

## Middle Grades Education: Fundamentals and Research User's Guide

### Purpose

*Middle Grades Education: Fundamentals and Research*, a collection of PowerPoint presentations with presenter notes, is a multipurpose education and advocacy tool on important topics in middle grades education. Whether you are a school leader, professional developer, higher education faculty, or community member trying to effect local or state policy, these presentations will help you deliver high-quality information on middle grades education. The presentations can be used with parents, community members, teachers and staff, college students, school boards, and policymakers.

Among the questions that these presentations help to answer are the following:

- What is the history of middle grades education?
- What is a middle school?
- What are the characteristics of middle grades students and programs responsive to those characteristics?
- What evidence shows that the middle grades concept works?
- What makes an exemplary middle school?
- What are appropriate curriculum, instruction, and assessment for this age group?
- What are the qualities and characteristics of an effective middle grades teacher or administrator?
- What reform models are currently being implemented?

*Middle Grades Education: Fundamentals and Research* can be used easily whether you are a new or veteran presenter or if you are an expert or a novice with middle grades concepts. If you are comfortable with the content, just use the presentations. Others might find the presenter notes helpful. Pick and choose from the nine topics those that best meet your needs. Suggestions about segments most helpful to particular situations follow.

### Contents

- Segment 1: Middle Grades Fundamentals
- Segment 2: Evolution of Middle Grades Education
- Segment 3S: Research in Support of Middle Grades Education-Standard
- Segment 3E: Research in Support of Middle Grades Education-Expanded
- Segment 4: Research in Support of the Components of *This We Believe*
- Segment 5: Characteristics of Young Adolescents
- Segment 6: Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment
- Segment 7: Characteristics of Effective Middle Grades Teachers and Administrators
- Segment 8: Middle Grades Preparation and Licensure
- Segment 9: Comprehensive School Reform Models for Middle Grades



## Matrix of Possible Uses

Because this resource was designed to meet various needs of middle grades practitioners, the matrix below is a guide to identify the segments that might be of most help to you.

Do you ...	These segments could be helpful
A. Educate parents and community about young adolescents and middle grades programs?	Segment 1: Middle Grades Fundamentals Segment 3S: Research in Support of Middle Grades Education - Standard Segment 5: Characteristics of Young Adolescents
B. Have a staff that is mostly secondary or elementary certified?	Segment 1: Middle Grades Fundamentals Segment 2: Evolution of Middle Grades Education Segment 4: Research in Support of the Components of <i>This We Believe</i> Segment 5: Characteristics of Young Adolescents Segment 6: Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment Segment 7: Characteristics of Effective Middle Grades Teachers and Administrators
C. Have a staff that wants to know more about developmentally appropriate curriculum, instruction, and assessment?	Segment 5: Characteristics of Young Adolescents Segment 6: Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment
D. Have a staff trying to improve the academic performance of their students?	Segment 3S: Research in Support of Middle Grades Education-Standard Segment 5: Characteristics of Young Adolescents Segment 6: Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment
E. Have a school exploring what it means to be an exemplary middle school?	Segment 1: Middle Grades Fundamentals Segment 2: Evolution of Middle Grades Education Segment 4: Research in Support of the Components of <i>This We Believe</i> Segment 5: Characteristics of Young Adolescents Segment 6: Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment
F. Find yourself defending your middle level program?	Segment 3S: Research in Support of Middle Grades Education-Standard Segment 4: Research in Support of the Components of <i>This We Believe</i>
G. Present to your school board or other decision makers about middle level practices?	Segment 3S: Research in Support of Middle Grades Education-Standard Segment 4: Research in Support of the Components of <i>This We Believe</i> Segment 9: Comprehensive School Reform Models for Middle Grades
H. Work with your school board to initiate a middle level program?	Segment 3S: Research in Support of Middle Grades Education-Standard Segment 9: Comprehensive School Reform Models for Middle Grades
I. Have a state considering implementing or withdrawing middle level licensure?	Segment 3S: Research in Support of Middle Grades Education-Standard Segment 5: Characteristics of Young Adolescents Segment 7: Characteristics of Effective Middle Grades Teachers and Administrators Segment 8: Middle Grades Preparation and Licensure

## Presentation Tips

- Set up early and make sure all your equipment works prior to your audience arriving.
- Familiarize yourself with the presenter notes so that you can talk to your audience, rather than read to them.
- Think about who your audience is so that you are talking about the topic in an appropriate way.
- Speak loudly enough so that everyone in the room can hear you.
- Manage your time effectively. Make sure you stick to the time allowed. Two minutes per slide or overhead is a good rule of thumb when estimating how long your presentation will take.
- Allow time for questions.

## Anticipating Typical Questions

Whenever you make presentations, questions will certainly be an important part of the program. But answering questions can feel risky. The University of Surrey Communication Skills Unit Pack Web site (<http://www.surrey.ac.uk/Skills/pack/comms/ques.html>) recommends "STOP":

- **Share** the question (if appropriate) with the rest of the audience who may not have heard it because they were too busy thinking about the questions they wanted to ask.
- **Think** about how you are going to answer the question.
- **Only** answer the question-don't get side-tracked, and don't go into too much detail.
- **Politely** check that your answer was sufficient.

