



**THE STATE EDUCATION DEPARTMENT / THE UNIVERSITY OF THE STATE OF NEW YORK / ALBANY, NY 12234**

**TO:** The Honorable the Members of the Board of Regents  
**FROM:** James A. Kadamus  
**COMMITTEE:** Elementary, Middle, Secondary and Continuing Education  
**TITLE OF ITEM:** Proposed Regents Policy Statement on Middle-Level Education  
**DATE OF SUBMISSION:** June 2, 2003  
**PROPOSED HANDLING:** Discussion  
**RATIONALE FOR ITEM:** Revision of Regents Policy  
**STRATEGIC GOAL:** Goals 1, 2 and 3  
**AUTHORIZATION(S):**

**SUMMARY:**

At its October 2002 meeting, the Board of Regents agreed to review and revise the 1989 Regents Policy Statement on Middle-Level Education and Schools with Middle-Level Grades and requested that Department staff prepare a report on the core topics the revised policy statement should address.

In December 2002, the Regents, after discussing the core topics that needed to be in the revised policy statement, directed the State Education Department to prepare a draft Regents Policy Statement on Middle-Level Education for their review in February 2003. This draft policy statement would be a revision and update of the 1989 Regents Policy Statement and, as such, would:

- be written from the perspective of the young adolescent;
- address the dual needs of young adolescents:
- academic achievement, and
- personal development;
- reflect the most recent research on the educational and personal needs of young adolescents;
- include the following seven core topics: Philosophy, Mission, and Vision; Educational Program; Organization and Structure; Classroom Instruction; Educational Leadership; Student Academic and Personal Support; and Professional Learning; and
- be concise but sufficiently substantive and precise so as to guide and inform the review of Commissioner's Regulations related to the middle grades.

The State Education Department, at the direction of the Regents, organized and conducted, during late March, April, and early May 2003, an extensive public engagement process. Its purpose was to solicit comment and reaction to the draft Regents Policy Statement on Middle-Level Education not only from the educational community but also from others interested in the education of young adolescents. Over 2,000 people participated in the public engagement opportunity.

The attached report describes the public engagement process, its yield, and recommended changes in the draft Regents Policy Statement on Middle-Level Education based upon the public's comments and reactions. It includes the following:

- A description of the public engagement process and a discussion of who participated;
- A summary of the public comments and reactions organized around the following six general themes:
  - General reaction to the draft policy statement,
  - Specific language suggestions for additions, deletions, or modifications to the draft policy statement,
  - Thoughts and ideas about how best to implement the policy statement,
  - Potential barriers to the implementation of the policy statement,
  - Suggestions for specific regulations in support of the policy statement, and
  - Concerns ancillary to the policy statement;
- The unique perspectives of parents and students; and
- Proposed revisions to the draft Regents Policy Statement on Middle-Level Education based upon the public engagement comments and reactions.

The schedule of planned activities related to middle-level education includes:

- **June 2003:** The Regents review revised policy statement.
- **July 2003:** The Regents approve the final policy statement and discuss conceptual issues regarding Commissioner's Regulations that relate to the middle grades (e.g., Sections 100.3 and 100.4) using the new policy statement as the lens.
- **September 2003:** The Regents review preliminary draft of proposed changes in Commissioner's Regulations.
- **September-November 2003:** The public comments on preliminary draft of proposed changes in Commissioner's Regulations.
- **December 2003:** The Regents review draft of proposed changes in Commissioner's Regulations.
- **February 2004:** The Regents approve proposed changes in Commissioner's Regulations. Schools must implement the changes no later than September 2005.

