



Transitioning into post-secondary education:

A resource for front-line staff supporting students

Transitioning into a post-secondary education (PSE) setting can be a difficult process for students in the best of times, and the COVID-19 pandemic has brought an extra layer of stress for grade 12 students transitioning into PSE this fall. In June 2020, we talked with both grade 12 students, and those who had just completed their first year in PSE, and developed this resource to provide front-line staff in both campus and community settings with some ideas for how to build and bridge support for students.

Main concerns for students *(based on consultations with Grade-12 students conducted by School Mental Health Ontario and The New Mentality):*

➤ Worries about falling behind on academic learning

Difficulties learning from home

- Lack of a quiet space to focus on instruction
- Distractions that make studying difficult
- Added family and caregiving responsibilities
- Feeling less engaged than when they are learning in a classroom setting

Interruptions in courses needed for PSE

- Sense that some coursework was not covered as thoroughly as usual in the spring
- Inconsistent access to educators on virtual platforms to ask questions
- Harder to grasp learning objectives
- Incomplete learning in courses that require in-person instruction
- Fear they will not be as prepared as they should be for PSE academic demands

➤ Concern about finances

Difficulties learning from home

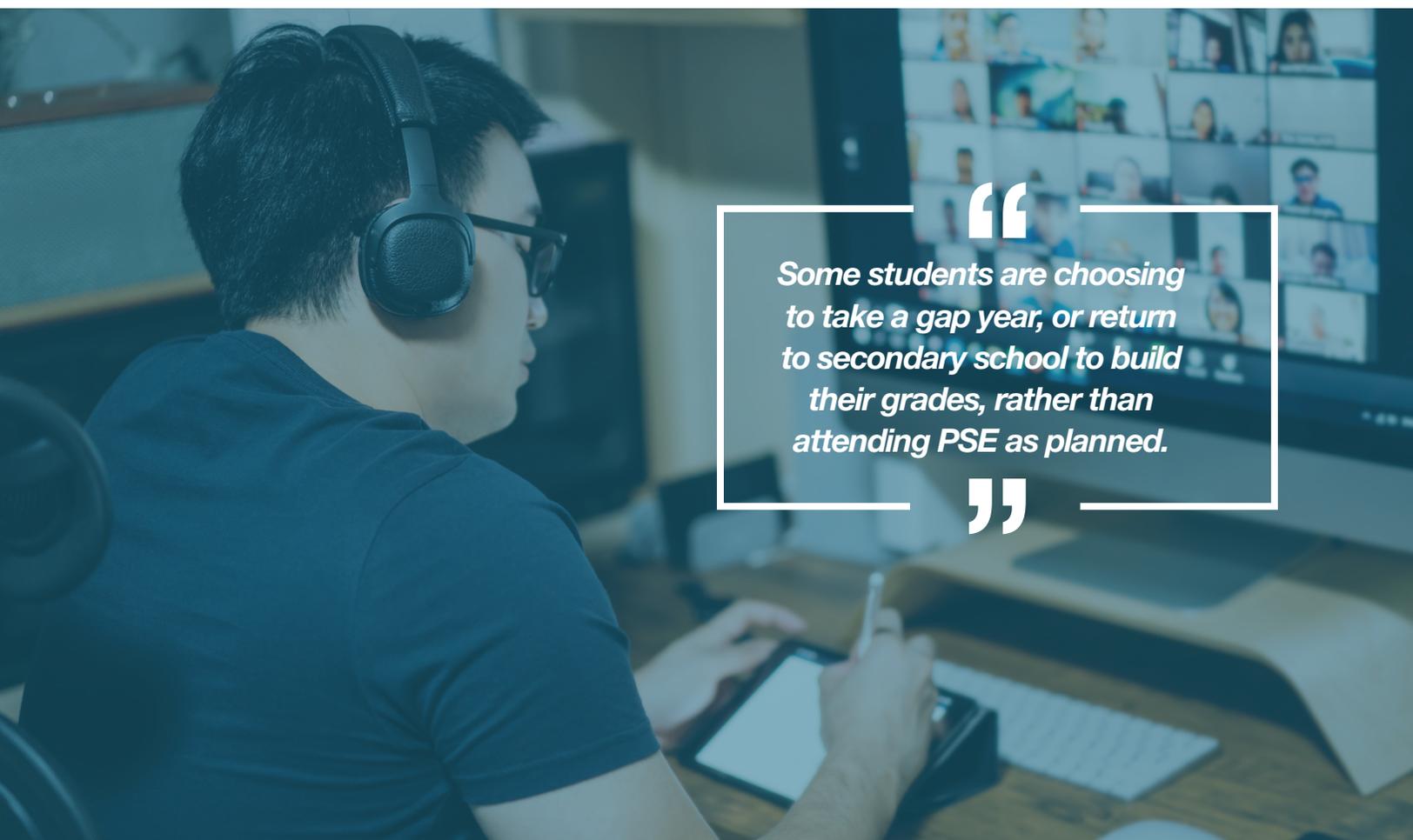
- Fewer job opportunities to earn money to pay for school
- Heightened family financial stress due to COVID-19
- Worry that PSE costs are adding to family financial strain

