

## A Solution-Finding Report

**Title:** Middle School Research

**Date:** March 27, 2007

**Prepared for:** New York Regional Comprehensive Center

This document responds to a request from Louis Constantino, deputy director of the New York Comprehensive Center, for “research documents around middle school issues.” Most critically needed at this time by NYCC are research documents showing:

- successes with K–8, 5–8 and 5–12 building structures;
- an in depth focus on the social, emotional, psychological, academic, intellectual, and physical developmental characteristics of middle school students; and
- research investigating demonstrated teaching styles, elements, and appropriate instructional strategies to engage learners—including the general population of middle school students, students with disabilities, English language learners and the bilingual special education population.

This *Solution-finding Report* is intended to provide a quick response to the request for information; it is not intended to be definitive literature survey or synthesis of the topic.

### Contents

1. Successful Building Structures
2. Developmental Characteristics
3. Instructional Strategies
4. Composite-Topic Resources

### **Successful Building Structures**

- Baltimore City School System, Division of Research, Evaluation, and Accountability. (2001, November). *An examination of K–5, 6–8 versus K–8 grade configurations a research study conducted for the new board of school commissioners*. Baltimore, MD: Author. Retrieved March 27, 2007, from:  
[www.bcps.k12.md.us/Student\\_Performance/PDF/IR\\_K5\\_6\\_8\\_Comprehensive\\_Report\\_Nov2001.pdf](http://www.bcps.k12.md.us/Student_Performance/PDF/IR_K5_6_8_Comprehensive_Report_Nov2001.pdf).

“The purpose of this report to focus specifically on examining the differences between schools configured as K–8 versus those that pair two schools, a K–5 elementary feeding into a middle school configured with students in grades 6–8. This is done through a review of the relevant literature along with examining existing data available in the Baltimore City Public School

System, a district that has implemented both grade configuration structures. Data examined include perceptual survey information, achievement test results, availability of Algebra I and foreign language courses, and citywide high school enrollment rates. Results indicate positive findings for K–8 schools.”

- Cook, P. J., MacCoun, R., Muschkin, C., & Vigdor, J. (2007). *Should sixth grade be in elementary or middle school? An analysis of grade configuration and student behavior*. Durham, NC: Terry Sanford Institute of Public Policy, Duke University. Retrieved March 21, 2007, from: <http://www.pubpol.duke.edu/research/papers/SAN07-01.pdf>

“The study finds that “sixth grade students attending middle schools are much more likely to be cited for disciplinary problems than those attending elementary school” and that “higher rates of infraction persist at least through ninth grade. An analysis of end-of-grade test scores provides complementary findings. A plausible explanation is that sixth graders are at an especially impressionable age; in middle school, the exposure to older peers and the relative freedom from supervision have deleterious consequences.”

- Hough, D. L. (2005, March) The rise of the “elemiddle” school. *The School Administrator*. Retrieved February 26, 2007, from: <http://www.aasa.org/publications/saarticledetail.cfm?ItemNumber=984&snItemNumber=950&tnItemNumber=951>

“Much bias, misunderstanding and misinterpretation accompanies the most recent phenomenon compelling schools nationwide to adopt the K–8 elemiddle school concept. . . . Not every K–8 school genuinely applies best middle-level practices and deserves the new designation that’s coming into vogue.” The study revolves around questions of implementation, “The debate will continue over which grade-span configuration is best for children in the middle of our vertically articulated educational system. The answer should be found in schools where middle-level promising practices are most easily and readily implemented at the highest degrees for the longest periods of time, resulting in positive student outcomes.” No bibliographical references provided.

- Klump, J. (2006). What the research says (or doesn’t say) about K–8 versus middle school grade configurations: Assessing the benefits of K–8 schools. *Northwest Education*, 11(3). Retrieved March 21, 2007, from: <http://www.nwrel.org/nwedu/11-03/research/index.php>

“This article briefly summarizes some of the latest research on grade school configuration, specifically the benefits of K-8 configurations versus middle school configurations. The article has an extensive bibliography of research studies.”

