

ENSURING A SMOOTH TRANSITION FROM ELEMENTARY TO SECONDARY SCHOOL

ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

SECONDARY SCHOOL



**I care
about school!**

Québec 



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WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF THIS GUIDE?

How can schools work together to make sure they are doing everything possible to ensure a smooth transition from elementary to secondary school? What does the research tell us about effective transition activities? The purpose of this guide is to provide people in the education and health and social services systems with information about the nature of a smooth transition, thus allowing them to analyze, improve and implement measures aimed at meeting students' needs with respect to their transition from elementary to secondary school.

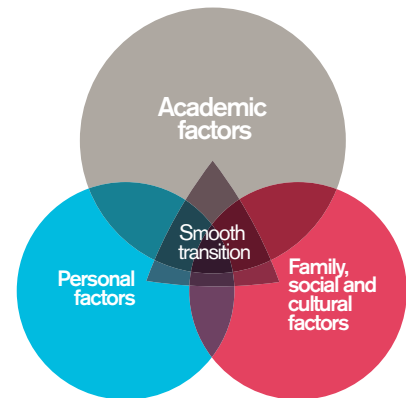
WHO IS THIS GUIDE FOR?

This guide is intended for school administrators, complementary educational services staff, elementary and secondary school teachers, administrators and practitioners in health and social services centres (CSSS) and youth centres, and various community partners.

WHAT IS A SMOOTH TRANSITION?

A transition is "a period of time during which children gradually adapt to their new physical, social and human environment."¹

A smooth transition from elementary to secondary school is a peaceful transition for the student, the family and the other adults involved. It requires mutual adaptation among the different institutions in order to foster the student's success at the academic, personal, family, social and cultural levels.



WHAT DOES A SMOOTH TRANSITION DEPEND ON?

A smooth transition enables students to:

- › recognize their strengths and challenges
- › quickly form quality interpersonal relationships in their new environment
- › feel comfortable and safe in their new environment
- › develop or maintain positive attitudes toward school and learning
- › develop or maintain confidence in their ability to succeed in school

Taking academic, personal, family, social and cultural factors into account fosters continuity of the educational experience, allowing students to develop to their fullest. When schools can effectively meet their basic needs (independence, self-esteem, safety, relationships), students are more likely to persevere.

Young people go through several transitions before arriving at adulthood, and each of these is potentially problematic. Transitions are all the more difficult when they are accompanied by developmental changes, which is the case when students enter secondary school. According to the literature, the transition from elementary to secondary school is the key factor influencing student retention. It is an intense period of adaptation in which young people are faced with physical, psychological, social and environmental challenges.²

¹ Legendre, 2005, p. 1404 [Translation].

² Chouinard, Desbiens, 2009.

WHY IS THE TRANSITION FROM ELEMENTARY TO SECONDARY SCHOOL SO IMPORTANT?

Several studies agree that the transition from elementary to secondary school has an impact on student success and retention. Researchers have observed the following effects among young people, to varying degrees:

- › severed social ties (the most harmful effect)
- › greater isolation
- › a greater level of performance anxiety
- › a decline in academic performance
- › loss of interest in school subjects
- › less positive attitudes toward school and teachers
- › decreased confidence in their ability to succeed in school

While for most students the negative effects are minor and soon wear off, some experience more serious difficulties: problems arise in one or more subjects and appear to persist.³ For these students, the transition has a definite impact on their motivation and commitment at school and, by extension, on their academic success and perseverance.

WHO NEEDS A SMOOTH TRANSITION?

Since every student is affected, however minimally, by the transition from elementary to secondary school, they would all benefit from a smooth transition. Most of them exhibit a capacity for adaptation that allows them to make a smooth transition. These students are said to possess protective factors. In the literature, this concept has more than one meaning: one denoting a personal or environmental characteristic reflecting the absence of risk factors, and the more common one corresponding to a variable that helps to reduce the impact of risk factors.

