

RESEARCH IN SUPPORT OF MIDDLE LEVEL GRADE CONFIGURATION

NMSA BELIEFS

National Middle School Association strongly believes 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.
- Successful schools for young adolescents are staffed with teachers who are prepared to teach young adolescents and do so in an environment that is academically challenging, socially equitable, and developmentally responsive.

CURRENT RESEARCH FINDS

- The number of schools with a middle grades organization (i.e., grades 5-8 or 6-8) has grown from 23% in 1971 to 69% in 2000 (Valentine, 2000).
- A 2003 national study of over 100 K-8 schools found that 84% of K-8 respondents believe that the ideal grade organization for middle grades students is a separately organized middle school. Further, only 16% of K-8 school respondents believe that the ideal grade organization for young adolescents is a K-8 school (McEwin, Dickinson, & Jacobson, 2004).
- A 2000 national study of middle level schools found that 65% of middle level principals believed that the ideal grade organization for the middle grades was grades six through eight (Valentine, Clark, Hackman, & Petzko, 2002).
- Middle schools are more likely than other grade organizations to offer programs and practices such as interdisciplinary teaming, flexible scheduling, advisory programs, and a wide variety of elective courses, considered to be essential for effective education of young adolescents (Epstein & Mac Iver, 1990; McEwin & Alexander, 1990; McEwin, Dickinson, & Jacobson, 2004).
- Young adolescents in middle schools are more likely to be taught by an interdisciplinary team. In fact, 77% of middle schools and only 33% of K-8 schools reported using interdisciplinary team organization in the middle grades (McEwin, Dickinson, & Jacobson, 2004)
- Several large scale and comprehensive studies demonstrate that young adolescents who attend middle schools that use essential programs and practices like interdisciplinary teaming have higher achievement scores (Felner, Jackson, Kasak, Mulhall, Brand, & Flowers, 1997; Lee & Smith, 1993; Mertens, Flowers, & Mulhall, 1998).

ACTION STEPS/RECOMMENDATIONS

- 1) Provide adequate funding for teacher professional development throughout the year, as well as insist that schools dedicate a minimum of 10 percent of their budgets to professional development and at least 25 percent of a teacher's work time to learning and collaborating with colleagues.
- 2) Insist that new middle grades teachers receive specialized professional preparation and establish middle level certification for all new teachers.
- 3) All schools enrolling young adolescents should establish and maintain programs and practices such as challenging and relevant curriculum, interdisciplinary teaming, integrated curriculum, and teacher-based guidance programs, which have been shown to increase student success and achievement.



National Middle School Association
4151 Executive Parkway, Suite 300
Westerville, Ohio 43081
Phone: (800) 528-NMSA
Fax: (614) 895-4750
www.nmsa.org
100_03449

REFERENCES

- Epstein, J. & Mac Iver, D.J. (1990). The middle grades: Is grade span the most important issue? *Educational Horizons*, 68(2), 88-94.
- Felner, R.D., Jackson, A.W., Kasak, D., Mulhall, P., Brand, S., & Flowers, N. (1997). The impact of school reform for the middle years: Longitudinal study of a network engaged in Turning Points-based comprehensive school transformation. *Phi Delta Kappan*, 78(7), 528-532,541-550.
- Lee, V., & Smith, J. (1993). Effects of school restructuring on the achievement and engagement of middle-grades students. *Sociology of Education*, 66(3), 164-187.
- McEwin, C.K., & Alexander, W.M. (1990). *Middle level programs and practices in elementary schools: Report of a national study*. Columbus, OH: National Middle School Association.
- McEwin, C. K., Dickinson, T.S., & Jacobson, M.G. (2004). *Programs and practices in K-8 schools: Do they meet the educational needs of young adolescents?* Westerville, OH: National Middle School Association.
- Mertens, S. B., Flowers, N., & Mulhall, P.F. (1998). *The Middle Start Initiative, Phase I: A longitudinal analysis of Michigan middle-level schools*. University of Illinois, Center for Prevention Research and Development.
- Valentine, J. W. (2000). United States middle level grade organizational trends. Compiled by the Middle Level Leadership Center. Downloaded from [www.mlhc.org/docs/USML trends.pdf](http://www.mlhc.org/docs/USML_trends.pdf) on August 12, 2004.
- Valentine, J. W., Clark, D.C., Hackman, D.G., & Petzko, V.N. (2002). *A national study of leadership in middle level schools. Volume 1: A national study of middle level leaders and school programs*. Reston, VA: National Association of Secondary School Principals.