- National Middle School Association. (2004). Research brief: Research in support of middle school grade configuration. Westerville, Ohio: Author. Retrieved from: [http://www.nmsa.org/portals/0/pdf/advocacy/opinion\\_leaders/grade\\_configuration.pdf](http://www.nmsa.org/portals/0/pdf/advocacy/opinion_leaders/grade_configuration.pdf)

A two-page brief with references supporting NMSA’s contention that “middle level education is not about grade configuration, but rather about effective programs and practices, like interdisciplinary teaming and integrated curriculum, that are developmentally appropriate for young adolescents.”

- Poudre School District. (2006, October). K–8 Research Summary. Fort Collins, CO. Retrieved February 26, 2007, from: [http://www.psdschools.org/documentlibrary/downloads/Superintendent\\_Office/Major\\_Initiatives/Initiative\\_4-9-12\\_HS\\_Configuration/K-8\\_Research\\_Summary\\_Oct2006.pdf](http://www.psdschools.org/documentlibrary/downloads/Superintendent_Office/Major_Initiatives/Initiative_4-9-12_HS_Configuration/K-8_Research_Summary_Oct2006.pdf)

This two-page report, based on the reading of “numerous research articles pertaining to several different grade configuration models,” concludes that “little evidence exists that draws a clear relationship between grade configuration and academic achievement. There are no empirical, large-scale studies that have examined the relationship between grade configuration and student achievement as measured by standardized test scores. There does not appear to be a particular sequence of grades that guarantees both academic gains for students while providing for a healthy social and emotional environment for adolescent youth.” No bibliographical information provided. Available also from 2407 LaPorte Avenue, Fort Collins, CO, 80521-2297; Phone: (970) 482-7420, and FAX: (970) 490-3403.

- Renchler, R. (2000, spring). Grade span. *University of Oregon Clearinghouse on Educational Policy and Management Research Roundup 16*, 3. Retrieved February 26, 2007, from: <http://eric.uoregon.edu/publications/roundup/S00.html>

This report summarizes 5 studies produced in the 1990s focused on grade span issues, including academic achievement, social needs, and influence on high school dropout rates. Bibliographical information provided.

- Schmitt, V. L. (2004). The relationship between middle level grade span configuration, professional development, and student achievement. *Research in Middle Level Education Online*, 27(2). Retrieved March 21, 2007, from: <http://www.nmsa.org/Publications/RMLEOnline/Articles/Vol27No2Article1/tabid/451/Default.aspx>

“This study found a significant percent of 6-8 middle level schools to be more highly engaged in professional development activities than their K–8 and 7–12 counterparts. However, when taken together, professional development and grade configuration were not found to have a direct relationship to student achievement. . . . Relationships among professional development, grade configuration, and student achievement may exist but cannot be fully explained until researchers are able to identify and account for other variables that may be related to the unexplained variance. Until empirical evidence is produced, policymakers are encouraged to continue discussions regarding the most appropriate means of addressing young adolescents’ academic needs regardless of other factors.”

### Developmental Characteristics

- Eccles, J. S., Lord, S., & Midgley, C. (1991). What are we doing to early adolescents? The impact of educational contexts on early adolescents. *American Journal of Education*, 99(4), 521–542.

This article explores some reasons for declines in several indicators in the early adolescent years. It suggests that “declines in motivation . . . are less a consequence of students’ developmental stage than of the mismatch between the students’ needs and the opportunities afforded them in many middle-grades school settings.” It also suggests that improved student–teacher relationships and teachers’ sense of self-efficacy are more important than grade configuration.

- Laboratory for Student Success (<http://www.temple.edu/lss>). *Partnerships*. Philadelphia, PA: Author.  
Issues in these briefs by noted researchers in educational psychology are typically paired issues to address either teachers or parents. Several issues address topics relevant to middle-grades students:

Elias, M. J. Bryan, K., Patrikakou, E. N., & Weissberg, R. P. [2003]. The four *Ls* of building adolescent identity. *Partnerships*, Nos. 109 (for parents) & 110 (for teachers).  
[http://www.temple.edu/lss/pdf/partnerships/lss\\_partnerships109.pdf](http://www.temple.edu/lss/pdf/partnerships/lss_partnerships109.pdf)  
[http://www.temple.edu/lss/pdf/partnerships/lss\\_partnerships110.pdf](http://www.temple.edu/lss/pdf/partnerships/lss_partnerships110.pdf)

