

**5c. Delegation: Granda Kopytko re Western Area Accommodation**

Hello,

I oppose closing JH Putman. *I oppose changes to the delivery of education to grade 7 and 8 students.* Middle Schools are the best way to educate young adolescents. The following conclusions from the Ottawa Carleton District Report 15-127:

First: Student achievement is greater at K-8 schools than at middle schools.

AND

Second: Both a 7-12 and a 9-12 are viable options.

ARE FALSE.

As it happens both the Ottawa Carleton District School Board and the Toronto District School Board Both school boards have published reports researching “Grade Span Configuration”.

Both examined the K-to-8 schools model, Grade Configuration and Transitions.

Toronto’s review also examined Program Quality, Peer Appropriate Grouping, Middle School Preferences and Teacher Training. Both research documents cited 6 of the same references.

At the end the Ottawa report came to conclusion:

*Student achievement is greater at K-8 schools than at middle schools.*

At the end the Toronto report came to conclusion:

*There is no specific grade-span configuration that will assure student academic and social improvement. Also that grade-span has no significant long term effect on student achievement on graduation.*

Why were the conclusions so different?

A literature review is the foundation of good research. However the literature review within Ottawa Carleton District Report 15-127 is an example of poor research. Numerous studies have been mis-quoted. Here are 6 examples:

In regards to Student Achievement you say on page 11:

**In terms of student achievement, several studies have shown that students attending schools with a K-8 configuration obtain higher achievement than those attending middle schools. “**

Both Abella, 2005 and Offenber, 2001 are listed as references but neither supports these conclusions.

Here is direct quote from Abella defining the student achievement that he designed his study to measure:

Evaluation Question 1. How does the academic performance of K-8 students compare to that of students who attend traditional middle schools once they reach high school? (Abella, 2005, pg 31).

If you have a printed copy of the speech you can now refer to the inserted Figure 2. It is a graph of cumulative changes in Reading scores. The graph shows that by grade 8 there were no statistically significant differences in reading scores between the 2 groups. The middle school students are slightly lower. After both groups transition to high-school the middle school students score higher. Yes, higher. But the study is inconclusive: these differences are too small because random sampling does not guarantee that the true mean will be found. This study concludes, essentially: “no difference”.

