there’s a cultural divide here amongst, you know, depending on where you’re from or what your ethnicity is or the color of you skin, your religion? $$$1YC2EE244D: Not as much as other schools, but a bit. And it’s divided more by like, class-system like, richer or poorer, I think. That’s what I find.

C’est qu’on a, comme, des projets dans les différentes classes, mais les professeurs ne parlent pas vraiment ensemble ; comme, c’est dû tout en même temps. C’est, comme, dur à gérer, un peu. Comme, il y a des fois que c’est tellement calme : comme, il n’y a pas de projets dans aucun des cours, puis, comme, c’est la fin de l’année, alors les profs essaient de mettre tout en même temps, mais, comme, on n’a pas le temps. Beaucoup, comme $$$2YL2FF164A dit, ont des emplois et, comme, on veut être bien chez nous, on veut relaxer un peu ; pas, comme, passer tout notre soirée à faire des devoirs.

I find that there’s a lot of pressure. Like, if you’re still a virgin when you get to high school, especially when you’re a girl, it’s like crazy. It’s like all of a sudden that, you know, you’re in high school and once people find out, don’t ask me how they find out. So you tell your best friend and then all of a sudden everybody knows. And then, like, I find that once your guy friends that you hang out with start like pressuring you to like, get a boyfriend, and like, I don’t know, and then like, like she said they’ll party. My friends have parties like at least once a month. And like, I don’t, haven’t been able to go to them lately cause I’m grounded, but last time I went it was like the guy’s mom was there but like she’s pretty cool so they, she let them all drink. And they all got really wasted.

I work probably thirty hours every two weeks, and I find homework is definitely the last thing on my mind after I’m done my shift. I usually just want to go to bed, and I find that having a job definitely interferes with my school because I don’t really have time to do homework, so I don’t worry about it… I usually work one day during the school week, and then Friday, Saturday, Sunday, so it’s like I never really have a break, so I’m always tired.

On the other hand, the youth culture in high school was also seen to be a protective and positive influence at times. For instance, the grade 10 students spoke about the ways in which violence dropped off in comparison to elementary school and how older students in the high school could act as mentors and guides. Moreover, their “elders” were seen to be giving more room for exploration and new responsibilities.

Examples:

From a teenagers point of view I think that like a lot of teenagers like they have like this wide open space just to like, and that’s like the Phase where
you make a lot of mistakes and you get caught for things, and you know. Then, and then they’re just learning from their mistakes like knowing what’s right and what’s wrong... Yeah it’s kind of that way because mostly nowadays we just want to be independent. It’s just like no we’re not doing that, cause well we don’t care, it’s not that because it’s our lives, but at the same time we know we’re not at that stage yet where we’re completely independent, but right now they’re giving us a little bit of it. They’re giving us a taste of it... Facilitator: Who’s they? $$$1YL2EE268E: Like our parents, like the elders that we have around us, it’s like we’re loosening our rings a bit because we know we’re getting older. We’re getting to that stage, we’re trusting you with this, we were once your age, we know what’s going on, like you don’t have to hide it because we will see it. But at the same time we’re giving you the trust.

$$$1YL2EE268E: Well then again she’s like a sister, cause she’s like near my age. Yeah she’s nineteen, but when I started in grade nine she was still in high school though and she was like, she just gave me a few pointers on what to do... She was like, as a female, the first thing you want to do when you get to high school is never ever let a guy get in the way of your success... She’s like just learn to keep your head up, don’t fall into the impact of the peer pressure and you’ve been through the bully stuff with us before, like this time just be like it’s not even worth looking at it cause it’s just immature and it’s stupid. Like she used to give me those tips that would help me through grade nine... So yeah, and now she’s like in her second year of University and she’s like and even now she talks to me she’s like I know in grade nine we had all our fun, but we’re in grade ten now. Buckle it down. Buckle it down, we’re going into grade eleven, we’re not that far away from university. She’s like and I’m telling you, university is not a game... And I’m like I know.

$$$3YC2EA253A: In grade school there was always one popular girl and everyone would follow that girl. Facilitator: Yes – I still remember the one in my class. (Laughter) Facilitator: So how is that different in high school? General: there’s more than one. $$$3YC2EE254A: But you don’t have to follow them. In grade school, if you didn’t follow that person everybody would go against you. $$$3YC2EA253A: Yes, everyone would go against you.

$$$4YC2EE137B: But now you’re in grade ten, I think it’s kind of equal. People don’t try to push you around as much... With bullying in grade ten – I don’t really think that there is too much bullying per se at this school because – I don’t know... Not a lot of people get bullied much now.

$$$6YL1FF140A : Moi je n’ai pas pris d’anglais l’année prochaine en onzième et je suis allé en orientation et elle m’a quasiment chicaner parce qu’elle m’a dit, on est en Ontario, tu es sensé être capable de parler en anglais. Je suis encore en décision là.

$$$4YL2EE140C: Bullying’s not really present I find in this school... There’s more bullying and everything in elementary school than high school.

$$$2YCEE: In elementary school kids are cruel. They were a lot meaner back then... In elementary school there’s more bullying and being outcasts and stuff... I guess people are just trying to get more attention in middle school. And then in high school, you have your groups but it’s not like they classify them like in middle school. In middle school it was all like cliques, and now it’s different people from different
groups together... $$2YC2EE278B:$$ Yes I think the worst was grade six. I had the feeling that the girls in grade six in my elementary school thought it was cool to gang up and go into groups and stuff. As you grow older you grow up and realize you don’t really care, and you act more mature.

$$6YL1FF135A :$$ Tu fais quelque chose en septième, huitième année et c’est comme ‘oh my God’ tout le monde va te connaître; ce que tu as fait en septième année, cela va rester ça pour le reste du secondaire.

The **third most frequent** theme arising in the Phase III youth Focus Groups was that relating specifically to the influence and role of friends and peers. Friends are understood to be those with whom youth have close relationships, while peers are simply the larger grouping of young people in their classrooms and the school in general. This theme generated 181 different text segments across 46 pages of text. Within this discussion about friends and peers, the young people in grade 10 spoke about the potential for friends and peers as both protective and risk creating. The voices of the grade 10 students echo a reflective perspective on the importance, meaning and place of friends and/or peers in their lives.

As the influences of friends and peers often overlap, we have categorized them together as the third most frequent theme. However, in an effort to portray how each sub-group functions in relation to transition, we have separated specific quotes.

**Peer examples:**

$$4YC1EE135B. $$ Well like, coming here for the first time I was worried, because you hear all the strange stuff when you’re in elementary like get there and there’s going to be initiation or something. There’s going to be a million new people, you know? At first it was like, you know, well when I first came here I kind of felt like ‘now is when I can decide do I want to be someone that’s like, constantly skips, and sneaks out for smokes and stuff and then eventually drops out? Or do I want to become someone who does really well in all his classes and stuff?

$$1YC2EE225B:$$ When people, when you like, walk down the hallway and there’s like a group of kids like, standing in the middle of the hallway and you just kind of have to like, walk through them and then all you hear is like, the whispers as you’re walking through them. $$1YC2EE227B:$$ Ya. $$1YC2EE225B:$$ It’s, it’s very aggravating especially when like, they’re starting to talk about like, who you are and they don’t even know you... Even on the bus it like continues. It doesn’t matter where you are, the whispering doesn’t stop. It’s very frustrating. Makes me angry.

$$1YC1EE231B:$$ Well for me it’s kind of like, I, I hang out with like every, people from like different races, so like I have brown friends. I have Asian friends. I have black friends. And, just when I came here like, my biggest fear was that I wouldn’t be accepted because I’m white and I’m scared that like, like brown people or Asian people that they wouldn’t want to talk to me or help me or whatever just because I’m white.
Friend examples:

$$$1YL1EE232C.  Well over the years, my friends have gotten a little more extreme with what they do, and they like to party hard. It’s all good fun but sometimes they go a little too far. I try to stay out of it.

$$$1YC2EE229B:  Well like in grade eight, grade nine it was kind of like, birthday party, yay, cake and balloons, right? But now it’s like, well even like sort of in grade nine it’s like, your friends are like, ya, let’s go to this party, let’s get totally wasted and like do a whole bunch of crap that’s like really bad for your body. And like to me that’s like, like I used to do it, whatever, but nowadays it’s like I’m really focused on like academics and sports and stuff and I know that will hurt me in the long run, so ya, but my friends still do it all the time. Facilitator: Okay, so when they say they do it, what, what kinds of things are you finding that your friends are doing.

$$$1YC2EE229B:  Well, my friends are basically very involved in like, getting wasted, getting laid. Facilitator: Is it drugs, drinking...$$$1YC2EE229B: Ya, like drinking alcohol and all that stuff. And then I go over to their house, and like, let’s get wasted. I’m like, ya, not really. And, cause I’m not really into that any more.

$$$1YL1EE235C.  Well last year I had to be home earlier, and now staying out late takes on a whole new perspective of different things. You experience many different things, but in some ways it’s good and some ways it’s bad. I just have more fun now that my curfew’s later cos I can hang out with my friends for longer which is good.

$$$1YC2FF155A : Je trouve que les amis que j’ai maintenant, c’est beaucoup plus important que quand j’étais en 6e et 7e, parce que quand j’ai des travaux et toutes ces choses là, c’est plutôt mes amis que mes parents à qui je parle si je suis stressée, ou si j’ai besoin d’aide.

Comparison of Youth Focus Groups across Three Phases

It is quite instructive to compare the discussions arising from the Youth Focus Groups across the three years of the study. School features, friends and peers, the important and reflective place of the self and discussions about the barriers/enablers of transition permeated the Focus Groups. The themes illustrating the constellation of risk and protective factors and contradictions/tensions in transition can be seen as being both continuous and discontinuous over the course of transition (See Table 60). For example, the influence and role of friends and peers was always extremely important, but the character and quality of these relationships changed. The perceived negative features of secondary school were only sometimes borne out and at other times were later perceived to have been a myth that was “untrue”. However, the making of good or bad schools and classrooms was described in similar ways across the years. School violence and bullying remained yet was seen to diminish and different forms of peer related problems arose over the three years.
The main themes over time show how young people in the elementary side of transition focus on their schools and their negative feelings about transition. By grade 9, the high school and its problems appear as important to speak about and the place of young people and their friends are important. This remains the same in grade 10 where young people and their friends dominate the discussion with school only secondary to the conversation about transition. This process of assimilation into the school and the burgeoning place of youth culture was seen also in the Face Sheet and *Alceste* analyses. By youth culture we mean to highlight the more pronounced impact of young people in the process of transition and school life for students in grade 10.

Table 63: Top 3 Themes for Youth Focus Group Participants over Three Phases

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Phase I</th>
<th>Phase II</th>
<th>Phase III</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>1</strong> Features of a Bad Elementary School</td>
<td><strong>Features of a Bad High School</strong></td>
<td><strong>Views of Self</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>2</strong> Features of a Good Elementary School</td>
<td><strong>Views of Self</strong></td>
<td><strong>Youth and Youth Culture</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>3</strong> Negative Feelings about Transition</td>
<td><strong>Influence/ Role of Friends and Peers</strong></td>
<td><strong>Influence/ Role of Friends and Peers</strong></td>
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In Phase I, the three most frequently discussed text segments of the Focus Group with English-language youth were (1) features of a bad elementary school; (2) features of good elementary school and (3) negative feelings about transition. The Phase I report provided a rich portrait of the culture of elementary schools as painted by students in grade 8 just as the Phase II and III data provides such a portrait of high school cultures. However, the Phase III Focus Groups centered more on reflections about the place of self, friends and youth culture on life in schools and communities.

**School Features and Structures.** In the Phase I data, the main features of good elementary schools included great teachers and principals, supportive friends and classmates, good school structure and an involved community of parents. The main features of bad elementary schools included problematic (bad) teachers, pedagogy and curriculum, too much homework, school structure issues such as dirty or decaying schools and bullying. Much of this discussion about teaching and learning was inter-related to the expressed need for independence or wanting teachers to understand the busy and varied lives of young people. These busy and varied lives were echoed in the Phase II and III data and increasingly voiced over the years. By Phase III, the juggling and super-charged, busy lives of young people occupied a good deal of discussion.

In elementary school, “bad” teachers were similar to those described in high school as those who exhibited forms of perceived injustices by “singling out,” “segregating” or practicing sexist pedagogies. There was also a good deal of discussion in all Phases relating to the problematic nature of the school structure. In Phase I we heard about
schools in need of repair, school yards and playgrounds that did not meet the needs of young people in grade 8, and an overall lack of school spirit that can exist in such schools.

The grade 8 youth in Phase I also spoke about bullying in clear and compassionate terms. Many young people noted the differences in gender between how boys and girls express non-social behaviours and the impact these behaviours have on them and their peers. One interesting finding we have noted in Phase I related to a normalized understanding of bullying. While no young people appeared to like it or condone it, they often suggest that “it is just the way it is.” In Phase II, bullying also appeared as a frequent risk and characteristic of discussion of features of bad high schools. In Phase III the young people suggested that bullying and violence was less frequent in their grade 10 cultures.

The grade 9 youth spoke clearly about the various forms bullying takes in high school, including: grade 9 initiation, rumours, intimidation, social exclusion and physical fighting. They spoke frankly of how these relate directly to race, gender, sexual orientation, socio-economics, personal style and/or a perceived “weakness”. Interestingly, there were two main findings which differed from Phase I. Firstly, in elementary school (Phase I), gender played a key role in whether bullying manifested itself through verbal or physical confrontations. In high school (Phase II), although rumours and “social drama” were linked more often to girls, verbal harassment and physical altercations were experienced commonly and equally across genders. Secondly, although still present, the normalization of bullying was not as pervasive in Phase II as in Phase I. Young people in grade 9 spoke with much less ambivalence and were able to describe specific incidences with more detail than youth in grade 8.

Examples:

$$2YC1EE126B:$$ Well, in grade eight, I wasn’t really worried about it, like I knew it was going to happen. And then it actually happened, I was like oh my god…
Facilitator: So what was the initiation? $$2YC1EE126B:$$ umm I was paddled.
Facilitator: So is that something that just happened with the guys? $$2YC1EE126B:$$ Yeah…. $$2YC1EE126B:$$ The grade 12s did it…. $$2YC1EE126B:$$ They spank you….
$$2YC1EE122B:$$ Oh, I got dragged up to the top of the hill up there by, I don’t know, a huge crowd, and everyone crowded around you. … Facilitator: Is there any sort of initiation that girls go through? $$2YC2EE125B:$$ Walking down the halls being intimidated with looks I find. $$2YC2EE128B:$$ Oh, I’ve had like full confrontations, where girls would just come up to me, threaten me. It is intimidating, like I won’t walk alone in the hallways anymore. I never do it. I never walk home alone either. I definitely feel very intimidated. …

$$1YC1EE164C:$$ Like in Elementary School, like a friend – you and a friend would get in an argument – it’d be over in like a day. Like, it started and stuff, cos you’re in the classroom, you have to talk to each other and stuff. In High School it’s different, like it’ll last a long time. Usually ends up in like a physical, like confrontation, stuff like that.
As we saw in Phase I, a “bad” elementary school was one with a host of negative features and from which the young people were most excited to transition, escape and begin again. But such a negative experience in elementary school left them feeling ill prepared for high school on many levels. It also suggests that earlier studies which simply equate elementary school with a positive, caring and familial experience from which young people do not wish to transition will require more scrutiny. The data here show that the elementary years were complex and paradoxical and cannot be understood simply as either directly or simply positive or negative. For instance, even good classes can be housed in troubled schools and even a good elementary school and class was both difficult to leave and praised for its ability to help young people do just that. Even a good school was igniting the excitement for a fresh start, but for different reasons than were the badly perceived schools and classes. Moreover, there were many good features of high schools exposed in Phase II data and pleasantly surprised young people who could have fun and the fresh start they were seeking.

Indeed, the young people in Phase I elementary schools provided many perceived and “stereotypical” views of their expected high school cultures. Both positive and negative images were gleaned while they were still in elementary school. However, many also remarked about how it “would not really be like on TV”. Their views were positive, but also paradoxically negative, for example young people shared fears about drugs and peer pressure but were also confident they would be able to stay away from “those kinds of kids”.

Were these images borne out? How was high school actually experienced in grades 9 and 10? The Phase II data suggests that the negative characteristics and false starts of secondary schools are very frequently discussed, enumerated and juxtaposed to the more positive experiences and fresh starts that young people were having. The Phase III data showed a less frequent discussion of the negative/positive features of high school (7 and 6 most frequent themes respectively) but when the grade 10 students did discuss their school cultures, they did so reflectively.

Examples:

$$4YC1EE135B: One thing I’ve really noticed, I really wouldn’t call it ‘segregation’. But the first day of the semester you’ll have your class and everything, and you’ll have a great big group of kids, and then suddenly after a week or two you’ll notice your class is getting smaller. They separate the kids they don’t think are going to do as well, and that’s what brings a lot of people down and makes people drop out. Like in general terms it’s like the dumb kids and the smart kids, but these ‘dumb’ kids aren’t actually dumb. It’s just people they gave up on already. And then they’re put in a class and it’s like the Applied class or whatever.
Communities of helpers. There was also a continuity and prolongation of the presence and importance of a community of helpers that emerged from Phase I data and continues into the Phase II and III. Whether in elementary or secondary school, there were perceived and real constellations of people who supported or negated youth at school and in transition (family, friends, teachers, self, and peers).

It is useful to determine and track which young people have such a community of helpers at their disposal, and which do not, and to keep in mind the central finding that self, friends, parents and teachers remain very important in the process. Moreover, there is an emerging contradiction around this community such that they can behave as both risk and/or protective factors in the transition and are appreciated in relatively different ways by youth, parents and educators. This is a critical part of defining those who are in situations of risk or complex resilience. Unlike other studies of transition, this research uncovered the very important and relevant place of the "self" in the process. Young people themselves are therefore considered a critical but often hidden part of this community of helpers.

The most frequent and second most frequent theme in all of the Phase III and II youth Focus Group discussions and was views of the self as a young person in high school. In each case, the young people saw both risk and protective elements in their behaviours, feelings, and emerging senses of self. Included in this discussion was evidence that the young people were experiencing emotional issues, were feeling self conscious and intimidated about being in grade 9 since they were now newcomers to school ("at the bottom") and/or were feeling insecure compared to other students.

By Grade 10, the juggling of busy lives, looking toward the future and engaging in more responsibility were seen as important. In both grades 9 and 10, young people discussed how they were seeing themselves and their actions as potentially protective in transition. Here they discussed feeling more grown up and independent/mature, being open fresh starts and to new experiences with friends and/or feeling that they were meeting their expectations for themselves.

Therefore, the self was discussed in a paradoxical manner not unlike the emotional contradiction of transition. In fact, the simultaneous discussion of characteristics of self as both risk and protective factor in transition was a main theme in this data. Young people may have experienced a heavier workload in high school than expected when leaving elementary school, but many also felt up to meeting the challenges. Or, young people also discussed how they had exhibited poor behaviour or grades in elementary school but were making conscious efforts to change and achieve better academic standing in high school. Or, young people were experiencing a desire to be treated as older now that they were high school students while also recognizing that they are still often actually treated as “kids”. Thus, their insightful self perception of their new place on the high school side of the transition was often indicative of active negotiations to come to terms with, or overcome, past issues or current challenges.
This whole piece of the Focus Group discussion about “self” illustrates young people's centrality and active engagement in thinking about, reflecting on, and managing transition.

Examples:

$$2YC2EE127B: Well, I felt that more was expected out of me, so I wanted to do better, like just for myself, and for people around me who sort of though, well, you know, she's going into high school now, she can do a bit more, she can be a little more responsible. And I find I'm happier now cause I'm not as stressed as I used to be and because that's one of the good things of having only four courses to think about, so I'm just less stressed, and I find that I'm able to enjoy things more, and like I think I'm a friendlier person then I used to be cause I was kind of alone.

$$3YC1EE139A: I think high school made me mature. Like, I used to be so bad like, I used to not, like, I used to like be in a mood where like, 'I want to be suspended,' I used to say that to myself and just get suspended and get sent home for the rest of the day. Now it's just like, I don't want to go home, well I do, but I don't want to get suspended. ...I've already gotten in a fight this year and I got suspended for a lot so I've failed like, two classes already. The second semester just started I didn't want to get suspended and do it all over again so I was like, like, I've thought about like, losing another two credits, like I thought before I was about to fight again. 'Cuz Ms. M- was like, 'You'll get kicked out, you can't fight again', so I thought ok, I won't fight.

Friends and peers remained a consistent and important theme across all three Phases. Not unlike the self and emotions, their influence and role operated in a paradoxical manner. Once again, although Friends and Peers have been amalgamated as a theme in order to emphasize their overlapping influence, we have separated quotes to highlight the difference between the two sub-groups. As seen below, students spoke often about the distraction that both friends and peers created in class, the impact of bullying (based on racism or homophobia) and pressure from others to engage in drugs or sexual activity.

Peer Examples:

$$2YC1EE123B: In the beginning of the year when I was doing cross country and I'd run by the woods, and I could smell marijuana every time. ... $$2YC2EE128B: And I find that it's easier to get access, to. Like, anybody who looks a little suspicious, if you walk up to them, they will have it. ... $$2YC2EE128B: What's sketchy is that as a girl, I know it's easiest to get it, cause guys will give it to you for free for sex and stuff, and it's kind of creepy when guys ask you to try it and stuff. And certain guys will ask you like everyday, it gets irritating...

$$4YL1FF115B : Oui, mais, si quelque chose va mal, tu vas le dire à un enseignant ou quelque chose, tu vas être known comme le rat, puis personne... tout le monde va s'exclure de toi, parce que toi t'as dis sur eux autres, alors ils ne veulent pas te parler. $$1YCEEG : there's a lot of peer pressure also um with everybody like you're friends um
they might be like your best friends, they might like push to do something that you don’t really want to do and um on what they said the environment like it has to be healthy for you to like develop in and yeah cause if it’s like a bad environment and like drugs everywhere around you then you might get like sort of attracted that way to the drugs.

Friend Examples:

$$1YC2EE169:$$ It’s really distracting. Like one of my classes, I have a lot of friends in it, we all sit in one group, so we always get in trouble because they’re always talking. And ... we’re texting back and forth.

$1YCEED: I got like one friend. She’s all like putting me down and saying how I won’t do well.

$$5YC2EA120D:$$ Like, instead of staying in one homeroom you’re switching classes to classes and you only have like a limited time to go to that class... $$5YC2EA118D:$$ It leads you to different places sometimes...to look into your other friends classes. $$5YC2EA118D:$$ I think everybody does that. $$5YC2EA118D:$$ Yeah, but you go back to the class. Eventually. Facilitator: Are you late? $$5YC2EA118D:$$ Yeah, a little bit. $$5YC1EA117D:$$ 10 minutes, 20 minutes, sometimes half an hour.

Interestingly, while young people spoke of friends as offering both protective and risk influences, they mainly spoke of peers in the negative. For example, the risk influence of peer pressure and the impact of bullying. It seems that while youth are able to view those who are known to them as being a positive or negative influence, they see those who are outside their circle as “other” and mainly assign negative characteristics to them.

Friends then were discussed in positive ways and seen as protective factors in the transition, as well as negative. Young people spoke frequently in the Focus Groups about how their friends had assisted them academically with the transition by helping with school work. They also assisted socially by making them feel more engaged and excited at school and by making school fun. In general, much of the discussion around the positive aspects of friends was that they bolstered the self-esteem and comfort levels of young people at school and so were very important to transition.

Friend Examples:

$$1YC1EE157B:$$ Yeah, my Grade Twelve friends they, 'cuz they've been in the school for four years now so they helped me and they told me everything I need to know... Like, where the classes are, they told me like, directions and everything and they told me like, what teachers are really good (laughter) and one’s that they don’t like, and they told me about the programs too.
Therefore, just as the “self” and emotions exist in paradoxical tension across transition, so too do the places of friends and peers. For example, much of the discussion around the features of a bad high school in Phase II Focus Groups suggested bullying as a problem. But friends were protective and protecting of young people when other students created negative bullying situations. Moreover, friends were seen as both a distraction and a help with academics and in the classroom. And, while peers could pressure young people, friends often provided support in helping them avoid unwanted pressures and activities.

Friend Examples:

$$4YC1EE105C: \text{ Well, of course, me, I see a lot of bullying... A lot of people make comments, and like me, just the way I act, people assume things, and they'll make fun of me for things, like they'll walk by me and call me gay or fag, which isn't even true. But like, last week, my friend G- and my friend J-, someone walked by and call me a fag, and they got all up in their face, and I was really happy because I have friends who protect me now. Like last year, my friends were bullies to me. And this year, I actually have friends who like me and stuff...}$$

$$2YL1FF131B : \text{ Comme, si j'ai un test...comme, en physique, je ne comprends rien ; ils vont dire « ok, je peux t'aider » et venir m'aider.}$$

**Educator Focus Groups**

**Phase III: Most Frequent Focus Group Themes for Educators**

In Phase I we concentrated primarily on Focus Groups with elementary level educators, in Phase II cross-panel Focus Groups with elementary and high school educators, and in Phase III, we spoke with high school educators. The 7 most frequently discussed themes emerging from the four Phase III Educator Focus Groups, comprised of 24 educators who work with grade 10 youth are as follows:

1. **Enablers to a Successful Transition** - 111 text segments
2. **Features of a Good High School** - 82 text segments
3. **Barriers to a Successful Transition** - 74 text segments
4. **Views of Youth and Youth Culture** - 70 text segments
5. **Effective Strategies for Transition/Engagement** - 63 text segments
6. **Inter-relation of Barrier/Enabler** - 61 text segments
7. **Parents’ Place in Transition** - 58 text segments
The most frequently discussed theme from the Phase III Educator Focus Groups was Enablers to a Successful Transition. Educators spoke passionately about the elements that make a difference in a young person’s experience of transition and in their own ability to support students. This theme was discussed in 111 text segments, covering 31 pages of content. Educators spoke about the importance of communication with elementary partner schools, in particular the use of Ontario Student Records94 (OSRs) and information helpful to individualizing timetables.

Examples:

$$1EC2EE063A(HS): I think the OSR can be useful. There was one kid I remember from last semester that had a lot of absences, looked really really sick, was tired, you know, wasn’t passing, you know, really upset and he actually came to me and said that he was going through some troubles at home and when we looked in the OSR, there was records of again, lots of missing classes and CAS had been involved, so in that way, it sort of helped to fulfill the picture, and then whenever he said you know, what was going on, etcetera, and how he lived out of area because he couldn’t live with his Mom anymore who was in the government housing nearby, but that was technically his home school, but he was living with his grandmother, but they, she didn’t have custody so they couldn’t send him to the school that was close by and so all this other stuff, so in that way, the OSR kind of backed it up and then referred it to Guidance and the VP of our school contacted his teachers and his principal from the elementary school just to get a fuller picture because I said, you know, he’s a really good kid, he’s trying, but everything is stacked against him. So together, we kind of worked with all the information that was available and got him transferred, even though it probably wouldn’t have gone through otherwise.

$$2EL2EE073A: One thing we I think we do well and it’s because a lot of the kids come from F-R-(HS) is we sort of get that hit list of the students who they feel will struggle here in Grade Nine, and we individualize their timetables. Yeah, it’s, cuz they will recommend, ‘This student loves Phys. Ed., try to get in for a semester or for their Homeroom, this student loves Art, let’s try to get Art together, real struggle with Academics, can we save the Math and English till the second semester?’ So I’ve found that’s really been helpful. And we will do that for a lot of students, probably at least thirty, maybe.

Educators also agreed on the importance of a caring adult in the lives of young people. In some schools this notion has become a formalized program while others ensure it happens on a more casual basis.

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94 The Ontario Student Record (OSR) is the record of a student’s educational progress through schools in Ontario. The Education Act requires principals to collect information about each student registered in their school. The Act regulates access to this information, stating that the OSR is "privileged for the information and use of supervisory officers and the principal and teachers of the school for the improvement of instruction” of the student. (http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/document/curricul/osr/osr.html)
Examples:

$$2EL2EE073A$$: And we also try to think of mentors, right? Even in June, like in June for the next year, so say again, ‘Maybe this young lad enjoys football’, so we’ll try to, we’ll ask a teacher in September, the football coach or whoever, if they will mentor that student right away. So we, there’s a lot of good collaboration... It’s informal. I mean, we know we have a list of the students and who is mentoring them, but it’s informal in that they don’t write anything down... they would try to actually touch base with them almost on a daily basis, in the hall or if they’re teaching them it’s a lot easier, ‘Hi, how’s it going? How’s your weekend?... you know, that kind of stuff. It’s not a tutoring, it’s more just a... sort of a friend.

$$3EL1EE066A$$ (HS): Last two years, it’s been formal. This year we were getting it going and then we decided on another approach... but I think our school is really good, our staff is really good in that respect, you know. Last year, we did do it formally and it went well. We had, you know, a good turnout from teachers and paired them up with students and things like that...

The impact of a student’s attitude and the involvement of their family were also noted as being critical enablers to a successful transition. In fact, involvement on various levels was raised as an important Enabler throughout our Focus Groups. This includes a student’s involvement with academics, with positive peers and extra-curricular activities, as well as a parent’s involvement in the academic, social and emotional well-being of their children.

Examples:

$$1EC2EE061A$$ (HS): A student who is flexible...who wants to do well no matter how, he wants to do well and a student who is organized. $$1EC2EE065A$$ (HS): A student who is doing as well academically as they are capable of doing...

$$1EC2EE063A$$ (HS): Prioritizing education. Vital. $$1EC1EE062A$$ (HS): A nice home life, where it’s like I guess stable or a consistent home life because if you come to school here in Grade nine, nothing is stable. Everything has changed

$$1EC2EE063A$$ (HS): Motivation, perseverance and support. So, just being self-motivated and trying. A kid who is ready to go out there and try their best will be successful even if they are not the brightest kid, who is not going to give up and support. I mean that from a school perspective but also a home environment perspective and just from having parents that, you know, recognize the value of education and instil that in their kids.

$$2ELEEA$$ Participant: Parental involvement and how supportive their parents are, getting them set up and getting a binder and a pen and a book bag and all that stuff that they need, and then caring that they bring it to school every day, that’s so important. Cuz they have no memory and everything’s a sieve and they’ll come to class with nothing if someone’s not behind them.
Fresh Starts/False Starts: Young People in Transition from Elementary to Secondary School

$2ELEEA Participant: Well, any young person needs a family, a supportive family, supportive staff, supportive teachers, you know, supportive friends. It’s the support system around them and how they adapt to what they face, so the more the community and we’re all in the community can support them and help them in times of trouble, etc. that will help them be more individually more successful in their transition. So it’s a combination of a lot of different things. But (inaudible) confidence is built by how much support you have and you know, your past experiences, which we can try and help them with, it’s very, very complicated, but they need support from many, many different sources.

$1EC2EE064A(HS): … A girl who came to us last year in Grade 9, currently Grade 10, and she was one of those at-risk girls to watch for and … I felt I was completely unsuccessful last year when she was in Grade 9 to really get through to her. This year... I am just so happy with the turnaround that she has made because she is passing all her classes for the first time... What’s different this year? For her it was her peer group. She says she has this one friend who is very academically inclined and that’s really been the turnaround for her. … I think peer support and finding the right peers can truly make a difference.

$1EC2EE064A(HS): I think we have a lot of student clubs. Like $EC2EE063A mentioned the Social Justice. There’s a very strong arts council. There’s school plays that we have. $EC2EE063A(HS): There’s the environmental action committee that’s really good.

$3EL1EE066A (HS): Another great thing about our school in particular is once they get here, when we talked about our diversity and we talked about everything that we have here... our staff gets involved in so many different things. We have, I don’t know even, how many different clubs do we have? $3EL1EE070A (HS): Dozens. $3EL1EE066A (HS): Dozens of different clubs, not necessarily teams, right? Because sports isn’t for everybody and we know that and I really try and push that when I go out to the elementary schools too...

Educators spoke confidently about the positive impact of these Enablers to Transition. However, they were also realistic about the challenges and the boundaries within which these elements play out in real life. For example, while a positive peer group can have a tremendous influence on a student’s ease of transition, a negative experience can be problematic; while educators agree that their relationships with students have the potential to create a supportive environment, they are also aware of how difficult that can be on a daily basis.

Examples:

$1EC2EE063A(HS): Well, I think if you end up coming from a school where you don’t have any friends, your ability to, you know, be gregarious and go out and meet new people is gonna be, you know, important. If you are not able to make friends easily, it might be difficult. You might be isolated and depressed.
Participant: Teachers are getting burned out and disillusioned because there are a million expectations put on them. And like...if you’re an engaged teacher...there’s a thousand things I want to do. And you, you can so easily just take on too much and then say I don’t care anymore. Because we care so much as, as a profession. We care so much and we feel so deeply because these children come and it’s, I always say to them, I, I care for you when your parents can’t. You’re here so I care for you. I’m your caregiver. It’s, you feel beaten by the time you’ve, you’ve served a hundred and sixty students in a year. Do you know how many children that, that’s a hundred and sixty children. And nobody seems to understand that, that it’s not my responsibility for everything that happens in their life. But as a caring teacher we do take all of that on. And you can’t.

Establishing a really good relationship with the kids in your class and so, we have whatever ninety max a semester, but like, finding out what’s going on and having them feel comfortable enough to talk to you about it and you’re gonna be there and you’re not their parent and you’re not their friend so that kind of gives you this like interesting inroad into their life and to be able to give them guidance and direction in a very informal way, but to like, just stay there for them. We’re here to be there for them. What about kids who are really messed up? It requires a person to put a lot of time into that student. This doesn’t just happen.

But I think even...those teachers who will make that personal connection with students, it doesn’t necessarily mean that information gets widely shared. It might may mean that she’s aware of it and that if there’s issues that come up will she bring it to our attention say and guidance or whatever else like that. But I think sometimes the challenge that happens there, like let’s say, being realistic, it goes to the luck of whose classes you’re in. You may have four classroom teachers that not one of those classroom teachers is really making too much of an inroad to get to know them. And I think Mr. S- and I have had repeated conversations, these are kids who are in the building. What about the ones that we know are never here? And so the ones that we know that are never here we can speculate on their long list of issues and concerns and everything else and we can say well, they’ve transitioned poorly. Or, you know, it’s an issue of this, this or this but like, again..., what interventions are we doing, can we do, can we maintain? And which ones are being successful? Which ones are a band aid over getting the kid the credit and which ones...are the strategies that are going to help that kid cease to have those concerns? Sort of permeate their lives? We’re getting good at the first band aid solution. And it’s exhausting us.

The second most frequently discussed theme was Features of a Good High School, resulting in 82 text segments, covering 23 pages of content. While a positive school climate was noted as the main feature of a good high school, a number of sub-themes were presented as being an integral part of such an environment. Educators spoke of programs specific to their schools such as their Special Education Department, their BEAP (exceptional athlete) program, co-op and ESL programs, among others.
Examples:

$$1EC1EE062A(HS):$$ This is a nice solid school and it has the BEAP program, but it also, it’s just a - $$1EC2EE065A(HS):$$ Community school. $$1EC1EE062A(HS):$$ yeah, community school. I’m trying to put my finger on it. - laughter -. You know, but they do choose for that reason that I’m trying to describe. $$1EC2EE061A(HS):$$ With a strong Special Ed. Department.... It’s the largest, but I don’t know if it’s in the southeast or the east or the - District School Board, but the largest Special Ed department.

$$2ELEEA Participants:$$ I think the expectations that we have here, I don’t know if they’re a lot different than other schools, but the perception sometimes is that, you know, that we have good discipline and a dress code that we enforce and our academics, our teachers are great, I guess.... We have the biggest co-op department almost in [the city]... We’re also an ESL Centre at this school so we have students that are bused in from... outside the region who are coming here just to learn English and be in the ESL program.

$$2EL2EE074A:$$ I think often when people come to our school they are impressed with the, we’ve got a nice looking school, with lots of, there’s tradition here, you can see it everywhere, there’s also a lot of artwork up and there’s a lot of students, and you can see the student work on the walls and thinking of our murals and stained glass and all the different things we’ve contributed... $$2EL1EE071A:$$ A sense of ownership.

Participants in our Educator Focus Groups also spoke of the abundance of extra-curricular activities and strategies/programs designed around transition as important features of a good high school.

Examples:

$$2ELEEA Participant:$$ And extra-curricular activities, too. There’s really something, at least at the school, I’m sure it’s for every high school, that anybody can find something that they want to do. From the play to Art Club to all the things that are going on, it’s impressive when you take a look, if you’re to list out all the stuff we’ve got going on at this school, there’s certainly no reason for people to say, ‘Well, there’s nothing for me’. But even if there isn’t, I’ve had students who want to have an anime club, you know, to go Japanese anime, well, let’s get it, come on to Art club and let’s do that there, we’ve had that happen. We had those Strategy games for a couple of years, you know, if students are interested in something there’ll be a teacher to volunteer to do it.

$$3ELEEA Participant (HS):$$ Kids are so excited about coming to play sports at high school. They love it or just I mean get involved in something. Like when I tell them that we have the play going on, they are like, oh my God, or the fashion show and they’re like, oh I can’t wait. I gotta get involved in that and you know, with the sports, it’s funny. I think it was last year. I was over there and one kid raised his hand and he’s like, Sir, my Dad used to play for the school team because we’re the M(HS) school team, right? And you’d just be laughing and when you think about it, it was like this big deal, you know, he was gonna play where his Dad played.
Facilitator: I heard you have a Grade nine day? $$$1EC2EE063A(HS): Yeah, the BBQ. $$$1EC2EE064A(HS): Yeah, there’s another day that started last year. It’s called Moving On Up and it’s an initiative through the - District School Board where the incoming Grade nines have an orientation day in September, so none of the other students are in the building, it’s just the Grade nines and a few teachers who have different stations set up in the school. So it’s really a transitional day for them to sort of rotate in different stations and different classrooms so it they might get exposed to Drama, they might get exposed to another station that talks about like using the high school agenda and different rules, the role of Guidance, etcetera. And so we did that for the first time last year. There were six different stations and it was half a day. So that’s something I think we’re hoping to continue and I know there is a Grade eight day in June where Grade eights come to the school who are going to be coming in September and they get a tour of the school and they sit in various classes. $$$1EC2EE064A(HS): Our kids are not there, but the Grade eights are there... They get to be in a classroom with a teacher who is like, kind of teaching them as though they would be - $$$1EC2EE063A(HS): Yeah, like a mini lesson and then they kind of talk about what kind of things they’ll be learning...

$$$2ELEEA Participant: We try to do a lot, like for example, in the Guidance Department, we go over [to the elementary schools] and we do visits with them and we talk about all things High School, not only academics, but clubs and sports and expectations and, you know, the semester system, you name it, we talk about it, we go over when they’re doing their options sheets and we talk about that.... We have them over, they’re coming tomorrow, they’re coming over, they’re all going to be walking over here and we give them a tour and they go through the school and they see what it’s like and they see, you know, they’re shown all the classrooms and where everything is. We have a BBQ for them in the summertime, where they can come, yet again do a tour, we address them, the Admin., the Guidance department etc, and we talk about expectations, so we try to get them over as often as we can or we go to them and explain to them.

$$$2EL2EE073A: Well, some of the transition programs are Student Success Team programs. Here at P-(HS) we’re really fortunate cuz we have a really strong group of teacher, or some teachers that run the Peer Helpers and they do a lot of the Welcome Wagon and the BBQ and Coffee House and more the school-wide things. I would kick into gear with the team, when we’re looking more at the at-risk students, so the individualized timetabling and the things we talked about, the caring adult and then we worked with our school rehab officer, drug counsellor, resource department, social worker... Often we just provide a place where, ‘Hi, come on in, we’re really glad to see you, come on in, have a cup of tea with us’, that kind of thing with the Grade Nines.

$$$3EL1EE069A (HS): We’re working on a podcast as well for next year... The pilot that we’re gonna be releasing will be directed at Grade nine students coming in so all the web pages will be podcast talking about all the programs that are available, interviews with current Grade nine students, talking about all the changes from Grade eight to Grade nine. And all summer long they can click on...the website...
Sub-themes raised pertaining to features of a good high school examine both protective elements as well as the paradox of protective/risk factors present within these positive features. Some include the paradoxical nature of peer friendships, the limitations of extra-curricular activities, the challenges of transition programs and the changing relationships between high school educators and parents of high school students.

Examples:

$$$1EC1EE062A(HS): Yeah, there’s people who have left K(HS). There was a girl, she was bullied and I’ve been hearing about girl bullying at K(HS), and she came here and, you know, she did very well and she made friends here, so there’s a lot of kids who don’t like M(HS), all that cliquey stuff and they come here... It is a good school. Believe me. You could do a lot worse than this.

$$$2ELEEA Participant: We send the Guidance Counsellor over [to the elementary schools] for what they call Guidance Express, which they don’t take advantage of; I’ll be honest with you, where we sit there in a lunch time and they can come in and ask anything and none of them come.

$$$2ELEEA Participant: ... I started it last year, and at the beginning of the year I tried to get all the parents email addresses by sending a letter home, having the kids bring it back and I would send out daily, weekly, monthly, whatever I felt like, updates as to what we were doing in class and some of the times it was almost like I had to re-train the parents to care about what their kids were doing in school, or at least be interested, like writing something as simple as ‘We’re doing this, feel free to ask your son or daughter about this’ and I’d get parents emailing me back like, ‘Yeah, you know I asked Johnny about this and we actually talked about it’, it’s like a light bulb’s going off, you know? But then other parents are so involved and I mean, it’s really a spectrum of the, I’ve found it’s made a big difference in getting assignments in and attendance... I’ve done that to help the transition cuz I felt like, and the parents complain about it too, there’s a disconnect when you get from Grade Eight to Grade Nine. There’s the parental/teacher relationship which seems to kinda disappear between Grade Eight and Grade Nine. ... I definitely see how they can feel that way cuz they’re getting all that interaction in the Elementary Phase and then they get to Grade Nine and there’s nothing. Like, the agendas gone... and it’s now, you have to ask your kid, ‘What’d you do today?’ and ...you don’t get anything. So if it’s not coming from me, it’s not coming from the kid, then really how do they know? So a lot of parents really want to be there, but they just don’t know how and they can’t get there and I’m trying to help them get there.

The third most frequently discussed theme by educators was barriers to a successful transition. There were 22 pages of text that encapsulated 74 separate text segments. Barriers to a successful transition as discussed by participating educators were easily categorized into three sub-themes: negative peer interactions; systemic and family and/or personal issues, such as low socio-economic status,
mental illness, emotional challenges ("lives of quiet desperation"), or discrimination; and difficulty negotiating the academic elements of high school for various reasons.

Examples:

$$\text{4ECEEA Participant: }... \text{ one thing we have discovered is that the social, emotional challenges supersede all the other challenges they have. It’s the pressing - it’s the priority in their life. Whether it’s dealing with something at home or dealing with the developing because with the grade nines that the developing is, I think in their mind both romantic relationships. And, peer relationships with the boys with each other, finding their place, and that encompasses all sorts of things. Being bullied and being a victim, it all ties into that and we, basically it’s not, it’s not touched... that important life they have before class, during the quiet moments in class, at lunch when in this building they cycle through the hallways and outside.}$$

$$\text{1EC2EE064A(HS): } I \text{ think...some students are not prepared for the realities of what they might encounter in high school as far as the bullying that might occur or certain things that have happened to them. Like I’ll give you an example of this young ESL student that I was working with, new to the country, you know, it was his first year here and he was, he was I guess mugged outside the school, not too far from the school, just at the bus stop and that was very traumatic for him and I think his coming to Canada, thinking it’s relatively safe and coming to a high school here never really, you know, ever anticipating such a thing would occur, was very very traumatized by the experience and I think some other kids also who face bullying or other situations like that didn’t expect that it would happen in high school or maybe even parents, you know, just didn’t think that it would happen, but it has, so there is the other side of it too.}$$

$$\text{2ELEEA Participant: I think a lot of boys are coming into Grade Nine and even in Grade Ten who haven’t hit puberty yet and that can be a reason to be bullied so I know I’ve seen that. And I’ve had boys come to me afterwards and they’ll talk openly probably in their Grade Eleven or Grade Twelve about what it was like to be so small in Grade Nine and that can be quite a traumatic experience.}$$

$$\text{1EC2EE063A(HS): } I \text{ think that is really important. The socioeconomic thing from that conference said that Grade three’s from the lowest socioeconomic strata have a vocabulary comparable to Grade, no, Grade three’s from the highest socioeconomic strata have a vocabulary comparable to Grade twelve’s from the lowest.}$$

$$\text{1EC2EE061A(HS): } Yes.\text{ }\text{1EC1EE060A(HS): And the problem is -}$$

$$\text{1EC2EE064A(HS): } Sometimes the transitional stuff is also matched by transitions happening in the home life so if parents have recently separated or divorced, a lot of times, students are also not able to adjust because of the dual levels of adjustment that are occurring. The second piece that I find is that when parents are feeling helpless themselves because they are going through a transitional time, say marriage or jobs or otherwise, that their children often match that helplessness as well and feel that they can’t do it or they can’t succeed in school or whatnot, so I think just from that perspective, there is more than one transition happening at that juncture.
Participant: I guess one of the things that I have become aware of is... the lives of quiet desperation that more of them lead, that we’re completely oblivious to. The single parent, no food, the abuse, the rape, the sexual assault, the issues with the justice system, the significant drug abuse that we’re, we miss as teachers. But even last year [they were] in all the regular classes. And so most of them were written as you know, they didn’t do the work and they didn’t attend. Not, why were they disengaged? And we never asked that... But now there’s still many of those kids within the school - And they survive and they - or they hide. Or they hide and they’re, they’re marginalized and they exist and they’re the ones I think who’ve had a negative...experience in grade school. Their home life is less than positive and then we put them into this huge melting pot or cauldron.

Participant: students who come in who lack a lot of confidence can really struggle cuz they’re not very resilient and they can’t really persevere. And there’s gonna be things that knock them down, depending on, you know, their body shape or what they’re like, but even the best kids, there’s gonna be things that, well like, in life and the kids that really struggle either cuz of the family or whatever, they really have a hard time... They just, they don’t have that resilience for whatever reason.

Participant: The biggest problem I find is when I get the kids in the class and they are sitting there in Grade twelve and they can’t put a sentence together and they are pushed through elementary. To me, that’s the biggest problem is you’ve got students who are pushed through from Grade one to Grade eight and there is no holding back anymore... They just push them through and so they end up in classes in Grade ten and they just can’t write a decent sentence and I think that’s the biggest barrier to transitioning in high school. I mean if you, you know, we all have, I mean, they are all going to have the same sort of, to a certain degree, some, you know, the hormone issues and the transition issues and all that, but I mean it’s, you know, academically... what happens is they don’t fail in elementary school. When they come into high school, they begin the failing process.

