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**Declining trends in student performance in lower secondary education.**

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Summary: Student performance is related to motivation to learn. As motivation generally declines during lower secondary education, one might expect performance to decline as well during this period. Though, until now, it has been unclear whether this pattern exists. In the present study, we examined student performance during the early years of secondary education from a developmental perspective. Participants were 1544 Dutch secondary school students across three grades (grades 7 to 9). To investigate student performance trends, we analysed report card grades by using hierarchical linear modelling with two levels (level 1, time point; level 2, student). Potential moderators to be examined were (1) gender, (2) school type and (3) initial level. A linear decline in report card grades from grade 7 to 9 was found for boys and girls, in all school types, and regardless of initial level. Two variables moderated the steepness of the decline: school type and initial level. Gender and school type had a main effect on performance level. The same pattern was observed for the subset of ‘core subjects’ – Dutch, English and mathematics. Motivational and cognitive factors that may explain the performance decline are discussed.

*Classification:* C33 C23 C63

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