Student Perspectives of Stress and Improvements in Coping With High School

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Abstract

The transition to high school is a watershed moment in determining the success of an individual's school career. Youth face important challenges as they segue to high school, learning to cope with myriad changes related to early adolescence, and a move into a new social and academic setting generated by the high school environment. The current investigation used a grounded theory approach to understand the stressors, experiences, and coping strategies of students as they transition to high school, additionally asking how more effective coping strategies would help to ease student stressors. In Quebec, youth begin high school in Grade 7. One hundred fifty-five seventh grade students ($N = 155$) from the Montreal area were interviewed. Students stated that they experienced stress at the start of high school, specifically in their social lives, such as when meeting new people, and within peer and teacher relationships. Students said that academic changes--such as larger academic workloads--were stressful. Students' responses also showed that dealing with these new stressors included social strategies, such as talking to friends and family, and participating in extracurricular activities. Avoiding or distracting themselves from their difficulties was mentioned as a negative coping strategy. Finally, students discussed how high schools could better assist them in coping efforts, perhaps by offering greater social resources, support and activities. Students discussed that activities to meet fellow students with similar interests would be helpful, along with more learning opportunities, such as workshops. The results from this investigation point to changes that could be made within school systems to strengthen adolescent adjustment.

Résumé

La transition au niveau secondaire est un tournant décisif dans le futur succès scolaire d'un étudiant. Cette transition coïncide avec le début de l'adolescence, une période pendant laquelle les jeunes doivent apprendre à faire face à de multiples changements tout en devant s'adapter au milieu de l'école secondaire. La présente recherche repose sur une approche théorique à base empirique pour identifier, comprendre et analyser le stress, les expériences et les problèmes d'adaptation vécus par les étudiants lors de la transition au secondaire. Les jeunes du Québec commencent l'école secondaire en septième année. Cent cinquante-cinq étudiants du secondaire ($N = 155$) de la région de Montréal ont été interrogés sur la façon dont les écoles pourraient les aider à mieux gérer l'ajustement. Ils ont fait état de difficultés dans leur vie sociale causées, entre autres, par la rencontre de nouvelles personnes ainsi que par les changements dans leurs relations avec leurs pairs et leurs professeurs. Les étudiants ont également mentionné le stress occasionné par les changements scolaires, dont une plus grande charge de travail. Leurs réponses ont également révélé qu'ils géraient ce stress en parlant avec leurs amis et leur famille, ainsi qu'en participant à des activités parascolaires. Selon eux, leurs efforts pour se distraire ou pour éviter leurs difficultés étaient des stratégies négatives de gestion du stress. Ils ont offert des suggestions très perspicaces sur les moyens que l'école pourrait prendre pour mieux les aider à gérer leur stress, soit en offrant plus de ressources sociales et d'activités et un meilleur soutien. Ils ont suggéré que des activités favorisant la rencontre d'autres étudiants partageant les mêmes intérêts, de meilleurs moyens d'apprentissage, tels que des ateliers, ainsi qu'une réduction de la charge de travail seraient utiles. Les résultats mènent à des changements qui peuvent etre incorporé dans la vie quotidienne des adolescents à l'école, et qui peuvent avoir des effets importants pour leur ajustement.

Acknowledgments

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Graduation rates in the United States (US) reached their pinnacle over 40 years ago and have since declined steadily (Editorial Projects in Education Research Centre, 2010; as cited in Ruglis, 2011). In Canada, 9.8% of 20-to-24-year-olds in 2005 dropped out of school (Bowlby, 2005). Graduation rates in the US are estimated to be between 66% and 77%, and vary by sex and race (Levin, Belfield, Muennig, & Rouse, 2006). Finally, estimates of students at risk for school failure range from 20% to 40% (Demaray & Malecki, 2002).

Rates of failure and dropout among youth are concerns for several reasons. In 2010, 7,200 students in the US were predicted to drop out every day (Ruglis, 2011). Ruglis (2011) asserted that "education is now a primary regime of power responsible for sorting out who gets to live and who gets to die" (p. 629). This is due to the education gradient, a phenomenon where at each increasing educational level of attainment, people live longer and healthier lives (Braveman, Cubbin, Egerter, David, & Pamak, 2010; Cutler & Lleras-Muney, 2009). Each added year of schooling, therefore, is highly valuable for individual outcomes (McIntosh, Flannery, Sugai, Braun, & Cochrane, 2008). Dropping out of high school diminishes the potential for a productive and meaningful contribution to society (Landis & Reschly, 2013). For example, lower levels of schooling are related to a higher likelihood of requiring welfare (Hansen, Lofstrom, & Zhang, 2006). Moreover, in Canada, 62% of high school dropouts are unemployed (Bowlby, 2005). Dropping out of high school costs billions of dollars a year in taxes, in the form of unemployment, underemployment, crime prevention, and prosecution (Anderson, 2012; Levin et al., 2006; Lochner & Moretti, 2001; McIntosh et al., 2008; Nagle & Hiller, 2003). Students who drop out of school are at risk for poor adult outcomes, such as higher rates of unemployment, lower incomes, higher rates of health problems, incarceration,

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substance abuse, and dependence on government assistance (Brown, Moore, & Bzostek, 2003; Hair, Ling, & Cochran, 2003; Levin et al., 2006; McIntosh et al., 2008; Tyler & Lofstrom, 2009). As such, educational professionals should be focused on keeping students in school as long as possible (McIntosh et al., 2008).

Importantly, the evidence suggests that dropping out is the result of a series of events over a student's educational career, rather than a single, independent event (Alexander, Entwisle, & Horsey, 1997; Landis & Reschly, 2013; McIntosh et al., 2008). This is not surprising considering that the literature on risk and resilience also highlights the importance of the culmination of factors that contribute to either. No single factor warrants a classification, but a multitude of risk or resilience factors must be present. Similarly, LaRue and Herrman (2008) asserted that stressors for adolescents also build on each other, causing "greater cumulative stress" (p. 379). Thus, factors that lead to disengagement and dropout need to be examined as early as possible (McIntosh et al., 2008; Stearns & Glennie, 2006; Tyler & Lofstrom, 2009) to counteract accumulation. An understanding of the processes and stages of high school dropout is necessary to allow for intervention before factors reach a stage at which they cannot be mediated or improved. The transition to high school is one of many potential turning points in the academic trajectory (Eccles et al., 1993; Samel, Sondergeld, Fischer, & Patterson, 2011).

School environments profoundly shape adolescent lives and development (Newman, Newman, Griffen, O'Connor, & Spas, 2007; Way, Reddy, & Rhodes, 2007; Virtanen et al., 2009; Zahid, 2014). Following family influence, schools are the most influential socializing factors (Eccles, 2004; Kasen, Cohen, & Brook, 1998; Whitlock, 2006; Way et al., 2007). Schools are especially important during adolescence when teenagers look to their peers and other adults as models of norms and mores, replacing their parents as primary sources for this

information (Kasen et al., 1998; Nickerson & Nagle, 2004). Furthermore, mounting evidence suggests that school experiences deeply influence students (Johnson, Crosnoe, & Elder, 2001; Kasen et al., 1998; Oswald, Johnson, & Howard, 2003). For example, social and emotional climates in schools affect academic performance and attitudes (Kasen et al., 1998; Ireson & Hallam, 2005; Plunkett, Henry, Houltberg, Sands & Abarca-Mortensen, 2008; Samel et al., 2011; Roeser, Eccles, & Sameroff, 1998; Wenz-Gross, Siperstein, Untch, & Widaman, 1997).

Students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds benefit from high degrees of teacher loyalty and organized schools, as evidenced by lower rates of absenteeism, dropout, delinquency, and higher academic achievement (Kasen et al., 1998, Oswald et al., 2003). Conversely, students who do not become academically and socially involved in their high schools are more likely to drop out, in effect resisting their perceptions of being insignificant within academic spheres (Cammarota & Fine, 2008; Mehan 1997; Ruglis, 2009; Samel et al., 2011). In essence, students who gradually become disengaged or drop out defy educational practices that do not meet their needs (Anderson, Jacobs, Schramm, & Splittgerber, 2000).

High school environments also influence the emotional health of adolescents (DeWit, Karioja, Rye, & Shain, 2011; Kidger, Araya, Donovan, & Gunnell, 2012; Roeser et al., 1998). Factors such as school size, student-teacher ratios, interactional quality, peer and teacher relationships, safety, fairness, as well as feelings of school connectedness, all have been linked to positive emotional health for adolescents (DeWit et al., 2011; Roeser et al., 1998; Ireson & Hallam, 2005; Kidger et al., 2012; Newman et al., 2007; Oswald et al., 2003). In turn, good emotional health is related to educational success, healthy living, reduced risk from negative socioeconomic outcomes, psychological disorders, self-harm, and suicide in adulthood (Kidger et al., 2012; Roeser et al., 1998). This evidence pointed to a crucial aspect of education. These

are contextual school factors, as opposed to individual factors, that are highly influential for student achievement and future well-being (Anderson et al., 2000; Benner, 2011; Kasen et al., 1998; Roeser et al., 1998; Schiller, 1999; Whitlock, 2006). Importantly, contextual school factors are more easily adapted and changed as opposed to individual student characteristics (Anderson et al., 2000; Kasen et al., 1998). Consequently, school improvements could have a beneficial effect on student functioning.

The current investigation is a qualitative inquiry into the experiences of youth during the transition to high school and while in high school. This includes an investigation of the stress they experience and the coping strategies they harness in its management. Students were also asked to discuss the strategies their schools use to help cope with stress, and what they thought schools should do to help them cope more effectively with the stressors arising from the transition to high school as well as in high school in general. This information contributes to the literature on improvements that could better meet the needs of students in high school.

Literature Review

Early adolescence is a critical period with regard to stress, mental health difficulties, and the development of effective coping mechanisms. The transition from elementary to high school occurs as adolescents cope with maturational changes. This is a period of high stress, in which school climates, relationships with peers, parents and other adults, and standards of self-discovery, are in a state of flux. Given the considerable effect that high schools have on adolescent well-being and adjustment, it is critically important that schools implement effective programs to respond to youths' needs.

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Adolescent Mental Health and Stress

In Canada, approximately 15% of youth or 1.2 million youth below 19 years of age have mental health difficulties that influence their development and ability to participate in typical activities (Leitch, 2007). This means that roughly one in seven Canadian youths has a mental illness (Leitch, 2007). Leitch (2007) released a report for the Government of Canada about the health of children and youth, including incidence rates of mental illness. First, about 80% of mental illnesses begin in adolescence (Leitch, 2007). The most frequent of these mental illnesses is anxiety disorders, affecting 6.5% of young people (Leitch, 2007). Secondly, depression, commonly discussed in the literature on adolescence, also has its onset during this time, with the highest rate of depressive symptoms occurring before the age of 20 (Leitch, 2007). Next, among the ages of 15 to 24 years old, 24% of deaths are by suicide (Leitch, 2007). Additionally, hospitalization due to eating disorders occurs most frequently among youth between the ages of 15 and 19 years (Leitch, 2007). The highest mortality rate of all mental illnesses is also attributable to eating disorders, with a rate between 10% and 20% (Leitch, 2007). Finally, the rate of youth between the ages of 15 and 24 with either a mental illness or substance abuse problem is 18% (Leitch, 2007).

Furthermore, the Canadian Health Behaviour in School-Aged Children survey, done in 2006, uncovered a continual decrease in the emotional well-being of youth in Grades 6 through 10, as based on feelings of depression, psychosomatic complaints, and poor self-confidence and self-image (Freeman, 2008). As of Grade 10, 38% of girls and 22% of boys felt depressed in the previous week (Freeman, 2008). As Leitch (2007) noted, youth are experiencing a greater degree of pressure at a younger age, with increasing numbers experiencing distress from anxiety, bullying, low self-esteem, and a lack of security, separate from those who have diagnosed

disorders. Several issues, such as behavioural and emotional difficulties, depression and decreasing self-esteem, often arise in Grades 7 to 8 (Hankin & Abramson, 2001; Lanson & Marcotte, 2012; Roeser, Eccles, & Freedman-Doan, 1999; Seidman & French, 2004; Steinberg, 2002). For example, symptoms of depression typically occur between the ages of 13 and 15 (Hankin & Abramson, 2001; Lanson & Marcotte, 2012).

Adolescence is commonly associated with risk-taking behaviour, such as consuming drugs and alcohol, or risky sexual activity (Spear, 2000). Stressful life events have been linked to risky behaviours such as violence perpetration, delinquency, and drug use (Baker, Hishinuma, Chang, & Nixon, 2009; Cervantes & Cordova, 2011). Researchers have found that rats that experience stress in adolescence exhibit greater risk-taking and novelty-seeking behaviours than those who do not experience stress (Toledo-Rodriguez & Sandi, 2011). One explanation for this increase is that adolescents' decision-making abilities are more disrupted by stress due to their immaturity or lack of experience (Spear, 2000). Another explanation is that risk-taking behaviour is adaptive for adolescents, allowing them to explore their own development; more problematic behaviours are the unfortunate side-effects of this natural evolution (Spear, 2000). Nonsuicidal self-injury (NSSI) is another cluster of worrisome behaviours in adolescents. NSSI, also known as self-mutilative behaviour, is defined as causing tissue damage without conscious suicidal intent (Nock & Prinstein, 2004). Rates of NSSI are especially high in adolescence, with onset around the ages of 13 or 14 (Zetterqvist, Lundh, Dahlström, & Svedin, 2013). The prevalence rates of NSSI are between 13% and 24% in community samples (Muehlenkamp, Claes, Havertape, & Plener, 2012). It is most commonly used by adolescents as a coping strategy for negative emotional experiences, such as stress (Nixon, Cloutier, & Aggarwal, 2002; Nock & Prinstein, 2004); it is also used as a self-soothing mechanism (Klonsky, 2007). Both

risk-taking behaviours and NSSI, therefore, are closely associated with adolescence and stress encountered during this time.

As a system within which youth spend a large amount of time, schools have a central role to play in adolescent resilience (Minnard, 2002). This is especially crucial as the ability to cope effectively allows youth to "…maintain high levels of academic motivation, knowledge, and skills essential for progression towards college" (Newman, Myers, Newman, Lohman, & Smith, 2000, p. 46). Schools represent an important context in which the well-being of youth can be fostered (Kia-Keating, Dowdy, Morgan, & Noam, 2011). Usually, youth experiencing distress and disorders are identified, but they receive services too late, contributing to a downward cascade of difficulty (Leitch, 2007). Indeed, estimates suggest that earlier diagnosis and treatment could resolve 70% of mental health difficulties in youth (Leitch, 2007). Consequently, schools contribute to either improving or worsening students' mental health and future well-being.

Schools can be protective by providing youth with opportunities and guidance to foster social and problem-solving skills (Rutter, 1987; Greenberg et al., 2003; Minnard, 2002). These skills may further lead to greater self-efficacy and self-esteem, and better academic achievement (Rutter, 1987; Greenberg et al., 2003; Jindal-Snape & Miller, 2008; Kia-Keating et al., 2011). When youth feel supported in schools, this may provide additional protection against negative family factors and other harmful situations (Kasen et al., 1998 Minnard, 2002; Murray & Greenberg, 2000, Newman & Blackburn, 2002; Niehaus, Rudasill, & Rakes, 2012; Plunkett, Henry, Houltberg, Sands, & Abarca-Mortensen, 2008; Samel et al., 2011). For example, school environments focused on learning and with high levels of achievement and academic aspirations, appear to lower risk regardless of preexisting risk factors (Kasen et al., 1998; Minnard, 2002;

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Roeser et al., 1998; Samel et al., 2011). These positive features have lasting effects because supporting competence development and constructive feelings about learning reduces the impact of risk factors and potential maladjustment later in life; youth are provided with more options for positive participation in society and greater life satisfaction (Minnard, 2002; Suldo, Shaffer, & Riley, 2008; Roeser et al., 1998). Low educational aspirations, on the other hand, reduce the likelihood of graduation (Heck & Mahoe, 2006). In sum, adolescent mental health and school contexts are integrally interrelated and serious changes must be called for to improve outcomes for all youth.

 Adolescent stress. Adolescence is conceptualized as a period of difficulty and is a life stage characterized by the rapid influx of physical, physiological, neurological, cognitive, social, and pubertal changes (Herrman, 2005; Jindal-Snape & Miller, 2008; LaRue & Herrman, 2008; Levitt et al., 2005; Wenz-Gross & Siperstein, 1998; Wenz-Gross et al., 1997; Wigfield, Lutz, & Wagner, 2005). Adolescence is a stage during which all youth may be exposed to stressors and may actually experience trauma (Rudolph, Lambert, Clark, & Kurlakowsky, 2001; Reyes, Gillock, Kobus & Sanchez, 2000; Wenz-Gross et al., 1997). The most stressful aspects of life for early adolescents, including academics, relationships, and conflicts with adults and rules, are also the central themes of the changes they experience (Eccles et al., 1993; Isakson & Jarvis, 1999; Jindal-Snape & Miller, 2008; LaRue & Herrman, 2008; Reyes et al., 2000; Wenz-Gross et al., 1997). While our understanding of the deleterious effects of stress on mental and physical health has improved, it is still poorly understood as a concept (LaRue & Herrman, 2008). Stress is used to encompass a wide variety of ideas and experiences (LaRue & Herrman, 2008). It has been conceptualized as both an environmental and psychological phenomenon (Finkelstein, Kubzansky, Capitman, & Goodman, 2007), or as a stimulus that creates physiological and

psychosocial demands (Goodman, McEwen, Dolan, Schafer-Kalkhoff, & Adler, 2005). Interest in adolescent stress has also increased. According to LaRue and Herrman (2008), adults neither fully appreciate the levels of stress that adolescents experience, nor understand the potential consequences.

Adults and youth find different events and situations stressful. For example, adults view major life events as stressful, while youth view daily difficulties, including issues with peers or school, as causing major pressure (Newman & Blackburn, 2002). Thus, the frequency of stressful events affects youth more than the enormity of situations (Jindal-Snape & Miller, 2008). Given the influx of multiple crucial factors, the transition to secondary school is a highly stressful period for adolescents. Due to its complexity, the interpretation of adolescent experience is likely poorly understood and conceptualized. Therefore, incorporating students' voices into research provides a clearer picture of the reality faced by youth.

School stress. Given that stressors may lead to persistent illness later in life, adolescent stress levels are an integral component of healthy adolescent outcomes (Goodman et al., 2005). Additionally, stress levels are related to adolescents' experiences, having a noteworthy influence on daily functioning, including sleep, good eating habits, managing peer pressure, performance in school, and quality of life (LaRue & Herrman, 2008). High school plays a major role in adolescent stress (Burnett & Fanshaw, 1997; Jindal-Snape & Miller, 2008; LaRue & Herrman, 2008; Rudolph et al., 2001; Siperstein & Wenz-Gross, 1998). Semi structured interviews with youth between the ages of 14 and 16 indicated that while youth enjoyed elementary school, it was their high school experience that lead them to become disengaged from education (O'Connor, Hodkinson, Burton, & Torstensson, 2011). In fact, as the years in school progress, the enjoyment of school decreases (Epstein & McPartland, 1976; Hirsch & Rapkin, 1987; Ireson

& Hallam, 2005). The school environment tests adolescents' adaptive abilities (Downey, 2008; Roeser et al, 1998; Wang & Eccles, 2013) as they navigate new social, organizational, and academic climates. Schools build the foundation for an adolescent to learn about themselves and develop effective coping strategies (Way et al., 2007). However, researchers indicated that moving towards bigger schools, nonlinear curriculums, and reduced attachments to teachers and peers, also cause tremendous stress for youth in high school (Akos, 2004; Eccles et al., 1993; Heck & Mahoe, 2006; Jindal-Snape & Miller, 2008; Reyes et al., 2000). Other factors in high school that have been highlighted as difficult for students include school size, the complexity with which day-to-day life is organized (Maras & Aveling, 2006), and changes in social support (O'Connor et al., 2011).

Burnett and Fanshawe (1997) investigated adolescent stress among 1,620 Australian secondary school students. They used confirmatory factor analysis from a 68-item questionnaire with three separate samples to derive the main themes of school-related stressors (Burnett & Fanshawe, 1997). The three main categories to emerge were difficulties relating to school, those relating to self, and difficulties managing relationships (Burnett & Fanshawe, 1997). LaRue and Herrman (2008) noted that school is the primary stressor for adolescents, followed by factors such as family and social life, as derived from their descriptive study involving 17 separate focus groups. The qualitative study showed that the most common factors of school life considered stressful for adolescents included maintaining grades, passing classes, and keeping up (LaRue & Herrman, 2008). Byrne and Mazanov (2002), by confirmatory factor analysis with 2,725 Australian adolescents, found that adolescents were most pressured in their academics, questioning the relevance of education to their future, and inflexibility within the educational process. These researchers also noted that the stressors adolescents mentioned changed subtly as

they aged; moreover, as contexts change, so do the primary stressors (Byrne & Mazanov, 2002).

Thus, the transition stage between primary and secondary schools may engender its own set of

stressors, especially because it is a period of marked anxiety for many students (Galton,

Morrison, & Pell, 2000). For example, significant decreases in self-esteem, academic

motivation, and achievement occur during this time (Eccles et al., 1993; Isakson & Jarvis, 1999;

Reyes et al., 2000; Roeser et al., 1998; Rudolph et al., 2001; West, Sweeting, & Young, 2010).

Thus, the transition to high school deserves attention as a major turning point in the trajectories

of adolescent coping and health.

Transition to High School

School transition is defined as a process during which institutional and social

discontinuities impact youths' academic pathways positively or negatively, marked by

complexity and the interaction of multiple factors (Anderson et al., 2000; Schiller, 1999). In

addition to a convergence of physical, emotional, cognitive, and developmental changes,

students must learn to cope with new physical environments, expectations, and peers. This may

lead to anxious readiness, defined as optimism, and anticipation towards novel prospects

(Zeedyk et al., 2003). The transition can also cause considerable difficulty for some students

(Rice, Frederickson, & Seymour, 2011; Schiller, 1999; Zeedyk et al., 2003). Greater anxiety,

anticipation, loneliness, and depression may be common during transition (Benner, 2011; Rice et

al., 2011; Smith, Akos, Lim, & Wiley, 2008). At best, the transition to high school causes a

small amount of nervousness, and at worst, intense anxiety (Galton et al., 2000). For most

students, difficulties may be short lived (Anderson et al., 2000). However, differences between

individuals' concerns about transition, coping responses, and resulting adjustment suggest that

some youth are especially vulnerable to disengagement and maladjustment (Lucey & Reay,

2000; Smith et al., 2008; Rice et al., 2011). Some of the potentially more problematic factors of transition include changes in developmental demands tied to adolescence, as well as characteristics of the new environments (Felner, Primavera, & Cauce, 1981; Lucey & Reay, 2000). Challenges with these changes can negatively influence emotional and psychological adjustment (Rice et al., 2011). Rice et al. (2011) suggest that an investigation of the transition to high school is necessary because, even for those who are able to cope effectively, all youth undergo anxiety and stress. Moreover, poor adjustment during the transition is linked to psychological problems and causes a cascade of events that negatively affect achievement and adjustment over time (Rice et al., 2011; Schiller, 1999).