Figure 2  
Changes in Mean Scale Scores Stanford-9 Reading

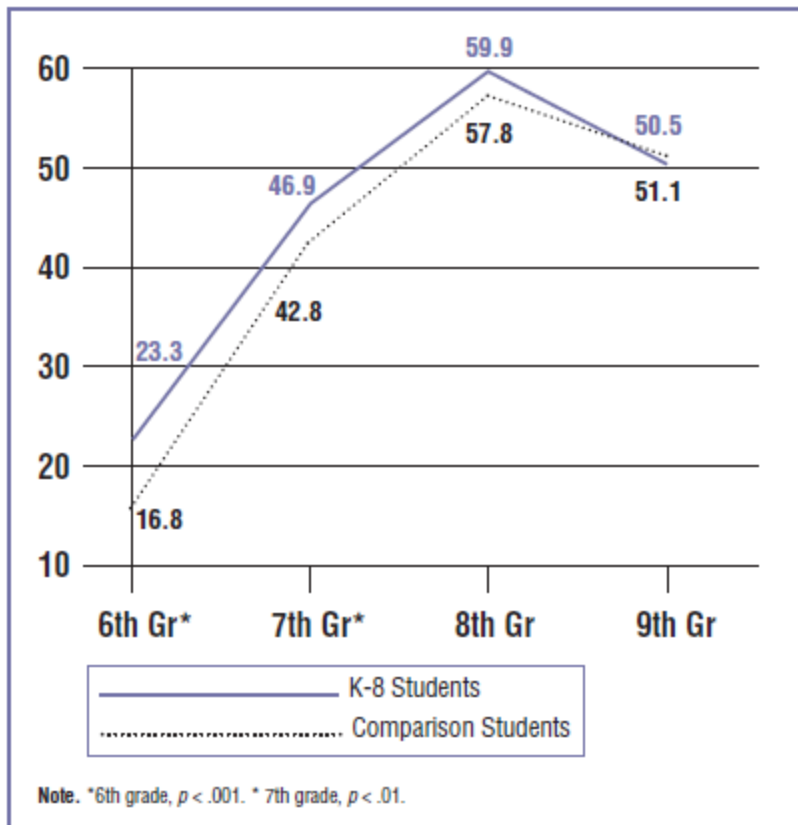


Figure 2 displays the cumulative changes in reading performance relative to fifth grade for every middle school year and through the first year of high school for both the K-8 and comparison groups. For example, the ninth grade figures represent the groups' changes in mean scale scores on the Reading Comprehension component of the Stanford 9 since the fifth grade. (Abella, pg 31)

**Summary.** Both K-8 and comparison students began the sixth grade with identical Stanford reading comprehension mean scale scores. Through grades six and seven, K-8 students showed greater improvement in reading scores than their student counterparts attending traditional middle schools. However, by ninth grade the two groups once again had **identical reading scores**. (Abella, pg 31)

Abella, 2005: Conclusion : no statistically significant difference in student achievement between K-8 and middle school students in Miami-Dade (Florida) for mathematics, reading comprehension, or out-of-school suspensions

Likewise for Offenber: Conclusion: no statistically significant differences in ninth grade achievement between K-8 and middle school students in Philadelphia (Pennsylvania) for attendance, credits earned, nor in the scores for mathematics, reading comprehension, or science.

It appears the effects of transitions do not last.

And now back to the Ottawa Carleton District Report 15-127, literature review:

**page 19 “ Of the available research examining middle school and junior high effects, many have reported significant differences such that students enrolled in a middle school configuration typically exhibit poorer academic achievement when compared to students enrolled in a K-8 program”.**

Eleven studies are cited but **five of them do not exist**. Cited: Byrnes and Ruby. 2007. “Comparing Achievement between K-8 and Middle Schools: A Large-Scale Empirical Study. American Journal of Education. The purpose of this study was to compare Philadelphia middle schools to older K-8 schools as well as new K-8 schools.

One of their Conclusions: 1. The newer K-8 schools, with disadvantaged students and less experienced teachers, did not perform statistically differently in terms of student math achievement than middle schools. 2. Much of the old K-8 advantage clearly resides in the different student populations that are served by old K-8 schools and middle schools (pg 130)

To quote directly from Byrnes and Rudy page 131 *“In the end, even where a district can successfully redistribute its middle school students to K-8 schools of smaller size, we come*

*back to the point that so long as the student demographics remain unchanged, a district is not likely to replicate the K-8 advantage based upon size and school transition alone if its student population remains unchanged. As a policy, then, a district must weigh the infrastructure cost of redistributing middle school students versus the limited achievement gains they may make given the same population demographics.*

I would like to remind you that many of the students and the communities of JH Putman School are poor. They are food bank, low income, new immigrant and less than high-school education poor.

Also your conclusion "Student achievement is greater at K-8 schools than at middle schools" is not supported by this literature.

And now on to another measure of student achievement, high-school graduation:

**On Pg 15 you say "Indeed, research converges to show that increases in the number of school-to-school transitions with a school district is positively associated with an increase in the high school dropout rate".**

Reference given, Alspaugh and Harting 1995; " Transition Effects of School Grade Level Organization On Student Achievement".

But The purpose of this study was to compare student achievement in reading, math, science and social studies for Missouri K-4, K-5, K-6, K-7 and K-8 grade level organizations. Conclusion: losses in achievement for the transition year and recovery from the achievement loss in the following years. No mention of high school dropout rates. None

**You say on Page 21 "Using longitudinal data, a group of researchers examined the role of configuration on student graduation time and found that moving to a middle school prior to high school decreased on-time high school graduation by 1-3 percent**

Reference given: Rockoff and Lockwood. 2010. "Stuck in the middle: Impacts of grade configuration in Public Schools. This is a longitudinal study from grades 3 to grade 8 of New York student achievement of that switch from elementary K-5 or K-6 schools into middle schools versus students that remain in a K-8 schools using standardized test scores. There is no mention of high school graduation rates. In fact they state "Unfortunately, **our data do not allow us to measure persistence further than grade 8, and whether these effects persist through the end of high school is unclear.** (Rockoff and Lockwood, 2010. pg 1058)

