

Success in the Middle:

*A Policymaker's Guide to Achieving Quality
Middle Level Education*



National Middle School Association

Summary



Goal #1

Ensure that all middle level students participate in challenging, standards-based curricula and engaging instruction, and that their progress is measured by appropriate assessments, resulting in continual learning and high achievement.

1. Expand federal programs to eliminate the achievement gaps in math, science, and literacy for middle level students.
2. Provide adequate financial resources to states to help them develop engaging, challenging, and relevant middle level curricula and appropriate assessments aligned to national and international standards.
3. Provide support to states and school districts to broaden and strengthen assessments of individual students, and use the results to inform instruction and measure each student's progress over time.
4. Establish an office within the U.S. Department of Education to track middle level students' progress nationally, disseminate research and appropriate best practices, and serve as a liaison to policymakers and related professional organizations.

Goal #2

Support the recruitment and hiring of teachers and administrators who have strong content knowledge and the ability to use research-based instructional strategies and assessment practices appropriate for middle level students.

1. Ensure that every middle level student, including those in our highest-need schools and school districts, is taught by highly qualified teachers.
2. Provide incentives to highly qualified teachers and administrators in our highest-need schools and school districts to encourage them to become actively engaged in middle level reform.
3. Strengthen the definition of highly qualified middle level teachers by requiring a strong content background in two subject areas and a solid understanding of instructional strategies and assessment practices appropriate for young adolescents.
4. Require states to provide professional development opportunities for administrators and teachers to improve the effectiveness of math, science, and literacy instruction across the middle level curriculum.
5. Provide the needed resources and incentives to ensure that both new and experienced middle level educators receive the mentoring and sustained support necessary to teach effectively.

Goal #3

Support organizational structures and a school culture of high expectations that enable both middle level students and educators to succeed.

1. Support states and school districts to ensure that all middle level students have personalized learning plans and adult advocates to help them succeed.
2. Provide incentives to states and school districts to create small learning communities within middle level schools through practices that include—but are not limited to—teacher and student teams, looping, multiage grouping, schools-within-a-school, and learning academies.
3. Encourage and support principal and teacher leadership that builds a culture of high expectations and healthy, respectful, and mutually supportive relationships between students and adults as a condition for maximum learning.
4. Provide the necessary resources and support for students who need to accelerate their academic learning through practices that include—but are not limited to—extended time during the regular school day and after-school programs with highly qualified and knowledgeable educators.
5. Ensure that academic standards for middle level education have the needed breadth so that every student has curriculum choices that include the arts, world languages, technology, careers, health, and service learning.

Goal #4

Develop ongoing family and community partnerships to provide a supportive and enriched learning environment for every middle level student.

1. Support collaborations among school, family, and other stakeholder groups (such as service agencies, faith-based communities, and businesses) to strengthen learning opportunities for every middle level student.
2. Provide adequate funding to support service learning initiatives that enable young adolescents to learn, serve, and develop as citizens in their communities.
3. Establish policy permitting federal employees to regularly volunteer in schools as tutors, career guest speakers, and resource persons for classroom projects, or provide other services that will enrich students' learning and enhance home-school-community partnerships.

Goal #5

Facilitate the generation, dissemination, and application of research needed to identify and implement effective practices that lead to continual student learning and high academic achievement at the middle level.

1. Recognize middle level schools, in statutes and regulations, as distinct from elementary or secondary schools to ensure the recognition, attention, and funding needed to be successful.
2. Create a national middle level database accessible to education researchers, practitioners, and policymakers to spur middle grades school reform.
3. Promote collaborative research initiatives that examine and respond to the most critical middle level education issues, such as improving adolescent literacy, increasing math and science proficiency, and closing achievement gaps among groups of students.
4. Support the dissemination of research about middle level education to practitioners and policymakers.



GOVERNORS, LEGISLATORS, STATE BOARDS, OR DEPARTMENTS OF EDUCATION

Goal #1

Ensure that all middle level students participate in challenging, standards-based curricula and engaging instruction, and that their progress is measured by appropriate assessments, resulting in continual learning and high achievement.

1. Help school districts develop middle level curricula that adequately prepare students to take challenging high school courses and successfully engage in post-secondary education as well as achieve success in the workplace.
2. Ensure that the curricula and assessments for middle level education are consistent with national and international academic standards.
3. Provide professional development that will help middle level administrators and teachers use data to inform instruction and refine their practices.
4. Provide professional development that specifically helps middle level teachers strengthen the core curriculum and integrate curricula.
5. Designate a qualified middle level liaison at the state department of education to help develop state middle level policy and professional development for teachers and administrators, and ensure that school reform activities reflect an understanding of the distinct needs of young adolescents.

Goal #2

Support the recruitment and hiring of teachers and administrators who have strong content knowledge and the ability to use research-based instructional strategies and assessment practices appropriate for middle level students.

1. Establish specific middle level licensure and certification requirements—separate from elementary and high school requirements—for teachers and administrators.
2. Adopt the Middle Level Teacher Preparation Standards written by National Middle School Association and approved by the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education to ensure that graduates of teacher preparation programs have the knowledge, skills, and dispositions to effectively teach young adolescents.
3. Develop methods to assess the effectiveness of middle level teachers' practices.
4. Collaborate with colleges and universities to align administrator preparation programs with research-based leadership and instructional practices that have been shown to increase the academic performance and healthy development of young adolescents.
5. Provide local school systems with resources and technical support to engage middle level educators in ongoing professional learning as part of their daily work.