Jindal-Snape and Foggie (2008) conducted interviews with youth twice in their final year of elementary school, once in the first year of high school, and twice in the second year. The researchers found that a student's adjustment during the transition was highly dependent on his or her character, family, peers, particular school system, professionals, and community (Jindal-Snape & Foggie, 2008). Furthermore, students who were independent, good at making friends, and dealing with change were better able to cope with the stress of transition (Jindal-Snape & Foggie, 2008). Effective transition programs included orientations, buddy systems, clubs at lunch, and extracurricular activities (Jindal-Snape & Foggie, 2008). Other findings included the necessity for more bullying intervention, communication between primary and secondary schools, greater continuity in expectations between primary and secondary school, along with improved efforts to teach independence (Jindal-Snape & Foggie, 2008). In sum, coping and adjustment involves complex and layered factors related to both the individual and the school system (Jindal-Snape & Foggie, 2008). Wide variability exists within students' adjustment. For example, Roeser and colleagues (1998) found that following the transition to middle school, 14%

of students in their sample valued school less, 31% said they devalued school and had low

academic competence, while 55% felt competent, valued school and were achieving well. Wallis

and Barrett (1998) found that 11% of boys and 10% of girls significantly decreased in well-being

during the transition to secondary school. As a result of the variability in adjustment processes,

Roeser et al. (1998) support the use of person-centered research methods to bolster

understanding. Methods that investigate individual patterns of adjustment processes help our

understanding of why youth vary in their academic and emotional adaptation.

Transition stress. In 2003, the British Columbia Adolescent Health Survey disclosed

that of more than 30,000 students in the province, 43% of Grade 7 students reported high levels

of connectedness. As of Grade 10, however, only 22% of them felt connected to their schools

(May, Katzenstein, Liebel, Saewyc, & Skay, 2004). Investigations in the US and Canada

showed that an important proportion of students become disengaged from school by the time

they enter high school, which has been called the "connectedness slump" (Whitlock, 2006).

Perceptions of declining support begin in elementary school (May et al., 2004). Similarly,

according to a questionnaire-based longitudinal study including 2793 students from Ontario by

DeWit and colleagues (2011), students felt less support from classmates and teachers during the

transition to high school (DeWit et al., 2011).

The connectedness slump has been associated with the theory of stage-environment fit,

which underlines the importance of effectively supporting youths' developmental stages (Eccles

et al., 1993; DeWit et al., 2011). The theory underscores that schools do not respond adequately

to the developing needs of adolescents (Eccles et al., 1993; DeWit et al., 2011). Researchers

used the stage-environment fit theory to account for, among other issues, the changes in student

perceptions in peer and teacher support, linking them to the concurrent rise in mental health

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problems (DeWit et al., 2011; Newman et al., 2007; Roeser et al., 1998; Way et al., 2007). The

lack of fit between adolescent needs and the school environment is believed to aggravate

students' vulnerabilities because the larger sizes of high schools, with a variety of teachers and

ages, fails to meet adolescents' needs for autonomy, support from nonparental adults, positive

relationships with peers, social acceptance, and development of personal identity (Eccles, 2004;

Wigfield & Eccles, 1994; Martínez, Aricak, Graves, Peters-Myszak, & Nellis, 2011; DeWit et

al., 2011). Secure attachments may be more difficult to forge due to the increased numbers of

students and teachers in high school (Jindal-Snape & Foggie, 2008). Thus, feelings of social

support decline, despite increasing adolescent needs for positive, nonparental role models and

peer ties. Essentially, school environments and the needs of adolescents diverge (Davis, 2006;

Eccles et al., 1993, Mizelle & Irvin, 2000; Samel et al., 2011).

High school environments are also marked by greater attempts at control,

compartmentalization, and competition (Eccles, 2004; Wigfield & Eccles, 1994). Schools focus

on control and discipline, while the need for nonparental models increases and relations with

teachers become more distrustful as adolescents push for increased autonomy (Davis, 2006;

Eccles et al., 1993; Samel et al., 2011). Another example of the stage-environment mismatch is

the change in academic evaluations. The learning environment becomes more complex while

demands for achievement rises (Eccles et al, 1993; Mizelle & Irvin, 2000; Rudolph et al., 2001).

Using achievement as the standard of success underscores the importance of ability, competition,

and social comparison, when "fitting in" is a priority for adolescents (DeWit et al., 2011).

Therefore, despite the importance of high schools for adolescent well-being, researchers pointed

out that there are considerable differences between what youth require and what is present in

these environments. This misalignment should be noted when dealing with school reform

because improving adolescent functioning and well-being should, first and foremost, address the importance of meeting their needs.

Researchers commonly highlight only one adjustment factor instead of assessing the breadth of youths' experiences (Rice et al., 2011). Felner et al. (1981) suggested that the concurrent developmental and environmental changes require youth to harness new resources and develop new skills, which may worsen the difficulties of mastering the high school transition itself. Simultaneously, students are required to navigate and acclimatize to more challenging school settings, academics, expectations, and different relations with parents, peers, and teachers (Anderson et al., 2000; Seidman, Allen, Aber, Mitchell, & Feinman, 1994; Rice et al., 2011). Rice et al. (2011) investigated student concerns both prior to and following the transition to high school. The researchers administered a battery of questionnaires to 147 sixth grade students prior to the transition to secondary school, and again to 263 seventh grade students after the transition to high school, 39% of whom were part of the original sample. The most common concerns students expressed included institutional and social differences, organizational structures, social roles, and expectations (Rice et al., 2011). Bullying and homework were the most highly rated worries at both points (Rice et al., 2011). Student preoccupations with the environmental and procedural factors, such as changing classes and the size of their schools, were only high prior to transition (Rice et al., 2011). Concerns were related to adjustment and well-being (Rice et al., 2011). For example, once students had made the transition, high levels of preoccupation were linked to reduced enjoyment of high school, as well as lower trust and respect for teachers (Rice et al., 2011). Worries about school were also linked to internalizing difficulties and peer problems (Rice et al., 2011). Furthermore, generalized anxiety was strongly associated with concerns both prior to and following the transition, along with depression,

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school-specific anxiety, and emotional problems (Rice et al., 2011). Preoccupations about school were not related to any positive adjustment variables, such as prosocial or cooperative behaviour (Rice et al., 2011).

In sum, Rice et al. (2011) found that youths' worries regarding the transition to high school evolve as they approach the transition--as well as during the transition--and they continue to transform throughout high school (Rice et al., 2011). Moreover, various concerns will affect students' adaptations differently, depending on whether these concerns are pre transition or post transition (Rice et al., 2011). For example, students adapt rapidly to some changes, such as new settings and structures, but other features take longer to adapt to, such as greater responsibility (Rice et al., 2011). These considerations are important because some students' problematic adjustments may extend beyond the school years (Seidman et al., 1994; West et al., 2010; Rice et al., 2011). Great complexity exists concerning student trajectories, as different stressors affect individual students in varyious ways, depending on their backgrounds and priorities.

Transition consequences. The transition to secondary school has been associated with declines in mental health, adjustment, and well-being (Anderson et al., 2000; Galton et al., 2000; Rice et al., 2011; Smith et al., 2008), and may lead to depressive symptoms (Hankin & Abramson, 2001; Lanson & Marcotte, 2012). This period of uncertainty may affect self-perceptions and even spark traumatic experiences (Jindal-Snape & Miller, 2008; Rudolph et al., 2001; Seidman et al., 1994). Self-esteem and motivation also tend to decrease in this period, along with changes in identity and feelings about the self, potentially contributing to developing mental health difficulties, loneliness, stress, feelings of loss (Topping, 2011), noteworthy increases in anxiety, and deterioration in academic motivation and achievement (Otis, Grouzet, & Pelletier, 2005; Seidman et al., 1994; Wigfield, Eccles, MacIver, Reuman, & Midgley, 1991;

Wigfield et al., 2005). Declines in academic performance, often related to the transition to high school, are associated with decreased self-concept as a learner (Mullins & Irvin, 2000). In turn, changes in self-concept and anxiety with social situations can affect how youth cope with the transition (Sirsch, 2003).

Academic achievement is a major factor related to the transition to high school, as it impacts a student's progression (Benner, 2011; Stevenson, Schiller, & Schneider, 1994; Langenkamp, 2009). Academic achievement tends to vary after the transition to high school, depending on the particular context (Benner, 2011; Heck, Price, & Thomas, 2004; Langenkamp, 2009; Schiller, 1999). Academically successful students are most likely to establish relationships in (Langenkamp, 2009; Libbey, 2004, Little & Garber, 2004) and be attached to their new school (Johnson et al., 2001; Langenkamp, 2009; Libbey, 2004). Importantly, relationships affect achievement (Little & Garber, 2004) by serving as guides through the transition (Newman et al., 2000). For example, academic persistence is especially helped by school integration (Finn & Voelkl, 1993; Marcus & Sanders-Reio, 2001) and is also central to the student experience during the transition to high school (Crosnoe, Johnson, & Elder, 2004; Libbey, 2004; Smerdon, 2002). However, some students encounter broken social networks at this time (Almeida & Wong, 2009; Langenkamp, 2009; Seidman, Aber, Allen, & French, 1996; Weiss & Bearman, 2007). The reorganization of relationships during the transition to secondary school can either result in opportunities for new relationships or increasing vulnerability by a loss of support (Roderick, 2003; Langenkamp, 2009; Schiller, 1999; Swanson & Schneider, 1999). Therefore, transition can be double-edged. It may lead to disrupted relationships with teachers and peers (Weiss & Bearman, 2007) or it may be a chance for youth to move away from negative peer groups and reputations (Aikins, Bierman, & Parker, 2005; Langenkamp, 2009; Reyes et al., 2000).

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Transition and peer relationships. The importance of feeder patterns on transitioning students should not be overlooked. These are the differential patterns that exist in moving to a new school, either with or without the peers from a student's elementary or junior high school. Feeder pathways have varying effects on student integration and outcomes (Weiss & Bearman, 2007), especially as a result of the continuity, or lack thereof, in social relationships (Langenkamp, 2009). Langenkamp (2009) used the data from the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health and Academic Achievement to focus on feeder patterns and on the central components of students' integration into schooling, including relationships with teachers, bonding, popularity, and extracurricular participation. The sample included 20,745 students in Time 1 and 14,738 students in Time 2, from Grades 7 to 12 (Langenkamp, 2009). Students who transitioned with their previous school's peers were more likely to be white, while students from minority groups were most likely to go to different schools than their peers (Langenkamp, 2009). Moreover, students who followed their peers to new schools and maintained relationships occurred more often in small schools and least often in cities (Langenkamp, 2009). On the other hand, transitioning separately from peers, or transitioning with at least some peers, was more common in cities and larger schools (Langenkamp, 2009). Students who transitioned with their peers had higher levels of bonding with teachers and increased popularity compared with those from other types of transition patterns (Langenkamp, 2009). Students who transitioned with only some of their peers had higher grades in the first year of high school, indicating potential effects of transition pathways on grades (Langenkamp, 2009). This may be the result of benefits from new academic and social opportunities along with some familiarity (Langenkamp, 2009).

Relationships with teachers, popularity with peers, and extracurricular participation also predicted higher grades in the first year of high school (Langenkamp, 2009). Students who did

not transition with their peers had lower grades than youth who followed their peers, regardless of their previous levels of attainment. This suggests that academically successful students who do not transition with their peers have more difficulty adjusting academically due to the loss of familiar social networks (Langenkamp, 2009). Both transition pathways in which youth moved with at least some of their peers were associated with greater incidences of strong relationships with teachers. These patterns also predicted higher grades in the first year for these students (Langenkamp, 2009). However, social integration only predicted grades for students whose new high schools were a mix between some of their elementary school peers and new students from other elementary schools (Langenkamp, 2009). Specifically, the only students in this mixed pathway who benefitted from popularity were high achievers (Langenkamp, 2009). Moreover, high achieving students from mixed pathways received lower grades when they were involved in extracurricular activities (Langenkamp, 2009). Thus, participation in extracurricular activities may actually work against higher achieving students who followed mixed pathways (Langenkamp, 2009) because increased opportunities for socialization may have detracted them from academics. Social integration affected academics in the first year of high school for students regardless whether they followed their peers to a new school (Langenkamp, 2009). However, the pathway in which students had an opportunity to make new friends while maintaining some familiarity seemed to benefit some (Langenkamp, 2009). Students who changed schools without their peers experienced lower grades in their first year of high school, consistent with research that transitioning to a new school with fewer peers is a disadvantage (Langenkamp, 2009; Schiller, 1999). Students who followed the two transition pathways that allowed them social continuity had higher grades in their first year, compared with those whose peers did not transition with them (Langenkamp, 2009).

However, caution must be exercised because great variability exists. For example, individual differences predict reactions, but so do contexts and students' positions within these contexts (Langenkamp, 2009). Different types of transition pathways necessitate various kinds of programs to help students cope, specifically with regard to supporting social relationships (Langenkamp, 2009). Students who do not transition to a new school with any peers may benefit from activities where they meet new students. Generally, students who do not transition with their peers experience the most change in their social contexts and the greatest effect on academic achievement; as such, they may need extra support from peers and teachers (Langenkamp, 2009). Social networks are especially disrupted during transitions (Benner, 2011) because of considerable discontinuity in relationships (Ganeson & Ehrich, 2009). An increasing orientation towards peers and away from parents marks adolescence, and disruptions to these peer social networks may create difficulties with image and status (DeWit et al., 2011; Mizelle & Irvin, 2000; Topping, 2011). Disrupted friendships may also negatively affect academic trajectories (Benner, 2011). Students who are challenged by academic work after the transition also find it more problematic to make new friends and have difficulty with peer pressure (Benner, 2011; Newman et al., 2000; Weiss & Bearman, 2007). Increased stress with peers has also been associated with worsening depression after the transition to high school (Benner, 2011; Newman et al., 2007). Conversely, relationships with peers can protect against stress during the transition to high school (Hirsch & DuBois, 1992; Langenkamp, 2009; Topping, 2011). Peers help each other feel safe and less anxious, and therefore, more confident and able to cope (Ganeson & Ehrich, 2009). Peer relationships can also contribute to academic success by helping the adjustment process to a new school (Langenkamp, 2010). Thus, relationships with peers have a significant impact on well-being during the transition (Rice et al., 2011).

Promoting peer relationships has been found to improve coping during the secondary school transition (Topping, 2011). In particular, peer mentoring, where one student agrees to support and encourage another, improves school attitudes and achievement while increasing school confidence (Knowles & Parsons, 2009; Parsons et al., 2008). Hirsch and DuBois (1992) conducted a two-year longitudinal study of 143 students beginning in elementary school and ending in junior high school, investigating peer support and psychological symptomatology. Students who had structured interactions with older peers had fewer failing grades and better attendance than those who did not have these same contacts (Hirsch & DuBois, 1992). This suggests that adolescents with strong support networks before transition may be more likely to maintain positive peer networks afterwards, or to use their earlier sense of connectedness to help them cope with stress (Hirsch & DuBois, 1992; Jindal-Snape & Miller, 2008; Newman & Blackburn, 2002). Consequently, peer support programs could be effective interventions for youth during the transition to high school.

Transition and adult support. External support networks are also important for the transition to secondary school (Akos, 2004; Jindal-Snape & Miller, 2008; McGee, Ward, Gibbons, & Harlow, 2004; Topping, 2011). Family support is associated with a successful transition, including improved achievement (Falbo, Lein, & Amador, 2001; McGee et al., 2004; Topping, 2011). Support from parents is cumulative; the more encouragement that students receive over longer periods, the greater protection it offers to youth (McGee et al., 2004). Parents who are more involved in their children's lives - monitoring their activities, providing positive intervention, and involvement in their academic and social lives – help to smooth the transition (Falbo Lein, & Amador, 2001; Smith et al., 2008). This support leads to fewer disruptions and greater resilience after the transition to high school (Catterall, 1998; Falbo et al.,

2001; Newman et al., 2007; Roderick, 2003). Students with supportive parents commonly

identify them as the most helpful during the transition (Akos & Galassi, 2004).

Teachers and school support personnel have vital roles in terms of student functioning

during the transition. Youth must adjust to period-based schedules with many teachers, each with

differing teaching and management styles, expectations, and relationships to their students

(Felner et al., 1981; Jindal-Snape & Foggie, 2008; Tonkin & Watt, 2003; Weiss & Bearman,

2007). Students may be confused by differences in expectations, standards for behaviour, and

consequences, which can hamper learning and understanding (Ganeson & Ehrich, 2009).

Students tend to have a negative view of the new curriculum, the reduced cooperative work, and

their new relationships with teachers (Topping, 2011). However, student bonds with teachers

are crucial (Galton et al., 2000) because they provide the backdrop for educational careers,

sending youth messages of encouragement while supporting enjoyment in learning

(Langenkamp, 2010). Nonetheless, teachers may not always be available when needed, which

can increase feelings of isolation and anonymity among youth (Ganeson & Ehrich, 2009).

Teachers can help integrate students by getting to know their peers and by building confidence

(Ganeson & Ehrich, 2009). Teachers who are caring, considerate, and helpful are critical for

effectively coping with transition (Ganeson & Ehrich, 2009). Teachers who do not listen to their

students may disadvantage students by making their integration more difficult and increase

feelings of alienation (Ganeson & Ehrich, 2009; Weiss & Bearman, 2007). Unrealistic and

negative expectations by teachers intensify discouragement in students (Newman et al., 2000).

Higher and tougher standards, with an increase in discipline and a greater focus on results, may

be perceived as necessary and appropriate for high school, but students interpret these as

indifference and unavailability (Newman et al., 2000).

Amidst these changes, students are also expected to take more responsibility for their academics (Schiller, 1999). O'Rourke and Houghton (2008) investigated student perceptions of classrooms among 60 students with mild disabilities, using a Likert scale-based questionnaire of academic and social support mechanisms. The researchers found that youth perceive academic success stemming from clear and effective teaching (O'Rourke & Houghton, 2008). Students defined clear and effective teaching methods as giving good notes and clear explanations of class work (O'Rourke & Houghton, 2008). Furthermore, teachers who were friendly and positive, and who made their teaching material interesting and fun, had students with more positive academic results (O'Rourke & Houghton, 2008). For these students, the classroom environment was more predictive of positive academic outcomes than was classroom structure (O'Rourke & Houghton, 2008). Student-defined characteristics of good teachers were rarely mentioned by teachers themselves, such as having fun activities in the classroom, smiling, being interesting, being in control, calmness, friendliness, being encouraging, and providing positive regard for good work (O'Rourke & Houghton, 2008). Students also strongly supported cooperative learning, noting that it helped with their social integration (O'Rourke & Houghton, 2008).

Students who have more negative relationships with their teachers and school also have greater difficulties during the transition to high school (Benner, 2011). Furthermore, decreases in attachments during the transition are associated with greater aggressive beliefs, violent behaviours, and reduced academic motivation (Frey, Ruchkin, Martin, & Schwab-Stone, 2009). Students who are disengaged or drop out of school often display difficulties adapting to new instructional styles and report that their high school teachers were less supportive than their teachers in elementary school (Roderick, 2003). On the other hand, youth who adapt effectively to the high school transition report seeking help from teachers when experiencing difficulties,

and also state that teachers respond positively to help-seeking, providing the necessary support

and encouragement (Roderick, 2003). This underscores the complexity and reciprocal nature of

teacher-student relationships. Furthermore, Ganeson and Ehrich (2009) stated that it is the moral

responsibility of teachers and school professionals to be informed about how students experience

the transition and resulting relationships in order to bolster development and learning (Ganeson

& Ehrich, 2009).

The opinions of youth are crucial in implementing effective support programs (O'Rourke

& Houghton, 2008). Whitlock (2006) employed focus groups on two occasions over six months,

including 350 students from Grades 8, 10, and 12. Relationships with adults and with the

institution (e.g., common practices, policies, and procedures) were the most commonly discussed

themes among all age groups. More specifically, youth in Grades 8 and 12 highly valued the

willingness of school adults to give their time and help, and their emotional availability

(Whitlock, 2006). Youth also appreciated feeling visible to adults (Whitlock, 2006). With

regard to institutional relations, youth in Grades 8 and 10 highly valued the perceived

willingness by school personnel to assess and reward them according to more than simply age,

peer relationships and academics (Whitlock, 2006). Interestingly, only Grade 12 students

appreciated having their opinions-regarding controversy or conflict with adults-respected and

heard, in addition to having a role in determining school structure, curricula, and policy

(Whitlock, 2006). Finally, two other themes emerged, namely academic practices and pressure

(Whitlock, 2006). Grade 8 students appreciated interactive learning strategies, while Grade 12

students recognized that the curriculum was relevant to their interests, abilities, and futures

(Whitlock, 2006). Finally, with regard to academic pressure, students, especially those in Grade

8, experienced pressure because of a focus on ability or state-wide testing (Whitlock, 2006).

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This demonstrates that student opinions and desires may vary according to their life stage. It is important, therefore, to consider that student priorities and needs change depending on circumstance. Person-centered methods that seek to elicit student voices are one way to reflect complicated, embedded, and true experiences, which in turn, can lead to effective interventions and support programs.

Coping and Resilience

Coping is defined by Griffith, Dubow, and Ippolito (2000) as a process of continuously changing cognitive and behavioural approaches to manage both internal and external challenges that tax individual resources (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984, as cited in Griffith et al., 2000; Sapienza & Masten, 2011). Individuals manage or cope with stress using different strategies. The success of a strategy is dependent on individual factors, such as developmental level and sex, as well as features of events themselves, such as the type of stress and the perception of control over it (Griffith et al., 2000). Similarly, resilience is considered as positive adaptation even in the face of considerable difficulty, involving a variety of aspects that exist within an individual and the environment that influence coping (Luthar, Cicchetti, & Becker, 2000; Jindal-Snape & Miller, 2008). Protective factors can counteract the negative effect of risk factors (Jindal-Snape & Miller, 2008). Resilience is a dynamic and ever-changing process: factors that could put an individual at risk early in life could be protective later (Newman & Blackburn, 2002). Similarly, successful coping strategies can always be developed, even though early attempts fail (Newman & Blackburn, 2002). Different situations call for various coping strategies; the match between demand and response is most important (Griffith et al., 2000). However, for some youth, even a single negative experience may lead to decreased well-being (Jindal-Snape & Miller, 2008). Evidence suggests that youth have ineffective and immature

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coping strategies (Compas, Orosan, & Grant, 1993; Seiffge-Krenke, 1993; Wills, 1986). Youth

recover more slowly from stress, which in addition to their limited experience, may make

adverse events even more poignant (LaRue & Herrman, 2008). Thus, schools could play a large

role supporting the reduction of stress, but also could implement support programs to help youth

develop coping skills.

Many researchers have embarked on the investigation of outcomes for youth who do not

effectively deal with stress, or those who do not have requisite protective factors, such as social

support. Stress experienced over lengthy periods may have crucial negative psychological and

physical consequences (LaRue & Herrman, 2008; Baker, Hishinuma, Chang, & Nixon, 2010;

Byrne & Mazanov, 2002; Compas et al., 1993; Hoffman, Cerbone, & Su, 2000; Wills, 1986).

High-risk outcomes, including smoking, suicide, depression, drug-abuse, behavioural difficulties,

and risky sexual conduct have been identified (Chandler, Lalonde, Sokol, & Hallett, 2003;

LaRue & Herrman, 2008). Other researchers have evidenced that young adolescents are

vulnerable to worsening internalizing difficulties due to the breadth of changes that accompany

puberty (Reardon, Leen-Feldner & Hayward, 2009). Adolescence is a period of major change

and potential difficulty; developmental changes, school transitions, and social changes have

repercussions for socio-emotional and behavioural functioning (Martínez et al., 2011). There is

considerable variability in adolescent adjustment, yet developing successful coping strategies is

considered foundational for positive adaptation later in life (Patterson & McCubbin, 1987;

Peterson, 1988; Griffith et al., 2000). It is necessary for adults to attend to stress in youth,

especially in an effort to help youth develop effective coping strategies, with the goal of

attenuating negative outcomes (Goodman et al., 2005). Therefore, it is important to also

discover the coping strategies that youth find effective (Byrne & Mazanov, 2002) and to

implement programs to support these strategies. Research that more accurately reflects an

adolescent's actual experience of stress and how he or she developed effective coping strategies

is imperative to more adequately reflect their points of view (Byrne & Mazanov, 2002).