Participant: I think that’s a huge issue going into Grade Nine, the Academic and Applied stream and the influence of parents, I mean we talk about it in the Staff Room and how little teacher input we have like, in trying to determine where the parents are like, ‘No, we want him in this’ and we’re saying, ‘Well, you know, he probably shouldn’t be in that, he should be in that over here’ and the parents are so adamant in putting him in this certain stream or whatever, and it just, it’s a bombshell waiting to happen like, and the kid will get into the wrong stream and it’s hard to get out and things start to spiral as we know and snowballs and once you get on the wrong path it’s hard to get back onto the right path, like a lot of things they do in life, not just High School.

Participant: And we’ve got the teachers in this school who I’ve heard, one of my Grade ten’s last year said that his Phys. Ed teacher tells the kids they are gay if they can’t accomplish a task in class. A couple of years before that, one of the Math teachers apparently. Don’t be gay was the thing that he would say if you got a wrong answer in class. He’s no longer here, but the Phys. Ed teacher is. So when you’ve got teachers who don’t even have the respect, how are we supposed to teach the kids?
Throughout the year, I have phone calls and parents coming in who are crying in my office because they are just in such utter despair because they don’t know how to deal with their kids that are hooked on like marijuana.

So it’s not academics. See, there are other troubles that they are asking. No, but it’s all related, isn’t it? Like if the kid is skipping and he’s like smoking outside and, you know, he’s never at home, like it’s impacting the academics for sure.

I’ve had to take the Grade ten English kid who’ll work his butt off - he’d run into a wall if I asked him to, but I can’t ask him because he can’t read and it’s like, you’re just setting him up to fail and the parents were contacted four times, five times and they are steadfast.... He’s gonna be successful here. You tell them, no, he can’t be successful here and then the kid just gets caught in the middle. Because I deal with stigma. You get kids in Academic who should be in Applied but the parents don’t want to put them in Applied. They let them flounder, which then has, you know, not just academic effects but psychological effects on the kid. That’s difficult but you can, it’s a free country. You can only give your opinion and then the parents have to guide them.

Educators were quick to speak up about solutions to many of the challenges they and their students face and to identify ways in which barriers to a successful transition can be overcome. Some suggestions were about dollars and cents, increased financial resources to support specialized staff and diverse programming. Other issues could be resolved through educating parents and students about the realities of high school versus the misconceptions they may hold.

Examples:

I think that we need more social workers in our school. I think one that we share with eight people, with eight different schools is not enough.

Like counsellors, more adults in the school.

We need more of those helping professions back in the school. Helping people in the school would be huge. Yes.

More attendance counsellors.

I've got kids that I’m dying for them to get some kind of like therapy, like counselling.

Some of them have these lives that are sometimes unthinkable. We can empathize with them but, you know, but something that’s unrelatable for us and as the educator, not having the, necessarily, the skill to really deal with that. And so we don’t have the supports, you know... You know, drug abuse is a humongous problem and so to talk about it for, you know, a moment in time is one thing. To make a connection with the student is one thing. But to help to solve that problem, we’ve got nowhere to turn... We’re trying really hard to close those gaps but they keep going through your fingers because we’re educators. We’re not social workers. We’re not addictions people.
$$4EC2EE031A: \text{We're not their parents and when you bring their parents in and sometimes see the family dynamics and you just kind of shake your head because you think, wow that student goes home to that every night. They need, you know, a family counsellor who is intense with them. $$4EC1EE025A: And then when you access that you're on a six month wait list.}

$$3EL1EE067A (HS): One of the things I think also that maybe we are not always constantly aware of - we're talking about how diverse our student population is... We're looking at the probably the greatest level of immigration that we've ever seen, you know, in our history, but when you look around at the teaching population, you see a significant lack of diversity. And our high school experience was unique to sort of our sort of connection to this kind of white middle class existence. So our belief about transitioning kids I think is that you have to have spirit. You have to get involved. You have to do these things and we now have a huge population of students coming in and that reality is not really acceptable ... because there are sort of cultural restrictions, particularly I think for a lot of our female students who are coming from, you know, certain diverse cultures.... I think that reality is not necessarily accessible to a lot of our students and I'm not sure that we have really sort of broached that issue and I think a lot of the transition things that we have put into place are based on our own experience of high school and it's not the experience I think that a lot of our students are having and I think that's a huge issue in terms of helping certain groups of students, you know, particularly in this discussion with diversity. And you know what? It probably extends to gay and lesbian students as well because certainly that was not an issue that was ever discussed, you know, in our experience in high school, so I think a lot of what we promote has been sort of transitioned activities and programs are based on perhaps a reality that isn't accessible to a lot of the kids that we're trying to maybe help transition.

$$3ELEEA Participant: I don't know why but I get it every school, every year and you know, is there initiation or this and that, and I think there is that misconception, you know. We don't have initiation. I don't know. I've never heard of anybody getting shoved into a locker. ... like our school is the largest around or one of the largest and they are coming from an elementary school of say three hundred kids and they are coming into a high school with fifteen hundred and that can be pretty intimidating too.

$$4EC2EE031A: I think when I see some of the things in the media that the kids see in terms of what high school life is like it's frightening too you know... DeGrassi, Gossip Girl, I just find that some of the content is so grown up. You know, the issues that they're dealing with, and obviously they're dealing with that in real life because there's this, you know, appetite for it. But we live in this building and we're here year after year. And I'm not quite sure that it's solely based on reality.

As discussed within the context of enablers to a successful transition, there was unanimous agreement amongst educators in Phase III regarding the importance of parental involvement. The paradox however, occurs when these same educators are faced with the reality of low parental engagement - which then becomes one of the significant barriers.
Examples:

$$3ELEEA\ (HS)\ Participant: \ Like\ for\ Student\ Success,\ one\ of\ the\ kids\ I’m\ dealing\ with\ the\ other\ day\ he\ says,\ and\ the\ home\ life\ for\ the\ majority\ of\ them,\ I\ can\ tell,\ the\ majority\ of\ them\ is\ tough\ and\ it’s\ rough\ and\ there\ is\ no\ support.\ There’s\ lack\ of\ maybe\ the\ male\ figure\ in\ their\ household,\ things\ like\ that,\ and\ you\ can\ see\ it\ when\ you\ come\ in\ and\ how\ they\ are\ doing.\ They\ are\ the\ parents\ that\ never\ come\ to\ the\ parent\ teacher\ interviews\ and\ stuff\ like\ that.\ And\ how\ do\ you\ get\ to\ them?\ I\ don’t\ know.\ We\ try\ our\ best.\ We\ just\ try\ and\ support\ them\ and\ do\ whatever\ we\ can\ but\ you\ know,\ is\ that\ enough?\$$

$$1EC2EE064A(HS):\ I\ think\ if\ we\ did\ offer\ say\ some\ parent\ whatever,\ like\ how\ to\ deal\ with\ your\ teenager\ kind\ of\ classes,\ I\ think\ it\ would\ be\ well-attended.\ Like\ I\ would\ give\ out,\ you\ know,\ fliers\ and\ cards\ for\ parents\ groups\ because\ I\ think\ some\ parents\ are\ genuinely\ seeking\ that\ support\ and\ if\ we\ can’t,\ as\ educators,\ you\ know,\ actually\ give\ the\ presentation,\ then\ certainly\ we\ could\ call\ outside\ agencies\ and\ set\ up\ some\ of\ these - \$$\$$1EC2EE061A(HS):\ Hmm.\ I\ beg\ to\ differ.\ How\ many\ parents\ do\ you\ see\ at\ parent\ night?\$$\$$1EC2EE064A(HS):\ But\ these\ parents\ have\ mitigating\ circumstances\ in\ their\ lives\ where\ they\ cannot\ leave\ work\ to\ do\ this,\ but\ if\ you\ made\ time\ at\ other\ points\ of\ the\ year,\ perhaps\ they\ would\ come\ when\ they\ realize\ their\ kid\ is\ flunking,\ hasn’t\ gotten\ their\ four\ credits\ or\ whatever.\ Sometimes\ they\ are\ hopeful.\ They\ don’t\ come\ to\ the\ parents\ night.\ They\ think,\ oh\ yeah,\ it’s\ gonna\ be\ fine\ and\ then\ once\ they\ realize,\ yeah,\ all\ these\ people\ are\ calling\ me.\ I\ need\ help\ or\ whatever.\ If\ we\ could\ offer\ this\ service\ or\ resource\ perhaps\ it\ might\ work.\ I’m\ not\ saying\ it\ would\ for\ sure.\ I’m\ not\ saying\ it\ would\ be\ well\ attended,\ but\ it’s\ something.$$  

**Comparison of Educator Groups across Three Phases**

Throughout our three research Phases, we conducted a total of 24 educator Focus Groups comprised of 125 participants. We spoke with grade 8, 9 and 10 classroom teachers, elementary and high school guidance counsellors, Student Success Teachers, vice-principals and principals. In analyzing the data from across all three Phases, we are presented with a continuity and discontinuity of themes and practices over time and throughout the three stages of transition (Phase I, II and III). As presented below (see Table 64), educator discussions highlighted enablers and barriers, views of youth and of the school itself. What stands out, is the dissimilarity in the main concerns of educators over time. When they do show similarity in themes for discussion it is around the positive and effective things that are happening in their schools.
Table 64: Top 3 Themes for Educator Focus Group Participants over Three Phases

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In Phase I, the three most frequently discussed themes in the English-language educator data were (1) barriers to a successful transition; (2) effective strategies for transition/engagement; and (3) advice about redesigning schools to facilitate student success/transition. The Phase I report details how these themes resonate with grade 8 educators and play out in the halls of elementary and middle schools across the province as students prepare to enter secondary school. In Phase II, our educator Focus Groups were primarily cross-panel. This provided a unique and valuable opportunity for grade 8 elementary and grade 9 high school educators to come together and discuss their views on transition. They commented about their appreciation in having this opportunity and felt that it should happen more often. As these educators were working with students in the midst of transitional passage, it is understandable that the focal point of these discussions would be the youth themselves and the transitional supports around them. In Phase III, grade 10 educators were witness to high school students who have already made the passage and were continuing their transition to high school life. Consequently, they are in an ideal position to highlight the enablers and barriers to transition, as well as the features they view as important to a good high school.

**Barriers and Enablers.** Across all three research Phases, educators have spoken frankly about the elements which hinder or help a student’s transition. In each of our three Phases, there was a continuity of dialogue about student engagement, student ability, and parental involvement as having the potential to be negative or positive, risk or protective, depending on the situation.

Examples:

$5ECEEA Participant: Which is a huge impact in the transition because if you have a kid that should be working at the essential level and they are in an applied class, they are already experiencing failure and they’ve only been there for a couple of weeks. That is really going to impact them negatively.

$5$1ECH1EE057C (HS): I tend to think of at-risk as a student who’s skills are not at the level that looks like they’re going to get through high school. And whether that’s an academic skill, or social skill, behaviour, etcetera, it’s just that this student doesn’t seem to be doing the things necessary to move forward.
Maybe a family marriage breaking up, or one parent is an addict, or there’s a younger sibling that has special needs that requires a lot of care. Like there are other things pulling them in different directions and they don’t yet know how to take care of themselves and take on responsibilities that are sort of being put on and the balance there. So that to me is also an at risk student.

And not that they can’t do it. There’s no uh, you know, I’m thinking of a girl in my head right now, she can definitely do the work but because of her behaviour and because of her attendance, she you know, doesn’t pass the course repeatedly. So the guidance thinks, oh, well they must need remedial work. No, they don’t need remedial work because their academic level, their capabilities are there, what they need is for parents to be on board... And parents to support the school staff and encourage their children to come to school on a daily basis.

Some of the at-risk kids get involved with athletics.

Yeah, that’s true. A lot of them, I mean, I know coming in sometimes in the morning, students who wouldn’t arrive on time for class, if you strapped them in and yanked them there at the bell, are waiting there for the gym to open at eight fifteen. Are there at seven forty five, waiting for the gym to open so they can start their, whatever practice they have in the morning. Cause that’s important. It’s important, and it gets them there.

While there was continuity in theme about the importance of cross-panel communication between elementary and high schools, there was a discontinuity over the 3 Phases in terms of how educators saw their roles and the role of their partner school(s). In Phase I, we heard about the challenges grade 8 educators faced in developing and maintaining communication with their secondary receiver schools. In particular, participants spoke about the “two different worlds” of elementary and secondary school, gaps in teaching styles, gaps in discipline, difference in assessment and curriculum, the need for “bridges” to be built between them, and ways to do so.

Examples:

Well first of all, the curriculum between grade nine and grade 8 has to link up, and it doesn’t.

I think that one of the things that the ministry is going to put money into it would be really effective if some of those PA days that we’re getting, instead of focusing on assessment and evaluation until its dead... [participants laughing, talking at the same time] If the high school, and the grade eight teachers,
grade nine teachers, could spend a day, could have math groups, have LA groups, you could have subject groups, and talk about and plan, what do the grade nine teachers want the grade eight teachers to do to help the kids make that transition better and so on.

$1ECEEA Participant: It is a sad commentary that we’ve lost the connection between elementary and secondary schools...It is lamentable for a system that professes to be different and professes that it has that intimacy.

The general discussion relating to cross-panel issues in Phase I was relatively negative compared to Phase II and III. However, many educators in Phase I felt that some of these discontinuities across panels were exactly what was needed for young people to make a well supported “fresh start”. This theme did indeed arise in the Phase II and III discussions as well. The fresh start remained an important protective factor from the point of view of educators in grade 9 and 10. Indeed, we heard the perceived need for continued and ongoing discussion, communication and programming across panels to support fresh starts and intervene on false starts.

In Phase II, where the majority of our Focus Groups were cross-panel, and in Phase III where they were at the secondary level, educators still spoke about the importance of communication; however it had broadened to encompass a variety of ways in which collaboration between levels is an integral part of successful transition. This included a desire for information regarding a student’s academic ability and potential, extra-curricular interests, family circumstances, health, and behaviours. Finally, Phase II and III educators spoke optimistically of an improvement in cross-panel communication since the introduction of Student Success Teachers and this was in direct contrast to some of the negativity heard in Phase I.

Examples:

$$4ELH2EE023B: ...you know our feeder schools, we have a chance to sit down and talk about so – like, you said the biggest thing I think, is to be able to collaborate and talk to the teachers, find out what they’re doing and to make sure you’re on the same page with the curriculum and your assessment practices - make sure they’re in line with the way you, you’re teaching.

$$4ELH2EE022B: I discuss, I go to all my feeder schools usually earlier on in the year just to meet with the teachers to get a better idea of you know the students and then definitely again this time of year we’re meeting again and we are going through a physical profile just so we are more aware of how we can support that child once they’re under our umbrella so we profile just you know the appropriate pathway, academically speaking, we talk about their strengths you know, their weaknesses you know, how can we even look at time tabling them going into first semester so it’s a time table to at least some of their strengths so they have the positive experience... Sometimes that’s difficult to do but we do take a look at, once we have the profiles I sit down and guidance is always you know part of that discussion also with the feeder schools and so the more we know about the students, the better off we are to prepare and try and meet their needs, you know especially that first semester-
$\text{ECH2EE042A (HS). I was just going to say, one of the things that I've found interesting is this year we've had more communications with the Elementary Schools because of exchange of information. I know that you know, even this morning $\text{ECH2EE045A gave me the name of a student who she's now talked to the parents and they've agreed to let the child drop down to a different level. And I've had, you know, constant communication with other Grade Eight teachers because of $\text{ECH2EE040A (HS) and I going out there and talking to the Grade Eight teachers and saying 'Do you think you can talk to the parents and see if they, you know, and have them call us because we'd be happy to talk to them'.}$}

\textbf{The School and the Students.} While barriers/enablers and educator recommendations were at the forefront of discussions across all three Phases, views of youth and youth culture emerged in Phase II as one of the top 3 themes. And Phase III was the only time features of a good school appeared as one of the top 7 themes. Here again we see evidence of some of the continuities (barriers/enablers and recommendations) and discontinuities in terms of what educators across all three grade levels highlighted and the ways in which they view school and the young people within their classrooms.

It is interesting to note that in Phase I discussions did not centre on positive or negative qualities of either elementary or high school. Rather, educators spoke primarily in terms of barriers and enablers, strategies and recommendations to transition. The grade 8 educators were very much looking forward to the needs of their students being met as they enter grade 9, and commenting on what needs to be in place in their schools to facilitate movement into the secondary level.

Alternatively, in Phase II educators spoke of youth very much in the present, noting the impact of various influences on the lives of these young people in the present day. \textbf{Views of youth and youth culture} was highlighted as the number one theme for grade 9 educators who spoke in particular of the importance of peer and parental influence, noting the potential risk or protective qualities. While this theme was noted at the elementary Phase I level, it appears to resonate more intensely in high school when peer relationships become more central to young people, parental relationships become more peripheral and pressures youth face have the potential to be more problematic.

Examples:

\textit{$\text{ECH2EE045A (ES). Cos if they're too much into their friends and not into academics, it's unsuccessful because they really eventually too late most of the time, that they've failed something, that they've taken too many days off, or they've skipped too many days, or they're too social, but if they have a good balance and they have the right group of friends I find that they feel accepted. But the wrong group friends, if there's drugs and all sorts of other things, right? Facilitator: Are there other roles that friends play? $\text{ECH2EE045A (ES). Well encouraging them to participate, to sit at the back of the classroom, or at the front of the classroom, and actually ask questions}$}
– cos there’s peer pressure in every classroom for sure. But it just depends if it’s an academic classroom, hopefully it’s more focused on the teachers, and more focused on what’s going on but, some other classrooms it might be more, there might be more behavioral issues or other things that are a source of distraction.

$$1EC2EE064A$$: there’s a huge change, physically, socially, and emotionally, they’re going through so much and they’re really trying to kind of identify themselves, they’re trying to think about what they want to do with their lives and where they want to go and everybody’s kind of putting those demands on them for the first time; what do you want to do in high school, what do you want to do with your life? And I can see some of them making choices you know making different high school, making different paths because they’re, they think that’s what they should be doing and then all the influences and pressures from parents and from the teachers often times are different because the parents want them to do and what we suggest are two different ways to think and I think there’s a lot of pressure, there’s a lot of you know, emotionally they’re, you know they’re dating, their girlfriend, boyfriend, with the drugs and sex and all those pressures are there such a, a difficult time for them to be making those choices and to kind of, to deal with that is really I don’t know, there’s a time before that it has to put pressure on them and so I think being able to use those pressures and say kind of allay their fears and say ok, we can help you, is huge because you’re developing that kind of support character for them early on ... you know you’re there to kind of help them go though their choices and so it’s just a huge part, huge time in their lives to be making those kinds of decisions so it’s very important to deal with that.

Phase III Educators, while realistic about many of the pressures and risk factors faced by young people, were the only cohort to have positive features of high school as one of the most commonly referred to themes. Features of a good high school were noted as being central to a young person’s experience in the school and of having the potential to be a significant protective factor.

Examples:

$$1EC2EE064A$$: I think we have a lot of student clubs. Like $$1EC2EE063A$$ mentioned the Social Justice. There’s a very strong arts council. There’s school plays that we have. $$1EC2EE063A$$: There’s the environmental action committee that’s really good. $$EC1EE060A$$: You know, we’re all saying, you know, we’ve got the environment club. Who goes to the environment club? The same kids who go to the arts club, you know, those $$1EC2EE063A$$: They are not the at risk kids, yeah. $$EC1EE060A$$: You know, the ones - $$1EC2EE063A$$: Well, I’ve seen at risk kids turnaround from participation.

$$1ECH2FF003A$$ : Les grands sont fiers aussi de pouvoir aider les plus jeunes en septième et huitième, parce qu’ils sont fiers du mentorat, du tutorat aussi. Ils sont les médiateurs s’il y a un conflit. Ils sont aussi des entraîneurs pour les équipes sportives ou des dirigeants d’activités parascolaires alors tu peux avoir un jeune qui est intéressé à la mise en page pour l’annuaire qui va travailler avec les personnes plus expérimentées, les plus grands. Alors ils vont travailler ensemble sur une page de
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l’annuaire. Les grands ont un rôle de mentorat auprès des septièmes et huitièmes, c’est un genre de brise-glace aussi.

Parent Focus Groups

Phase III: Most Frequent Focus Group Themes for Parents

In Phase I we spoke with Parent/Guardians of grade 8 youth, in Phase II we met with Parent/Guardians of grade 9 youth finishing their first year of high school, and in Phase III, we spoke with Parent/Guardians of Grade 10 youth to learn how their children have fared in the post-transition adjustment.

Through each Phase we faced the challenge of recruiting parents from diverse backgrounds and ensuring that we had representation from the more marginalized populations. This challenge extended to encouraging fathers to participate as well as mothers, reaching out to parents whose children are struggling at school and who themselves are not able to be engaged in their child’s education due to language, cultural and/or economic barriers; as well as parents whose children are excelling and who are themselves involved in the school culture. We wanted to include parents from a range of socio-economic, ethnic, religious backgrounds.

In Phase III, we were able to conduct 8 Parent Focus Groups comprised 25 participants. The 7 most frequently discussed themes emerging from these groups are as follows:

1. Views of Youth and Youth Culture - 232
2. Inter-relation of Barrier/ Enabler - 148
3. Influence and Role of Parents in Transition/ Schooling - 134
4. Influence and Role of Friends/ Peers in Transition/ Schooling - 115
5. Parents’ Place in Transition - 114
6. Features of a Good High School - 113
7. Enablers to a Successful Transition - 101

The top most frequently discussed theme by parents/guardians was the view of youth and youth culture. There were 133 pages of text capturing 232 distinct text segments. Although the theme of friends appeared on its own as the fourth highest node, the impact of peers was threaded throughout discussions of youth and youth culture. Parents spoke of friends and peers as being even more important in high school than they were in elementary and of the huge influence they can have on one
another. Parents highlighted this influence in every aspect of young people’s lives, from their transition, to their schoolwork, to their behaviours and indeed as one parent put it, to their souls, and recognized the many positive aspects of this influence.

Examples:

$$$1PC1EE027A: My daughter... knew all of her friends and they knew her coming in, so there’s lots of people to say hi to her. And there was a lot from her elementary that already were here and probably about a dozen that were coming as well. So, she wasn’t really nervous at all. She was actually looking forward to it.

$$$3PL2EE029A: Yeah it’s huge. It’s just the biggest thing in her life, is friends. I think it makes a difference on everything. In my opinion friends are huge. Yeah, and her friends are all good students... you know, eighties, that’s good. Um, yeah, that is a big deal. And some of her new friends have been friends she’s met in classes so, um and they have the group project thing, so it gets them together outside of school. But, yeah it’s huge, friends it’s big, big, big at this age.

$$$2PL1EE003A: Well, [friends are] certainly more important in their lives than they were in middle school. Facilitator: And how does that play out for them?

$$$2PL1EE003A: Well I, you know, I guess depends on what you’re speaking about but if you’re talking about academics, actually I think almost in any area that they’re in whether it’s socially or how they’re behaving or what they’re thinking. I mean, they all sort of, you know, they feed off each other. Facilitator: Mm Hmm. And is that, you find that that’s more so now than it was a few years ago? $$$2PL1EE003A: I, I mean before it was about being together and doing activities and stuff. Now it’s more about their soul than it was. $$$2PL2EE001A: And about dealing with their own maturity and, I know in my case with the boys ... they probably would go to their friends before they would go to either my husband or myself.... I’m sure they go to their friends for advice or just to talk about, because it’s so new at this stage of their lives.

In talking about how they see youth and youth culture, parents also spoke about watching their teenage children and their children’s friends grow up and begin to think about their futures. Participants saw this goal-oriented thinking as being a protective factor in their children’s lives. They also recognized how school programs can help support this kind of thinking and how their own roles have shifted to accommodate their maturing children.

Examples:

$$$1PC1EE027A: One thing that I think is good in the grade ten is that they take the careers... they actually have them research a program and where they would go. Either to the college or university in what they would take and how they would get there and so at least it gets the kids thinking about... something that normally at this age they don’t think about, you know. $$$1PC1EE027A: They’re just thinking about who’s having the next party and he’s so hot, you know. (Laughter). $$$1PC1EE027A:
That’s where their minds at you know. But at least with the careers... it gets them thinking about that so it’s good because it establishes that, okay next year in eleven and twelve you have to start making that transition now to the next stage.

$$3PLEE0A$$ Participant: First semester of school I thought, they’ve changed so much, so of them started smoking, and some of them have girlfriends, a different girlfriend every week. But then they go, they completely revert back to the way they were, and I know that the school is doing everything that they can to try to tell these kids that you have to do well now. You don’t, you can’t wait until grade twelve, so I think a lot of them are starting to be a little more serious with their grades.

$$4PC2EE022B$$: But one thing that my son has that I feel, that maybe I’m hearing from everybody else is he’s well focused. He knows what he wants to do. He, and he has his priorities down pat. As far as, I want the house. I want the nice car. I want the nice shoes. And what do I have to get, to do that? I need my education.

$$2PLEE0A$$ Participant: It’s just, to me it’s, they’re going in a path and you, you’re trying to guide them but it’s their path. $$2PL2EE034A$$: They’re young adults now, especially the girls. They mature that much.

Of course, parents also recognized some of the risk factors that surround young people. In speaking about youth and youth culture, parent participants spoke honestly about the myriad of issues young people face and how these can have an adverse influence on a young person’s trajectory. Parents spoke about systemic issues such as sexism, racism and homophobia; they touched on the challenges faced by young people struggling with learning disabilities or mental illness; and some spoke about their own fears regarding the lack of interest or motivation shown by their children in schoolwork.

Examples:

$$1PC1EE027A$$: Sometimes it’s academically that they really struggle and then, then there’s a lot of anxiety around that... And sometimes it’s mental health issues.

$$4PL2EE017A$$: It’s like, I think you’re being, you’re being given too much responsibility to make it. And if you are, you know, a little bit bored or a little bit challenged, if you’ve got issues at home or if you’ve got any sort of learning difficulties, and it’s, you’re not really right on the radar. And ... you slip because it’s just sort of like, ... $$4PL2EE018A$$: There’s not a lot to - $$4PL2EE018A$$: There’s not a lot of personal connection.

$$4PC2EE019B$$: But I know with C- in terms of his identity, like he’s a mixed child right. Like he’s, he’s half black and he was pinned as this gangster kid. I remember in grade eight him crying, sitting on the couch and just bawling because he was like, everybody thinks, I have this reputation as a gangster. I feel like I need to live up to it, right?... It was hard... And now I see him starting to like, identify, he totally identifies with the gangster rap. But he’s a kid of colour in a sea of whiteness. And I don’t care, a lot of people say, oh you know get over it. He’s just, I don’t see colour,
he's just a kid... Well you don't see colour because you're white. $$$4PC2EE022B: Ya. $$$4PC2EE019B: You know, in a dominantly white community, so of course you don't see colour. $$$4PC2EE021B: And you know, like they say when a child has a black parent and a white parent they're still considered a black $$$4PC2EE019B: Kid. $$$4PC2EE021B: person kid or whatever because that's all they see. $$$4PC2EE019B: That's all they see. C- is, he's, that's how he's identified. And I think for him transitioning right now into his maleness, all he sees is, like he doesn't really have a lot of positive black role models, male, black role, he has none.

$$$1PC2EE028A: Well O-, she has a really hard time since she started here... We're trying so hard to get her to not be late for school and she's pretty near late half of the time. Every, every week there's a couple of days where she's late. So, it's been a real struggle for these last two years to get her to school on time because she just can't seem to get her, I don't know what it is, she just can't seem to get up early in the morning. Because I work till eleven at night I'm home eleven thirty, quarter to twelve and I try to encourage her to get into bed, get up. So I have to get up with her to get her to school. And many of the times she can't get up.

$$$4PC2EE021B: because he's not, he's not getting it. He's just not getting it. He's, I don't know what's wrong with him but, and yet you give him something he can invent anything you give him. $$$4PC2EE022B: That's what saying, they're not stupid. $$$4PC2EE019B: It's not a question about any of our kids' abilities. $$$4PC2EE021B: No, not at all... $$$4PC2EE019B: It's just at this point they're so lost. And, I don't know, there's a lot, C-'s using a lot of pot. $$$4PC2EE021B: Ya. $$$4PC2EE019B: too and drinking. $$$4PC2EE021B: Ya. $$$4PC2EE019B: And he wants to smoke dope every day cause that's his lifestyle. $$$4PC2EE022B: Mmm and that's what the focus becomes - not interested. It's more a down, down time.

In touching on their views of youth and youth culture, parents spoke about that fine line between childhood and adulthood. They discussed the ways in which they see their children as they mature into young adults and the ways they think their children see themselves.

Examples:

$$$4PC1EE020B: He thinks he is [an adult] but I keep telling him he's not. It's true. He's only a teenager.

$$$4PC1EE020B: They have to start growing up because they're, like J-'s sixteen years old. He's got to start growing up. He's an adult right now. He's got the mind of an adult. He needs to start focusing that way that. $$$4PC2EE021B: Ya. $$$4PC1EE020B: You know what, the responsibility's on you.

$$$2PL2EE034A: I think it's back to independence. These kids will be at university in a couple of years. They, they've got to be doing it all on their own and structuring their own time. And being responsible for getting their stuff done. So, I think it's actually let them be as independent as they can. If their marks suffer a little bit or you know, they need to ask for help.
The second most frequently discussed theme by parents/guardians was the inter-relation of barriers/enablers in transition. There were 73 pages of text that encapsulated 148 separate text segments. One of the persistent findings across all three categories of Focus Groups (youth, parents and educators) has been the paradox of a single element having the capacity to influence in either a risk or protective manner – and in some cases, as both risk and protective simultaneously. Parents emphasized this paradox as it plays out in the lives of their adolescent children.

In analyzing the Phase III Focus Group data, three main sub-themes emerged illustrating the inter-relation of barriers/enablers in the process of transition. The first was highlighted the positive and negative sides of a schoolwork demands and the ability of teachers to help or hinder a students’ transition.

Examples:

$$\text{4PC1EE020B: I think a lot of them are just still in the identity crisis area. They’re trying to find out where they still belong. Who, where, what group they belong to. And that’s the hardest thing I guess for them.}$$

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$$\text{Examples:}$$

$$\text{4PC1EE027A: I found the elementary school that my daughter went to really prepares them because they give a lot of homework, in fact a little too much at times. But at least it wasn’t a shock to the kids when they got here.}$$

$$\text{4PC2EE022B: So I think that his teachers have made a difference cause there’s been some meatheads. There’s always meatheads out there, but I think he has concentrated on a couple of teachers, professionals that have helped him when he struggled in certain areas to say, you know what I need? This is where I need help in sir and he’s gotten it. Had he not gotten that, it might be different. But there’s always been help for him and he’s doing wonderful.}$$

$$\text{4PL2EE018A: I know from my experience I needed, I needed teachers that treated me with respect. That was huge for me. That didn’t talk down to me. And that had, you know, good standards, like, and I was not, I was not a really a good student. But I mean because I felt cheated with my high school education and, and with J- I think it’s important to him too that, that’s, you know, don’t, don’t dismiss me. Some issues have come up in school where he wasn’t happy with what happened with a teacher and he dealt with it. Like, you know - I think, probably that was definitely number one. Was the whole, you need... teachers that are in there. That enjoy teaching and, and see kids as, as people, as young adults that, that are at the beginning of their journey and, and that, that have respect for them. And that want to see them succeed, you know. Not just putting in their time and, I find in the teaching profession, it, it’s, it’s a challenge, a lot of unhappy teachers out there for whatever reason.... And that’s not, and, and because it’s such an important, I mean, oh my god, what they can do. With the power a teacher can have... In a child’s life, and I don’t think that a whole lot of them really, there are some that, and, and hats off to the ones that do.}$$

$$\text{4PL2EE017A: Yes. 4PL2EE018A: You know, because there are a lot of special}$$
people that are teachers. But not always. $$$4PL2EE017A: I think teachers need to be very special because it is very challenging. And they do have so much power and influence on the generation, the next generation that’s going to be doing something in the world.

The next barrier/enabler sub-theme that emerged was the impact of a parent’s influence as it converges with a young person’s need for independence. This paradox was keenly felt by parents as their role changed from one of a parent with an elementary age child to one with a high school age adolescent.

Examples:

$$$1PC1EE027A: When they were in elementary my wife volunteered a lot. She’d be going on all the school trips as a parent assistant. She’d go in and do artwork with kids and volunteer in class and all that sort of stuff. Now in high school, no. She’s been here twice maybe, so, you know. Facilitator: And that’s because there isn’t an opportunity for her or because she doesn’t want to any more, or the kids don’t want her? $$$1PC1EE027A: Both, both, you know, in high school the kids are more independent and they don’t need that assistance like they did in elementary. The teachers don’t need the assistance like they do in elementary.

$$$2PL2EE001A: This year I’ve had a lot less, you know, bending over and looking at their agenda and what are you doing in your notebook and some of that, I think last, in grade nine the teachers would send some of the, the tests home and still ask for a signature. This year I don’t think I have. I don’t think I’ve signed anything. So, the, that’s part of the teachers too I think. They’re trying to make the kids more responsible for their own work and actions.

$$$4PC2EE019B: And I’ve been kind of like, like up until grade eight I was really involved in the school. And then grade nine there was really no place for me in all of that. Facilitator: How come do you think? $$$4PC2EE019B: Well I think one of the reasons is it’s not cool for C-’s mom to show up at school anymore. That’s like, from that angle. But there’s just nothing, there’s nothing that’s been put in place for me so that it is cool for me to go to school as a parent if I am available to go to school. Like I’ve got some flexibility with my job where I could go to school and hang out and do something. But there’s nothing there for me. I mean really. $$$4PC2EE022B: You want to feel connected. $$$4PC2EE019B: I wanted, ya to maintain that connection... It’s not as hands-on, grassroots type of school council any more. So there’s no place for me there as a volunteer or as a parent. Which I think is kind of detrimental.

$$$4PL2EE017A: And I get that because of, I mean there’s certainly, part of it is because the kids are getting older and there’s an onus, and a responsibility on them to own more. But I don’t think, I mean there’s the, there’s the ideal and there’s the reality. And the reality of it is maybe there’s again too much responsibility that’s being asked. $$$4PL2EE018A: Ya. $$$4PL2EE017A: And these kids are not prepared for it. $$$4PL2EE018A: Mm Hmm. They’re not prepared for it... $$$4PL2EE018A: Okay, you’re in high school now and you’re supposed to - You should be responsible. But that doesn’t happen overnight. $$$4PL2EE017A: It doesn’t happen overnight. I don’t think they’re taught some of the skills to help them to, to do that.
Finally, in terms of barriers/enablers to transition, parents spoke once again about the impact and influence of peers and the enormous role - for positive or negative - they play in the lives of their children.

Examples:

$$\text{Peer group’s huge. You hope as a parent that they get in with the right kids, because the right kids can be a positive influence and a negative kid can lead them the other way, right?}$$

$$\text{Facilitator: what is the role of friends in high school and how is that different from elementary?}$$

$$\text{I think that it sort of helps direct them to where they want to go. Of course the partying and the drinking and all that is a temptation that we’ve all been through in school. But I think for my kids it’s there but … they knew what was important. Because of the support at home, support at the school and support of some of the friends … Temptations for them in every corner, but because of our support at home and at school with friends, they all seem to go in the right direction.}$$

The **third most frequently** discussed theme by parents/guardians was the influence and role of parents in transition/schooling. For this theme, 134 text segments were captured within 59 pages of transcript. As with the other themes, participants presented us with both sides of the issue – the significant protective influence that can be in place, as well as the risk for youth whose parents are unable to have such a positive impact. The first example of the influence and role of parents in their child’s schooling and transition illustrates the importance many parents place on being involved in their child’s schooling, even at the high school level.

Examples:

$$\text{I’d say as far as at home my involvement is just as much as elementary with homework. This semester she’s fine. Last semester she had math and science. So every night I was the math guy. I did that in elementary with them as well. Every night my wife says, go see dad now. And every night we sit there with them for an hour every night so that hasn’t changed as far as you think, oh maybe you leave the kids a little more. They’re on their own in high school, well with a couple of subjects, not necessarily. This semester she’s fine because she’s got the writing subjects, English and history and all that. She’s very, very verbose and has no problems but the analytical thing, she needs a little more help with so I helped in elementary and I’m still doing that now.}$$
And I've also encouraged my daughter to seek assistance with other teachers for help, my grade ten daughter. She was struggling with math for example, first semester and her math teacher was great. She would meet after school and helped her all the time but sometimes she wasn't available so I said, well go see Miss So-and-so, she’ll help you.

B- has, is a very smart kid, but has absolutely no interest in school. No initiative. I encourage him daily

Well I've been there a couple of times only to meet with the teacher to support his work. And what I usually do too, is when I know that he's having problems, I just call the social counsellor there and she gets together with him and they work something out from that. And even the teachers when I go meet them, I tell them that you know, he has to do his work and if not to call me. To communicate with me right away, and usually I try to get him to do his work. Facilitator: How do they do with that? Are they good at communicating? ...

Usually yes. When he has a problem they contact me. That’s what I recommended all his teachers to do... call me right away when he’s behind in his work.

Parents spoke about their own influence in encouraging their children to make friends and join activities as a way of getting and keeping them engaged with and at school. Parents also indicated the importance of helping their children think ahead to their own futures and potential.

Examples:

And I really made sure I got to meet the parents and the, some of the kids, so there’s, like, I mean, we’re open to the kids and open to their friends.

Like for me and my husband. We try to help our child as much as we can, like paying for the extra-curricular activities like hockey, tae-Kwan-do, music – that’s what we’ve been doing for the past six years we’ve been here.

So the role of the parent has to be really to help the kids and luckily we’re all able to do that and encourage them. And as you say, a little hands off. I’ll tell my daughter too, if you’re having trouble and I don’t get that, you know, I don’t know that in science, physics, you go see the teacher, you know, encourage them to do that and, and that really helps the kids with the transition. And the same thing with the next step from high school on, too. You know, I’ve always talked about higher education and what they want to go into and I don’t stress just university. It’s college as well. There are great college programs. You know, Uncle K- is a tradesman and he’s doing fantastic and we need electricians and plumbers and that’s what I try to stress... Have a goal, think of where you’re going and, and but dream of doing something.

He knows an education is important to us cos both me and my husband went to high school and university. My husband went to college, so I think he wants to follow in our footsteps. That’s what I think, you know, and I hope he does.
Throughout our Focus Groups, parents discussed the ways in which open communication with their children is the cornerstone of their relationships, and about how this communication has changed as their children have grown up. Interestingly, these conversations appear not only to alter with the age of the child, but also with the gender. Parents spoke to both their sons and daughters about the risks of drugs and sexual activity, but in different ways.

Examples:

$$$2PL2EE034A: Ya, at that age so I started just an open conversation. You know, bring it up. If they want to talk about it, and talk about it. You know, especially in the case of drugs and in the case of the, of the high school guys now. I’m warning them about some of the stories that you hear of things that are going on that they might not have seen themselves yet.

$$$2PL2EE001A: We’ve always had very, I would suggest, very open conversations with the boys about smoking and drinking and, and drugs as they got a little bit older... So we’ve always encouraged them to like, never go anywhere in a car with anybody that they think has been drinking or, or taking drugs. Never hesitate to call us at any time of the day or night or whatever if they don’t feel comfortable in a situation

$$$1PC2EE028A: Listening is a very important tool for the communication. Just sitting and listening and letting them be able to come to you and tell you things... Being there just to say to them, what’s going on and if there’s problems they come to you and you listen to what’s going on... We stay in touch and we communicate... and we try to, you know, be more positive.

$$$5PC2EA016A: And we also talk to him about not fooling around with girls at an early age, because if he wants to go to school he can’t touch a girl. Or if he ends up with a baby, he’s stuck with a baby.

$$$2PL1EE003A: Ya, I just found girls terrible. Evil. You know, (everyone laughs) I can’t use another word. And it, it comes in all different forms... Boys to a certain degree, physically or whatever, they’ll get into a fight, this, that and the other thing, but it’s a lot more fractured female wise. Whether it be clothes, whether it be emotions, whether it be, whatever happens, and my daughter’s fairly open minded. Her range of friends are incredible, but ... You know, there’s, there’s a group of girls who are just mean. They all put down somebody for no reason or whatever it is. And I, you know, my daughter’s not perfect ... but hopefully from her range of friends - I found out that there are all kinds, it takes all kinds and you know, you let people be who they are. And from the different things, not just her, I mean, I talk to her and her friends about this...

The potential for a parents’ influence to work as either a protective or risk factor in their children’s lives is a theme which came out continuously in our Focus Groups. When speaking about the role they play in schooling and transition, parents
recognized the fine line they must walk in supporting their children, yet allowing them to find their own path; the balance between being involved and over-involved.

Examples:

$$1PC2EE026A: It is a hard balance because...I try to help my kids, I give the support but at the same time, you know, I'm not going to hand hold them because I'm not doing them any favours... I mean, you have to let them fall, I mean I'm not going to hard fall them, I'm not going be hovering but at the same time I gotta keep that eye, keep that line of communication. All that is a big transition from elementary to high school because they feel like little kids and all of a sudden they're adults.

$$1PC2EE026A: I mean, ya, it’s like the parent role...is the encouragement and, and the, also the living an example. Like they see us trying and working and, you know, our level of education is, isn’t as high as my daughters’. They both, you know, one's already been accepted and is going to university. B-, that’s all she sees. She wants to be a vet. I don’t know if that’ll happen. I can’t discourage her but I can’t let her live in la-la land. ... Like, you have to give them the chance. And if it doesn’t work out it, you, they have to take the down side with it, and I don’t know, it’s, I think it’s harder for them now. The transition is harder on a different level. I don’t remember having that big adjustment from grade nine to, from grade eight to grade nine. I just, it was the next step. I don’t know, you just made new friends. I don’t know, it’s just, it’s different.

Many parents who view their own lives as being a risk factor shared with us their strategies for positively influencing their children. For some of these parents, they are simply tired at the end of a long day.

Examples:

$$1PC2EE026A: I deal with difficult kids all the time and my patience is short. I feel badly because I didn’t, I helped my oldest daughter more, so part of it I’m sure, I can’t help my youngest. I’m working now. I wasn’t working full time before. So I hired a tutor. That put the homework in its place, took the pressure off me and they get along better than, you know, when I do. I just complain, why didn’t you get this? Well there’s tears. They don’t cry with the tutor and, I get that now. It’s a whole different - I’ve had to remove myself more, but also be aware.

$$1PCEEA Participant: Because you, I mean, I admit it, I’m honest with the girls. My brain is fried, especially if it’s been a tough day...and the last thing, like I just want to come home and unwind a bit myself. But I’m also a parent. I have a responsibility. So, ya, I mean, I’m always proofreading essays, and I’ve got two of them, and they both always have papers due the same time. I’m, like my eyeballs are going to fall out of my head. So I still help, but I know where my stress levels are and I alleviate it by having the tutor or they have math group and homework club here. That’s, like that’s another huge support here in the school. I’ll say go, go to the math group.
For others, their own life path has been a difficult one. Their strategies include using their own life history to impress upon their children the importance of making good life choices so their own futures will not be limited.

Examples:

$$4PC2EE019B: \text{Cause I was a student, like I went back to school when I was like twenty-four. He was five, you know. And I went, so I tried to explain to him that it's going to be shitty for you when you're twenty years old and your friends are working and whatever.}$$

$$4PC2EE021B: \text{I tell him all the time. And that's where again the encouragement comes from all the time. Or I use myself as an example. Do you want to be a casual worker like I am? Sitting by that damn phone waiting for them to call you to go to work? No. Do you want to struggle every god damned day of your life like I do? No, probably not.}$$

$$4PC2EE022B: \text{Cause I'm in the same boat as you guys. I'm not, I'm a dental assistant. I don't make a lot of money. I work really hard for what I do have and what it can provide for my kids.}$$

**Comparison of Parent Groups across Three Phases**

We conducted a total of 21 Parent Focus Groups comprised of 74 participants. In compiling the data and analyzing our findings across all three Phases, we can clearly see the continuities and discontinuities of themes throughout the three stages of transition (elementary/pre-transition; the transitional phase in the first year of high school; and the post-transition year in the second year of high school).

The top three themes are presented below (see Table 65). It is interesting to note that across all three Phases and years, the top theme for parents remained consistently about the young people themselves (views of youth and youth culture). In addition, their own role as parents weighed heavily in their discussions across time as well. In Phase I the focus was also on the positive aspects of elementary school. This changed to a focus on the negative aspects of high school in Phase II and the discussion of how influences functioned simultaneously positively and negatively in Phase III.
The Phase I, II and III parent Focus Groups were full of insightful discussion relating to young people, school and the transition from grade 8 to grade 9, and into grade 10. The sample of parents in Phase I was relatively small and homogenous. We gained a better variation of the range of parents from different regions, social class backgrounds, and communities over Phases II and III.

**Views of youth and youth culture.** Across all 3 Phases of research, the most frequent theme in parent Focus Groups were views of youth and youth culture. This continuity of theme is further echoed by the specific ways in which parents spoke about young people. Throughout the 3 Phases, parents highlighted the risk and protective factors they see as surrounding young people, as well as the inter-relation between these factors.

The main risk factors as seen by the parents were peers, educators, lack of communication between parents and schools and the youth themselves. The protective factors in this theme were almost mirror opposites; peers, educators, parents, and youth engagement in extra-curricular activities at school. The issue of appropriate placement within and flexibility in high school programming was mentioned frequently by parents as both risk and protective, depending on how it was functioning.

