What is this research about?
There is general agreement that when students transition from elementary to junior high school, their academic performance can suffer. Some researchers claim that the difficulties that students experience in this transition might have long-term negative effects. With this in mind, many education systems in Canada have taken steps to make the transition from elementary to junior high school smoother for students. This research used nationally representative survey data to see if there were any actual differences in achievement between students who transitioned to grade seven from an elementary school compared to those who remained in the same school.

What did the researchers do?
Jess Whitley, a professor at Lakehead University, along with Judy Lupart from the University of Alberta and Tanya Beran at the University of Calgary used data for 714 students who were part of the National Longitudinal Survey of Children and Youth (NLSCY) to see how they were
rated by teachers and parents, and how they rated themselves on their academic achievement as they transitioned from grade five to grade seven. Students responded to the question, “How are you doing in your schoolwork?”. Teachers rated student achievement in three areas: across all areas of instruction, in reading, and in mathematics, and parents responded to a question on how well their child was doing in reading, and in mathematics. All answers were on a five-point scale. The researchers compared the responses of students, teachers and parents when students were in grade 5 to when they were in grade 7.

**What did the researchers find?**
The most important finding was that the transition status of students, that is, whether they had remained in elementary school or moved onto a junior high school for Grade 7, had no effect on their academic achievement. According to the researchers, this may be due to the many programs in place to make the transition from elementary to junior high school smoother. These programs include: students visiting the junior high schools in the year before the transition, students meeting with school counselors to plan programs of study, and information sessions and guides for parents. Students tended to self-report lower performance in grade seven than in grade five. The researchers explain this finding as a result of students becoming more aware of criticism from parents and teachers and becoming more self-evaluative.

The researchers found lower performance in mathematics achievement as students moved to grade five to grade seven. A similar pattern was observed for Canadian and U.S. students in the international Third International Mathematics and Science Study. Given these findings, the researchers suggest that some students may struggle to adjust successfully during the “storm and stress” of adolescence, and that mathematics is an area that may be effected in particular.

**How can you use this research?**
This study shows that the widely publicized decline in academic performance in students who transition to junior high school may not actually exist. A better for focus for parents and teachers may be on supporting students entering grade seven, as all of those students showed a general decline in academic achievement.
References

About the researchers
Dr. Jessica Whitley is an Associate Professor in the Faculty of Education at the University of Ottawa.

Dr. Judy Lupart is a Professor in the Faculty of Education, Department of Educational Psychology at the University of Alberta.

Dr. Tanya Beran is an Associate Professor in the Department of Community Health Sciences and Medical Education Research Unit at the University of Calgary.

jwhitley@uottawa.ca
judy.lupart@ualberta.ca
tnaberan@ucalgary.ca

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About this summary
The Ontario Education Research Exchange (OERE) is a project of the Knowledge Network for Applied Education Research, an Ontario network promoting the use of research in education. The OERE’s clear language summaries of academic research aim to support this mandate.

This summary reflects findings from this study only and is not necessarily representative of the broader body of literature on this subject.

This summary has been adapted from the ResearchSnapshot series developed by York University and ResearchImpact and has been developed according to writing and design principles unique to OERE. For more information about this summary or the OERE network please contact oere.knaer.oise@utoronto.ca.

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