There is no support for the spurious claim of improved graduation rates for K-8 students. Instead as stated by Toronto District School Board report "*grade-span has no significant long term effect on student achievement on graduation.*

And now onto the second conclusion from the Ottawa Carleton District School Board report:

**"Both a 7-12 and a 9-12 are viable options, with feeder school transitions being limited to one transition point; K-6, and K-8 respectively."**

The next section of the literature review titled "Reviewing the 7-12 Model" is only 2 pages long and it lists no studies in support of the 7-12 model. In fact the opening statement of this section is:

"There is very limited information and empirical evidence speaking to the benefits of a 7-12 configuration model."

In this section there are no examples given of any type of academic success by a junior high in Canada. Instead it proceeds to list 6 Ontario school districts that have at least one school in a 7-12 configuration. According to Wikipedia there are 76 public school boards in Ontario. It appears the 7-12 option is not popular. Why not?

It is easy to find information speaking the detriments of the 7-12 model. On the second page of the Offenbergs paper is a lengthy review of Simmons and Blyth (1987) who “carried out longitudinal research comparing Milwaukee junior high students with peers attending K-to-8 schools. The K-to-8 students had higher GPAs, mathematics test scores, greater self-esteem, higher extra-curricular participation, greater leadership levels and lower rates of victimization. Simmons and Blyth proposed replacing junior high schools with middle grade schools.

**Your statement “7-12 is a viable option” is not supported by any literature.**

I have more examples of errors in the literature review, for example there are 12 journal articles in the References section that are not even cited in the text.

**To close:** As a parent of child in the OCDSB, and in solidarity with other parents of children in OCDSB schools, I find it disappointing and suspect that wide-spread changes to the delivery model for grade 7 and 8 education are being proposed, that we are being led to believe that transitions are bad and the 7 to 12 model is better...ALL based on poorly conducted research.

It is incumbent on the OCDSB to start again, and give the parents and children in your schools decisions based on solid and well conducted research.

Middle Schools are the best way to educate young adolescents. I oppose closing JH Putman. Thank you.

To quote directly from Byrnes and Rudy “ A K-8 conversion policy alone does not represent a “silver bullet” reform for closing the achievement gap and improving student achievement, and administrators must ask themselves if such a massive reform is truly worth the resources given the likely impacts

### **Appendix A- Further details of studies cited**

**Extra from Abella, 2005:** The Effects of Small K-8 Centers Compared to Large 6-8 Schools on Student Performance.

*These schools were quite different, the average student population of the middle schools was approximately 3 times larger (1600 versus 575 students) than the K-8 schools and the number of students per grade level was also about 3 times larger (534 versus 192 students). Also, the K-8 centres were newly created in academically average to above average schools*

**Extra from Byrnes and Rudy:** \*These are the words to describe the old K-8 schools: ..significantly lower proportions of Hispanic, black, and high-poverty students compared to middle schools, .. higher proportions of white and Asian students. .. smaller average grade sizes .. much lower rates of student mobility during the year. .. teaching staff that averaged more than three years greater experience compared to teachers at middle schools, ..lower rates of teacher absenteeism ... greater proportions of certified teachers (pg. 113-114

\* Words to describe the new K-8 schools: ..., like students at the old K-8 schools, experienced fewer transitions and were in much smaller schools when compared to middle school students. ... served student populations with lower levels of achievement than middle school students and with larger proportions of Hispanic students and fewer Asian and white students...The teachers were significantly less experienced than their middle school counterparts.. (pg 115)

What is the K-8 advantage being touted by reformers? In the Philadelphia study the measure of success is the percentage of students scoring above Basic on a standardized test. Middle school students did poorly on these tests; 60% were below Basic in math and 56% below Basic in reading. If these students had attended an older K-8 school (ie. without a disadvantaged population) and achieved the best results possible, then 53% would still have scored below Basic in math and 51% would still score below Basic in reading