Examples:

$$4PL2EE013A: \text{ It was recommended she go into Essentials for her language and math, and that if she was doing fine that she would be bumped up to the regular programme. They did bump her up in her reading, in her English, after not quite a month, and then the second term, no the first term in one of the other subjects – the math, she was doing fine. The work was just basic. So we try to bump her up, couldn't do that because they said there was too many students already in classroom and I said, well that wasn't the agreement. You said if she was doing fine and that wasn't that case. They said, well we can't do it because there's already too many students in that classroom. So I had a meeting with them and I told them that I was not happy and this was not the deal...I find at the High School if the parents are not right on their tail, nothing gets done... That's not our problem. You know, they should have the staff.}$$
Influence/Role of Parents in Transition and Schooling. A thorough discussion of their own parental place in the process of transition and schooling was a continuous theme for parents across all three Phases. Beginning at the elementary level (pre-transition) and continuing into the first and second years of high school (adjustment and post-transition), parents spoke about the ongoing tensions of parenting young people as they move from childhood into young adulthood. Many parents see the ultimate risks of this task as arising from the lack of understanding and communication with the schools and educators about expectations, curriculum and activities that may help keep their children engaged.
Examples:

$1PLEEA Participant: I file my kid into that school, the doors shut, and I do not know what happens in there, it’s very hard to become involved or get information back out about what’s going on. I’m not made to feel welcome.

$$1PC2EE024A: I understand that they’re trying at this point in high school to get parents [to be] not as involved, but I think in grade nine, it’s needed.

$$6PL1FF008A: Mais si tu veux être engagé dans la vie de ton enfant. (Acquiescement de l’animatrice). Puis le secondaire, c’était la grosse transition, ensuite, tu as la puberté, ensuite jusqu’à... au... à l’emploi puis au mariage, puis tout ce qui en suit, bien c’est la transition qui se fait toute, puis tu fait ... toutes les transitions se font en même temps. Tu pars du primaire, tu t’en vas au secondaire, puis là tu as une blonde, puis un chum, puis après ça, tu as tout le secondaire, puis là tu as un autre monde, complètement nouveau, et là tu as, comme je disais, la puberté qui rentre là dedans, tu as toutes sortes d’émotions qui rentrent... fait que c’est un petit monde puis ça bouillonne. Fait que tu ne peux pas arriver puis juste exclure l’école ou juste inclure l’école, il faut que ça soit... il faut que tu démontres, tant qu’à moi, une liaison entre la famille, l’école, le travail, l’amour, la haine (acquiescements), la paix, la guerre, ensuite tu essaies d’introduire... (rires) de sensibiliser les jeunes aux problèmes du monde, puis aux problèmes de l’environnement, puis du compostage, puis la foresterie qui s’en va sur la bum, puis oh ! Tu as un test de maths demain ! (Rires, acquiescements).

$1PC2EE013B: I found that the nice thing in elementary School is they have agendas, so you always are corresponding with the teachers. So you’d actually write, you open and there’d be this red note glaring at you – so that was good. But in high school, you find that you don’t have that so the communication line is totally different, and when they got their report card and we talked to the teachers they said, “No you can’t phone’. I have a problem and I call. But they will only call if it’s a problem, unlike in elementary School where you got this note every day. Not paying attention, not doing work, so you were on top of it. But I find in high school you don’t have that, and I keep on telling him, “You’re in high school now. They’re not going to follow up on everything you do, they’re not going to police them, they’re going to let you go, you’re going to hang yourself and then you’re going to drown yourself, so you’ve got to keep on top of everything”. So I think in elementary School, the teachers were on top of him and they were guiding him, but in high school you’re just left on your own.

$$2PC1EE018A: One of things, I still have no idea, I have no idea what clubs are available, or sports that he could sign up in this school. Nothing’s ever been sent home to any of us... I talked to the gym guy and he said, “Oh yeah, we do intramural sports”. But I haven’t seen, like, nothing’s come home as a parent for me to encourage him and “You’re interested in that club, why don’t you go out for that club?” You know, so you can encourage them right? Help direct them. That’s part of our job and responsibility as parents is to try and guide them along the path, because...it’s tough for them to make common choice decisions at this age right? ... So, I would like to see more information coming home from the school on those types of things.
The shift between a parent’s ease of involvement at the elementary level compared to the high school level is one of the more continuous themes across all 3 Phases. In every Phase parents spoke about their desire to be supportive and involved, while still encouraging their child’s development and growing independence. The tension arises for these parents when they do not feel supported by the schools in their attempts.

Many parents also see their place as very much protective if they do get a hand in course selection and school work progress, and also noted their protective role outside school hours. Participants spoke of the ways in which specific teachers help them remain involved with their children’s education. They highlighted how these risk and protective factors coincide across the school terms, with some frustrations and some successes once the balance is found.

Examples:

$3PCEEA Participant: Seeing what they’re doing and showing an interest. Cos if you’re interested they want to go on and succeed cos they know “You did well” and you rewarded them. Whether it’s a hug or a kiss, some little thing or who knows what, that they know you’re proud of them and they want to succeed cos they know you’re already proud. So if you continue and carry on, cos you want to succeed and keep impressing your parents.

$$3PC2EE02A: Yea, I would say it’s a different role because like in grade school, it’s like she would just come more naturally, like more trust like, you were more involved with decisions made that she would try to make whereas at this level now, it’s like very important that she make the decisions and you know, there’s that tug of war thing mother daughter like she’s going to if I make that decision then no, it’s definitely like if you don’t have to be the opposite so it’s like I definitely don’t want to be making her decisions want to you know, let her have that room but yet she has to know that she can’t make all the decisions, I mean she’s only fifteen. So yea, to like be supportive so it’s a little different than in the grade school. You know, still having to be there and if it’s something heavy than she can come to you, she doesn’t have to handle it or decide it but for the most part you know, just trying to give her that room, eh? So I find it’s a bit of a trick.

$$1PC2EE024A: I knew that this was only grade nine and depending on how far this teacher went, I would step in. But I wanted to give him some space to be able to react and to see the different types of teachers and be able to react cause if I stepped in I mean, grade nine for sure, there could be one in grade ten, grade eleven, grade twelve, and he wouldn’t know how to respond to something like that. So I would just make sure reinforce that you know... don’t be afraid or think that you’re tattle tailing on him, just tell me...and we’ll talk to him, it doesn’t have to be a big thing, whatever. ... But you know I probably would have gotten more involved, why did this happen, why wasn’t I called, why wasn’t I- But I’ve, I’ve learned that I kind of have to step back a little bit in high school because this is where the transition starts. Like in three years, he could be gone from the house, he could be you know - and if I keep on having too much control then he won’t know how to, how to react in society...
My two oldest kids, they did okay in school, they didn’t really struggle. My last one did academically so I found I had to work more with her and be right there helping her and encouraging her and being very patient. You have to show a lot of patience with them. So that’s what I found what I had to do was you know, just be there and encouraging, going over assignments and you know, help reading with them, and that’s what I found I had to do.

Throughout Phases I, II and III, parents spoke about the inter-connection of risk and protective factors in their children’s academic, social and personal lives. The paradox of one element having the possibility of working as either a risk or protective factor, or even in some cases as both simultaneously, has been a continuous theme in all our Focus Groups. It makes sense therefore that when analysing the top 3 themes across all parent Focus Groups, the third encapsulates positive (Phase I) and negative (Phase II) features of school as well as this inter-connection (Phase III).

Features of a Good and Bad School. As opposed to the Youth and Educator Focus Groups which had numerous discontinuities across Phases (as well as continuities), themes for parents seemed to resonate across Phases in very similar ways. One of the only discontinuities is that in Phase I parents highlighted the features of a good school and in Phase II, they focussed on the features of a bad school. This is striking as it fits well with their overall feelings of inclusion/exclusion in the school. Parents at the elementary level felt their involvement was well facilitated by the school and classroom teachers, whereas at the high school level, parents felt disconnected to the school and unaware of their child’s daily routines. It stands to reason then, that elementary parents (Phase I) emphasised the positive, whereas high school parents (Phase II), stressed the negative.

Features of a good school according to Phase I parents included a supportive ethos, good teachers, nice friends/peers, fun activities, and outreach to families and communities. In short, schools that had good and caring teachers, were welcoming and fostered a sense of belonging were highly valued by parents.

Examples:

$2PLEEA Participant: I think the sense of inclusion. Um, everybody’s included, everybody’s invited to participate in all the extracurricular activities here. Everybody is encouraged to play in teams. Um, I know during class everyone is urged to participate. The teachers, uh, the teachers have a good relationship with the students for the most part.

$5PLEEA Participant: Yea, like I say you know, the rest of the years we were lucky. The teachers were awesome, the program was good. It was a smaller school you know, so the kids you know, they all grew up with one another. The comfort zone.
$4PCEEA Participant: ...a good teacher to me is one who can obviously get along with the kids, and I also said that school shouldn’t just be about learning, there should be, they should be doing things with these kids in the winter, they should, there’s sliding hills, there’s skating arenas, there’s all kinds of things.

$1PLEEA Participant: And there’s a strong charity focus as well here. Doing things for um, for example, the Christmas hamper and so on and so forth. And I think that was always something that was um, of interest. Like, right from the beginning. You know, from the younger grades. And I think all those things- it’s great for parents when the school environment really um, reinforces what you’re trying to teach yourself.

In Phase II, parents more frequently discussed risk factors such as violence, social isolation, lack of support for parental engagement and issues with the curriculum (too heavy and the need for diversity). Often parents saw themselves as advocates and provided examples of how such action could assist their child if the school was open and flexible.

Examples:

$$1PC2EE024A:  Now, it’s an opportunity for the parents of those who were initiated to say I don’t want to catch you doing this... and then it’s going to happen less and it’s a chance for a parent whose child may be - to say be aware of this, if there’s any sign of it, tell the teacher, tell me, tell this, tell that, whatever, but if you’re a parent who has no clue of it or who didn’t go to school in Canada who knows about it- You can just imagine them, their child coming home and saying you know, somebody did this and this and they said it was initiation. Well, they might just think that it’s a part of the school practice.

$$2PC1EE018A:  You know, and so it’s like this big new school and the little fish in the pond again, and you don’t know where you fit in and there’s not a support system trying to help them to fit it.

$$3PC2EE022A:  You can’t get to the guidance counsellor here - my daughter’s tried three times.

$$1PCEEA Participant:  I don’t think he was worried about being initiated but I find that high school possibly can be lonely. I don’t know why, sounds funny as for a kid that’s talking to everybody and makes friends with everybody but it’s - I don’t know if they bond enough.

$$2PC1EE018A:  A lot of courses are force fed courses now. They cover – I could not believe and I still can not believe, the amount of topic coverage they do in one semester. You do not cover that in University. Okay? So much content. Too much for them to take it. They are doing like in math, they do like 5.1, 5.2, 5.3 which is four or five pages a day. You know? $$2PC2EE016A:  And try and get them to retain that.
Fresh Starts/False Starts: Young People in Transition from Elementary to Secondary School

He’s only been in it since the beginning of this term, and they’ve done one hundred and sixty-two pages of math. And how much of that is retained? Honestly. They’ve been here for thirty days, or sixty days, and they’ve got to retain a hundred and sixty-two pages worth of math that nobody’s really sat down and talked to them about it.

Not surprisingly, engaged parents in Phases I, II and III were articulate about the range of issues in schools and in transition, in particular the impact of risk and protective elements in young people’s lives. Interestingly, parents concurred with both educators and young people on the importance of attending to all of social, academic and procedural/structural matters. Moreover, their discussions reveal the deep level of commitment and concern that they express on behalf of their children and education. Their wish to become more engaged in the process of transition and education is reflected in their comments. Interestingly, it is also reflected by educators, whose Focus Group discussions in all 3 Phases noted the challenges and importance of attending more thoroughly to parents and families.

Interviews with Youth: Narratives, Themes and Continuities

"During the beginning of second semester, I joined the grade 11 dance class even though I am only in grade 10, because of this class, I learnt that all of my fears could be pushed aside when it came to being confident & prepared for any & everything. I performed on stage, in front of the entire school and felt the support of my dance class, friends, staff, family members & school companions also, it was a proud day in my life…and helped me to truly discover a friendlier vibe to high school."

"An average school day for me...the concept seems pretty far off because my life is pretty hectic to me. I have about four divisions in my life, friends, family, academics, and boys. My mood can be particularly based on how these four areas are doing. When things with boys are going horribly at least I know my academics are doing well. It’s when all four of these areas are suffering or even three, that I really start hurting. For instance my mother was murdered over the past summer. My father is a genuine horrid person. I got kicked out of my house and am living at my aunt’s house. Family life sucks. My friends have all been either moving on or changing and getting into negative things that I don’t want to be a part of. Boys are stupid. The guy that I’ve liked for the past year is gay and I’m pretty sure I’m only dating this other guy to get over him. Boys suck. My academics are now suffering because of everything else, which has me further more stressed out because I need my academics to leave my family. Oie. So that’s my story. I’m dying to get out.”
“On an average day I spend time with friends and family and at school I attend classes and try to suck out as much knowledge as I can. Some days I have play rehearsals and those days I love because I get to be on stage which is where I want to be.”

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“Tuesday and Thursday – I have rugby, get driven to school by my friend (my house is on the way), go to science class with two of my good friends- art-many of my friends are in this class, lunch-I mostly play cards with my friends or finish homework if its not done then I either have history or French depending on what day it is. I have a few friends in those classes, and then I eat and leave to go walk an elderly lady’s dog, then homework/T.V/computer/sleep”

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“An average school day is usually somewhat entertaining but also a little boring. It is boring in the sense that some things are just too easy. This usually causes me not to try so much in school. Otherwise, school is fun, mostly because my friends are there. Some teachers, though, make learning a little more fun. I come to school mainly for an education, but it is also like a bonus that I get to meet my friends, too. An average school day goes by quickly in some classes, but slow in others. This semester, I have chemistry, English, computers, and civics/careers. Chemistry goes by pretty quick, although there are quite a lot of notes. English goes by a little slower than chemistry but sometimes is a little boring for me. Computers class goes by very quickly, since it is my favourite class. Finally civics and careers goes by the slowest, since it would be my least favourite of the four.”

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“I get on the bus and I see my friends, when the bell rings I go to class. None of my best friends are in my class except in English class so I spend most of my day alone but I enjoy my classes so it doesn’t bother me that much and it forces me to make new friends. Then I go to lunch and hang out with my best friends. After school I might have band and it’s really fun. This is a typical day for me, nothing exciting but I still love high school better than elementary school and middle school.”

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“I admit that I get really bored by filling out sheets all day. Other than the teacher checking on you the odd time the teacher doesn’t really help. The fun part about class is talking to friends. I am happy on the outside, but not the inside.”

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“I’m 16. I do belly dancing. I’m the oldest girl in my family. I have 1 brother & 3 sisters. I’m full Native American. I want to become a nurse. My day - starts off really tired & usually always running late. I love math. I love Spanish. Usually go outside for a smoke at lunch. I don’t like gym. I hate English (hate the teacher-not subject).”
"I wake up at about 6:13 in the morning and eat a breakfast (assuming there is food in my house) and make myself a cup of tea after a shower. After that, I chat online with whomever happens to be awake at the time. I’m out of the house by 7:30, if my mother can drive me in, and I’m at school by 8:20. Upon arrival, I meet up with ML who promptly gives me food for lunch and affection. We hang out until school begins. English is my first period and one of my favourite courses. Then comes math, I see ML between classes and then spend the class eating. Media is 3rd and 4th periods... Most people groan about the course, but I like it. Again, I see Q between classes as I Head up to French. Then comes lunch, Q has English and the Caf. is too loud so I generally sit and read in the hallways outside of his classroom. I get laughed at for this, but I enjoy it nonetheless. Q leaves after his English class for work, so I don’t see him much after that. Science and Art are fun, but sometimes a bit drawn out. After this, I take the bus home and get home around 4:30-5:00. I have to cook and clean and take care of my siblings as my mom is too busy watching TV or with her friends. I’m usually tired out after the first few hours and finally can sit down and talk or work in my room. Hopefully my interaction with my mother stops after that point in time and I can relax until around midnight when I finally fall into a restless sleep."

**********************************************************************

"Happy and average- I don’t care what I am, what I earn, how long I work I don’t carry any false pretences or unrealistic expectations of greatness. All I want is to live a simple, happy life. I want to come home to a smile, I want to be worth something to someone, I want to know that I’m cared for. I don’t care for social norms, I don’t long for richness or grandeur, I don’t need to be wealthy or successful. All I want, all I need, all I hope for is to be happy. By 30, I will have done whatever it takes to get there."

These eleven passages are examples taken from the complete text of the “typical day at school” which the young people shared with us on their Phase III (grade 10) Face Sheets. We have also reported on these “typical day” stories in Phases I and II. Young people wrote these brief but surprisingly detailed narratives about themselves, and included any or all aspects of the day that they found to be important. The experience of reading these short stories is one of recognition, awe, disbelief, compassion and understanding of the complex and variable daily lives of young people in transition. The stories also show how the whole of life in families, with friends, and in communities is related to a typical school day.

The similarities in these “typical day” stories across grades 8, 9 and 10 are of interest. Friends are always at the heart and are reported to be one of the best and most important aspects of the day. Families also figure prominently although they can act as risk or protective influences for young people. Schools and academics are also seen as important and often exciting but also as a location of struggle and hardship for some young people. Homework, paid work, sports and arts are mentioned frequently as important before/after school activities as is the mass media including computers, video games and TV.
However, these “typical day” stories do relate to the need for ongoing negotiations and support over the transition years. Noteworthy are the different ways in which the young people begin to reflect on their lives as they entered grade 10. While the content of these stories may have been much the same over the three years in relation to the range of influences discussed, the form of telling and reflecting on their lives changed. In addition, the meaning of certain hardships or successes also altered. Young people made explicit differentiations between their spheres of home, school and friends even though they suggested great overlap in these. They also offered nuances in their likes and dislikes suggesting, for instance, that pedagogy can be separated from content or structure in schools.

Although we did not conduct Individual Interviews in Phase III, these intersections and complexities were the concern of our in-depth Individual Interviews with youth in Phase I and Phase II. Fortunately, the Interviews have allowed us to delve more deeply into the themes and issues that were raised in these brief narratives and then to compare changes over time for a select group of youth across the transition. The Focus Groups have offered us a multi-vocal coverage of the process of transition from groups of young people around the province of Ontario in grades 8, 9 and 10. The 130 Individual Interviews have offered a more profound and uni-vocal but composite understanding which builds on the Focus Group discussions and the “typical day” descriptions.

Interview Samples

In Phase I, the team conducted 52 Individual Interviews with young people selected from among the 34 youth Focus Groups. Of these, 43 English and 9 French-language Interviews were conducted. This first cohort of young people in Phase I (2007) was further subdivided into two groups, those who were either in Grade 8 (cohort 1A=15 youth) at the time of interview or those who were in Grade 9 (cohort 1B=37 youth) at the time of the interview. Cohort 1A was comprised of all 9 French-language and 6 English-language Interviews. Cohort 1B was made up of the remaining 37 English-language Interviews. The Phase I interviews were chosen from the Focus Groups and conducted across the provincial regions as noted in Table 66. (For detail on the sampling strategy, please refer to the Methods section of this report.)

Table 66: Phase I Focus Group and Interview by Site

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>English-Language Youth Focus Groups</th>
<th>Region</th>
<th># of Focus Groups</th>
<th># of Interviews</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>GTA</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>16</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ottawa</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Windsor</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sudbury+</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>12</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thunder Bay+</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ENGLISH-LANGUAGE YOUTH SUB-TOTAL</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>43</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
In Phase II, we therefore conducted our follow-up Interviews with these young people as they moved into their subsequent years of school. This meant that in Phase II, cohort 1A follow-ups took place when the students were in Grade 9 and cohort 1B follow-ups took place with students in Grade 10. These were considered to be our Phase I follow-up interviews and numbered 36 in total. Additionally we conducted a second group of 42 Interviews (Phase II cohort) from among those who were in Grade 9 in 2008. The figure below shows the frequency and cross sequencing of the Phase II interviews. We completed a total of 78 interviews with young people in Phase II. The Phase II interviews were chosen from the Focus Groups and conducted across the provincial regions as illustrated in Table 67.

### Table 67: Phase II Focus Group and Interview by Site

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>English-language Youth Focus Groups</th>
<th>Site</th>
<th># of Focus Groups</th>
<th># of Participants</th>
<th>Interviews</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>GTA</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ottawa</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Windsor</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sudbury+</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Thunder Bay+</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>ENGLISH-LANGUAGE YOUTH SUBTOTAL</strong></td>
<td><strong>21</strong></td>
<td><strong>163</strong></td>
<td><strong>27</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>French-language Youth Focus Groups</th>
<th>Site</th>
<th># of Focus Groups</th>
<th># of Participants</th>
<th>Interviews</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>GTA</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ottawa</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sudbury+</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Kapuskasing and Hearst</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>FRENCH-LANGUAGE YOUTH SUBTOTAL</strong></td>
<td><strong>7</strong></td>
<td><strong>52</strong></td>
<td><strong>8</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>YOUTH TOTAL</strong></td>
<td><strong>28</strong></td>
<td><strong>215</strong></td>
<td><strong>35</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
In total, the 130 interviews from Phases I and II were cross-sequenced so as to have a cohort of young people with whom we spoke over two years. Another cohort of young people was interviewed in-depth about the transition from their grade 9/10 perspectives. Catterall (1998) has asserted that when you follow young people from Grade 8 to 10, the further behind a student started, the more potential room there can be for improvement, so long as the community of helpers are responsive and supportive. He suggests that deeper insights can be gained on further exploration of the stories of 10th graders who have turned themselves around. This is precisely the design and intention of the Interviews with young people. This design allowed for a) discussion of the continuities and discontinuities in the risk/protective situations of youth over the transition, and b) detailed and in-depth analysis of the ways in which social, academic and procedural process played out across the transition.

The interviews have yielded very rich and detailed information and provide a thorough discussion of the hows and whys of the risk and protective factors, perceptions and feelings about the transition that were raised in the youth Focus Groups. In all of the interview discussions, the young people generously and graciously shared their experiences of nested transition and provided retrospective, current and prospective evidence of their joys and challenges. The cross-sequencing of the interviews took place as indicated in Table 68.

Table 68: Cross-sequencing of Individual Youth Interviews

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Grade 8/9</td>
<td>Grade 9/10</td>
<td>n=87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Pre-Early Transition)</td>
<td>(Transitional Adjustment)</td>
<td>(35 were followed over 2 years)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Phase 1 cohort</strong></td>
<td><strong>Phase 1 cohort</strong></td>
<td><strong>n=43</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>52 youth</td>
<td>35 youth</td>
<td>(Interviewed only in PII; there were no Phase III interviews)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grade 8</td>
<td>Grade 9</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 English-language</td>
<td>4 English-language</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9 French-language</td>
<td>8 French-language</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grade 9</td>
<td>Grade 10</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>39 English-language</td>
<td>23 English-language</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0 French-language</td>
<td>0 French-language</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Phase 2 cohort</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>43 youth</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grade 10</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35 English</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8 French</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>SUB-TOTALS</strong></td>
<td><strong>TOTAL</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grade 8: 13 youth</td>
<td>130 youth interviews</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grade 9: 51 youth</td>
<td>(35 youth have been interviewed twice)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grade 10: 66 youth</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Findings from Phase I Interviews

In Phase I, the most striking results from the Interviews signal the paradoxes and nuances of the process of transition from the elementary (grade 8) side. For example, the young people spoke openly about issues and experiences relating to elementary school, perceived secondary school, lived secondary school and transitional experiences (from the 39 young people who had made the transition to grade 9), the most important influences on their school and life, and descriptions of their lives outside of school in youth culture.

Across these 52 Interviews we noticed a trend that was informative yet not surprising; inter-relational kinds of discussion were most frequent such that both barriers and enablers could be found simultaneously at school, home, with friends and in communities. Although they are more difficult to analyze, reduce, and understand, this kind of discussion provides a holistic indication of the complexities of experiences for young people in transition. The five most frequently discussed topics arising from the youth interviews with their corresponding number of produced text segments were as follows:

1) The Simultaneous Barriers/Enablers in Transition - 405
2) View of Self as Young Person Starting High School - 386
3) Lived/Actual Features of a Good High School - 352
4) Influence of Friends as Protective Feature - 269
5) Influence of Parents (and family) as Protective - 253

Other highly relevant discussions from the interviews held over 220 text segments and were related to self/identity as connected to school/transition, influences of parents and families on school/transition and features of a good elementary or middle school. Across all of these themes, the most frequent and interesting codes were those relating to the inter-relational text wherein young people spoke directly about contradictions, paradoxes, tensions and overlapping issues in school and life. For example, many young people spoke about the ways in which bullying happens but “is no big deal”. This normalization, coping, and rationalization of problems were apparent in much of the inter-relational text.

In addition, young people who had already moved into grade 9 stated that while work load and academics are more difficult than that in elementary school, this is a “good thing” because they are trying harder and are more engaged. Leaving friends behind from grade 8 was, in retrospect, sometimes even seen as positive. Youth realized that the intense social “drama” of grade 8 classrooms in which friends and classmates created urgent social “scenes” was not always helpful. They appreciated the less
intense social atmosphere of grade 9. This intense “drama”, was seen to drop away or change in character during high school where new groups were joined and new friends were made. The cliques of elementary school years were seen as a problem worth escaping. As we will see below, this is a theme which recurred into Phase II as the young people moved into grade 10.

Another common theme from Phase I Interviews with youth who had already gone to high school was that high school was turning out to be much “better than expected”. On the other hand, young people did encounter many problems on leaving their elementary schools behind and the multiplicity of risk situations proved to be very daunting for some. For instance, in the elementary years, friends and teachers could make an otherwise negative experience at school worthwhile. On the other hand, the school may have been fine, but peers and educators could be a problem. Young people spoke about the social “drama” in their schools as a problem while at the same time, the social aspects of school were seen as essential to the school day. One of the most difficult aspects of transitioning was leaving friends and schools behind, even though a fresh start could be exciting.

Examples:

$1Y2EE047$: I had a good experience because of the people who I’m around, like my friends, my teachers like I had a good year because I made it like fun. Like if someone would bring me down I would just like you know what just brush it off and I would have like fun. I go to school to learn and I hang out, I chill out with my friends, you have a good time, go home, you eat, you’re with your parents, you like… Just because of what one person says you can’t like let that person bring you down.

$1YL2EE005$: It’s a really friendly school, to give it a chance, don’t judge it on the first couple of days, it’s a really friendly school in a safe neighbourhood. It’s kind of cliquey compared to here, at high school X which isn’t very cliquey at all. It’s more cliquey, but it’s a good school.

$1YC1EE110$: The school was nice enough, I just didn’t like the people there. Like, the students in my class. So, as it worked out, when I was in grade 6, I always hung out with the grade 8s and 7s. So, when I was in grades 7, I hung out with the grade 8s. When I was in grade 8, there was like, no one to hang out with.

For those youth who had already moved into grade 9, we heard about how the negative stereotypes and myths about high school could be proved to be untrue and that some of the worries about grade 9 were unfounded. However, there were also negative encounters with teachers, classmates and schools structures and a normalization of school violence continued. We also heard about the continuing tensions between social and academic aspects of school, a theme that was present in elementary school and lasted into grade 10 as well.
Examples:

$1YC1EE050: When I was younger, people were just telling me like, there were little
rumours about high school as a big thing. There was going to be fights. There’s
going to be big kids...huge tall kids that are just going to keep fighting and everything
and I was looking at it as a big step from elementary school into a high school with all
that stuff in there and when I come here, all those rumours are all fake. I’m like, why
did I listen to them? It’s all fake. Now I’m friends with all grades...9, 10, 11, 12.

$1YC1EE064: I’d like more friends in my classes. But again I think that that would be
kind of bad too, cos they kind of get in the way. That’s why I’m doing so good in my
class, is because I don’t have anyone really to socialize with.

$1YC2EE078: Well the bullying is ok now, like, I still get bullied sometimes but I just
ignore them, but the people with drugs and alcohol are usually the people in the front
of the school you either just don’t go there, people have pressured me for it , I’ve
said no. I want sports in my life and so I don’t want the problem with that stuff to
occur.

When the young people addressed the processes of transition from grade 8 to 9 in
their Phase I interviews, they also revealed interesting paradoxes and conflicts. For
instance, the developmental issues of the changing nature of relationships between
parents and youth were a source of tension, just as it had been for parents who
participated in the Focus Groups. Also, the emotional paradox of transition was made
plain as was the tension between the problems and charms of being with the older
students. In the end, the youth suggested that “growing up” was a large part of the
process and working through these status discontinuities could be difficult but
necessary. Moreover, there were ways in which this could be facilitated in schools.

Examples:

$1YC2EE065: Yeah. Cos it’s kind of embarrassing walking to high school with your
Mom. Facilitator: Okay. So how did it feel knowing that she wanted to?
$1YC2EE065: It felt good. Yeah.

$4YL2EE051F: Well, sad because like you’re leaving somewhere that you’ve been for
the past eleven years...and you have to start somewhere new and you have to adjust
to it but you know it’s a new beginning and you’ve gotta grow up and find new things
and stuff so, you get used to it I guess.

Not surprisingly, elementary schools were therefore experienced by these young
people in variable and paradoxical ways. The “good” elementary schools had many
positive features including great teachers and pedagogy, good friends, caring and
helpful guidance in transition, and a fostered sense of self efficacy, independence and
competence. Here we also are able to hear what make great teaching - care, humour,
concern, high expectations, fairness and inclusion.
Examples:

$1YC1EE110$: Yah. The teaching styles of the teachers were very great. I remember in grade seven, I had my French teacher he was hilarious. Um teacher uh he was so funny, and like yah, he mixed the proper amount of funniness and work load.

$1YL2EE031$: And he always involved everybody, he didn’t leave anybody out, even some kids that didn’t want to participate, he was trying to make them. And when he taught, like a lesson, like for instance math, like not a lot of kids like that but he made it fun. Like he made us go outside sometimes for math.

$1YL2EE005$: Our guidance counsellor, she was always available to talk to about high school and, like, when I was thinking about coming to high school X, I went in with my Mom and we talked to her after school and she went, “Oh yeah. I have a bunch of contacts and you can talk and you can call them and find out, like, the best way to get to the school and whatever. And she helped me fill out my Optional Attendance Application Form. Said ‘Oh yeah. This is what you do’. And she, she just helped me, like, make sure this is the school I wanted to get into and stuff like that.

On the other hand, the “bad” elementary schools held teachers who were “mean”, “unfair” and/or “boring” and gave too much work.

Examples:

$1YL2EE005$: I really didn’t like my science teacher. He had a bit of an attitude, it was a problem…He was hugely intimidating and he scared kids and he always talked down to them…It used to be like, ‘Oh yeah. When I was doing this’ and he’d like brag to us. It wasn’t fun. He was really intimidating and if you asked a question he’d like ‘Oh yeah. That’s a stupid question, why d’you ask that question?’ Like he wasn’t the greatest teacher. I didn’t like him personally.

$1YC2EE065$: like, in Grade Eight, my teacher had favourites … there was this girl and just stuff. Like she wore low-cut shirts and everything so she was one of his favourites. I didn’t like that much… Like he always picked her for everything and she always got good marks even though she never paid attention in class and just, stuff like that.

And, the “bad” elementary schools also housed school structures which detracted from learning such as violence, bullying, large class sizes, dirty and crumbling buildings, and poor transportation.
Examples:

$1YC1EE109: That was good but like our schools were like low on money for us like when we needed paper like we had to take it out of like, cause the government wouldn’t, the board wouldn’t, give us any more money to get paper. So we had to like, we were always low on paper…we had to like earn it like (pause) bring it in like when we had jog-a-thons and stuff like that, it like the school would save all the money because they wouldn’t give us any…and some bricks were falling off the side and stuff like it wasn’t good when concrete is breaking up. Oh and then around the track is always flooding, like the drains they should bring in one of those machines like suck up all like junk in the bottom. Cause all around our track it floods about like a foot and a half deep in some spots…So our school’s like pretty beat up, and the portables are all bad...

$1YC2EE047: Yeah a lot of people at elementary school used to talk about me. Like they used to talk about like “oh is she fat” or this or that. Like I heard about this rumour about her when it’s not even true but I guess that’s how people are but, you can’t change the way other people think.

$4YL2EE051F: That happened in grade six, and they wouldn’t bus me here because of the insurance policy or something. I missed out two months of school because of that and I have to have surgery…and I can’t go [to school] again cause I have no way of getting there, so the transit is definitely something that, you know, with people who have disabilities or broken bones or something so, yeah.

However, there are many ways in which elementary and secondary schools can assist in achieving a better transition for students and in building on the excitement that they feel on entering high school. The Interviews show that there is a complex interaction between barriers and enablers. Moreover, the young people have demonstrated how they themselves can be an integral part of the mix, and that the sense of self, identity and agency must not be overlooked in making sense of the academic, social and procedural aspects of transition.

Examples:

$4YL1EA001: Yeah, it wasn’t that hard compared to---I don’t know, I find high school is pretty hard. Just cause I don’t have a good work ethic… I barely do my homework. I’ve gotta start doing it though.

$1YL2EE040: I want to prove to every single person that girls can do just as much and even better actually. I want to prove to [my mother] that you could have done this at your time but I’m taking advantage and I’m gonna do it too. I’m gonna do better and I’ll show you how it’s done. And because she doesn’t have the education here and um, I just want to be at a level that nobody can pass...infinity level, you know.
$1YC1EE050: When it’s harder, it makes me go harder so I’d say in all my applied classes, I didn’t really have homework so I’d be outside more right? And now that I’m in academic, I’m not going outside. I’m staying home and I’m gonna read my books and everything and memorizing everything like that.

In summary, the young people who were interviewed in the Phase I suggested that there is no need to fix something that is not broken. But, when things are broken, they require help and support. Both continuities and discontinuities arise in the transition from grade 8 to 9 and neither continuity nor discontinuity is seen as necessarily better. Sometimes it is perceived as best to have a change, even if it is difficult. Other times it is best to keep things the same if they are working well in elementary school. For example, sometimes making new friends is very hard to do, but it turns out well and is seen in retrospect as a valuable lesson. Sometimes, the young person demonstrates that their concerns expressed while in grade 8 are no longer of importance and “they cannot believe” that they felt a certain way. Or, the academic challenges of high school are seen as indeed new and more difficult than those in elementary years, but this is seen as a positive motivator and/or a good antidote to the boredom or social “drama’ that was experienced in elementary school.

The importance of the transition as a fresh start was described and explained by many young people as giving them something to work toward, to feel more mature in mastering, and to expand their social, academic, and personal horizons as they move toward young adulthood.

Examples:

$1YL2EE005: I was sad to leave my friends behind and stuff, but I find I wanted a fresh start because at elementary School X, I was known as shy tomboy, and by the time I got to 6, 7, and 8, I didn’t feel that I was shy. I felt that I was more outspoken and people still treated me like being shy and quiet, and I didn’t feel that was the way I am. So I didn’t come here just because of that, it was primarily the music programme and French immersion. But that was also something...

$1YC2EE099: Not confused. Just that how I was feeling-- weird. At the same time I was like feeling like happy and confusing. Its like getting into high school and graduating from elementary school, I feel like kind of weird. The thing is like confusing, I don’t know it feels kinda weird coming to high school and at the same time I feel happy I don’t know why, its just kind of the same way.

$5YC2EE017: Um, I thought that it wouldn’t bother me as much, but it doesn’t bother me at all but it’s just I don’t know, some of the grade twelves seem like they’re adults. You’re a little nervous around them, you don’t want to mess with them sort of thing. And yea, in elementary, we’re the big kids.
Findings from Phase II Interviews

In Phase II, the most striking results from the interviews with young people were reflected in the top 7 themes arising from the 78 English and French-language interviews and the 382 pages of text that were derived and analyzed. The 5 top themes with their corresponding number of text segments were,

1) Views of self in high school: 935
2) Positive feelings about high school: 714
3) Positive features of high school: 525
4) Barrier vs. enabler paradox: 439
5) Negative feelings about high school: 435

This deeper and more positive discussion arising from the Interviews runs in contradiction to the negative views of high school which arose as a most frequent theme in the Phase II Youth Focus Groups. In both sets of data, the risk AND protective factors are clearly discussed by young people. However, the relatively more frequent positive feelings as discussed in the Interviews were also reflected in the following Lexico graph relating to discussions of “good” and “bad” terminology by gender as analyzed from the Interview transcripts of Phase II. The relatively greater frequency of “good” to “bad” terminology for both males and females connects with the most frequent themes (views of self and positive feelings and features of high schools) found in the NVIVO analysis of the interview transcripts (See Figure 31).
In Phase II, the Interview discussion relating to the **views of young people in high school** occupied the heart of the discussion with 935 text segments and 261 pages of text. These textual segments were highly instructive as the young people provided input and detail as to how their family and home related to their schooling. They also provided further detail about the importance of fresh starts and the commitment and conviction with which so many young people approached them. In this process, they agreed that it is the classroom that is so very important to creating and maintaining fresh starts and avoiding false starts. Both they and their teachers were seen to have the ability to truly make or break the school engagement and transition process on daily and longer-term bases.
Examples:

$$2YC1EE126: \text{Science I was failing and now I’m passing, like ridiculously good and so. Facilitator: So what’s changed that you’re doing so well in science? } $$2YC1EE126: \text{I went in for extra help in the morning. I really like, tried for like, a week. And then like, I just learned everything and I just did the test. (laughing). Facilitator: So what happened that made you decide to ask for help and go in and get that extra help in the mornings? Why did you decide to do that? } $$2YC1EE126: \text{To bring my mark up cause I was failing it and I didn’t want to fail. (laughing).}

$$4YC1EE105: \text{Being older, well I didn’t like the idea of being older at first. I kind of like being a kid. But now that I’ve kind of grown up more, and you mature in High School, you definitely mature in High School, but I find being older you’re more accepting of people, you’re more accepting of different things, you’re more accepting of a lot of things really, and really you take things a lot more seriously. You know at grade school, most people you know are immature, and you just look at life an entire different way, especially in High School.}

$$3YC1EE139: \text{What makes it really hard is when you’re not getting that encouragement, I mean you’re not getting in your family at home, like you’re having problems at home and you just come to school like, mad and same like with the anger I have. If you have problems at home you’re going to come to school with like, like a feeling. Like you’re sad or angry or something. I just say forget that, if you’re like, if you’re in a good mood at home and your parents don’t like get on your nerves, nothing bad is happening, you’ll come to school in a perfect mood and be ready to, ready to learn. But once I’m at school, at home and I’m in a bad mood and I come to school, I’m not going to have a good day at school too.}

The Phase II Interview discussion relating to positive feelings about high school covered 714 text segments and 183 pages of text. The most notable and quotable of this text was coded in 66 segments (26 pages of text) which suggested positive affect about being in high school. These positive feelings were most often related to educators/curriculum, friends and the young person. For “happy” or positive feelings toward educators and classes, the young people explained in some of the following ways.

Examples:

$$3YC1EE138: \text{They [teachers] always encourage me, like Mr. S-, everyday. You can do that…you can do it. And when I get it done, good job!}

$$3YC1EE139: \text{Like, he makes me feel not dumb and stuff, and I can go in there, eat too. Like, it’s like Miss M’s room. You feel comfortable, like, you’re not stupid. No one’s like, c’mon, blah, blah, blah. Like no one’s like, on one student, they leave you alone. It’s like R’s always on me.}

$$3YL1EE141: \text{Well it’s like hands on and the teacher is really good cause he explains}
everything perfectly before we start. He showed us how to use all the machines properly so we don’t hurt ourselves or hurt the others around us.

$$3YL2EE148: I guess if the teachers know I’m older they kind of have a little more respect because they know I’ve been here, I know the rules, I’m going to be more respectful, I know how to be more mature instead of the Grade Nine’s who think they own everything.

Facilitator: So, what makes you happy? $$1YL1EE149: The fact that I succeed in all my classes. Facilitator: And what makes you confident? $$1YL1EE149: Well, the same thing.

$$5YC2EE073: You know what? It’s great to be able to sort of have some decision in your courses like, I had to drop a course because I can’t physically do it so I had to replace that course with something else and I had the option of what to replace it with so that was nice. Facilitator: How does that make you feel when people give you that option? $$5YC2EE073: It makes me feel like, independent cuz I feel like sometimes I’m so dependent on people; there’s a sense of independence there.

In relation to the positive feelings at high school connected to friends and self, the young people in the interviews made many comments to show the connections with their learning and school engagement. They also noted how young people this age tend to mature and “settle in” once they have adjusted somewhat to high school.

Examples:

$1YC2EE099: Actually it’s really fun being in High School. Like, Elementary School I mentioned in Grade Eight or something, or Seven, I’m not sure, it was like, I was really excited to come in High School. Last year I am really excited cos like, the days are going really fast and like, I’m seeing more people and my friends are still here with me, and yea, it’s really fun actually. It’s like I’m learning more stuff now. Some of my friends are in Grade Nine they just came to High School, like when I see their work I’m like “Hey, it’s really easy. Why do you need help for that?” Cos I already experience the work before, so they get help from me and my other friends cos we all in Grade Ten. Yea, it’s fun being in High School, like helping Grade Nines.

$4YC2EA064: We do social things together and me and my friend, we kind of like hang out with all of our other friends and wherever there’s a game, we all make sure that we have transportation back to our homes and things like that. But having my friend in the same class as me is, I like it, it’s fun, like it’s whenever you’re done she’s like pretty good at everything that I am and things like that. So we get done early and we can just kind of chit chat. Facilitator: Okay so overall, how would you describe your experience of being here so far? $4YC2EA064: It is amazing.

$$4YC1EE105: At first I was really shy. I was scared to meet new people. So at first I couldn’t just hang out with a group. I wouldn’t talk. I was a very quiet person, but this year I have become a little more self-confident in a way. And I’m way more social now because everyone is so accepting. Yea especially with people themselves. Like I find as they get older, they mature, they’ve had to find out who they are. Like last
year I wasn’t really sure of who I was. I always wanted to fit in with everybody else so I dressed all depressed looking, and now I kind of got a sense of who I am and I dress colourful and happy, and always smiling.

$1YL2EE040: Physically, I got bangs (laughter). Yeah, definitely, I think I've changed, my attitude’s gone much better, I have more self esteem, I’ve concentrated, I have made a huge pact that I will get good marks this semester, I’m still confused on what I want to be, which just pisses my mom off. She wants me to quickly pick what I want, get out of school, high school, and get on my own life, get out of my home at the age of eighteen. But I guess, just you know, just emotionally, I think I’m really much better, really, really better, I’m so happy from last year in grade nine, it was just so horrible, my self esteem, I would not even look up to the teacher because I would be so scared of what she would do, you know, she’d be staring right up at my eyes, what would she think, oh my god, look at her, ew, or something. Or I guy that I would really like. And I would just, you know, just not even talk to them or something. Just look straight down. But now I’m talking straight at them, straight eye to eye, I have so many people on MSN now, because I talk to them more, some confidence with myself, and it's such a huge transformation. I think grade ten is probably one of my best years I’ve ever had.

The third most frequent node in the Interview data in Phase II was the positive features of high schools which covered 525 text segments across 183 pages of text. The most quotable of this text related to good educators/administrators, good school structures and programs. For example, young people demonstrated their appreciation for the care that educators took in class and in guiding them in high school.

Examples:

$$5YC2EE073: You know, it is great because it is completely confidential, anything you say is completely confidential, it doesn’t matter what it is. Unless, there’s a 'but' here, unless you are hurting, going to hurt yourself or somebody else, then your parents get contacted. But other than that it is completely confidential. Facilitator: Ok, so yeah, how do you get hooked up with a Guidance Counsellor? $$5YC2EE073: They give you this blue slip, they have blue slips in Student Services that you fill out with your name, your teacher’s name, your homeroom teacher, you find out who exactly your Guidance Counsellor is at the beginning of the year when they meet with you and you check off that person and you put the slip in their mail box and they give you a time, they give it to your homeroom teacher, your homeroom teacher gives it to you.

$$1YL2EE205: “And teachers – there’s some teachers like in Grade Nine I had Mr. C for Geography and he was a great teacher. Like he really loved it so he made you really love it. And he made you, like he would do things so we understood it. Like, he explained it in different ways. Like he’d draw on the board, and if you didn’t get it still he would like get something and like, try it with like people – to try to get it.”

$$2YC1EE126: [Teachers] start to know you better cause like, a lot of the teachers I had last year I also have this year. ..But some of them are different. But like, for some
reason I feel like I have like, a stronger connection with them. Like, as in like, friendship wise cause like, they're like, I don't know, they just know that, I don't know how really to explain it, it's just how it is, kind of. Facilitator: Okay, do you have an example of the situation where you felt more comfortable or where you feel like a teacher reacted differently than they might have last year? $$2YC1EE126: Well, (long pause), like, like, like just like last period my teacher brought like, a cake for my supply, or my peer teacher person, and like, some of my other teachers have peer teachers, but like, they didn't get cake on their birthday, and something. Facilitator: Mm Hmm.$$2YC1EE126: So like, Mr. C- like, seems like, like I had him last year too, so like, and all my other friends had him too, so like...It's like, it's like I'm going to know him for the rest of the four years, two years that I'm here, so like, I don't know, it's just like, also, like for hockey and stuff, it's like cool cause like, like if you know the teachers really well you can like, get on the team and like, participate and stuff.

$$4YC2EA064: The vice-principal I've met with her a couple times due to student activities fees and gym fees, cos altogether that was something like a hundred and forty dollars, and we had just sent G- off, and my mom was gone and things like that, so I didn't have time. Like we didn't have the money and time to get it to the school and things like that. So I went and talked with her and she was very understanding. She's like 'well we can set up payments or you can just pay us altogether at the end of the month' and things like that.

The young people also detailed the proactive and flexible schools, which housed good and innovative programs that help to keep them socially and academically engaged in school.

Examples:

$$2YC1EE123: If you train certain hours, a certain number of hours a week like, ten to fifteen or something, or more they'll be lenient. They'll, if you have lots of practice in the morning like just figure skaters. They'll actually be able to cut half your first class period and you won't, you'll never get lates for that class, or something. When I'm in a tournament for my water polo and I'm gone Monday through Wednesday or something, and I'm completely beat cause I got home at eleven o'clock, Thursday, well actually they give you that day off. They'll actually allow me to stay home on Thursday, rest up, do the homework I was supposed to do cause they gave it to me... and then come back Friday completely fresh with all my work, totally, totally revitalized.

$$1YL2EE205: We have, our school has like a Math clinic or something. I haven't gone yet, but it seems – yes anyone can go – any grade – and just get help...After school. I think it's Monday to Thursday. It's really cool I like the idea. Yes, and teachers ask for extra help. Like they say if you need extra help then just come in. and I've gone a couple of times

$$4YC2EA064: I honestly love it, like there's no bullying going on. Like the first day of Grade nine it was kind of bad because food was being thrown at us and things like that outside. But after that it was fine, there's like no bullying going on and they've got a programme called the Peace-Posse which I've been invited to join. Like you where
an orange shirt on Fridays, specially made with a logo and things like that, it’s got like the native circle on it and P2 for Peace-Posse... it’s just like, just to prevent bullying. Like if you see bullying going on you can go and talk to these people, like the Grade Nines, Tens, Elevens, and Twelve’s, who you think are responsible and things like that. And well, it stops bullying and like racism and things like that. Like if they see it going on they try and intervene like positively...I really feel honoured to be like invited.