Attachments

## **Supporting Young Adolescents: Regents Policy Statement on Middle-Level Education**

### **Introduction:**

The Board of Regents and the State Education Department are involved in an ongoing, comprehensive, and systematic effort to strengthen and improve education in the middle grades. This initiative has three distinct phases:

- Phase One: Reviewing and discussing the literature and research on middle-level education to develop a knowledge base for making informed decisions; engaging the educational community and others interested in the education of young adolescents in a broadly-based discussion of middle-level education; and revising the 1989 Regents Policy Statement on Middle-Level Education and Schools with Middle-Level Grades to reflect current research, best practice, and public input.
- Phase Two: Reviewing Commissioner's Regulations related to the middle grades; engaging the educational community and others interested in the education of young adolescents in a discussion of Commissioner's Regulations related to the middle grades; and, finally, aligning Commissioner's Regulations as closely as possible with the newly adopted Regents Policy Statement on Middle-Level Education.
- Phase Three: Developing guidance and support materials and resources (e.g., Essential Elements of Standards-Focused Middle-Level Schools and Programs with self-assessment rubrics, Statewide Network of Middle-Level Education Support Schools, promising practices) that will assist school districts and schools with middle-level grades in implementing the new Regents Policy Statement on Middle-Level Education and Commissioner's Regulations related to the middle grades.

Phase One – the review and approval of a new Regents Policy Statement on Middle-Level Education – is nearly completed. During the months of March and April, the Education Department, at the direction of the Regents, organized and conducted an extensive statewide public engagement effort to solicit comment and reaction to a draft Regents Policy Statement on Middle-Level Education.

The remainder of this report:

- explains the particulars of the public engagement process including who participated;
- presents what the Education Department learned from the public engagement experience including the unique perspectives of parents and students; and
- discusses the proposed Regents Policy Statement on Middle-Level Education that has been revised based upon comments and reactions solicited during the public engagement period.

### **The Public Engagement Process:**

At its February 2003 meeting, the Board of Regents directed the State Education Department

to develop an extensive and inclusive process for public review of the draft Regents Policy Statement on Middle-Level Education. The Department engaged in this review process not only the educational community, but also other relevant constituencies (e.g., students, parents, etc.) using a variety of approaches. Attachment B contains more detail on the particulars of the public engagement opportunities (e.g., number of sessions, number of participants, etc.).

<b>Target Groups</b>	<b>Process</b>
<b>Local School District Teams</b>	Thirty-three BOCES, individually or regionally, convened 30 public engagement sessions where local school district teams met and discussed the draft Regents Policy Statement on Middle-Level Education. Each session involved participants who were broadly representative of the educational community and others interested in the education of young adolescents.
<b>Big Four City School Districts</b>	The Department solicited reactions to and insights about the draft policy statement from the Buffalo, Rochester, Syracuse and Yonkers City School Districts. Rochester, Syracuse, and Yonkers joined with a local BOCES to conduct their public engagement sessions; Buffalo conducted its own forum
<b>New York City</b>	The Department solicited reactions and comments from the Chancellor's Office of the New York City Public Schools and staff of the New York City Department of Education. New York City School Support Center staff met with building leadership teams in three Boroughs to solicit comment and reaction to the draft policy statement.
<b>Students</b>	The Department's Student Support Services Unit, working closely with the Coordinated School Health and Wellness Centers and the Regional School Support Centers and using a specially designed survey instrument, conducted several regional forums upstate involving middle-level and high school students. In New York City, Young Citizens, Inc. hosted a student forum involving middle-grades students.
<b>Parents</b>	The Department, working closely with the NYS PTA, a Big Four City School District, and the United Parents Associations of New York City and using a specially-designed survey instrument, solicited comments and insights from the parents of young adolescents on their opinions and concerns about education in the middle grades.
<b>Middle-Level Teachers</b>	The New York State Council of Educational Associations, with the support of the Department, held a public engagement session that involved not only organizations whose constituency consists of teachers from the disciplines where there are no intermediate State assessments, but also organizations whose constituency consists of teachers from disciplines where there are intermediate State assessments.
<b>Organizations,</b>	The Department provided a series of opportunities (e.g., conference

<b>Agencies, and Other Groups</b>	sessions, special meetings, on-line surveys, etc.) for organizations, agencies and other groups both within and outside the educational community to provide commentary on the draft policy statement.
<b>Statewide Educational Groups and Organizations</b>	The Department solicited public testimony via a structured statewide hearing in Albany on Tuesday, April 29. Twenty-four people, representing a variety of perspectives (e.g., the Arts, Technology Education, District Superintendents New York State United Teachers (NYSUT), NYS School Boards Association, NYS Middle School Association, NYS PTA, Family and Consumer Sciences United Federation of Teachers (UFT), Middle-Level Principals, Public Television, Gifted and Talented Education, Higher Education, Physical Education, Second Language, etc.), presented testimony.