For some adolescents, however, multiple risk factors make transitions more difficult. Chouinard, Desbiens (2009) and Vaatz-Laaroussi (2009) identified different risk and protective factors. The following table divides them into three main categories: personal, family and academic.

A collaborative effort involving the school, the family and the community is ideal, since schools can only do so much on their own.



³ Anderson et al.

The following table contains examples of risk factors and protective factors that come into play during the transition from elementary to secondary school :

	Protective factors	Risk factors
Academic	<p>Good relationships with teachers (the most important protective factor)</p> <p>Availability of someone to count on at stressful times</p> <p>Organizational, instructional and social continuity between elementary and secondary school</p> <p>Positive classroom and school climate</p> <p>Sense of belonging</p> <p>Smaller, stable groups</p> <p>Increased linguistic support for immigrant students in regular classes</p> <p>Consideration and appreciation of differences with a view to ensuring inclusive education</p> <p>Participation in extracurricular activities</p>	<p>Academic delay (the most important risk factor)</p> <p>Difficult teacher-student relations</p> <p>Secondary school much larger than elementary school</p> <p>Lack of organizational, instructional and social continuity between elementary and secondary school</p> <p>Lack of proficiency in the language of instruction (learning a new language, difficulty with written language)</p>
Family	<p>Parental support (in particular at stressful times)</p> <p>Parental involvement in academic success</p> <p>Positive family atmosphere</p> <p>Democratic parenting style that encourages independence</p> <p>Quality relationship with a significant adult</p> <p>Relationship between the family and the school (especially as concerns immigrant families and families from disadvantaged areas)</p> <p>Emphasis on the importance of education</p>	<p>Insufficient parental support</p> <p>Limited academic support (e.g. language barriers, parenting skills)</p> <p>Difficult family atmosphere</p> <p>Authoritarian or permissive parenting style</p>
Personal	<p>Positive self-esteem</p> <p>Physical appearance</p> <p>Perceived self-efficacy</p> <p>Ability to socialize/good social skills</p> <p>Ability to thrive and overcome adversity (resilience)</p> <p>Proficiency in languages and mathematics</p> <p>Interest in school subjects</p> <p>Effective problem-solving strategies</p>	<p>Poor self-esteem</p> <p>Psychological distress (victimization, rejection, anxiety, depression)</p> <p>Lack of motivation and commitment</p> <p>Psychosocial and relational adaptation difficulties</p> <p>Internalized or externalized behavioural problems</p> <p>Negative perception of school, in conjunction with learning difficulties</p> <p>Migration-related integration difficulties (war, PTSD)</p>

It is important to remember that all of these factors interact with one another, and that their impact is cumulative. Research has shown that risk factors have a multiplier effect.

Number of risk factors	Negative effects
One	The possibility of suffering negative effects is the same as for those who are not exposed to any risk factors.
Two or three	The possibility of suffering negative effects is four times greater.
Four	The possibility of suffering negative effects is ten times greater.

Source: Rutter, Gillet and Hagell, 1998

By becoming familiar with the student and analyzing his or her specific situation and needs, we can adapt our actions accordingly. Elementary and secondary schools have the ability to work together to support students by focusing on making their transition experience as positive as possible.



WHEN ARE MEASURES FOSTERING A SMOOTH TRANSITION NEEDED?

An effective transition must first be planned, and includes these five key junctures over a period of at least twelve months:

- › before admission to secondary school (October to December of the previous year)
- › upon admission to secondary school (January, February, March)
- › after admission but before the student starts secondary school (April, May, June)
- › just before the student starts secondary school (July, August)
- › after the student starts secondary school (up to the end of the first year of Secondary Cycle One in June)

It is important to pay special attention to students who start school in the middle of the year (because they moved or immigrated, etc.).

WHAT ARE THE PRINCIPLES UNDERLYING A SMOOTH TRANSITION?

Six analysis grids reflecting current knowledge regarding these underlying principles were developed to help implement measures to ensure a smooth transition from elementary to secondary school. Various examples of related practices are also provided for information purposes to help fuel discussion among educators. Institutions are encouraged to develop their own innovative measures in order to meet their students' specific needs.