Elias, M. J., Weissberg, R. P., & Patrikakou, E. N. [2004]. The ABCs of coping with adolescence. *Partnerships*, Nos. 111 (for parents) & 112 (for teachers).  
[http://www.temple.edu/lss/pdf/partnerships/lss\\_partnerships111.pdf](http://www.temple.edu/lss/pdf/partnerships/lss_partnerships111.pdf)  
[http://www.temple.edu/lss/pdf/partnerships/lss\\_partnerships112.pdf](http://www.temple.edu/lss/pdf/partnerships/lss_partnerships112.pdf)

- Mertens, S. B. (2006). *Research summary: Adolescent health, wellness, and safety*. Washington, DC: National Middle School Association. Retrieved March 20, 2007, from <http://www.nmsa.org/Research/ResearchSummaries/Health/tabid/267/Default.aspx>

This document provides a brief overview of the topic and then outlines the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention’s eight facets of its Comprehensive School Health Programs (CSHP) that “seek to reduce or eliminate health-related barriers to student academic and personal success. CSHP are designed to reinforce health-promoting behaviors in students and to provide the skills students need to avoid negative health practices.” The CSHP is a framework “for healthy schools for school age children . . . that guide[s] middle level schools in providing and promoting health behaviors and a health promoting environment.” It also provides annotated references to the following works:

Blum, R. W., & Rinehart, P. M. (1997). *Reducing the risk: Connections that make a difference in the lives of youth*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota, Division of General Pediatrics and Adolescent Health.

Lockwood, D. (1997). *Violence among middle school and high school students: Analysis and implications for prevention*. Washington, DC: Department of Justice.

National Center for Education Statistics. (2000). *In the middle: Characteristics of public schools with a focus on middle schools* (NCES 2000–312). Jessup, MD: U.S. Department of Education.

North Carolina State Department of Public Instruction. (1996). *Middle school risk behavior 1995 survey results*. Raleigh, NC: Division of Accountability Services.

Ozer, E. M., Park, M. J., Paul, T., Brindis, C. D., & Irwin, C. E., Jr. (2003). *America’s adolescents: Are they healthy?* San Francisco: University of California, San Francisco, National Adolescent Health Information Center.

Resnick, M. D., Bearman, P. S., Blum, R. W., Bauman, K. E., Harris, K. M., Jones, J., Tabor, J., Beuhring, T., Sieving, R. E., Shew, M., Ireland, M., Bearinger, L. H., & Udry, J. R. (1997). Protecting adolescents from harm. Findings from the National Longitudinal Study on Adolescent Health. *Journal of the American Medical Association*, 278, 823–832.

Rumberger, R. W. (1995). Dropping out of middle school: A multilevel analysis of students and schools. *American Educational Research Journal*, 32(3), 583–625.

The report further recommend the following resources:

- Bosworth, K. (Ed.). (1999). *Preventing school violence: What schools can do*. Bloomington, IN: Phi Delta Kappa International.
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center for Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion, Division of Adolescent and School Health; Health Resources and Services Administration, Maternal and Child Health Bureau, Office of Adolescent Health; National Adolescent Health Information Center, University of California, San Francisco. (2004). *Improving the health of adolescents and young adults: A guide for states and communities*. Atlanta, GA: Author.
- Collaborative for Academic, Social and Emotional Learning. (2003). *Safe and sound: An educational leader's guide to evidence-based social and emotional (SEL) programs*. Available at <http://www.casel.org/safeandsound.htm>
- Hoy, W. K., & Sabo, D. J. (1998). *Quality middle schools: open and healthy*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.
- Marx, E., Wooley, S. F., & Northrop, D. (Eds.) (1998). *Health is academic: A guide to coordinated school health programs*. New York: Teachers College Press.
- McCarthy, A. R. (2000). *Healthy teens: Facing the challenges of young lives*. Birmingham, MI: Bridge Communications.
- Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction. (1997). *Component quality: A comprehensive school health program assessment tool*. Madison, WI: Author.
- What Works Clearinghouse. Interventions for Preventing High School Dropout. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education  
<http://www.whatworks.ed.gov/Topic.asp?tid=06&ReturnPage=default.asp>

The What Works Clearinghouse reviews studies of interventions “designed to increase high school completion rates. . . . The general target population includes students who attend middle school, junior high school, or high school. Although dropout prevention programs that address all students will be included, subpopulations that are especially vulnerable are of particular interest: racial and ethnic minorities, second-language learners, high-poverty students, and low-achieving students. The interventions with middle school students found to have at least “potentially positive effects” (at the time of this report) are ALAS: Achievement for Latinos through Academic Success (staying in school, progressing in school); Check & Connect (staying in school, progressing in school); Financial Incentives for Teen Parents to Stay in School (staying in school); Talent Search (completing school); and Twelve Together (staying in school).