Status Descriptions and Trajectories

The three status descriptions for the young people who were interviewed are those detailed in the methods section of the report as a) clear and multiple risk situations, b) complex resiliencies and c) mostly protected and supported. These statuses were ascribed based on thorough reviews of the Face Sheet and interview data and then brief narratives were written for each young person. The narratives were often fluid and flexible. Certain people, events and structures may shift in the lives of these young people over the transition and it was our intention to map out these trajectories and processes. Moreover, the lines may become more blurred between clear and multiple risks, complex resiliencies and mostly protected as time passes. In essence, all of the young people we have spoken with in interviews in both Phases I and II demonstrate some adverse situations and some resilient events and promises. It is the patterns, narratives and examples provided in the full interviews which illustrate the fluidity of trajectory statuses.

The Tables below provides a further synopsis of these statuses for the whole group of Phase I English and Phase II interviews and presents the corresponding numbers of young people in each (See Tables 69 and 70). Of note is the variation that we have been able to achieve in the samples. For instance, we have been able to speak with Aboriginal, French-language, English-language small city and urban youth across the regions of Ontario. Moreover, the larger proportion of youth in the complex resiliencies category is purposeful since most young people do experience a range of both risk and protective situations and demonstrate a complex and varied life course in which resiliency takes place with proper care, support and competence.
Table 69: Phase I Interviews By Status And Region

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<tr>
<th>Phase I Status</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Region</th>
<th>Notes</th>
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| Clear and multiple risk situations | 9     | 3 GTA        | These young people have very clear indications of encountering multiple risks situations at all levels. A combination of family, school, social, academic, structural and/or community issues are evident. They may also exhibit personal problems and issues and/or appear to be very hopeful in the face of adversity. These young people may “like school” or feel fine there, but still be struggling or may have a good friend/teacher but feel isolated at school etc. They may still be hopeful in the face of adversity but unclear as to how to make things better and/or feel that there is no way to do so. There is often no person who is stepping in to notice or ameliorate risk situations. This could be because they are not available; they do not know how, do not notice and/or do not seem to care. We have the following groups represented in this category:  
   Aboriginal (2)  
   Other Northern/Small city (4)  
   Urban (3)  |
| Complex resiliencies               | 22    | 9 GTA        | These young people demonstrate many risk situations but also show many clear signs of real support and protective factors in some combination of school, home, family or community. In some cases, these young people may appear to be at clear and multiple risk situations in grade 8, but by grade 9 they have found a “better school” or different/more friends and begun to excel in new ways. Or, these young people have a pervasive support system that can help them to turn adversity around. Most of these young people also appear very positive and hopeful and their actions and hopes in the face of adversity are of note. They speak of how things are “not that bad” even bullying can become just a normal event. The self and collective agency with friends is an important source of resiliency. We have the following groups represented in this category:  
   Aboriginal (4)  
   Other Northern/city (8)  
   Urban (11)  |
| Mostly protected and supported     | 21    | 5 GTA        | These young people are surrounded by a supportive community of family, helpers and friends and generally feel confident and positive about school, both elementary and secondary. They exhibit signs of social inclusion in school and are part of teams/groups and have strong friendships. They often demonstrate a wise, mature, and reflective position on life and its adversities. We have the following groups represented in this category:  
   Aboriginal (4)  
   Other Northern/Small city (10)  
   Urban (7)  |

TOTAL  | 52     | 52          | 52
Table 70: Phase II Interviews by Status and Region

<table>
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<th>Phase II Status</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Region</th>
<th>Notes</th>
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| Clear and multiple risk situations | 20    | GTA 7, Sudbury 3, T-Bay 1, Ottawa 1, Windsor 6, North 2 | These young people have very clear indications of encountering multiple risks situations at all levels. A combination of family, school, social, academic, structural and/or community issues are evident. They may also exhibit personal problems and issues and/or appear to be very hopeful in the face of adversity. These young people may, however, “like school” or feel fine there, but still be struggling or they may have a good friend/teacher but feel isolated at school etc. They may still be hopeful in the face of adversity but unclear as to how to make things better and/or feel that there is no way to do so. There is often no person who is stepping in to notice or ameliorate risk situations. This could be because they do not know how, do not notice and/or do not seem to care. We have the following groups represented in this category:  
  French-language 4  
  English-language 16  
  Aboriginal (English-language) N/A |
| Complex resiliencies            | 33    | GTA 12, Sudbury 9, T-Bay 3, Ottawa 5, Windsor 4, North N/A | These young people demonstrate many risk situations but also show clear signs of real support and protective factors in some combination of school, home, family or community. In some cases, these young people may appear to be at clear and multiple risk situations in grade 8, but by grade 9 they have found a “better school” or different/more friends and begun to excel in new ways. Or, these young people have a pervasive support system that can help them to turn adversity around. Most of these young people also appear very positive and hopeful and their actions and hopes in the face of adversity are of note. They speak of how things are “not that bad” even bullying can become just a normal event. The self and collective agency with friends is an important source of resiliency. We have the following groups represented in this category:  
  French-language 3  
  English-language 30  
  Aboriginal (English-language) 6 |
| Mostly protected and supported  | 25    | GTA 3, Sudbury 5, T-Bay 8, Ottawa 6, Windsor 1, North 2 | These young people are surrounded by a supportive community of helpers and friends and generally feel confident and positive about school, both elementary and secondary. They exhibit social cohesion in school and are part of teams/groups and have strong friendships. They often demonstrate a wise, mature, and reflective position on life and its adversities. We have the following groups represented in this category:  
  French-language 9  
  English-language 16  
  Aboriginal (English-language) 1 |
| **TOTAL**                      | **78**| **78**          | **78**                                                                                                                                     |
Narrative Summaries of Interviews by Status

Examples of the detailed summary narratives as derived and written by the research team from the coded Focus Group and interview transcripts as well as survey data are presented below to provide the narrative essence of the Interviews. Pseudonyms have been used and community markers removed to protect identities. The patterns and variability in experiences at school, home, with friends and in the community, both across the groups and within individual lives is noteworthy in the narrative examples. Our Interviews were designed to facilitate an open and purposeful discussion about the transition process such that the young people are free to speak about all levels and manners of shifting experience, feelings and influences on elementary and secondary school and transition. This is reflected in these narrative summaries which are organized and presented by the three descriptive statuses: (a) clear and multiple risk situations; (b) complex resiliencies; and (c) mostly protected.

Clear and multiple risk situations

Sherry

Sherry lives in a remote community and must travel 2 hours to school. She lives with a parent, step-parent and two siblings and mentions her mother as her biggest support. Relationship with one sibling is very bad due to extreme bullying which she endures at home and school. Her parents appear not to be dealing with this situation. She has positive feelings about school and is in grade 10 in the applied program. She did fail one core course in grade 9 and is repeating it to recover credits. Rumours her sibling spread impact how school peers treat her and bullying has extended from her home into the school. She is receiving help in coping from resource counsellor and although the school has intervened, interventions have only temporary results and many are ineffective, i.e. making her responsible for solving the issue by telling her to ignore the bullying. The consequence of bullying is that she becomes angry which ruins her concentration and ability to focus on her studies. She feels that she is treated unfairly by some teachers and the bus driver. The long distance between home and school prevents her participation in extra-curricular activities after school and nothing offered during school interests her. She was very neutral about the transition and had not been able to participate in transition events because they take place after school and on weekends and she lives too far away to stay after or return on non-school days. Her main advice to school would be to give her extra time and help with work to compensate for lost time due to behaviour problems she has as a result of the bullying. (Phase II)

Joanna

Her family consists of both parents (although her father does not live with them), two siblings who live with them and another who has moved out. She notes being very close with one of her siblings. She is in grade 10 and is very sociable. She has asthma.

95 All youth names are pseudonyms
Her elementary years were difficult as she was bullied. Teachers tried to help but other students made fun of that and bullying worsened. In grade 6 and then again in grade 8, she began hurting herself. She did not receive any professional help for this, however, did make a pact with her mother to stop and she did. In elementary school she had what she called "secret" friends who would not hang out with her at school but would on weekends away from school. She feels that her transition into high school did allow her to escape from the gossip and drama of elementary, but some of the youth who bullied her are in her high school and it remains somewhat of a problem. She had trouble in grade 9 making friends and found it boring, although noted that by the end of December, things were a bit better. In grade 9 she was taking pills which impacted her ability to wake up in the morning and to stay focused at school (her story changed a from the grade 9 Focus Group to the grade 10 interview). She had a "false start" in grade 10 when she changed to a new high school and had a terrible time. She changed again and has had trouble catching up in her current high school. She now appears to be disengaging quickly, failing classes, frustrated and missing a lot of school, including missing detentions set out to have her come to the office every morning. She seems in-risk for leaving school although admits classes are important and wants to start attending. She is involved with one of the student run shows and says she would like to be involved in other things, but does not have the correct "card". She continues to have difficulty waking up in the morning and skips classes with her sibling (who is also in high school). She recently found out that one of her siblings betrayed her in a way that hurt her deeply. She likes to be with her friends at lunch and is often late coming back to class. But also said she now wants to be alone and away from friends who can be annoying. She is able to discuss her problems with a "caring adult" and each finds a new adult with whom to speak. Despite the many issues raised, she says that she "loves" this year. She noted that she would like to be a psychiatrist but is unsure what is required, asking if she would have to go to university. At the end of the interview, she asked the facilitator if there were any social workers or "student counsellors" at high school that she could talk to about personal problems, as she views guidance as being just about courses. (Phase II)

Lateisha

This young woman was in Grade 9 who was attending a lower middle class elementary school which was "gross, old and run down" and "a poor school, very dirty." She receives support from her mother/father who are working class and her siblings are somewhat supportive. She spoke of unstable friendships and a lack of interest in school, academically and socially. She was challenged academically and receiving marginal grades. She appeared to be an insecure person but shows some reaching out in seeking help when high school gets bad (has experienced consistent bullying from peers and friends). She was demonstrating low engagement with school, did not like doing homework and was pessimistic about most teachers and peers. She was having multiple negative perceptions/feeling about transition in Phase I. The positive aspect of transitioning only involved physical differences (ie. lockers, cafeteria v. eating in hallway). She was engaged in a job shadowing of a friend's family member as hers will not help her see how a hospital works. Her future aspiration/goal (lawyer) as unattainable and probably too much work. (Phase I).
Charlie

Is a young man living in a rural area. He is 14 yrs old in grade 9 and was living with mother in grade 8 (part-time also with grandmother as mom is a shift worker). Over the summer he moved to his dad’s place (also shift worker), but then a couple of weeks into high school moved back to mother’s place. Therefore, he has had to change high schools in the first 3 weeks of grade 9. His parents are estranged and the divorce has been difficult and he is caught in the middle. In grade 8 had a fairly positive images of self and rated his grade 8 teachers highly. High school education is “very important” to him, parents & friends. He participated in variety of sports and planned to do so in high school but was not doing so yet (just one so far in grade 9). Friends makes him happy at school and bullies make him feel badly. Friendships are also important in regards to his homework and academics. His grades in elementary school were in 70-79% range. He chose his original high school due to sports, shop class, friends and music and was really looking forward to making new friends in high school as he is a very social. He liked his original high school for its good transition programs such as open gym time where kids could just go in and play. He likes shop class and fixing things and offered good insights on teachers and pedagogy – knows what makes things fun, “surprises” in class keep him engaged. He does not like to be picked on by teachers but has felt this in his school. At the time of the interview, he was doing well enough in this new high school of only 2 weeks (meeting people). He feels safe and happy in this new high school but feels a bit crowded in the hallways. He has a hard time being rural since his friends are in town and he is still alone in the evening and it is far to go to school. (Phase I)

Sofia

Is a girl in Grade 8 who lives in a low socioeconomic condition and poverty. She has a close and fairly supportive single mother who left high school early and who struggles with illness. Sofia is a visible minority in her school. She has some support from aunts and a grandmother who live in same apartment building. Her family tries to get her the material things she needs for school as best they can (printer cartridges etc). She likes her elementary school but fails and struggles at times with the school work. She likes that there are many friends there and she seems to be a sociable person. She speaks of the many principal changes in her school and how it can be a problem. She speaks as a sociable, happy and resilient person- very positive in the face of adversity. In grade 3 was told that she had to be taken off the bus route for being “too old.” But she notice that other kids in her neighbourhood still get to take the bus and this seems unfair. The family was not listened to when they complained. She suffered an injury in elementary school which led to her miss a good deal of school. Same has the same health issue still facing her in grade 8 and nothing has been put in place to help her get caught up and stay on track when she misses school. She was very worried that she will miss the transitions readiness programs in grade 8 while she is out of school this time. She had not seen much transitions work in her elementary school yet. Sofia plans to become a nurse or firefighter but unsure how she will do at high school. (Phase I)
**Complex resiliencies**

**Maya**

This young woman lives with her single parent and reports good support from this person. She also lives with a sibling who has “given up” academically and their mother has “given up” on this adolescent as well. She is in an academic program with all credits received to date. She identifies as being different from other students in school due to minority status (African Canadian). She was diagnosed with a seizure disorder. She has always been treated differently by students but finds it is less so now. She had a ‘false start’ to her transition when she began high school (grade 9), in ‘town’ and found herself to be in-risk immediately with peers/friends due to skipping etc. After a short period of time she came to her current high school and remained here. She mentioned that if she becomes confident she will not slide back into risk behaviour she would like to return to this school (it has a speciality program she likes). Her mother will let her return to this school if her grades reach 80%. She had few friends when she was younger but now is very involved in sports and other clubs and appears to have a good level of social engagement. Bad curriculum scheduling caused initial difficulties with transition – the school scheduled a spare instead of a core course and it took over a month to get resolved. So when she was finally able to start this core course, she was a month behind all the other students. She has very positive opinions about teachers and recognizes efforts to help her with her studies etc. She also recognizes herself as “talkative” but is trying to change this with help from teachers. She works a few hours over the weekend for one of her teachers doing odd jobs. She appears to have a high involvement in school culture/spirit. She spoke about a career in healthcare, but also her long-term interest in music. (Phase II)

**Jason**

He is in the academic program in high school. He played two different sports in elementary, but has since quit all sporting activity in high school. He finds grade 10 easier and has adjusted to the curriculum. He plays an instrument in a band professionally and his involvement is well over the ‘risk’ amount of time for work/extra-curricular activities outside of school. He practices 7 days per week, plays late evenings and tours during the year with his band (tour mostly happens outside of school time). Other band members are either just about to graduate or are already in college. Band members do support academics and respect the importance of graduating. He notes his girlfriend and the band manager as important people. He also noted his parents as protective but his relationship with them was not emphasized. He mentioned ‘frosh hazing’ as a negative feature of high school and that this contributes to negative perceptions of high school. He is maintaining a low B average and noted the short lunch period as a feature of a bad high school. The biggest risk factor for this young person appears to be his work (band involvement/gigs) outside school. (Phase II).

**Ponthioun**

Is an urban male, 14 years old, grade 9 who is black and speaks English and Tigrinya. He lives with both parents, sister and brother. His Parents have college diplomas – father works in a manufacturing and service jobs store and have also gone back to school. They are very encouraging of him to do well in school and inspire/push him to succeed.
He is close with a same-age cousin and they push each other to do well and strategized before high school about how to make friends and succeed. He has rated elementary school as "Not so good"/"Not good at all" in most categories and have grades in elementary averaged 70%. Had a very hard time in grades 6 & 7 due to bullying and sought advice from guidance/parents, befriended bully; this worked, bullying stopped. This episode was seen as empowering him to make decisions about his life - emotional change from grade 7 to end of grade 8 – more social, more confident, happier and more focused on goals and positive he could handle high school. High school education is "Very important" to him, his parents and his friends and he attended a summer school – a grade 8 review program – as a high school preparation and teacher taught what to expect re: academics and socializing. He picked high school based on where he felt more comfortable, other school he checked out had "bigger and stronger boys" that "freaked him out". Started in Applied in high school, based on advice from grade 8 teacher. He and his parents agreed, but after 1 week in Applied, the high school teachers encouraged him to switch to Academic – he finds it hard, but he is managing and finds the challenge exciting and wants to do well so he can be a businessman (in grade 8 he said he wanted to be a computer tech, or science chemist and had a whole plan about going to university in the USA). Trusts guidance/teachers in high school if he has a problem; Transition has been smooth Found that all the rumours he heard in elementary about high school were “fake” – he stays away from the “wrong crowd” and is very happy, finding HS to be a great experience and he has made lots of new friends. Wants to play lots of sports and join things –to do things in HS, to be a "socializing person”, on committees and teams so he can make friends and have people (students, principal, teachers) know him. (Phase I)

Judy

Is in grade 9 and has experienced moderately strained social relationship with ‘friends’ in grade eight. There were no overt negative events but she felt her friendships were unstable. Her father left the family. This coincided with her grandmother’s death. She thinks this was a starting point for emotional/academic difficulties which she calls losing the ability to ‘focus’ making it harder to complete work or write tests in a timely manner. This new learning barrier was recognized by teachers etc., and some help was offered, but only in terms of time to complete tasks. She mentioned no other assessment or assistance. She mentions transition events but with mixed reviews. Her focus was clearly on her relationships to friends. Has a sibling who is one year behind and suffering from the same ‘focusing’ difficulties and has other recognizable anxieties also. This may derail her mothers focus from her. She mentions supportive other family but with inconsistent/ mixed ideas of whether she believes this is really helpful. She views high school as a fresh start. It is clearly a positive step away from elementary school and she looks forward to that. There was good linkage with guidance/teachers in that her academic problems are being addressed at high school. She maintains her grade 8 teacher as a significant support person (someone she can talk to and get help from). Her participation in transition events programs was mixed. Her perception of their helpfulness was also mixed. She perceives herself as weak academically. Her most significant relationship in terms of transitions and other aspects of her life, seems to be her grade eight teacher. She has perceptions of herself beyond high school of going to Queen’s University and becoming a lawyer – her aunt is a lawyer and an uncle mentioned once she should do that. (Phase I)
**Mostly protected and supported**

Rachel

This young person reports a positive relationship with her parents and notes that they are “good supporters”. She really enjoys high school and finds it to be easier than she thought it would be. She was bullied in elementary, but this is no longer an issue in high school. She is taking all applied courses and claims it is because she does not like homework. She is doing well academically and received an award for academic excellence. She noted one core teacher in particular that has a better teaching style that makes it easier for students to learn and notices that when students do well on tests it promotes their confidence and those student want to succeed and so try harder. She wants to finish her required credits early so that in her last year of high school she can relax and take spares. She appears respectful and has a good sense of self. She has joined a club at school designed to help and feels good being part of this and confiding in peers/teachers. She noted the cliques at school and that it is hard to move from group to group. She also spoke about gender differences in that girls take cliques more seriously than boys do. She says that people who make fun of other students are insecure and she does not want to be part of something that makes people feel bad. She has a good group of friends that support each other and she feels comfortable confiding in the school guidance counsellors. She also has a part-time job that she enjoys and that keeps her very busy. She likes to work because she gets extra money to go out and buy the things she likes. She also indicated her level of financial responsibility and said that she would not blow all her money on one shopping spree. She said she feels good about herself when she makes responsible decisions and feels more confident as she grows up. She said she wants to have a balanced life so she has time for school, work, family, friends, chores and herself. (Phase I)

Dakota

She has close ties to her Aboriginal community, family and friends and notes her parents as important and protective, socially and academically. She has a sibling in high school and it appears that this person as well as this person’s partner are protective, positive influences for her. In addition, she has another sibling for whom she sees herself as a mentor and reports a very caring, close relationship with as well. She takes a 30 minute bus ride to and from school each day as she lives in a rural community with only one other public high school available to her, other than the First Nations school, which she attends. Her only other alternative is to leave her community, which she reports would cause huge anxiety. If her family ever moved, she would ask to stay with her grandparent so she could stay at her current school as she believes that going to school with lots of white people would be stressful for her and she would want to stay in her Aboriginal community. She is neutral about the role of school and transition programs so far, but does have positive feelings about school. She views her friends as the best feature of high school and has had good academic and social adjustments. She feels respected and listened to by her friends and wants to be involved in sports in the future. She is not involved in any paid or volunteer work outside of school. (Phase I)
James

Is in grade 9 from supportive and close two-parent family. He also has a supportive sibling. Having multiple out-of-province moves resulting in resiliency (has become good at meeting new people because of it). Initial difficulties with the moves were small, and they have worked out for the best. Does not consider himself a minority but did experienced one period of mild bullying due to his accent. He has a positive attitude about self and others’ perception of him and is a very confident young man. He maintains lasting friendships and enthusiastic about sports. He is also academically successful and has a positive attitude about teachers and friends. He was a bit apprehensive about the size of the high school but trying to enjoy the respect and adult treatment in high school compared to elementary school- a real improvement. He has spoken about discriminated against others at school on two occasions (racial slurs which are thought to be rather normal but a problem). He is optimistic about future both in school and afterward (university engineering). (Phase II)

Madhur

Is a young woman in (15 year old) in grade 9 who is North American Indian and White. She lives with mother, who she is close with, also mentions father and friends as being important in her life. She had a good elementary school experience, felt that teachers cared for her and prepared her for high school – she was in French Immersion with good grades (79%). She did experience bullying in grades 3, 4, 5 & 6, but that ended and does not find bullying to be a problem in high school. She listed her reasons for choosing her high school as it being the “best school ever”, “friends”. She is involved with sports at elementary and in grade 8 mentioned interest in joining sports in high school. High school education is listed as very important to her and her parent. She has a male best friend (who she mentions throughout her interview) helps her with schoolwork and with life in general – and he spends lots of time with her at her house. She also has part-time job. So far, it has been a smooth transition - finds everything about high school a bit bigger and a bit harder, but not too much. She is in Applied program at a semestered school and loves photography and drama – feels that drama program has helped her overcome her shyness. She still maintains close friends from elementary and has made new ones. She identifies as someone who does not like to see other kids being bullied. (Phase II)

Interviews over Time

It is instructive to see the range of life stories of the young people who are making the transition. Moreover the fluidity and rigidity of boundaries between these categories are of analytical, practical and policy interest. Understanding who moves in and out of situations of risk and resilience and why/how they do so over the course of transition fills a gap in our understanding. Our analysis shows both fluidity and rigidity in risk/resiliency across transition. Risk and protective factors appear, disappear and reappear for these young people at multiple levels. What remains the same, however, is the constellation of influences on school and transition from family, friends, community and schools.
Below is one example of a fluid narrative from a young woman who, in the Phase I (grade 8) Focus Group was virtually silent. However, her Face Sheet data and field notes from the facilitators indicated a signal of multiple risk situations and we therefore decided to include her in the complex resiliencies group and invite her for an Interview. We found the young woman in the following year in Grade 9 and conducted her first in-depth Interview. The narrative summary of this Interview is presented below followed by the narrative summary from the follow-up interview conducted when she was in Grade 10. One can see the continuities and discontinuities in the risk and protective factors that occurred for this young person across the family, community, school and social realms.

This example, of a young girl we have called Stella, is not meant to represent or reflect all of the stories of these young people but to illustrate the complex and shifting character of the transition for some.

**Phase I: (Apparent Complex Resiliencies) – “Stella”**

“Stella” lives in a rural community and has moved homes and schools multiple times. Amongst these school moves was also a period of home schooling due to issues taking place at the school. She lives with both parents and her 3 siblings, one of whom has a disability. Her siblings have also had difficulties with school – academically and socially. She suffers from an anxiety as well as a speech disorder – the latter which is slowly improving with specialized help at school. One of her parents is unable to work due to an injury and as a result her family does not have much money. She had a hard time in elementary school due to bullying and feeling awkward, lonely, out of place, and that other students did not like her. She found her elementary teachers to be “asses” who were not helpful and she struggled academically (50%). She felt her peers were “mean” and judged her. She participated in 2 sports in elementary school. She purposely chose a high school where almost none of her elementary peers would be attending – both for this reason, as well as for a specialized program offered by the school. It takes her 90 minutes each way to get to this school. She is in the applied program in high school and doing really well. Her grades have all improved; she finds the teachers to be helpful, good listeners, caring and with good teaching styles that suit her needs. However, she still identifies as someone who can’t do tests and who struggles with school. She said her high school does not have bullying, but mentioned an incident of bullying as well as a grade 9 initiation which she enjoyed but that kids had no choice about whether or not to participate. She says cigarettes smoking and drug use is the norm at school (marijuana and snorting Ritalin). However, she stays away from these things and wants her friends to quit. She does odd jobs for extra money, is on a sports team and has earned a high level for this activity, which she loves and is very important to her. She describes herself in high school as “hyper, sometimes annoying to others and no longer shy”. She would like one day to be a paramedic, as well as a hairdresser and a coach for the sport she loves. Socially things have improved quite a bit for this young woman, she is doing really well in high school, is engaged and happy. She has lots of friends and feels people accept her for who she is, no matter what she looks like.
**Phase II: (Apparent Multiple Risk Situations) - “Stella”**

"Stella” was on the verge of tears at several points during this interview. She has an anxiety and speech disorder, the former she has suffered from most of her life. She was also in an accident last year and suffered a head injury, resulting in a number of months of physiotherapy. In our first interview with her, she did not disclose anything of specific or significant concern. However, in our second interview, she disclosed that she had been abused multiple times by a family member and after encouragement from two female family members, told the police and was subsequently placed in a foster home. This move required her to leave her school’s catchment area and thus the high school she loved and where she had friends, and start over in a new school, where she knew no one. It is her impression that as long as she is in foster care, she is not permitted to attend the high school local to her family’s home. This move also resulted in her losing many important people in her life, including family members, friends and her pet. She has a strong bond with one of her siblings and pet, and misses them very much. One parent suffers from a mood disorder and has anger management issues and the other does drugs and has stolen money from her. When she was moved into foster care, her parent refused to help her pack her clothes. Currently, she has very little money of her own and lives with a number of other teenage girls at the foster home. Happily, she really likes her foster mother. This young person noted that although there are people who know about the abuse, the Interview facilitator was the first person to know all the details, in order of what happened. She is attending high school full-time, as well as working 30 hours a week. At school, students make fun of her because of the way she dresses as she does not have enough money for new clothes. Although she was very happy at her former high school, she really does not like her new school – finding there to be lots of cliques and the students to be "too preppy”. Because of how many people live in the foster home with her, she is unable to get her schoolwork done there, but does not view this as a problem because she doesn’t yet have a lot of homework. Her average is 60-70% and dropping and while guidance is aware of the issues she is facing, has not been helpful or proactive.

Through a careful review of our 35 cross-provincial, longitudinal narratives we identified two young women surrounded by significantly high situations of multiple risk within each area of her life. We then re-analyzed their surveys and transcripts to comprehensively map out their stories over a 3-year time period. “Stella” was one of these young women, as was another young woman we have called, “Lilian”.

In order to visually represent the complexities, fluidity and overlapping of multiple levels of lived experiences in transition, we teased out distinct, yet enmeshed categories and located each category within intersecting spheres. These spheres are positioned to provide a unique method of seeing every category as providing risk or protective influences in the life of each girl. In this portrayal, we are producing detailed narratives which provide and examination of the processes of being in risk situations. These processes are animated in families, at school, with friends and in communities. Viewing narratives in this manner may make clear moments of potential intervention and/or prevention that could make a real difference in the lives of these young women. Figures 32 and 33 illustrate visual transitional narratives for our two young women, “Stella” and “Lilian”.

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Figure 32. Visual Transitional Narrative: “Stella”

**FAMILY**

**Pre-Transition:** Lives in rural community; moved homes 6 times; lives with parents and 3 siblings (one with a disability). **Transition:** Low SES: Both parents injured or sick and not working; dysfunctional relationship with parent. **Post-Transition:** Parental drug use, depression, violence and theft of money; disclosed long history of sexual assault in home; told extended family who called police; parents abusive after disclosure; after placement in care, abuser welcomed back into home; currently living in foster care; has not spoken to parents in months; desperately misses youngest sibling and pet; more devastated that parents did not take her side than by sexual abuse; loves foster mother but has conflictual feelings about living with 5-7 other fostered girls; Struggling with poverty and lack of supports.

**SCHOOL/Academics**

**Grade 8:** Changed elementary schools 4 times; 50% average; high school education as "very important" to her and parents and "somewhat important" to friends; “passing” is main goal at school; teachers as “very good” in most categories; school itself "not good at all"; one teacher and a friend make her happy at school; “mean friends” make her feel badly. **Grade 9:** Very long commute by bus; mostly Applied courses and grades have improved; personal interests and school programs are good fit; teachers are helpful, good listeners, caring and with teaching styles that suit her needs; low self-esteem relating to schooling. **Grade 10:** Former high school is outside foster home catchment area; forced to leave school she knew and loved; has switched to Applied due to stress; Claims new school has “good academes”; taking grade 9 and 10 Applied courses; grades have improved to 60-70%.

**FRIENDS/YOUTH CULTURE**

**Pre-Transition:** Socially marginalized - feels like an outsider, awkward and does not belong, lonely, bored; other don’t like her, does not want to go; has experienced severe bullying. Physically marginalized - compared to classmates she feels she looks shorter, younger and is not good-looking. **Transition:** Drug use is norm at school; she claims to abstain and wants friends to stop; pressure to skip class and be promiscuous; describes herself as hyper, annoying to others and no longer shy; socially engaged and happy, lots of friends and potential boyfriend; baby-sits and shovels snow for extra money. **Post-Transition:** At former school she was with the “wrong crowd”, skipping class and taking drugs; very unhappy at new school; socially marginalized - no friends, impenetrable cliques and is bullied due to emotional state and poverty; lots of “druggies” at school, but she stands up to peer pressure; no longer participating in performing arts or her sport; now works 30 hours a week at a food establishment; very emotional in school and teachers, counsellors unsympathetic, unhelpful.

**SELF**

**Pre-Transition:** 13 years old, grade 8; born in Canada, Caucasian. **Transition:** 14 years old, grade 9; severe speech impediment (improving with help from school); panic and anxiety; closest connections are best friend and pet; loves performing arts; earned high level in a sport and on a team. **Post-Transition:** 15 years old, grade 10; severe speech impediment still improving; anxiety and panic attacks abate upon leaving family home; Car accident/injuries.

**FUTURE GOALS**

**Pre-Transition:** Paramedic. **Transition:** Paramedic, hairdresser and children’s sport instructor. **Post-Transition:** Paramedic/sport teacher, hairdresser or “some kind of social worker”.
Figure 33. Visual Transitional Narrative: “Lilian”

SCHOOL/ ACADEMICS

**Grade 8:** Good school fit; she is happy, confident, ecstatic and frightened about transition; learning disability identified in grade 7 and school provides excellent support/resources; grades 60-70%; selected high school due to school’s ability to support LD students, but plans to switch to a different high school once grades have improved. **Grade 9:** Initially embarrassed to attend current school, but now so happy with improved grades, LD supports, course selections and options, teachers and peers that wants to stay to graduate; grades now 70’s-80’s; personal interests, school programs and support a great fit; feels she belongs and has a place at this school. **Grade 10:** Custodial parent forced change to new school board; very poor fit – lack of friends, feels judged, lack of adequate LD supports/resources; teachers unhelpful; Applied stream; hands-on courses and performing arts are not as available at new school; misses school every other week due to colds/illness; frequently misses school programs due to poverty and when cannot afford fee for events often takes off entire day to avoid embarrassment; grades dropped severely; 1 week suspension due to fighting; guidance has been helpful and she has used resources of her own initiative; hates new school and wants to return to former school but parent won’t allow it.

FAMILY

**Pre-Transition:** Lives in small urban city; moved homes 4 times; alternates between living with parents/sibling and sick grandparent; low SES and low parental education. **Transition:** Lives with parents and sibling; speaks of family support. **Post-Transition:** Recently separated parents; moved homes due to separation; unstable living arrangements, included overnight visits with non-custodial parent until she and sibling witnessed parent’s attempted suicide; rarely sees hospitalized parent; does not feel connected to other parent.

SELF

**Pre-Transition:** 13 years old; grade 8 student, identifies as: Italian, Scottish, black, Native and Indian. Notes she feels part of a unfairly treated group “slaves”; has a learning disability. **Transition:** 14 years old; grade 9; trying to stop smoking and be a role model for younger cousin. **Post-Transition:** 15 years old; grade 10; money significant barrier to participating in school activities; does not feel safe where she lives due to violence and drugs; feels most connected to her aunt and grandparent.

FRIENDS/YOUTH CULTURE

**Pre-Transition:** Enjoys sports; has close friends and fears losing touch as they go to high school due to varied interests; scared about peer pressure; looking forward to performing arts opportunities in chosen high school. **Transition:** Many new friends, has stayed in touch with friends from elementary; supportive, non-judgemental environment; feels she fits in; increase in sexual and drug activity among peers, but she is comfortable abstaining; peers more respectful when she says no – less pressure than in elementary; lots of gossip. **Post-Transition:** difficult social adjustment at new school- few friends, peers are judgmental; misses social events and cannot afford dues for sports teams/uniforms; smokes cigarettes and reports occasional drug use; peer pressure regarding drugs similar to former school so she feels able to handle it; had to stop babysitting due to move and now has no job.

FUTURE GOALS

**Pre-Transition:** future employment not noted, but is looking for summer work and baby-sits to earn money. **Transition:** Pastry chef. **Post-Transition:** Pastry chef and to leave city where she lives.
We mapped out these shifts and stabilities in the trajectories of the 35 young people with whom we spoke in interviews over Phases I and II. As Table 71 shows, most of the young people we interviewed over time were in similar circumstances between Phase I and Phase II. However, certain specific events and influences may have presented themselves. But, for those who “stayed the same” these were not enough to alter their descriptive status. Those whose situations worsened were the group who moved from complex resiliencies in Phase I to multiple risk situations in Phase II or from mostly protected in Phase I to complex resiliencies in Phase II. Those whose situations improved moved from multiple risks to complex resiliencies or complex resiliencies to mostly protected.

Table 71: Trajectory and Status of Young People Interviewed in Phases I & II

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Youth Trajectories</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Descriptive Status in Phase I</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Stayed the same</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>3- multiple risks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>9- complex resiliencies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>8 - mostly protected</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Situations worsened</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3-complex resiliencies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3 -mostly protected</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Situations improved</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>1- multiple risks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>8- complex resiliencies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Totals</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

When we return to the narratives and interviews of these young people, we see many interesting patterns emerging. For those whose situations worsened (who encountered more risk over the transition), the pervasive risk factors appeared at a range of levels. Family strains (divorce/separation, poor labour market conditions for their parents, taking over many adult roles at home, parental neglect, abuse in the home, etc) were discussed. At the same time these young people were also having a range of academic struggles (e.g. slipping grades, disengagement, unmet learning needs) and waning involvement in high school activities. On the social dimension, these students were also meeting a number of challenges that ranged from the loss of girl/boy friends to bullying and drug use etc. It is important to notice, however, that these young people also had protective factors simultaneously operating in their lives and that many of them had very much been looking forward to high school and a new start.

The protective factors for the group of young people whose situations improved over Phases I and II appeared also to cross a range of social and academic issues. Noteworthy among them was the “good fit” with “who they were becoming” and the culture of their new school. They discussed, for example, the many ways in which teachers and counsellors were providing a range of supports in grades 9 or 10. These young people also spoke about supportive and encouraging families and about liking
school and having good friends. Even when these young people continued to experience troubles at home or school, there was a sense of an ability to reach out and seek the supports that were readily available for them. For example, teachers were calling home and connecting well with parents, parents were finding ways to support course choices that they may not necessarily agree with, sever friendship troubles and “drama” of elementary school were alleviated etc. There was also much mention from the young people in grade 10 of smoothing out of earlier bumps in transition from grade 9 across academic and social spheres. It is important to note that many of these young people also felt that the transition was “huge” and difficult but that the supports were there to help them manage it and support their social and academic challenges.

The narratives of the group of young people who stayed on an even trajectory (stayed the same) also tell us how these factors operate. For those who started out the transition in multiple risk situations and remained with such struggles over time, the interview pointed to some themes. For instance, academic challenges that were pervasive in elementary school remained and for many they became worse. The workload and faltering grades remained and began to emerge into forms of social disengagement and negative feelings about school and even early school leaving. The familial challenges and neglect did not improve and social exclusion continued. However, where outreach was in place for reengagement, some positive signs were emerging such that school may be an option for them.

More frequently encountered scenarios for the group of young people who stayed the same over the transition were that they remained mostly protected or in complex resiliency status. As was discussed above, these statuses were characterized by layers of protective factors or risk/protective factors at social, academic and community levels. While the specific manifestation of these factors may have changed somewhat over time, the presence of the whole constellation did not.

**Summary of Youth Interview Data**

In general, the Interview data has yielded powerful stories about the processes and experiences of transition and the lives of the young people who are negotiating it. There are pervasive themes and stories that arise from this mass of data. The need to seek and find balance across social, academic, familial and community spheres is evident. Walking the balance beam toward and through transition proves to be both exciting and problematic. Young people have detailed the ways in which these processes are playing out. The importance of the transition as a fresh start was described and explained by many young people in Phase I as a hope, and in Phase II as a reality. The new start had the potential of giving them something to work toward, to feel more mature in mastering, and to expand their social, academic, and personal horizons as they move toward young adulthood. The constellation of risk
and protective factors allowed for the young person to build on these fresh starts and to avoid false starts and downward spirals.

For instance, the Phase I young people spoke directly in their Interviews about contradictions, paradoxes, tensions and over-lapping issues in school and life. Their top themes from the interview were similar to those from Phase II. For example, many young people in Phase I spoke about the ways in which bullying happens but “is no big deal”. This normalization, coping, and rationalization of problems was apparent in much of the inter-relational text. In addition, young people who had already moved into grade 9 in Phase I stated that while the academics were more difficult than in elementary school, this was a “good thing” because they were trying harder and were more engaged.

Leaving friends behind from grade 8 was, in retrospect, sometimes even seen as positive so long as new ones could be found and included as positive influences in social and academic matters. For example, if youth realized that the intense social “drama” of grade 8 classrooms in which friends and classmates created urgent social “scenes” was not always helpful, and they appreciated the less intense social atmosphere of grade 9. This intense “drama”, was seen to drop away in high school where new groups were joined and new friends were made. Another common theme of inter-relational text was that high school was turning out to be much better than expected. On the other hand, young people did encounter many problems on leaving their elementary schools behind and the multiplicity of risk situations proved to be very daunting for some. In the elementary years, just as in secondary, friends and teachers could make an otherwise negative experience at school worthwhile. On the other hand, the physical structure of the school may have been fine, but peers and educators could be a problem. Young people also spoke about the social “drama” and cliques of elementary school years as a problem worth escaping. The nature and frequency of social drama tends to shift in high school, but this does not mean that high schools are always socially apt. At the same time, the social aspects of school were seen as essential to the school day and one of the most difficult aspects of transitioning was leaving friends and schools behind, even though a fresh start could be exciting.

From those youth who had already moved into grade 9, we heard about how the negative stereotypes and myths about high school could be proved to be untrue and that some of the worries about grade 9 were unfounded. This reverberated in our Phase II Focus Groups and Interviews as well. However, there were also negative encounters with teachers, classmates and school structures and the normalization of school violence continued in both Phases as young people moved into high school. We also heard in both Phases about the continuing tensions between social and academic aspects of school, a theme that was present in elementary school as well. For example, young people are having difficulties balancing the social and academic aspects of school. In addition, young people feel transitions to be primarily social
while those around them (educators, parents) often view it as mainly academic in nature.

When the young people addressed the processes of transition from grade 8 to 9 in their Interviews, they also revealed interesting paradoxes, conflicts and tensions in being and becoming. For instance, in Phase I we heard about the developmental issues of the changing nature of relationships between parents and youth were a source of tension, just as it had been for parents. Also, the emotional paradox of transition was made plain as were the tensions between the problems and charms of being with the older students. In the end, the youth suggested that “growing up” was a large part of the process and working through these status discontinuities could be difficult but necessary. Moreover, there were ways in which this could be facilitated in schools.

Not surprisingly, schools were therefore experienced by these young people in variable and contradictory ways. The “good” elementary schools had many positive features including great teachers and pedagogy, good friends, caring and helpful guidance in transition, and a fostered sense of self efficacy, independence and competence. Here we also are able to hear what make great teaching - care, humour, concern, high expectations, fairness and inclusion. On the other hand, the “bad” elementary schools held teachers who were “mean”, “unfair” and/or “boring” and gave too much work. And, the “bad” elementary schools also housed school structures which detracted from learning such as violence, bullying, large class sizes, dirty and crumbling buildings, and poor transportation.

However, there are many ways in which elementary and secondary schools can assist in achieving a better transition and in building on the excitement that is felt. Signs and directions arising from the Interviews suggest that there is a complex interaction between these barriers and enablers. Moreover, the young people have demonstrated how they themselves, their friends, teachers and parents are critical to transition. The sense of self, identity and agency must not be overlooked in making sense of the academic, social and procedural aspects of transition.

In summary, the interviews with young people in transition have suggested that there is no need to change things that are working well; and there are many things that work well presently. However, when things are not working well, youth require flexible, proactive and ongoing help and support. Both continuities and discontinuities arise in the transition from grade 8 to 9 and neither is seen as necessarily better nor disposable. Sometimes it is good to have a change, even if it is difficult. Other times it is best to keep things the same if they are working well in elementary school. For example, sometimes making new friends is very hard to do, but it turns out well and is seen in retrospect as a valuable lesson. Sometimes, the young person demonstrates that their concerns expressed while in grade 8 are no longer of importance and “they cannot believe” that they felt a certain way. Or, the academic challenges of high school are seen as indeed new and more difficult than those in elementary years, but
this is seen as a positive motivator and/or a good antidote to the boredom or social “drama’ that was experienced in elementary school. Indeed, these academic and social challenges can be lifted for many students by grade 10.

Catterall’s (1998) assertion was borne out in the interview data when we examined the over-time interviews. For example, the further behind a student started, the more potential room there was for improvement, so long as the community of helpers were available, responsive and supportive. His suggestion that deeper insights be gained on exploration of the stories of 10th graders was useful. In doing so, we saw the range of narrative and life stories that these young people bring toward and carry with them in transition and the complexity of the balancing act they carry with them while crossing the river to high school. For our small group of students who were interviewed twice, most did not experience dramatic changes in their transitional narratives. However, for those who improved, these responsive and supportive elements were seen as the community of helpers in schools, families and communities worked with the young people to make positive changes.

Barriers and Enablers to Transition: A Youth Perspective

Barriers to Transition

Young people spoke openly about the many aspects of their transition and their schooling. They shared with us the myriad of ways these aspects function either as risk or protective factors in their experiences. When reviewing the data across all three Phases, there were seven main themes which youth highlighted as being the most problematic in terms of their transition. These risks or barriers to transition include: (1) getting used to new things/people; (2) elementary/middle school ‘scare tactics’; (3) negative high school features, including: workload, ineffective pedagogy/mean teachers; lack of supports/poor level placement; (4) peers/peer pressure; (5) rumours/awful school reputation; (6) family/low socio-economic status; and (7) youth themselves.

Getting used to new things/ people. Change is often difficult and frightening and the move from elementary to high school represents a change that impacts most areas of a young person’s social and academic life. The unknown aspects of high school – a new building, new teachers, new peers, new programs of study and new expectations – represent a large part of young people’s anxieties around transition. For many youth, these anxieties were overcome within the first few weeks of school as they learned their way around and became familiar with students, teachers and expectations. However, the time between elementary school ending and their settling into a routine in high school is one that is often fraught with fear and concern.
Examples:

$1YCEE001D: But I thought like...in the beginning it was the hardest part. Like you have to get used to it. $1YCEE002D: Your classes, school. $1YCEE003D: Your friends. Like, people. $1YCEE001D: Making friends. $1YCEE002D: Getting used to it. $1YCEE003D: Getting used to the amount of work.

$$1YL1EE150A: I think the one hour class in the beginning is really hard to adjust to, 'cuz like in Middle School it's like thirty minutes or something and like, the first month of High School, like the first semester, it's just like, really hard I guess, sitting in one class for an hour, listening to a teacher speak, it's really hard to like, adapt to that, but then eventually you get used to it, but in the beginning I found it, I got headaches and stuff in one class for an hour, sitting.

$$1YCEED Participant: I think finding your way around the building, that was really confusing. Like, getting to class on time. For me personally, it was making friends because I came in from out-of-area and I didn't know anyone. So, the first couple of weeks were pretty hard cuz, it seemed like everyone knew someone, even if they were out-of-are too, like they have friends already and then it was kind of hard to just like, kind of cut in.

Elementary/ middle school ‘scare tactics’. Many of the young people we spoke with had been in the same elementary school, with the same classmates, since kindergarten. Others had changed schools between elementarily and middle school and still others had changed schools numerous times due to family moves. Regardless of the length of time in a school, young people spoke about the ways in which their elementary or middle schools had made their transition more difficult. One of the biggest complaints we heard through all three Phases and from youth in most every Focus Group was how teachers needlessly frightened them about high school.

Examples:

$2YC2FF079C : Comme on dirait qu’ils essaient de nous inquiéter pour rien. Moi, j’avais peur et, là, j’arrive ici, et je suis comme... bien, là, qu’est-ce qu’ils nous disent ; il n’y a pas de raison.

$4YC1EE063G: Pressures, like I’m scared with the time management thing, you do your homework now, and with some marks, like if you don’t do good they say ... 'well, they won't put up with that in high school, and you better get it done or you’re gonna repeat that year again’ and that just doesn't help at all.

$$1YC1EE157B: My [elementary] teacher made me think that High School would be like jail... $$1YC1EE156B: You’ll be loaded with homework, there’s no rest... $$1YC1EE158B: Yeah, in Grade Eight they like, made you, like, 'Oh, we’re just preparing you for High School, it’s gonna be way hard, they just really intimidate you and then once you get here it’s alright. $$1YC2EE160B: Yeah, they like, really stress
you out about it, like tests and stuff and they’re like, ‘You won’t get away with bad in High School’ or whatever and you get away... $$1YC1EE157B: Yeah, my teacher got me going so good one time, just freaking out about it. $$1YC1EE159B: And like, when you ask to go to your locker [in elementary school], my teacher told me, ‘Oh, you’re not going to be able to do that in High School, you’re not going to be able to go in like, the middle of your class just to get a text book from your locker’

$$1YL2EE179E: They tell you, ‘Oh, you’re gonna be doing this in High School so you better do it now’, but it’s not true... $$1YL1EE180E: High School is like, I don’t know, High School is not—teachers try to scare us and stuff like that, and High School’s just what you make it... $$1YL1EE182E: Yeah, Elementary School teachers they really gotta stop doing that like, they’re really trying to make the kids like, afraid and but like - $$1YL2EE181E: But it’s only ’cuz they want you to do their work.

$$3YCEED Participant: Yeah, they made it worse! Like, they just made it sound like it was going to be an awful place to go. And that the teachers were not going to help you at all and they made it sound like, an evil place.