In addition, for those who were interested but not able to participate in one of the above scheduled opportunities, the Department developed and offered an on-line survey and also created a designated e-mailbox where individuals could record their comments and reactions regarding the draft Regents Policy Statement on Middle-Level Education. Over 180 people completed the on-line survey and another 30 provided comments via the e-mailbox.

### **Public Comments and Reactions:**

The comments and reactions generated by the public engagement effort fall into six general groupings:

- General reactions to the draft policy statement;
- Specific language suggestions for additions, deletions, or modifications to the draft policy statement;
- Thoughts and ideas about how best to implement the policy statement;
- Potential barriers to the implementation of the policy statement;
- Suggestions for specific regulations in support of the policy statement; and
- Concerns ancillary to the policy statement.

General reactions: By and large, the overall reaction to the draft policy statement language was extremely positive:

- "It is difficult to argue with general philosophical statements. Moving from policy and philosophy to implementation and action is where true guidance is needed." (BOCES Forum)
- "This is a beautiful and comprehensive document but the operationalization of this policy statement is the real challenge." (Big Four City School District)
- "Structure/framework of policy provides a good overview – recognizes need to balance academics and developmental needs." (BOCES Forum)
- "This is a good, general statement for middle school education." (BOCES Forum)
- "Overall this document covers all the areas that I believe are critical." (Big Four City School District)

Of the many people who provided comments and reactions, only a few expressed a basic disagreement with the overall content of the proposed policy statement:

- "[I am here] to express ...disappointment over the content of a statement that ought to address one of the most critical issues in American education today -- what to do about our middle schools -- but falls somewhat short of that urgent goal." (Public Hearing on April 29, 2003)
- "Delete the entire section 'Student Academic and Personal Support.' It is redundant and fiscally impossible for rural schools to provide such support.... It is all the school can do to assist the child, let alone the family." (BOCES Forum)

Specific Policy Language Suggestions: Suggested language changes fell into three categories: additions, deletions, and modifications, and ranged from very specific suggestions (e.g., change "transitions" to another word) to very general (e.g., "edit the document to 'cut to the chase.' Pare down to essentials."). Staff used the following decision rules to review and evaluate the suggested language changes:

1. The suggestion addresses policy (reflecting broad-based philosophy and purpose) rather than regulation (specific mandates and requirements) or implementation (practical "how-to's").
2. The suggestion is research based.
3. The suggestion adds value to the policy (clearer wording, new concept, etc.).

Implementation Recommendations: Many comments and suggestions focused not on the policy language but on how it should be implemented. Examples of the various recommendations included:

- "Create an I.E.P. for each student to meet his/her individual needs. Emphasize more communication from grade level to grade level on individual learning styles." (BOCES Forum)
- "Need a grade-by-grade curriculum." (Public Hearing on April 29, 2003)
- "Schools should have a behavior modification or counselor program that deals with behavior issues." (BOCES Forum)
- "Teachers need longer contact time with students. Lengthen professional contact time with teachers and with kids." (External Middle-Level Education Advisory Group)
- "More career development opportunities." (BOCES Forum)
- "The only opportunity for participation and leadership skills are given outside the school for example at church." (**Parent Focus Group**)
- **"More attention should be directed to multiple intelligences." (Parent Focus Group)**
- "Smaller class size." (Big Four City School District)
- "Offer classes, support groups for caregivers." (Big Four City School District)

These comments and reactions will be extremely valuable during the discussion of the implementation of the policy statement and Commissioner's Regulations related to the middle grades (Phase Three of the middle-level education initiative).