## Instructional Strategies

- Balfanz, R., & Byrnes, V. (2006). Closing the mathematics achievement gap in high-poverty middle schools: Enablers and constraints. *Journal of Education for Students Placed at Risk*, 11 (2), 143–159.  
ERIC number: EJ736312

“The study shows that high-poverty students who enter middle school below grade level in mathematics tend to follow two radically different paths: one where students make achievement gains and one where they fall further behind. Researchers found that students in schools implementing comprehensive whole-school improvement models made greater progress in closing mathematics achievement gaps than did those in the comparison group.”

- Balfanz, R., MacIver, D. J., & Byrnes, V. (2006). The implementation and impact of evidence-based mathematics reforms in high-poverty middle-schools: A multi-site, multi-year study. *Journal for Research in Mathematics Education*, 37(1), 33–64

“This article reports on the first four years of an effort to develop comprehensive and sustainable mathematics education reforms in high poverty middle schools. . . . The study found that a moderate level of implementation was achieved and that [program] students outperformed students from control schools on multiple measures of achievement.”

- Comprehensive School Reform Quality Center. (n.d. [2005?]). *Enhancing the Participation of Students with Disabilities in Comprehensive School Reform Models*. Washington, DC: Author and American Institutes for Research. Retrieved February 26, 2007, from <http://www.csrq.org/documents/EnhancingtheParticipationofStudentswithDisabilitiesinCSRModels.pdf>

This guide supplements an earlier guide concerning the choice of comprehensive school reform programs for elementary schools. “*Enhancing Participation* includes 22 model descriptions. The first section of each model description, Description and Model Mission, includes an introduction to the model with details about the model’s components. This section is intended to provide readers with an overview of the major tenets of each of the 22 models reviewed in the CSRQ Center *Elementary Report* and describes the model’s major implementation strategies. This descriptive information was taken from *The CSRQ Center Report on Elementary School Comprehensive School Reform Models*. Following this overview, *Enhancing Opportunities* includes a section entitled an Evidence of Effects for Diverse Student Populations. This content was taken directly from the CSRQ Center Elementary Report as well. . . . This guide examines the model features that most directly impact student achievement for diverse populations.” It provides a list of web resourcehs.

- Cooney, S., & Moore, B. (2002). *Making middle grades work: Technical assistance guide for site coordinators*. Atlanta, GA: Southern Regional Education Board  
ERIC number: ED479782

“The goal of the Southern Regional Education Board’s (SREB) Making Middle Grades Work initiative is to increase the percentage of eighth-graders who perform at the proficient level in core academic subjects and who leave eighth grade ready for college-prep work in high school. This document contains a comprehensive improvement framework to aid in SREB’s effort. The framework discusses the importance of a core curriculum, high expectation of students, classroom practices that engage students, teacher cooperation, parental support, strong leadership, qualified teachers, and the use of technology in instruction.”

- Council of Chief State School Officers. (1995). *Second-language learners and middle school reform: A case study of a school in transition*. Washington, DC: Author. Retrieved March 19, 2007 from:  
<http://www.ccsso.org/publications/details.cfm?PublicationID=106>

“This report presents the findings of a case study of the education of second language learners in a middle school undergoing middle school reform. The purpose of the study was to gain an understanding of the challenges faced by a middle school experiencing rapid demographic changes while attempting to implement key elements of middle-level reform. . . . The report contains policy recommendations for action at the district and school levels.”

- Deshler, D. D., & Hock, M. F. (2006). *Adolescent literacy: Where we are—Where we need to go*. Retrieved March 19, 2007, from LD Online website:  
<http://www.ldonline.org/article/12288>

“A growing number of intervention initiatives aimed at struggling adolescent readers have emerged in the past several years. The instructional approaches described [here] have been shown to have some efficacy in improving outcomes for struggling adolescent learners.” The authors then propose a theory of adolescent reading.