     Schools are crucial in creating environments that either support or threaten students'

adjustment. Catterall (1998) investigated issues related to student resilience and dropping out in

a longitudinal investigation that included 24,588 students in Grade 8 and 20,706 students in

Grade 10. School factors that prove to be protective for students include teacher support,

offering positive learning opportunities, community and sports involvement, and community

support networks (Catterall, 1998; DeWit et al., 2011; Downey, 2008; Oswald et al., 2003;

Plunkett et al., 2008; Samel et al., 2011). Moreover, family support in school, involvement in

school activities, and school-based efforts that are responsive and caring to students also provide

protection, especially with regard to school success (Catterall, 1998). Furthermore, Catterall

(1998) found improved chances for graduation in students who were more involved in school-

based and extracurricular activities, those who reported having both high teacher interest in them

and teachers who listen, and those who perceive fair disciplinary systems in their schools.

Therefore, background characteristics, family support, attitudes towards school, school

responsiveness, achievement, and involvement, all are key for school success and resilience

(Catterall, 1998; Eccles & Barber, 1999; Eccles et al., 1993; Frey et al., 2009; Furrer & Skinner,

2003; Isakson & Jarvis, 1999; Jindal-Snape & Foggie, 2008; Johnson et al., 2001; Kerpelman,

Eryigit, & Stephens, 2008; Mizelle & Irvin, 2000; Newman & Blackburn, 2002; Plunkett et al.,

2008; Stevenson et al., 1994; Topping, 2011). There are a number of protective factors within

the scope of schools that can help youth cope more positively. It is necessary, however, that

adults be aware of stress levels in youth and effective ways to help them cope (Goodman et al., 2005; LaRue & Herrman, 2008).

       Coping with school and transition. The school environment occupies an integral role in youth development (Way et al., 2007). School climate is poorly conceptualized, as it is amorphous and difficult to define (Libbey, 2004; Niehaus et al., 2012; Kasen et al., 1998). Conceptualizations include the ambiance created by teachers, administrators, and other students, or defining characteristics such as achievement and aspirations (Kasen et al., 1998). School connectedness is often considered synonymous with climate, attachment, bonding, and engagement (Libbey, 2004; Niehaus et al., 2012). Perceptions of positive school environments are consistently related to students who have better relationships with their teachers, higher grades (Crosnoe et al., 2004; Davis, 2006; Niehaus et al., 2012; Roeser, Midgley, & Urdan, 1996), greater academic motivation, and effort (Davis, 2006; Newman et al., 2007; Patrick, Ryan, & Kaplan, 2007; Ryan, Stiller, & Lynch, 1994), improved self-efficacy with regard to academics (Roeser et al., 1996), and increased cognitive, emotional, and behavioural involvement in school (Furrer & Skinner, 2003; Newman et al., 2007; Patrick et al., 2007; Ryan et al., 1994). School climate also significantly predicts depression, school adjustment, and self-esteem (Rueger, Malecki, & Demaray, 2010). Moreover, longitudinal evidence from elementary, middle, and secondary school students suggests that elevated levels of attachment to school are associated with a reduced likelihood of failure (Langenkamp, 2010), dropout, and repeating a grade, as well as obtaining better grades (Catalano, Haggerty, Oesterle, Fleming, & Hawkins, 2004; Niehaus et al., 2012). Thus, school climates may be difficult to define and align for research purposes, but they have a very important impact on student functioning, especially because decreases in students' perceptions of school belonging are consistently found in the

literature (e.g. Niehaus et al., 2012; O'Connor et al., 2011). The difficulty of defining school climates results from the differential importance placed on various aspects, depending on the goals and values of researchers. Students are the most centrally affected by schools and thus, they are well placed to define the important factors of school climates that could be targeted for effective improvements.

Schools can support positive adjustment by aligning with developmental needs (Eccles et al., 1993; Mok, 2006; Mullins & Irvin, 2000; Reyes et al., 2000; Roeser et al., 1998; Way et al., 2007). Positive emotional experiences, well-being, and intrinsic motivation are dependent on the three integral human needs for competency, autonomy, and relatedness (Deci & Ryan, 2000; Isakson & Jarvis, 1999; Niehaus et al., 2012; Roeser et al., 1998; Way et al., 2007). In the absence of this alignment, psychological and behavioural well-being may be jeopardized (Deci & Ryan, 2000; Eccles et al., 1993; Mullins & Irvin, 2000; Roeser et al., 1998; Suldo et al., 2008; Way et al., 2007). This is a continuous struggle within the school setting: requiring standards for behaviour and achievement, while respecting the developmental needs of adolescents (Galton et al., 2000). Moreover, youth arrive in secondary school heavily influenced by a plethora of previous school, social, and familial backgrounds (Galton et al., 2000). While there is increase in interest and evidence in youth perceptions of school climates and their impact on well-being, a firm understanding is elusive because of high variability in students and difficulty in consistently defining core aspects (Bachman & O'Malley, 1986; Brand, Felner, Shim, Seitsinger, & Dumas, 2003; Hoge, Smit, & Hanson, 1990; Roeser & Eccles, 1998; Roeser et al., 1998; Way & Robinson, 2003; Way et al., 2007).

Nonetheless, a number of school climate characteristics have been associated with students' academic and general well-being, relationships with teachers and students, support for

student autonomy in decision making, and the provision of consistent, transparent and just rules (Bachman & O'Malley, 1986; Deci & Ryan, 2000; Furrer & Skinner, 2003; Kidger et al., 2012; Kuperminc, Leadbeater & Blatt, 2001; Reddy, Rhodes, & Mulhall, 2003; Roderick, 2003; Roeser & Eccles, 1998; Roeser et al., 1998; Wang & Eccles, 2013; Way et al., 2007; Wentzel, 2002; Whitlock, 2006). Evidence suggests that these factors are not commonly supported in schools. For example, teachers tend to resist student empowerment because of unease over ceding power and control to students (Lewis & Burman, 2008; MacBeath, 2006; Sellman, 2003). Students feel like they belong in their schools when they can influence school policies, participate in engaging class material, and have meaningful interactions with adults (Newman et al., 2007). Involving students in organizational and pedagogical decision-making may play a role in sharpening communication and engagement in academic and societal spheres, increase students' sense of autonomy and motivation, help teachers gain insight into bettering their practices and relationships, and provide feedback to help schools improve learning and teaching (Fielding & Bragg, 2003). Adolescents' actual perceptions and experiences within school environments are more important than a school's objective reports for understanding adjustment and well-being (Eccles et al., 1993; Way et al., 2007). Statistical analyses offer a static view of a developmental period in which change and differences are the norm rather than the exception (Way et al., 2007). Therefore, adding student voices to these investigations can provide deeper insight into the student experience. These methods can also help researchers gain firsthand knowledge of what students deem to be central to their needs and what could be done to help meet those needs.

Self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 2000; Niehaus et al., 2012) underscores the importance of school connectedness. Relatedness is the need for secure and supportive relationships in a variety of contexts and is highly associated with school connectedness,

especially since school is so influential for youth (Niehaus et al., 2012). Perceptions of school

connections have very important consequences-cognitively, emotionally, and behaviourally

(Appleton, Christensen, & Furlong, 2008; Niehaus et al., 2012) for youth both in and out of the

classroom (Niehaus et al., 2012). Perceptions of school connectedness are related to more

positive educational outcomes, reduced engagement in risky behaviours (Catalano et al., 2004;

Diaz, 2005; Niehaus et al., 2012; Resnick et al., 1997; Rudasill, Reio, Stipanovic & Taylor,

2010; Voisin et al, 2005), and better psychological and social-emotional functioning (Demaray,

Malecki, Rueger, Brown, & Summers, 2009; Reddy et al., 2003; Rueger et al., 2010; Suldo et al.,

2009; Van Ryzin, Gravely, & Roseth, 2009; Way et al., 2007). For example, perceptions of

positive relationships between teachers and students have been linked to increases in responsible

classroom behaviour (Wentzel, 2002). On the other hand, conflicts between students and

teachers have been associated with greater misbehaviour and disrespect in the classroom (Davis,

2006). Greater perceptions of teacher support are also related to fewer behavioural problems,

including absenteeism, suspension, and expulsion (Aaronson, Barrow, & Sander, 2007; Crosnoe

et al, 2004; Way et al., 2007; Woolley, Kol, & Bowen, 2009). Youth who view teachers as

helpful, supportive, and providers of safe classrooms with clear expectations also have a greater

motivation and interest in academics (Wentzel, Battle, Russell, & Looney, 2010). Moreover,

feeling appreciated by teachers leads students to be more interested in school activities and to

feel comfortable and happy in class (Furrer & Skinner, 2003).

High teacher regard at the beginning of seventh grade predicts better academic self-

concept at the end of eighth grade (Roeser & Eccles, 1998), in line with Newman and

colleagues' (2000) findings that students who struggle academically after the transition to high

school also have greater difficulty with teachers. Similarly, students with high academic

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motivation, self-regulation, social competence, and identity knowledge have stronger

relationships with their teachers (Davis, 2006). Teacher behaviours are highly associated with

students' feelings of support in school (Martínez et al., 2011). This point should not be

understated, as teachers influence youths' attitudes towards school (Demaray & Malecki, 2002).

Teacher support is linked to better emotional functioning and greater school achievement, and is

a significant unique predictor of more positive attitudes towards school (Rueger et al., 2010).

The lack of social connectedness has been associated with negative outcomes such as

distress, increased health problems, and a reduced ability to cope with stress (Baumeister &

Leary, 1995). Disliking school, not getting along with teachers, and failing, all have been among

the most frequently reported reasons for dropping out (Catterall, 1998; Heck & Mahoe, 2006;

Rumberger & Larson, 1998; Rumberger 1987; Stearns & Glennie, 2006). Reasons for dropping

out of school later in adolescence are closely related to youth perceptions of nonresponsiveness

by their schools (Catterall, 1998). Thus, youth do not usually leave school because of external

options that entice them; rather, they feel cumulatively unsuccessful and unconnected due to

school contexts that do not meet their needs (Catterall, 1998; Heck & Mahoe, 2006; Lee &

Burkam, 2003; Rumberger & Thomas, 2000; Samel et al., 2011).

Social support and coping with school. Student coping and resilience are closely

related to the social relationships they maintain. Social support is defined as perceptions of

general or specific supportive behaviours that are either available or concrete, and that have

protective functions against negative outcomes and improve functioning (Malecki & Demaray,

2002; Martínez et al., 2011). Social support is a fundamental human need, one that drives all

people to connect with others, forming positive and lasting bonds (Baumeister & Leary, 1995;

Newman et al., 2007). It is important for health, satisfaction with life, and positive adjustment

(Newman et al., 2007). There are important associations between student perceptions of social support, and negative or positive adjustment (Demaray & Malecki, 2002; Newman et al., 2007). Support from social networks can be protective against school maladjustment, in addition to attenuating negative--and bolstering positive--physical and psychological outcomes (Demaray & Malecki, 2002). For example, lower levels of social support are related to greater conduct problems, aggression, hyperactivity, anxiety, depression, and withdrawal from others (Demaray & Malecki, 2002). On the other hand, social support improves adjustment, helping to shield youth from stressful events and provide a sense of connection and belonging (Newman et al., 2007; Wenz-Gross et al., 1997). These positive feelings are harnessed both in the management of stress and while adjusting to changing environments and situations (Compas, Slavin, Wagner, & Vannatta, 1986; Hirsch & DuBois, 1992).

Youth who do not have strong social connections are not as likely to receive emotional and physical support during difficult times, thereby increasing the chance of internalizing and externalizing difficulties (Newman et al., 2007). Evidence indicates that there are significant, positive relationships between social support and social, leadership, and adaptive skills, as well as school competence (Demaray & Malecki, 2002). High levels of perceived social support are linked to additive benefits for youth who have learning difficulties, are gifted, or are at-risk (Demaray & Malecki, 2002). Peers and friends also exert influence on school functioning. Youth who have higher grades have greater perceptions of both school connectedness and support from friends (Newman et al., 2007). Despite the protective nature of social support, students also express a necessity to disengage from friends and reduce time with them to spend more time on schoolwork (Newman et al., 2000). Relationships within schools are greatly

changeable and interventions at this level have powerful potential on whether adolescents will complete secondary school.

Social support and coping with transition. Social relationships with peers, teachers, and parents have received considerable investigation, especially because of the fluctuation in these spheres related to the transition to high school. Martínez et al. (2011) examined social support and adjustment before and after the transition to high school with two cohorts of 140 students. The researchers found that overall, social support and teacher support plummeted during the period discussed (Martínez et al., 2011). The slide was especially elevated for females, who perceived decreases in total support, friend support, and school support (Martínez et al., 2011). Thus, for females the dynamic nature of social support may be even more pronounced (Martínez et al., 2011). Reductions in teacher support and total support are also related to high levels of problems, such as negative attitudes towards school and teachers (Martínez et al., 2011). Researchers demonstrate the importance of social relationships for adolescent adjustment, including school functioning. Schools, therefore, have the ability to provide protective opportunities during the transition to high school, in the form of supportive relationships. Peers and friends influence well-being, especially for adolescents, in the midst of tumultuous and rapid change (Martínez et al., 2011; Wenz-Gross et al., 1997). While the relationships may not be causal, they add information for professionals who need to be aware of these important bonds.

Investigators have found that both during the transition to secondary school and while in high school, perceptions of greater social support are linked to better adjustment (DuBois, Felner, Meares, & Krier, 1994; Hirsch & DuBois, 1992; Lessard, Fortin, Marcotte, Potvin, & Royard, 2009; Plunkett et al., 2008; Wenz-Gross et al., 1997). Students who experience stress

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but cope effectively, have positive experiences in elementary school and outside of school they have someone who is supportive and believes in their potential for improvement (Newman et al., 2000). Moreover, children who are able to maintain or increase their feelings of support have better mental health and engage in less risky behaviour (Newman et al. 2007). As mentioned earlier, Hirsch and DuBois (1992) conducted a two-year investigation with 143 adolescents through the transition to junior high school. The researchers found relationships between peer support and mental health (Hirsch & DuBois, 1992). Peer support predicted symptoms of mental health difficulties during the time that youth moved from elementary to secondary school (Hirsch & DuBois, 1992). Severity of symptoms, on the other hand, also predicted peer support during the transition to high school, as well as in the new school (Hirsch & DuBois, 1992).

Hirsch and DuBois (1992) report that psychological symptoms had a stronger effect on peer support than the impact of peer support on psychological symptoms. A number of factors are proposed to explain this phenomenon. First, students with high psychological symptomatology have more difficulty making friends because they are not attractive companions and are not pleasant (Hirsch & DuBois, 1992). Secondly, these youth could be presenting fewer friendships due to less satisfaction with their support networks and, therefore, they are more negative in their reports of relationships (Hirsch & DuBois, 1992). The connection between adjustment and social support during the transition to high school is complex. Despite the differential findings, however, support from social networks is a fundamental adolescent need and interventions aimed at improving student relationships would be beneficial.

Perceptions and coping. Another layer of complexity is that students from various backgrounds have differing perceptions of how they cope with school. Newman et al. (2000) investigated perceptions of academic success among African American students, differentiated

as high- or low-achieving. High performers reported the need to work hard, focus on schoolwork, and have effective time management strategies (Newman et al., 2000). Despite potential issues with teachers, they knew they had to enlist teacher help (Newman et al., 2000). High performers were more analytical toward their performance and recognized that success was attainable given the right amount of determination, grades as their primary goal, and effective study strategies (Newman et al., 2000). They also reported a lack of motivation and boredom as factors leading to bad grades, but were able to call on effective self-regulation strategies and determination to avoid disengagement (Newman et al., 2000). High performers, therefore, had concrete strategies and perceptions that led to academic success (Newman et al., 2000). On the other hand, students who were low performers did not have the strategies and tools necessary for academic success (Newman et al., 2000). Moreover, they tended to be unconcerned about drops in their grades, but believed they could succeed if they tried (Newman et al., 2000). In an effort to maintain their self-image, low performers seldom reported a lack of motivation as a reason for their academic difficulties (Brophy, 1991; Newman et al., 2000). These researchers uncovered that some students--particularly those experiencing difficulty in school--lack the tools and strategies for success, which demonstrates a potential avenue for intervention.

Some students also use maladaptive coping strategies. Students' externalized behaviours may be a way to physically act out or display their frustrations and disengagement with school. Structures in school (such as size and ability grouping), institutional processes (such as scheduling, teacher assignment, and experiences in classrooms) and policies (such as discipline, transferring students who misbehave, and retention), all play a role in disengagement processes and ultimately, the decisions to drop out (Croninger & Lee 2001; Heck & Mahoe 2006; Lee & Burkam 2003; Rumberger & Thomas 2000). Sellman (2009) asserted that functional analyses

suggest that these behaviours may communicate students' goals and needs to adults. Students

who feel disempowered may use increased misbehaviour to communicate their feelings (Heck &

Mahoe, 2006). Researchers use the term *resistance* to describe how groups of students challenge

teaching methods and materials that they might view as unrelated, alienating, and belittling

(Galton & Morrison, 2000; Sellman, 2009). Youth may engage in protective actions such as

resistance and dropping out; they are coping strategies for systems that disempower them (Heck

& Mahoe, 2006; Nieto, 2005). Efforts to regain self-worth and recognition by taking control of

their lives occur when students leave school (Ruglis, 2011). As such, absenteeism, violence, and

eventual dropping out may be a manifestation of the rejection of a system whose values and

goals are incongruent with their own (Galton & Morrison, 2000; Heck & Mahoe, 2006).

Importantly, public schools and those with greater proportions of African American and

Hispanic students exhibit more negative effects of social control (Heck & Mahoe, 2006). This is

further evidence that dropping out and disengagement are not explained by adolescent

characteristics, but are deeply intertwined within school systems. In essence, Ruglis (2011)

noted, student dropout is an effort to reclaim humanity and fight an institution that breeds

indifference, disengagement, and stress, which may prove dangerous to physical and emotional

health. Evidence indicates that males especially tend to use direct resistance, whereas females

challenge injustice through avoidance strategies (Galton et al., 2000). Moreover, disengagement

is not a single event, but a process that begins in elementary school (Lee & Burkam, 2003).

Stress in youth is displayed through depression, anxiety and hostility, which in turn, is related to

self-injury, early pregnancy, and unprotected sex with several partners (Derouin & Bravender,

2004; Ethier et al., 2006; LaRue & Herrman, 2009). In essence, many of the maladaptive

strategies that youth use to cope with their stresses communicate strong messages to adults. It is

imperative that these messages are not ignored and that their roots are understood. This understanding can be turned into effective intervention.

Coping with transition sets the precedent for managing experiences later in life. Some youth are able to actively gather their resources to successfully cope with the transition. In essence, they are fostering a series of events that have positive effects for lifetime well-being (Rutter, 1989). Individuals react and cope differently, so events that pose real difficulty for some may be a challenge for improvement for others (Anderson et al., 2000; Benner, 2011; Catterall, 1998; Galton et al., 2000; Newman & Blackburn, 2002; Rice et al., 2011; Wigfield et al., 1991). The transition may provide opportunities for positive change as some youth are able to actively empower themselves and better their situations (Almeida & Wong, 2009). A certain level of stress, anxiety, and emotional consequences are likely inevitable; indeed, they are required for the development of effective coping strategies. However, serious and lasting problems may arise for children who do not have the necessary coping strategies, protective factors, or networks (Jindal-Snape & Miller, 2008). Despite the characterization of adolescence as a period marked by unpredictability, much can be done to counteract the declines in youth well-being (Martínez et al., 2011). Given that both risk and resilience are cumulative, schools should be engaged in as many supportive activities as possible. Students who are successful tend to be those who are academically competent, confident, mature, and have strong social support (Galton et al., 2000). Resilience processes may be greatly improved by efforts that are well within the realm of possibility for educators and policymakers (Catterall, 1998). Responsiveness to students, safety, networks of social support, and involvement in school activities have been evidenced to be strongly supportive of resilience, and are features within school systems (Catterall, 1998). Youth can be extremely articulate and informational when asked about issues and questions of practice

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in schools (Sellman, 2009). Youth can help inform researchers and practitioners about the types

of stress they experience, helpful coping strategies, and factors to support their adjustment.

Gaps in Existing Research

One of the best times to understand stress, coping, and resilience is the period of

transition between elementary and high school. How youth cope with the transition to secondary

school is often investigated in the context of changes in school size, increased difficulty of

schoolwork, evolution in rules, and less supervision from adults (Newman et al., 2007).

Researchers, however, commonly use instruments with topics originally oriented for adults, or

that reflect the interests of researchers instead of those of youth (Byrne & Mazanov, 2002). The

erroneous assumption is that adolescents and adults experience the same stressors (Byrne &

Mazanov, 2002). The result of this assumption is that adolescents' real concerns and experiences

may not be adequately reflected in research (Byrne & Mazanov, 2002). Stressors that are not

within the realm of adult experience, but are consequential for adolescents, may be overlooked

(Byrne & Mazanov, 2002). Therefore, as Byrne and Mazanov (2002) indicated, "there is some

doubt that the entire universe of stressors broadly reflective of adolescent concern has been

adequately tapped in studies reporting links between adolescent stress and a range of adolescent

dysfunctional behaviours" (p. 186). Similarly, in researcher-driven approaches, concepts are ill

defined, it is difficult to understand differential effects on individuals, and directionality is

inconclusive, at best (Kidger et al., 2012). Furthermore, a common theme in the stress and

adjustment literature is that it is adolescents' perceptions, rather than objective or informant

reports, which have a greater bearing on well-being and adjustment (Kasen et al., 1998; Malecki

& Demaray, 2003; Sterrett, Jones, McKee, & Kincaid, 2011). Therefore, adding student voices

to these methods can broadly reflect youth experiences and concerns.

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Fluidity and mobility characterize the movement of students in and out of categories of risk (Catterall, 1998; Cosden, 2001; Guerra, Boxer, & Kim, 2005; Morrison, Brown, D'Incau, O'Farrel, & Furlong, 2006). This changeability makes the classification of youth at risk difficult. Classification involves the identification of one or more characteristics or labels considered risk factors (Catterall, 1998). While this classification may be necessary for acute intervention, several issues remain. First, the focus on identifying risk factors ignores the mobility factor as students may be labeled at risk at one stage, but not at another (Catterall, 1998). Catterall (1998) underscores the importance of maintaining more positive expectations because mistakes occur when classifying students at-risk by judging their degree of engagement or un-involvement. The classification, therefore, may only apply during specific periods. Moreover, relying on classification may miss important information, namely individual and/or group experiences. Since researchers focus on populations with specific characteristics, it could mean that the full picture of stressors in adolescents is poorly understood, leading to underestimating the exposure to stress (Byrne & Mazanov, 2002). Furthermore, classification does not acknowledge the stress and challenge that the transition to high school presents for all students (Anderson et al., 2000; Benner, 2011; Catterall, 1998; Galton et al., 2000; Rice et al., 2011; Smith et al., 2008). These typical approaches to at-risk classification result in ignoring both individuality and conditions within systems (Catterall, 1998). Student trajectories involve great complexity, with a variety of individual and contextual factors that coincide and affect adjustment differently (Roeser et al., 1998). Similarly, contexts and students' positions within these contexts compound with individuality to influence adjustment (Langenkamp, 2009).