Implementation Barriers: Also common were references to potential barriers to the implementation of the policy statement. Among them mentioned were:

- "Parents are key! Their involvement is a must." (Big Four City School District)
- "The middle school environment currently allows for a very distracting, chaotic place that does not promote personal growth or academic success very well." (Youth Engagement

Session)

- "The draft states that every young adolescent should be provided with a supportive environment free from violence, bullying and other negative behaviors. Yet students who exhibit these behaviors are consistently put back in classrooms with the very students safety they habitually threaten. So, the possibility for a safe environment is non-existent in our schools. Lobby our State Legislature to pressure the State Education Department to ensure that habitual violent, negative behaving students are separated from the general population and placed in schools where their personal needs can be addressed and where their problematic behaviors can be dealt with." (Big Four City School District)
- "Funding needs to be made available to support the policy." (BOCES Forum)
- "Too much emphasis is placed on 'the school' and doesn't include the parental contribution to the success of the student." (BOCES Forum)
- "Guidance counselor needs to take more time to be available for individual counseling." (**Parent Focus Group**)
- "Students and teachers spend almost all of their time getting through the standards. There is no time for exploration and appreciation of any specific subject." (BOCES Forum)

Again, these comments and reactions will be extremely valuable during the discussion of the implementation of the policy statement and Commissioner's Regulations related to the middle grades (Phase Three of the middle-level education initiative).

Regulatory Suggestions: Many respondents used the opportunity for public comment to propose that the Board of Regents take specific regulatory actions, often in support of – or at the expense of – a particular discipline or curricular area. Other suggestions were more general, geared at increasing flexibility and local options. Examples included:

- "Mandate guidance counselor, social worker, and school psychologist for middle schools." (BOCES Forum)
- "Keep the Technology Education one unit of credit requirement for middle school students." (Public Hearing on April 29, 2003)
- "Curriculum units of study need to be clearly articulated so exploratories don't get eliminated in times of budgetary constraint." (BOCES Forum)
- "1/2 unit in the visual arts is inadequate; a full credit should be required." (Big Four City School District)
- "Teacher training must address middle level education, the 28 learning standards and differentiated instruction." (External Middle-Level Education Advisory Group)

These comments and reactions will be extremely valuable during the discussion of the review and revision of Commissioner's Regulations related to the middle grades (Phase Two of the middle-level education initiative).

Ancillary Concerns: A final category included responses that, while related tangentially to the policy statement, could not be easily classified. Among these were:

- "Middle schools need flexibility with State mandates and regulations." (BOCES Forum)
- "Address the needs of flexibility of timing of assessments." (BOCES Forum)
- "Hold State accountable for funding." (Big Four City School District)

- "Attend to induction/retention of promising beginning teachers." (Big Four City School District)
- "For the most part, I would like him challenged to his limits, not just passed because he does well compared to the average." (Parent Focus Group)

### Parent and Student Voices:

Parents and students had an opportunity in "role-alike" sessions to express and discuss their ideas about middle-level education. Their perspectives and insights are instructive. Following are illustrative, representative comments:

- "Kids need either sports or arts to make them interested in school. A full course of only academics can be boring." (Parent)
- "My child says that she does not have time to process information before the teacher moves to another topic." (Parent)
- "Once [teachers] get to know you, they are great but before that they keep you at arms length." (Parent)
- "I believe that if we as youth can help other youth we can make a difference because it is the youth that experience these things everyday." (Student)
- "I need to know that teachers want us to do well, instead of rushing to get through a criteria and not having the time to work on encouraging success in a certain area." (Student)
- "I think the most important thing is having encouraging, understanding teachers. I believe that teachers can basically make or break the middle school experience. It is in this time that students choose their 'path'." (Student)

### Proposed Revisions to the Draft Regents Policy Statement on Middle-Level Education:

The intensive and extensive public engagement process generated a number of significant modifications in the draft Regents Policy Statement on Middle-Level Education including, but not limited to:

- Noting that *students in the middle grades are in a unique period of development.*
- Explaining that the middle grades are *a key to success in high school.*
- Emphasizing that the middle grades program is part of an educational continuum and *builds on the foundational knowledge and skills of the elementary grades, and, in doing so, prepares students for success in high school.*
- Strengthening the personal development aspect of middle-level education by embedding the idea of "*caring*" in the policy statement where appropriate.
- Establishing a more "inviting" school experience through classroom instruction that is not only purposeful, challenging, integrated, ..... but also *relevant.*
- Recognizing the importance of addressing the needs of all students by emphasizing in the classroom instruction section the technique of *differentiated instruction.*
- Highlighting the importance of *emphasizing reading, writing, and mathematics across the subject areas.*
- Making explicit throughout the document the important role *parents* and the *community* play in the education of young adolescents.