FIRST PRINCIPLE

Parents have primary responsibility for their children's education

Main targets	OK	Needs work
Always maintain a positive attitude toward parents.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Develop and maintain a collaborative relationship with parents.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Involve parents in their children's transition from elementary to secondary school.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Inform parents about services offered at the secondary school and promote cooperation with complementary educational services staff.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Inform parents of the importance of their emotional and academic support.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Inform parents of the different choices students have (e.g. electives) and the different academic paths that can lead to the job market.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Develop appealing and regular means of communicating with parents.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

What do we need to work on?

Examples of effective practices

- Focus on how parents are received (e.g. openness, flexibility).
- Be flexible in planning meetings with parents.
- Approach newly arrived immigrant families to find out what they need and expect.
- Involve parents by asking them about their children's strengths and challenges. Discuss intervention strategies, channels of communication and school-family cooperation.
- Invite parents to an information meeting with school staff at the beginning of the school year to discuss such things as expectations, how things work and how to help with homework. For example: provide childcare and interpretation services if necessary.
- Keep parents apprised of their children's progress and the different choices offered (e.g. by introducing them to the school board's Web site).

SECOND PRINCIPLE

Everyone involved in the student's life must work together to ensure a smooth transition from elementary to secondary school

Main targets

	OK	Needs work
Encourage cooperation among everyone involved in the student's life (family, school, community partners, CSSS).	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Set up a working committee on transition.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Recognize the contribution and expertise of everyone involved; focus on complementary actions rather than competition.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Diversify and facilitate communications within and outside the school.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Ensure the continuity of instructional and evaluation practices among elementary and secondary school teachers.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Allow elementary and secondary schools to share relevant information (e.g. academic paths, student learning).	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

What do we need to work on?

Examples of effective practices

Invite everyone involved in the student's life to visit the secondary school and vice versa.

Set aside time for the various teams to work together.

Allow parents and the different practitioners from institutions other than the school to share their knowledge about the student in a confidential manner.

Organize workshops so that elementary and secondary school teachers can discuss teaching practices and subject content, especially in light of the implementation of intensive English as a second language classes in Elementary Cycle Three.

Appreciate the support of community organizations.

Inform elementary schools of the dates and times of various transition activities (e.g. open house, information session for parents, date of entry examinations, meetings between elementary and secondary school students, activities involving regular contact between elementary and secondary school students).



THIRD PRINCIPLE

Transition activities must be planned, organized and evaluated on an ongoing basis

Main targets

Develop a procedure for helping students from the different elementary schools in your area make the transition to your secondary school.

OK	Needs work
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Make sure that all partners are involved in implementing the measures.

<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
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Make sure that someone in each institution is clearly assigned to foster and monitor the transition process.

<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
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Encourage everyone to become involved and share responsibility while respecting each other's role.

<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
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If necessary, quickly develop an individualized intersectoral service plan (the IISP is a process through which the education and health and social service systems jointly plan and coordinate services and resources).

<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
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Conduct regular joint evaluations of the transition measures implemented.

<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
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What do we need to work on?

Examples of effective practices

Appoint someone at the elementary school and someone at the secondary school to foster and monitor students' transition from elementary to secondary school, and make sure they form a transition committee.

Develop a schedule based on the different stages of organizational, instructional and social transition.

Invite partners from the community to participate in transition activities involving parents and students.

If necessary, quickly mobilize everyone involved in developing an individualized intersectoral service plan (IISP) for the students with special need.

Develop and implement a way to monitor activities and make adjustments.

FOURTH PRINCIPLE

Determine the amount of time required and mobilize the necessary resources

Main targets

Determine the amount of time different staff members need to plan, organize, implement and evaluate transition activities.

OK

Needs work

Adapt the duration and intensity of transition activities to meet the specific needs of the student, the family and the institutions.

Satisfy each staff member's training needs.

Establish the necessary budgets.

What do we need to work on?