**Negative high school features.** Ironically, although young people spoke with frustration about what they viewed as unnecessary scare tactics from elementary school teachers, they were many things about their early high school experience which did indeed negatively impact their transition. These include a heavier workload, ineffective teaching practices and mean teachers, a lack of supports and poor level placement. While these risk factors were not discussed in detail in Phase I as the young people had not yet transitioned into high school, by Phases II and III, youth spoke openly about these challenges and the impact on their transition.

Many students spoke about the lack of communication between teachers when assigning projects or exams as being one of the big stressors for them. While some students did struggle with the work itself, almost all students found it challenging to balance the requirements of a heavier workload due to multiple teachers and conflicting deadlines.

Examples:

$$1YC1EE158B: And the teachers don’t really communicate, right? ’Cuz sometimes we get like, a Science Fair and an English essay the same day that are due, unlike Middle School where the same teachers, sometimes, that kind of communicated and you know, spread it out.

$$3YC2EA253A. Cos you have four classes, and one class of high school is like all the homework we got in elementary school. Facilitator. So was it that the work was hard, or the amount of it, or both? $$3YC2EA253A. The amount of it. $$3YC1EE247A. I was mainly worried about exams. That scared me the most.
One of the biggest barriers facing students and one of the issues youth were the most vocal about, is the way in which ‘bad’ teachers teach them and treat them. Young people spoke about uninspired and boring teachers, sexism and racism in the classroom, teachers who pick favourites, teachers who are perceived to be disrespectful and judgemental and who discipline unfairly.

Examples:

$$\text{1YC2EE160B: Bad teachers. Facilitator: What’s a bad teacher?}$$
$$\text{1YC2EE160B: They’re just really... Participant: Careless. Participant: They don’t care.}$$
$$\text{They’re just really rude! Group agrees. Facilitator: Ok, so can you give me some examples?}$$
$$\text{1YC1EE158B: Inappropriate language.}$$
$$\text{1YC1EE158B: Like, some like, some, one of the teachers, Ms. W- called one of the kids a ‘jackass’.}$$
$$\text{1YC2EE160B: Like, the teachers will actually swear at you.}$$
$$\text{1YC1EE159B: Well sometimes like, my Business teacher like, we’re doing business and like, I didn’t get something and I asked him like, why isn’t this working and like, he insults us like, he kinda does it in like, a joking manner like, he goes like, ‘Oh, you dummy’! Facilitator: And so do you, do you take it as an insult or do you take it as a joke?}$$
$$\text{1YC1EE159B: No, it’s, well he doesn’t really, he’s not funny, I’ve never seen him smile (laughter), but yeah...I it makes me feel like, like I’m really like, stupid.}$$

$$\text{1YC2EE189F: They come miserable to class, just because of they’re personal problems, and they put their anger on you. And I hate when teachers do that.}$$

$$\text{2YC2EE127B: I find that they don’t know how to teach, they kind of forgot how to teach. Like I don’t know, maybe they think that they’re doing a good job, but I find that a lot of courses that I’m not paying attention at all, I’m just getting the homework, finishing it, and I’m like reading in class, because they don’t keep my attention, not teaching anything, I don’t learn stuff...}$$
$$\text{2YC2EE128B: They expect you to learn from the textbook so they’ll put a note up on the board and get you to do questions in your textbook and have it done tomorrow.}$$

$$\text{4YL2EE114D: I think teachers are a big part of making a good high school cause if you have teachers who really don’t care and they’re just there to do their job and get paid, it doesn’t make it fun for the students and eventually they’re going to think, why should I even bother, you know?}$$

$$\text{4YL1EE113D: I hate history.}$$
$$\text{4YL2EE115D: Yea, I was just gonna say I personally hate history.}$$
$$\text{4YL2EA111D: Me too, it’s cause she talks for an hour and a half and we just sit there and sit there. Facilitator: So it’s how she’s teaching?}$$
$$\text{4YL2EE115D: Yea, it’s boring...nobody pays attention, we’re just sitting there like.}$$
$$\text{4YL1EE113D Cause you get so bored that you just sit there.}$$

$$\text{1YC2EE230B: Some teachers like, no offence to all like, IB. It’s just like they think like they’re better than us cause they’re like up there. And they treat us lower than them like they don’t care cause they think that we’re not going nowhere. And just like, okay you’re IB but they might fail and drop down in life...}$$
$$\text{1YC2EE229B: Ya, I find that sometimes teachers, like even in my Academic classes, they’re really degrading to like Applied kids cause even like, some of my teachers who go on and}$$
say, oh ya my Applied class, they can’t even do this, blah, blah, blah. And I’m like, that’s really degrading because even, they might have like a learning disability or they just learn different, right. Like some people are like hands on learners and most teachers they teach by like, talking or visual stuff. And, if like, that’s not your strength then obviously you are going to do very well. So, ya.

$4YC2EE137B. Yes, my teachers kind of teach too fast. You need them to slow down a little bit because I have lots of trouble with math, and I find teachers just try to explain it too fast. They already know how it is so if you’re doing a question, they do it up on the board and they just like ‘do this, and this, and then this’.

$4YCEEB Participant: Like a lot of teachers I find, they’ll hear something bad about a student and look at them in their class, and they’ll treat them from what they heard of them, and they’ll favour students if they have better marks. I find that’s not really fair.

Students in Phases II and III also spoke about the lack of supports in their schools and how difficult it is for them to change from Academic to Applied, even when at risk of failing.

Examples:

$1YC2EE161B: I don’t think guidance is very helpful. $1YC1EE158B: I don’t even know who my guidance counsellor is. $1YC2EE161B: I tried meeting my guidance counsellor for a course selection for Grade Ten and they’re like, ‘Oh come take an appointment or come after school’, and sometimes it can be really hard because you have to get a ride because you live far away from here and then at lunch they’re like, ‘Oh, we need an appointment, there’s like, ten people ahead of you’, so you have to wait the entire time. $1YC1EE157B: I always get pushed out when I’m talking to my guidance counsellor ‘cuz I’m going to summer school and I always get pushed out like, I’m trying to talk to my guidance counsellor about this stuff and she always pushes me out because she has someone else waiting so I have to make like, twenty appointments.

$3YC1EE131A: Like, when I switched I accidentally put Academic for some reason and now it’s like, all Academic classes like, in Math class I failed like, a seven percent and I failed like, every class besides three, but I passed with a fifty and then I switched to Applied and I have, I pulling eighties now and it’s really confusing and I don’t know. Cuz like, Academic, it’s like two different schools pretty much, like the Academic class and then you get the Applied classes and both of them are like, really, really different so I’m taking Math again now, but in Applied so I get the credit and I have like, and eighty in that class in which I used to have like, a seven percent so, I don’t know. Well, I tried really hard in the Academic class, but then after I kinda gave up ‘cuz it was pointless to end the semester with like, a seven I’m not even going to try.
There seems to be a lot of emphasis on – as soon as you leave grade eight you will be thrown into a world where you and you alone are responsible for everything. Then they went on to talk about option sheets and how a certain amount of courses have to be for this field, and a certain amount have to be for the other and stuff. In reality, the options are locked into place for you and you don’t actually have any say on them whatsoever.

**Peers/ Peer Pressure.** As noted throughout this report, peers have a tremendous impact on one another, and this appears to intensify as they transition into high school. This impact can serve as either a barrier or a protective feature, and in many instances, a young person can experience both simultaneously from differing peer groups.

Young people across all three Phases spoke of their concerns regarding losing childhood friendships, the challenges of making new friends, of negotiating new social situations, including bullying and of finding their own place amongst new peer groups.

Examples:

$1YLEEC participant: this year she’s um not making really good friends, people have um bullied her, she’s dressed a little different, she’s been called many words, you know. And that’s what really worries me, I really don’t want to be a target for someone and I don’t want to be the one whose weak you know? In this school we’re all friends, so it’s gonna be difficult [in high school].

$1YC1EE164C. Like in Elementary School, like a friend – you and a friend would get in an argument – it’d be over in like a day. Like, it started and stuff, cos you’re in the classroom, you have to talk to each other and stuff. In High School it’s different, like it’ll last a long time. Usually ends up in like a physical, like confrontation, stuff like that.

$1YC1EE193F: Some groups you can’t be friends just cause they don’t speak your language. $1YC2EE189F: Or they don’t accept you, you don’t have much in common. $1YC2EE188F: Yeah. Facilitator: And is that because of skin color or ethnicity? $1YC2EE188F: Yeah, kind of. Like sometimes they say if you’re white, or whatever, and you go into like a brown group. I mean they’re nice kids, but if they can’t, you know, if they can’t speak to you. Or sometimes they just don’t want to, you can’t really get into them. And then they realize, they don’t understand why other kids don’t talk to them.

$1YL2EE210H. Girls have so evil bullying and fighting. Evil bullying... the newest tool of evil, subtle, girl bullying, is Face book – Honesty box. $1YL2EE205H. Oh my god. $1YL2EE211H. Evil. Facilitator. What’s Honesty Box? $1YL2EE210H. Honesty Box is just like a place where you can just tell someone how you feel about them and they don’t know who you are and it is so mean, and so evil, and people they get Honesty Box and it’s almost like they’re addicted to finding out what people really think of them. And all it causes is huge problems. $1YL2EE211H. It causes drama.
For people to stop picking on me... Some of the people, I don’t know, nobody really talks to my face about things, but I hear some things. Like someone talking about me or something like that. Talking behind my back. Cause no one has the freaking guts to tell me to my face. So as soon as I find out, I want to do something about it, or I want the school to do something about it and nothing really happens. So I kind of want to do it myself, but I know that’s not right to. It’s kind of a little bit frustrating, but whatever.

I think that if you want to fit in with popular people, you don’t like not only have to be popular but they’re all like, they’re picky; like you gotta be pretty, like- Yea.

Rumours/awful school reputation. Rumours about high school and a school’s negative reputation play a huge role in creating barriers to a smooth transition. When young people hear stories from older peers or siblings about high school and when they believe the reputation they hear about a school is the truth, they are frightened about starting high school. Even once they have entered grade 9, rumours about other students and about events in the coming years, can continue to be disturbing and thus challenge their feelings of safety and security within the school.

Examples:

Facilitator: So how do you think you and your friends will be treated next year? In high school? $4YL2EE009F: Um, we’ll feel left out of things and if we don’t know the school well, people will say that, make fun of you and just treat you not like they should.

$4YL2EE044E: Yea, ’cause a lot of grade twelve guys- $4YL2EE049E: Are disgusting. $4YL2EA045E: And they’ll come up to me and say all this stuff and they- $4YL2EE044E: Like, watch out for them.

Facilitator: So do you feel prepared then? Academically?... $5YC2EE024A: I hear it’s pretty hard. Like, you always do big projects and stuff.

$1YL2EE179E: I think like, ok when you, like before you like, come to school, you’re always going to hear stuff about the school, you’re always going to hear good things, you’re always going to hear bad things, but... we’re like, number one ranked at the police station for being called, and... $1YL2EE179E: I’m not going to feel safe next year... ’cuz there’s so much bad people coming here. A few students agree. Facilitator: How do you know that bad people are coming here? $1YL2EE179E: Because man, like, people that are kicked out of other schools - Participant: Yeah like, all the bad ones, all the bad ones, they all start coming here... There’s this one guy, ok, there’s this one guy here M- and there’s another guy coming here and they’re both bad so they’ll just rob you for the sake of robbing you, they’ll like, they will challenge you to a fight and they’ll beat your face in for money and go, ’If I win, I get the money’, they’ll beat your face in and be like, ’I don’t want the money’.
I know my cousin used to come to this school, and like a couple years ago, and she told me that, cause I was a little nervous coming into high school, and she told me about stories when girls would come from C (ES), and they would come into grade nine, and some grade twelve guys would come and say that they have to do a test and that test would involve them sleeping with the guys so that they could become popular. And I found that really stupid, but I think that times have changed, like I don’t know if they’re true or not, but I found that was a little disturbing, and I was scared that that was going to happen to me. My cousin said that she didn’t go through, like there was occasionally guys coming up to you and kind of feel you and stuff, but apart from that, like it was kind of okay. When you have a group of friends around you, it’s fine, like have a couple of friends that will always help you, and it’s fine, so.

Well like, coming here for the first time I was worried, because you hear all the strange stuff when you’re in elementary like get there and there’s going to be initiation or something. There’s going to be a million new people.

Youth spoke about the impact of their families on their transition across all three Phases, however this was not a significant theme in Phase I, perhaps because they had not yet transitioned into high school. By Phase II and III however, youth shared more readily some of the challenges they face at home and the ways in which this creates risk for them academically. Ironically, youth spoke both about parents who are over-involved as well as parents who are unable to provide support as barriers to a successful transition. Young people shared examples of the ways in which they are compared to siblings and how detrimental this can be to their self-esteem. They also spoke of family stress and the ways in which poverty affects their ability to succeed.

Examples:

I’m not that close with my parents. They don’t know a lot...Like, what happens at school because I don’t tell them a lot because they speak a different than me and I’m not that good in that language.

– they try choosing your subjects. That’s not good. Facilitator-so do you mean when you were in elementary school and you had to choose your subjects.

– parents try to choose your classes for you... they are trying to make you live the life they didn’t live.

Like you know I have like two brothers and sisters and two smaller ones so I’m right in the middle so when I want to do something my little sister says my god, you’re such a big girl now, what are you doing? Like don’t do that, you’re in high school and treats me like, act mature and then when I go and want to do something like my big sister is like you’re still a kid, you’re in grade nine so act like, I actually never fit in my life with any group in my house so I’m always by myself kind of.
But I find my sister is like a really over achiever, like she was cheerleader, and competitive dancer, and like eighty nine point nine average, like easily, only studies ten minutes for class, she’ll like pass the test so easily and like done work, and she did like acting, modeling, she’s a big overachiever. And I find because of that, my parents expect more of me and if I don’t get a good grade, they say oh you can do what your sister’s doing and it’s like frustrating because your parents will assume that you’ll do the same as your siblings. I think when you have older people in your family, and its like you have an expectation, like you have to be as good as like you sister, brother, cousin, anybody that’s above you. Like I know my cousin’s becoming a doctor, my other one’s got a masters, and every time I do something bad, my dad always like, oh you should try to be like your cousin, you’re like studying so hard, and I’m like, okay. Like I have a different strategy then her, like it’s not like every single person can like do well.

I was thinking about actual food ’cuz if you don’t have a good lunch, you can’t concentrate if you’re hungry.

Like, well I’m, my parents are divorced, right, so it’s kind of hard going back and forth from parent to parent each week and then it’s also hard cause then when you’re at one parent’s house one parent will start criticizing about the other parent, and saying stuff that all that sort of stuff about them saying that oh they did this stuff in the past and stuff. And the other parent’s doing the exact same thing. It does get frustrating after a while. Cause you don’t know what the truth is and it’s like, it’s like, shut up. They just keep talking.

I think like, sometimes family. Like, if the person I guess doesn’t do as good as the family members think they can do and even though they try really hard, they can just like, give up cuz they think it’s not worth it anymore.

Okay, yes, it was kind of hard cos I moved around like three times last year, so like I had to find my way. Facilitator. Moved schools? No switched houses, three times. So I had to find my way to school from my new house and it was kind of hard.

Youth themselves. The 596 young people who participated in our Focus Groups offered insight into the barriers that surround them at the elementary level, in high school and within their own homes. They recognized and spoke of the risks associated with these barriers and the impact on their transition. Much in the same way these youth spoke about external elements, Phase II and III youth participants also spoke honestly about their own agency and the ways in which they hinder their own success and transition experience.

Examples:

Your own attitude to it, if you come to High School and you want to do well, it’s more likely that you’ll have a good transition then if you don’t want to, if you’re just not caring. And if you don’t want to be here then obviously you don’t want to do something.
$$1YL1EE180E: In the beginning I was being kinda disruptive in class and then trying to get back on track after... they already have this attitude towards you that you gave to them so, it’s hard... I think I kinda get myself in that position 'cuz I give up a good impression for the first two, first month or whatever, but I think usually I always fall off track, you know, but I think I kinda get myself in that situation.

$$1YL1EE180E: I feel like I’m keeping myself, my talent and my academics, I think I could push it to a further point but I think I’m just being lazy 'cuz I don’t even focus on my friends too much, I know my friends will always be there, sometimes I don’t even show my friends for a straight week, but my marks are still not boosting and I more than understand the work, I over stand it, you know? I can read the words and I understand it in a snap, I can understand it, but it’s just that, I don’t know where my knowledge, like I don’t know where all this is going to 'cuz I assume it’s in my work, but my marks are not as where there supposed to be, [it’s at] sixty-five... everyone of my teachers said I should be getting eighties and over, you know? ...

$$1YL1EE232C. In grade nine math, Mr. S he didn’t, I tried to get help and he still didn’t help me... I think it’s also me though. I like to blame it on him, but I think it’s also my attitude, I could have done more but so could he, so we’re both at fault, looking back on it now.

$$1YL2EE268E: Cause in grade nine, being in grade nine...teachers don’t care if you didn’t go to class. It was like an addiction... It was like you skip one period twice, and it was like oh my god, this is awesome. Why don’t I do this all the time? Facilitator: So you skipped a lot last year? $$1YL2EE268E: Yeah in grade nine I skipped a lot.

$$2YL2EE273A. In grade nine I did nothing. I didn’t participate in any extra-curricular activities because I just, you know, ‘it’s not my right’. You know. “The older kids will take care of it. They’re all going to be involved in that”. There was actually nothing that I did. Like you ask what I did in grade nine – nothing. In grade eight, it was like – I had a good six things going on, and in grade nine there was nothing, and then this year I’m kind of getting to do more things, and it’s kind of hard getting back into doing things when you did nothing.

**Enablers to Transition**

Young people were equally as forthcoming about the aspects of their lives which assist in their transition. In all three Phases, youth spoken eagerly about the enablers to transition and the impact of these protective features. We noted six main themes as being the most helpful in their transition, these enablers include: (1) elementary/middle school transition strategies; (2) positive high school features including: transition activities, extra-curricular school activities, specialized school programs, good teachers; (3) having a connection to an older student; (4) friends; (5) parents; and (6) youth themselves.
**Elementary/ middle school transition strategies.** One of the simplest and most often referenced elementary transition strategies is when grade 8 teachers implement grade 9 work into their year-end course plan. Youth noted how helpful they found it when teachers honestly spoke about grade 9 work and gave them examples of what to expect in the classroom and in regards to homework. As opposed to the criticism provided by youth in the Barrier section, helpful strategies do not simply warn students or threaten them with ‘what will happen next year; but rather give specific examples and opportunities to experience that difference. Young people spoke enthusiastically about teachers who starting using the term ‘exam’ for big tests, who know about the kinds of assignments they will be given in grade 9 and who introduced them to high school level work in an environment where they feel comfortable and are not yet facing other high school pressures.

Examples:

$1YCEEG Participant: I think the teachers help you the most and um they have the most experience with uh people going to high school because they’ve been doing it year after year and...they help you get ready...and another example is, um you have exams in high school and we just had an exam this morning which shows us how exams sort of work in high school.

$2YC2FF079C : Il faudrait qu’ils parlent de l’autre expérience aussi parce que, là, on s’était basé sur ce qu’ils nous ont dit. Tu vas faire plein de devoir ; prépare-toi ; je te donne tout ça parce que je veux que tu sois prête à avoir plein de devoir.

$$1YC1EE200G: Well last year in grade eight they switched one subject and school is basically forty minutes of teaching you how to take notes in high school and all this stuff. I forgot what it’s called. $$1YC2EE199G: It was learning skills. $$1YC1EE200G: yeah learning skills. $$1YC1EE197G: also some teachers taught you things that are not made for grade eight but that you’ll learn in grade nine so that helped too. Facilitator: anything else that teachers in grade eight did to help? $1YC1EE198G: The workload. $$1YC1EE198G: end of the year gave us lots of homework and told us this is how it’s going to be in high school.

$$5YC2EF071A. Our Grade eight teachers sort of helped us prepare like, our Grade Eight math teacher kind of like, made up a mock math exam for us to do. Like just for an example that showed us what it would be like.

$$4YC1EA131A Well at C(ES) my teachers started giving us, like instead of calling all the tests ‘tests’, she started calling them ‘exams’, and that kind of helped.

**Positive high school features.** Young people identified school features which eased their move into high school. They noted specific transition activities directed by their high school which took place at the end of grade 8, in the summer between grade 8 and grade 9, and at the beginning of grade 9. They spoke positively about the benefits of participating in extra-curricular activities offered by their schools, of
specialized programs/courses and extra help offered by their schools. And not surprisingly, students told us about the many ways in which good teachers inspire them, help them and make learning fun.

In Phase I, students were only able to tell us about the transition activities/strategies at the elementary level as they had not yet entered high school. In Phases II and III however, youth were able to reflect back to the beginning of grade 9 and tell us about the events that were offered to them and which helped them transition into high school. These events include: presentations by the high schools at elementary/middle school, summer BBQs, grade 9 camping trips, a grade 9 day designed around incoming students, and a grace period at the beginning of school when teachers/administrators were understanding about students being late to class as they find their way around a new and much larger building.

Examples:

$6YL2FF010B: Bien, moi, je trouve que comme... quand tu apprends en t’amusant, bien, tu apprends plus parce que, tu sais comme... bien, moi, je le sais que quand... mettons que je joue un jeu, bien, je vais me rappeler bien plus des règles que si je vais à l’école. Animatrice : Oui, parce que ce n’est pas forcé. $6YL2FF010B: Oui, c’est ça. Animatrice : C’est ça, c’est amusant, $6YL2FF009B. $6YL2FF010B: Ce n’est pas stressant non plus.

$$1YC2EE160B: They also sent over a few students, I don’t know who, but they actually did a presentation on what programs they offer here. Facilitator: So they went to your Elementary School? $$1YC2EE160B: A lot of the High Schools did, we had about maybe four or five presentations from all different High Schools. Facilitator: And did you guys find that helpful? $$1YC2EE160B: Yeah it was actually interesting to see what schools, what some of the High Schools offer and stuff.

$$1YC2EE166C: Like other schools, what they did with the whole class, was like on Wednesday they went to Camp A- and they came back on Friday. So it was like, you went away with the whole Grade Nines so obviously you’re going away with them you’re going to get close to the guys.

$$2YL2FF129B : Comme $$2YL2FF128B dit, plus de sorties ou d’activités. Il y avait une sortie en septième année qui était pas mal le fun, c'était à propos de l'historique genre downtown O-. On est allé faire des recherches et on se promenait à différentes places. Il fallait qu'on trouve des choses et puis qu'on les prenne en notes pour cette classe. Ce sont des choses comme cela qui sont le fun.

$$4YL2EE143C: Yeah, there was a barbeque. $$4YL2EE140C: Yeah there was a barbeque. I thought that helped though, cause we were able to get our schedules and go to classes, so like on the first day we weren't like - $$4YL2EE139C: So it was kind of, we actually get a taste of it before like we’re just like getting lost and like, where am I going, cause you didn’t want to just like go up and ask some random person, just be like, do you know where this room is? $$4YL2EE143C: And in February, March, they have the day the grade eights to come. And so they get to see the school.
The importance of extracurricular activities as a means of connecting students to their school and to peers was mentioned by youth, parents and educators in all three Phases and in most every Focus Group. Interestingly enough, many students who were active in such activities at the elementary level were anxious about joining once in high school. The feeling of being a ‘little fish in a big sea’ was overwhelming for some and youth shared with us their feelings that they weren’t “good enough” or that such activities were more appropriate for older students.

As with many other enablers, students in Phase I were not yet able to speak to the impact of school activities, however grade 9 and 10 students in Phases II and III did. What we heard was that although insecurities did create a barrier for some students, those who through their own volition or the encouragement of others joined teams or participated in after-school activities, found it a great way to make friends and to find their own niche in their new school.

Examples:

$$\text{YC1EE174D: it’s like an athletic school and I like sports and stuff so I thought that if I’m not really good at academics, than I can become an athlete and stuff.}$$

$$\text{YC1EE134A: You get to know the people a little bit better on the same team. YCEEA Participant: And you become friends with your team mates and stuff.}$$

$$\text{YC1EE231B: Well, I met a few friends from soccer and so then I just started hanging out with them and their friends. So, ya, just, they didn’t like, make fun of me or anything. They accepted me, ya, it’s pretty good.}$$

$$\text{YCEED Participant: I think like, getting involved in like...the different councils or clubs helps. Cuz you meet people not only in your grade, but in older grades, who can kind of help you cuz they’ve been through it and they’ve, like they’ve already settled in.}$$

$$\text{YC1EEA: There is a thing called 'Natural Helpers' that I was in when I was in grade nine and when I went there, I didn’t have any of my close friends with me, but I met lots of new people and lots of older students too, so I didn’t feel so out of place. So just general clubs like that, that are open to anyone.}$$
Young people spoke eagerly about the specialized courses and programs and extra help offered by their schools. Opportunities to access the kind of assistance they need and be part of programs helped maintain their interest in school despite other classes they found "boring", facilitated the discovery of their own talents, and highlighted ways in which they can succeed presently as well as in terms of their future goals.

Examples:

$$1YC1EE156B: Drama helped me care less about what other people think of me so I’m a bit happier, more carefree.

$$1YC1EE193F: I love my tutor. They make school fun with it. Facilitator: do you guys have peer tutors, or adult tutors? $$1YC2EE189F: We have like university [students], like they just finished- $$1YC1EE193F: Yeah, she’s young. Facilitator: Okay, and do you think it makes a difference in terms of how helpful it is? $$1YC1EE193F: Hell, yes. $$1YC2EE188F: The ones that are close to our age cause they know- $$1YC2EE189F: Yeah, they explain it better. $$1YC1EE187F: I like when they use hands on experience stuff. Like use your hands to learn. $$1YC1EE193F: No, I like my tutor. She’s very good. She’s in university. $$1YC1EE193F: And they know every damn thing.

$$1YL2EE153A: Some of the After School Programs I guess, like 'Counting On You'- C.O.Y.- ...like they’re good. Facilitator: What’s C-O-Y-? $$1YL2EE153A: It’s for like, every subject if you have trouble, you go to it and there’s teachers that help you get sorted or like, what you have trouble with you can say, ‘Oh, I don’t know how to do this’, they teach you, they show you how to get better at it. $$1YL1EE152A: Basically like, doing your homework while being supervised by a teacher. Facilitator: And it’s after school? $$1YL2EE153A: Yah, Tuesdays and Thursdays.

$$1YC2EE227B: I chose this school because of the cooking and stuff they have. Because my future career is cooking, right. So I’m, I’ve already got college set up for cooking. That’s why I came here because they have a good cooking class and stuff here, so I’m just like I should try it out and I’m enjoying it, so. I picked something good.

$$2YCEEB Participant: I found that the music programme made me feel comfortable in the school. We had music in first semester last year.

$$4YC2EE134B: I’m in the French immersion programme, and I find all of my French immersion classes are so much better than any other class, because even if I’m not doing a good in the classes as I want to, I like going to them because everyone’s who’s in the French immersion, you basically have almost all your classes with them so you’re more close to the people, and the teachers are so much more nicer, and they care so much more about your because you’re with them every single semester, every single year. $$4YC2EE137B: And they make it fun.
One of the barriers youth spoke the most passionately about were teachers they found to be disrespectful, unfair and mean. Happily, many of the same young people also noted the tremendous impact of good teachers – those who treat them with respect, are fair and open-minded and who make learning fun and engaging. Unlike many of the other enablers to transition, youth across all three Phases were able to speak to the importance of good teachers. Although Phase I students had not yet experienced high school teachers, they were able to speak about the important role good teachers play in their schooling. This theme was carried through Phases II and III as students in these later Phases echoed similar sentiments about what makes a “good” teacher.

It is interesting to note that while students used words such as “fun”, “nice”, “helpful” “teach in different ways”, “friendly” to describe good teachers, they did not see a good teacher as being one who is too easy or does not assign work. In fact, just the opposite as many students indicated that grade 8 teachers who were “too easy” on them, made the transition into grade 9 harder. Students were able to differentiate between teachers who are fair yet strict, compared to teachers who they see as meting out punishments unfairly. One of the main differences lies in expectations. Students spoke positively about teachers who had clearly set boundaries and who were also able to be flexible when necessary and to incorporate a sense of humour into their teaching.

Examples:

$1YCEEG Participant: You want people who are helpful and teachers who know how to like, teach in different ways. So good teachers...

$3YLEEB Participant: It’s also nice to like have like really cool teachers cause if you have really cool teachers that you can count on to like, like help you out with [personal] things but there’s also yeah like they won’t cop you, yeah like you don’t wanna tell your parents cause those things are embarrassing so you don’t wanna tell your parents but there’s like your friends and teachers.

$$1YC1EE159B: Like, like, in Elementary school I didn’t really like English or Language Arts as they called it, and then when I came to second semester here it became my favourite class because the teacher’s just really nice and she marks us well and she makes class fun... She lets us go into our own little groups, she doesn’t like, pick assigned groups she just like, ‘Ok, here’s your assignment, go like, work’.

$$1YC1EE157B: Yeah, a lot of my teachers...just want us to get the work done so...they’ll allow us to listen to MP3’s and ipods and all that, most of my teachers if we’re getting our work done.

$$1YC2EE160B: I’ve also noticed that the new teachers, like the new teachers that we’re getting are like, a lot nice compared to the older ones.

$$1YC1FF117B: ...Nous devons être plus proche, comme un ami. On peut leur faire confiance et ils peuvent nous faire confiance. Notre prof... il était comme un ami. Tous les élèves soupaient avec lui... Et en plus, il faisait des blagues avec nous, on lui
parlait. Et tous les élèves de sa classe avaient réussi... Il s'arrêtait toujours pour retourner en arrière pour aider les élèves. Et aussi, il nous parlait comment on pouvait s'améliorer.

$$1YC1EE159B: Well, my English teacher...she has her limits, she has her boundaries, but like, she also like, listens to people and gives them like, she listens really well and she gives people like, good suggestions.

$$1YC1EE158B: I think the teachers are probably the biggest in the transition 'cuz if they're really good and they're helpful it makes it a lot easier. $$1YC1EE158B: Telling you where other classes are, telling you rules, just letting you know about the school. $$1YC2EE160B: And just be nice.... $$1YC1EE158B: And tell you about sports teams and things to do. $$1YC1EE159B: And like, if you get to know the teachers through like, extra-curricular activities that they host or like, extra help at lunch or something, then that's really good. Participant: Yeah, it helps a lot. $$1YC1EE159B: To get to know the teachers.

$$5YC1EE076B: Mrs. J- is really good like, she'd go out of her way to help. With anything. $$5YC1EE081B: Mr. M- is good. I have him first period. He's very nice. He'll do anything for you

$$3YL2EE234C: I find the French department teachers were really nice and they were willing to like get to know you beyond school and become your friends. Become the same level as you instead of you looking at them as your teacher, you’re looking at them as your friends so you can talk about problems and everything – not just for school but for you know. So I really like the French department teachers.... It’s just like they talk to you, not just about work and school, they talk to you about what you – like say you’re not going to be here for one day because you’re at soccer or something, they’ll ask how it was and if you scored or something, or if you score a goal they’ll congratulate you. They’re really just friendly toward you... You can talk to them and joke around with them, and they won’t mind really. There’s a limit of course, but they don’t really mind so it’s like you can pretty much do whatever you want. They’ll interact with the whole class and everything instead of just sitting there and doing nothing.

$$5YC1EE126A: Like if there’s a teacher you really like and they like you too, they want you to succeed, they help you. Like Miss P likes me and now I’m doing really good. I was having trouble the one time with an English assignment. I didn’t know how to end it, and Miss P was trying to help me, and I thought that was really nice, because like I like English a lot, and I was just having the hardest time.

$$5YC1EE126A: In math like, when I first started the grade nine math I found it a bit difficult, and Mr. C would always be like – “I’m not trying to scare you about this but this is all you have to do” and he’d like show us little basic steps. Then he’d review.

**Having a connection to an older student.** Youth spoke in detail about the many ways in which having a connection to an older student eases their transition. For many young people, an older sibling fulfills this role, while for others, they have a
cousin or neighbour a year or so ahead of them at the same high school, or even an adult they know and trust. Phase I Grade 8 students who already had this connection in place spoke about their transition with confidence as issues which concerned others did not worry them.

Examples:

$2YL1EE059A: I know some people there. Like, I know the guidance counsellor because I’ve played on his son’s hockey team. So that’s good because I think he has a good impression of me. Hopefully. And uh, he also taught my mom, so that’s pretty good.

$4YC1EE060G: well, my mom says I should go to X High School cause some of my cousins go there. And instead of having to find all these people to give me directions, my cousins will be there to say, “okay, that room’s over there”. I wanna actually go there too, it’s just because of that reason. Instead of going to find all my stuff on my own, I can have my cousins help me.

In Phases II and III, grade 9 and 10 students were able to look back on their first semester at school and highlight the benefits of having someone show them where their classes are located, make introductions to peers, provide advice about teachers and courses and in effect, pave the way for them.

Examples:

$$1YC1EE157B: Yeah, my Grade Twelve friends they, ‘cuz they've been in the school for four years now so they helped me and they told me everything I need to know. Facilitator: So what kind of things did they help you with? $$1YC1EE157B: Like, where the classes are, they told me like, directions and everything and they told me like, what teachers are really good (laughter) and one’s that they don’t like, and they told me about the programs too.

$$1YL1EE182E: It was helpful ‘cuz I have an older sister and she came here and she told me like, ‘Oh yeah like, this is this’ and she…she said, she’s like, she told me that like, some teachers are easy, some teachers are hard… she kinda helped me like, she’s like, ‘Well, if you have like English and Math in different semesters that’s really good for you, you can focus on one, you can focus on the other, so you’re not clustered with too much work’, like little things like that.

$$3YL1EE147B: My older brother cause I hang out with a lot of his friends all the time and in they’re tell me like just like tell me about it, I wasn’t really that worried and then they’re like helping me with it and stuff… Like getting to know the school, like telling me where my locker was, tell me if my math teacher’s good they’re like oh, your math teacher is horrible, you don’t want her, all this stuff, you don’t want to do this to her, don’t fall asleep in classes.
Friends. While already knowing someone in high school appears to offer protective elements in the beginning stages of transition, having friends move into high school with young people or making friends quickly once at school, is an important enabler throughout the process of transition. Phase I students spoke about the ways in which they assume friends will help in their transition.

Examples:

$1YCEEG Participant: the whole thing’s really new to you and um so when your friends are like telling you they’ll be there for and they’ll keep in touch and stuff so it really kind of helps emotionally.

$3YLEEB Participant: Friends. I think that's the thing if you choose good friends cause your parents aren't gonna be there. Your parents aren't going into high school with you so if you choose good strong friends you know that are durable and they’re there for you then I think like that'll work. Sometimes you'll see something happening but nobody can say hey stop bugging my kid you have to deal with the situation so that that kid doesn't bug you

$4YC1EE012C: I think if you have one good friend, that's good enough.

On the other hand, Phase II and III students spoke concretely about the ways their friends assist them in navigating their social, academic and personal lives, and thus facilitate a positive transition experience for them.

Examples:

$1YC1EE168C: Like, everyone helps each other whenever they need it. Like some subjects like, other people are good at, so then your friends can help you if you’re not strong in that subject.

$1YC2EE215I: I think...you have like a few friends and not necessarily good friends because it’s not like you can force something like that but if you had a few people to talk to like if you need help or even just with school work or something personal, like as long as you have someone to talk to.
$$3YL1EE147B:$$ The year really depends on like, if you’ve got friends or not ’cause you’re going to feel more comfortable if you have friends.

$$4YC1EE105C:$$ My, most of my friends, they’ve been very, very, very supportive. They’ve been helping me with my work I’ve been having trouble with. And yeah, they’ve just been a very, very big part.

$$1YC2EE216A:$$ I remember during grade nine, second semester I go to sit down, my pants they split on my leg in Science… and I’m like, I texted my cousin ‘Get your ass to the washroom. Bring your stuff from fashion; you have to sew my pants.’ …

$$1YC2EE229B:$$ Your friends really help you along with it cause if you’re just coming here and you know absolutely no one, sure you can make new friends but you don’t have that like, connection that you had through other years before, so it’s kind of, it’s harder.

$$3YC2EE254A:$$ They’re just there for you when you have problems. They’re just there to talk things out and everything’s cool. When you’re making bad choices they’ll tell you you’re not going anywhere.

$$5YC2EE124A:$$ I’d say definitely friends. Because they’re with you in the high school so if you have supportive friends then it’s going to be really easy for you.

**Parents.** Although not discussed as much as friends, youth spoke about the ways their parents support them and help to overcome their anxieties about high school. They noted the ways in which their parents help them with their transition – through active encouragement, helping with schoolwork and reminding them about deadlines.

Examples:

$$1YC2EE176D –$$ well yeah, my mom makes sure that I do really well in terms of my grades and stuff. She’s more harder on me in terms of my work… I am still not doing well in my classes, but she calls and makes sure that I’m in class and everything.

$$3YL1EE142B:$$ Well my mom’s a high school teacher so she told me about like kind of like the background stuff so it helped me a lot ’cause I thought math was going to horrible, really hard so I got scared.

$$4YL2EE114D$$ My dad helps me out a lot too. He just makes sure I stay in line at school and do all my homework.

$$1YC2EE228B:$$ Well, I guess the parents will always help you…cause after like I came to my school and my marks [dropped]. And I was really upset about that but my parents were like, you know, you just try your best and like whatever you get like, it doesn’t matter, right. Like, as long as you’ve given, you put in your full effort, so I was kind of like encouraged. They kept encouraging me to do better. They were like, supporting me all the time so I guess I felt more comfortable.
Fresh Starts/False Starts: Young People in Transition from Elementary to Secondary School

My mom...she had to study like really hard in school. She was like, stressing herself out and she just told me "don't stress out, just try your hardest and that's all that matters", and stuff. Even if they try to be supportive and understanding, even if they can't really understand what you're going through. If they just try to, then it's really helpful.

Youth themselves. Young people in all three Phases were incredibly insightful about their own role in the success of their transition. They spoke about how they trusted their own instincts and took courses they were interested in, of the importance of a positive attitude and self-confidence, of working to improve their marks and making an effort to meet new people.

Examples:

$3YLEEB Participant: I took English because that's what I enjoy, I like writing. And I didn't want pressure in my first year, grade 9 to start off with a lot of homework and have a really negative attitude for the rest of high school so I just didn't want the pressure so I took English because I like to do it and that's what I'm really good at.

$1YC1EE156B: Your own attitude to it, if you come to High School and you want to do well, it's more likely that you'll have a good transition then if you don't want to, if you're just not caring.

$5YC2EF071A: Since last year, I've probably changed quite a bit. Just it's such a big step going to high school, you just kind of like, change with it. But I think its all good things. I have more friends, not just like a tight group. I have that plus a lot more. And, yes, and also like, mark wise I guess.

$1YC2EE216A: I think I'm a lot less self-conscious and stuff. Like I came here in grade nine and I was having a weird fit to begin with. I was so scared about what everyone would think. I don't know why. I'd be just walking down the hall and I'd be like, holding on to a certain bag or wearing a certain headband, and if someone just looked at me I'd think 'Oh no, they don't like my headband, oh my god'. But things like that now, I'd be walking around and if someone said something I don't care. Because I met a lot of people who are close to me as friends. Not only I changed, but my best friends around me changed.

$4YC1EE135B: when I came here I met a lot more friends and stuff and then, you know, I started being more inspired with the kind of stuff I do. Like I skateboard, I bike, and I play guitar and stuff, and when I was in grade eight I never really wanted anybody to know that. Now I go to the music room every day and I jam with people and that kind of stuff.

$4YCEEB Participant: When I came here you know, I just kind of felt more motivated to start working harder. And now I've been spending more time picking my career options and stuff, and I plan to do something in the medical field or something you know. In grade eight I wouldn't have thought of that.
Suggestions from Youth

In each of our 79 youth Focus Groups, we looked to participants to inform us as to what would help them, as well as future students, transition successfully. We wanted to know what would improve their transition from elementary school and enhance their experience once in high school. Three main questions were posed in order to gain various perspectives:

1. Who has been helping you settle into high school and how are they helping?
2. What would it take to make high school a better/more successful experience for you? What can young people do to make their own transitions more successful?
3. What advice would you give schools/teachers/parents about how to help kids get ready for high school?

In analyzing suggestions arising from these questions and other questions, three separate themes emerged: (1) effective practices to keep youth engaged at school/transition successfully; (2) advice about redesigning schools for student success/successful transition; and (3) advice to school, parents and youth about how prepare for high school.

As with other areas of discussion, our 596 youth participants offered their ideas honestly, with clarity, and often with humour. In order to present their suggestions clearly, we have categorized their answers into the following headings: suggestions to other youth, suggestions to schools, and suggestions to parents.

Suggestions to other youth

Young people throughout our Focus Groups enthusiastically offered suggestions to younger students on how to make their transition easier and more successful. At times their advice was based on what they did and what worked well for them. Other advice came from their mistakes and was based on hindsight. They spoke honestly about the consequences of their actions and the ways in which they are struggling now due to behaviours in their first year of high school. Focus Group participants were eager to reassure transitioning youth, to offer suggestions relating to their social life, work habits and extra-curricular activities and to provide advice as to their behaviours.

Don’t be scared. Grade 9 and 10 youth (Phases II and III) were quick to want to reassure incoming grade 8 students that high school is not as frightening as elementary school teachers and older peers may have told them. As noted earlier in the Barrier section, youth felt strongly that elementary level teachers exaggerated the difference between elementary and high school and scared them needlessly.
Examples:

$$1YC2EE169C: \text{It's not as bad as you think it is. Don't think it's really scary cos the first day you'll be like, really into it and you'll be excited and want good marks.}$$

$$2YC2FF079C: \text{Peut-être être ouvert à ce qui va arriver ? Parce que chaque génération a une différente approche à une chose. Il y en a qui sont plus matures que d'autres générations ; donc cela dépend d'eux autres. Il faut qu'ils soient prêts à voir comme... il y a du grand monde et tu n'es pas comme à l'élémentaire ; tu es habitué que tout le monde est pareil. Bien, là, une fois que tu viens ici, il y du monde vraiment différent et il faut que tu les acceptes.}$$

$$5YC1EE067A: \text{Don't be afraid of like, the other students. Just because he's from Grade Twelve or something, don't be like afraid if you have to find your class or something it's like 'Yo, where's - ?'; they've all been where you are.}$$

$$3YLEEB Participant: \text{I'd just tell them "don't listen to what your teacher says cos in grade eight my teacher told us... that high school would be so bad so I took that into consideration, that's why I was, "Oh man, high school's going to be so scary" and everything. And it was like "Hell, no". It wasn't like what she said. She was more strict than some of the high school teachers are.}$$

$$4YC1EA129A: \text{I just felt like telling all the grade nines 'don't worry, next year will be better'}.$$

Be yourself. One of the strongest messages arising from youth was importance of “being yourself.” Many young people noted the pressure they felt in elementary school to act a certain way eased once they entered high school. They encouraged incoming youth not to pretend to be someone they are not and to present themselves as who they are.

Examples:

$$1YL2EE081H: Be who you want to be. Don't let other people influence you.\]$$

$$1YL1EE083H: Don't change the way you are because other people like the way that you're trying to become.$$  

$$2YC2FF079C: \text{Il faut qu'ils essaient de ne pas trop se croire pour une autre personne. ... Il arrive une petite affaire et c'est comme la fin du monde. Il faudrait qu'ils soient sûrs d'eux-mêmes ; pas comme avoir besoin d'être quelqu'un d'autre.}$$

$$1YL2EE209H: \text{And it's better to be yourself and not maybe be accepted by everyone, than to get so wrapped up in trying to be accepted and then like forget really who you are and be like "Who am I today? Am I wearing yellow today or did I wear that yesterday? Is yellow too loud?" that sort of thing. Just be yourself.}$$

$$4YL2EE089A: \text{When you come to school just be yourself. Don't be something you're not just because you're in the school.}$$
Don’t like worry, be yourself and stuff. I’d say just like, be yourself... Like, don’t try to act like, to enter into another group or something. Like, find friends that are like you.

Talking about not falling into what other people do. Like don’t follow other people, cos it’s so really stupid.

Be yourself, and don’t be a follower, be a leader. You know? Don’t go for peer pressure, don’t go for this or that thing.

Make smart choices. Along with encouraging students to be themselves, Phase II and III participants hoped new students make smart choices as they enter high school. They maintained that new students should not cause “drama”, “talk garbage” or be judgemental. They should avoid drugs and alcohol, make a good first impression and not skip or be late for class. Socially and academically, participants encouraged new students to make the best choices.

Examples:

Don’t talk garbage. ... don’t make rumours.

Don’t go in the wrong groups.

Don’t put people down, like don’t put them down in any way and make sure they know like, not to be like someone else...

So like.. don’t judge, like, don’t judge people just ‘cuz.

Just like, don’t be late for class all the time.

Basically when you’re going into grade nine or like, throughout the years of high school, basically you’ll do well if you stay away from the bad stuff and if you study. That’s pretty much the most important thing. Facilitator: Okay, so what’s the bad stuff? Like, you know, drugs, drinking and... ya, that’s basically it.

I’d probably say that you should use your head and don’t, don’t get into anything stupid. Don’t make friends with people that do stupid stuff, and so, pick your friends carefully. Study and just be confident that you’re going to do well.

I would tell them like, don’t choose Academic so that you look smart. If you’re not going to do good, choose something else. And don’t choose Applied because you think you’re not going to succeed, choose Academic and work your way up.
You want to be known for good reasons. You don’t want it to be like “Oh there’s the kid who’s hot”. Or you don’t want to be known for “Oh there’s that kid who got in a fight with that kid”. Just stuff like that. Like really stupid stuff, like even though you know it shouldn’t matter, it does.

I think that when the grade nine’s come, they should stay down a little. Like not make a huge scene, like I said before, if you make a huge scene the teachers may not take you seriously, and if you screw up or joke around in the first year, the teachers are going to think you’re always like that. Even if you change, they won’t take you seriously.