If all else fails, don't be afraid to say, "I don't know," and promise to find the answer and get back to them.

Following are several questions that are frequently asked along with short, appropriate responses. Additionally, we have recommended resources available on National Middle School Association's Web site ([www.nmsa.org](http://www.nmsa.org)).

### What is a middle school?

A middle school is an educational institution that serves young adolescents (ages 10 to 15) and seeks to provide a program that reflects our knowledge of this age group and how they best learn. Effective middle grades programs focus more on what happens in the school and in the classrooms than on the name of the school or the grade configuration.

See also:

NMSA On Target: Defining Middle School



### What is the difference between a junior high school and middle school?

Some educators have come to think of a junior high school as having more of a senior high school type program and middle schools as having a more developmentally responsive program, or of junior high schools being comprised of grades 7-9 and middle schools grades 6-8. In truth, both the junior high movement (first half of the 20th century) and the more recent middle school movement grew out of a desire to educate young adolescents in developmentally appropriate ways, regardless of grade configuration. Schools with "Junior High School" or "Middle School" in their names may offer exemplary or less effective programs. The label doesn't matter as much as the practices used in the school. Effective practices are described in NMSA's *This We Believe* and in *Turning Points 2000*.

See also:

MGE:F&R Segment 1: Middle Grades Fundamentals

MGE:F&R Segment 2: Evolution of Middle Grades Education

NMSA Research Summary: Middle School vs. Junior High

NMSA On Target: Middle School or Junior High School

### What is the grade configuration of a middle school?

When you look at the full body of research on middle grades education, there is no clear-cut answer to the question of the best grade configuration. It is important to remember, however, that successful education for students in grades 5-8 does not depend on grade configuration as much as what goes on in the school and in the classroom.

See also:

NMSA Research Summary: Grade Configuration

NMSA On Target: Grade Configuration

### Do middle schools work?

There has been concern that middle grades students do not perform well academically. Instead of focusing on the label of "middle school," it is important to focus on the level of implementation of the middle school concept. Many of the indictments of middle school, while accurately pointing out the gap in meeting the educational needs of young adolescents, do not accurately critique true middle schools, since most "middle schools" have become so in name only and do not have programs that support the name change. There is a growing body of research that links improved student academic performance and socio-emotional development to the implementation of the middle school concept as outlined in *This We Believe* and *Turning Points 2000*.

See also:

MGE:F&R Segment 3S: Research in Support of Middle Grades Education-Standard

MGE:F&R Segment 4: Research in Support of the Components of *This We Believe*

NMSA On Target: Student Achievement

Myths & Realities document on the NMSA Web site



Following are other questions that typically arise in presentations, along with suggested NMSA resources available on the NMSA Web site ([www.nmsa.org](http://www.nmsa.org)):

What is block scheduling and what are some examples?

- NMSA Research Summary: Flexible Scheduling
- NMSA Research Summary: What Types of Block Schedules Benefit Middle School Students
- NMSA On Target: Block Schedule

How many middle schools are there in the U.S., and how many middle school students are there?

- NMSA Research Summary: Number of Middle Schools and Students

What makes a good middle school?

- NMSA Research Summary: Exemplary Middle School

What curriculum is developmentally appropriate for young adolescents?

- MGE:F&R Segment 6: Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment

How can I tell if my school is an exemplary middle school?

- NMSA Research Summary: Exemplary Middle School
- NMSA Research Summary: Evaluating the Effectiveness of Programs

What is heterogeneous grouping?

- NMSA Research Summary: Heterogeneous Grouping
- NMSA On Target: Differentiated Instruction

What is an advisory program?

- NMSA Research Summary: Advisory Programs
- NMSA On Target: Advisory

What is NMSA's position on middle level sports and competitive sports?

- NMSA Research Summary: Sports in Middle Grades

What value does physical education add to young adolescent education?

- NMSA Research Summary: Comprehensive School Health Programs

What is the research supporting higher achievement in middle schools?

- NMSA Research Summary: Academic Achievement
- NMSA Research Summary: What Works to Improve Student Achievement
- NMSA On Target: Student Achievement



Why is inclusion necessary in middle school?

- NMSA Research Summary: The Impact of Inclusion on Students and Staff

Why is my child in a class with students older/younger?

- NMSA Research Summary: Multiage Grouping

What is the history of the middle school movement?

- MGE:F&R Segment 2: Evolution of Middle Grades Education

What do middle schools do to ease the transition from elementary school and into high school?

- NMSA Research Summary: Middle School Transitions

Additional resources:

- *This We Believe: Successful Schools for Young Adolescents*
- *Research and Resources in Support of This We Believe*
- *This We Believe In Action*
- *Turning Points 2000*

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