Examples of effective practices

Set aside time for elementary and secondary school teachers to discuss their teaching and evaluation practices.

Set aside time for meetings between complementary educational services staff at the elementary and secondary levels.

Establish a flexible work schedule and conditions conducive to the organization of transition activities (e.g. allow staff members to take time off and use pedagogical days, recognize the time invested, and assign additional staff).

Provide more support and propose integration activities for students with special needs (e.g. an anxious student could visit the secondary school more than once).

Participate in joint training sessions with school and CSSS staff.



FIFTH PRINCIPLE

Everyone who knows the student should be involved and measures should be adapted

Main targets

	OK	Needs work
Allow elementary and secondary schools to share relevant information about students with risk factors (e.g. profile, reports).	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Remain focused on the needs of the student and the family throughout the transition.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Consider the student's risk factors and protective factors during the transition when developing the individualized education plan (IEP). ⁴	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Consider each student's personal situation and focus on their respective strengths.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Inform students of the different choices available to them in secondary school (e.g. special school projects, paths, electives) and help them choose.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

What do we need to work on?

Examples of effective practices

Set aside time for elementary and secondary school teachers and complementary educational services staff to discuss at-risk students (e.g. for placement purposes, to prepare students for their schedule and school standards).

Encourage school and CSSS staff to help families prepare for their children's transition from elementary to secondary school.

Provide buddies/tutoring for newly arrived immigrant students.

Send the secondary school a list of the computer aids the student uses at home and at school because of a particular difficulty or special need (e.g. speech recognition software, laptop).

Make sure that the student's special needs are well documented in the file.

Help the student identify his or her characteristics so that in light of his or her personal goals, he or she can choose from among the different options available in secondary school with the help of complementary educational services.

⁴ The framework for developing individualized education plans for students with handicaps, social maladjustments or learning difficulties may prove useful.

SIXTH PRINCIPLE

The transition to secondary school is a determining factor in student success and retention

Main targets

	OK	Needs work
Consider the student the primary architect of his or her academic success and perseverance.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Take into account the impact of teacher-student relationships on academic motivation.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Take into account student learning and the different academic paths.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Quickly identify problems with the student's commitment and motivation and implement support measures.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Quickly identify difficulties with reading, writing and mathematics and implement support measures (e.g. remedial teaching, peer tutoring).	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Foster the creation of new social ties among new students by encouraging them to participate in extracurricular activities.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Help develop a feeling of belonging at the school.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

What do we need to work on?

Examples of effective practices

Make the young person accountable for his or her own transition from elementary to secondary school by including him or her in the process: have the student participate actively and exercise his or her independence.

Identify students showing signs of school disengagement (e.g. late arrivals, absences, late with assignments, level of involvement or results below the student's capacity level, negative attitude toward school and teachers).

Focus on effective practices proposed in research studies, for example: *Référentiel d'intervention en lecture pour les élèves de 10 à 15 ans*.

Have an adult at the school (e.g. teacher, resource teacher, complementary educational services staff member) provide individualized support for students with a year's delay, certain vulnerabilities or signs of school disengagement that might compromise their success in school.

Offer multiple opportunities for young people to establish new social ties: create stable groups, foster team play, etc.

Group Cycle One students together in a specific section of the school.



WHO DOES WHAT, WHEN AND HOW?

Prior to admission to school

**After admission to school,
but before the beginning of the school year**

OCTOBER NOVEMBER DECEMBER JANUARY FEBRUARY MARCH APRIL MAY JUNE JULY

During admission to school

After the beginning of the school year



Around the beginning of the school year



FURTHER READING

QUÉBEC. MINISTÈRE DE L'ÉDUCATION, DU LOISIR ET DU SPORT (2001)

Québec Education Program, Preschool Education, Elementary Education.

(http://www.mels.gouv.qc.ca/dgfi/dp/programme_de_formation/primaire/pdf/educprg2001/educprg2001.pdf).

MINISTÈRE DE L'ÉDUCATION, DU LOISIR ET DU SPORT (2001)

Les difficultés d'apprentissage à l'école. Cadre de référence pour guider l'intervention.