Attachment A contains the full text of the proposed Regents Policy Statement on Middle-Level Education.

## Supporting Young Adolescents:

### Proposed Regents Policy Statement on Middle-Level Education

#### Introduction

Young adolescents from ages 10 to 14 are undergoing personal transformations – physically, intellectually, emotionally, socially and psychologically. The Board of Regents believes that the time these students spend in the middle grades 5 through 8 is critical to both their personal growth and development and their success in high school.

Based on a series of statewide discussions with many groups and a thorough review of the research on effective middle level education practices, the Regents and the State Education Department have identified seven Essential Elements of Standards-Focused Middle-Level Schools and Programs. This policy statement reflects these seven key factors.

The Regents believe that the following strategies are necessary if schools with middle-level grades across New York State are to implement the Regents Policy Statement and the essential elements successfully:

1. The Regents, the State Education Department, and school districts throughout the State must commit to providing both a rigorous academic program and a positive personal development program for all young adolescents in grades 5 through 8. The Board of Regents first signaled the importance of this level of schooling in 1996 with the approval of the learning standards for grades 5 through 8. However, Commissioner's Regulations, which focus primarily on grades 7 and 8, need to be amended to make them consistent with the levels of the standards.
2. The educational program in grades 5 through 8, no matter how these grades are configured at the local level, must reflect the State's 28 learning standards and must have challenging performance expectations for students. Middle-level learning must go beyond the basic foundational skills achieved in the elementary grades (Pre-k through grade 4) and lay the foundation for high school work. The educational program must emphasize reading, writing and mathematics across all subject areas. In addition, the program must ensure that students gain deep conceptual understanding, develop more complex problem-solving skills, and learn to apply basic skills in a variety of ways and in a variety of subject areas. The middle level program must provide opportunities for students to form good work habits and to accept increasing independence and responsibility for producing quality work. The Regents will review the current regulations related to the middle grades to ensure that a comprehensive and challenging academic program is available to all students.

3. Students in the middle grades must have opportunities to develop social, interpersonal, and life skills through activities that develop creativity, personal responsibility, and leadership skills. They need to become aware of the careers that are available and the educational requirements related to those careers. Their school experiences should provide a variety of experiences to participate in and understand democratic practices and to contribute to the local community. The Regents will review the current regulations affecting the middle grades to ensure that these personal development opportunities exist for all students.
4. Students must receive the necessary academic help and/or personal support to achieve the learning standards and keep pace with their peers. Many middle-level intervention programs are based on a reactive, remedial, deficit-based model that is implemented only after students fail. A proactive approach which prepares students for learning the material and skills they are about to engage, often called "pre-teaching," is needed to support struggling students. Schools should involve health and human services providers to work with students with health, social and psychological problems. The State Education Department will identify the most successful intervention and prevention practices and disseminate them statewide.
5. Generally, students in the middle grades are taught by several teachers in a team or departmentalized structure. Middle grades must be organized to provide teachers time to plan together in order maintain consistent performance expectations for students across subject areas, to develop interdisciplinary experiences for students, and to share those instructional approaches that have proven to be most effective with diverse students. Middle grades schedules should provide sufficient time for teachers to plan together and coordinate instruction. The Regents will review the time requirements and allocations for the middle grades as part of their review of the regulations.
6. Schools with middle-level grades must be staffed by highly qualified and skilled administrators and teachers who understand the essential elements of a standards-focused middle-level program and who also understand the needs and characteristics of young adolescents. The Regents will undertake a review of certification and professional development requirements for administrators and teachers in the middle grades to ensure that they enter positions with the requisite knowledge and skills they need to be successful and that they have ongoing professional learning opportunities to expand their knowledge and skills.

