



FACT
SHEET

14

PSYCHOSOCIAL AND ACADEMIC ADAPTATION DURING THE TRANSITION TO HIGH SCHOOL

Part 1

Evolution of behaviours and of some indicators of student academic adaptation

1 CONTEXT

The shift from elementary school to high school is an important transition in the lives of young people. For the majority of students, this passage unfolds smoothly. However, for some, it causes an increase in psychosocial difficulties (social behaviours and relationships) and academic difficulties (performance, motivation, engagement, etc.) that may eventually contribute to dropping out of school.

SOURCE

This fact sheet is a brief summary of the results presented in the following fascicle: DESROSIERS, Hélène, Virginie NANHOU and Luc BELLEAU (2016). "L'adaptation psychosociale et scolaire des jeunes lors du passage au secondaire", *Québec Longitudinal Study of Child Development (QLSCD 1998-2015) – From Birth to 17 Years of Age*, [Online], Institut de la statistique du Québec, vol. 8, fascicle 2, p. 1-32. [www.stat.gouv.qc.ca/statistiques/sante/enfants-ados/adaptation-sociale/passage-secondaire.pdf] (in French only).

Note that the QLSCD has been following a cohort of children who were born in Québec in 1997-1998.

2 HIGHLIGHTS

Whether in Grade 6 or Secondary 1, the vast majority of students who have followed the expected school path for their age (neither late nor early) do not have high levels of problematic behaviours.

Several aspects of the **psychosocial adaptation** of young people evolve positively during the transition to high school. Thus, on average, we notice a decrease in:

- aggressive behaviours
- indirect aggression (e.g., talking behind someone's back or pitting a group against someone)
- oppositional behaviour
- anxiety
- shyness
- victimization

In contrast, on average, there is an increase in:

- depressive symptoms
- delinquent behaviours
- inattention behaviours

With regard to the **academic adaptation** of young people, on average, the transition from elementary school to high school is marked by a drop in:

- results in certain school subjects (averages in the teaching language and mathematics)
- motivation to learn and feeling of competency in mathematics

That said, for the vast majority of students, the drop in academic performance remains modest. Only a small group (about 4%) sees their overall performance drop significantly to the point of becoming *low or very low*, according to the parent.

For the majority of students (about 6 out of 10), overall academic performance remains at a *very good or good* level between Grade 6 and the end of Secondary 1, according to the parent.



2 HIGHLIGHTS (continued)

During this period, on average, we also see an increase in the level of student engagement. This increase is greater for those who, in Grade 6, felt less competent or had lower grades in certain subjects. However, this positive evolution remains insufficient to allow these students to catch up with the engagement level of other students.

Level of psychosocial and academic adaptation at the end of Secondary 1 for different groups of students

Boys, on average, show more aggressive and delinquent behaviours, higher levels of victimization and school discipline problems, poorer learning attitudes, and less attachment and engagement towards school than girls. Girls, on average, exhibit more indirect aggression, anxiety and depressive symptoms than boys, and their feeling of competency and motivation levels in mathematics is lower.

Secondary 1 students living with both biological parents have, on average, less delinquent, oppositional, inattention, hyperactivity, anxiety or social withdrawal behaviours than those living in single-parent families or with a step-parent. They also have higher teaching language and mathematics averages and better learning attitudes, and are less undisciplined than students from other types of families. For these last four indicators as well as for school engagement, students whose mother has a university degree also show a more favourable profile than those with a mother with less education.

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3 OF NOTE

It is often the students with the most favourable profile in Grade 6 (for example, those from higher socio-economic backgrounds) who see their situation evolve less positively between the end of elementary school and the end of Secondary I. Nevertheless, these students continue to have a more favourable psychosocial and academic profile in Secondary I compared to other students.

INTERVENTION PATHS

Although proportionally few in number, students whose overall performance declines significantly between the end of elementary school and the end of Secondary I deserve special attention in the first months of the new school year. A closer link between these two education levels in terms of educational organization could contribute to fostering academic adaptation during the elementary-secondary transition.



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14

PSYCHOSOCIAL AND ACADEMIC ADAPTATION DURING THE TRANSITION TO HIGH SCHOOL

Part 2

Students at risk of dropping out in Secondary 1

1 CONTEXT

Some students starting high school have a higher risk of dropping out. Studies on the subject reveal that this process often starts early in childhood and is the culmination of a journey marked by many difficulties.

SOURCE

This fact sheet is a brief summary of the results presented in the following fascicle: DESROSIERS, Hélène, Virginie NANHOU and Luc BELLEAU (2016). "L'adaptation psychosociale et scolaire des jeunes lors du passage au secondaire", *Québec Longitudinal Study of Child Development (QLSCD 1998-2015) – From birth to 17 Years of Age*, [Online], Institut de la statistique du Québec, vol. 8, fascicle 2, p. 1-32. [www.stat.gouv.qc.ca/statistiques/sante/enfants-ados/adaptation-sociale/passage-secondaire.pdf] (in French only).

2 HIGHLIGHTS

Among Secondary 1 students born in Québec who had followed the expected school path for their age (neither late nor early), nearly 12% were at risk of dropping out.

About 4% had behavioural difficulties in addition to academic difficulties, while 7% had no discipline problem. These students seem to differentiate themselves from others by certain sociodemographic characteristics, as well as by conditions present since the beginning of their schooling.

Sociodemographic profile and risk of dropping out of school

There are proportionately more Secondary 1 students considered at risk among those who:

- live in a low-income household
- have a mother that doesn't have a university degree
- live with a single parent or a biological parent and step-parent
- attend a public school located in an average or underprivileged socio-economic environment
- live in a materially or socially deprived area

On the other hand, the proportion of young people at risk of dropping out is lower among students exposed at home to a language other than the one used at school.

The transition from elementary school to high school may increase the risk of dropping out for some students, while decreasing it for others.



2 HIGHLIGHTS (continued)

Past experiences and risk of dropping out of school

Among the characteristics present since the beginning of schooling that are associated with a risk of dropping out for Secondary 1 students are:

- living in a socio-economically disadvantaged household in kindergarten
- a higher level of anxiety in kindergarten
- average or low reading performance in Grade 1
- a lower level of attachment to school in elementary school

Changes in the risk of dropping out between Grade 6 and Secondary 1

The category of students at risk is not fixed in time. There is a similar proportion of Grade 6 students at risk of dropping out, but who are not at risk anymore in Secondary 1, and of Grade 6 students not at risk, but who become at risk in Secondary 1 (about 7% in both cases).

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3 OF NOTE

Differences in the risk of dropping out of school by socioeconomic background are more pronounced among boys than among girls.

In Secondary 1, the risk of dropping out is not statistically different depending on whether students attend a private school or a public school located in a privileged environment.

4 DEFINITIONS AND MEASUREMENT

The risk of dropping out was calculated in Grade 6 and Secondary 1 using the method described in Janosz et al. (2013), based on three main predictors: low performance, academic delays and low level of school engagement (see fact sheet 13).

INTERVENTION PATHS

Combined with the results of other studies conducted on the subject, these observations underline the importance of intervening on the various risk factors present in the environment of students from disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds, in particular boys', as soon as they start their schooling. It also seems essential to build on proven approaches to prevent reading difficulties and to educate parents, health-care professionals and child-care providers about the importance of identifying signs of anxiety in young children. It may also be relevant to promote attachment to school throughout elementary school by fostering the development of social skills and participation in the classroom, among others.