You should watch who you hang out with, and if someone tries to pick a fight and you know you didn’t do nothing, just ignore them or talk to [a teacher] or something. Stay out of the drama.

The thing I’d mostly tell a kid coming into high school is no matter how much you want to do it, don’t skip. It only kills you in the end. Like I failed math because I skipped so much.

Have the right attitude. Along with being true to oneself and making the right choices, young people spoke encouragingly about the importance of having a good attitude. A positive attitude was seen by participants across all three Phases as being a necessary element of a successful transition.

Examples:

They should be confident - self-confident and strong.

Don’t be afraid to express yourself...

Comment c’est, être responsable de moi-même, parce que mon casier, c’est n’importe quoi.

Don’t care about what people say about you. And don’t take what the teachers do to you personally.

Don’t be shy.

Just be open to change.

Trust yourself.

Always put yourself out there. Like I’m the kind of person, like I don’t really regret things, but one thing I didn’t do in grade nine was put myself out there. I was like so shy and stuff.

Have a positive attitude and have an open mind.
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$2YCEEB$ Participant: You have to be more self-disciplined and responsible. ... It’s really different. The teacher will give you homework or an assignment and he’ll not remind you when it’s due... You have to be self-disciplined to be on top of your work if you want to do good.

$3YC2EE248A$: You have to be motivated. $3YC2EE254A$: Self respect. If you don’t respect yourself, no-ones going to, you know. And then you’re not going to want to branch out.

$4YC2EA130A$: I would say grade nine sometimes, the grade eights come into high school really cocky. They think they ‘all that’. $4YC1EA129A$: Don’t be shy either.

**Do your work and ask for help.** Phase II and III students were well aware of the importance of keeping up with schoolwork and of seeking help when needed, both in grade 8 as well as once in high school. They encouraged incoming students to do their homework, study for their classes and ask for help, if necessary.

Examples:

$1YL2EE179E$: I think the best advice you can get for going to school is go to class, do your work and, yeah.

$1YC2FF118B$: Être prêt pour le secondaire, comme, savoir que ça va être plus difficile et tu dois te préparer pour savoir que ça va être plus... que ça va être différent.

$3YL1EE140B$: You do your work, you’ll be fine

$3YC2EF136A$: If you weren’t a person to study in grade school like, you should try it in high school ’cuz it actually does help if you study.

$4YL1EE090A$: You’ve got to be ready to do the homework.

$1YCEED$ Participant: Really like, focus because you’re at school to learn and really like, if you’re not doing that then what’s the point of going?

$1YL1EE235C$: If they’re really not liking it, they can go to the guidance counsellor. You can go there and just talk and try to come up with some things.

$2YCEEB$ Participant: Not to mess around in grade eight cos you really don’t care about your math tests. Like you get an ‘R’ on it you’re just ‘okay’, and then you don’t realize you really need that stuff for the next year.

$3YC2EE248A$: Work hard. You think it’s going to go away, but it’s always going to come to bite you when you don’t have that credit and you need that.

$4YC1EE135B$: One thing I would say to someone who’s transitioning, is to do your best before you come to high school, to get good grades, because if you fall behind in
grade eight but you still pass, you’re going to fall way behind in grade nine. Then you’re trying to catch up. Like they start off from where grade eight ended, so if you’re not at that point where grade eight ended then you’re probably behind and you going to be called one of the dumb kids where you’re separated. And then eventually you develop differently. You know I find, like some kids feel degraded and they’re not one of the smart kids of the school. And they eventually try doing dumb stuff, and then it leads to that.

Join activities and make friends. One of the most discussed themes arising from youth suggestions to other youth is the importance of having friends. Young people in Phases II and III spoke about how joining clubs and teams can facilitate new friendships and how being open to new people and experiences is an integral part of a successful transition.

Examples:

$$1YL1EE204H. \text{ Join some clubs, make friends if you’re new.}$$

$$1YC1EE164C. \text{ I’d say, like find a best friend. Like, you don’t have to find a group of people or whatever. Just find one good friend you can stay with and then you know, get more as you go along.}$$

$$1YC1EE159B: \text{ Also like, when its like, the end of grade eight, when you’re transferring out of your elementary school to your high school and you’re leaving a lot of friends behind, it’s like, important to like, hang out with your old friends like, for awhile before going into High School, but it’s more important to like, look ahead into high school and start meeting new people, instead of like, looking back and missing new, uh, old friends.}$$

$$4YL2EA111D: \text{ I would say involve yourself, like get yourself involved. Like know your teachers, join a team, a committee or whatever.}$$

$$4YC2FA100A : \text{ Je dirais comment faire pour les devoirs parce que tu es tout seul comme... tu peux en avoir comme plusieurs de finis dans plusieurs classes.}$$

$$5YC1EE079B: \text{ Get involved with things, like sports teams. That’s how I like, met lots of people.}$$

$$1YCEEA Participant: \text{ If you see someone you like but you know they’re not the most popular ones, maybe a little bit weird, I think you should always say ‘yes’ if you have a chance to know someone.}$$

$$1YL1EE233C. \text{ Get more involved. Like what I see is that if people don’t get involved in this school, they don’t participate in anything, but if they participate in everything then they meet more people and they get more friends.}$$
$$2YCEEB$$ Participant: I think getting involved in different activities – like programmes or clubs, or sports teams, and stuff is really good, cos you can ask the older people on the teams and you can watch things they do, so you have other people to help you.

$$2YCEEB$$ participant: To get involved because once you get out of high school, you don’t really have all opportunities, and also resumes and stuff when you’re applying for university. My brother has just realized how much better it is if you got involved in school sports teams. You actually have it all filled, but if you don’t get involved in things, then everything’s blank, and the university would say "why would I want them if they don’t get involved?".

$$3YC2EE251A$$ Get involved with your school, like joining sports or something.

**Suggestions to schools**

**Transition.** In discussions about what would improve their experience of transition, students proposed activities at both the elementary as well as high school level. They spoke about the benefits of taking grade 8 students into high schools to familiarize them with the school, to ‘shadow’ grade 9 classes, and to have presentations from current grade 9 students who could tell them what to expect. Although many of these students had opportunities to visit their high schools prior to beginning grade 9, in most cases, these tours took place in the evening when classes were not in session. Youth suggestions were specifically directed as ways in which incoming, transitioning students could see for themselves what a high school day looks like.

Examples:

$2YL1EE059A$ - We could go through like, maybe a day of class or something...

$2YL2EE056A$ - As group of grade 8s or whatever, we’ll be assigned to a grade 9 class...

$2YL2EE058A$ - There’s like, so that like, you could go with them to their classes and get to meet teachers and you get to see how they teach.

$$1YL2EE181E$$: I would have, I would bring like, a whole bunch of Grade Eights from different schools, like all over, and so like, see how we have an auditorium, we’d have Grade Nines and stuff and like, you would just have like, a big discussion like we’re having now, but with like, more people and then like, see like, what views they have on High School and just tell them, 'No, it’s not going to be like that', stuff like that.

$$4YL2EE141C$$: I think it would’ve been cool if we all like came as a class to shadow a class maybe, like follow them around to see what it’s actually like. Instead of following just one person. So you would have been with your friends to see what the school is like.
Other suggestions were directed towards elementary school teachers. Students expressed frustration at teachers who exaggerated the difference between elementary and high school. Many felt that their teachers needlessly scared them with an unrealistic picture of uncaring high school teachers, rigid rules and a significant increase in the amount and difficulty of the work. One of the main suggestions that came out of the Focus Groups addressed this issue.

Examples:

$2YL2EE056A$: Tell them the truth. $2YL1EE059A$: Yeah. Don’t lie to them

$$2YL1EE227B$: Don’t scare them.

$$2YLEEA Participant$: Don’t give the kids an anxiety attack – they’ll get through it fine.

$$1YC2EE227B$: Tell them the positive stuff about high school, so they don’t think so negative about high school.

$$4YL2EE141C$: You have to encourage them more and just - $$4YL2EE139C$: Not try to scare them. $$4YL2EE138C$: Yeah not try to scare them. Like tell them what’s actually going to happen; not like, you’re gonna get so much homework, you’re gonna freak out, you’re not gonna have any time for your friends. They make it so complicated, but it really isn’t.

Although students resented elementary teachers for scaring them about high school, they also recognized that there is a difference between grade 8 and grade 9 work. They want their teachers to speak to this difference realistically, and to prepare them for it. They ask that this be done by integrating grade 9 work into the end of the grade 8 school year, and thus providing opportunities for students to see high school level work for themselves.

Examples:

$$1YL1EE180E$: Give a student Grade Nine work. In Elementary School, just give them Grade Nine work.

$$4YL2EE115D$: If I was a principal, I would get my grade eight teachers to like towards the end of the year to just pretend that they’re high school teachers for a couple of days and teach them like a high school teacher would and get the kids used to it. $$4YL1EE113$: In grade seven and eight we had exams but they wouldn’t bring your mark down, it would only go up.

$$5YC2EF071A$: Our Grade eight teachers sort of helped us prepare like, our Grade Eight math teacher kind of like, made up a mock math exam for us to do. Like just for an example that showed us what it would be like.
Prepare the kids, that’s all. Make them know what to look forward to. Ya, like just help them to understand what’s coming and that, just like say, oh it’s not going to be like as easy as grade seven and eight. It’s going to be a bit harder. But like don’t forget, it’s not going to be like university hard.

Phase I students were able to look forward and make suggestions as to what high school teachers could do to make their transition less stressful and more successful. One of the main concerns raised during Focus Group discussions was a fear of getting lost in a new and much larger school and of not knowing what is expected of them. The latter issue was one also mentioned by Phase II and III students. While both issues are generally resolved within the first few weeks of school, they are nonetheless at the forefront of their minds and contributing their anxiety about transition.

Examples:

$1Y2EE002A: Help us not get lost.

$4YL1EA035D: Show us where everything is.

$4YC1EE061G: kind of give them, maybe for the first week, give them a chance.
$4YC1EE061G: or just until you start getting used to it. $4YC1EE063G: maybe a month.

$1Y2EE158B: I think the teachers are probably the biggest in the transition ’cuz if they’re really good and they’re helpful it makes it a lot easier....Telling you where other classes are, telling you rules, just letting you know about the school.

$4YC1EE158B: Well the grade nine teachers, they could have for the first few days, just explain what you’re going to be doing throughout the whole course and stuff, instead of just giving out work.

In Phase I and II, youth also spoke about the importance of transition activities designed to help them make friends.

Examples:

$1YCEEJ Participant: So I’d kind of like it if I mean it was mandatory to do one extra-curricular activity. Even though some people wouldn’t like that. But not necessarily like it wouldn’t have to be like a sport... Yeah. Kind of like any kind of club. I would like that because you’d have to do it, so because everyone has to do it, it wouldn’t be as awkward. So it’s kind of, that would sort of be easier if there was that one mandatory club. Even if it was just for your first year.
$5YC2EE024A: Keep people from the same schools together. Like homeroom, like one or two classes throughout the year... $5YC2EE018A: Maybe having like, one or two people from this school in each one of your classes, like a different person. $5YC2EE025A: Yea. $5YC2EE018A: That way, you still meet other people, but they still can know your face, like kind of rely on? $5YC2EE019A: Yea, you’re more comfortable.

$$1YC2EE213I: I wish we’d had a camping trip. Facilitator: Ok. $$1YC2EE213I: In the beginning of the year so like that we could squish all the grade nines together. Not like squish them but get to know everyone cause we’re going to do the grad thing right, we might as well get used to each other and- Facilitator: So a grade nine camping trip? $$1YC2EE213I: Yea, cause I know my friend told me about in another school they had a camping trip and it was really fun. Facilitator: Ok, and when do you think ideally this trip would take place? $$1YC2EE213I: Within the first three months or two months... that would be good... $$1YC2EE212I: Yea, so that way when you’re going to school you’re not like a complete stranger ’cause you know people.

$$5YC1EE080B: A day at school where everyone gets to know each other. Yes. Something like that.

**High school teachers: behaviour.** One of the most common areas of discussion across all 79 youth Focus Groups was the impact and the behaviour of teachers. Young people in all three Phases spoke clearly and consistently about what makes a good teacher and how teachers can better engage students in their classrooms and within the walls of the school. These suggestions correspond with the barriers and enablers discussed earlier in this report. Clearly stated suggestions from youth admonish teachers to avoid problematic behaviours such as sexism, picking favourites, rushing through curriculum and being mean.

Examples:

$1YCEE0D Participant: Teachers shouldn’t be sexist.

$1YCEEG Participant: Take your time to teach the students ’cause they might not get it.

$$1YCEF Participant: Act nicer, treat everybody the same.

$$1YL2EE154A: Don’t judge someone just as soon as you meet them like, get to know them properly. $$1YL1EE150A: Yah some teachers, they make an early judgment and they treat you that way for the rest of the year. $$1YL1EE152A: By your appearance mostly...

$$1YC1EE187F: Like say when we ask for teachers help for a question. And most of the time they just do it for you and you don’t know what they’re doing. And so like doing that, maybe sit down and relax, like help them understand step by step. $$1YC2EE188F: Yeah, and not get rushed. $$1YC2EE191F: Teachers want to move
onto the next subject because they have to like get all the subjects, so they’re rushing and stuff, but it’s not like their fault because the board of education is telling them that they need to go through all these subjects in one semester. So if they had all the time to teach all the subjects.

$$YC1EE226B: ... sometimes, I know like kids in my class, they need attention but teachers don’t give it to them because they don’t think they deserve it.

$$YC2EE137B: Ask them to slow down and ask the students how they’re doing on it. Make sure everyone’s caught up.

$$YC2EE124A: And I think the teachers that don’t like a student, they shouldn’t be hard on them. They should like encourage them more and try to like the student. Even if they don’t like the student, they should be more encouraging, instead of like always down and criticizing the students.

$$YC1EE158B: And just be nice. $$YC1EE137B: They gotta be more understanding and they gotta know where you’re coming from.

$$YC1EE083B.   Like listen to me.
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$\text{YCEEB Participant: Just talk to them more and listen. Like ask them questions about how they're feeling with bullying, if things are okay...}$

In Phase III, students noted that when they are seen, heard and understood, they are more likely to connect with that teacher and subsequently, be engaged in that class.

Examples:

$\text{YCEEB Participant: I think adults and teachers should pay attention to their students. It's hard for one teacher to pay attention to everyone, like it's really difficult, but I find student work better if they feel that someone cares about them.}$

$\text{YL2EE267E: Um I think like to help kids like stay in class and actually do well I think you should get to know them. And then see like what they need help with and what issues they have and then like and then like talk with them about it. And like, just to get to know people, that's probably like the best thing you can do.}$

$\text{YCEED Participant: Maybe go a bit beyond being a teacher and start being a friend. It's easier to learn when you have someone you have sort of a relationship with instead of just someone standing up there talking.}$

$\text{YC2EE216A: Like help to make them come out of their shells. Be more professional about it. Like talk to them, like ask them what they're interested in, give them options, and even the kids who aren't into very many things at all, they should say 'Well have you tried this?' That always helps them open up. YC2EE221A: Make them feel at home. Like talk to the kids and don't ignore them.}$

$\text{YC2EE216A: Like we're here for six hours a day, a quarter of our day, five days a week mostly, like more than half of the year. We only get two months off and stuff. We have so much time here we should feel comfortable coming. You don't want to go to a school and have teachers who don't treat you...well. Like, it's supposed to be like a second home for you.}$

**High school teachers: pedagogy.** Across all three Phases, young people had much to say about the ways in which teachers teach them. They had clear views on effective and ineffective pedagogy and offered insightful suggestions as how teachers can better connect with them in the classroom. These suggestions were divided into two main categories, the first being the importance of more personalized teaching strategies.

Examples:

$\text{YC1EE193F: Taking time to understand the students, and understand their weaknesses and know what they need to do to improve cause like they just say all these things, but they need to know exactly what you need to do.}$
I do like when they test us, they review what’s going to be on the test like, word for word and they let me have cheat sheets on it. Facilitator: So what does that mean, they let you have a cheat sheet? $IYC2EE160B: I’ll write out stuff that I think’s gonna be on the test and then the teacher will read it over and sign it, they keep it until the test and then when I have the test they give it to me. Facilitator: To use during the test? $IYC2EE160B: Yeah. $IYC1EE159B: For the way the teachers test me, they like, they summarize the units really well and on the test like, sometimes you would have, you would have something that you learned maybe like, two weeks ago or something, but that’s ok since like, you can’t really complain because you have to learn it and you already learned it so, yeah.

They should cater to like different learning styles. Like this year we should test our learning styles right? And maybe put them in a class, like that, kinds of like that.

Taking time to understand the students, and understand their weaknesses and know what they need to do to improve cause like they just say all these things, but they need to know exactly what you need to do.

Make the school better. Make a medium curriculum. Cause there’s applied, there’s extremely easy, and it’s a joke, and academic is extremely hard. So there should be something in the middle.

I think they should maybe ask what time of learners we are at the beginning of the semester: So they know what kind of learners we are.

Work around our needs better. Try and focus more on how we learn and then, like work with us individually if that’s possible. Try and find a way that we can learn and then keep going down that path.

Well, I find that like younger teachers, since they are less experienced, like they do make mistakes, which makes it interesting but they tend to ask you more like are you ok with this work, like is it too hard? They like really care about how you’re doing because they’re effecting your life and like how you do in their class is going to effect what happens to you later in life so they take it more seriously...

I don’t know if it makes sense, but I think if you better, like we were taught based on what type of learner we are, and like our talents and stuff. Because I’m a visual learner and I learn by like seeing things, like thinking and discussing things and I think we, everybody learns in a different way, but I think we should be taught based on how we learn.

Most teachers are going to be like “I went to teacher’s college, I know how to be a teacher”. They kind of have that attitude when students try to give them their opinions. Well teachers always have a high opinion of themselves, like she pretty much just said, ‘I’m the one with the experience so you don’t get to tell me how to do my job”. But you’re the one doing this job for us right? But they could take into consideration what we’re trying to tell them, and it could help them do their job better.
$$$$1YL2EE237C: I think the main thing I'd like to complain about is school is mostly the teachers. Like if I have a bad teacher that'd mostly be the bad thing for me…
$$$$1YL2EE237C: Yes. Because there’s some teachers who just make everything suck in school, and I think the teachers should be better, and that’d be great.
$$$$1YL1EE235C: … If the teacher could find a way – if they could go to school and be taught how to teach in a certain way that helps everyone better by using more hands-on, I think that would really help us; more varieties of teaching methods.

The second pedagogical area in which youth provided suggestions was about the manner in which teachers present their lesson. Young people do not like classes where teachers teach from their notes and lecture at them. They appreciate hands-on learning opportunities.

Examples:

$2YCEEB Participant: The ministry of boards or whatever you want to call it, they shouldn’t hire like teachers that suck at teaching…. Like, that hand out the sheets and just sit and tell the person to do it and not explain what they’re doing and how to do it.

$$$1YL2EE153A: Kinda liven up the classroom, you know, they don’t make it so boring. $$1YL2EE154A: Not like those teachers that just talk, like the entire period and make you fall asleep.

$$1YL1EA206H. Make the teachers actually interesting. Like some of the teachers that I have are really boring and you just don’t want to listen to them.

$$$1YL1EE235C. If they did more hands-on learning, that would help more of a variety of people because a lot of the teaching methods nowadays are really boring.

$$$1YCEED Participant: I think, particularly when you do hands on things like, labs, that helps, cuz you can see it visually like, if you, if you’re reading it out of a text book or the teacher gives you a note, you can kind of understand it, but it’s like, all in formulas or it’s all in words so then once you see it you’ll understand everything.

The message emerging from youth Focus Groups was that young people respond to teachers who use creative methods of presenting curriculum, who make learning fun and who make efforts to connect students to the material in new and different ways.

Examples:

$$$1YC2EE213I: I find newer teachers, they give you funner activities, like remember Miss C? $$$1YC2EE215I: She made us rap! $$$1YC1EE214I: Oh, yea. $$$1YC2EE215I: To Midsummer's Night Dream!
Teachers like Mr. S- and Ms. H-, Mr. R-, those teachers like, they really make your day, like you want to go to their class ’cuz they joke around and make you feel like, and you actually want like, you really learn from them.

Have fun with your students. Like I would say just make them want to learn like- Yea, you have to grab their attention. Yea, make it fun... like make your students want to go to class ... Yea, like you could be like, I don't want to go to science cause we're just taking down another note. Or yea, like I want to go to science cause we're building a hydraulic car today. We're blowing something up.


Like, make it more enjoyable, less serious.

Have fun with your students. Like I would say just make them want to learn like- Yea, you have to grab their attention. Yea, make it fun.

Like make learning more fun. Like especially the boring classes, like psychology. Math. You know... we’re still kids, and you know kids have really short attention spans sometimes, so just like make class more fun. And if you make class more fun people won’t want to leave class, it’ll be like hey I’ve got class. It’s fun.

Examples wouldn’t be sufficient. You learn a lot by fun.

They should make class way more fun. That’s pretty much why people skip cos it’s really repetitive and it’s really boring – all you do is sit there, you learn a lesson, and then do nothing. So it’s really boring. They should make it more fun... Well in Mr. E’s class for example, he’s a Geography and History and French teacher, so we work really hard and then like on Fridays we play a game, or after he’s done the lesson he’ll put on some music so we could work with, and he just makes it really fun.

More options. Young people had many ideas about how to improve their daily lives at school through expanded course options and improved accessibility to extra-curricular activities. Youth in smaller schools with fewer electives, as well as youth whose schools offered choices only after grade 9 or only to those that can afford the team expenses, noted the importance of such opportunities.
Examples:

$1YLEEB Participant: We should have cooking classes to teach the guys how to cook.
$1YLEEB Participant: And the girls had do like auto shop and wood shop to learn about cars.

$2YCEEB Participant: I think there is more need of life skills... $2YCEEB Participant: Managing our money. $2YCEEB Participant: Paying bills.... $2Y1EE089B: They should just have a course that kind of bundles everything together like staying organized, learning how to fix things just like things you should know.

$4YC1EA013C: Like a beginner soccer team... $4YC1EE012C: Ok. I'd like there to be like a football team for grade nine when you first go there so that - $4YC1EE012C: Yea, so you don't get killed by the grade twelves the first day.

$$1YL2EE210H: Honestly, I think to make school better, I think we should have more electives to be able to take, because you know what? I love the electives that I have right now. Like actually, they’re great.

$$1YC1EE202G: If you had more optional credits... Auto in grade nine. Facilitator: When can you take auto? $$1YC1EE202G: Grade ten. $$1YC1EE198G: There are a lot of courses that are interesting that you can only take when you are in grade eleven or twelve. $$1YC1EE202G: I know friends at other schools you can fast track and take grade eleven courses when you’re in grade ten, but here you can’t.

$$1YC1EE174D: – I would make it big...so it could fit more people. Yeah, so it would have a variety of subjects, because some of the subjects you’re not really interested in and like if they had stuff that you are interested in than you can have an opportunity to do it. But if its small you don’t really have space to be in and do it. If it’s small, they have a small amount of teachers so they can’t really teach some of the subjects you want.

$$2YL1EE116A: More specialized stuff. Like we have Wood Shop and Automotive like, maybe another thing like design or something.

$$2YL1EA115A: I’d have to say that maybe the school board could help by lowering the price of some sports like, rugby was like, one hundred and twenty-some dollars just to get the uniform itself.

$$4YC2EA130A: If they want to keep kids in school they should have other courses too. I think like there’s photography which I like, and if you like machines or tools or stuff, they’d also want to do that. Like Outdoor Ed is another thing that could be a good course.
Class numbers and materials. Students spoke up about class size numbers as well as the need for better and newer classroom materials.

Examples:

$$2YC2EE128B: \text{ Smaller classes, more teachers.}$$

$$5YC1EE015A: \text{ Smaller classes. } 5YC1EE021A: \text{ Yea, 'cause really, the classes are way too big.}$$

$$2YC2EE128B: \text{ I think they should have way smaller classes, I think they're putting them anywhere from twenty to thirty kids, and I think it's way too much. }$$

$$2YC1EE126B: \text{ Or maybe two teachers per class. } 2YC2EE128B: \text{ I think it's too much for the teachers cause they can't spend time with the kids.}$$

$$4YL1EE090A: \text{ there's a lot of computers without mousses, a lot of computers- Many Voices: Better bathrooms. Computers are broken.}$$

$$4YL2EA091A: \text{ I don't know, the text books aren't very good... They're like all ripped up. } 4YL1EE090A: \text{ Same with our science books. }$$

$$4YL2EA091A: \text{ Falling apart.}$$

$$5YL1EE086C: \text{ Good equipment.}$$

$$1YL1EE238C: \text{ We could use better text books at the school. Newer. The ones we're using in certain subjects like business, we're using them from the 1970s. Pretty old stuff, vandalized, falling apart. }$$

$$1YL1EE238C: \text{ I think it would benefit me, with the books not only in better shape, but books that are – newer books.}$$

Regular activities. As with pedagogy, students would like to see fun in their daily lives and interesting ways of relieving boredom throughout their academic year. When asked for suggestions, students spoke about the benefits of injecting fun and interesting activities throughout the school year.

Examples:

$$1YL1EE150A: \text{ Put something in the school that makes you want to come back to school every single day. }$$

$$1YL2EE153A: \text{ Like, if it's a spirit thing make it interesting, don't just say, like it's 'Hat Day' and then 'cuz no one's gonna dress up 'cuz no one really cares 'cuz it's not interesting. }$$

$$1YL2EE154A: \text{ Yah, like at least once a month at the school like, do something like, fun like, everyone can enjoy and have fun together.}$$

$$1YC2EE160B: \text{ Yeah, more school activities like dances, like we have a fair coming up, like more stuff like that where we can actually help people in the community.}$$

$$2YL2EE118A: \text{ More funds for like, field trips and stuff like that, 'cuz it's kinda boring to be in class all day.}$$
Organize more programmes. Get more people to get involved in them. Just more awareness. Get programmes and get high school students from everywhere and have a huge day. You give them activities, and one day it'll be about peer pressure, and one day it'll be about bullying... Just like a full day with different schools from all over.

Have a student day. Just have like everybody just chill for the whole day.... Just have a student day just to yourself. Facilitator: Have you had something like this before? Well there's grade nine days. The last day of school is like that. But that's pretty much it. They should have it like twice in the middle of each semester. Yes, that'd give us a break. It'd be like 'honestly give us a break. This is what we've been working for'. Teachers I'm sure don't want to teach every day, so it'd be like a break for them too.

Cafeteria, lockers, air conditioning. Students in almost every school throughout Phases II and III of the study, had complaints about their school cafeterias, the size and locations of their lockers, and for students in older or poorer schools, the lack of air conditioning. While no student directly linked these issues to a successful transition, they did note ways in which these factors added to feelings of discontent. When asked directly what they needed to make high school a better experience, suggestions in these three areas were widespread.

Examples:

the cafeteria's way too small. If the whole school has one lunch, whoever comes to the cafeteria first they get the bench seats at the table and then if you come late it's jam packed and you have to go outside or somewhere else.

Bigger caf with air conditioner.

Bigger lockers.

Free, healthy foods; free breakfast mornings. In the caf.

The only thing I'd change about our cafeteria is the line up. Yea, the line up. It's always really hot in there so nobody wants to go in there 'cos it's so hot. There's such a big line up at lunchtime, like you don't even get your food until five minutes before the bell goes.

A good cafeteria. Yea, a better cafeteria. It's like French fries – they have no salads or anything.
I’d love if we got air conditioning... That’s one of the reasons why people skip cuz like, if they go outside they don’t want to stay in the school where it’s so hot!
They could put air-conditioning in the school. That would be amazing.

The final area in which students offered suggestions to schools pertains to morning start times and the amount of time they are permitted in between classes (travel time). Young people protested early class start times and wished classes could begin later. They also complained that the time given between classes was barely long enough to get from one class to another (especially in large schools with portables or when changing for gym class). While travel time was noted as feasible though very rushed when going from class to class, it was seen as totally insufficient to provide enough time to go to their lockers or more importantly, speak to a teacher after class about a question or problem. Once again, as grade 8 students had not yet experienced high school, these suggestions come from grade 9 and 10 students in Phases II and III.

Examples:

Well make school start later so people aren’t so grumpy in the morning.

A later start, because kids need their sleep. They say that for teenagers, to be prepared enough for life in the future, jobs in the future, but we actually do need our sleep. I find I can do better in classes with a later start. I can focus more.

I think it’d be cool if we could come to school a little bit later, so I could have more time to sleep in. ... that’s one of the main reasons why I wasn’t coming to classes, it’s because I would sleep...

Longer lunch and travel time, which is the warning bell between the periods.

Well, I said this before already, but more time between classes. Definitely... Yeah, I can’t even get to my locker between class.

Suggestions to parents

Simultaneous to a young person’s move from elementary school into high school, is their transition from childhood to young adulthood, from stages of dependence to a growing independence. In examining the role parents play in their lives and how this role changes as they mature, youth participants offered poignant and often conflicting views of what they need.
While the tension between dependence and independence grows more intense during these years, what is evident from the young people we spoke with, is that although they need their parents to respect their growing autonomy, they very much need and want them in their lives. Youth want their parents to listen to them, support them, trust them, encourage them and give them space to grow.

**Academic life.** Many young people recognized that they still need their parents’ encouragement and help. They appreciate the necessity of boundaries, but want their parents to respect the increased pressures in their lives and not add to them with unrealistic demands.

Examples:

$1YCEEE$ Participant: I also think that... limits or boundaries are a good thing for us because in high school it’ll definitely be more studying, exams and they’ll be so much on your mind to worry about that you might not have time for everything.

$1YC2EE065F$: Make sure that they study a lot.

$1YCEEG$ Participant: Parents...have a lot of expectations at home as well and there’s the whole do your chores but sometimes they have to understand that like as you go into a higher grade you have more of a work load and you have a lot more to balance and you can’t like the chores you don’t mind doing them but sometimes it’s just you priority is school work and they need to like understand that they need to work with that and cooperate with you.

$1YC2EE066F$: Um, I think they should support- I think the parents should support the child but not like...$1YC1EE068F$: Not bully, but support.

$4YL2EE009F$: Um, just help, to help them, help me study, to help, tell the parents to help the kids study and sit down for an hour or two and help them.

$1YC2EE045D$: Um, I think that parents shouldn’t like, expect things from kids. Just telling them to do their best and try their hardest, not comparing them to like, their brothers and sisters.

$$2YC2EE128B$: Yeah, if they get a bad grade, support them... $$2YC1EE126B$: Tell them to persevere. $$2YC2EE125B$: If they get a good grade, congratulate them.

Animatrice : qu’est-ce que les parents pourraient faire pour aider les jeunes à se préparer pour le secondaire ? $$2YL2FF111A : Dirent aux gens des choses réelles.

$$5YL2EE085C$: Maybe, like, give me a little bit more attention when I get better grades.

$$5YC2EE123A$: I think they should also not so much pressure on getting good grades. They should, but not a lot. $$5YC2EE125A$: Not like “Get 100% or you’re
grounded”.

I think it’s also to tell them to be prepared, cos you’re not always going to have amazing teachers, so be prepared to have a bad teacher, cos you will at least once a year, and if you do, work extra hard.

Participant: At first try to push them a little bit, like try and get them motivated to do well in school, but my parents like they don’t bug me about my schoolwork. They leave me alone when it comes to my schoolwork and I just do it on my own...I work better if my parents aren’t pressuring me. I just think there’s other students out there who have parents who expect so much from them, it’s just like for the first year at least, they should tell them to relax and not worry too much. Cos grade ten and eleven is when it starts to get real. So for the transition into high school, I think they should just leave them alone and do their own thing.

Young people are also aware that they ultimately need their parents’ permission in choosing their high school, their courses and their program of study. While they are often amenable to their parents’ opinions and would like them to accompany them to open houses, they want their parents to respect their decisions and allow them to make their own choices.

Examples:

$1YC2EE069F: Um, make sure they actually listen to your child and what school they actually want to go to.

$1YLEEA Participant: I don’t think that parents should like pressure kids into taking subjects they don’t want to take.

$1YL1EE150A: Maybe try to...understand that if you want to go to a specific school like, to an orientation or something, let you go instead of like, being like, ‘No, it’s already to far, there’s no point of going and how’re you going to get there’, like instead of opening all the negative, say the positive. You never know there might be a bus there, or something like that.

$3YL1EE140B: Parents, they shouldn’t be, like they shouldn’t be pushing stuff on their kid like oh, you should take this oh, you should have this kind of average or whatever like you should just tell your kids you know you have to do better if you want to do this. And like just don’t really push them like into doing something they don’t want to do.

$4YL2EE138C: Leave our options open, not try to direct us. $4YL2EE141C: Don’t force us to go to like certain schools, like oh you have to go here cause so –and-so went here, and it’s the best school, and stuff like that.

$2YLEEA Participant: Let them go to the school they want to.

$4YL2EE141C: Just try to let us make our own decisions, cause it’s where we’re gonna be spending the next four years of our lives. We want to make it ours, not theirs.
Social life. As with their academic life, participants in our youth Focus Groups noted about the importance of encouragement. Across all three Phases, young people spoke about wanting their parents’ encouragement in making new friends and trying new activities. Again, they recognize their parents’ role in setting boundaries and protecting them, but they want their parents trust them and to start treating them as young adults as opposed to “babies”.

Examples:

$1YC2EE062E: Okay uh I think that our parents should support us and encourage us to try new things in high school because um it’s a big change and you’re gonna have new friends and new teachers and you want to be able to like find a group of people that you can get along with. And I think that yeah I agree ... that they should se boundaries because um it helps you find out what you can do and like you can do better when you know that you don’t have to, like when you have like exams or something, you know that you can’t like stay out all night and then study the day before exams cause like your parents will tell you to do that and then you’ll find out their right because they are adults and they probably do know better than you.

$$1YC1EE164C. Not drive their kids to school. $$1YC2EE169C. Yes, that’s kind of embarrassing.

$$2YL1EE180A: I say about High School, don’t restrict your child, let them experience everything first-hand, I’m not saying let them do drugs, keep contact with them and try to you know, communicate with them, say ‘If you have a boyfriend or a girlfriend right now, tell me if you are being pressured’, don’t intervene or interfere, but you know, you gotta keep track and contact of what they’re doing, but don’t restrict them from anything at all ‘cuz if you restrict them most likely its gonna make them wanna do it more.

$$3YL2EE146B: Well I mean I find like if your parents are like really protective like and they know what goes on in high school obviously because they’ve been there before and that’s what they’ll always say, I’ve been to high school I know what goes on... Like I feel like if you don’t talk to your kids like they’re gonna...hold stuff in like at school too. So I think their social life and the academic life like your social life affects your academic so I think you ... need to have like that level of trust you have in your kids.

$$3Y1LEEE Participant: To um encourage them to try new things, to meet new people to boost, that would boost their confidence, that would be helpful.

Personal life. On a personal note, youth raised issues similar to that which was said about their academic and social lives. They want their parents to recognize and respect their growing independence and their need to make their own choices and mistakes. They want their parents to be open to their needs, to listen to them, respect them and give them the space they need to grow and learn. The push-pull tension between the childhood needs of dependence and the adult need for independence is evident in discussions about what young people want from their
parents. It is clear that they still need parental involvement, encouragement and presence. But they want it on their own terms, in their own way.

Examples:

$1YC2EE101J: I think parents should maybe give us our space. Like let us figure stuff for our own. Let us start high school, like, our way. $1YC2EE103J: Because if we need help like we’ll ask. $1YC2EE101J: Yeah, like they’ll be there and we can fall back on them. But not like ‘Okay, that’s the door.’ $1YC2EE103J: Yeah, they’re still there if you need them. But not to like shove it in your face that they’re there.

$2YL2EE056A: Tell them to just ask how they feel about it, and then just like, let them talk and not interrupt. $2YL2EE058A: My mom always interrupts me when I’m talking to her - be quiet!

$1YC1EE068F: The parents- they should just support their child. $1YC2EE963F: Um, they should trust their children more and like, they should listen...and they might think it’s wrong but they should really learn to communicate with their child. Give them privacy and stuff.

$1YL2EE002A: I think if it’s just advice, but not too much advice, cause then you feel kind of overwhelmed... $1YL1EE009A: I agree... it’s just that um not to give so much advice, cause everyone’s high school experience will be different.

$1YCEEJ Participant: I think just be like really friendly and like open. And like make sure they know that you can talk to them if they need to, that you’re like open to give them advice. And like you can help them out if they need extra help like don’t be all like angry and stuff. And don’t pick on them, especially in the first month, it’s only because they’re just getting used to it.

$1YC2EE048D- I think support. I mean, I need a lot of support now.

$$2YC2EE124B: Stick by your kids, and don’t put them down

$$4YL2EE143C: Encourage us more.

$$1YC2EE230B: They shouldn’t like push their kids too hard cause if they do they’re going to stray away, so don’t push them and talk to them - $$1YC2EE230B: Ya, like talk to them but don’t like be mad at them

$$1YLEEE: Yeah, they should be like, we’re here for you. Don’t be afraid to come to us with anything. Especially at this age, teens tend to not want to talk to their parents because they sometimes jump down their throat before actually listening, so it’s good like, it’s good when your parents actually sit with you on the same level...

$$1YL1EE264E: And I guess just not like trying to shelter them too much. $$1YL2EE268E: Yeah. You’ve got to let them make their mistakes on their own, but show them that we’re here for you so then the mistakes they make are not as drastic as like some people would have, cause you will always need parental guidance.
I think it’s very important for parents to pay attention to their children, and make sure they’re doing their best. Not too far, but pay attention to their day, and their friends.

Let us figure stuff out on our own. Like pushing us in the right direction is good, but we need to know who we are, and I think in grade nine and ten, those are the years to make mistakes. By grade eleven and twelve you will know like who you are. I think they just shouldn’t push us much.

Tell the parents too, like if they’re strict that’s a good thing, but if they’re too strict you also want to be kind of level. If they don’t give them any type of rules or anything, then they’re really out of control. Don’t tell them not to do this or that, cos they’re just going to do it anyway.

Don’t say “I did this when I was a kid and ended up as so and so”. The more rules you keep on them, the more they’re tempted to do them. They’re going to break out, yeh

I would say “give them space”. Because the older they get, you know they’re not going to depend on their parents every time. They need to get a job, and I think the parents baby them too much. My mom baby’s me too much.

I guess, trust us more. I mean we know the other kids are doing bad things, and we know that other kids are doing drugs, smoking, drinking, and having sex and stuff. But you know, trust us, because the reason why those kids do it is because their parents push too hard, and they push either them away, or they try to bring the child so close to the point where it’s suffocating them. And just trust us and try to give us some space, and take our word for it, and be there for us. Don’t ridicule us, but you know, just try to help us.

Chill out. Lay off.

### French-Language Specific Issues in Transition

In our Phase I Focus Groups, youth, parents and educators were asked to reflect on the role of language and the idea of linguistic transfer in relation to transition and to schooling choices and trajectories. They were asked the following three questions:

1. En tant qu’élèves fréquentant une école de langue française, trouvez-vous que les années de transition présentent un défi différent [pour vous] ? Si oui, pouvez-vous donner des précisions ou des exemples ?

2. À votre avis, quels sont les facteurs qui font en sorte que certains élèves quittent le système des écoles de langue française à la fin de leur 8e année pour s’inscrire à une école de langue anglaise ?
3. À votre avis, quels sont les avantages d'obtenir son diplôme dans une école de langue française ?

In our Individual Interviews, students were asked the following question to determine what could be done to encourage French-language elementary school students to pursue their studies in French:

Qu’est-ce qui pourrait être fait qui aiderait les élèves francophones de 8e (ou de 6e) année à continuer leurs études dans une école de langue française en 9e (ou 7e) année?

The answers to these questions revealed that rather than a clearly organized and determined discourse existing, strong points and key elements emerged which are mostly ideological. These either serve as general guidelines in decision-making or simply work to influence youth’s decisions in contingent situations. Through these points and elements, Francophones have both similarities and differences in that although they share certain ideologies, their ways of thinking take on a particular meaning and express themselves differently in each life story. For example, the answers provided revolved around four issues: bilingualism, pro-English-language ideology, the possibility of switching to English-language and the unlikelihood of studying in English.

When they speak of bilingualism, the participants are clear on two facts: (1) studying in French is synonymous with being bilingual; and (2) being bilingual opens doors, creates schooling and career opportunities. If Francophones are aware of the importance of bilingualism, it is because they recognize that they are a minority in an English-speaking world and that is why, although they know the importance of speaking both French and English, they would easily adopt the latter as a main language, at least in the professional areas of their lives (schooling and career). But if all Francophones recognize that English is the dominant language, in some rural communities, where French culture is very present, when not dominant, the idea of studying in English rather than in French is never seriously considered. These issues and the ways in which they are presented by participants clearly reveal the inherent paradox of the French identity: language is intimately linked to culture and is therefore decisive of one’s identity, but since young people feel that English is an easier language to learn, and since it is more widespread and since it is the language of the corporate world, English-speaking facilities are better equipped and more appealing. Abandoning French as a first language, therefore, seems like a logical choice. In other words, bilingualism is an asset, but since English is the dominant language, French is disposable, especially when it comes to career-related decisions.
On being bilingual

Clearly, most of the young people in Phase I felt that going to a French school assured them of being bilingual, which would improve their job prospects following their education. Consider this discussion between the Facilitator and the students:

Facilitator: Ok. But is going to an English school something that interests you as well? Do you think it’s easier or better?

$4YL2FF015A: [Hesitation.] Non.
Facilitator: Not really.
$4YL2FF015A: Je veux juste rencontrer des nouvelles personnes.
Facilitator: Ok, which you would do at another school as well.

$4YL1FF014A: Moi, l’école anglaise... parce que, ici, si tu parles anglais, les enseignants te disent de parler français ; mais, à une école anglaise, si tu parles français, qu’est-ce qu’ils vont dire ? Arrête de parler français ? Non.

Participant: Non, ils t’encouragent à parler français ; puis, si tu parles anglais, ici, ils ne t’encouragent pas.

Facilitator: If you speak English here, do they tell you not to?

$4YL1FF014A: Ils ne t’encouragent pas.
$4YL2FF015A: Oui, comme ils ne t’encouragent pas à parler anglais, ils t’encouragent juste à parler français.
Facilitator: Ok, that’s clear. $4Yl2FF016A, do you agree with that? $4Yl2FF013A too? Why do you think there are students who leave to go to an English school? Why do you think they do that?

Participant: Parce que peut-être qu’ils parlent anglais plus à la maison.
Facilitator: Maybe they’re more anglophone than francophone.

$4YL1FF014A: Ou, si tu as appris le français de la maternelle à la huitième, comme : « oh ! let’s learn la moitié français puis l’autre anglais ».

Participant: Comme ma mère voulait que j’aillle à [nom d’une école] pour qu’elle voulait que je comprenne l’anglais aussi, et le français, comme elle voulait que mes cours soient en anglais et en français.

Facilitator: Ok. So you think that the concern would be to be bilingual; that’s important from what you say. Are there advantages, as $4YL2FF015A has told me, after graduating from Grade 12 or at [name of a school] in French immersion, for example, you still earn the French certificate ... do you think there are more advantages to earning a French high school diploma?

$4YL2FF015A: Oui, parce que tu peux aussi l’avoir en anglais, alors c’est vraiment facile à avoir une job quand tu es bilingue parce que tu peux parler les deux français ; puis si quelqu’un est vraiment français puis personne ne parle français, cette personne peut aller à toi et comme... tu lui as parlé français ou quelque... puis c’est vraiment facile de poigner une job si tu es bilingue.

Participant: Ma mère est infirmière et bilingue et les personnes l’ont prise plus vite que les anglophones parce qu’il y a des infirmières anglophones avec elle, mais elles demandent toujours à ma mère pour lui parler.

Facilitator: Of course. $4Yl2FF013A, you also say it’s an advantage.

$4Yl2FF013A: Oui, tu vas avoir une meilleure job.
Facilitator: Finally, what I’m hearing in what you say is that if you get a diploma from a French school, it’s good because it means you’re bilingual, because you know English anyway. You feel that all your friends speak English; it’s not hard to learn like French?

Participants: Oui.

Facilitator: Do you think there are any disadvantages to getting your diploma at a French school?

Participants: Non, non.

Facilitator: No, not at all. If you’re just francophone, do you think?

$4Yl2FF016A: Peut-être si tu es bilingue, mais tu veux enseigner dans une école anglophone ; tu dois aller faire tout en anglais ; alors ce serait une perte de temps.

Facilitator: Exactly. It has a lot to do with being bilingual, and then to get a job later, because being bilingual is important for employment later.

Here is another student’s opinion:

Facilitator: That’s fine. When you said ... you said: language is important because it’s important to you not to lose your French; has it always been that way?

$2YC2FF079C: Oui. Ça a toujours été comme ça, parce que, mes parents, ils parlent français ; toute ma famille parle français ; puis ça a toujours été, comme... pour moi, moi, j’ai toujours pensé qu’une fois que je suis rendue à chercher un emploi, d’abord, ils vont... ils demandent toujours si tu parles français ; donc, si je parle français, ça va, comme... j’ai plus de chances que quelqu’un qui parle juste anglais.

On going to an English school

In some communities, the very idea of going to an English school is shocking. French is such a part of the tradition that the idea cannot help being surprising, or giving rise to discrepancies that surprise the narrator himself, or being worrisome. Similarly, even if the question is asked, the answer may seem obvious for identity reasons.

Facilitator: So is that a decision you had to make, whether you wanted to go to English high school or French high school? Yes, $6YL2FF010B.

$6YL2FF010B: Bien, moi, moi, je vais francophone.

Facilitator: You are, of course. But did you even think about it?

$6YL2FF010B: Bien, y penser, j’ai dit bien, qu’est-ce que je faisais, oui. [Many voices]

$6YL1FF011B: Tu n’as pas encore été une année à l’école anglaise, so, là, tu vas à une école anglaise, tu vas être tout mêlé.

$6YL2FF008B: Bien, oui, parce qu’en maths, là, tous les mots... tu vas être tout mélangé. Tu sais, en français, ça se peut bien, bien, là, tu vas être bonne. Comme en maths, puis en science, tu commences à parler de ça.
Facilitator: So it’s not really a question that comes up.
$6YL1FF011B: Oui, puis, si tu changes d’école, ça change comme de… tu ne fais pas la même chose ; mettons que tu fais numératie en… à l’école, ici ; bien, là-bas, ils font peut-être une autre chose ; puis, après ça, ils vont dans la numératie, puis tu l’auras déjà fait.