- ERIC Clearinghouse on Disabilities and Gifted Education. (2002). *To light a beacon: What administrators can do to make schools successful for all students*. ERIC/OSEP Topical Brief. Arlington, VA: Author.  
ERIC number: ED466073

“In some schools, students with disabilities achieve exemplary results. To find out what these schools do that set them apart, the U.S. Office of Special Education Programs sponsored a series of studies focused on ‘Beacons of Excellence Schools.’ This topical brief highlights results from three of these studies. The University of Maryland study identified indicators that may be used by elementary and middle school administrators to focus school improvement efforts on behalf of students with disabilities.”

- Freeman, Y., Freeman, D., & Mercuri, S. (2003). Helping middle and high school age English language learners achieve academic success. *NABE Journal of Research and Practice*, 1(1)  
ERIC number: EJ666292

Provides brief case studies of middle and high school English language learners representing the diversity of these students in terms of their educational and language backgrounds. Presents four research-based keys for working successfully with struggling learners and describes how one teacher implements the four keys with her ELLs.

- Garcia-Reid, P., Reid, R.J., & Peterson, N.A. (2005). School engagement among Latino youth in an urban middle school context: Valuing the role of social support. *Education and Urban Society*, 3(3), 257–275.

“Findings suggest that safety enhancement intervention strategies should extend past merely identifying poor school conditions and identify enclaves within the school that, for example, perpetuate violence. School-based interventions are discussed.”

- Grisham, D. L. (n.d.). Mixing it up in middle school: Themed booklists to entice struggling adolescent readers. *Reading Online: An Electronic Journal of the International Reading Association*. Retrieved March 19, 2007, from [http://www.readingonline.org/editorial/edit\\_index.asp?HREF=september2002/index.html](http://www.readingonline.org/editorial/edit_index.asp?HREF=september2002/index.html)

An effort of San Diego, CA, to improve student performance “resulted in a successful partnership between literacy leaders in the district and literacy faculty at the San Diego State University. As partners, we have focused on ‘accelerating’ the literacy development of struggling middle school readers (learners aged approximately 11 to 14 years), particularly those at risk of retention.”

- Learning Point Associates. (n.d.) “Adolescent literacy.” <http://www.learningpt.org/literacy/adolescent/bibliography.php>

This webpage provides a list of resources concerned with adolescent literacy.

- Office of Special Education. (n.d.) *Adolescent literacy*. Washington, DC: U. S. Department of Education. Retrieved March 19, 2007, from:  
[http://osepideasthatwork.org/parentkit/adolescent\\_literacy.asp](http://osepideasthatwork.org/parentkit/adolescent_literacy.asp)

This is a somewhat brief webpage introduction to adolescent literacy. Links are provided to a parental toolkit and discussions of assessment, instructional practices, behavior, and accommodations. See also the related information, “NICHCY Connections...to Literacy” on “Reading With Older Children at:  
[http://osepideasthatwork.org/parentkit/nichcy\\_older\\_children.asp](http://osepideasthatwork.org/parentkit/nichcy_older_children.asp)

- National Center on Educational Outcomes. (2004 August). *Educator perceptions of instructional strategies for standards-based education of English language learners with disabilities* (ELLs with Disabilities Report 7). Minneapolis, MN: Author.  
<http://education.umn.edu/nceo/OnlinePubs/ELLsDisRpt7.pdf>

“The study reported here was conducted as part of a larger investigation designed to identify instructional strategies most beneficial for English language learners [Grades 6–9] with disabilities.”

- What Works Clearinghouse. *Middle School Math Curricula*. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education  
<http://www.whatworks.ed.gov/Topic.asp?tid=03&ReturnPage=default.asp>

“The What Works Clearinghouse (WWC) review focuses on interventions based on a curriculum which contains learning goals that spell out the mathematics that students should know and be able to do, instructional programs and materials that organize the mathematical content, and assessments.” WWC has reviewed studies of 21 interventions at the time of this report; most of these, are however, currently unavailable while they are being updated. For those intervention reports that are available, only The Expert Mathematician intervention has been found to have “potentially positive effects.”