(http://www.mels.gouv.qc.ca/dgfi/dp/programme_de_formation/primaire/pdf/prform2001/prform2001.pdf).

MINISTÈRE DE L'ÉDUCATION, DU LOISIR ET DU SPORT (2002)

Complementary Educational Services: Essential to Success.

(<http://www.mels.gouv.qc.ca/DGFJ/csc/pdf/19-7029a.pdf>).

MINISTÈRE DE L'ÉDUCATION, DU LOISIR ET DU SPORT (2010)

Modèle pour l'établissement d'une démarche pour le passage primaire-secondaire (Transmission de l'information relative au français écrit - Suggestions à l'intention des commissions scolaires).

MINISTÈRE DE L'ÉDUCATION, DU LOISIR ET DU SPORT (2011)

A common framework for developing an individualized education plan to promote cooperation and follow-up with respect to students with handicaps, social maladjustments or learning difficulties.

(http://www.mels.gouv.qc.ca/sections/publications/publications/EPEPS/Formation_jeunes/Adaptation_scolaire/

MINISTÈRE DE L'ÉDUCATION, DU LOISIR ET DU SPORT (2012)

Référentiel d'intervention en lecture pour les élèves âgés de 10 à 15 ans.

QUÉBEC. MINISTÈRE DE L'ÉDUCATION, DU LOISIR ET DU SPORT AND MINISTÈRE DE LA SANTÉ ET DES SERVICES SOCIAUX (2003)

Entente de complémentarité des services entre le réseau de la santé et des services sociaux et le réseau de l'éducation

(http://www.mels.gouv.qc.ca/lancement/ententeMEQ-MSSS/entente_f.pdf).

MINISTÈRE DE L'ÉDUCATION, DU LOISIR ET DU SPORT (2005)

Le plan de services individualisé et intersectoriel – Rapport déposé au Comité national de concertation sur l'Entente de complémentarité des services entre le réseau de la santé et des services sociaux et le réseau de l'éducation, ministère de la Santé et des Services sociaux et ministère de l'Éducation, du Loisir et du Sport.

(<http://www.mels.gouv.qc.ca/lancement/ententemeq-msss/PlanServicesIndivIntersec.pdf>).