➤ Sense of loss related to social connections

Difficulties learning from home

- Missed rites of passage (e.g., graduation, prom, orientation)
- Fewer social connections and increased isolation
- Unsure how time apart will impact their relationships
- Nervous to reconnect in-person due to fear of being infected or infecting other with the virus
- Challenge to build strong virtual relationships in post-secondary with fewer opportunities to meet new people (e.g., campus orientation activities/events, extracurriculars, study groups)

Some students are choosing to take a gap year, or return to secondary school to build their grades, rather than attending PSE as planned. They noted that they are choosing to wait for a time when they can have the full campus experience of PSE. This may also have potential consequences for campuses next fall.



Some students are choosing to take a gap year, or return to secondary school to build their grades, rather than attending PSE as planned.

How post-secondary institutions and community mental health can help?

➤ Communication and connection

- Opening up lines of communication with students, both formal and informal
- Establishing and clearly communicating new expectations for students around office hours, submission of assignments and exams. For more ideas visit CICMH's [Faculty Mental Health Toolkit](#)
- Facilitating student-led mentorships
- Supporting online clubs/intramural sports meetings
- Connecting students in similar programs through online platforms
- Placing emphasis on continued importance of personal connection with peers, faculty and campus staff

➤ Increasing accessibility for all

- Ensuring that school events are adapted to online for orientation week and other key points of the school year (homecoming)

➤ Providing and encouraging support

- Training non-clinical staff and student leaders how to recognize, respond and refer to students to support. A free online course is available at morefeetontheground.ca
- Creating opportunities for multiple types of peer supports - examples are available [here](#)
- Promoting programs that build resilience and promote self-care, like the ideas [here](#)
- Connecting students to mental health supports or resources in their immediate [community](#)
- Sharing what services and supports are available using multiple methods (social media, during lectures, peer-to-peer, email)

➤ Supports for international students

- If planning live programming, offer them at different times to accommodate a range of time zones
- Equity considerations such as different home environments, “flipped” schedules due to time differences and unstable internet connection
- Provide increased support around student visas
- Communicate clearly about assignments, bearing in mind deadlines due to different time zones

If a campus is planning for the safe and gradual return to campus:

- Consult with students to understand what they are comfortable with
- Establish safety plans and make these plans well known to students and staff

Further resources available

➤ Children's Mental Health Ontario:

CMHO represents nearly 100 publicly-funded child and youth mental health centres across Ontario that provide free virtual, phone, and in-person counselling and supports for children, youth, and families.

➤ Good2Talk:

By calling Good2Talk at 1-866-925-5454, students can receive information and referrals about services and supports for mental health, addictions and well-being on and off campus and speak anonymously with a professional counsellor.

➤ School Mental Health Ontario:

School Mental Health Ontario works together with Ontario school districts to support student mental health.

➤ Ontario Centre of Excellence for Child and Youth Mental Health:

Provides support Ontario's agencies, communities and decision makers working to ensure the best mental health and well-being for every child, youth and family.

➤ Centre for Innovation in Campus Mental Health:

Post-Secondary Institutions looking for resources and guidance around student mental health.



Watch the Webinar

To learn more about supporting students transitioning into post-secondary education, be sure to watch the webinar recording at: <https://campusmentalhealth.ca/webinars/transition/>

Credits for this collaborative webinar and content go to our speakers from: Children's Mental Health Ontario, School Mental Health Ontario, Ontario Centre for Excellence for Child and Youth Mental Health, Good2Talk, Kawartha Pine Ridge District School Board, Strides Toronto and Sheridan College.