Goal #3

Support organizational structures and a school culture of high expectations that enable both middle level students and educators to succeed.

1. Develop policies to ensure safety, dignity, mutual respect, health, and high expectations for middle level students and educators.
2. Support the development of school programs outside the traditional schedule to ensure that every student has access to quality learning opportunities.
3. Develop cross-agency relationships and coordinated programs and services to ensure that schools can maximize students' learning by addressing their physical, social, and emotional needs.
4. Provide funding and ongoing professional development that will enable middle level educators to meet the diverse and evolving needs of young adolescents and their families.

Goal #4

Develop ongoing family and community partnerships to provide a supportive and enriched learning environment for every middle level student.

1. Support initiatives that bring parents, adult caregivers, and community members together to improve educational opportunities for all middle level students.
2. Support service learning and career exploration initiatives for all middle level students.
3. Formally declare October of each year Month of the Young Adolescent to raise public awareness about the importance of improving the education, health, and well-being of young adolescents.
4. Establish policy permitting state employees to regularly volunteer in schools as tutors, career guest speakers, and resource persons for classroom projects, or provide other services that will enrich students' learning and enhance home-school-community partnerships.

Goal #5

Facilitate the generation, dissemination, and application of research needed to identify and implement effective practices that lead to continual student learning and high academic achievement at the middle level.

1. Develop a strong and resilient connection among researchers at state departments of education and educational service districts to expand the use of effective practices in middle level schools.
2. Encourage and support collaborations among researchers at public and private colleges and universities to improve middle level education.
3. Encourage districts to support middle level practices, such as teaming and integrated curricula, that have a sufficient research base demonstrating improved student achievement.
4. Create and sustain networks to disseminate and discuss current research that relates to middle level education.

Goal #1

Ensure that all middle level students participate in challenging, standards-based curricula and engaging instruction, and that their progress is measured by appropriate assessments, resulting in continual learning and high achievement.

1. Engage boards of education, superintendents, district office personnel, and parents in learning experiences that increase their knowledge of the academic and developmental needs of middle level students.
2. Develop school district policy that recognizes the middle grades as a distinct level within the K-12 education continuum.
3. Provide and adequately fund ongoing professional development for all middle level administrators, enabling them to be knowledgeable and collaborative instructional leaders.
4. Provide and adequately fund ongoing professional development for all middle level teachers that will expand their content knowledge and enable them to use research-based instructional strategies and varied means of assessing students' progress, while addressing the needs of diverse learners.
5. Enable students to move successfully through the K-12 continuum by requiring vertical alignment of curricula among elementary, middle, and high schools.

Goal #2

Support the recruitment and hiring of teachers and administrators who have strong content knowledge and the ability to use research-based instructional strategies and assessment practices appropriate for middle level students.

1. Employ educators who have deep knowledge of the subjects they teach and are specifically prepared to work with middle level students.
2. Adequately fund professional development that addresses the identified specific needs and challenges of middle level teachers and administrators.
3. Ensure the equitable distribution of highly effective teachers throughout the school district so that all students will benefit from their knowledge and skills.
4. Establish strong partnerships with colleges and universities to form professional learning communities consisting of prospective teachers and experienced middle level classroom teachers.
5. Collaborate with colleges and universities to help middle level administrators implement research-based practices that significantly increase the academic performance and healthy development of young adolescents.

Goal #3

Support organizational structures and a school culture of high expectations that enable both middle level students and educators to succeed.

1. Ensure that every middle level student is in a safe, disciplined, and healthy learning environment that respects all members of the learning community and promotes high achievement.
2. Require every school to develop a vision and mission statement that is aligned to district policy, sets a clear course for school growth, and supports effective teaching practices and high achievement.
3. Provide middle level educators with ongoing professional development and regular opportunities to collaborate with colleagues so that they can meet the diverse needs of all students and ensure that instruction is consistent and integrated across and within subject areas.
4. Support the implementation of flexible schedules and small learning communities within each school to provide a comprehensive education program.
5. Integrate services and coordinate support from community agencies to strengthen the education of young adolescents.

Goal #4

Develop ongoing family and community partnerships to provide a supportive and enriched learning environment for every middle level student.

1. Extend family and community collaborations in support of students' academic achievement and healthy development by providing middle level educators with professional development that specifically helps them build such partnerships.
2. Provide training in advocacy, school decision making, and young adolescent development so that all families can become effective partners in their children's education.
3. Mobilize communities to ensure that all students and their families have access to essential technology for 21st century communications and commerce; develop school system policies and procedures to enable electronic home-school connections.
4. Establish school and community partnerships to provide quality after-school activities for middle level students.
5. Ensure consistent and well-developed initiatives to assist young adolescents and their families as they transition from elementary school to middle school and from middle school to high school.

Goal #5

Facilitate the generation, dissemination, and application of research needed to identify and implement effective practices that lead to continual student learning and high academic achievement at the middle level.

1. Support the dissemination and discussion of education research related to young adolescent learning at both district and school levels.
2. Use sound research when making decisions that affect middle level education.
3. Adopt research-based middle level practices and provide adequate resources to ensure their broad implementation.
4. Establish the expectation that valid research will guide decisions in schools; support the efforts of middle level educators to conduct and widely disseminate action research to improve their practices and strengthen curricula, instruction, and assessments.