Implementing these strategies will require all of the resources of the University of the State of New York and a unified commitment to improving the educational and personal development experiences of students in the middle grades.

The challenge to middle-level education is to make the change from childhood to adolescence and from the elementary grades to the high school a positive period of intellectual and personal development. For many students, this is a hopeful time of life. However, for some youngsters emerging adolescence is a stressful time. These personal difficulties may be

exacerbated in cases where either the home or the community (including the schools) in which the young person lives and learns offers limited opportunities for positive role models, employment, and a satisfying lifestyle.

Educators, parents, families, and communities must not only recognize that all young adolescents have assets, but also acknowledge that they need to work together to assist students in a changing society. Educators need to recognize and assume a shared responsibility not only for their students' intellectual and educational development but also for their students' personal, social, emotional, and physical development. This includes students with special needs, such as those who have limited English proficiency, special talents, or disabilities, who require enhanced support. The entire school community must share responsibility for the success of all students, assure high-quality instruction, course content, and support and other services in the middle-level grades, and promote high expectations for all students.

The following seven essential elements must be in place in standards-focused schools with middle-level grades if young adolescents are to succeed academically and develop as individuals:

1. A philosophy and mission that reflect the intellectual and developmental needs and characteristics of young adolescents.
2. An educational program that is comprehensive, challenging, purposeful, integrated, relevant, and standards-based.
3. An organization and structure that support both academic excellence and personal development.
4. Classroom instruction appropriate to the needs and characteristics of young adolescents provided by skilled and knowledgeable teachers.
5. Strong educational leadership and a building administration that encourages, facilitates, and sustains involvement, participation, and partnerships.
6. A network of academic and personal support available for all students.
7. Professional learning for all staff that is ongoing, planned, purposeful, and collaboratively developed.

In a standards-focused middle-level school or program, the goals of academic achievement and personal development for each student are not in conflict or in competition. Rather, they are compatible, complementary, and mutually supportive. From a young adolescent's perspective, the essential elements of a successful standards-focused middle-level school or program must contain the following components.

### **Philosophy, Mission, and Vision**

**Every young adolescent deserves a school that values academic achievement and personal development and provides a supportive environment free from violence, bullying, harassment, and other negative behaviors.** Students in the middle grades are in a unique period of development, a period of rapid intellectual, physical, social, and emotional change. The philosophy, mission, and vision of a school with middle-level grades must reflect the dual purposes of middle-level education (academic achievement and personal development) and make explicit the commitment to provide students with:

- an educational experience that accommodates and capitalizes on their unique developmental needs and characteristics;
- learning experiences that are academically challenging, developmentally appropriate, and personally relevant;
- opportunities for increasing independence and responsibility with appropriate guidance and structure;
- a safe, inviting, trusting, and mutually-respectful learning environment that offers both physical and psychological safety;
- opportunities to thrive socially, emotionally, and ethically as well as academically; and
- a successful transition from the elementary grades to high school and from childhood to adolescence.

## **Educational Program**

**Every young adolescent needs a challenging, standards-based course of study that is comprehensive, integrated, and relevant.** This educational program:

- is enhanced by genuine involvement of students, their parents, their families, and the greater school community;
- emphasizes and promotes the requisite academic knowledge and skills needed to succeed in school—both middle-level and high school—and in later life;
- is fully aligned with the State’s 28 learning standards and emphasizes the natural connections and linkages among the standards;
- builds on the foundational knowledge and skills of the elementary grades and, in doing so, prepares students for success in high school;
- emphasizes reading, writing, and mathematics across the subject areas with expectations for performance that are consistent across and within the disciplines and commonly understood by both teachers and students;
- applies strategies for reading in all the content areas and provides writing experiences in a variety of forms;
- provides mathematics instruction that builds on basic skills and emphasizes conceptual understanding and problem-solving skills;
- promotes both an understanding and the use of the concepts of technology;
- fosters an understanding and an appreciation of the arts;
- teaches how to access, organize, and apply information using various media and data bases;
- helps students understand and apply positive health concepts and practices and participate in healthful physical activities;
- develops skills to explore new subject areas;
- encourages students to pursue personal interests, engage in school and community activities (e.g., sports, clubs, etc.), explore potential futures and careers, and develop useful social, interpersonal, and life skills needed to live a full and productive life;
- offers opportunities for the development of personal responsibility and self direction;
- uses up-to-date learning aids (e.g., textbooks, current adolescent literature, laboratory equipment, etc.), instructional materials, and instructional technology that support the educational program; and
- provides targeted and timely academic intervention services that are based upon a careful assessment of the academic, social, and emotional needs of students at risk of not meeting the learning standards (these additional academic instruction and/or student support services that address barriers to learning are critical in the middle grades to

ensure that all students achieve the State's learning standards and graduate from high school).

## Organization and Structure

**Young adolescents learn and develop best in a school that is organized and structured to promote both academic achievement and personal development.** Organizational effectiveness and school success are not contingent upon a particular grade or school configuration. What is critical is that a school is organized and structured to help young adolescents make the transition from the elementary to the high school grades, from childhood to adolescence. They need a school that is responsive to the needs and characteristics of young adolescents and:

- establishes within staff, students, and the community a feeling of belonging and personal identification with the school and with its purposes;
- makes all students, staff, parents, and families feel secure, valued, and respected as significant contributors to the school community;
- provides teachers with regular opportunities to interact and collaborate to ensure that instruction is consistent and inter-related across and within the subject areas;
- has scheduling flexibility to provide a comprehensive educational program, interdisciplinary curricula, targeted and timely academic intervention services, co-curricular and extra-curricular activities, and opportunities for students to engage in leadership and community service projects;
- connects youngsters to adults and to other students in the school and community; and
- provides opportunities for increasingly independent learning experiences and responsibilities within a safe and structured environment.

## Classroom Instruction

**Every young adolescent requires skilled and caring teachers who have a thorough understanding of their subject(s) and of the students they teach.** Young adolescents learn and develop best when they are treated with respect, involved in their learning, engaged with challenging content that has meaning and connections for them, and receive assurances that they are capable, worthy people. Teachers need to recognize and understand the changes that are occurring within their students, design and deliver a challenging curriculum based on the State's learning standards, and accept responsibility for each student's learning and development. Teachers of young adolescents need to:

- be caring and respectful in their interactions with students and other adults;
- have an extensive understanding of their subject matter and of different approaches to student learning;
- use a variety of successful instructional techniques and processes that reflect best practices (e.g., differentiated instruction, cooperative learning, etc.) and capitalize on the unique characteristics and individual needs of young adolescents;
- provide instruction that is purposeful, challenging, relevant, integrated, and standards-based;
- maintain performance expectations that are consistent and interrelated across and within subject areas;
- use classroom assessments that are useful indicators of individual student growth and performance to monitor each student's progress and to plan instruction;

- use student data, both personal and achievement, to make curricular and instructional decisions;
- use technology and other instructional resources to support and enhance learning;
- use flexible grouping based upon pupil needs, ways of learning, and interests;
- employ interdisciplinary approaches to help students integrate their studies and to fulfill their potential;
- create opportunities for students to develop social, interpersonal, and leadership skills in addition to academic proficiency;
- consult with each other and with other school personnel about instructional, curricular, and other student-related issues;
- engage in professional learning and intellectual growth activities; and
- inform and involve parents of middle-level students in their children's education by helping them understand the instructional program, their children's progress, and how to help their children at home with schoolwork, school decisions, and successful development through early adolescence.