Another complication for classification involves subjective judgments about cut-off criteria. It is difficult to determine where such cut-off criteria ought to be, in other words, at

which point students experience difficulty. Even if symptom levels or adjustment factors do not

reach predetermined criteria, adolescents may still encounter major difficulties. Thus, students

who experience critical disruptions in their well-being and adjustment may be overlooked due to

criteria that are insufficiently sensitive. Important information about differences in students'

adjustment and causes may be missed. Despite identifying a plethora of risk factors, Newman

and Blackburn (2002) suggested that the psychosocial well-being of youth has not necessarily

improved. The common practice of focusing on one adjustment factor rather than on the breadth

of the student experience (Rice et al., 2011), along with a focus on risk classification, contributes

to a lack of understanding of the overall student experience.

Inconsistencies within the literature further complicate establishing the major challenges

that students face during the transition to high school (Benner, 2011). According to Benner

(2011), while many researchers have focused on the adjustment of youth in high school, such

efforts have not been integrated in the effort to provide a consistent and clear picture of overall

functioning and well-being. This integration would greatly benefit the understanding of student

experiences. Researchers and investigators vary widely in their approaches to concepts.

Integration of research is problematic, caused by concepts that are either poorly defined or hard

to define. This makes comparison between studies challenging because concepts seem to

describe the same phenomena but actually have important variations that affect results. For

some researchers, for instance, rules and fair practices may be included in the concept of school

climate whereas for others, school climate may only include relationships with teachers and

school personnel. Similarly, some researchers may include a wider breadth of school personnel

in their measures of relationships in schools, such as principals and even support professionals,

whereas others may include only teaching staff. Measurement strategies, therefore, commonly

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reflect these differences. Just as stress is defined in different ways, school climate also has a variety of definitions (Kasen et al., 1998; Libbey, 2004; Niehaus et al., 2012).

Moreover, there is wide variability within the population under investigation. Even the smallest variations in student backgrounds and experiences may greatly change outcomes. The transition to secondary school occurs differently depending on the country and the region. Some students transition from elementary to high school in Grade 7. Others may first transition to middle school or junior high school and subsequently move to secondary school after Grade 8. Earlier transitions may have a larger influence on students for various reasons, including increased developmental vulnerability and a greater convergence of factors with puberty. For example, students who transition to high school after an earlier transition to middle school may have already developed strategies for coping. Indeed, researchers have found that students who are younger and less mature at the time of transition are at greater risk for adaptation problems (Galton et al., 2000). Younger age has been associated with difficulties in transition (Anderson et al., 2000; Galton et al., 2000; Newman & Blackburn, 2002; Topping, 2011; West et al., 2010). Younger students may lack the integral development and life experiences to cope as effectively as their older counterparts. Studies conducted in separate regions with different patterns of school transition may not be comparable due to these age differences. Similarly, few studies make note of feeder patterns, as some students may move to new schools with the same students, potentially facilitating transition with the continuation of social support and familiarity. Feeder patterns can have a large effect on transition adjustment. Various types of feeder patterns have differential effects on different students, but these are seldom taken into account in the literature (e.g. Langenkamp, 2009).

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Another common issue is sample sizes. Small sample numbers may not reflect the real diversity that exists. For example, a small sample may only investigate a portion of students, namely those who are expected to have adjustment challenges because of specific school characteristics or shared demographic factors. This could lead to conclusions that may be specific to certain kinds of students or contexts and thus, should not be generalized. On the other hand, participating students may adjust well, for example, if their particular feeder pattern allowed them to transition with their friends. Without taking into account the feeder pattern, the conclusions could apply to only a small subsample. On the other hand, samples that are too large may diffuse effects by missing subtle details that have far-reaching effects on well-being and adjustment. Given that the majority of students experience a short spike in anxiety, large samples may make it hard to identify particular students who experience greater difficulties than expected. The result may overlook nuanced differences between how students adjust and school environments.

Finally, the directionality of effects is commonly questioned. The directionality between school factors and well-being is complex and likely reciprocal, depending on school-related and adjustment factors, in addition to background, context, and personal characteristics. As such, methods seeking to incorporate students' voices could be vital to understand the complex transition period. For example, Whitlock (2006) found that students were more negative when they discussed their experiences rather than when they provided answers to questionnaires. Ganeson and Ehrich (2009) stated that in order to bolster development and learning, teachers and school personnel have a moral responsibility to be informed about how students experience the transition and resulting relationships. Intervention programs to promote positive transitions are of the utmost importance because poor transitions may be one of many episodes in a cascade of

events that affect future adjustment and educational attainment (Rice et al., 2011).   The decision

to drop out of school should be considered in connection with students' educational paths and

contexts, as well as political and organizational factors that influence schools (Heck & Mahoe,

2006). Researchers suggest that students usually make the decision to stay or drop out not long

after the transition to high school (McIntosh, et al., 2008). Using students' voices provides

insights into stresses and experiences (LaRue & Herrman, 2008) that youth deem essential for

their well-being, which also may be important for determining the direction for effective

interventions.

Purpose

Schools have a large yet unfulfilled role in ensuring positive development in students.

Schools are often less concerned with the social and personal difficulties of youth, and more with

organizational and administrative procedures (Galton & Morrison, 2000; Jindal-Snape & Miller,

2008; Sellman, 2009; Zeedyk et al., 2003). It has been suggested that the function of social

control in school is to override that of learning (Galton & Morrison, 2000; Heck & Mahoe, 2006;

Watts & Erevelles, 2004). Schools can have a significant effect on all student lives (Jindal-

Snape & Miller, 2008). Furthermore, schools are best placed to create competent and contented

members of society. Importantly, protection is not avoiding or removing risk; rather, it is

successfully managing it through effective and positive strategies that lead to adaptation (Jindal-

Snape & Miller, 2008; Rutter, 1987). Schools can help students successfully manage stress and

risk (Jindal-Snape & Miller, 2008) by providing necessary tools and strategies. It has been

suggested that interventions within school systems are most efficient and effective (Bryk &

Thum, 1989; Kasen et al., 1998). However, researchers have generally ignored the contextual

and organizational impact of schools on students (Lee & Burkam, 2003). Models of risk most

often assign responsibility to individuals or familial backgrounds (Bryk & Thum, 1989; Mehan, 1997; Caterall, 1998). By overemphasizing idiopathic factors, these models blame the students for their disengagement, without accounting for the failure of school systems to meet their needs (Heck & Mahoe, 2006; Mehan, 1997). Moreover, perceived contexts are more meaningful and more causally aligned to behaviour (Kasen et al., 1998; Malecki & Demaray, 2003; Sterrett et al., 2011). Therefore, youth have strong messages for researchers about their experiences (O'Connor et al., 2011; Sellman, 2009). Their behavioural, emotional, and social difficulties communicate important information, however, they are seldom consulted about their experiences or opinions (Macnab, Visser, & Daniels, 2007; O'Connor et al., 2011; Prout, 2000). Schools are integral not only for successful learning but also for social and emotional development, and are strategically placed to influence well-being (Davis, Kruczek, & McIntosh, 2006; Koller & Bertel, 2006).

This research project solicited students' voices about their experiences during the transition to high school and more generally, in high school. It also examined students' stressors, coping mechanisms, and their opinions of the schools' roles in helping youth cope effectively. Students were identified as engaging in risky behaviour, NSSI, or in a comparison group for the purpose of contrasting their responses to the above questions. This investigation is an exploration seeking to streamline theory with qualitative student voices, adding to our current understanding of the experiences of youth during the transition to secondary school. The ultimate goal is to provide guidance for intervention efforts based on the themes indicated by the students' discourse. The following questions are addressed:

- What do students perceive to be stressful about the transition to high school and what do they find stressful about high school in general?

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- How do students cope with these stressors?

- What do students think schools can do to help them cope with their stress more effectively?

Method

Participants

Participants included 155 Grade 7 students ($N = 155$), including 89 males ($n = 89$) and 66 females ($n = 66$). The mean age for all participating students was 12 years, 5 months ($M = 12.49$, $SD = 0.54$). Participants were recruited from 14 English-language high schools in the greater Montreal area. Forty-one percent of the sample came from seven suburban public high schools. Thirty-two percent of students were from three public high schools located outside the city limits. Nineteen percent of the student sample came from two private schools. Finally, seven percent of the student sample was from two inner-city public schools (see Appendix A for further demographic information). Students who participated had parental permission, provided their own assent to participate, and were also present on the days of data collection. Three groups of students were interviewed. Grouping decisions were made based on endorsements of specific items and sections of the "How I Deal With Stress" (HIDS) questionnaire and "Beck Youth Inventories" (BYI). Two groups were selected based on endorsements of the How I Deal With Stress questionnaire. Students who were classified into the risk-taking and self-injury groups endorsed these respective sections of the questionnaire. Students who were part of the risk-taking group endorsed the *Do Risky Things* section, including reckless driving, theft, gambling, drug and alcohol abuse, vandalism, as well as promiscuous or unprotected sex. The self-injury group students endorsed the *Physically Hurt Myself on Purpose* section, which included a number of self-injurious behaviours, including cutting wrists, arms or other areas, burning or scratching oneself, and banging one's head or punching oneself. These behaviours

were followed by body parts that were hurt, how it made the individual feel, how often they have

self-injured, age of onset, and the number of times that the behaviours were enacted, as well as

that intent and the need for medical treatment.

The final group was the comparison group, selected because these students endorsed

neither the risk-taking section nor the self-injury section on the How I Deal With Stress

questionnaire, and selected *never* or *sometimes* (0 or 1) on Item 44 ("I wish I were dead") of the

Beck Depression Inventory (BDI). Fifty students comprised the risk-taking group ($n = 50$; 31

males, 19 females), the mean age of which was 12 years and 5 months ($M = 12.52$, $SD = 0.52$).

The next subgroup was comprised of students who endorsed self-injurious behaviours ($n = 38$;

14 males, 24 females), with a mean age of 12 years and 5 months ($M = 12.47$, $SD = 0.48$). The

final group was a comparison group, comprised of 67 students ($n = 67$; 44 males, 22 females),

with a mean age of 12 years and 5 months ($M = 12.49$, $SD = 0.6$). Twenty-one students who

endorsed self-injurious behaviours and 13 who endorsed risk-taking behaviours on the original

screening questionnaire, but at follow-up expressed either misunderstanding the question or

filling out the section in error, were not included.

Measures

Beck Youth Inventories - Second Edition (BYI-2; Beck, Beck & Jolly, 2005). The

BYI-2 is a self-report measure of five inventories, including depression, anger, anxiety,

disruptive behaviour, and self-concept. Each inventory includes 20 self-statements, answered on

a 4-point Likert scale from *never* to *always*. Standardization occurred among a sample of 800

students and included age- and sex-based groupings, with significant efforts to ensure the

representation of the broader population, especially for sex, ethnicity, and parental education

(Bose-Deakins & Floyd, 2004). Internal consistency was evaluated using Cronbach's alpha, and

for all inventories, was above 0.80 (Bose-Deakins & Floyd, 2004). Test-retest reliability was

also above 0.80 for most inventories (Bose-Deakins & Floyd, 2004). Furthermore, inventory

scores were consistent and statistically significant over time (Bose-Deakins & Floyd, 2004). For

example, median 7-day test-retest correlations were large for all five inventories, being at or

above 0.73 (Steer, Kumar, Beck, & Beck, 2001). For clinical purposes, the inventories had

"good" to "excellent" internal consistencies (Steer et al., 2001). In a review of the internal

consistency for the Depression Inventory by Beck, Steer and Garbin (1988), 22 of the 25

coefficient alphas were above 0.80, with the remaining three above 0.70. Furthermore, there was

stability over time. For example, in psychiatric patients, the Pearson product-moment correlation

coefficients were between 0.48 and 0.86, and for nonpsychiatric individuals coefficients were

between 0.60 and 0.83 (Beck et al., 1988). All students in the current research project completed

the BYI-2. Scores from the Beck Depression Inventory were used to identify students to be

included in the comparison group. Only students who endorsed "*never*" or "*sometimes*" (0 or 1)

for item 44 ("I wish I were dead") were included in the comparison group.

How I Deal With Stress questionnaire (HIDS; Heath & Ross, 2007). The HIDS is a

self-report questionnaire that asks individuals how they cope with stress, commonly used as a

screening questionnaire for risky behaviour and nonsuicidal self-injury. It includes sections for

risk-taking behaviours and nonsuicidal self-injury, asking students to rate, on a 4-point Likert

scale (*never* to *always*), the following questions: "Have you ever hurt yourself on purpose?" and

"Have you ever engaged in risky behaviour?" The questionnaire includes follow-up sections for

both of these questions, asking students about specific types of behaviour (including onset and

frequency), and asking them to rate their effect during and after engaging in risky behaviours or

self-injury. Students who endorsed risk-taking or self-injury were chosen if they endorsed the first question from 2 to 4 (*sometimes*, *often* or *always*) and if they completed follow-up sections.

School Support Interview. The School Support Interview is a semi structured interview with seven questions assessing what students find stressful about high school and the transition to secondary school, how they themselves cope, how their friends cope, how schools help them with stress, and what schools might do to worsen stress (see Appendix B). The questionnaire specifies numerous probes and additional questions to help students elaborate their answers. The students are also asked to rate their stress on a 4-point Likert scale (*no stress*, *slight stress*, *moderate stress*, and *extreme stress*) for homework, tests, grades, social life issues and parents. Students were asked the following questions:

1. Once you are in high school there are all kinds of regular stress: homework, tests, social difficulties, and arguments with parents. Can you talk about how stressful or not stressful you find these types of things? On a scale of 0-3, rate how stressful each of these things are for you.

2. Making the change from elementary to high school can be very stressful. Can you talk about that experience and about what you found most stressful?

3. How did you cope with the stress of making that change from elementary to high school?

4. What kind of things do you think other kids do to cope with the stress of that change?

5. How do you deal with these kinds of stressors?

6. Some kids do less healthy things to cope with stress, like doing risky things (drinking and driving, extreme drinking, self-injury, etc.). Is there anything you think schools could do to prevent kids from doing these worrisome behaviours?

7. How does the school help or not help with these everyday stressors?

Procedure

McGill University's Tri-Council Ethics Review Board approved the current research project. It is embedded within a larger study investigating the use of maladaptive coping strategies while adjusting to high school, concerned with understanding risk and resilience, as well as stress and coping in students, beginning with the transition to high school in Grade 7 and ending in Grade 9 (though the current investigation deals only with the Grade 7 cohort in order to gain an understanding of their perspectives at this time). First, Montreal and surrounding area school boards received an application for conducting research in their area schools. The five school boards that were approached approved the research project. Then, all high schools, except those serving special populations (e.g., alternative schools) and those requiring over an hour of travel time outside of Montreal, were approached. School directors were sent electronic applications for research (see Appendix C for the letter of application), including details of purpose, recruitment and data collection methods, as well as requirements from school personnel. Eighteen secondary schools agreed to participate. Three of the 18 were discontinued due to consent return rates that were too low or inconsistent, or because travel distances were too great.

A research team for data collection was recruited. The research team consisted of McGill University master's and PhD students who were part of the same research laboratory. These

team members were trained over a number of sessions by the principal investigator of the larger

project, Dr. Nancy Heath. These training sessions included: reading scripts for consent form

distribution, conducting the group sessions, scoring, following up with students, breaking

confidentiality, and conducting interviews. Dr. Heath and graduate student team members

recruited and trained McGill undergraduate students as assistants in the research project.

Training included a number of sessions to prepare and practice for distributing consent forms,

articles about stress, coping, and nonsuicidal self-injury, information about conducting group-

administered questionnaire sessions, and strategies for managing unexpected situations with

students.

Following the approval from individual schools, a trained research team, comprised of

trained graduate and undergraduate students, visited the schools to deliver consent forms.

Research team members went to classrooms and delivered a script (see Appendix D) detailing

the purpose of the project, along with the details and limits of confidentiality. Students were

asked to bring consent forms home to their parents, and to return the completed forms to school.

Regardless of a "yes" or "no" answer, students who returned their consent forms received a mini

chocolate bar. Some schools did not allow chocolate to be distributed to their students, in which

case the research team organized pizza parties for those classrooms with a majority return rate.

Consent forms (see Appendix C) that went home to parents included details about the research

project and its aims, the rules and limits of confidentiality, an explanation about the consent to

record audio, and an area on the form to indicate whether they would allow their child to

participate in the research project. A separate, password-protected Microsoft Excel database was

kept with parent information, completion dates, and consent information, along with assessment

and interview dates for all participating students. Responses to target questions for risk-taking,

nonsuicidal self-injury, depression, and suicidal ideation were recorded to ensure proper follow-up. This database was the only location where student names and participant numbers were connected. To ensure confidentiality, only participant numbers identified all measures and data. Students were informed that all those who returned a consent form, regardless of a yes or no answer, would be entered into a draw for one of either a $100 or $200 gift certificate from a local mall. Students were also informed that all those who were interviewed individually would be entered into a draw for one of four $50 gift certificates, and that all students who were interviewed would receive a $10 dollar gift certificate.

Once the consent form return rate reached 50% for an individual school's Grade 7 population, the research team prepared to visit the schools over a number of days. Two assessment batteries with approximately 11 different measures, including the aforementioned HIDS and BYI, were administered. Students who had written consent from parents or guardians were brought to separate rooms to complete the assessment batteries in groups. They were provided with pencils and privacy boards, and asked to avoid disrupting their peers while they completed their measures. Each assessment battery session lasted approximately one hour. At the beginning of the first session, students were read an assent form, including their rights and limits to confidentiality, and were asked to sign a form prior to beginning the first questionnaire (see Appendix C). Students who did not provide assent were escorted back to their classrooms. Both sessions included a script of instructions to be read prior to each questionnaire, as a guide for students to complete individual measures (see Appendix D). Due to the sensitive nature of some of the questions in the first session, only general directions for completing measures were provided prior to beginning each new questionnaire. Students were asked to wait for the next set of directions if they completed the previous measure. The second session included general

directions at the beginning of each new questionnaire, and each question was read aloud.

Students were prompted to slow down and wait for instructions if they began measures ahead of

the set time.

Following the completion of the first assessment battery, the HIDS and BYI were

immediately scored for certain responses that would qualify students for subsequent interviews.

Students who endorsed question 44 on the BYI ("I wish I were dead") as *sometimes* or more

frequently, or who had high scores on the BDI, received immediate, same-day interviews to

probe for potential suicidal tendencies or risk thereof. Students deemed to be at-risk were then

referred to the schools' mental health professional for immediate follow-up. Students who

endorsed the HIDS' risk taking or self-injury items and constituent sections were flagged for

individual interviews. Comparison group students were selected based on nonendorsement of

any of the risk-taking or self-injury items on the HIDS, as well as a score of 0 or 1 on question

44 of the BDI. Trained graduate students then interviewed students who endorsed risk-taking,

self-injury, and the comparison group, individually. The School Support Interview was included

in each of these individual interviews. Interviewers recorded, by hand, student responses during

the interview. The School Support Interview portion of the meeting was recorded for those

students who had both parental consent and provided their own assent for audio recording.

Data Analysis

Written records from interviewers were entered into a Microsoft Excel database.

Responses to questions and their subquestions were entered into separate columns. The result

was a database of participants' responses to each question posed. Master's- and undergraduate-

level research assistants from psychology and education were trained for data entry and analysis.

Training included reading articles pertaining to grounded theory methods and analysis, including

a discussion of these with the author. Data entry and coding were first modeled for the assistants, and then the assistants performed these responsibilities on their own with the guidance of the author. Assistants and the author then developed coding guides to direct their work. With regard to analysis, the first step of open coding was done between the principal researcher and the assistants, involving reading through all responses for one question together, and then discussing the main ideas that emerged. This step helped guide the assistants' efforts through the coding process. The author also verified each updated step in the process to discover potential inconsistencies or any requisite changes.

The current investigation used both a grounded theory approach aimed at analyzing, understanding, and categorizing topics and themes, as well as frequency counts to identify commonalities between participants. Grounded theory uses an inductive and comparative approach characterized by emergence for analyzing data (Charmaz, 2008). It is a method of generating a conceptual understanding of qualitative data by concentrating efforts on the progression and evolution of theoretical themes during analysis (Charmaz, 2008). With regard to frequency counts, the individuals who discussed particular themes within each question were counted, rather than the incidence of these themes, in order to represent the general thematic weight between participants rather than only the number of times that participants expressed particular themes (Maxwell, 2013; Namey, Guest, Thairu, & Johnson, 2008).

Thematic analysis of every question was undertaken to understand patterns in student responses and the social realities they expressed. Analysis proceeded according to the process detailed by Maxwell (2013) and Charmaz (2008). Open coding (Corbin & Strauss, 2007; as cited in Maxwell, 2013) procedures of reading and developing coding categories were used to develop topics. Analysis involved reading line by line through each response to a single question

to generate ideas for organizational categories, topics, their relationships, and ways of ordering data (Charmaz, 2008). The initial analysis involved comparing data, concepts and categories to generate ideas of what students hold to be important in their school experiences, essentially "interrogating" the data (Charmaz, 2008, 2010). Coding proceeded to refine and specify emerging concepts by constantly comparing responses, identifying connections, defining categories, and informing ideas to understand and organize student responses. Therefore, themes were colour-coded through selective coding, after which data were rearranged for categorization (Charmaz, 2008). This process created the topics that represent the broad themes students expressed (Maxwell, 2013). Due to the immensity of data available, substantive themes within the topics were also created (Maxwell, 2013), in a process similar to that when creating topics. Open coding within the topics was also performed to generate these underlying themes and to understand the breadth of student experience (Maxwell, 2013). This was done to further capture the ideas and patterns included in student responses, by comparing responses, generating ideas, colour-coding common themes, and rearranging for categorization. As such, each question and subquestion was coded and organized into two levels: first by topic and then by theme.

Finally, frequency counts within both topics and themes were performed to gather additional information. These frequency counts serve to guide ideas about patterns and what occurs most often in students' discourse, providing insight into what issues are most prevalent in student experience (Maxwell, 2013). The following are examples of coding decisions. For example, a student response as to how he or she copes with stress included "make a schedule, do a little bit every night," which was coded under the topic of *using organizational strategies* within the theme of *schoolwork approach strategies*. Similarly, the student response "ask for help before it becomes a problem" would be coded under *social strategies* within the theme of

schoolwork approach strategies. Within maladaptive coping strategies, the student response "slack off and try to forget about it, then you're unprepared" was coded under the theme of *avoidance strategies*, more specifically, within the topic of *ignore*. Finally, as to how schools help with stress, a student response of "talk to teachers, they offer tutorials" would be coded under the theme of *academic support*, and more specifically, within the topic of *remediation or extra help*.

Reliability. Reliability is a common criticism of qualitative research, due to the differing standards between quantitative and qualitative research, such as different sampling techniques and the use of statistical methods. For example, reliability is commonly of concern with thematic analysis, due to potential variability in interpretations (Namey et al., 2008). Confirmation of the accuracy of data entry and coding was undertaken to ensure credibility within the current investigation. Available audio recordings of the School Support Interview were transcribed and compared with database entries to verify the accuracy of interviewers' notes and entries. Eighty-nine recordings were available (57% of all interviews). Each student's interview transcription was compared with his or her respective data. If entered data and the transcription diverged widely (e.g., through the presence of a missing response), then the student response was corrected. If data did not differ importantly (e.g., via synonym usage), then responses were not changed. This comparison resulted in 84% accuracy between the audio and the entry.

Furthermore, peer debriefing is a way to provide validity and credibility in qualitative research (Creswell & Miller, 2000; Spall, 1998), and was used in the current investigation for coding and categorization decisions. The author and trained assistants collaboratively reasoned and rationalized to develop clear, systematic, mutually acceptable decisions for category

classification. These discussions involved reflective and challenging questioning, whereby members of the team discussed and tested alternative ideas about coding directions and specific decisions regarding categories and response placement. When divergent opinions occurred, they were discussed through a questioning process investigating why the individuals thought the way they did, drawing on personal experience, comparing process notes, and providing empirical evidence when necessary, until the members agreed on the direction taken. This challenging questioning, collaboration, and reflexivity helps to avoid individual assumptions, single-mindedness, and actions that may be taken for granted (Charmaz, 2008).

