

Hey grade 8's! Don't be scared, high school's great!

By Cassidy Pedersen

I can't believe I am finished with my first year of high school, grade 8.

What a year of changes it has been! My friends and I talked about and imagined what it would be like to be teenagers and go to high school during our entire grade 7 year. The thought of it was exciting and nerve wracking at the same time.

Teachers and parents talked about "preparing us" for the transition, which made it seem even more frightening. Students came from the high school to talk to us and we visited the school several times. The tour during the day really intimidated me. The building was so huge and the older kids looked scary. How was I ever going to find my way around? Would I make a fool of myself?

When I think back to last September, it seems like such a long time ago. I spent hours shopping for the "perfect outfit" for that first day of grade 8. I changed my mind so many times! I drove my mom crazy trying to pick out the right backpack, lunch kit and school supplies. I didn't want to look like a dork!

On the first day of high school we only stayed for a couple of hours. I sat in the car with my mom, paralyzed, too afraid to go in. My mom was really understanding and nice, so I sucked it up and went in anyway. Luckily, it wasn't nearly as horrifying as I expected. When I walked into the gym, I was shocked to see that there were so many of us! The gym was filled with grade 8 students, hundreds of them. My mom stood with some other parents while I hung with my friends from elementary school. I pretended that I was mad at her for

staying, because I didn't want to look like a wimp. I knew she understood. I just wanted to turn around and run! The teachers called us by name, one by one, until we were all divided up into 'homerooms', kind of like a daily meeting place for us.

We were given a map of the school and our itineraries, a schedule of when and where our classes were to be. In high school you will take eight courses in one year. The year is divided up into two semesters (half the year). Each semester you will take four courses with four different teachers in four different classrooms, so for example, in the first half of the year (first semester) you might have Math, English, PE and Social Studies. You will take exams and get grades on those subjects at the end of the semester, around February. Then you start 4 new courses for the second half of the school year.

On that first day, right away, I met some people, and I made a new friend. As much as it sounds like kindergarten, I did make lots of new friends during the next few weeks. The older students were very helpful and nice, not at all what I was expecting!

Throughout the first couple weeks, I clung to my itinerary and map like they were the only thing keeping my head on. And then one day I found I didn't need them anymore. I didn't even get lost! For me that was a huge shock and I surprised myself everyday. I was no longer that frivolous girl who thought fashion was the most important thing in the world, I didn't think I would die if not everyone knew my name. I had new friends, new classes, new teachers and a new school. And the biggest shock of all: I was doing great and I loved it!

Yes, the workload is larger than elementary school and yes, we have to move from classroom to classroom for each course, and there are different people in each of my classes, but that doesn't matter. I love having my own locker to keep my stuff in, instead of a desk and cubby. I love being able to choose where (and what) I eat, and what I do with my free time. I love the independence and the anonymity of high school.

I went to a few student council meetings, and I attended a cool retreat to Newcastle Island. I haven't joined any clubs (yet) but hey,

I'm only in grade 8! I went to a lot of in-school events, wore a crazy costume for Halloween and dressed up for "Tight & Bright Day", self-explanatory!

If you're a grade seven student reading this, you might be wondering about whether the courses are hard, what are the teachers like and what about the dreaded exams? Don't you worry! Millions of kids go to high school and survive. Make a good place at home to do your homework where you won't be distracted. Don't have your electronics with you when you are doing homework. I learned this the hard way! Not even music. You won't be focusing as well and it slows you down. Who wants their homework to last longer? Not me!

My experience has been that the courses are great. Some courses are more challenging than others; they are harder than elementary school, but it's very interesting. Exams are a big deal, but if you study hard, make sure you understand the material, basically be prepared, you should be fine. Don't be too shy to ask for help. Get on top of it right away before it's too late. There is help available if you are having trouble, like the homework club and you can ask your classmates to study with you, which is a great way to get to know each other.

One last important topic: if you plan to bring electronics to school, such as an iPod, cell phone, etc., make sure you carry it with you at all times. Girls, get a comfortable student bag that you can strap across your chest to carry your pencil case and electronics. It's not likely that you'll have your locker broken into, but better safe than sorry, right? Do NOT, ever, ever use them in class unless the teacher says you can. Believe me, you will be caught, and they will take it away from you. A few of my friends have had their electronics confiscated by the teacher for a week. That sucks.

Now as I move on to grade 9, I am reflecting on how much I've learned. I feel like I'm firmly settled into my teens now. I have many new friends and I've grown both physically and emotionally. For me at least, this has been an amazing year. In September, I will be one of the "older kids" you see in the hallway. Don't be afraid to ask me for directions. I'll be happy to help you!