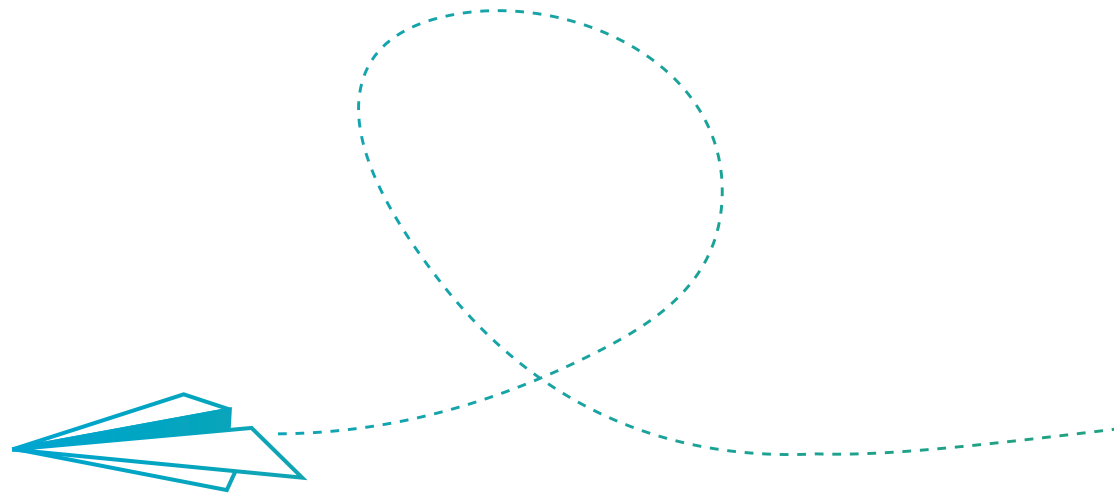


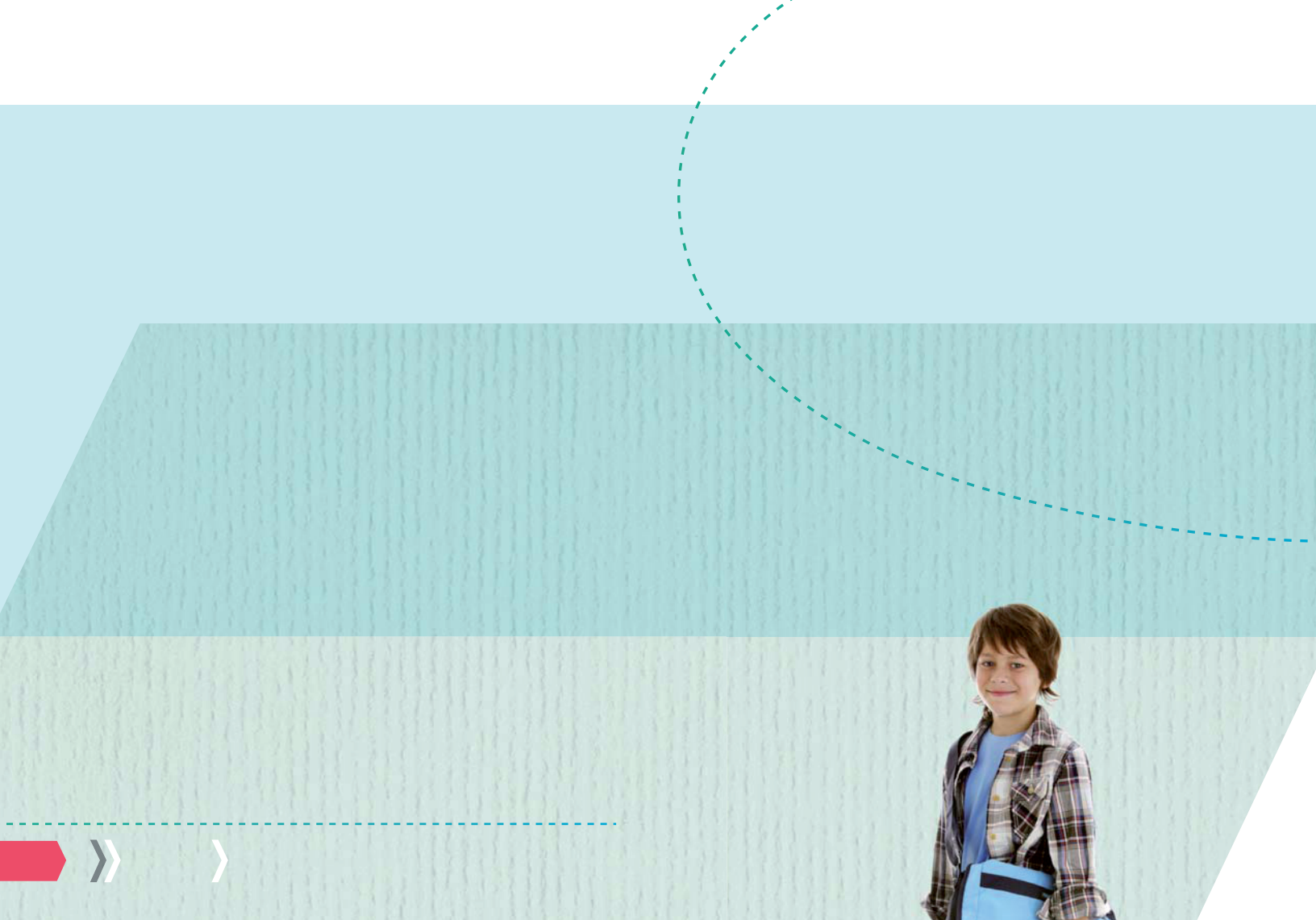


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