### Introduction

**School is stressful.**
- The transition to post-secondary education involves numerous stressors, such as social isolation, academic pressure, financial difficulties and homesickness, psychological distress and health problems (Fisher & Hood, 1987; Hicks & Heathie, 2008).

**Grades drop in university.**
- The distress associated with post-secondary transition has a strong, negative effect on the academic achievement and post-secondary retention for freshman students (Hysenbegasi et al., 2005).

**Social support as a protective factor.**
- Theory suggests social support is a buffer against these stressors. Thus, perceived social support is thought to contribute to improved academic performance distally by decreasing the stress of academic life (Lakey & Cohen, 2000).

### Hypotheses

**H1:** Grades will tend to decrease over time as students transition from high school to post-secondary education. 

**H2:** A higher level of perceived social support at age 15 will predict a less pronounced drop in grades in students transitioning to post-secondary education.

### Method

**Participants.**
- Adolescents ($N = 10,445$) transitioning to university for the first time
- All were age 18 (60%) or age 19 (40%)
- Were randomly selected and nationally representative in terms of demographics

**Materials.**
- **Perceived Social Support.** Perceptions of how much social support one has available, if it were necessary. Used a modified 6-item short-form of the Social Provisions Scale (Cutrona and Russell, 1987)
- **Self-Reported Grades.** High school grades at ages 15 and 17 were measured on a 7-point scale ranging from 1 (90%) to 7 (less than 50%). Age 19 grades were measured on a similar 6-point scale.

**Procedure.**
- Used an archival Statistics Canada dataset (Youth in Transition Survey).
- The survey population was created by selecting a random sample of schools in Canada, then selecting a systematic equal-probability sample of no more than 35 students from each school.
- Data were collected longitudinally across three cycles. During April and May of 2000 (age 15), 2002 (age 17) and 2004 (age 19).

### Results: Bivariate Growth Curve

- **Social Support (Age 15)**
- **Social Support (Age 17)**
- **Social Support (Age 19)**

### Discussion & Conclusions

- **Grades tend to decrease during the transition to post-secondary education for adolescents, supporting hypothesis 1.**
- **Post-secondary education appears to “level the playing field” in terms of academic achievement, with the highest-performing high-school students experiencing the greatest decrease in their grades.**
- **However, high levels of perceived social support at age 15 did not protect against declines in academic achievement over time, failing to support hypothesis 2.**
- **In sum, perceived social support appears to have no bearing on adolescents’ future academic performance, despite commonly held assumptions of its importance.**

Full results published in:

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### Acknowledgements