- What Works Clearinghouse. *Reports on interventions concerning English language learners*. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education. Retrieved March 14, 2007, from  
<http://www.whatworks.ed.gov/Topic.asp?tid=10&ReturnPage=default.asp>

“The What Works Clearinghouse (WWC) review focuses on interventions designed to improve the English language literacy and/or academic achievement of elementary school students who are English language learners. . . . This WWC review focuses on ELL elementary school students, meaning the intervention is offered to students in K–6 classrooms. In addition, curricula are being characterized based on whether they target special subpopulations of children (e.g., learning disabled, language impaired, ESL). The review could include studies in which students may no longer be considered limited English proficient by the school, but where students still possess limited English language skills.” The interventions which have been reviewed, which might apply to younger middle school students, and which were found to have “potentially positive effects” are (at the time of this report) Fast Forward Language (English language development), Instructional Conversations and Literature Logs (reading achievement, English language development), Read Well (reading achievement), Reading Mastery/SRA/McGraw-Hill (reading achievement), and Vocabulary Improvement Program for English Language Learners and Their Classmates (reading achievement).



## Composite-Topic Resources

The following are resources that address on two or more of the focal concerns in the request for information about successful building structures, developmental characteristics of middle-school adolescents, and instruction strategies for middle school students.

- Anfara, V. A., Jr., & Stacki, S. L., (Eds). (2002). *Middle school curriculum, instruction, and assessment. The handbook of research in middle level education*. Vol 2. Greenwich, CT: Information Age Publishing, Inc.  
ERIC number: ED472257

“This volume theorizes, describes, and explains practices and some specific programs designed to help meet the needs and demands of a diverse student population. The central point of this volume is that curriculum, instruction, and assessment in middle-level education is a dynamic, interrelated system undergoing change.” The book contains the following chapters/articles which apply to the topics specified in the request for the solution finding report: Chapter 3: “Developmental Appropriateness Versus Academic Rigor: An Untenable Dualism in Middle Level Education”; Chapter 5: “Every Student and Every Teacher: Crossing the Boundaries of Middle Level, TESOL, Bilingual, and Special Education”; Chapter 8: “Character Education Infused Into Middle Level Education”; and Chapter 9: “Reculturing Middle Schools to Use Cross-Curricular Portfolios to Support Integrated Learning.”

- Banks, R. (2003, revised July 2004). *Middle school*. Urbana, IL: Clearinghouse on Early Education and Parenting, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. Retrieved from: <http://ceep.crc.uiuc.edu/poptopics/middle.html>

This web guide is “intended to provide an orientation to the middle school movement in the United States and includes information about various issues of importance to middle level education. After a synthesis of recent literature, a variety of Web sites are provided, organizations are listed, and a recent ERIC database search is provided.” Topics addressed include the history of middle schools; demographics and statistics; developmental needs of young adolescents; key elements of middle schools; teacher and administrator training; middle school model and standards, high stakes testing, and accountability; research into middle school effectiveness; the future of the middle school movement. References, extensive web resources, organizations, and ERIC resources are provided.

- Comprehensive School Reform Quality Center. (2006, October). *Report on middle and high school comprehensive school reform models*. Washington, DC. Author and American Institutes for Research. Retrieved March 14, 2007, from: [http://www.csrq.org/documents/MSHS2006Report\\_FinalFullVersion10-03-06.pdf](http://www.csrq.org/documents/MSHS2006Report_FinalFullVersion10-03-06.pdf)

“This consumer guide provides comparative ratings on the effectiveness and quality of 18 widely adopted middle and high school whole-school improvement models. . . . To prepare this report the CSRQ Center screened nearly 1,500 documents and reviewed 197 studies on 18 widely implemented middle and high school models. We used rigorous standards that are aligned with the requirements for scientifically based research established by NCLB. Each model is rated on a number of dimensions, including evidence of raising student achievement. The reviews of the individual models provide education decision makers with profiles of each model and the evidence needed to make decisions to meet locally defined needs.”

- CCSSO. (1998). *State policies to support middle school reform: A guide for policymakers*. Washington, DC: Author.  
<http://www.ccsso.org/publications/details.cfm?PublicationID=105>

“This report describes what state policymakers, as well as teachers, principals, parents, central office administrators, and school board members can do to support and encourage the fundamental restructuring of the education of young adolescents (ages 10–15) in the middle grades. Its framework is based on the eight principles for restructuring middle grade education originally put forth by *Turning Points: Preparing American Youth for the 21st Century*, the 1990 report of the Carnegie Corporation Task Force on Education of Young Adolescents.” It addresses some issues of school structure and student physical well-being.

