The transition to post-secondary vocational education in the Netherlands appears to be difficult for many students. Dropout rates peak in the first year after the transition to senior vocational education (SVE, or MBO in Dutch). To enhance the school careers of students in SVE, we need to find out what particular factors interfere with school success after the transition to SVE. As there are multiple pathways leading to dropout, several sources of influence, from both inside and outside the school, need to be considered. To facilitate dropout prevention, we need to identify factors that are malleable through school-based interventions in particular.

In this dissertation, a step-by-step approach is adopted to uncover distal and proximal processes that contribute to student persistence or dropout after the transition to SVE. A cohort of 1438 students is followed from the moment of entrance into SVE until the start of the second year. In six consecutive studies that examine students’ entrance, experiences, and attainment in the first year in SVE, the principles and pitfalls of a successful start in SVE are described.