Findings and Discussion

The following section combines both results and discussion in the interest of continuity and readability. Each section includes a visual review of the most commonly occurring topics and themes that resulted from interviews with the entire student sample. This is followed by a discussion of the results, which includes differences between males or females and for the risk-taking and NSSI groups. While the focus of this investigation is on stress, coping, and desired school improvements for all students, group differences are included because males and females, and youth categorized as risk-takers or as NSSI, have been found to experience stress and cope differently. Thus, their responses--even when different--deserve mention as they support previous research or present potentially informative directions for future research. Their responses, however, tend to be the same as the comparison groups'.

Stress

Students were asked about the stress they experienced. They first had the opportunity to rate their stress on a four-point Likert scale (0-*No stress*; 1-*Slight stress*; 2-*Moderate stress*; and 3-*Extreme stress*) with regard to common high school experiences, including homework, tests,

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grades, social issues, and parents. Generally, students reported greater stress arising from

academic sources, followed by (in descending order of occurrence) tests, grades, homework,

parents, and social life issues. When further broken down by sex and group, academic issues

were also rated as causing more stress than social life issues. This is similar to previous research

where youth tended to endorse high levels of stress and ambiguity with new academic challenges

(Mizelle & Irvin, 2000; Rudolph et al., 2001; Smith et al., 2008; Zeedyk et al., 2003). Uniquely,

both males and females in the self-injury group rated their stress from parents as third highest of

the five potential stressors. Previous research indicated that problematic family situations, such

as divorce, lack of parental emotional warmth, alienation, and overly critical parenting, were

common issues among youth who self-injure (Bureau et al., 2010; Hilt, Nock, Lloyd-Richardson,

& Prinstein, 2008). Females' mean ratings were slightly elevated compared with those of males,

as the range of means for males was highest at 1.86 (tests; $SD = 0.91$) to 0.81 (social life; $SD =$

0.83) at the lowest; whereas, females' mean ratings of stress ranged from 1.92 (tests; $SD = 0.86$)

at the highest to .99 (social life; $SD = 0.93$) at the lowest. This is in line with evidence that

females tend to experience more stress than males, especially in early adolescence (Ge, Natsuaki,

& Conger, 2006; Stevens, Murphy, & McKnight, 2003). Students in the risk-taking group (range

= 2.02 to 0.9), as well as in the self-injury group (range = 2.13 to 1.32), also had stress ratings

that were higher than the comparison group (range = 1.69 to 0.55). These particular findings

may be in congruence with those that indicated risk-taking behaviours and self-injury as

manifestations of anxiety, stress or the lack of effective strategies for coping with negative

emotions (Allison, Adlaf, Ialomiteanu, & Rehm, 1999; Copeland-Linder, Lambert, Chen, &

Iaolongo, 2011; Derouin & Bravender, 2004; Nixon, Cloutier, & Aggarwal, 2002).

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All the students were prompted to discuss what they found most stressful in their high

school experience. The following table is a representation of the answers.

Table 1

Student Reports About What They Find Stressful in High School

Topic	Total sample %	Theme	Quote/Example
Social issues	60		
		Making new friends/fitting in	*-My best friend isn't at school, it's hard to fit in with new people* *-I don't know a lot of people, so I have to make new friends*
		Not knowing anyone/losing friends	*-I'm afraid to lose friends and make new ones*
		Peer pressure/bullying	*-Scared about being bullied by older kids* *-Major stressor was peer pressure, like pushing you down, convincing you to do the wrong things, or bullying.*
		New teachers	*-Dealing with a whole new batch of teachers.*
		Being in school with older students	
		Being surrounded by new people	
Academic and Workload Stress	58		
		Amount of work	*-More homework and more projects* *-The workload in school is overwhelming*
		Difficulty of work	*-The work is harder, hard to adapt to* *-The pace is faster, you can't keep up.*
		Novelty of work	*-New exams and new homework*
		Academic performance	*-I was worried about how well I do and if I'll be on the honor roll*

Note. Themes are listed in descending order of frequency in students' discussions.

Table 1 (continued)

Student Reports About What They Find Stressful in High School

Topic	Total sample %	Theme	Quote/Example
New physical environment	29.7		
		Being late	*-Being late, finding stuff, getting in trouble because of being late*
		New/bigger school	*-Different environment, a lot more room*
		Finding locations	*-Remember where classes were*
Higher expectations/ Increased pressure	23		
		From parents	*-Not doing well, parents pressure too much to study*
		General	e.g., less tolerance of mistakes, greater responsibility, tests for enriched programs
Changing schools	12		e.g., moving a number of times, trying out for sports, worrying about high school choice, not knowing what to expect
Stress with families (not pressure)	4		*-I fought a lot with my brother but I can't rat on him* *-My parents think I'm doing drugs*

Note. Themes are listed in descending order of frequency in students' discussions.

Youth had enlightened answers regarding their stress when entering and then while in

high school. For the entire sample, students most often expressed stress from social situations,

academic stress, stress arising from navigating the new physical environments, as well as high

expectations. The pattern was similar for both females and males. However, males talked more

about academic stress than social stress, as did students who did not engage in risk-taking or self-

injurious behaviours. Females tended to discuss social stress more than males. This result may

parallel conclusions from Martínez et al. (2011) that declines in social support during the

transition are especially important for females because they tend to rely more on social support

as a coping strategy than males. Similarly, social support has been more strongly associated with

females' adjustment (Rueger et al., 2010). In agreement with findings that stress and concerns

evolve over time (Rice et al., 2011), social stress may attenuate once students have the opportunity to meet their peers and connect with a group of friends. After this, the academic workload becomes a primary concern, corresponding to findings that academics tend to be the most common stressor for students (LaRue & Herrmann, 2008; Byrne & Mazanov, 2002). The decline in the salience of social stress following the transition also supports the outcomes from other researchers who found declines in feelings of connectedness during the transition to high school (e.g., DeWit et al., 2011; Martínez et al., 2011). Two possible explanations are offered. It may be that declines in perceptions of support are not necessarily what youth define as stressful for them. Alternatively, as Way et al. (2007) stated, perceptions of support decline as years in high school progress. Therefore, it is possible that declines in perceptions of support occur over longer periods, and that the transition year offers youth with novel social experiences and connections. Finally, that students do not necessarily name social stress during the transition to secondary school may exemplify youths' stressor-dependent adaptation, because students tend to adapt more slowly or rapidly depending on the stressor (Rice et al., 2011).

Coping

Students discussed their use of coping strategies. Questions posed included a general question about what kinds of strategies students use to cope, what useful strategies they employ, what strategies might not be so useful, and how they cope in response to specific stressors.

General coping strategies. The following tables represent students' answers about their general coping strategies.

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Table 2

General Coping Strategies

Topic	Total sample %	Theme	Quote/Example
Social support strategies	26		
		Friends	*-Hang out with friends* *-Talk to friends.*
		Families	*-Talked with my mom. Ask parents to help and ask about how school works helped a lot*
Distraction/avoidance strategies	11		
		Activities	e.g., listening to music, playing video games, exercising, sports
		Avoiding thinking	*-Try not to think about it* *-Let it go, forget about it*
Relaxation strategies	2		*-Take a deep breath* *-Relax* *-De-stress and relax*

Note. Themes are listed in descending order of frequency in students' discussions.

Students were also asked what their friends used as coping strategies. The following table

represents students' answers.

Table 3

How Friends Cope Generally

Topic	Total sample %	Theme	Quote/Example
Social resources	14	Social support General/multiple sources of school support Parents and family help	
Distraction/avoidance strategies	12		e.g., media, computers, video games, television, reading, extracurricular activities, exercise, sports
Academic strategies	4		e.g., studying, doing homework, getting organized

Note. Themes are listed in descending order of frequency in students' discussions.

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Useful coping strategies. Respondents were asked to discuss strategies they found useful

for coping with stress.

Table 4

Useful Coping Strategies

Topic	Total sample %	Theme	Quote/Example
Social support strategies	47		
		Friend and peer support	
		Multiple sources	*-Talked to parents and friends* *-Talked to mom and guidance counsellors*
		Family members	
Distraction/avoidance strategies	32		
		Activities	*-Playing videogames and drawing to use imagination* *-Using the Internet*
		Try not to think about their stress	
		Physical activities and sports	
School and organization strategies	8		*-I use my agenda to write homework for organization* *-Studying for four hours every night*
Self-talk and relaxation strategies	8		*-I'll tell myself it will be okay and I will do better* *-I take deep breaths and tell myself it will be okay*

Note. Themes are listed in descending order of frequency in students' discussions.

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Students were also asked what their friends used as helpful or useful coping strategies. The

following table represents students' answers.

Table 5

Friends' Useful Coping Strategies

Topic	Total sample %	Theme	Quote/Example
Social strategies	48		
		Friend and peer support	
		General and multiple sources	
		Parent support	
		Counseling	
		Teachers	
Distraction/avoidance strategies	26		
		Multiple activities/hobbies	e.g., media, school activities
		One activity	e.g., music, reading
		Sports and exercise	
School strategies	14		
		Specific strategies	*-Balancing social life and homework* *-Using schedules in lockers*
		Remediation services	*-Ask for help from teachers* *-Go to the resource room*
Relaxation strategies	7		*-Take a break and relax* *-Think of scenery around them and not stress*

Note. Themes are listed in descending order of frequency in students' discussions.

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Coping strategies that are not helpful. After students addressed both general and

useful coping strategies, they were also invited to discuss coping strategies that they considered

unhealthy or not useful, both for themselves and their friends.

Table 6

Coping Strategies That are Unhealthy or not Useful

Topic	Total sample %	Theme	Quote/Example
The student did not use strategies that were not helpful or did not know of anything	49		
Specific behaviours that are not helpful	18		
		Distraction activities	e.g., videogames, listening to music
		Academic behaviours that are not useful	e.g., not studying, procrastinating, and putting enough effort into their schoolwork
		Sports/Exercise	*-I was really focused on exercise, but I should have been studying*
Avoidance strategies	5		*-Isolate self* *-Keep problem hidden*
Strategies that cause harm	4.5		e.g., self-injury, fighting
Families were not helpful	3		*-Parents are not helpful because they get mad*

Note. Themes are listed in descending order of frequency in students' discussions.

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Students were also asked what their friends used as unhealthy or not useful coping strategies.

The following table represents students' answers.

Table 7

Friends' Coping Strategies That are Unhealthy or not Useful

Topic	Total sample %	Theme	Quote/Example
Harmful behaviours	33	Substance use Self-harm Theft	
Avoidance strategies	19	Specific activities for avoiding coping	*-Watching TV a lot also to forget everything*
		Emotional avoidance/lack of coping	*-Not dealing with their stress and letting it pile up*
School-related strategies that are not helpful	14	Strategies to avoid schoolwork Overworking themselves	
Negative social behaviours	14	Bullying/hurting people Fighting/arguing Hanging out with bad crowds	
Eating behaviours	12	Overeating Undereating	

Note. Themes are listed in descending order of frequency in students' discussions.

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Coping strategies for specific stressors. Students were asked to discuss strategies they used for specific stressors: homework, grades and tests, relationships with parents, and social difficulties.

Table 8

Coping Strategies for Specific Stressors

Subject	Theme	Total sample %	Theme	Quote/Example
Homework				
	Useful strategies for approaching their schoolwork	21		
			Study habits	*-Snack before you work, take a break between subjects*
			Organizational strategies	*-Make a schedule, do a bit every night*
			Asking for help	*-Ask for help before it becomes a problem*
	Not helpful or healthy	8		
			Not doing the work	*-Not paying attention in class and not doing the work*
			Distractions	*-Sometimes distracting yourself doesn't help.*
Grades and Tests				
	Academic solutions	32		e.g., remediation and extra help
	Social resources	6		e.g., using friends' help, asking for families for help
	Self-talk/Motivation	4		*-Look at the positive side, always believe in yourself and set goals*
	Unhelpful coping strategies	10		
			Bad study habits	*-Leave everything until the last minute*
			Not doing the work	

Note. Themes are listed in descending order of frequency in students' discussions.

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Table 8 (continued)

Coping Strategies for Specific Stressors

Subject	Theme	Total sample %	Theme	Quote/Example
Relationships with parents				
	Social Resources/talking	14		
			Family	-*Go to another family member (grandma)*
			Talk to friends	
	Distraction strategies or ignoring the problem	9		-*Ignore them when they get on my nerves*
	Arguing or being upset	5		-*Back talking to them just gets you in trouble Trying to argue or fight back.*
Social difficulties				
	Social resources/talking	24		
			Friends	-*Talk to friends who understand, get in clubs, call friends and hang out*
			Families	
	Distraction strategies or ignoring the problem	7		-*Walk away if friends are bothering me, ignore what happened*

Note. Themes are listed in descending order of frequency in students' discussions.

Students communicated various ways in which they cope with specific stressors. Generally, the most common coping resource was social support, followed by distraction or avoidance strategies, and then academic or school-related strategies. This same pattern emerged for females, however, males mentioned distraction and avoidance strategies, followed by social support and academic strategies. Females also talked more about using strategies to avoid thinking about their stress compared with the males. Similarly, in a breakdown by group membership, reflected that students in the risk-taking and self-injury categories rated distraction

and avoidance strategies as second after social strategies. Finally, of the themes that emerged from within topics, friends were the most highly discussed as a coping resource, followed by activities such as distraction, school-related strategies, family, multiple sources of social support, physical activities, avoiding thinking about stress, and then remediation. Interestingly, counselling as an effective method of coping emerged as a distinct social coping strategy used by other students, but this strategy was not mentioned when students were asked what strategies they personally use. Notably, more students noted that their friends engaged in harmful or unhealthy behaviours; this aspect was not mentioned as part of their own coping efforts. This may be an indication that students were not comfortable discussing harmful behaviours in which they may participate.

Again, the centrality of social support is apparent for student stress and coping. Furthermore, the prominence of avoidance or distraction strategies could indicate the lack of competence that students feel in coping with their stress (Jindal-Snape & Miller, 2008). This may also be evidence of how students feel about the stress that they are experiencing. The strategies chosen for coping are commonly dependent on the control and demands that individuals perceive about the stressor (Griffith et al., 2000). Furthermore, students tend to use avoidance coping strategies to manage social or family stress because it is viewed as less controllable (Griffith et al., 2000). Thus, students may feel less control over social stress than academic kinds of stress. Concurrently, school-approach strategies also parallel past evidence that students use more approach-oriented strategies for schoolwork-related stressors, partially as a result of their predictability, allowing students to problem-solve more effectively to develop school-related coping strategies (Griffith et al., 2000). Finally, the higher incidence of avoidance-related strategies may support findings that younger students tend to have less

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developed abilities for coping-related reflection and problem solving (Griffith et al., 2000).

Similarly, the higher incidence of avoidance and distraction strategy use among students who

engage in maladaptive behaviours may be an indication of either their decreased ability to cope

with stress or parallel previous research linking poorer adjustment with avoidance strategies

(Griffith et al., 2000). Students' use of social support and resources for coping underscores the

importance of these factors in their lives and are encouraging given their importance in

determining positive outcomes (Newman et al., 2007). Finally, the greater use of social support

by females and the greater use of avoidance and distraction activities by males, also support

previous research (Rueger et al., 2010).

Students were prompted to discuss the strategies that they found were not helpful in

coping with stress. Generally, students most often discussed avoidance as unhelpful for their

coping efforts, followed by harmful behaviours, academic strategies that are not useful, negative

social behaviours, eating, and finally, family factors that were unhelpful. The most common

themes, in descending order of frequency in students' discourse, included;

1. Substance use

2. Specific avoidance activities

3. Not doing work or the lack of strategies to do it

4. Using strategies for distraction and avoiding work

5. Arguing and fighting

6. Emotionally avoiding coping with stress

Results were similar for males and females, although males differed. Males discussed having no

negative strategies more than they discussed using avoidance strategies. While the patterns of

commonly discussed topics for both the comparison and risk-taking groups were similar to

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grouped results, the self-injury group most often spoke about harmful behaviours, followed by

avoidance. Students have insightful and up-to-date ideas of what is not helpful in their coping

efforts. More specifically, youth appear to be aware that while harmful behaviours may provide a

sense of satisfaction in the moment, they are not meaningful ways to cope. Additionally, the

concurrent incidence of the use of avoidance and distraction activities, and the recognition that

these tend to be unhelpful, suggests that students may not have adequate reflection and problem-

solving capabilities to devise effective coping strategies. Adolescents' ineffective problem-

solving is potentially further reflected by the commonality of using harmful strategies and

avoidance-related strategies in the self-injury students' discussion.

School Experience

Students discussed how their schools helped them cope with the transition to secondary

school. The following table is represents students' answers.

Table 9

How Schools Helped Students Cope With the Transition to High School

Topic	Total sample %	Theme	Quote/Example
Social support and social resources offered	38		
		Teacher behaviours that are helpful	e.g., asking and listening to how students were doing, having understanding and encouraging teachers
		Friends help with stress	*-Making friends helped me cope, so I stayed with them*
		Guidance counsellors/social workers	*-When something went wrong, went to guidance counsellor*
		Separating younger students from he older ones in the school building	*-We were kept in the C-wing* *-Just Grade 7 and Grade 8 together so it was less intimidating*

Note. Themes are listed in descending order of frequency in students' discussions.

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Table 9 (continued)

How Schools Helped Students Cope With the Transition to High School

Topic	Total sample %	Theme	Quote/Example
Social support and social resources offered (continued)			
		Families help	-*Family helped by giving me tips, helped me organize my time and with how to use my locker*
		Multiple people helped	e.g., teachers, friends, or school professionals
Schools offered group activities, orientation and information	20		
		Visits, tours, and orientation sessions are helpful	-*Teachers introduced themselves when we had a mini day--a half day when we came to the school to get a feel for it*
		Social activities and icebreakers	-*Icebreakers and activity day for Grade 7's to get to know each other*
		Preparation in elementary school	-*A girl came to talk about peers and peer pressure, she showed us how to get organized.* -*In elementary we had an assembly, the slide show was helpful.*
		Clubs and sports teams	-*Activities at school help get the stress off, like choir and Student council.* -*Sports teams and other activities help you forget about it.*
		Activities that allow different grades to meet	-*House system, with people in all grades- house activities were helpful*
		Workshops about stress	-*Had a workshop to learn how to deal with stress*
Receiving extra help/remediation	12		
Schools do nothing to help coping	8		-*School didn't help at all*
General ways that school helped	5		-*School was welcoming and helped us when we got lost* -*Let us get away with being late, they should keep doing that.*

Note. Themes are listed in descending order of frequency in students' discussions.

Students then had the chance to discuss, in general, how schools help them cope with stress.

Table 10

How Schools Help With Coping in General

Topic	Total Sample %	Theme	Quote/Example
Social events	13.8		
		Clubs and activities are helpful	*-Lots of groups that are organized to help people meet new people, like drama club, sports team, self-esteem group*
		Orientation events to introduce them to school and people	*-Organization at beginning to support students* *-They did an orientation day to help with making friends where you learn everyone's name in small groups*
Receiving help form other people helps	8.5		
		Teacher's help	*-Teachers tell us where to go*
		Assistance from friends or peers is helpful	*-Harder to get together as much, friends help with stress*
		Parents being helpful	*-Mom helped*
		Extra help with academics	*-Teachers say you must be organized, they give us tips like writing to-do lists*
		Receiving information from school	*-Have assemblies about school stress*
Less homework	7.5		

Note. Themes are listed in descending order frequency in students' discussions.

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Next, students talked about how schools help with stress in general.

Table 11

How Schools Help With Stress in General

Topic	Total Sample %	Theme	Quote/Example
Social support resources and strategies	83		
		Mental health support	-*Student services, or guidance, talk to students about why they are stressed*
		Talking to people	e.g. school personnel or parents
		Clubs and teams	-*Lunch activities to meet people with commonalities* -*They have group activities, clubs, sports*
		Anti-bullying efforts	-*The school doesn't tolerate bullies. Discourage bullying, they are strict about that*
		Involve parents	-*Parent-teacher interviews help so parents know what you are doing*
		Support from friends	-*Friends at school help because we have the same stress*
		Separating younger and older students	-*Older kids are farther away*
Academic support strategies	61		
		Remediation and extra help	-*Schools and teachers help by offering remediation at lunch* -*The student support centre takes you in*
		Strategies that teachers use to help with school and work	-*Teachers help a lot, understand about giving less homework*
Schools do nothing or make things worse	11		
		Schools do nothing to help	
		Schools make things worse by giving too much work	

Note. Themes are listed in descending order frequency in students' discussions.

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Table 11 (continued)

How Schools Help With Stress in General

Topic	Total Sample %	Theme	Quote/Example
Information and learning	9		
		Learning	*-School talked about peer pressure, education, need more of this* *-DARE classes*
		Transition preparation, orientation sessions and information	*-Talked to us, and prepared us with educational material, tips and tricks on high school organization*
		Other school efforts	*-Try to be understanding* *-Keep an eye on them to make sure they are understanding*

Note. Themes are listed in descending order frequency in students' discussions.

Students also had an opportunity to express their thoughts about how schools did not help with

stress, or how schools worsen stress.

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Table 12

How Schools Don't Help or Make Stress Worse

Topic	Total Sample %	Theme	Quote/Example
Schools do not help with stress generally	35		
		Do not help	*-You can go ask questions, but they don't really help more than that* *-Doesn't help.*
		Schools can't help	*-They can't help, you have to help yourself. Sometimes they help, but not really. It's sort of on and off - sometimes they can't help you.*
Schools are not helpful because they cause stress with academics	13		
		Pressure	*-Reminding kids about tests makes them more stressed* *-Some teachers put too much pressure*
		Workload	*-They give an overdose of homework- they don't know all the other subjects you have.* *-There's too much homework and so many tests before breaks. Six tests in a week makes you not want to do it*
		Schools visits were unhelpful	*-Visiting school in summer didn't help because I saw how big it was and got nervous.*
School services are unhelpful	7		
		Schools increase social difficulty	*-I don't see friends enough, we only see them in hallways and lunch.* *-Schools will talk to people who are mean but it isn't always helpful- might make it worse*
		Mental health services are unhelpful	*-Seeing mental health professionals is up to the student because there are so many kids and not all of them get the help they need*
		Teacher behaviours that are not helpful	*-Parent-teacher interviews don't help if the student doesn't do well. Teachers might say bad things at the parent-teacher interviews* *-They don't listen to you if you're trying to talk to a teacher or something*

Note. Themes are listed in descending order of frequency in students' discussions.

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Students expressed how schools help them cope with stress in general and specifically, with respect to the transition to secondary school. Students overwhelmingly discussed social support resources and strategies, followed by extra help and remediation. After this, in descending order of frequency, students said that schools do not help, followed by appreciating orientation and high school preparatory efforts, as well as receiving more information and learning. With respect to the themes related to school resources that students stated were helpful to their coping efforts, the most commonly occurring, in descending order, were mental health professionals, clubs and teams, help from teachers, talking to people, schools visits and orientations, and help from friends, peers and families. Females and males did not differ from the overall trend. Moreover, the same general trend was apparent by group comparisons, although only the risk-taking and self-injury groups noted that they did not know how schools helped. The frequency for the self-injury group not knowing what resources schools provide was twice that of the risk-taking group.

