

Many boards of education are facing declining enrolments. This is especially true in small rural and northern communities.

Recent changes to the grants the provincial government gives to boards have helped, but boards are still planning to close schools.

To avoid closing high schools, school boards sometimes consider moving grade 7 and 8 students from elementary schools into high schools. This is short-sighted and not in the best interests of these young adolescent learners.

Young adolescents need a nurturing, secure environment. They need to be with others their own age, supervised by teachers experienced with elementary students. They don't need to be subjected to the pressure of older, more mature students.

Surrounded by older students, left on their own, young adolescents are more likely to engage in high risk behaviours that can lead to higher dropout rates, lower self-esteem, teen pregnancy, sexually transmitted diseases, and substance abuse.



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Fédération des enseignantes et des
enseignants de l'élémentaire de l'Ontario
Federation of Ontario
Elementary Teachers'



- Keep in touch with your local school.
- Contact your school board trustees. Tell them you want grade 7 and 8 students to stay in your elementary school.
- Connect with other parents, community groups, and your school council to develop a plan of action.

Make sure your board doesn't move grade 7 and 8 students to high school.

"Adolescence is a border between childhood and adulthood. Like life on all borders, it's teeming with energy and fraught with danger. Growth requires courage and hard work on the part of the individual, and it requires the protection and nurturing of the environment."

Gail Caissy

Early Adolescence – Understanding the 10-15 year old



ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS –

the best place for young adolescents to learn

The Young Adolescent Learner

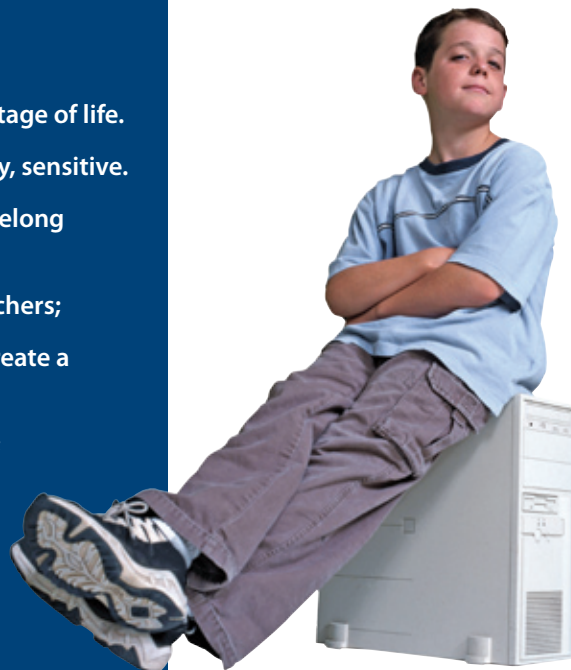
Early adolescence, from 10 to 15 years of age, is a distinctive developmental stage of life.

Think back to when you were that age – self-conscious, awkward, tired, moody, sensitive.

It's a difficult time for students and a critical period in their development as lifelong learners. That's why young adolescents require

- the experience, special attention, and expertise of elementary school teachers;
- programs that promote self-esteem, develop a sense of belonging, and create a connection to the school;
- teachers who encourage parent involvement to ensure academic success;
- a social environment that is safe for emotional growth and development.

The elementary school is best suited to meet the needs of young adolescent students.



Research suggests that young adolescents do better in elementary schools.

- **Elementary schools** are smaller and safer – a better environment for young adolescents to develop close, trusting relationships. The average Ontario elementary school has 360 students; the average secondary school has 790 students.
- **Elementary schools** protect and nurture their students – reducing the likelihood of high-risk behaviour. Elementary schools provide adult supervision before and after school and during the lunch period.
- **Elementary schools** encourage young adolescents to be leaders and role models. Typically older elementary students participate in mentoring programs such as “reading buddies” with younger students and assist with coaching house-league teams.
- **Elementary schools** are connected to students’ families and the community. Parents of elementary students volunteer at school and on school field trips. Elementary parents participate at a much higher rate on school councils.



What do young adolescent students need? Here's a checklist.*

- ✓ Small communities for learning.
- ✓ A core academic program for all learners.
- ✓ Successful experiences for all students.
- ✓ Empowerment of teachers and administrators in decision-making.
- ✓ Teachers who are expert at teaching young adolescents.
- ✓ Improved academic performance fostered through health and fitness.
- ✓ Schools connected with their communities.

Only elementary schools pass the test.

*Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development. *Great Transitions: Preparing Adolescents for a New Century*, New York: Carnegie Corporation of New York, 1995.