- Feist, M. (2003). *A web of support: The role of districts in urban middle-grades reform*. NY: Academy for Educational Development.  
ERIC number: ED478097

“This report presents challenges of and strategies for implementing reform in middle-grades schools, highlighting the perspectives of district administrators who participated in the Urban Middle-Grades Reform Network.” It reviews the literature, reports on and discusses interviews conducted with administrators.

- Heller, R., Calderon, S., & Medrich, E. (2003). *Academic achievement in the middle grades: What does research tell us? A review of the literature*. Atlanta, GA: Southern Regional Education Board.

“This literature review surveys research on academic achievement in the middle grades to answer the following questions: What is the current state of middle-grades education? What led to the reform of middle-grades education? What does the research say about educational practices that support academic achievement in the middle grades? The review focuses on research associated with improving student achievement and presents a list of best practices for improving achievement for all middle-grades students.”

- Jesse, D., Davis, A., & Pokorny, N. (2004). High-achieving middle schools for Latino students in poverty. *Journal of Education for Students Placed at Risk (JESPAR)*, 9(1), 23–45.  
ERIC number: EJ682927

“This study was conducted to examine the characteristics of middle schools in which Latino students from low-income families made substantial achievement gains. Nine schools in Texas were selected where Latino students had shown strong gains in the Texas Assessment of Academic Skills. Data from onsite interviews, focus groups, and documents were reviewed for evidence of 57 characteristics of effective schools. As expected, schools were characterized by strong leadership; a clear focus on achievement; positive climate, including supportive relationships among students and teachers; and good communications with parents. Surprisingly little attention was paid to providing culturally relevant curriculum or bilingual instruction. The schools generally exhibited a strong coherence, marked by articulation of common goals and a strong sense of guiding purpose, shared norms, consistent messages, and consistency of beliefs and practices. The schools could be further improved by drawing more explicitly on the cultural knowledge of home and community.”

- Juvonen, J., Le, V.-N., Kaganoff, T., Augustine, C., & Constant, L. (2004). *Focus on the wonder years: Challenges facing the American middle school*. Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation. Retrieved March 21, 2007, from: [http://www.rand.org/pubs/monographs/2004/RAND\\_MG139.pdf](http://www.rand.org/pubs/monographs/2004/RAND_MG139.pdf)

This RAND Education publication, 179 pages, presents findings from “a comprehensive assessment of the American middle school to separate the rhetoric from the reality.” The report makes the following recommendations:

- Consider alternatives to the classic 6–8 grade middle school configuration that would reduce multiple transitions for students and allow schools to better align their goals across grades K–12.
  - Offer interventions for the lowest-performing students, possibly including summer programs, before the 6th grade and additional reading and math courses, and tutorials after 6th grade to lessen the achievement gaps between certain demographic groups.
  - Adopt comprehensive disciplinary models that focus on preventing disciplinary problems and changing the social norms or a peer culture that fosters antisocial behavior, and provide principals with technical assistance to support the cultural changes such models require.
  - Make use of proven professional development models, to compensate for the lack of preservice training in subject-matter expertise and classroom management.
  - Offer parents information about the academic and instructional goals and methods used in middle grades and suggest activities to facilitate learning at home.
  - Establish a research program to learn how other countries successfully promote student well-being and foster positive school climates in a manner that supports academic achievement in schools that serve young teens.
- National Association of Secondary School Principals. (2006). *Breaking ranks in the middle: Strategies for leading middle school reform*. Washington, DC: Author.

Written as a “field [guide] to improve the learning experience of every student, [this publication provides] principals and their leadership teams with illustrations of possible entry points or areas in which to begin reform, strategies for implementing successful reform, and profiles of successes, challenges, and results of implementation. Breaking Ranks reform focuses its strategies in three key areas: collaborative leadership, professional learning communities, and the strategic use of data; personalizing the school environment; curriculum, instruction, and assessment.” “The report details nine strategies and 30 specific recommendations for improving student achievement.”