Students were also asked to share their views on how schools were unhelpful in coping efforts. The most common issue that students discussed was that schools do not help. Then, in order of frequency, students discussed schools as culprits for causing stress, unhelpful school services, and teacher behaviours that were unhelpful. More specifically, the themes, in descending order of occurrence, were that workloads made stress worse, schools cannot help, and that pressure from school was harmful. These results support the findings that students heavily rely on their social support networks, including peers, families and teachers. Moreover, students fully appreciate remedial academic avenues available to them. Students' need for extra help with their academics supports evidence that students find the changes in workloads and the level of difficulty challenging (e.g. Newman et al., 2000) and, therefore, perceive benefits from

remediation. Students also appreciate school efforts in providing group-based activities because these are opportunities for socialization and camaraderie with like-minded peers. Particularly interesting are the responses that schools offer no resources to students, especially by the groups that endorsed maladaptive behaviours. This may be further evidence for an immature awareness of effective coping strategies, the use of ineffective coping strategies, or the effects of maladjustment on the use of coping strategies. Alternatively, this could indicate that schools need to encourage all students, particularly those classified at-risk, to seek help and participate in activities offered to them. Finally, perhaps some schools are not able to offer a selection of activities that students find interesting. More generally, however, these responses affirm that students experience stress in school, feel unsupported, and even feel increasingly alienated (Newman et al., 2000).

Ideas for Improving School

Finally, students were asked to share their ideas about what schools could do to help them cope with the transition to high school.

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Table 13

How Schools Could Help Cope With the Transition to High School

Topic	Total Sample %	Theme	Quote/Example
More orientation	19		
		Social activities and icebreakers	*-More bonding activities like the first day* *-You should meet your homeroom before so you can have familiar faces when you first go in to school*
		Better preparation/More information	*-Workshops when students are in elementary school so they know what high school will be like*
		Easing into high school	*-Give us at least a week to get to know the school better, to explore* *-They could have made an after school thing to meet people and talk and see if they have the same interests*
Academic changes	18		
		Less homework/Teachers should coordinate to reduce the amount of overlapping due dates	*-Teachers should talk together to coordinate projects and homework so it's not too much*
		More time to complete work	*-Give us extra time in class to study or do homework*
		Extra help with academics	*-Help students and let them ask questions. Teachers don't help enough*
		Reviewing work from the previous year	
Social support and resources	7		
		Having friends around in school	*-They can put them with friends in classes*
		Guidance counsellors could be more helpful	*-School could get more guidance counsellors - he was really busy and could only see so many during the day*
		Parents could be helpful	
		Keeping grade levels separate	

Note. Themes are listed in descending order frequency in students' discussions.

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Students were reminded that some of their peers engage in unhealthy coping strategies. They were asked to share their ideas about what schools could do to prevent engaging in such behaviours.

Table 14

How Schools Can Help Prevent Students From Engaging in Unhealthy/Negative Coping Strategies

Topic	Total Sample %	Theme	Quote/Example
Social support	43		
		Mental health workers	*-Try to get them more support, like social workers* *-No one is in the guidance counsellor office enough*
		Having people to talk to	*-Having people to talk to, like teachers and staff being more open*
		Should have groups and clubs	*-Alcoholics anonymous in school* *-They could offer more interesting/good afterschool activities*
		Parents need to be involved	*-Get the parents involved* *-Hold seminar group - parents could do this and then go back and talk to their kids.*
Receiving information is helpful	34	Extra education, workshops, assemblies	*-Talk to kids more, inform them about danger* *-Speeches about how these can harm you* *-Education, bring in someone who used to do it*
Changes to schoolwork	17		
		Limit work and give more time	
		Teachers should coordinate the amount of work they assign	*-It would be nice if teachers would talk to each other and not have all tests on the same day to reduce stress* *-Speak to each other so not everything is due in the same week, kids get stressed because of schoolwork, so they need to decrease that stress*
		Remediation, extra help and academic support	
		Changing teaching methods	*-Make information amusing and interactive so students will be interested*

Note. Themes are listed in descending order of frequency in students' discussions.

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Table 14 (continued)

How Schools Can Help Prevent Students From Engaging in Unhealthy/Negative Coping Strategies

Topic	Total Sample %	Theme	Quote/Example
Improve control	17		
		Reducing tolerance and stricter punishments	*-Harsher punishments and more humiliation for bullies* *-Expel kids who are doing drugs or alcohol, because suspension doesn't work for that*
		Better surveillance	*-Watch students more to make them feel like they're watched and they won't do anything that's bad*
Schools need to reduce stress	6		
		Generally reducing stress	*-Tone down on the stress - find a middle ground between stress and learning* *-Decrease competition between students*
		Strategies for helping student de-stress	*-Hand out stress balls* *-Have a program for de-stressing*
It is not schools' responsibility to prevent maladaptive coping behaviours	6		
		It is parents' responsibility	*-Parents should help, not school* *-If parents allow it, not much you can do*
		General	*-It's kids' choices* *-It's not the school's job*
		Ineffective school approaches	*-Hard to stop kids - suspension doesn't work* *-Come up with something but kids wouldn't listen. Assemblies are a waste of time, we know drugs are bad*

Note. Themes are listed in descending order of frequency in students' discussions.

Students were asked for a final time how schools could lessen student stress and help in coping.

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Table 15

How Can Schools Reduce Stress and Help Students Cope

Topic	Total Sample %	Theme	Quote/Example
Social resources/Extra social support	81		
		Organized activities	-*Organize more sports events to take mind off problems, have fun* -*Once a month - grade goes on a fun outing not during school- not learning*
		Parents should be involved	-*If they see a student has trouble at home, they could talk to parents.* -*Parents can come to after school programs to know more about what kids are doing*
		Support from school personnel	-*More support from teachers* -*Teachers are unfair, need to be more sensitive to students' issues and needs, don't place blame without hearing their side of the story*
		Someone to talk to	-*Ask each student if they are stressed and talk about it*
		Improvements with mental health workers	-*School needs more serious resources that focus on mental health (depression issues).* -*Counsellors are there to talk to, but should have more because they travel back and forth between campus*
		More groups and clubs	-*School could make clubs so kids could fit in* -*More activities in groups, they can talk, switch them around in groups often*
		More orientation activities	-*Create program for new kids where they have opportunities to get used to teachers and school* -*Teachers should welcome kids, make a small tour to show where the bathroom is and stuff*

Note. Themes are listed in descending order of frequency in students' discussions.

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Table 15 (continued)

How Can Schools Reduce Stress and Help Students Cope

Topic	Total Sample %	Theme	Quote/Example
Workload changes	66		
		Reducing workloads and coordination by teachers	-*Teachers could coordinate so that they don't have all projects at the same time* -*Less tests and homework*
		Extra help with academics/Remediation	-*Do more review before tests to go over the material.* -*Homework clubs: could have teacher meetings once a week to meet with struggling students.*
Changes to schedule	7	More time between classes, shorter classes, shorter days -	-*It would be good if school started and finished earlier, that would make homework easier too* -*Extend time between classes and recess so we can burn off energy.*
More monitoring and control	6		-*They can try to stop bullying by having teachers on duty at break* -*Lunch monitors should have better control over rowdy students*
Learning and information	5		-*Asking Grade 10 and 11 students to share their experience at assemblies* -*Show kids how to talk to other kids and teachers - like how to get along with others*
Less control	3		-*Could have fewer rules and give more freedom* -*Cut down on punishments*
Administrative/building changes	3		-*Should have a larger library*

Note. Themes are listed in descending order of frequency in students' discussions.

Students were asked to discuss what they thought schools should do to help them cope

with stress. Again, students overwhelmingly spoke about needing social support and resources

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along with academic changes. Following these, in descending order of frequency, the changes that students felt were most needed in schools included more life-learning opportunities and orientations, improvements in control and surveillance, and changes to daily schedules. The most common themes were, in descending order of frequency in students' discourse, workload coordination between teachers to reduce the amount of work and overlapping due dates, more groups, clubs, and activities, improvements in mental health services, more opportunities for extra academic help and remediation, involving parents, generally reducing workloads or giving more time, increasing support from school personnel, reducing tolerance for misbehaviour, receiving more information and preparation, as well as more social activities and icebreakers for students. No differences for or between sexes were evident, nor were there major differences between the different groups. Interestingly, however, the risk-taking group accounted for nearly half of the discussion calling for improvements in control and surveillance. This last observation may be evidence of students' need for clarity and consistency of rules, as discussed by Way et al. (2007), showing that behavioural issues increase as perceptions of support and consistency in rules decrease. Furthermore, not only do researchers commonly find the necessity of social support for positive adjustment (e.g. Langenkamp, 2009; Way et al., 2007), but students also call for these types of school-generated support mechanisms. Students' social lives can be especially disturbed during transitions (Brenner, 2011) and students feel the need for schools to provide them with more opportunities to develop their networks, such as joining groups and clubs. Social groups and clubs have also been found to have an important effect on adjustment and coping (Hirsch & DuBois, 1992; Martínez et al., 2011; Newman et al., 2007; Wenz-Gross et al., 1997). Interestingly, students do not view mental health provisions as adequate in their schools. This finding is an important aspect of schools that ought to be further investigated, especially if it

is a commonly held belief. The provision of adequate mental health services in schools is important for students' adaptation and functioning. Finally, students also seek more opportunities to acquire noncurricular and life-related experiences, as evidenced by their calls for more workshops, preparation and information. This is an indication that students want learning beyond the classroom and expect these lessons to originate in the school setting.

Conclusion

Limitations

A number of limitations should be considered in the current investigation. Students vary in their development of reflective capabilities, as well as their ability to express their opinions, affecting the depth, breadth, and quality of their responses. Consequently, some respondents were precocious while others were less forthcoming, resulting in a range of response types. It should be noted that the interviewers were strangers to the students, thereby reducing the comfort level of students and thus, potential communication between them. Furthermore, as Kasen, et al. (1998) pointed out, students' perceptions of their schools are influenced by their individuality, resulting in highly variable responses. However, this also can be regarded as a strength of qualitative interviewing because student responses that are more common than others can be highly informative for a comprehensive view of, in this case, the stress that students experience and the resources they need. In this way, responses that are more common than others, despite the possible variability and lack of depth or breadth, are indicative of youths' highly important concerns.

Another limitation of the study is that students were chosen based on their responses to questionnaires, without taking into account the frequency of maladaptive behaviours. Students were classified in the risky behaviour and self-injury categories regardless of severity, or how

recently or frequently they had engaged in these behaviours. The result is that categories included students who, for example, may have participated in a variety of risky behaviours from a single time to repeated occasions. Categories, therefore, include an array of students; this should be remembered when interpreting responses. Another limitation is that students were interviewed during their first year in high school. Researchers, such as Galton et al. (2000), suggest that stress is highest right before the transition, but declines over subsequent months. Therefore, an increase in the amount of time for adjustment in high school may have resulted in either an evolution in student stress, students having more time to cope with their stress, or a dilution in remembering their difficulties and wishes for improvement.

Furthermore, as noted by Maxwell (2013), both the researchers and the students shaped each other's responses. There were a number of interviewers involved in the current research project, resulting in different styles of performing interviews, such as the depth of probes and the rapport established with students. Additionally, there was variance in researchers' styles and methods of recording their interview notes, which were the basis for the creation of the database. Moreover, it is essential to note researcher bias in any investigation such as preexisting beliefs, the creation of topics, themes, and categorizations. In this case, it is believed that schools have an important role in supporting students' functioning and well-being. Furthermore, students are dissatisfied with their experiences in school, and that it is of utmost importance for schools and systems to ensure that adolescents' needs are addressed. Additionally, programs for intervention should be informed by adolescents' opinions and desires for optimal effectiveness. Schools must move beyond a strictly academic role and address the learning requirements of adolescents in all spheres of life. As such, coding and results are interpreted through this lens, a common challenge of the methodology employed (Charmaz, 2010).

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Directions for Future Research

There are a number of interesting directions for future research. The first is a continuation of qualitative inquiry into the subject of student stress, coping, school experience and suggestions for improvements. This will further elucidate and clarify students' needs in schools. The goal is to be able to predict specific student trajectories in order to intervene appropriately and effectively. Particularly informative would be an investigation of the evolution of stress, coping, and opinions for school improvement during the secondary school years, because these aspects substantially evolve as youth mature. As each successive year in high school heralds new developmental challenges and experiences, interventions should also evolve and optimally respond to students' changing needs during such a formative life phase. Longitudinal within-subject designs are also promising endeavours in investigations of this complex period characterized by continuous change. Students' adjustment may transform drastically within a short time due to improving or worsening conditions, and the accumulation of risk and resilience factors. At different stages in their secondary school development, students will undergo different kinds and degrees of stress, and these also depend on individual characteristics. Their suggestions and desires for improvements would evolve in line with their experiences and stress levels, but would also depend on their individual reaction to these forces. The potential for understanding student trajectories of risk and resilience and the processes involved in school disengagement is vast. With this understanding it would be possible to ensure that the necessary interventions are available to students at each grade level. The complex stories and patterns could offer an understanding of the processes of disengagement, but also contribute to positive ventures such as implementing intervention programs to assist students cope effectively with their stresses. The benefits are twofold: we might understand the process

of disengagement as it occurs with levels of stress and experiences in schools; we also might address student needs along with the problem of disengagement and dropout.

Other directions for future research include students' opinions of mental health services in schools, and how these might be improved. In the current investigation, several students referred negatively to the mental health services they received, especially about the lack of availability. Therefore, an understanding of how and why students access these services, and what is actually received, would allow for improvement in these services. Finally, more in-depth investigation of students' use of avoidance coping methods is necessary to identify why students use them, in which circumstances and their effectiveness in different situations. This information would help researchers and practitioners to better understand adolescent coping and the maturation process, in addition to offering appropriate support programs for developing adaptive coping at different ages.

The current investigation sought to elicit students' major school-related stressors, coping mechanisms and suggestions for school improvements when newly transitioned to high school. The students' discourse provided insightful and important messages for researchers and professionals alike. The youth expressed a number of factors that caused them stress, most notably, issues with their social networks and with academic changes. Interestingly, the stress-related Likert-scale question showed higher stress ratings with academic issues, whereas with the qualitative portion, social life issues were one of the top priorities for discussion. This is an important indication that different question structures may obtain different kinds of answers. When students are given an existing list of stressors they endorse their stress levels differently than when they are asked to freely discuss their stresses. This interesting result is a significant consideration for quantitative and qualitative investigation. It further underscores the importance

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of using both methods as complements to each other to ensure a depth and breadth of understanding.

The implications of the current investigation underline that professionals in schools have much to do to support positive student adjustment. Students easily identify changes they think would be beneficial for their coping efforts, and these changes are similar regardless of classification into groups considered at risk. The conclusion is that, while students categorized as at-risk may benefit from targeted interventions, they would appreciate the same changes in school life as typical students. They also experience similar stressors. Schools can support student adjustment in meaningful ways, regardless of categorization, through the same methods. Therefore, implementing interventions that students say would help them cope more effectively may alleviate some of the need for more intensive, targeted interventions. In other words, intervening on a global school level may benefit all students and have the added benefit of preventing or mitigating the severity of at-risk or maladaptive coping behaviours for some particular students.

The importance of social networks in coping came to light, along with a high incidence of avoidance and distraction-related coping. Social opportunities offered by schools were highly valued by students and their significance was further underscored as students most often named improvements associated with social aspects. Schools should heed students' wishes for added social support and opportunities for socialization, especially given the evidence that social support is an effective strategy for stress reduction. Implications for improvements by schools include social, information, and procedural-type of introductions, especially for the transition, in addition to greater opportunities for learning noncurricular and life lessons. Students want more than the academic courses required of them. Furthermore, few students mentioned guidance

counsellors or school psychologists as being part of the efforts to reduce stress in high school. This may relate to the criticisms students had of the unavailability of such professionals, or indicate an overall lack of understanding about the role these professionals have and could contribute. Similarly, it is possible that guidance counsellors and school psychologists are perceived to intervene only in cases where there are significant difficulties and their potential role as global helpers is lacking. The importance of this finding deserves further investigation and also indicates that these professionals could have a larger mandate to contributing to the well-being of students in high schools.

Finally, students experience a high level of stress from changes in academics. Students proposed a number of ways that they can be helped in their coping efforts, such as by coordinating due dates, lessening the workload, and by offering more opportunities for remediation and extra help. According to this investigation, students tend to view contextual and organizational factors as highly important changes that can help them cope with their stress, a matter that has been largely ignored by previous research (Heck & Mahoe, 2006; Lee & Burkam, 2003). Students' voices about their experiences and directions for school improvements are a high priority given that they live through and with these contextual school factors every day. As central forces in students' lives, schools can do much to improve student outcomes and drop out rates, and this investigation elucidates the role of schools in helping students adapt successfully.

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Appendix A

Demographic Information
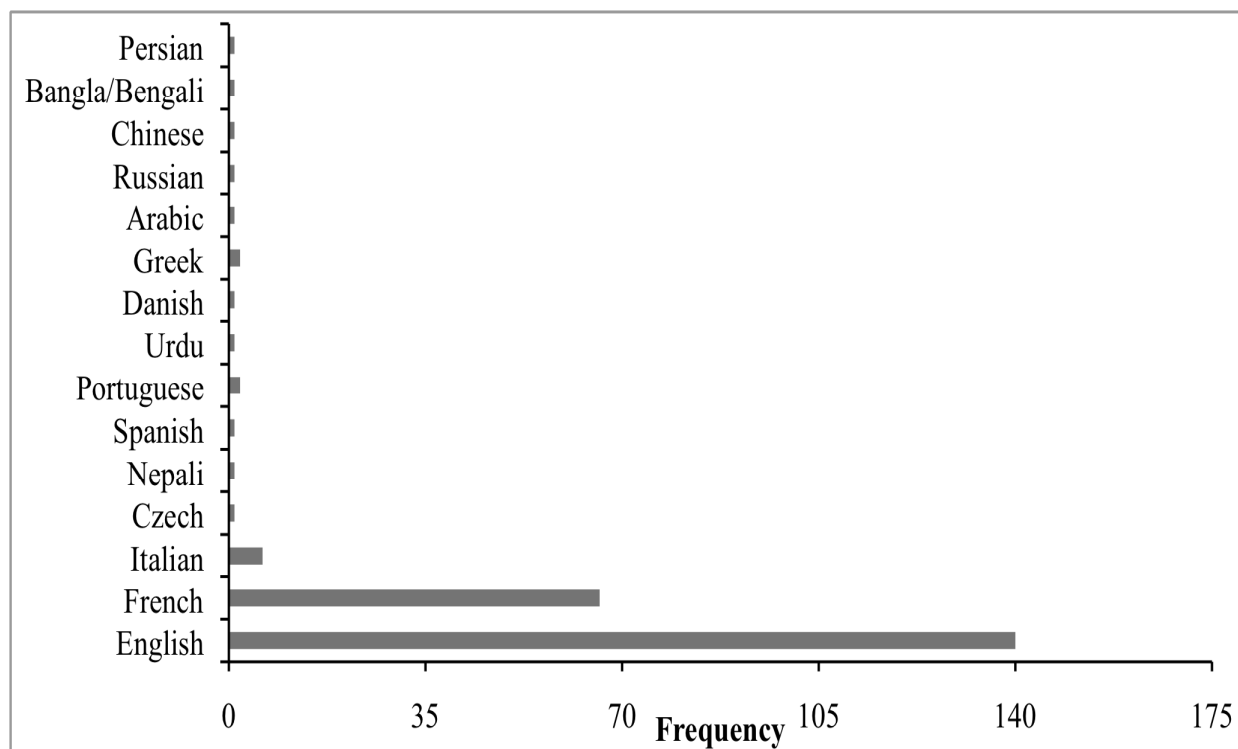
Figure 1.

Student Sexual Orientation.
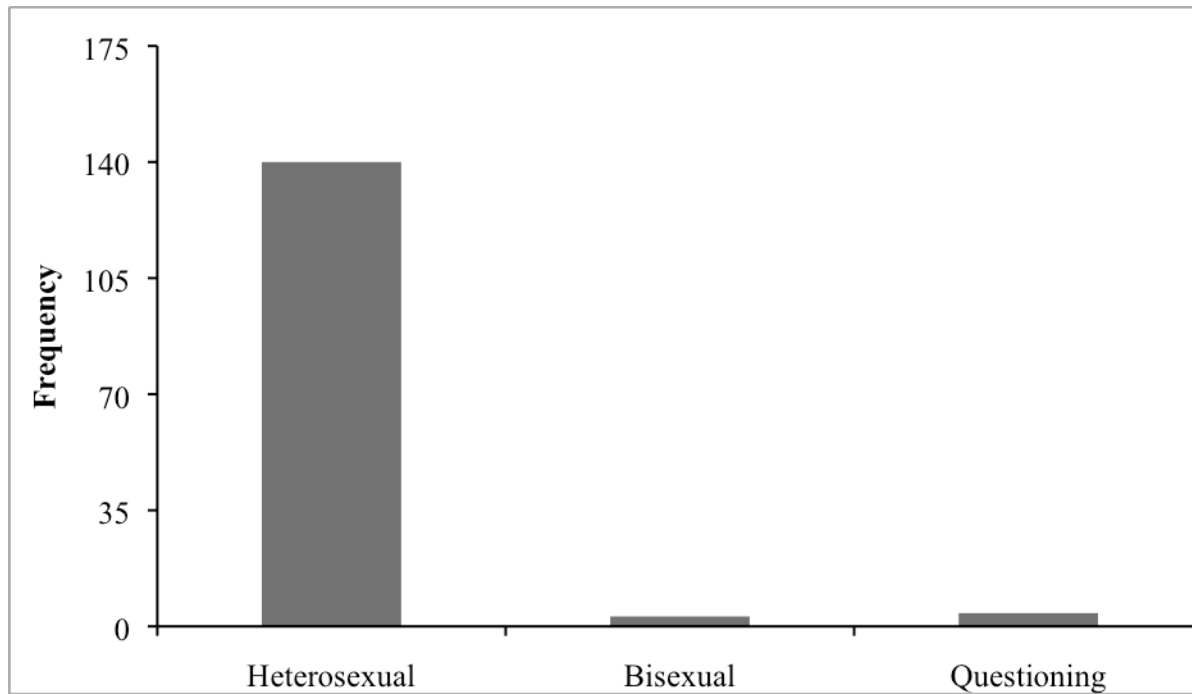
Note. $n = 147$; 8 student responses missing.

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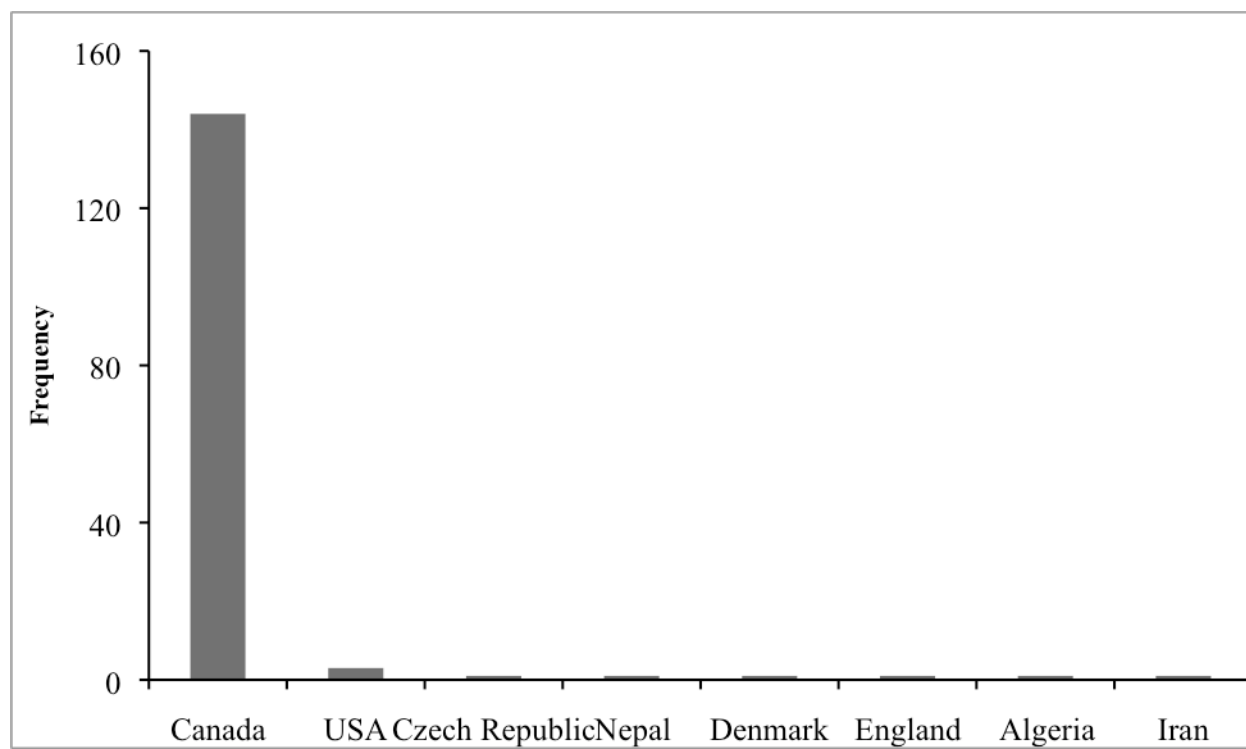
Figure 2.