Facilitator: Ok. Just a second. Yes, $6YL1FF006B.
$6YL1FF006B: Bien, moi, je pense que j’irai comme, chose d’anglais, là, bien à cause que je connais plus mes mots en anglais.

Facilitator: Ok. So did you think of going to English school? Are you still thinking about it?
$6YL1FF006B: Oui.
Facilitator: Ok. So, for you, it’s something that might happen. Yes, $6YL2FF010B.
$6YL2FF010B: Bien, moi, c’est une question que je ne me poserais pas vraiment parce que, tu sais comme… c’est là, vraiment, qui compte pour aller à l’université ; moi je veux aller à l’université ; mais pour aller à l’université, il faut que j’aie les notes... comme assez hautes. Ça fait que, si je vais en anglais, ça se peut que j’aie de la misère.

Facilitator: So your marks might not be as good.
$6YL2FF010B: Oui, je veux faire sûr que... tu sais comme... j’assure une place.
Facilitator: Yes. You, $6YL2FF009B, was that a choice you thought about?
$6YL2FF009B: Pas vraiment. Bien, j’étais meilleur en anglais avant, mais avant que mon père soit mort ; mon père était Anglais ; bien, là, il est mort, puis je ne parle plus anglais. J’étais assez bon, là, mais...

Facilitator: Ok. So you’re saying “well, you know, I’m comfortable in French, so I’m continuing in French”. That’s fine.

* * *

$2YC2FF078C: Bien comme, moi, ma première langue, c’est français. Alors je vais toujours aller à une école française ; puis, mes amies, il y en a quelques-unes qui vont... qui sont sur ma rue puis elles parlent toujours en anglais ; puis je veux toujours parler en anglais parce que je ne vais pas parler en français ; ça ne va pas fonctionner ; mais je trouve que c’est toujours important d’avoir français pour des carrières. Donc, c’est ça.

Facilitator: Good. What about your friends? As a factor that influenced your choice?
$2YC2FF078C: Non, c’est plutôt moi.
Facilitator: Ok.
$2YC2FF078C : Même si mes amis changeaient à l’école anglaise, je crois que je vais quand même rester à l’école française parce que je trouve que, le français, c’est important, mais mes amis ne changent pas la leur. [Chuckles]

* * *
Facilitator: Would language make any difference? Language, religion?

$6YL2FF010B: Oh oui ! J’avais complètement oublié. La langue, oui, oui. Bien, moi, je sais que je vais aller en français parce que... bien, peut-être en anglais parce que... bien, à [nom de ville], je ne sais pas s’ils offrent des cours en français que je veux aller.

Facilitator: Ok.

$6YL2FF010B: Donc, ça dépendrait. Je pense que je ferais une recherche là-dedans. Si oui, bien, peut-être je m’habituerais à l’anglais à l’école secondaire, parce que j’ai vraiment de la misère. Ce n’est pas pareil. Les termes changent, puis tout ça.

Facilitator: Yes.

$6YL2FF010B: Oui, mais ça dépendrait de l’université ou est-ce que j’aimerais bien aller.

Facilitator: Ok.

$6YL2FF010B: Puis, non ; j’irais en français pas mal, parce que je suis habituée là-dedans, puis j’excelle là-dedans aussi. Ça fait qu’il y a la langue puis la religion. S’il n’y aurait pas de religion ça ne me dérangerait pas, puis s’il y en aurait eu, bien, non plus. Pas vraiment, ce n’est pas ça qui m’influencerait.

Some terms from pro-English ideology

However, not all the discussions about the possibility of studying in English, for young people attending French schools, are based on ideas that are expressed exclusively by francophones and are not all in the same vein. Because of its minority status, French does not always have a good reputation. Young people frequently say or understand that it is a difficult language; that it is dull; that anglophone teachers make their courses more interesting than francophone teachers; that French is pointless because everything around them is in English; that English schools are better than French schools; that English universities are better than French universities. Consider these statements by students who regard English schools as superior:

$4YL2FF017B: Mon amie a dit qu’en sixième année, elle irait à une école anglaise, ensuite, pour ses sept et huit, et, ensuite, elle allait à une école en français.

Facilitator: Ok. Why did she want to go to an English school? Do you know?

$4YL2FF017B: C’est parce que ses deux parents sont français et, moi, je suis sa meilleure amie. Donc, je l’ai convaincue de venir à mon école parce qu’elle voulait apprendre le français. Donc, je l’ai aidée parce qu’elle allait dans un... ça s’appelle... en anglais ; c’est comme quelque chose... comment l’école s’appelle, je ne m’en rappelle pas comment elle s’appelle, mais c’est comme en français à la place de l’anglais. Elle peut apprendre la mathématique, comment lire l’anglais. Mais, elle, elle est en français ; puis c’est comme ça qu’elle a tout appris ; mais elle voulait aller vers d’autres amis pour comme... puis elle est à [nom de ville]. Donc, je n’ai pas été capable de la voir depuis comme trois années, mais...

Facilitator: Ok. So she wanted to go to an English school to join a girlfriend there. Are there any other reasons? Are there any other people you know who are like
that, people who want to go to English high school?

$4YL2FF017B: Oui.
Facilitator: Why do you think they would want to go there?

$4YL2FF018B: Parce que comme... les différentes qualités comme...
Facilitator: Yes? You think English schools are better in quality?

$4YL2FF018B: Je pense.
Facilitator: Like more resources, bigger, more ...

$4YL2FF018B: Oui.
Facilitator: Yes? Do you agree, $4YL2FF017B?

$4YL2FF017B: Oui.
Facilitator: Yes too? Ok.

Switching to English

All these pro-English ideological statements serve the ends of anyone who is trying to distance himself or herself somewhat from French, which is not unusual in adolescence, when people are attempting to identify with their milieu, which is predominantly anglophone. The ideology of bilingualism often has to work against many persistent counterarguments. When the pressures of life combine with the terms of the pro-English ideology, the drift toward the language of the majority readily gains momentum. Even if means living in paradox. Consider this discussion between the interviewer and a student:

Facilitator: [...] When we talked ... but when we discussed, in the focus group, we talked about choosing a high school. I asked you which school you wanted to go to and why. And then I asked you ... even if you knew exactly which school you were going to, what factors influenced your choice of school. And you said French; you wrote down French.

$6YL2FF005A: Le français, c'est la langue que j'ai eue pendant que j'étais jeune ; mais je ne suis pas certaine si je devrais continuer en français parce qu'il y a beaucoup de gens anglais à [petite ville bilingue] et c'est là que je compte travailler ; donc j'ai besoin d'améliorer mon anglais.

Facilitator: So, today, if we look at it, what factors are influencing your choices ... ah! well, yes, you wrote [name of a French school]. At that time, you were planning to go to [name of a French school]; that was last month, so already things have changed somewhat; you’re not sure anymore.

$6YL2FF005A: Je ne suis plus certaine, là.
Facilitator: Ok. So you said [name of a French school] because it was French, and if you’re thinking of other school you might go to, is it because they're English?

$6YL2FF005A: Oui, il y a [nom d'une école anglaise], puis il y a [nom d'une école française] ; il y a une école anglaise et une école française. Donc, j'ai juste deux écoles à choisir.

Facilitator: Yes, if you decide to attend an English school. Aside from language, is there anything else influencing your choice? Like if you’re going to live with your father, can you still go to either [name of a French school] or [name of a English school]?
$6YL2FF005A: Oui, je peux aller à une des deux, mais j’aimerais mieux aller à une école anglaise si je vis avec mon père, parce que ce n’est pas un homme français et si jamais j’aurais besoin d’aide avec mes travaux, bien avec des travaux en français, il ne pourrait pas m’aider du tout.

Facilitator: So, for you, one of the influencing factors is language, and that depends on your parent: it depends on which parent you’re going to live with?

$6YL2FF005A: Oui.

Facilitator: Ok. And when you wrote French, it was the reason you wanted to go to [name of a French school]. It that because you feel that French is still important to you?

$6YL2FF005A: Oui. Je ne veux jamais perdre ma langue française, parce que, les Anglais que je connais aimerait bien savoir parler le français.

Facilitator: Has French always been important to you, or is it something that has become important over the last few years?

$6YL2FF005A: C’est devenu important. Quand j’étais plus petite, je pouvais parler anglais ou français à mon école ; ça ne me dérangeait pas ; mais, au cours, j’ai réalisé que je suis française et que je devrais être fière de ma langue.

Bilingualism as openness to the world

Despite the pro-English discourse, the bilingual vision of the world persists and often expands the way the world is viewed, an openness that is combined with utilitarian ideas. And the young people who express those ideas do so with pride. Moreover, this perspective makes it possible to overcome the very terms of a statement that discredits French, though without contradicting them. The discourse is paradoxical, then, but the components of the paradox are not on an equal footing, as openness is more important.

$1YC2FF020A: Oui. Les mathématiques sont vraiment peut-être les plus importantes parce que, dans ta vie quotidienne, tu vas toujours, à chaque moment, peut-être que tu ne vas même pas le réaliser, mais tu vas toujours utiliser des chiffres. Tu vas toujours avoir des situations où tu vas utiliser les mathématiques. Puis, ça, c’est toujours important. Les sciences, bien sûr, c’est toujours important. Le français, peut être qu’avant c’était comme un peu ennuyeux et plat, personnellement. Je sais que je ne connais aucun étudiant qui aime vraiment la grammaire ; mais maintenant que je le réalise, c’est vraiment important parce que, dans ta carrière, tu vas écrire des rapports, tu vas écrire des documents, tu vas parler, et tout ça influence si la personne va t’engager ou non.

Facilitator: Why?

$1YC2FF020A: Parce que la communication est très importante. Si, par exemple, une personne n’est pas bilingue, qu’elle parle seulement en anglais ; elle ne pourra pas aller dans une grande compagnie où il va y avoir des personnes d’autres pays, par exemple, parce qu’elle ne connaît seulement qu’une langue ; elle n’a pas assez... comme son vocabulaire n’est pas assez grand. Par exemple, il y a quelques employés qui vont être français ; comment est-ce que tu vas communiquer avec eux ? C’est vraiment un grand problème ; alors c’est pour ça que la langue est importante. C’est la communication.
In some cases, the terms of the pro-English ideology turns against themselves and become pro-French arguments. That is what we see in the statements by this girl, who points out that her environment is English and, instead of using that as an excuse to abandon her French education, makes it a reason for continuing in French:

**Facilitator:** What could be done [...] to help Grade 8 francophone students to continue their education in a French school in Grade 9?

**$1YC2FF020A:** Ce qui pourrait les encourager ? [Hesitation.] Peut-être, les élèves francophones, s’ils savaient l'importance de la langue française, comment c’est important et comment ça leur aiderait dans le futur ; bien, peut-être qu’ils iraient plutôt à une école française qu’une école anglaise parce qu’à [nom de ville], quand tu vas dehors, au magasin et tout ça, tout le monde parle anglais plutôt. Alors c’est vraiment un endroit anglais. Alors s’ils vont à une école anglaise, ils vont apprendre ce qu’ils savent déjà parce que quand tu regardes la télé ou quand tu lis un livre, il y a plus de chance qu’un étudiant d’une école va probablement lire un livre en français ou va voir des films ou des émissions anglaises. Alors s’ils savaient l’importance, eh ! bien, peut-être qu’ils vont choisir d’aller à une école secondaire française.

The invitation to young people to value their French is common to all the transcripts. Here is another case:

**Facilitator:** [...] What could be done to help Grade 8 francophone students to continue their education in a French school in Grade 9, in your opinion?

**$2YC2FF079C:** Je pense qu’il faudrait qu’ils... ils leur expliquent combien important est le français. Il y en a beaucoup qui sont déjà en train de le perdre, même s’ils sont à l’école française. Quand tu les entends parler en français, ça a un gros accent anglais ; puis, il faudrait... comme que quelqu’un leur explique combien le français est important. Puis il ne faut pas que tu le perdes. Une fois que tu l’as perdu, c’est vraiment dur de le ravoir.

**Facilitator:** And why do you think it’s important to keep your French?

**$2YC2FF079C:** Parce que, ça, ça fait partie de toi, comme, si toute ta famille parle français puis, là, toi, tu ne peux plus parler français, d’abord, là, tu vas... tu ne pourras pas parler ici. Puis, comme je l’ai dit, les emplois, ils vont chercher...

À l'impossible, nul n'est tenu
(common French-language phraseology loosely translated in English to mean, “no one can be expected to do the impossible”)

Arguments promoting Frenchness can undoubtedly be drawn, directly or indirectly, from everything that the young people said in the interviews and focus groups. But no campaign will win everyone over, as this girl explains in her conversation with the interviewer. We shall leave her the last word from the Phase I data:
Facilitator: Do you think there is anything that could be done [...] to help Grade 8 francophone students to continue their education in a French school in Grade 9?

$6YL2FF005A: Je ne sais pas ; je ne sais vraiment pas ce qu’il faut faire. Il y a beaucoup de gens à notre école… sont très, très fiers de leur langue et sont très certains qu’ils, qu’elles veulent aller à une école francophone ; donc… je ne sais pas comment quelqu’un qui n’aime pas le français se sentirait ; je ne me suis jamais demandé. Je ne sais pas qu’est-ce qu’on pourrait changer.

Facilitator: For you, the problem doesn’t really arise, in the end, because you don’t know many other students who are going to an English school for Grade 9?

$6YL2FF005A: Il y a en un qui veut aller à une école anglophone, mais ce n’est pas par son choix. Il s’en va en [nom de pays anglo-saxon].

Facilitator: Yes, [student’s name]. He’s going there after all?

$6YL2FF005A: Oui. C’est presque certain qu’il va à une école anglophone ou, sinon, il va aller à [nom d’une école de langue française].

Facilitator: Yes. If he stays here, he’ll go to [name of a French school] too. And the ones who are going to an English school for … do you think they’re going?

$6YL2FF005A: Il y a des gens qui n’aient pas le français autant que les autres et...

Facilitator: Nothing more.

$6YL2FF005A: Tout simplement. Il y en a qui croient que, l’anglais, peut-être ça serait plus facile donc...

In Phase II, participants were asked the same three questions as in Phase I, specific to French-language issues in transition. The answers revolved around the same four issues and participants spoke of them in much the same way. Bilingualism is perceived as an asset or as a near-necessity. The idea, according to the youth participants, that English is easier to learn and that its popularity makes whatever structures are associated with the language of easier access and more appealing is very present, especially in the discourse of youth. In the rural communities, francophone students still naturally expect to study in French, although the idea of switching to English, in order to pursue specific academic or professional goals, is not shocking to them. One striking fact emerges from the data: if there is a pro-English-language mentality, it is counter-balanced by a pro-French-language discourse, one which is less paradoxical, which stresses the importance of French culture and which highlights the fact that living in French is a conscious choice that reflects the desire to preserve a certain heritage, an identity. This message is explicitly related by parents and implicitly by youth, who appear to have interiorised parents’ views but who seem simultaneously aware of the importance of preserving this identity, and disposed to relinquish it if necessary.

**A difference in transition due to the system?**

In Phase II, when asked if the transition years represent a specific challenge for French-language youth, participants indicate that they do not believe it does, that the process is pretty much the same, whether youth are in a French-language or English-
language system. Some even suggest that it might be more difficult for English-language youth, given the fact that English-language schools are usually larger than French-language schools; as these educators point out, it may be harder for English-language youth entering a school with thousands of people, but fundamentally, the challenges faced in transition have little to do with the school system per se and much to do with being a minority.

Example:

Animatrice: Est-ce que vous pensez que la transition c’est différent dans un système de langue française que dans un système de langue anglaise? $$6ELH2FF016A : Qu’est-ce qu’il y a, c’est que des fois, c’est des plus grosses écoles, là, eux-autres. Tu sais, les écoles secondaires anglophones, règle générale, sont beaucoup plus grosses que les écoles secondaires francophones. Animatrice : Ok. $$6ELH2FF012A : Si on regarde ici à l’école secondaire, parce que là, on a les deux... $$6ELH2FF016A : Les anglophones eux-autres, ici, ils doivent se sentir envahis par les francophones. $$6ELH1FF018A : C’est peut-être une question de milieu aussi. Il y a le multiculturalisme, les nouveaux arrivants, puis d’autres gens à situation unique.

A transition which would involve a change in systems and therefore in languages, is seen as problematic. Aside from having to learn terminology in a different language, students imagine they would also have to get used to a different way of doing things, to a different system all together; the difficulty resides in having to adjust to both components. Participants do not believe that one system makes it easier or harder than the other.

Example:

$$2YL2FF129B : Moi, je pense que ...parce que j’étais pour changer à l’école pour le programme des arts, mais j’y ai aussi repensé, parce que je savais tous mes termes et whatever en français, mais là, si j’étais pour aller à une école anglaise, ce serait complètement différent. Ma mère me disait « tu vas les apprendre », mais personnellement, je trouve que ce serait pas mal dur de faire la transition.

While the some students worry about learning the terminology, others have more global concerns and imagine it would be hard to fit into an English-language school, to enter a system that is unknown.

Example:

Animatrice : Quand vous avez eu à choisir une école secondaire, ce sont quoi les facteurs qui ont influencé votre choix? $$6YL1FF082A : La langue. Animatrice : La langue, tu dis, $$6YL1FF082A ? T’avais envie de venir dans une école...$$6YL1FF082A : Bien, si je voulais aller en français c’était ici, puis si je voulais aller en anglais c’était à KD. $$6YL2FF084A : Bien, j’avais été dans une école française toute ma vie, so je ne voulais pas, comme, aller dans une école anglaise après, là, ça aurait fait trop différent... $$6YL1FF082A : Ça aurait été dur de s’intégrer dans une école anglaise...
The main advantage to obtaining a diploma from a French-language high school: bilingualism

When asked about the advantages and disadvantages of obtaining a degree from a French-language high school, participants (Youth, Educators and Parents) seem to agree that there are no disadvantages and that the biggest advantage is bilingualism. In fact, it is clear to all these participants that attending a French-language high school is synonymous with being bilingual. Even in predominantly French-language rural northern communities, learning in French means being bilingual; and being bilingual means having access to more post-secondary institutions and better career opportunities. For these youth, attending a French-language high school makes them bilingual and there is a narrow correlation between bilingualism and job opportunities.

Examples:

Animatrice : À votre avis, ce sont quoi les avantages d’obtenir son diplôme dans une école de langue française ? $6YL1FF095B : Tu es bilingue. Animatrice : Tu es bilingue... $6YL1FF095B : Oui.

Animatrice : Est-ce que vous sentez qu’il y a un avantage d’obtenir votre diplôme d’une école de langue française dans la vie? $1YC1FF120B: Oui. Si tu connais plus de langues, tu peux avoir une job après. Animatrice : Tu connais plus de langues.

$2YL2FF133B : Oui, je pense que oui. Personnellement, comme je disais, je pense que c’est une bonne base, parce que c’est quand même une des langues les plus complètes dans le monde alors que l’anglais, tu l’apprends très facilement. Alors tu pourrais l’apprendre plus tard. C’est toujours bien d’avoir plusieurs... même au niveau du travail, comme, être bilingue et si tu connais encore plus de langues, cela te rapporte plus d’opportunités pour ton emploi. Animatrice : Donc pour toi, graduer d’une école de langue française, cela veut dire que tu es bilingue ? $2YL2FF133B : Oui.

Parents share this view.

Example:

Animatrice : C’est quoi, pour vous, les avantages pour votre enfant d’obtenir son diplôme dans une école de langue française ? $6PL1FF010A : Le choix est ouvert à eux autres. De ce point-là, ils peuvent aller où est-ce qu’ils veulent. S’ils veulent choisir un collège ou une université anglaise, c’est bien correct, s’ils veulent y aller en anglais, c’est bien correct. C’est comme il veut. Les portes sont ouvertes partout. Animatrice : Parce ce que s’ils obtiennent... cela suppose que s’ils obtiennent leur diplôme d’une école française, ils possèdent déjà l’anglais ? Tout le monde : Bien oui, c’est ça... $6PL1FF008A : ... oui, il y a la culture. Moi, j’insiste que ce soit le français à la maison tout le temps. Et puis je n’accepte pas que mes enfants parlent en anglais. Et s’ils ne parlent pas bien en français, je les reprends constamment. [On entend : « moi aussi » et un rire]. Pour m’assurer qu’ils aient les bons termes, parce qu’eux autres,
English-language as better geared towards schooling and career opportunities

Studying in French means being bilingual; and bilingualism is an asset in that it provides better schooling and career opportunities. After all, most post-secondary institutions are English and English is the dominant language, in and out of the corporate world.

Example:

Animatrice : Votre diplôme de 12e année, est-ce que vous voyez des avantages? $6YL1FF082A : Oui, à cause la plupart du temps, disons tu vas au collège, ils regardent, la plupart du monde qui vont au collège, la plupart du temps sont anglais, puis ils regardent, des fois, pour du monde qui comprennent d’autres langues, comme le français. Être bilingue, aussi... Animatrice : Ok, donc pour le bilinguisme, c’est ça? $6YL1FF082A : Oui, à cause, par exemple, mon frère est français, mais où il est parti, ils regardent pour du monde anglais puis français, so il a plus de chance à avoir une job à cause qu’il comprend les deux langues. $6YL2FF084A : Si tu parles juste en anglais dans des places... tu sais il y a des places qui ne t'engageront pas à cause que tu ne parles pas français, à cause la plupart des personnes sont françaises, so il faut que tu saches parler les deux. Animatrice : Oui, $6YL2FF090A $6YL1FF082A : Bien ça va avec la majorité aussi, comme, la plupart... il y a bien plus d’anglophones aussi dans notre pays que, bien, dans notre province, ou whatever, qu’il y en a, comme ici, la plupart sont français, mais si tu décides de t’en aller ailleurs plus tard, bien, tu es aussi bien de savoir la langue là, à cause la majorité du monde vont parler cette langue-là, donc c’est mieux de savoir les deux. Animatrice : Fait que le plus grand avantage d’obtenir son diplôme d’une école de langue française c’est que ça fait qu’on est bilingue. Parce que quand on va à l’école en français, vous pensez qu’on parle nécessairement l’anglais. Comme ici, est-ce que c’est ça que vous voyez? Les élèves qui sont ici étudient en français, mais ils parlent aussi l’anglais? Participants : Oui. Animatrice : Est-ce qu’il y a d’autres avantages, à part de ça, à part du bilinguisme? Est-ce qu’il y a des choses qui sont spécifiques aux écoles francophones? $6YL1FF082A : Bien, c’est pas mal mieux, parce que quand tu rencontres du nouveau monde, puis des fois ils sont anglais, puis si tu as été à une école française, bien ici, on donne des cours d’anglais, puis la plupart du monde qui entrent à CJ connaissent déjà l'anglais... $6YL2FF084A : Bien, la plupart du monde qui viennent à CJ, sont bilingues, mais tous les anglophones qui vont KD connaissent, la plupart ne connaissent pas le français. $6YL1FF082A : Oui.
As one educator points out:

*Participante*: Là j’ai beaucoup d’amis anglophones qui envoient leurs enfants au français, ou en immersion française, puis rendu au secondaire, ils ont peur d’être dépassés par la langue, et que là, ils vont envoyer leurs enfants à l’école anglaise pour pouvoir encore supporter leurs enfants, les guider, les encadrer… Donc ça, j’en vois aussi. $$2ELH1FF007A : Oui, j’en vois beaucoup de ça, tu as raison. Participante : Ils ont peur de ne pas avoir assez de support, de ne pas pouvoir aider assez… Il y a de parents qui me questionnent, « est-ce que vous pensez que… » $$2ELH1FF007A : C’est parce qu’ils pensent que, étant donné que l’université est anglaise, qu’il faut préparer l’enfant… Participante : Bien, il y en a des françaises aussi, là… $$2ELH1FF007A : Oui, mais plusieurs parents ont l’impression, surtout si tu vis dans un milieu très, très, minoritaire francophone, que l’école secondaire devrait se faire en anglais, parce qu’il faut les préparer pour l’université, puis l’université c’est en anglais, alors qu’à [nom d’une ville], j’espère que ça se pose moins, parce qu’on peut étudier en français à l’Université de [nom d’une ville] puis ailleurs, alors que… dans les régions dans l’Ouest canadien, ou l’Ouest ontarien, vraiment, les parents ont peur de l’université, puis que les jeunes ne seront pas préparés, parce que l’école française ne peut pas les préparer. Alors c’est un mythe, hein… Moi je pense que le ministère de l’éducation devrait faire la promotion à la télévision pour dire que chez nous, on les prépare aussi bien à l’université. Participante : De toute façon, à l’école secondaire, ils ont anglais, même pas anglais langue seconde, c’est un cours d’anglais, English, donc à un moment donné, c’est la même chose…

And, making them even more appealing, English-language universities are more accepting of the Francophones than French universities are of Anglophones:

$$2YL2FF109A : Aussi, ça nous donne la chance de pouvoir étudier presque partout, comme… bien, au Canada, je veux dire, mettons. On est tous capable d’étudier en anglais, c’est sûr, mais… et puis en français, mais je suis pas mal certaine que les universités francophones acceptent rarement des élèves d’écoles anglophones, tandis que les universités anglophones acceptent, comme, régulièrement des élèves d’écoles francophones. Donc, comme ça nous donne plus de choix, comme mettons, comme L’Université Laurentienne, c’est français, right ? Mais, comme, je doute que…

**Minority status**

French-language participants realize they are part of a minority. They feel that because English is “everywhere”, it will be a constant in their lives. With this realization comes a fear, that of losing the ability to express themselves in French. Excerpts from the transcripts illustrate this fact.

**Examples:**

*Participante*: Oui, on est une minorité dans la province.

$$2YL2FF133B : Oui, c’est français, premièrement, parce que je garde mon français,
parce qu'il ne faut pas nier le fait que l'anglais, c'est plus facile à apprendre que le français ; si tu as la base française, l'anglais cela s'apprend partout. Je pense que c'est une des langues les plus connues dans le monde, une des plus courantes. Alors cela s'apprend très facilement ; cela « s’attrape », comme on dit. Alors ici, je garde une bonne base du français et c'est catholique. C'est pourquoi je suis ici.

$$2YL2FF130B : Oui, à cause que je trouve que c'est plus facile à perdre que mon anglais. Mon anglais va toujours rester là, mais même à la maison, je parle toujours en français avec ma mère, mais mon beau-père est anglais et mon père est francophone, et il est né au Québec alors je parle toujours un peu des deux. Je trouve que oui, c'est bon, c'est bon pour garder ton français pour des années.

$$1YC1FF120B: Je pense que ici à [nom d'une ville] c'est facile d'apprendre l'anglais… Comme, moi je ne suis jamais allée à une école en anglais, mais je peux quand même le parler parce que tous mes amis le parlent. Je crois que c'est facile, mais tu peux facilement perdre le français si tu ne va pas à une école française.

Participante : Maintenant nous, il faut ramener les élèves à choisir de continuer leurs études secondaires en français, parce que notre grande compétition c'est le conseil anglophone. Animatrice : Oui. Participante : Puis d'aller les chercher même plus jeunes que la 6e année…. On en a beaucoup, mais on en perd encore beaucoup à l'école anglaise. $$2ELH1FF007 : La recommandation, si elle était faite, je crois qu'elle devrait être beaucoup plus autour d'une tradition, au lieu que ce soit une recommandation ; il faudrait faire un choix que, par exemple, dans deux ans, il faut que ça se fasse.

Dual tendency: idolization of English culture, preservation of French culture

The realization that participants are a French-speaking minority in an English-speaking world gives way to two tendencies which often coexist in the form of a paradox: on one hand, youth idolize English culture, yet on the other, they feel an attachment to French culture and a certain need to promote it. This is interesting as most arguments made in favour of French culture consist in stressing the importance of bilingualism and not of French culture per se.

Pro-English arguments

Those who idolize English culture will argue not only that English is more commonly spoken and, therefore, the language of choice when it comes to academics and career, but also, that it is easier to speak and to learn than French.

Examples:

$$2YL2FF132B : Moi, je changerais parce que moi, je ne veux pas travailler en français quand je suis plus vieille. Je veux savoir les mots en anglais. Le français ne va pas vraiment m'aider et puis je ne veux pas travailler au Québec, je veux travailler ici en anglais.
Animatrice : Oui. À votre avis, pourquoi est-ce qu’il y a des élèves qui quittent le système des écoles françaises pour aller dans une école anglaise en 9e année? $$4YL1FF113B : Plus facile. $$4YL2FF114B : L’anglais est beaucoup plus facile...

Animatrice : $$4YL1FF113B, tu dis que c’est plus facile, $$4YL2FF114B, tu dis aussi... Animatrice : C’est intense... Toi, $$4YL1FF115B, pourquoi tu penses qu’il y a des élèves qui quittent pour aller dans une école anglaise? $$4YL1FF115B : À part des meilleurs points? Comme, tout le monde... à ce que moi je sais, ils s’expriment mieux en anglais, donc ils comprennent mieux, et moi je peux corriger un texte en anglais vraiment facilement, et pour français, comme, je suis toute perdue, comme 100 quelque chose différentes règles qu’on a besoin de savoir par cœur, et ça affecte notre rendement énormément, donc, si tu veux vraiment avoir les points que tu veux, anglais.

Animatrice : Tu vas aller en anglais... $$4YL2FF114B : Comme en anglais, quand je suis en train de corriger quelque chose, d’écrire quelque chose, comme if it sounds right, usually it is right, mais en français, c’est comme l’opposé... Il faut que tu vas regarder dans un dictionnaire, puis tu dis « ah bien, ça c’est féminin, mais moi je pensais que c’était masculin »... Puis là il faut que tu l’accordes avec tout, puis c’est comme... Oh, my god!

They will also argue that as English-language is dominant, English-language schools are larger than French-language schools and are better as they offer more courses and activities.

Examples:

$$4YC1FF103A : Bien, pour moi la différence est comme, en français, si tu vis comme, à [nom d’une ville], tu as seulement deux écoles, trois écoles, tu peux en choisir deux, mais en anglais, tu as beaucoup plus, comme, il y a beaucoup plus de programmes comme... Animatrice : Oui. $$4YC1FF103A : [Nom d’une école secondaire] a le Step, il y a plusieurs écoles qui ont différents ateliers comme, en anglais, mais en français, on a seulement les trois. Animatrice : OK, donc en français c’est différent, pour les francophones que pour les anglophones ; est-ce qu’il y en a d’autres qui pensent ça, ce que $$4YC1FF103A a dit ? Quand on est dans le système anglophone, on a plus de choix parce qu’il y a plus d’écoles ? Participant : Oui.

Animatrice : Est-ce que...on entend aussi parler des fois ou on a conscience d’élèves qui vont à l’école en français, à l’élémentaire, puis ensuite au secondaire, qui s’en vont en anglais. Vous en voyez peut-être ou vous en entendez peut-être parler... Participants : Oui. Animatrice : Pourquoi est-ce que vous pensez que ça arrive, ça? $$4YC2FF107A : Parce que l’anglais c’est plus facile. [Petits rires.] Animatrice : $$4YC2FF107A, tu dis parce que l’anglais c’est plus facile? $$4YC2FF107A : Tu n’as pas comme, le comme, le CODUL, la grammaire puis, toute la conjugaison puis tout ça... Animatrice : Les verbes, oui. Oui, $$4YC2FA104A? $$4YC2FA104A : Je ne pense pas que c’est comme, la raison c’est parce que c’est plus facile, je pense que ce, l’anglais c’est comme, plus la majorité de la population le parle aussi, tu sais, il y a beaucoup plus de choix, de choisir. Animatrice : C’est beaucoup plus de choix d’écoles tu veux dire? $$4YC2FA104A : Oui. Animatrice : Ok. $$4YC2FA104A : C’est comme plus de différents programmes.
But those are not the only factors that make English-language schools appear better to these youth. English-language schools are also seen as being less strict, more “chill” than French-language schools and religion is perceived as a contributing factor to this lack of flexibility in the French-language system.

Example:

$$2YL2FF129B : Je pense que, comme tout le monde dit, c’est plus chill en anglais, aux écoles anglaises. Mais je trouve que ça… écoute, dans une école française, spécialement une école française catholique, ils font beaucoup que la religion ait un rôle. Ils disent « ah, tu es catholique, tu n’es pas supposé faire cela ». Je trouve qu’ils trouvent beaucoup à dire… on veut être sans problèmes. Animatrice : Ok, alors que dans une école anglaise, la question de la religion ne se pose pas ? $$2YL2FF129B : Eh bien, cela dépend de l’école. Je trouve beaucoup qu’ils sont plus moyens que les écoles... Animatrice : Ok. $$2YL2FF128B ? $$2YL2FF128B : Cela tombe vraiment comme $$2YL2FF129B a dit : fanatique avec la religion.

**Reasons for leaving French-language system**

These beliefs surrounding English-language and English-language schools are the main reasons given by participants when asked why a student would choose to leave the French-language school system and move into the English-language system.

Examples:

Animatrice : Oui. À votre avis, pourquoi est-ce qu’il y a des élèves qui quittent le système des écoles françaises pour aller dans une école anglaise en 9e année? $$4YL1FF113B : Plus facile. $$4YL2FF114B : L’anglais est beaucoup plus facile... Animatrice : $$4YL1FF113B, tu dis que c’est plus facile, $$4YL2FF114B, tu dis aussi...

Animatrice : Tout à fait. $$2YL2FF126B, est-ce que tu peux concevoir pourquoi un élève voudrait quitter... $$2YL2FF126B : Ils disent tous que c’est moins strict.

To these reasons, we can add location, a direct consequence of the fact that a predominantly English-speaking society, logically, has more English-speaking institutions. As noted by one parent:

*Parent: C’est le défi aussi, parce que quand tu quittes l’école élémentaire, il y en a combien qui disent « bien moi, mon enfant ne s’en vas pas à l’autre bout du monde dans une école francophone ». En tout cas moi, je l’entends de parents amis, parce que c’est loin.*

A high school principal, speaking as a parent, admits to having to enrol his son in an English-language school, due to distance:
The strength of identity and cultural attachment

So if, according to our youth participants, English is easier to learn, if it is so common, so accessible, if, as a culture, it generates better institutions, better life opportunities, why are these youth not embracing it and relinquishing their French language and the culture that comes with it? Because there is another factor to consider: identity. And identity extends beyond the self and includes friendships, ways of being, and a sense of community.

Examples:

$6YL1FF082A : Ça aurait été dur de s'intégrer dans une école anglaise. $6YL1FF087A : Comme mes amis étaient tous français, so.

Animatrice : Quand vous avez eu à choisir une école secondaire, ce sont quoi les facteurs qui ont influencé votre choix? $6YL1FF082A : La langue. Animatrice : La langue, tu dis, $6YL1FF082A? T'avais envie de venir dans une école... $6YL1FF082A : Bien, si je voulais aller en français c'était ici, puis si je voulais aller en anglais c'était à KD. $6YL2FF084A : Bien, j'avais été dans une école française toute ma vie, so je ne voulais pas, comme, aller dans une école anglaise après, là, ça aurait fait trop différent.

And as one parent explains:

$6PL1FF009A : ... ce n'est pas que... il y a la langue, mais je pense aussi que ce qu'on veut dire par la langue... tu as l'environnement, ce à quoi tu es habitué, ce que tu sais qui va se passer dans une école francophone à cause de ta culture... il y a le fait d'être à l'aize puis habitué à l'école ; tu sais, tous nos jeunes enfants sont venus au carnaval de [nom d'une école] depuis qu'ils ont cinq ans, donc c'est mon chez-nous, ni plus ni moins... Animatrice : Presque l'idée de communauté finalement ? Plusieurs : Oui.

The role of parents in youth’s perception of culture

Although they do not always express clearly its importance or speak explicitly of it as part of their culture, youth feel an attachment to the French language; it is part of who they are. This creates a tension: being who you are when who you are is not part...
of the majority. The attachment to French culture, at this time in youths’ lives, is therefore paradoxical and somewhat ambivalent. It is not surprising then, to note the important role that parental discourse plays in youth’s explanation of the importance of French. But if youth are quick to say that their parents insisted that they go to a French-language school, they do not argue this fact or express any form of opposition.

Examples:

$$2YL2FF111A : Moi, c’est tout mes parents, comme ils connaissaient des parents qui avaient des enfants qui allaient ici, donc ils trouvaient que c’était une bonne école et mes parents ne me laisseraient jamais allez à une école anglaise.

$$2YL2FF130B : Moi, je ne connaissais personne. Je connaissais juste peut-être deux... bien, une couple de personnes, mais pas dans mon année. Ma mère voulait... parce que je suis francophone, je viens du Québec, et ma mère voulait que je reste et que je garde mon français alors elle a trouvé que c’était une école...

Animatrice : Qui était bien. Est-ce que tu te souviens pourquoi elle trouvait que l’école était bien ? Est-ce que tu te souviens de choses dont vous avez parlées? $$2YL1FF127B : Pas vraiment. Ma mère voulait ; elle voulait que je garde mon français aussi. Mon père, il est plus content que moi. Ils viennent de Ma ou quelque chose comme cela.

Parents however, are clear on the fact that living in French means living their culture; that it is the result of a conscious, although often difficult, decision.

Examples:

$$6PL1FF008A : Donc pour moi, la culture, c’est important. J’ai été élevé en français, mes parents sont francophones pur laine, j’ai l’intention de mourir francophone et mes enfants seront francophones jusqu’au bout. Même mon garçon veut aller à l’université française. $$6PL1FF009A : Je pense que l’important aussi, c’est pour eux autres mêmes, c’est qu’ils ont le choix de continuer leurs études dans une langue qu’ils sont confortables dedans, c’est leur propre langue, puis... [Acquievements] si tu as ce choix-là et que tu apprécies ça, ça veut dire que tu te sens confortable dans ton cheminement académique. Si tu te sens confortable, bien tu produis mieux, puis ça va bien, ton affaire. Si tu n’as pas le choix et que tu t’en vas dans un milieu anglophone, dans une différente culture, puis toi tu ne veux pas être là puis tu n’as pas le choix d’être là, bien ça ne marche pas l’affaire.

$$6PL1FF007A : Puis à la fin, $$6PL1FF008A l’a bien dit, c’est le maintien de notre culture. Je me suis débattu pour avoir une école francophone avec le groupe qui était là, c’était pour ça, c’était pour garder l’identité. Pas pour devenir séparés des autres, c’est pour garder son identité. Quand tu es quatre vingt pourcent de francophones dans une population, et que ce quatre vingt pour cent là a dix pourcent des travailleurs au niveau « white collars », tu sais... quand je retourne en arrière, mon père puis mes frères, puis tout ça, là, ça te marque que... comment est-ce que dans un pays démocratique, où finalement, à la fin, tu te dis « bien, c’est le capitalisme,
Youth in transition

So is this ambivalence towards French culture cause to worry? Probably not; or at least not yet. As this high school principal reminds us, youth are at a critical time in their lives, a time when they question who they are, a time when they are also in some way “transitioning” into identity... and these questions can lead to anxiety. But since French-language schools are generally smaller, they are also probably well equipped to deal with these “crises” in an effective manner.

Example:

$$1ECH2FF001A : C’est peut-être un stade où les élèves, je pense que c’est l’aspect francophone qui commence à se questionner sur la francophonie eux autres, et qui ils sont. C’est normal à cet âge là de se questionner sur qui tu es, pourquoi je suis là, et tout ça. Il y a en a que c’est « je suis là parce que c’est mes parents qui voulaient que je sois là, mais je m’en fous de l’école francophone. Moi je veux aller à la grosse école du coin, avec mes amis du coin ». Donc je pense que le fait de se questionner au niveau de la francophonie, c’est une crise dans ces années là. Mais par contre, vu qu’on est petit, peut-être qu’on répond mieux aux besoins de nos élèves dans ces années là. Certaines crises, on peut en discuter de certaines crises, on est mieux placés pour répondre et pourvoir et on se parle entre nous « as-tu remarqué cela ? Oui, oui, correct ». 

From this brief examination of the information gathered in the French-language Focus Groups surrounding the issue of French language and culture, we can conclude that:

1. Transitioning into high school is neither easier or harder for French-language youth than for English-language youth;

2. Attending French-language school to obtain a high school diploma from a French-language high school is synonymous with being bilingual and being bilingual means more opportunities in terms of schooling and career;
3. Participants realize that they are part of a minority and this leads to a
dual tendency: idolization of English culture, preservation of French
culture;

4. The pro-English arguments point to the fact that English-language
schools are better geared towards schooling and career opportunities
and that they are less strict and they believe English to be easier to
learn than French; all of these arguments, along with location, are
stated as reasons for which youth would leave the French-language
system;

5. The pro-preservation arguments point to a certain ambivalence towards
the attachment to French culture in youth, but to a conscious decision
for parents.

In Phase III, participants were again asked the same three questions relating to
French-language issues. The four categories (bilingualism, pro-English-language
ideology, the possibility of switching to English-language and the unlikelihood of
studying in English) which define Phase I and II data emerge from the Phase III data
as well; and they are often complimented by important precisions concerning, for the
most part, differences between French-language and English-language systems.
Among these differences, two are intimately tied to what we have called the “urban
versus rural factor”: the first speaks to multiculturalism and presents itself in terms of
a great advantage and the second, relating to distance, is probably perceived as the
greatest disadvantage of the French-language system.

1. The importance of bilingualism

Data from all three Phases reveals that French-language participants consider
bilingualism to be an asset, if not a necessity. It is perceived as the means to
employment, in a predominantly English-speaking Canada. And because it is so closely
linked to employment, it is also associated with postsecondary schooling
opportunities.

Participants, therefore, are relatively open to the idea of studying in English, which
could explain why students leave the French-language system after grade 8 - by
switching to the English-language system, they are, in their minds, preparing for
University (1.1.). They realize that they live in a predominantly English-speaking
society and are therefore no strangers to the fact that English-language institutions
appear in greater numbers. Following the same train of thought, they admit the
possibility of having to lead a professional life in which English presents itself as the
primary language (1.2.). In that sense, English, and the English ideology which is
associated with the language, are valued. But if English is seen as important,
bilingualism is still by far the greatest asset one can possess (1.3.). Across all Phases,
predominantly French-speaking rural communities deviate from the norm - the idea of studying in English is never seriously considered (1.4.).

1.1. One student points to the fact that there are a greater number of English-language universities and that the transfer from a French-language high school to an English-language university may prove difficult:

$$6YL1FF134A : \text{Mais quand même, il y a plus d'universités en anglais. Cela peut être un plus gros changement quand tu tombes dans une université anglaise. C'est dur à t'exprimer parce que tu es français.}$$

1.2. Another draws attention to the importance of getting used to the English language in high school in order to lessen the shock provoked by a switch in language at the postsecondary level:

$$2YL2FF164A : \text{si tu veux aller enseigner... en anglais ou en français au secondaire ; quand tu penses, en réalité, est-ce que tu veux vraiment, comme, travailler en français ? Les élèves, comme, peut-être, oui, c'est possible d'étudier en français à l'école maintenant, mais je veux, plus tard, travailler en anglais, alors peut-être changer maintenant pour s'habituer maintenant...}$$

1.3. Another still explains how despite his lack of fondness of the French-language system, he has decided to stick with it in order to better his career opportunities, given the importance that is placed on bilingualism:

$$2YL1FF167A : \text{Moi-même, j'ai considéré quitter le système français, parce que franchement, je ne l'aime pas. ... On doit avouer que [nom de ville] est une ville plutôt anglaise, puis on va probablement travailler en anglais, so je l'ai considéré, mais... Animatrice : Tu as décidé de rester ? 2YL1FF167A : Oui, j'ai décidé de rester, parce que le français c'est une bonne chose, puis c'est bon pour le futur, puis tout ça. Animatrice : C'est bon pour le futur ? Tu penses à quoi ? 2YL1FF167A : Comme, un employeur embaucherait un gars qui est bilingue avant qu'il va embaucher un gars qui est juste anglophone.}$$

1.4. In predominantly French-speaking rural communities, students do not, for the most part, consider studying in English as an option. However, a lack of courses in a specific discipline can make some reconsider their position, especially when career goals and education opportunities come into play.

As this parent states:

$$6PL2FF012A : ... mais là, en onzième, elle commence à dire « je ne sais pas si je vais aller étudier au postsecondaire en français ou en anglais ». Elle se sent à l'aise dans l'un ou l'autre, puis... « est-ce que je serais comme les autres puis aller strictement à une université que tout le monde... je ne suis pas certaine ». Alors là, je vois que, rendu à la fin de la dixième année, que l'ouverture d'esprit commence à s'établir. Animatrice : Oui, tout à fait. 6PL2FF013A : Ça dépend, aussi, dans quoi
elle veut se lancer.
Animatrice : Oui. $$$6PL2FF013A : Parce que ce n’est pas tous les cours qui sont offerts en français. En tout cas... moi, je suis allée les chercher, puis je ne le regrette pas.

2. Pro-English ideology and Pro-French ideology

In previous Phases, participants clearly established that English is easier to learn and that because it is more widespread than French, English-language schools are better funded; both arguments fall under what we defined as a Pro-English ideology; and both are present in Phase III data. They are, however, counterbalanced by arguments through which also emerges a Pro-French-language or Pro-French-language-system ideology; this Pro-French-language ideology seems to be of greater importance in the last Phase of the research. If, in Phase II, participants imagine the English-language system to be slightly better than the French-language system, in Phase III, they have much praise for the latter, which they deem better structured, for the most part, than the former. The French-language system is valued for its early transition (grade 6 to 7), which makes the transition from grade 8 to 9 seem like a simple move into a higher grade (2.1). It is also seen as a more inviting system (2.2.), which promotes an extension of French-language culture (2.3) and in which school size reduces the probability of gang influence (2.4) and allows for a better dialogue between schools and parents (2.5). It is perceived, furthermore, as a more serious, more rigorous system (2.6).

2.1. A mother explains how the transition from grade 6 to grade 7, combined with a peer system, makes the transition from grade 8 to grade 9 a very smooth one.

$$$1PC2FF016A : Moi, ma fille était ici de la septième... Animatrice : Ok. $$$1PC2FF016A : ... donc c’était déjà territoire connu, la transition était déjà bonne de la sixième à la septième parce que... ils ont un système en place, là, pour accueillir... ils ont des élèves de septième, huitième qui vont dans les écoles nourricières pour présenter l’école. Animatrice : Oui. $$$1PC2FF016A : ... ensuite, quand ils arrivent, ils sont très vite pris en charge par des anciens... Animatrice : Ok. $$$1PC2FF016A : ... de leur école initiale ; donc là, c’est pareil : au niveau des casiers tout ça, tout ce qui était nouveau, tout ce qui était un peu... grand, là, tout de suite, ils étaient... ils étaient accueillis. Moi, j’ai trouvé que c’était formidable. Et puis... donc après, là, je ne suis même pas... moi, je ne me rends même pas compte qu’il y a eu un secondaire ici.