- National Forum to Accelerate Middle-Grades Reform. <http://www.mgforum.org/ImprovingSchools/STW/STWbackground.htm>

In its effort to identify and learn from high-performing middle schools, “the National Forum identified criteria to describe high-performing schools that serve students in the middle grades.” Such schools are “academically excellent, responsive to the developmental challenges of young adolescents, and socially equitable, with high expectations for all students,” with “clearly articulated and effective organizational structures and processes.” The Forum identified four “Schools to Watch” that met the criteria and developed case studies and online tours of the schools, as well as detailed information about the criteria. In 2002, to further expand the reach and impact of the Schools to Watch initiative, the program was first implemented at the state level in Georgia, North Carolina, and California; in 2007, the number has increased to 15 states.

- National Middle School Association.  
<http://www.nmsa.org/Research/tabid/57/Default.aspx>

The website provides research summaries, with bibliographies, on such topics as “multiage grouping”; “heterogeneous grouping”; “flexible scheduling”; “adolescent health, welfare, and safety,” “student achievement and the middle-school concept,” and so forth. In addition, the site also provides access to articles in *Research in Middle Level Education*, the association’s professional journal. Some recent articles that pertain to this solution-finding request are as follows:

- Dutt-Doner, K. M., Cook-Cottone, C., & Allen, S. (2007). Improving classroom instruction: understanding the developmental nature of analyzing primary sources. *RMLE*, 30(6)  
<http://www.nmsa.org/Publications/RMLEOnline/Articles/Vol30No6/tabid/1271/Default.aspx>
- Tonso, K. L., Jung, M. L., & Colombo, M. (2006). It’s hard answering your calling: Teacher teams in a restructuring urban middle school. *RMLE*, 30(1).  
<http://www.nmsa.org/Publications/RMLEOnline/Articles/Vol30No1/tabid/1051/Default.aspx>
- Adams, S. K., Kuhn, J., & Rhodes, J. (2006). Self-esteem changes in the middle school years: A Study of ethnic and gender groups. *RMLE*, 29(6).  
<http://www.nmsa.org/Publications/RMLEOnline/Articles/Vol29No6/tabid/711/Default.aspx>
- Hall, L. A. (2006). Struggling readers and content area text: Interactions with and perceptions of comprehension, self, and success. *RMLE*, 29(4).  
<http://www.nmsa.org/Publications/RMLEOnline/Articles/Vol29No4/tabid/685/Default.aspx>
- Meeks, G. B., & Stepka, T. H. (2005). State-wide middle level implementation: Lessons learned. *RMLE*, 29(3).  
<http://www.nmsa.org/Publications/RMLEOnline/Articles/Vol29No3/tabid/673/Default.aspx>
- Bishop, P. A., & Pflaum, S. W. (2005). Middle school students’ perceptions of social dimensions as influencers of academic engagement. *RMLE*, 29(2).  
<http://www.nmsa.org/Publications/RMLEOnline/Articles/Vol29No2/tabid/655/Default.aspx>
- Morocco, C. C., Clark-Chiarelli, N., Aguilar, C. M., & Brigham, N. (2002). Cultures of excellence and belonging in urban middle schools. *RMLE*, 25(2).  
<http://www.nmsa.org/Publications/RMLEOnline/Articles/Vol25No2Article4/tabid/512/Default.aspx>

The website also provides public access to selected articles in *The Middle School Journal*, a publication of the National Middle School Association:

<http://www.nmsa.org/Publications/MiddleSchoolJournal/tabid/435/Default.aspx>

- Picucci, A. C., Brownson, A., Kahlert, R., Sobel, A. (2002). *Driven to succeed: High-performing, high-poverty, turnaround middle schools. Volume I: Cross-case analysis of high-performing, high-poverty, turnaround middle schools*. Austin, TX: University of Texas at Austin.  
ERIC number: ED476107

“This study investigated how seven high-poverty middle schools demonstrated strong academic improvement so they were performing at levels consistent with, and often better than, higher-income schools in their states. . . . What differentiated these schools from demographically similar schools were conscious efforts by staff to understand school contexts and work proactively to raise all students’ performance. Four characteristics emerged as essential to supporting teaching and learning: high expectations for all students; dedication to collaborative environments; commitment to supporting teaching and learning through implementation of thoughtful organizational structures and building the capacity of the system; and attention to individual students and provision of extra services and supports beyond those traditionally offered by schools. Each school understood how school improvement was affected by the larger

surrounding context; intentionally and thoughtfully implemented elements leading to improvement; and used different approaches to improvement.”