Languages Spoken at Home

Note. Responses based on two yes or no questions as to whether they spoke English and French at home, and an "Other" option

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Figure 3.
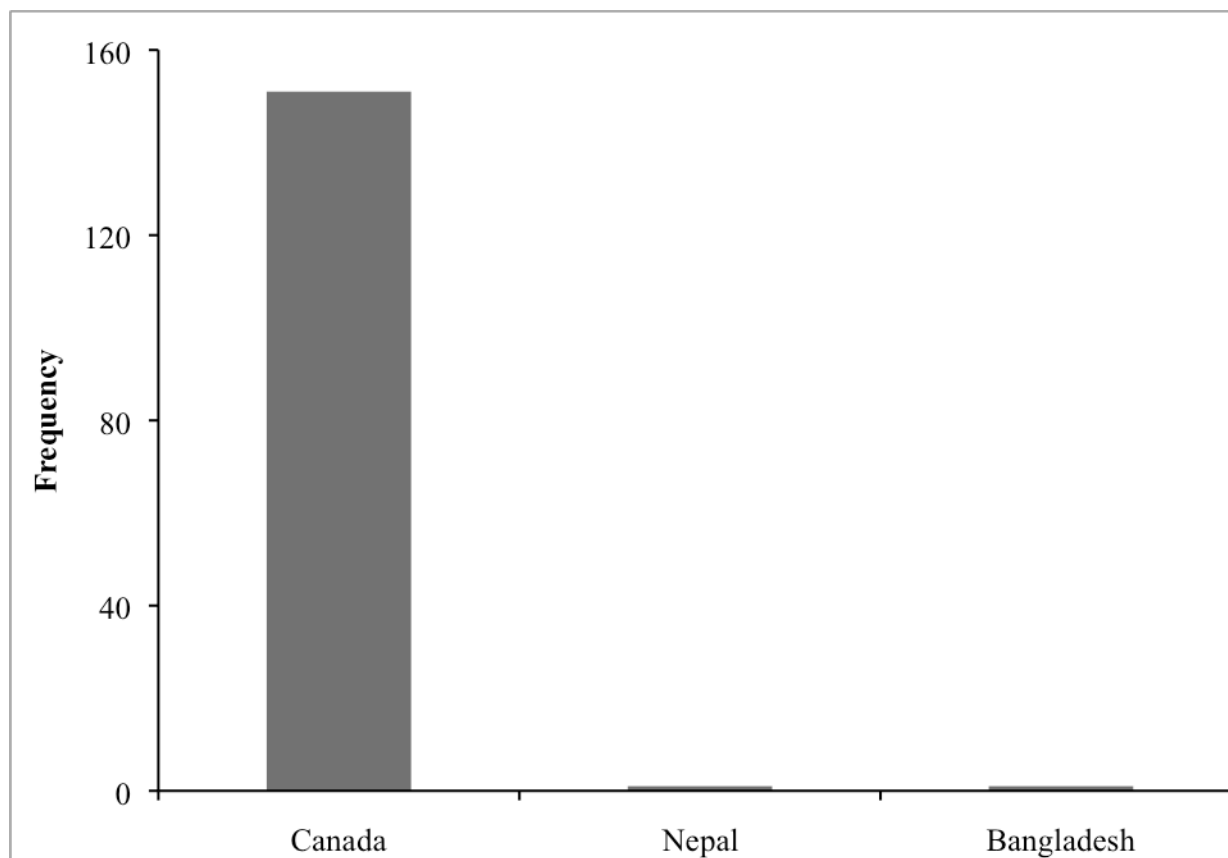
Country of Birth.

Note. *n* = 153; two student responses missing.

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Figure 4.

Country of Residence.

Note. $n = 153$; two student responses missing.

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Appendix B

School Support Interview

In this project we have looked at how some teenagers deal with stress, both healthy ways and not so healthy. In this short interview, I want to ask you how school can help teens deal with different stresses better. There is no right or wrong answer; I really just want to hear your thoughts on how schools can support teens. Everything you say will be completely confidential.

1. Making the change from elementary to high school can be very stressful. Can you talk about that experience and about what you found most stressful?

Probe: How did the school help or not help with that stress?

Probe: What else do you think the school could do to help with this change?

Probe: What about, in general, any ideas what could be done to make this easier?

2. How did you cope with the stress of making that change from elementary to high school?

Probe: What strategies worked well for you?

Probe: What did you do that you know probably wasn't that helpful or wasn't a good idea?

3. What kind of things do you think other kids do to cope with the stress of that change?

Healthy things?

Maybe not so healthy?

How common are these? Do you see these strategies a lot in your friends?

4. Once you are in high school, there are all kind of regular stress: homework, tests, social difficulties and arguments with parents. Can you talk about how stressful or not stressful you find these types of things? On a scale from 0- 3, rate how stressful each of these things are for you:

	No stress	Slight Stress	Moderate Stress	Extreme Stress
Homework:	0	1	2	3
Tests:	0	1	2	3
Grades:	0	1	2	3
Social life issues	0	1	2	3
Parents:	0	1	2	3

5. How do you deal with these kinds of stressors?

What works?

Probe: Try to elicit if different strategies are used for different types of stress.

What may not work or is probably not the healthiest?

Probe: Try to elicit if healthy/unhealthy effective/ineffective are associated with particular types of stress.

6. Some kids do less healthy things to cope with stress, like risky things (drinking and driving, extreme drinking, self-injury, etc.). Is there anything you think schools could do to prevent kids from doing these worrisome behaviours?

Probe: Are there specific, concrete strategies that could be used by schools?

7. How does the school help or not help with these everyday stressors?

Probe: Homework, test, marks stress? How does the school help or not help with that stress? What else do you think the school could do to help with this kind of stress?

Probe: Social difficulties? How does the school help or not help with this kind of stress? What else do you think the school could do to help with social stress?

Probe: Parental stress? How does the school help or not help with parent problems? What else do you think the school could do to help with this kind of stress?

What about in general, any ideas what could be done to make everyday high school stress easier?

Appendix C

Letter of Application for Data Collection in Schools

Parent Consent Form

Student Assent Form

McGill

1

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Transition to Secondary Schools: How Students Cope

1. Description and Objectives of the Research

In the last decade, school personnel have expressed increased concerns about students' use of negative coping strategies within the schools, such as excessive online gaming, risk-taking (e.g., alcohol or substance abuse), and particularly self-injury (e.g., cutting, burning). NSSI is defined as the "deliberate, self-inflicted destruction of body tissue resulting in immediate damage, *without suicidal intent*" (Favazza, 1998); this has emerged as a growing problem, and has been reported by 14-20% of secondary school age youth in Canada and the United States (see Heath, Schaub, Holly, & Nixon, 2009 for review).

It was previously believed that NSSI was unequivocally linked to suicide, but research has shown that many adolescents who engage in this behaviour do not have intent to die and are otherwise functioning well at home and school. Youth often report using NSSI in an attempt to "feel better" or "to cope" with stress and tension—that is to say, to regulate negative emotions. This is of concern because for some youth, the initiation of NSSI may lead to an ever escalating trajectory of self-injury. Not surprisingly, many school professionals have expressed that they deal with this behaviour on a regular basis and are eager to have more information.

The vast majority of youth begin engaging in one or more of these problematic behaviours (e.g., excessive gaming, risk-taking, NSSI) in early adolescence, which corresponds with the transition and adjustment to secondary school. As such, the main objective of this study is to better understand the risk and protective factors that influence the use of these negative coping strategies during the adjustment to secondary school. In addition to this, we hope to explore how adolescents think their schools can help them more effectively manage this transition period. It is hoped that this research project will shed light on how these negative coping strategies can be prevented and treated more effectively among youth.

2. Research Design

This project is aimed at working with **secondary school students in grades 7 and 8**. Data collection will follow these two cohorts of students over two years, and four time points (late fall and spring of each year). Thus, Times 1 and 2 will occur when students are in grade 7, and Times 3 and 4 will occur when students are in grade 8. See Appendix A for the data collection timeline.

<u>Student Sessions</u>
This project will begin with a brief presentation to all seventh graders during homeroom. At this time, our team members will distribute parent information letters and consent forms (Appendix D). This presentation will describe the goals of the project, methodology, and what is involved in participating (e.g., time commitment, questionnaires completed with the students).

2

All students who receive consent to participate will complete the **Standard Assessment Battery (SAB)** at each time point (i.e., twice per year) in a group format (20 students per group). The purpose of the SAB is to evaluate students' current use of positive and negative coping strategies, and how this changes over time. At Time 1, students will complete the student assent form (Appendix E).

In addition to the regularly occurring SAB group sessions, students who are identified at any of these time points as having engaged in excessive gaming, risk-taking, and/or NSSI will complete an individual **Follow-up Interview** session. We estimate that approximately 30% of students who complete the SAB will complete a follow-up interview. This interview will include an evaluation of risk and protective factors related to the coping strategy, as well as questions about how schools can better support students in coping with transition stress. There will be an additional group of 10 students, who do *not* engage in negative coping behaviours, interviewed as a comparison of life stressors and school perceptions.

In the event that, during the SAB, we note that a student has "changed groups" through a change in their behaviour (e.g., began or stopped engaging in NSSI), we will conduct the **Group Change Interview** session. The group change interview is a short and open-ended measure of the participant's perspectives on what has contributed to the change in their coping behaviors. An overview of the student sessions is presented in Appendix B, alongside detailed descriptions of each measure included in Appendix C.

All student sessions will take place during class time (as agreed upon by the student and his/her teacher), in a private room at the school. The total maximum time spent in project activities for any one student over one year will be 5 hours. The majority of students will only take part in SAB sessions, totalling 3 hours per year. The number of days spent working in the school by the research team will depend on the number of students who agree to participate. We anticipate it will not be more than 15 days (or the equivalent in half days if that is more convenient for the school schedule). Our schedule can be negotiated with the school administration and/or teaching staff.

3. School Staff Involvement

Involvement is minimal for most school staff. Letters detailing the project will be handed out during homeroom to be sent home to parents by team members. Parents will be asked to return consent forms to be collected by team members if they agree to their child participating.

Involvement will be requested from the mental health professional at each school. Upon entering the school we will ask one or two mental health professionals to serve as "contact personnel" within the school. Usually this would be a school counsellor, but could be a school psychologist or social worker. We would meet with the contact person to explain the nature and content of the study, and to provide them with information and resources about the targeted negative coping behaviours. Working with the contact person, we would set-up a procedure in advance such that when students are perceived as "at risk" a research team member will involve the contact mental health professional. Youth are identified as at risk in accordance with the protocol approved by the Research Ethics Board of McGill University. The specific protocol will be shared with the identified mental health professional. Consistent with this protocol, the research team member would encourage the student to discuss the area of concern with the contact personnel, or the team member would contact the mental health professional directly. Note that the research team member would not share any information beyond the one issue of concern; the file from the research would remain confidential. The mental health professional would then contact the parents together with the student to ensure appropriate follow-up. We would require written confirmation from the mental health professional that this had been done.

3

4. Benefits to Students, Parents, and Schools

Following completion of the project:

- There are substantial benefits of following students through the difficult two year transition to high school, twice a year assessing their coping, stress level, mood, anxiety, and self-perceptions. With participation in this project, many students who encounter significant difficulties will be identified and receive the appropriate support they might otherwise not have obtained.
- Designated mental health professionals will be provided with the most current information and resources concerning the assessment, prevention, and intervention of negative coping strategies that they may not otherwise have access to.
- Following completion of the project, in preparation for the 9th grade, all students participating will be invited to attend a series of sessions scheduled together with the guidance department on effective stress management. Additionally, at individual schools' request, the stress management course can be offered to all 9th grade students.
- The schools will receive a summary of the group results upon completion of the project. The summary will provide a profile of stress/coping within the school, as well as student suggestions. In addition, a compilation of resources specifically geared to the school profile will be provided.
- Students will be compensated based on their level of participation. All students who return the consent form regardless of agreement to participate will be entered in a draw for one of two gift cards to a local shopping mall in the amounts of $200 and $100. Each student who participates in the Standard Assessment Battery (SAB) will be entered into an additional draw for one of four gift cards to Famous Players in the amount of $50. Students who complete a follow-up interview will be compensated with a $10.00 certificate for each session in which they participate.

5. Ethical Approval

This research project has been approved at the school-board level, in addition to review by the McGill University's Research Ethics Board.

6. Contact Information

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Department of Educational and Counselling Psychology

Appendix A
Data Collection Timeline

	Year 1		Year 2		Year 3	
	Fall	Spring	Fall	Spring	Fall	Spring
Cohort 1	**Time 1**	**Time 2**	**Time 3**	**Time 4**		
	SAB [N=700] ⇩	*SAB* [N=700] ⇩	*SAB* [N=550 attrition] ⇩	*SAB* [N=550 attrition] ⇩		
	NSSI Interview [n=140]	*GC Interview* [n=40]	*GC Interview* [n=40]	*GC Interview* [n=20]		
	RT Interview [n=140]					
	Compare Group [n=10]	*Compare Group* [n=10]	*Compare Group* [n=10]	*Compare Group* [n=10]		
Cohort 2			**Time 1**	**Time 2**	**Time 3**	**Time 4**
			SAB [N=700] ⇩	*SAB* [N=700] ⇩	*SAB* [N=550 attrition] ⇩	*SAB* [N=550 attrition] ⇩
			NSSI Interview [n=140]	*GC Interview* [n=40]	*GC Interview* [n=40]	*GC Interview* [n=20]
			RT Interview [n=140]			
			Compare Group [n=10]	*Compare Group* [n=10]	*Compare Group* [n=10]	*Compare Group* [n=10]

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Appendix B
Overview of Student Sessions

Standard Assessment Battery
Group Administered Sessions (Times 1-2-3-4)
Student assent*
How I Deal with Stress **(HIDS)**
Weekly Activity List – Adapted **(WAL-A)**
Objectified Body Consciousness Scale-Youth **(OBCS-Y)**
Beck Youth Inventories – Second Edition **(BYI-II)**
Self-Perception Profile for Adolescents **(SPPA)**
Resiliency Scales for Children and Adolescents **(RSCA)***
Behavioural Regulation in Exercise Questionnaire-2 **(BREQ-2)**
Inventory of Parent and Peer Attachment **(IPPA)**
Pathological Video Gaming Questionnaire **(PVGQ)**
Early Adolescent School Role Strain Inventory **(EASRSI)**
Two sessions of 45 minutes (1 ½ hours total)
*Note that the measures marked with * are only completed at Time 1*

Follow-up: Individual Interviews
NSSI Follow-up
Life Stressors and Social Resources Inventory – Youth Form **(LISRES-Y)**
Self-Injurious Thoughts and Behaviors Interview – Adapted **(SITBI)**
School Support Interview **(SSI)**
RT Follow-up (e.g., alcohol/drug use, excessive online gaming)
Life Stressors and Social Resources Inventory – Youth Form **(LISRES-Y)**
Suicide Risk Assessment **(SRA)**
School Support Interview **(SSI)**
Comparison Group Interview
Life Stressors and Social Resources Inventory – Youth Form **(LISRES-Y)**
School Support Interview **(SSI)**
Group Change Follow-up
Change Interview
Life Stressors and Social Resources Inventory – Youth Form **(LISRES-Y)**
Self-Injurious Thoughts and Behaviors Interview – Adapted **(SITBI)** (NSSI)
Suicide Risk Assessment **(SRA)** (RT)
School Support Interview **(SSI)** (NSSI & RT)
Approx 30-60 minutes per student
If needed, when student is identified as engaging in target behaviour

Total testing time for each student per year: **3 hours (min) to 5 hours (max)**

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Appendix C
Measure Descriptions

STANDARD ASSESSMENT BATTERY

How I Deal with Stress (HIDS; Heath & Ross, 2007). This 30-item survey presents a list of both adaptive and maladaptive strategies that adolescents may use to cope with stress. Students indicate whether they have used each strategy frequently, a couple of times, once, or never. NSSI and risk-taking are embedded within this questionnaire as possible coping strategies.

Weekly Activity List Adapted (WAL-A; Sallis, Condon, Goggin, Roby, Kolody, & Alcaraz, 1993). This is an adaptation of the Weekly Activity List, a measure of physical activity. It provides a simple checklist of all activities the youth may have engaged in over the last seven days followed by a couple of questions concerning the perception of overall activity level and satisfaction.

Objectified Body Consciousness Scale-Youth (OBCS-Y; Lindberg, Hyde, & McKinley, 2006). The OBCS is a 24-item self-report measure which comprises three subscales designed to assess self-objectification and body consciousness. [Title on survey *Body Thoughts*]

Beck Youth Inventories – Second Edition (BYI-II; Beck, Beck, & Jolly, 2005). The BYI-II is a set of five self-report inventories that each contain 20 statements about thoughts, feelings, and behaviours in youth 7 through 18 years. Five different areas are assessed; depression, anxiety, anger, disruptive behaviour, and self-concept.

Self-Perception Profile for Adolescents (SPPA; Harter, 1988). The SPPA is a 45 item self-report inventory, designed to tap domain-specific judgments of competence in eight different domains (i.e., scholastic competence, social competence, athletic competence, physical appearance, job competence, romantic appeal, behavioural conduct, close friendship), as well as provide a rating of global self-worth. The test employs a structured-alternative response format such that the child sees two statements and has to choose which one is most true for him or her. Once the child has chosen, he or she indicates whether that statement is "really true for [me]" or "sort of true for [me]". Items are scored on a scale of 1 to 4, with higher scores indicating more positive self-perceptions. [Title on survey *What I am Like*]

Resiliency Scales for Children and Adolescents (RSCA; Prince-Embury, 2006). The RSCA is a self-report measure with three scales each containing 19 to 24 items designed to assess personality strengths and vulnerabilities in youth aged 9 to 18 years old. The scales include: sense of mastery; sense of relatedness and emotional reactivity.

Behavioural Regulation in Exercise Questionnaire-2 (BREQ-2; Markland & Tobin, 2004). This is a self-report measure developed to assess motivation towards exercise. This scale comprises 19 items relating to the five types of regulation identified by Self-Determination Theory. Five subscales relate to these types of regulation, including (from least to most self-determined): amotivation, external regulation, introjected regulation, identified regulation and intrinsic motivation. [Title on survey *Exercise Questionnaire*]

Inventory of Parent and Peer Attachment (IPPA; Armsden & Greenberg, 1987). Adolescents' feelings of alienation toward their parents are assessed with the Alienation subscale. This measure consists of 50 items (25 pertaining to each parent) assessing the youth's feelings of anger, isolation, and mistrust in relating to each parent. [Title on survey *Parent and Peer Relationships*]

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Pathological Video Gaming Questionnaire (PVGQ; Gentile, Bricolo, Sim, & Serpelloni, 2010). The PVGQ is a ten-question survey that examines participants' use of video games. The questionnaire was originally based on similar surveys for addictive behaviours, and is designed to determine pathological video game use. Each item on the questionnaire asks the participant about his/her video game use. Questions 1 and 3 of the survey can be answered with either Yes or No; all other questions can be answered Yes, No, or Sometimes. [Title on survey *Video Game Use Questionnaire*]

Early Adolescent School Role Strain Inventory (EASRSI; Mickey Fentzel, 1993). The EASRSI is a 32-item measure in which adolescents rate aspects of academic strain experienced. High internal consistency and test–retest reliability has been found for the subscales of this measure. [Title on survey *School Stress Inventory*]

INDIVIDUAL FOLLOW-UP INTERVIEWS

Life Stressors and Social Resources Inventory – Youth Form (LISRES-Y; Moos & Moos, 1994). The LISRES-Y inventory assesses life stressors and social resources amongst youth aged 12 to 18 years. It is comprised of nine Life Stressors Scales (physical health, home/money, parents, siblings, extended family, school, friends, boy/girlfriend, negative life events), and seven Social Resources Scales (parents, siblings, ext family, school, friends, boy/girlfriend, positive life events).

School Support Interview (SSI). This interview has been structured to assess students' perspectives on how schools can better support them in dealing with stress, transition, and in preventing self-injurious or risk-taking behaviours.

Self-Injurious Thoughts and Behaviors Interview – Short Form (SITBI-SF; Nock, Holmberg, Photos, & Michel, 2007). SITBI is a structured interview that assesses the presence, frequency, and characteristics of a range of self-injurious thoughts and behaviours, including suicidal ideation, suicide plans, suicide gestures, suicide attempts, and NSSI. Past research with adolescents has suggested that the SITBI has strong interrater reliability (.99, $r = 1.0$) and test-retest reliability (.70, intraclass correlation coefficient = .44) over a 6-month period. Moreover, concurrent validity was demonstrated via strong correspondence between the SITBI and other measures (.54 to .87). The SITBI comprehensively assesses a wide range of self-injury-related constructs and has been used in both research and clinical settings. For the purposes of the present study the assessment of suicidal behaviours was shortened for ethical reasons to focus largely on possible risk.

Suicide Risk Assessment (SRA). This is a standard suicide risk assessment protocol that has been developed with reference to recommendations in the literature (e.g., Joiner, 2005) and has been in use in our research for four years. It has been approved by the McGill REB and school boards in the past, and has been found to be very effective in our past studies. Research assistants completing the SRA are all senior School Psychology students and have an experienced clinician on emergency call at all times. Additionally, a contact professional will be identified within the school in collaboration with the principal who will be aware of the study and the need for possible immediate referrals in the event of a high risk youth being identified.

Change Interview. If the youth has indicated they are engaging in a new or different target behaviour the appropriate follow-up interview from above will be completed. However, if the participant has terminated a target behaviour, or increased/decreased the target behaviour a semi-structured interview will be used. This interview is drawn from Deliberto and Nock's (2008) study of onset and offset of self-injurious behaviours which provides open-ended questions tapping common contributing factors to the emergence and termination of these behaviours. The change interview consists of four open ended questions asking participants about the change in their coping behaviour noted in the project assessment. Questions ask about what contributed to the change, what has changed in their life, how they are coping in general and if there is anything we should know about their coping and stress.