2.2. A parent speaks of the positive effect of a system in which younger students are exposed to older students; of a system which promotes exchanges among students of all ages, which does not discriminate by age.

$$$1PC2FF016A : Alors moi je ne sais pas si c’est... bien, je pense que, enfin, dans le cas de ma fille, je pense que c’était vraiment très net, peut-être parce qu’elle était dans une école auparavant, qui avait déjà cette façon de voir les choses, c’était beaucoup, prise en charge des plus petits par les plus grands, et il y avait toujours, il y avait un esprit de famille... Animatrice : Oui. $$$1PC2FF016A : Je trouve ça assez
2.3. Participants also value the French-language system because it is an extension of their culture, of their identity. A student speaks of a sense of pride associated with his French-language heritage:

$$6YL1FF136A : Pour moi, c'est plus pour la fierté d'être francophone. Je m'instruis en français.

2.4. Participants seem to think that transition, in the French-speaking system, might also be easier due to the fact that French-speaking schools are usually smaller than English-speaking schools. This argument appears in Phases I and II; it appears again in Phase III data and is clearly correlated with the notion of security: because French-speaking schools are smaller, it is easier to monitor the flow of individuals within the structure and the presence of gangs, as well as that of drugs, which are usually associated with gangs. As one student points out regarding the ability to monitor:

$$YC2FF151A : Surtout à cause que c'est une école petite, on connaît plus de gens, alors on se sent plus sécuritaire quand on connaît les gens qui passent dans les corridors, alors s'il y a quelqu'un qui n'appartient pas à l'école, on va le savoir.

And another, concerning the higher frequency of drugs in English-language schools:

Animatrice : Est-ce que vous pensez que le passage au secondaire, comme, passer en neuf, dixième année c'est différent quand tu es dans une école francophone de quand tu es dans une école anglophone ? $$YL2FF162A ? $$YL2FF162A : Je ne pense pas vraiment, mais, comme, dans les écoles anglophones, comme, il y a plus de gangs et de drogues, alors que nous, on est plus dans les sports. C'est surtout ça.

This higher frequency according to another student, is correlated with school size:

$$YLFF144B : Mes parents ont décidé pour moi parce qu'ils ne voulaient pas que j'aille dans une grosse école à cause des drogues et de l'influence. Animatrice : À cause des drogues et pour l'influence? Ok, donc pour eux, c'était la taille de l’école qui a déterminé? $$YLFF144B : Oui
2.5. School size is also seen as an asset in that it facilitates the circulation of information between school personnel and parents, hence allowing for a more integrated approach. As one parent states:

$$\text{Animatrice: ... l'expérience dans une école secondaire francophone, comparativement à l'expérience dans une école secondaire anglophone, est-ce que tu vois que c'est différent, être dans un système... ?}$$

$$\text{Je pense que c'est différent, je... évidemment, je ne sais pas de première main, puisque les miens sont venus ici... je sais que, quand ils étaient petits, je voyais la différence, parce que quand on est dans une école anglophone, ses parents... quand les parents viennent chercher leur enfant, on... la question, c'est : « Did you have fun today ? » ; et quand on... quand on est dans une école francophone : « Tu as bien travaillé aujourd'hui ? » [Rires].}$$

$$\text{Je vois que, par exemple, les sessions d'information, j'ai... pour avoir discuté avec d'autres parents qui étaient dans des milieux anglophones... une ou deux années à l'avance, je savais déjà à quoi m'attendre pour ce qui était de tous les processus, les dates pour l'université et tout ; on savait tout, on nous a tout fourni, assez tôt quand même ; dès la... quoi, la neuvième...}$$

$$\text{Et même...}$$

$$\text{... et puis j'ai vu des parents qui avaient déjà leur enfant pratiquement en douzième, ils n'étaient pas encore au courant, ils n'étaient pas... donc je pense qu'il y a vraiment une... Animatrice: ... façon de procéder...}$$

$$\text{... une façon, là, très organisée, très structurée de... de procéder, là, d'après ce que je vois... c'est... ils sont vraiment au point.}$$

2.6. The French-speaking system is perceived as a more serious, more rigorous system.

In the following quotation, a parent emphasizes the distinction between French and English-speaking systems, difference which seems to be recognized by other parents as well:

$$\text{Animatrice: ... l'expérience dans une école secondaire francophone, comparativement à l'expérience dans une école secondaire anglophone, est-ce que tu vois que c'est différent, être dans un système... ?}$$

$$\text{Je pense que c'est différent, je... évidemment, je ne sais pas de première main, puisque les miens sont venus ici... je sais que, quand ils étaient petits, je voyais la différence, parce que quand on est dans une école anglophone, ses parents... quand les parents viennent chercher leur enfant, on... la question, c'est : « Did you have fun today ? » ; et quand on... quand on est dans une école francophone : « Tu as bien travaillé aujourd'hui ? » [Rires].}$$

$$\text{Je vois que, par exemple, les sessions d'information, j'ai... pour avoir discuté avec d'autres parents qui étaient dans des milieux anglophones... une ou deux années à l'avance, je savais déjà à quoi m'attendre pour ce qui était de tous les processus, les dates pour l'université et tout ; on savait tout, on nous a tout fourni, assez tôt quand même ; dès la... quoi, la neuvième...}$$

$$\text{Et même...}$$

$$\text{... et puis j'ai vu des parents qui avaient déjà leur enfant pratiquement en douzième, ils n'étaient pas encore au courant, ils n'étaient pas... donc je pense qu'il y a vraiment une... Animatrice: ... façon de procéder...}$$

$$\text{... une façon, là, très organisée, très structurée de... de procéder, là, d'après ce que je vois... c'est... ils sont vraiment au point.}$$
3. When the “urban versus rural” factor is added to the problematic of the difference between French-language and English-language systems, two key elements emerge: one which represents an advantage for students and one which represents a disadvantage. The first deals with the importance of multiculturalism and the second, with the obstacles Francophone-language students are faced with due to distance.

3.1. Participants agree that in an urban setting, French-language schools are synonymous with multiculturalism. In a province where an estimated 95% of the population speaks English as a first language, one can expect to find a greater number of English-language institutions. One can also expect, given the fact that our country opens its doors to people from around the world each year, and that many of them are French-speaking, to find, within the school system, a reflection of the cultural mosaic that is Canada. One can, furthermore, expect to find more expressions of this phenomenon in urban areas, where job opportunities draw in the highest proportion of new comers. French-language schools, in these circumstances, are seen as structures, which encourage multiculturalism and, therefore, openness of mind and tolerance. A parent clearly expresses this view in the following excerpt:

$1PC2FF015A: Bien, je pense qu’on en a touché sur plusieurs des points, le fait que… que c’est… la multiculture, et qu’on vient de partout. La francophonie, ça vient de partout, tandis que… une école secondaire anglophone c’est seulement les gens du coin. $1PC2FF017A: Oui… [En même temps] pas vraiment… pas toujours, pas toujours. $1PC2FF015A: En général. $1PC2FF017A: Peut-être plus, mais pas… pas vraiment. $1PC2FF015A: Non, je parle du fait que si on habite dans un coin riche, je t’assure, tous ces gens-là qui vont dans… $1PC2FF017A: Ok, oui, oui. $1PC2FF015A: … si on habite dans un coin qui est moindre, il y aura ce genre de… d’enfants tandis qu’ici, comme Madame l’avait dit- $1PC2FF017A: -ok. $1PC2FF015A: C’est vrai. $1PC2FF017A: … socio-économique… $1PC2FF015A: C’est vrai. $1PC2FF017A: … religion, culturel, tout, on est tous mélangés, c’est comme un mini UN. $1PC2FF015A: Mais d’un autre côté, ils arrivent, surtout cette école-ci, puisque je n’en connais pas d’autres, donc je ne peux pas en parler, ils arrivent quand même à les unir et les préparer, d’après ce que j’ai entendu très, très bien pour l’université. $1PC2FF017A: Oui. $1PC2FF015A: Et leur prochaine étape, qu’elle soit universitaire, collégiale, etc. $1PC2FF017A: Ils les aident vraiment… $1PC2FF015A: Donc…de ce point de vue, je pense que c’est un peu plus sérieux, il n’y en a pas autant, dans notre communauté, qui arrivent à ne pas avoir des études, après le secondaire, c’est… ils font quelque chose d’autre après, tandis que dans le système anglophone, j’entends qu’il y a une grande proportion qui ne finissent pas la douzième ou après, c’est tout, ils deviennent caissières ou… je ne sais pas, moi… quelque chose, mais ils ne… $1PC2FF017A: Ils ont plus de soutien. $1PC2FF015A: … continuent pas leurs études. $1PC2FF017A: Il n’y en a pas autant, dans notre communauté, qui arrivent à ne pas avoir des études, après le secondaire, c’est… ils font quelque chose d’autre après, tandis que dans le système anglophone, j’entends qu’il y a une grande proportion qui ne finissent pas la douzième ou après, c’est tout, ils deviennent caissières ou… je ne sais pas, moi… quelque chose, mais ils ne… $1PC2FF017A: Ils ont plus de soutien. $1PC2FF015A: … continuent pas leurs études. $1PC2FF017A: Ils ont plus d’informations aussi. $1PC2FF015A: Et donc, ça, je voulais dire, justement, ça montre que ce n’est pas toujours le niveau socio-économique où on commence ; c’est vraiment les études qui nous portent… $1PC2FF017A: Oui. $1PC2FF015A: … à aller plus loin dans la vie. $1PC2FF017A: L’entourage. $1PC2FF015A: Pas nécessairement « Ah ! Bien ce n’est pas grave, mes parents ont de l’argent, donc je peux aller… devenir quelqu’un. ». Non. Ici, ils leur montrent que… on les pousse, ils arrivent… $1PC2FF017A: Tout le monde est égal.
Her view is supported by another parent:

Animatrice : Puis, vous dites, ils sont très bien accueillis... $$$1PC2FF014A : Oh, oui!
Animatrice : Très bien pris en charge. $$$1PC2FF014A : Là, s'ils n'étaient pas bien accueillis, ils allaient... alors, imagine-toi que... s'ils sont dans un domaine que personne ne partage avec eux, ou même personne ne les aide, ils allaient être, alors, perdus ! Non, non, non, non, c'est ça... et puis, en réalité il y en a beaucoup, ici, qui sont... ou bien la plupart, nous sommes tous des étrangers, parce que nous sommes venus ici... maintenant, tous, nous sommes des Canadiens, donc la plupart, ce sont des immigrants... donc on... $$$1PC2FF017A : Puis c'est une... $$$1PC2FF014A : ... ils ne sont pas... $$$1PC2FF017A : c'est une bonne école pour intégrer les gens.

3.2. But if the restricted number of French-language schools acts as a promoter of multiculturalism, it also acts as a barrier to the preservation of friendships. In urban areas, the restricted number of French-speaking schools means students often travel greater distances to get to school or must simply, due to lack of transportation or to its high cost, choose an English-speaking school, closer to home. Across all three Phases, location is seen as one of the reasons behind French-language youth leaving the French-language system. On a macro level, this threatens the very existence of the French-language population; on a micro level, it intervenes in youths’ personal relationships in that it restricts their contacts with friends as well as their “free” time.

A parent speaks out about the difficulties she faced when trying to obtain bus services for her children:

$$$1PC2FF015A : L’autre chose que j’ai entendue, c’est qu’il y a beaucoup de parents qui... si les enfants viennent ici jusqu’à la huitième, puis ils s’en vont, c’est le transport... Animatrice : Ah, oui ? $$$1PC2FF015A : ... puisque... $$$1PC2FF014A : Ah oui! Ça, c’est un grand problème ; vraiment, oui. $$$1PC2FF015A : Ce n’est plus donné ! Animatrice : Vous l’avez évoqué, oui. $$$1PC2FF015A : Et, c’est très difficile de l’obtenir ; j’ai vécu... j’ai dû faire des demandes et des demandes pour l’obtenir, donc... $$$1PC2FF017A : Pour obtenir l’autobus ? $$$1PC2FF015A : Pour obtenir l’autobus... $$$1PC2FF017A : Ah oui ? $$$1PC2FF015A : ... scolaire, oui. $$$1PC2FF017A : Ah ! $$$1PC2FF015A : Parce que ce n’est plus donné, après la huitième. $$$1PC2FF017A : Ah ! $$$1PC2FF015A : Et dans mon cas, on n’avait pas les moyens de... $$$1PC2FF017A : Ouï ! $$$1PC2FF015A : Et il y a beaucoup d’autres gens qui vivent dans mon quartier, qui, je sais... ils ont quitté après la huitième.

And about the lack of time available to friends, as well as the impositions on students’ time in general:

$$$1PC2FF015A : ils n’ont pas le temps même de se dire au revoir. Animatrice : Non. $$$1PC2FF015A : Ils doivent ... Participante : Oui. $$$1PC2FF015A : Et oui! $$$1PC2FF014A : Surtout que les casiers sont, par exemple, dans... $$$1PC2FF017A : Oui, à l’autre... $$$1PC2FF014A : ... un coin, et ils sont dans un autre coin, dans leurs cours, donc, ils n’ont presque pas le temps. Animatrice : Donc, ça, c’est... $$$1PC2FF017A : Mais... Animatrice : ... une des choses qui fait - $$$1PC2FF017A : ... si... Animatrice : ... le problème? $$$1PC2FF017A : Si elle prenait le transport...
This overview of the data collected in French-language Focus Groups in all three Phases of the research reveals that:

1. Attending a French-language high school and obtaining a high school diploma from a French-language high school is a guarantee of bilingualism; and bilingualism ensures more job and schooling opportunities; this fact, however, does not apply to predominantly French-language rural communities, where the necessity for English-language is not a part of the everyday reality;

2. Participants do not always perceive a difference in systems: often, it is said that transitioning into high school is neither easier nor harder for French-language youth than for English-language youth; however at times there is a perceived difference. When the perception tends to favour the English-language system it is because the youth believe that the English-language system has higher academic requirements; when the perception favours the French-language system it is because the students believe that school sizes and structure better prepare them for life in general;

3. The minority status of French-language students leads to a dual tendency, consisting in an idolization of English-language culture and a certain pride or attachment to French-language culture and to the French-language system; both parents and students express this attachment;

4. The minority status is also the cause of a limited number of schooling opportunities for students in urban areas, a factor which has both a positive and a negative effect: it creates an atmosphere in which students are confronted to several cultures, but it also interferes with the interpersonal
relationships of students, who are limited by both distance and time.

In summary, most of the arguments that young people used to justify a move from French school to English school when it comes to transition were highly ideological. Ideologies were built partly on true observations. But, they were also far from the truth since they were constructed solely on the elements that supported the discourse. We then recommend that young people be, year after year, exposed just to facts, so that the ideological discourse be at least weaken. Facts could be repeatedly communicated to young French-language students on such issues as: the complexity of all languages; the possibility of university studies in French in Ontario Canada and world; the relation between language of study and language ability; diversity of cultures in the world; links between studying in French and bilinguism. These kinds of factual discussions can be useful to dissuade students from holding beliefs similar to those stated in our Focus Groups and noted below:

"Puisque je suis Français, je ne peux pas perdre ma langue maternelle, donc il est préférable d'étudier en anglais."

"On ne peut pas vraiment faire des études universitaires en français, il vaut donc mieux étudier en anglais."

"Même si je suis francophone, il est préférable d'étudier en anglais pour ne pas perdre mon anglais."

"Il est préférable d'étudier en anglais parce que le monde est anglais."

"L'anglais est plus facile que le français, donc je vais étudier en anglais."
PART 10: SUMMARY, IMPLICATIONS AND DIRECTIONS

Summary

Twenty years ago, a literature review on research about schooling in the transition years in Ontario concluded that “the tragedy of the transition years is not that students experience anxiety on transfer to secondary school. The tragedy is that this anxiety passes so quickly, and that the students adjust so smoothly to the many uncomfortable realities of secondary school life. These realities...can restrict achievement, and depress motivation (especially among the less academic) sowing the seeds for dropout in later years” (Hargreaves and Earl, 1990: 214). The intervening years have seen further research into the transition but unfortunately this research has suggested that the “tragedy” is not yet fully understood.

The processes of transition from elementary to secondary school have been conceptualized in our recent review of international literature as relating to all of the academic, social and procedural aspects of negotiating the continuities and discontinuities between school cultures over time (Tilleczek and Ferguson, 2007). These processes take place among young people, parents, educators and community members while young people simultaneously negotiate the complex realities of early adolescence (physical, social, cognitive, emotional). The processes of “nested transition” look different for various young people from diverse families, schools and communities (Tilleczek, 2008c; 2007). The mapping of these processes offers a unique chance to capture, over time, the abundance of experience that encompasses contemporary youth, school, community and education.

Our Early School Leavers Study (Tilleczek, 2008a; Ferguson, Tilleczek, Rummens, Boydell & Roth Edney, 2005) demonstrated that for young people who had already disengaged from school and left school early, flexibility, care and proactive commitment was needed to re-engage them in their educational paths. Similarly, our review of Ontario’s alternative education programs for young people who had left traditional secondary schools and re-engaged in alternative schools revealed that strong alternative programs were those which deliberately promoted self-worth, confidence and competence while creating the caring communities that had been missing.

“Academic aspects, although very important, are only one component, of this mix. An effective school is one that, in addition to high expectations and standards, is a warm and caring place. Moreover, it is a place that exhibits strong leadership, a sense of purpose and allows for broad participation in governance by encouraging open two way communication. The programs in these cases provided a sense of belonging and engagement in school life. They were responsive to a whole range of student needs” (Volpe and Tilleczek, 1999: 3).
One important component of this belonging and engagement/re-engagement is the manner in which schools and communities facilitate, support and encourage young people who are in transition from grade 8 to grade 9 and continue to maintain this support through grade 10. We know that schools with good transition programs can reduce the rate of early leaving. For example, Reents (2002) reports a dropout rate of 8% in schools with effective transition programs, while schools without transition programs averaged 24%. But what are the elements of a “good” transition program, and how much of this work is currently being accomplished? How much more can we do? How do we encourage flexible, proactive, and caring solutions as young people cross the river from elementary to secondary school?

This report provides details on transition for a range of young people who have not left the school system. They may be in different states of engagement/re-engagement and have come from very different kinds of families, schools and communities. But each has much to tell us about the process as they are living it. Their stories and experiences portray both similarities and differences. We have examined their perceptions and experiences of elementary and secondary school and then spoken to parents and educators to round out the portrait. The data presented here shows how the tensions and experiences in the fundamental social processes of youth “being, becoming and belonging” (Tilleczek, in press) are paramount in transition.

Is the transition necessarily experienced as a time of dips in academic achievement, dips in self-esteem, and increased social anxiety as suggested by some researchers? If it is so troublesome, then why is this so? To what extent should we recognize and treat the transition in the manner suggested by other researchers who see it simply as a major stumbling point for students, particularly those “at risk”? If, as young people, parents and educators all tell us, academics are “only one part”, what are the other ingredients, and how do they look during the time when young people are beginning this nested transition? How are schools and programs encountered by young people and their families? How have schools and educators socially organized youth-attuned learning and living opportunities to facilitate transition?

The Phase I, data focused on the elementary years of the transition. Young people, educators and parents had already indicated the depth of various and interesting


experiences relating to these early years of transition. We saw a clear picture emerging of the academic, social and procedural issues and experiences that make or break school experiences and can facilitate the preparations for transition. We reported on the deep and embedded emotional paradox with which young people are juggling. We saw how educators and schools can both facilitate and detract from daily experience at school and the transition process. We saw caring and engaged people who are looking deeper to better understand ways to assist in transition and to share their successes with each other.

In Phase II, we said more about the kinds of secondary schools that young people arrived in and inhabit. They are similar and dissimilar, continuous and/or discontinuous from elementary schools. Young people, educators and parents all shed light on different aspects of the process and on those for whom the process is most troubling. Feelings of being on the outside, lonely, unhappy and bored are present for many young people in high school. Their transition has not yet been smooth and more work needs to be done to engage them and their community of helpers. False starts can be merged into fresh starts, if not in the first months of grade 9, then over the course of grades 9 and 10. We heard how fresh starts can be made, how risks/resiliencies can be negotiated and how protective factors can be enabled.

In Phase III, the study illuminated transition issues in grade 10. Most of the young people, parents and educators found this year to be one of continual adjustment to transition. However, it is mainly the social and developmental processes of youth and emerging adulthood that remain in flux. Some young people felt that they have settled in and are turning to the next phases of preparation for transition into pathways to work, apprenticeships, college and/or university. The sophistication and reflection with which grade 10 students spoke about transition, schooling and life was noteworthy.

Students in all Phases of transition focussed their goals at school in the academic realm and focussed their perspectives on the realities of high school such as workload and social issues. Young people appreciate much of what high school has to offer them, although they would prefer better school spirit/attitude and safety. Young people named the social/friend aspects of school as the very best things about it and this did not change over the transition. Neither did their feelings change about the excitement, promise and importance of making a fresh start and gaining new status. Transitioning from elementary schools into high schools that were ‘bigger but not better’ is a theme that emerged. Students appreciated the extra-curricular aspects of high school but named social pressures and bullying as real problems.

In total, the study has detailed the many risk and protective influences that occur over the transition from elementary to secondary school. Moreover, we have studied these influences and processes via four modes of data and analysis and found strong complementarities between them. As the literature review stated, the gaps in
understanding the qualitative way in which these influences worked over time and the importance of the meso system were addressed. The meso system is where intersections between culture and individual meet and where we can best begin to appreciate and describe the intersections of daily lives of young people with teachers, friends, peers, and parents. It is at this level where the experience and embodiment of social class, poverty, ethnicity, identity and age are played out (Tilleczek, in press).

One important example of this is the way in which social class was seen to function for the young people in the study. In each Phase, the subjective notion of social class was more influential than were the usual measures of socioeconomic status such as parental occupation and income. While these measures had some effect, the young people showed how it was the daily enactments in the meso system (schools, classrooms, homes) that was of importance. In the classroom and school, the feeling of being relatively poor or rich in relation to their friends and classmates was a cause for concern. Thus, simply placing students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds in “at-risk” categories would not do justice to them since all young people from low socioeconomic status did not experience similar problems. This study provides a more nuanced understanding of the way in which socioeconomic status can function for students in transition including the movements and trajectories of students from a range of socioeconomic backgrounds. This is not to understate that poverty often creates real and enduring “daily hassles” and problems at school, but rather to suggest further awareness of the ways in which social comparison works for young people.

Another example is the impact that every day teacher and classroom practices have on students’ feelings of success and belonging. Moving to a bigger or more complex school within a complex family of schools can be mediated as a negative influence by fun, engaging, dynamic and caring learning, classes and educators. Moreover, friends and classmates figure prominently in this mix.

Youth, parents and educators differ as to what they see as important in the process of transition. Parent’s ideas and concerns about transition were more stable over time. And, both youth and parents remained at the core of the process for parents. Educators were quite variable in their concerns over the years other than when they collectively highlighted their school success stories. They were also dissimilar in their perspectives from youth and parents. Youth were focussed on friends, school and the troubles they encountered (or thought they would encounter) at high school as they first prepared for and made their transitions. They then began to squarely place themselves and their friends at the centre of life and school. Even though self and friends were integral in elementary school, they became more so across the years. The ongoing importance of friends for young people remains a critical aspect of transition although the character of these relationships changes over time and must be understood as such.
Therefore, not only do issues of timing, grade, age, region, gender, culture, and development matter in our conversations and programs about transition, perspective also matters since different stakeholders attend to different aspects. These lessons from the data are important to remember in programming and in assembling the community of people to support transition. The study shows that we need to make these groups aware of the concerns and perspectives of each other while engaging each of them in elementary school and re-engaging them in the secondary years.

Moreover, educators need to detect what is “broken” and fix it with the help of an engaged community of helpers. We have indications of the need for more attention to be paid to friend, families and community agencies during transition. Transition was seen to be impacted by in-school and out-of-school situations including the following: students having “false starts” in social and academic realms; use of “scare tactics” with students; large discontinuities in workload; curriculum and pedagogy; misplacement in and rigidity of high school programs; and out-of-school factors such as family stress, poverty, emotional struggles and peer troubles which are not alleviated at school.

The message then is to leave what is “not broken” alone, and celebrate it! Young people need to be recognized for their strengths, hard efforts and hopes. Educators and parents need to be celebrated for the ways in which they are preparing and facilitating young people in transition but also for the ways in which they create the everyday learning and living atmosphere that is so cherished by young people. Transition creates stresses that can be attended to. Time and support are essential ingredients in success. Indeed, transition was seen to be facilitated by in-school and out-of-school situations including the following: supports for “fresh starts”; supports for positive social development and making friends; giving time to get acquainted with the school and new peers; support for meaningful and sustained cross-panel conversation and programming; cross-panel transition teams with expanded membership (youth, parents, community, etc.); assuring the ongoing availability of caring adults, positive school cultures and climates with good programs that best fit each young person; and the ongoing engagement of parents and families.

The study has provided many kinds of data. The detailed narratives of young people arising from follow-up individual interviews show the complexity and intersections of daily life in families, communities and schools and how the transition process is nested. These stories allow us to break through into the daily lives of young people and recognize their fresh starts and false starts and how/when we could better intervene and support them when needed.

The Focus Group data provides a clear sense of the ways in which young people, parents and educators perceive and experience the transition. It also provides specificity of the main risk and protective situations for each of grades 8, 9 and 10. In concert with the Face Sheet data collected in the Focus Groups these participants provided a good deal of information on the social, academic and procedural aspects of school and transition. This data was also designed to directly examine four important
influences on transition; family of schools, region, gender and time (grade/Phase). A summary of this data shows ways in which each matters in transition.

**Region**

- There were few regional differences and the majority of them were seen in Phase II, relating to friends, classroom learning and students’ ratings of their schools.
- Differences that were found suggest that preparation and transition of students depends on the milieu in which the school is situated and the transition policies/programs provided in schools. This explains why regional differences were more prominent in Phase II as compared to Phases I and III.

**Family of schools**

- There were few but important differences between families of schools. The influences of entering a school within a complex or less complex family of schools is mostly mediated by classroom level experiences and evens out over time.
- Schools within complex families were rated as more culturally diverse.
- The greatest influences of the complexity of families of schools is seen in grade 9 as students approach their high schools for the first time – complexity of family of schools can relate to students comfort/discomfort in schools.
- Students also felt that they were liked by others but felt more bored in the schools from complex families of schools compared to the schools from less complex families.
- There is something appealing about the ways in which high schools from less complex families of schools provide open areas for students to hang out. In Phase I, young people in less complex families of schools also better appreciated the size of their school building than did those in complex families of schools.

**Gender**

- The general pattern is non-difference between genders which suggests that the social and academic aspects of transition themselves are the concern for all young people. But gender influences young people differently across different Phases of transition.
• In Phase I females tend more than males to feel awkward; males more than females to feel lonely. In Phase III, females tend more than males to feel like an outsider and tend more than males to like to go to school.

• Gender influences reflect larger social and cultural realities that young men and women bring with them to school.

• In general, females are more critical of their physical selves than males, but also tend to see themselves as more serious and grown up than males.

• Differences in the experiences and meanings of friendships and school from young men and women need to be understood and considered given the importance of each in the transition.

• One troubling trend in the Focus Group data is that many young women in grade 9 experience sexual pressures and harassment by older male students. Given the specific concerns voiced by young men and women about the transition, this is a particularly disturbing trend.

Language

• French-language students must be exposed to facts over time so that their ideological discourses can be addressed. Facts need to be communicated repeatedly on such issues as: the complexity of all languages; the possibility of college and university studies in French in Ontario, Canada and world; the relation between language of study and language competence; diversity of cultures in the world; links between studying in French and bilingualism.

Time/Phase (The transitional process)

• There are some important differences and foci per grade/Phase that suggest that we attend to different messages and practices in grades 8, 9, and 10. However, the transition also should simultaneously be seen as spanning across these grades/years since educators, parents and students still experience many important adjustment processes.

• Grade 9 is so new an experience that it is a focal point for difference. The shift from elementary to secondary school depends a good deal on the foundations addressed in elementary school. This preparation depends on the milieu in which the schools are situated and on the polices/programs that are applied in the schools. Some schools and educators are doing better than others at setting foundations and assisting in adjustments for transition.
Evolution within the secondary school itself (from grade 9 to grade 10) is more generalized and evens out because the students and schools adjust within a system that is assimilating them. This is not to say that grade 10 students experience no challenges, but the character of the adjustment process changes.

By the beginning of the last year, transition is no longer a real emotional concern but the students in grade 10 have a different set of feelings related to transition. Transition is emotionally laden in grades 8 and 9.

The grade 8 transition teams could more profitably spend their time on positive preparatory work and creating social and academic foundations for transition, rather than emphasizing negative social and academic aspects of high schools. Elementary educators play a part in creating and perpetuating negative high school stereotypes. Cross-panel collaborations in transition team planning and implementation could address this and other demystification issues.

The literature suggests that the transition is a time of dips in academics for most students but that was not necessarily the case in this study. General grade averages remained rather stable for this group with a drop of about 5 percent. But, a growing standard deviation over the years suggests that grade averages are less stable for some students than others. Moreover, certain regions of the province reported lower grades for students than did others.

The spirit of the way in which students evaluate their relationships with their teachers is stable over the transition. From elementary to secondary school there was a good deal of appreciation for teachers but there remains a distance in student-teacher relationships regardless of grade/phase.

There is room to broaden the range of school social activities for young people as they move into high school. The drop in participation in high school is set against the background of young people hoping for more teams and clubs as they enter high school and their appreciation for extra-curricular activities as necessary social events. Even if available, however, there is a group of students who are consistently not participating. Given the fundamentally social character of the transition, this is a situation to address.

In general, we found risk situations in this study which both confer with and yet extend our recent literature review (Tilleczek & Ferguson, 2007). The ability to map the process over three years allowed for understanding the phase/grade and temporal dimensions of transition that many other short-term or cross-sectional studies have not. For instance, the more often students have changed elementary schools, the
more they tend to feel like outsiders, the less they tend to feel popular or to belong at school. But contrary to the literature we did not find important trends in student mobility and their negative feelings specifically toward school over time.

This study also extended the literature by illuminating school-based risk situations as judged to be present when students were lacking in belonging (eg. feeling like an outsider and/or lonely) and being (eg. feeling bored and unhappy at school). These were related to class size, school size, poor school spirit, lack of support and not working with their friends. The way the students feel at school depends on what the school and its teachers have to offer, specifically on the relationships between the school staff, students and teachers. The more young people think that their teachers make learning fun, the more they appreciate the attitude or spirit of the school, and the higher their grades, the happier they are at school. The support and availability of educators and social possibilities is a determinant of a positive transitional state. As others have found, this creates a good fit which needs to be constantly negotiated.

But it is the whole and complex relation between the students and the numerous components of the school that we should facilitate, not the simply the school itself. Facilitating the everyday experiences in classrooms and schools is necessary but not sufficient to make the transition better. Indeed, as expressed in the literature, it is the ongoing fit between student, school, teacher, family and community which must be assessed and addressed in transition planning. Families, friends and communities have an impact and are many are poised to become an engaged communities of helpers.

**Recommendations**

In speaking to 795 youth, educators and parents in Focus Group conversations and conducting an additional 130 Individual Interviews with young people about the transition from elementary to secondary school over three years of study, we have heard a vast array of experiences and perspectives. When attempting to grasp at once the mass of data that we have produced to fully describe the processes of transition it is useful to use two strategies.

First, we begin to separate some important recommendations for each of the community of people who must be engaged in transition. The second strategy is to return to the heuristic of the triptych of transition; being, becoming and belonging to conceptually chart some principles to guide recommended actions. In each case this calls for educators, parents, young people and their surrounding organizations and communities to be active in recognizing, discussing, and animating these fundamental social processes of transition. Each of these two strategies is discussed in turn.
Strategy 1. Transition as Social Ensemble

To begin to cluster recommendations for action, we categorize them around important groups of people who we were told must support the complex, social and academic process of transition. We see in the data that the ensemble of important people may be seen somewhat differently from the perspectives of Youth, Educators and Parents. But, they all assemble people first and organizations later to assist in the transition.

Programs and policies could begin to be more diversified. This “community of helpers” should be invited and engaged to create foundations in elementary school and be continuously re-engaged over the transition and across school/grade divisions. They should be seen as the integral heart of any transition teams and/or transition plans which are still too often conceived of as simply academic, individual and short term. We heard often about transition events which invite all parents and students only to end up hosting an evening of a handful of people.

Moreover, the complexities and tensions in emotions, friendships and self must be understood and attended to. A large part of this will be learning to better attend to and address families and friends in educational and social processes as young people move into high schools. There are specific perspective issues to be worked through in assembling the community of people to support transition teams. We need to make these groups aware of the concerns and perspectives of each other while engaging them in elementary and re-engaging them in secondary years.

Policy and Implementation

The participants in the study consistently demonstrate how the transition is temporal, nested, complex and fundamentally social in character and requires policy and programs to build extended, cross-panel transition teams and plans.

The transition will be made more successful when the Ministry of Education and Boards of Education:

- Provide leadership and support to educators to understand the transition from elementary to secondary school as occurring at a busy and dynamic time for students. They are in the midst of physical, social, cognitive and family changes and educators need to understand this complexity and to reflect on its meaning for their students;
- Emphasize the core role of cross-panel teams in assessing impacts of the variable nature of families of schools and the successes and failures in supporting the transition of their students. Each family will have established continuities and discontinuities in transition which should be examined, discussed and assessed in cross-panel transitions teams;
• Continue to build supports to extend the transition planning processes to include more elements and people in their transition teams and planning (eg, parents, young people, community agencies, educators across panels, etc);

• Review the various definitions of “at-risk” and the practices relating to transition (eg, at-risk or grade 8 students profiles). Ultimately the definitions and school practices should reflect the importance of the concept of “in-risk” situations and/or potential resiliencies and trajectories of transition. “In-risk situation” portfolios might be developed and discussed with cross-panel teams and on an ongoing basis from grades 8 to 10. All of the academic, social, familial, health/wellness and goals of youth should be considered;

• Review the extent of transition programming across boards and regions. Determine whether differences in context (rural/urban, north/south) require adaptation of transition programs to support optimal transition;

• Build on the successes of existing programs and strategies in each stage of transition. Transition resources need to be directed to the right place at the right time. This will be best accomplished with attention to the needs of individual families of schools within specific regions and across all phases/grades of transition.

Educational Practice

School Administrators

Parents, educators and young people provided perspectives on what is/is not working for transition at the school-based level. They agreed that people such as elementary teachers, high school teachers, guidance counsellors, principals and parents working together at the everyday level make a big difference. They spoke about the necessity of continually working together to build on already helpful cross-panel work. Young people were looking to schools for a safer place and a better school spirit. They reported being impacted by negative rumours about high school in general and the reputations of specific schools. Many of these issues can be addressed by improved and/or extended cross-panel relationships and planning.

The transition will be made more successful when we:

• Support educators who recognize and value the place of cross-panel work in promoting transition. Cross-panel transition planning, programs and practices are a necessity;

• Inform cross-panel discussions by examining the specific discontinuities and continuities that exist in each family of schools. Continuities/discontinuities can
be either positive or negative and both elementary and secondary educators will need to develop coordinated strategies to address these issues;

- Provide support and strong processes/programs for cross-panel transition planning in all its emerging elements (eg, flexible time tables, student “in-risk” situational profiles, caring adults, student success teams across panels, strategies/interventions, training for transition planning);

- Connect with communities and agencies that support students in their complex modern lives and assist in monitoring and supporting students “in risk situations”. Maintain and build on any positive integration that is currently happening in either elementary or secondary school. Ensure that it continues and is augmented;

- Broaden the range of school social activities for young people as they move into high school. The drop in participation in high school is set against the background of young people hoping for more teams and clubs as they enter high school and their appreciation for extra-curricular activities as necessary social events. Even if these are available, however, there is a group of students who are consistently not participating. Given the fundamentally social character of the transition, this is a situation to address.

**Educators**

In discussing transition, educators focused on the many barriers and enablers relating to school and family. Educators highlighted their own roles in supporting students in transition and shared with us their success stories. They also spoke about the importance of providing caring adults and the need to work closely with their partner schools across panels. Students shared with us both their deep appreciation for excellent teachers as well as a desire for more human connections with educators.

The transition will be made more successful when we:

- Remind educators that transition is a fundamentally temporal, nested and social process of being, becoming and belonging. Parents and friends play a critical role for students in this process;

- Continue to provide educators with processes to support parental/familial engagement in transition;

- Provide educators with support for cross-panel transition planning, programs and practices. Ensure opportunities for educators who value cross-panel work to put into practice their focus on promoting transition; providing support and processes for cross-panel transition planning and implementation (eg, flexible time tables, student “in-risk” situational profiles, caring adults, student success teams across panels, and strategies/interventions);
• Examine the specific discontinuities and continuities (such as pedagogy, assessment practices and curriculum) that exist in each family of schools to inform cross-panel discussions. For example, identify the positive or negative discontinuities and continuities for student academic and social success inherent in the transition process from grade 8 to grade 9 (or elementary to secondary school);

• Provide support and professional development to educators for the following: integrating friends into class work especially in Grade 9, making learning fun, demonstrating care to students in transition, supporting students’ different learning needs, providing further information and help with high school decisions, and supporting and understanding the emotional paradoxes of transition;

• Understand that “risk” is not a characteristic of students but an interaction of young people and the situations they find themselves in at any time. We propose the concept of “student in-risk situations” suggest the use of “in risk profiles” as a way of being more sensitive to the broad range of student needs related to risk;

• Encourage and facilitate students’ participation in extracurricular activities as a way of increasing their engagement with school and expanding their network of social supports.

Young People

Young people are at the heart of the transition. Their feelings and emotions about transition remain paradoxical but emerge as more positive over time. They set academic goals for themselves at school and see social goals and processes as the way to become educated. Transition takes place not just at school but also in a larger social context, as a part of the developmental paths of young people. Transition is nested and occurs with the assistance of friends and peers in schools and communities.

The data indicate that for young people, transition is more a social than only an individual process. The importance of close personal friends is a characteristic of young people and for this reason, friends can make transition easier. Friends are a primary and continuous element of the transition and only start to diminish slightly once the transition is realized.

The transition will be made more successful when we:

• Develop mechanisms that encourage students to move from elementary to secondary school with their friends;
• Support young people to make new friends and acquire a sense of belonging;
• Support the development of learner identities and good attitudes about themselves and their friends when making school transitions ("don’t be scared, be yourself, make good choices, do your work, join activities");
• Support young people and their friends in juggling their school/work/life complexities;
• Make youth aware that missing classes may be a part of the grade 9 experience that can both paradoxically provide social status and disengagement. Alternatives to ‘skipping school’ as a way to gain social status should be addressed.

Parents

The focal point of transition for parents is their sons and daughters. Parents are aware of the importance of peers and classmates in the education of their children. Parents and families are an essential part of transition. Parents are generally aware of what is going on at school but are under-invited and under-engaged on transition teams/programming at present. There is a range of useful methods for keeping them engaged, but face-to-face communications are the most appreciated.

The transition will be made more successful when we:

• Invite parents to help set the foundations for transition in elementary school as many are still left out. They need to be continually re-engaged in the adjustment to high school at a time when their sons and daughters may want them to be differently engaged than they were in elementary school;
• Make parents aware of the importance of friends to the transition.

Strategy 2. A Triptych for Transition: Being, Becoming and Belonging

The cast of actors in the social ensemble of transition have specific tasks to accomplish in further supporting this critical developmental time for young people. Each recommendation above will be further enhanced by this community of helpers by acting on the fundamental social processes of the nested transition (being, becoming, belonging) as described by the young people, educators and parents in
the study. This triptych of transitions is a heuristic device that forms a set of principles to recognize, discuss and animate in school transition planning and programming.

**Discuss Being**

- See young people at this age for the holistic variable and complex beings that they are. Young people are negotiating nested transitions and as such have challenging and full lives that are not all the same.
- Young people need to fit in now, for who they are now. Identity negotiations are central and ongoing during the transition.
- Young people are cognizant of the risk and protective aspects inherent in themselves. They are determined and they see themselves at the centre of the process.
- Friends are also of critical significance – young people do not wish to leave their friends behind. However, many young can be adept at making new friends resulting in positive social and academic experiences.
- Youth are balancing and juggling many aspects of their lives and transitional narratives show the complexity of the balance.
- An emotional paradox exists for students; students are both excited and anxious, both doubtful and hopeful – the constellation of emotions may change from grade 8-10 but the presence of the paradox of emotions remains.
- The amount of discussion relating to self, experience and learning from it (in the class, in the halls, in the homes) demonstrates that the place of young people in active negotiation of nested transitions.

**Recognize Becoming**

- The first step in re-thinking transition planning and programming is to re-conceptualize the transition from a short-term movement between elementary and secondary school to a much longer term academic, social and cultural process. Young people are in a process of becoming young men and women and this transitional point is crucial in that developmental process. The transition encompasses social, emotional and academic realms while nested within the paths to young adulthood.
- Students face both *fresh starts and false starts* as they move into high school. There are both continuous and discontinuous aspects to transition - and either can be seen as a positive or negative in its influence. For example, just because aspects of school or friendship change dramatically in some realms does not mean that they are necessarily experienced as problems by young people. Indeed, sometimes these changes are inspiring and engaging and at
other times they are seen to be negative experiences. Transitions are both
growth inducing and potential trouble spots.

- Not all young people are making the transition from the same familial, social
  and academic starting points – risk and resiliency situations change since youth
  are in process of becoming. Young people must balance and re-balance these
  aspects over time
- Young people are seeking status and potential (i.e. agency) for exercising their
  new maturity.
- As the initial adjustment phase passes, academic issues such as homework
  take precedence over social and procedural issues – But, social issues are the
  core of the ways in which youth see school at this point in their development.
- Educators and parents are also developing and their relationships to students
  change. The transition brings into focus the changing nature of relationships
  with parents and teachers.

**Animate Belonging**

- Developing a real sense of belonging to the school and community is a
  fundamental social process that young people can be assisted and fostered in.
- An ongoing transition community can be built up around the process including
  young people, their friends, parents and educators. There is plenty of room for
  better understanding and engagement of friends and families for their place in
  both social and academic spheres of belonging.
- Fun, joy and relevance in learning is of primary concern to youth.
- While many young people do feel that they belong at both elementary and
  secondary school, there are many who feel on the outside and are faltering in
  their transition. All young people do not feel completely safe, happy, included
  or have a sense of belonging at each school.

**Study Limitations and Research Directions**

All research has drawbacks and limitations and this project is no exception. While we
have been very fortunate to have had three years to study the process of transition
with the cooperation of myriad educators, young people, and parents, there are still
gaps in understanding that can be filled in future projects. The following list provides
some points of departure for continuing research in transition from elementary to
secondary school:
• This study is qualitative in character and therefore not generalizable since this is not the goal of qualitative research. Even the Face Sheet data and SPSS analysis is therefore drawn from qualitative sampling frame. However it can be seen to have transferability and credibility given the deep description of the process that have emerged, the complementarity in the messages arising from the different data sources and analysis, and its relation to the international literature. It is reflective of the process of transition for Ontario’s young people.

• This study should be continued through grades 11 and 12 to broaden the understanding of the transition through and out of high school and the foundations being set for trajectories to work life, post-secondary school and/or other destinations. Most especially, the over-time student Interviews should be continued into grades 11 and 12 to map emerging “evening out” and “in –risk” processes that were evident in grade 10.

• Further study and refinement of the “at-risk” discussion that takes place in transition planning is required. Our construct of young people “in risk situations” for problematic transition requires further study as it is implemented in the system.

• The further follow-up interviewing of this group of young people would feed into the development and assessment of “at-risk” situational portfolios as a practical strategy for programming and facilitating transition. What happens if we continue to develop maps of these “super-charged” lives as students move in and out of risk-situations? Could transition teams clearly see moments for prevention and intervention with the development of a tool such as visual transitional narrative? Do these tools assist in augmenting the beliefs and actions of educators over time?

• This Ontario study should be replicated in other provinces and territories and thus compared across differing types of families of schools, regions, school structures and levels of transition plans and strategies.

• Further study on the character and efficacy of transition teams as social ensembles is needed.

• Further study relating to high school space allocation and for students would be of value in assessing more thoroughly the ways to enhance belonging in transition. For example, what is about these areas to hang out in that students like/dislike and how are they used and misused to support belonging?

• Further research on the stability/instability of grades and the growing standard deviation over transition is required. While this study demonstrates a general stability in grades, there is clearly a necessity to find out for whom grades are most likely to fall and at what point. Matching this data with EQAO and/or OEN data would be useful to detect which specific course grades are most
vulnerable over the transition and for whom. This study provides the context of the school and classroom level that begin to show how some of this variability may be an artifact of transitional continuity/discontinuity in curriculum, pedagogy and assessment. This future research will nuance the current literature, which suggests that the transition is necessarily a time of dips in academics for most students.

- The French-language students in this study often espoused a pro-English discourse. This kind of discourse contributes to cultural drop-out and coincides with a switch from French to English schools during transition. This creates a serious challenge for the French-language education system and it is imperative that the system clearly understands this problem in order to counteract both causes and effects. To better understand this phenomenon, four research projects are needed.
  - The first should measure the extent of this phenomenon and identify macro social factors.
  - The second should determine if the pro-English discourse is the only factor that distinguishes Francophone and Anglophone students. This research could study both linguistic groups on school, family and community levels and compare their profiles.
  - The third should analyze the correlation between the student perceptions regarding transition with the perceptions of others that surround them (parents, friends, and school staff).
  - The fourth would compare the youth that choose to retain the French-language system and those who leave in order to determine their socio-demographic, psychological and ideological profiles and establish the extent to which the pro-English ideology is responsible for the switch from French to English during the transition period.

An ongoing evaluation of the effectiveness/fit of the evolving transition planning and implementation initiatives is required as the Ontario Ministry of Education moves to implement changes.
References


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Popay, J., Rogers, A. and Williams, G. (1998). Rationale and standards for the systematic review of qualitative literature in health services research. *Qualitative Health Research.* 8(3):341-351.


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Parent/Guardian Face Sheet (PI)
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Appendix B: Phase I English-Language Consent Forms
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Parent for Child Consent Form (PI)
Youth Assent Form (PI)
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Appendix C: Phase I French-Language Research Tools
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**Appendix O: Transcription Protocols**

**Appendix P: Focus Group Codebook**
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**Appendix Q: Interview Codebook**
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