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Appendix D
Parent Consent

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RESEARCH PROJECT
Transition to Secondary Schools: How Students Cope

September 2010

Dear Parent/Legal Tutor,

Adolescence is characterized by considerable change physically, socially, and emotionally; often, the added pressure of starting secondary school can increase the stress associated with this time period. The stressors during the transition to secondary school typically include interpersonal stress (e.g., difficulties with peers or family members), intrapersonal distress (e.g., anxiety, mood, self-esteem), and generalized school stress (e.g., homework stress, test anxiety). Our research team is interested in examining adaptive and maladaptive strategies that youth use to cope with these stressors through 7th and 8th grades. Our research has shown that youth may engage in both adaptive coping (e.g., problem-solving, communication), as well as some worrisome coping mechanisms. Your son/daughter's participation will help us to better understand the various ways in which youth cope with stress during transition to high school.

Project activities: Students who participate in the project will complete a package of questionnaires *twice per year during their first two years of secondary school*. These questionnaires will assess interpersonal, intrapersonal, and school stressors, as well as potential protective factors (e.g., self-efficacy, physical activity, involvement in the community). These sessions will take place in the fall and spring of each year within the school setting. The sessions will be completed in groups of 20 students and will take approximately 1.5 hours (two sessions of 45 minutes each). A research assistant will explain the instructions to all students and answer any questions. Students will complete the forms individually and confidentially.

Following each of these sessions, students may be invited to meet with a member of our research team (e.g., graduate student in Educational Psychology) for an individual interview session to clarify their responses. This interview would take approximately one hour. The time of the interview would be arranged to ensure that important class activities are not missed. We are interested in interviewing students who engage in a variety of different coping strategies—as such, not all students will complete individual sessions. Students would participate in a *maximum of 5 hours* of research activities per year if they are selected for individual interviews.

Audio taping: For the students who complete an individual session, we request permission to audio tape one aspect of the interview related to students' views of how they can be better supported in dealing with school stress. This information will be critical to help school professionals understand the services that adolescents need during this transition period. Please note that all audiotapes will be coded and kept confidential. The tapes will not be accessible to any school personnel and will only be listened to by researchers at McGill.

Compensation: Students will be compensated in several ways for their time and effort. All students who return the consent form regardless of agreement to participate will be entered in a draw for one of two gift cards to a local shopping mall in the amounts of $200 and $100. An additional draw for one of four $50 gift cards to Famous Players will be held following completion of each of the group sessions (e.g., package of questionnaires completed twice per year). Students who participate in the individual interviews will receive one $10 gift card for each session.

Benefits: Youth are reporting increased levels of stress and difficulties in coping. Transition to high school is a particularly challenging time. Although there are no direct benefits for individual participants, this project has the potential to greatly enhance our understanding of both risk and protective factors for youth experiencing transition. Following completion of the project, in preparation for the 9th grade, all students who participate will be invited to attend a workshop on effective stress management. Furthermore, information provided by students on how schools can better support them in coping with stress (information collected in the audio taped interview) will be synthesized and shared with school professionals.

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Potential risks: While there are no direct risks involved in participation in this research project, some participants might be sensitive to some of the questions. Please be assured that students do not have to answer any question they don't want to, they can take a break or end a session at any time or withdraw from the study at any time.

Note that all information collected will be kept confidential, and all completed questionnaires will be kept in a locked cabinet accessible only to the primary researcher from McGill University. All data will be coded to ensure confidentiality. No identifying information will be used in any written or oral presentation of the results. Students are free to withdraw from the project at any time.

Although all information will be kept confidential, in the event that your son/daughter is perceived to be a risk to him/herself or others, we are required to break confidentiality. In this case, we would contact you immediately to ensure that your son/daughter receives the support they need. In the unlikely event that this occurs we will accompany the student to a designated school mental health professional (counsellor, psychologist, or social worker) who is informed concerning the project goals. This person, together with your son/daughter will contact you. All of this will remain completely confidential between your son/daughter, the mental health professional and yourself, no other personnel at the school will be involved. However, even if you are contacted the full details of your son/daughter's responses must remain confidential although the reason for concern will be shared by the student or the researcher.

Please sign below, indicating whether or not you would like your son/daughter to participate, and return this form to school. Should you have any questions, please feel free to contact me at the coordinates listed below. If you have any questions or concerns about your child's rights or welfare as a participant in this research study, please contact the McGill Research Ethics Officer at (514) 398-6831. Thank you so much.

Sincerely,

Nancy Heath, PhD
James McGill Professor
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(514) 398-3439

Marianne Christie
Project Coordinator
(514) 398-1232
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❏ **YES** → I consent to my son/daughter's participation in this project.
❏ **YES** → I consent to audio taping if my son/daughter is selected to complete an individual interview session.

Signature: _____   Date: _____

Name of **parent/legal tutor** (please print): _____

Name of **student** (please print): _____

Student's date of birth (month/day/year): _____   Grade: _____

Parent telephone number(s): _____

❏ **NO** → I do not consent to my son/daughter's participation in this project.

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Appendix E
Student Assent

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Transition to Secondary Schools: How Students Cope
ASSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN PROJECT – *STUDENT*

- This project is about the pressure or stress that students face during the transition to secondary school. Our research team is interested in understanding how teenagers cope with this stress through 7th and 8th grades. Your parents have already agreed for you to take part in this project.

- In this project, you will be asked to complete a package of questionnaires *twice per year during their first two years of secondary school*. These questionnaires will ask you about stress, coping strategies, as well as the way you feel about yourself and school. These sessions will take place during the fall and spring of each year. We meet with students in groups of 20 during school time and each session takes about 1.5 hours (two sessions of 45 minutes each). You complete the questionnaires individually and confidentially.

- Following each of these sessions, we may or may not ask you to meet with a member of our research team for an individual interview session to talk about some of your answers. This interview would take about one hour. We will be meeting with students who indicate many different kinds of coping strategies, so you may not be asked to complete an individual session. We ask your permission to audio tape one part of this interview.

- If you agree, you would participate in at least 3 hours of research activities per year—and up to a maximum of 5 hours of research activities per year if you are selected for individual interview sessions.

- Your teachers will not be told about the answers that you give in these interviews. Your parents will also not be told about your answers, unless it is perceived that you are at serious risk to yourself. In the unlikely event that this occurs, you would need to speak with _____ (school's designated school mental health professional) who would contact your parents with you. No other school personnel will be notified. The full details of your responses will remain confidential and will not be shared with your parents or _____.

- Although there are no direct benefits for individual participants, this project has the potential to improve our understanding of how to help students when they are dealing with stress. Following completion of the project, in preparation for the 9th grade, you will be invited to attend a workshop on effective stress management.

- While there are no direct risks involved in participation in this research project, there may be questions that you find sensitive. Please be assured that you do not have to answer any question you don't want to, and you can take a break or end a session at any time or withdraw from the study at any time.

- You will be compensated in several ways for your time and effort. All students who returned consent forms have been entered in a draw for one of two gift cards to a local shopping mall ($200 and $100). After each of the group sessions, you will be entered in a draw for one of four $50 gift cards to Famous Players. Also, if you participate in the individual interviews, you will receive one $10 gift card for each session.

- No identifying information about you will be used in any presentation of the results from this project.

- Your classroom work and grades will not be affected by your decision to participate or not to participate.

❑ **YES** → I consent to participation in this project.
❑ **YES** → I consent to audio taping if I am selected to complete an individual interview.

Name: (please print):_____

Signature: _____   Date: _____

Student telephone number(s): _____

❑ **NO** → I do not consent to participation in this project.

Appendix D

Assessment Battery 1 Script

Assessment Battery 2 Script

Consent Form Distribution Script

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Group Administration Script
Standard Assessment Battery – Session 1

This session is group administered, although the students individually complete the measures. For this set of questionnaires, we do not read aloud due to the sensitive nature of the questions. Please ensure that students do not talk, share answers, or look at their peers' responses. When presenting each different questionnaire, please hold up the form to show the students what it looks like.

Welcome: Hi! We are _____ and _____. Today, we will be filling out six questionnaires. Please don't hesitate to raise your hand and ask us questions if you have any. Today, you will be filling out the forms on your own, although we will give you a set of instructions before you begin each one.

Assent form: Please open your envelope and remove the first page that has the McGill logo and says "assent to participate in project" at the top. As you know, your parents received an information letter and they returned a signed form to school giving you permission to participate in this project. However, it is also important that we talk about this research with you and ask that you also agree to participate.

The form in front of you has some information about the project and we ask everyone to sign before we start to show that they agree to participate. This project is about the stress students face during the transition to high school. We want to know how teenagers cope with this stress. We will ask you to complete two packages of questionnaires during the fall and winter in groups of 20. After these group sessions, we may ask some of you to do individual interviews. Your teachers and parents will NOT know about the answers you give. The only time we will share anything is if we feel that you are at serious risk to yourself. In this case, we will talk to your school's mental health professional, and they may decide to contact your parents. Either way, we won't tell them any of your answers in our research. There are some good things that will come out of your participation in this research because it will help us help other students deal with stress. Also, you will be invited to a workshop on effective stress management as you are preparing to begin grade 9. You do not have to answer any question you don't want to, and you can take a break, end a session, or withdraw from the study at any time you want. After the group sessions, everyone will be entered into a draw for one of four $50 gift cards to Famous Players, and if you participate in the individual interviews, you will receive a $10 gift certificate for each session. No identifying information about you will be used for this project, and your work and grades will not be affected by whether or not you want to participate.

If you agree to participate, please complete your information (name, signature, and phone number) at the bottom of the page. We ask that you check both boxes that say YES – one is about completing the interviews in the project, and the other gives permission for us to audio tape the session if you get selected to complete an individual follow-up interview. If you indicate NO- you will leave and go back to class with my colleague _____. Does anyone have any questions?

If a student indicates NO, thank them for their time and escort them back to class.

General directions: Before we begin, there are a few things we want to tell you. First, please remember that these questionnaires are confidential. You should not be discussing your answers, looking at your neighbour's forms, and we ask that you please do not talk even if you are finished out of respect for those that may still be answering questions. Please leave all of the questionnaires in your envelope. I will ask you to remove them one by one. Once complete, you can flip it over on your desk. The whole group will begin each questionnaire at the same time, so do not continue with the next questionnaire

until I give you a new set of directions. Do not write your name on the envelope or any of the forms; this is how we maintain confidentiality with your answers.

You will complete each questionnaire independently. If there are any words that you are unsure of, or if you do not understand a question, please raise your hand and we will be happy to help you.

If there are questions that ask about your parents, you should think about your primary caregiver – whether that be a parent, grandparent, guardian, etc.

HIDS: First, please remove the questionnaire that says "How I Deal with Stress" at the top. This questionnaire is going to ask you about stress and the strategies you use to deal with it. Before you start answering the questions, please make sure to fill out the section at the top with your personal information. *Stop and wait for them to complete this demographics section.*

Before you begin, let me give you a quick explanation. In the first section, we want to know what kind of strategies you use when you are stressed. Please circle a number that describes how often you use each strategy – as it says on the form, 0 is never, 1 is sometimes, 2 is often, and 3 is always. Figure out how often you do each of the coping strategies listed. For example, if you "try not to think about it" usually when you are stressed, circle 2 (often).

After you complete this rating for the 32 strategies listed, there are three follow-up sections. Please answer the questions in these sections. REMEMBER: These questions are about the strategies you use to *deal with stress*. When you are finished, put down your pencil and turn over the questionnaire until we are ready to move on to the next one.

Circulate around the room, ensuring that students are not talking or sharing answers. Pay attention to their completion (i.e., if they flipped it over, is the questionnaire actually complete) without explicitly taking their form and looking at the answers. The HIDS should take approximately 8 minutes to complete. At 10 minutes, if there are students who have still not completed the questionnaire, ask everyone to stop and tell them that they can complete it at the end of the session.

WAL-A & SCOFF: Please return the "How I Deal with Stress" questionnaire to your envelope and take out the one that says "Weekly Activity List" at the top. It is important for these questions that you think about the past week. This questionnaire will ask you about the physical activities you did outside of school during the past week – this should not include phys ed class, but can include before/after school sports and any activities you participate in outside of school or at lunch time. For each of the activities, mark an X in the box for each day that you did this for more than 15 minutes. For example, if you did *more* than 15 minutes of walking on Monday, Wednesday, and Saturday, you would put X's in the boxes along the row for "walking" in the Monday, Wednesday, and Saturday columns.

On the second page, there are some questions that ask you about how you think of yourself physically. Please read each question and circle the answer that most closely describes you – as it indicates, choose one answer for each question. The first question, you choose one of the answers from A to E. The next set of questions, you circle an answer from never to very often. And the last set of questions, you simply check yes or no.

Circulate around the room, ensuring that students are not talking or sharing answers. The WAL-A & SCOFF should take approximately 4 minutes to complete. At 5 minutes, ask them to stop and return their questionnaires to the envelope. Those who have not finished can continue at the end of the session.

OBCS: Please take out the questionnaire that says "Body Thoughts" on the top. This questionnaire has a series of questions about how you feel about your body. For each question, circle the number that corresponds to how much you agree with this statement – 1 is strongly disagree, 4 is neutral (or neither agree or disagree), and 7 is strongly agree. The numbers between indicate the degree to which you disagree or agree. For example, if a statement says "When I am happy, I feel like singing" and you don't feel like singing when you are happy, then you will answer one of the disagree choices. If you NEVER feel like singing when you are happy, you would circle 1 for strongly disagree.

Circulate around the room. The OBCS should take approximately 5 minutes to complete. At 7 minutes, ask them to stop and return their questionnaires to the envelope. Those who have not finished can continue at the end of the session.

BYI-II: The next questionnaire is a bit long, so if you want to take a moment to relax, please feel free to put your head down. If you have not completed any of the surveys from before, this is a good time for you to finish those up. If you have any questions, please raise your hand and we will come see you. Please do not talk to your classmates. *Wait a couple of minutes, and direct them to get ready to start again.* Please remove the blue/white questionnaire that says "Beck – Combination Booklet" from your envelope. Please do not complete any of your personal information on the first page. Open the booklet to page 2, but please do not start as I want to explain the questionnaire.

I will ask you to stop between each of the pages, so that I can explain what the new set of questions are about and give you some instructions. The response options are the same on every page – there is a statement and then you are asked to circle the one answer that best describes you (never, sometimes, often, and always).

On page 2, here is a list of things that happen to people and that people think or feel. Read each sentence carefully and circle the *one* word that tells about you best. There are no right or wrong answers. When you are done this page, please put down your pen.

Move to the next page. On pages 3 and 4, there are lists of things that happen to people and that people think or feel. Read each sentence carefully, and circle the *one* word that tells about you best, *especially* in the last two weeks. There are no right or wrong answers. When you are done page 4, please put down your pen.

Go ahead and move on to pages 5 and 6. Here is a list of things that happen to people and that people think or feel. You *do not* have to think about the last two weeks, these are more general questions about you. Read each sentence carefully, and circle the *one* word that tells about you best. There are no right or wrong answers.

Circulate around the room. The entire BYI-II should take approximately 12 minutes to complete. At 15 minutes, ask them to stop and return their questionnaires to the envelope. Those who have not finished can continue at the end of the session.

SPPA: The last questionnaire we are going to complete today is the one that says "What I Am Like" at the top of the first page. This questionnaire has a series of questions about what you think you are like. You will see that each question has two sentences – you need to choose one sentence that is most like you, and then rank your answer as really true or sort of true.

As you read through the instructions, hold up the questionnaire and demonstrate. Point to specific corresponding areas and show how to correctly complete the questionnaire.

Let's look at the sample sentence together. The sentence is "Some teenagers like to go to movies in their spare time <u>but</u> other teenagers would rather go to sports events" – decide which sentence is most like you. First, circle the sentence which is most like you. If the movie answer is most like you, then you would circle the sentence: "Some teenagers like to go to movies in their spare time." If the sports answer is most like you, you would circle this sentence. Then, for the sentence that you selected as most like you, check a box to indicate if this is really true for you or sort of true. For example, I would rather go to the movies and this is really true because I really like going to the movies, so I would check the "really true" box on the left side. So, to summarize, even though there are four boxes, you will only check *one* box for each number.

Circulate around the room. The entire SPPA should take approximately 8 minutes to complete. At 10 minutes, ask them to stop and return their questionnaires to the envelope. Those who have not finished can continue at the end of the session.

Wrap-up: Thank you so much for your time today. We will be meeting with you again soon to complete the second group session – it will be about the same length as this one. If you still have to answer some questions, please go ahead and continue working on those. You have a little bit more time to finish. If you have already finished everything, please don't talk! Put your head down on your desk and wait a few minutes while everyone finishes up.

When you are done, please make sure you have returned all of your completed questionnaires to the envelope and you can seal it if you like. Pass your closed envelope to me or _____ at the back of the class.

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Group Administration Script
Standard Assessment Battery – Session 2

This session is group administered, but the team will be reading each question of each survey. Please ensure that students do not talk, share answers, or look at their peers' responses. At the beginning of each questionnaire, please hold up the form to show students what it looks like. Take turns reading the questionnaires and circulating around the room.

Welcome: Hi! We are _____ and _____. Today, we will be filling out five questionnaires. Please don't hesitate to raise your hand if you have any questions. Today, we will be reading each question for each questionnaire, so we can all follow along together.

General directions: Before we start, there are a few things we want to remind you of. First, please remember that these questionnaires are confidential. You should not be discussing your answers, looking at your neighbour's questionnaires, and we ask that you please do not talk. Please leave all of the questionnaires in the envelope. I will ask you to remove them one by one, and we will do this as a group. Do not go ahead unless I have told you to return your previous questionnaire to the envelope and take out a new one. Do not write your name on the envelope or any of the forms, this is how we maintain confidentiality with your answers. If there are any words that you are unsure of, or if you do not understand a question, please raise your hand and we will be happy to help you.

If there are questions that ask about your parents, you should think about your primary caregiver – whether that be a parent, grandparent, guardian, etc.

Please follow along as we go. If you don't have enough time to answer a question and I've already moved to the next question, please keep up with me and move on to the next question. I will give you time at the end to finish filling out anything you may have missed.

RSCA: Take out the booklet that is titled "Resiliency Scales for Children and Adolescents." Please follow along as I read it to you.

Turn to page 3, which says "MAS" at the top. This is a list of things that happen to people and that people think, feel, or do. Listen as I read each sentence carefully, and then you are to circle the *one* answer (from never, rarely, sometimes, often, or almost always) that tells about you best. There are no right or wrong answers. *Read each statement, from 1-20 slowly. Pause between each question, wait and watch as students complete the answer.*

Now, let's move on to page 4, which has the letters "REL" at the top. Here is a list of things that happen to people and that people think, feel or do. Listen carefully as I read each sentence to you and circle the ONE answer (from never, rarely, sometimes, often, or almost always) that tells about you best. There are no right or wrong answers. *Read each statement from 1-24 slowly, pause and wait for students to finish answering the question.*

Now turn to page 5, which has the letters "REA" at the top. Here is a list of things that happen to people and that people think, feel, or do. Listen carefully as I read each sentence to you and circle the one answer (from never, rarely, sometimes, often, or almost always) that tells about you best. There are no right or wrong answers. *Read each statement from 1-20, then read the three questions included on the label. Pause and wait as the students finish each question. The RSCA should take about 13 minutes.*

BREQ-2: Please return the RSCA to your envelopes. We will now do the questionnaire titled "Exercise Questionnaire". We are interested in the reasons underlying peoples' decisions to exercise or not to exercise. Using the scale on the page, please show how true each item is for you. Please note that there are no right or wrong answers and no trick questions. We simply want to know how you personally feel about exercise. Your responses will be held in confidence and only used for our research purposes. Circle 0 if the statement is not true for you, 1 if it is sort of true for you, 2 if it is sometimes true for you, 3 if it's usually true for you, and 4 if it is very true for you. *Read each statement 1-19 while pausing after each one to allow all students to finish answering it. The BREQ should take about 4 minutes.*

IPPA: We are halfway through our questionnaires. So if you want to take a moment to relax, please feel free to put your head down. If you have not completed any of the surveys from before, this is a good time for you to finish those up. If you have any questions, please raise your hand and we will come see you. Please do not talk to your classmates. *Wait a couple of minutes, and direct them to get ready to start again.*

Let's do the next questionnaire. Please return all your questionnaires back to your envelopes, and the next one we will do is the one that says "Parent and Peer Relationships". Please take this one out of your envelope at this time. Please answer the following questions about the relationship you have, and the support you receive, from your parents and peers/friends. Answer on the following scale: 1 is almost always true, 2 is often, 3 is sometimes, 4 is seldom/hardly ever, and 5 is never true. *Read through each sentence 1-28, then 1-25 and after each question allow the students time to complete each question. The IPPA should take around 8 minutes to complete.*

PVGQ: We are now going to answer some questions about your video gaming, so return the "Parent and Peer Relationships" questionnaire to your envelope and take out the one called "Video Game Use Questionnaire." The purpose of this questionnaire is to find out more about how different people use video games. This can include home consoles, such as the Xbox 360, PlayStation 3, or Nintendo Wii; handheld devices, such as the Nintendo DS, PSP, or iPhone/iPod Touch, or online games such as World of Warcraft. Questions 1 and 3 can be answered with either Yes or No; all other questions can be answered Yes, No, or Sometimes. Circle the most accurate answer for you over the past year. *Read through each statement 1-11, pause to see that each student has completed the question before moving to the next. The PVGQ should take about 4 minutes to complete.*

EASRSI: Now, please return the last questionnaire to your envelopes, and take out the one called "School Stress Inventory". The following statements describe situations that are sources of frustration or stress for some students from time to time. Read each statement and circle the number that indicates how much frustration or stress each situation described has created for you during the past three months of school. For example, 0 is no frustration or stress, 1 is slight frustration or stress, 2 is moderate frustration or stress, 3 is extreme frustration or stress. *Read each statement 1 through 32, pause and wait for each student to answer each question. The EASRSI should take about 5 minutes to complete.*

Wrap-up: Thank you so much for your time today. If you still have to answer some questions, please go ahead and continue working on those. You have a little bit more time to finish. If you have already finished everything, please don't talk! Put your head down on your desk and wait a few minutes while everyone finishes up. *Watch as students complete their questionnaires. Allow an extra 5(or so) minutes for all students to complete.*

When you are done, please make sure you have returned all of your completed questionnaires to the envelope and you can seal it if you like. Pass your closed envelope to me or (other team member) at the back of the class. _____ and I would like to thank all of you for your time and effort.

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DISTRIBUTION OF CONSENT FORMS
Transition to Secondary Schools: How Students Cope

Hello. My name is _____ and I'm a student at McGill University. I am here today with some of the members of my research team to tell you about a project that we are beginning in your school.

In this project we want to talk to teenagers about the stress that students face during the transition to high school, and hear your views about how schools can help students better cope with the challenges during this time. This project will take place in grades 7 and 8. We will meet with you between 2 to 4 times each year, during school hours. Of course, we'll make sure that you are taken out of class at a time that is convenient for you and your teacher. Some of these sessions are done in a group and some of them will be individual interviews. We will be asking you questions about your stress level, how you cope, your mood, physical activities, and self-perceptions. All of your answers are completely confidential.

In order to participate, we would need you to bring back this consent form signed by a parent. On the form, your parents can indicate whether or not you can participate by checking *yes* or *no*. We will show our appreciation for your time and effort in several ways. All students **who return consent forms** will be entered into a draw for one of two gift cards to a local shopping mall ($200 and $100). Remember, you will be entered into the draw **whether your consent form says *yes* or *no* – you just need to return it.** After each of the group interview sessions, you will be entered in a draw for one of four $50 gift cards to Famous Players. Also, if you participate in the individual interviews, you will receive one $10 gift card for each session.

We will be coming back to your class tomorrow to pick up the forms, so we hope that you can return them as soon as possible. You can hand your forms directly to us when we come back. We have to get the forms back from you whether they say yes or no. We will need to keep coming back to get the forms. So please just return them as soon as possible.

Does anyone have any questions?