## **Educational Leadership**

**Every young adolescent should be educated in schools that have knowledgeable, effective, and caring leaders.** Students learn and develop best when the adults in the school community have high expectations for students and staff, share and support a common vision, and work together to achieve common purposes. The personnel in effective schools with middle-level grades share leadership responsibilities. For the school to prosper, those in positions of leadership must:

- know and understand the needs and developmental characteristics of young adolescents;
- know and understand the essential elements of a standards-focused, high-performing school with middle-level grades;
- articulate and maintain high standards for classroom instruction and student performance;
- support and encourage teachers to take risks, to explore, to question, to try new instructional approaches, to continue as learners, and to grow;
- provide students with opportunities to assume significant and meaningful leadership roles in the school;
- ensure and facilitate inter-school cooperation, collaboration, and communication with feeder elementary schools and receiving high schools;
- promote school/community partnerships and involve parents and other members of the community in school activities and initiatives that benefit students;
- work to create, promote, and sustain a school culture and climate of mutual support and collective responsibility for the educational and personal development of every young adolescent;
- involve school staff, parents, and families to enhance student learning and development; and
- view parents as full partners in decisions affecting students and families.

## **Student Academic and Personal Support**

**Every young adolescent needs access to a system that supports both academic achievement and personal development.** Caring adults are a significant positive influence

for young adolescents. Schools must welcome and engage students, parents, families, and the community as partners in the educational process. To ensure a comprehensive network of academic and personal support is available for students and their families, schools with middle-level grades must:

- maintain two-way communication with parents and families;
- ensure that all students and their families have access to counseling and guidance services to make educational, career, and life choices;
- make trained professionals (including school counselors who know and understand the needs, characteristics, and behaviors of young adolescents), special prevention and intervention programs, and community resources available to support those who require additional services to cope with the changes of early adolescence and/or the academic demands of middle-level education;
- provide opportunities for students to have access to adult mentors and positive role models; and
- inform parents, families, and community groups of the essential role they play in ensuring students attend school and access available services, in expanding and enhancing venues for significant learning, in promoting youth development, and in supporting positive school change.

## Professional Learning

**Every young adolescent deserves an educational setting that values continuous improvement and ongoing professional learning.** Young adolescents need highly-qualified, well-trained, knowledgeable, caring teachers, administrators, and other school staff if they are to succeed. Schools with middle-level grades need to be professional learning communities where adults in the school engage in programs of growth and development that are ongoing, planned, purposeful, and collaboratively developed. At the core of professional growth should be specific subject area expertise and a knowledge and understanding of:

- the linkages among the 28 learning standards;
- research-based instructional practices that have proven successful in raising student achievement;
- at the practical level, the developmental characteristics of young adolescents;
- the use of data to make informed curricular and instructional decisions to improve academic performance and/or enhance personal development;
- the mission and philosophy of a standards-focused school with middle-level grades, not only theoretically but also operationally; and
- the essential elements of a standards-focused, high-performing school with middle-level grades.

## Summary

The University of the State of New York and all of its resources are unified in the mission to raise the knowledge, skill, and opportunity of all people in the State. The Board of Regents believes that the middle-level grades, typically grades 5 through 8, are a vital link in the education of youth, a critical period of individual growth and development, and a key to success in high school. A high performing, standards-focused school with middle-level grades addresses both academic performance and personal development. It ensures that young adolescents are prepared and ready to make a successful transition to high school,

academically and personally. Creating effective schools with middle-level grades will necessitate systemic change and require a philosophy and mission committed to developing the whole child, a challenging and rigorous educational program, a supportive organization and structure, skilled and knowledgeable teachers who use effective instructional practices, strong leadership, a network of support appropriate to the needs and characteristics of young adolescents, and a strong will to succeed.

## Attachment B

### Public Engagement Particulars

**Summary:** To date, more than 2,300 people representing various constituencies have reacted to the draft Regents Policy Statement on Middle-Level Education through a variety of venues. More involvement is expected as there are additional public engagement sessions scheduled, but not yet held. Participant totals will be updated in the July Regents report.

**Local School District Teams:** At the time this report was prepared, 33 BOCES, individually or as part of a regional consortium, had reported conducting a total of 30 public engagement sessions, involving over 1,270 participants. Their demographic profile is as follows:

46	Middle-Level /High School Student
97	Parent
312	Teacher (of a subject assessed by NYS intermediate assessments)
134	Teacher (of a subject not assessed by NYS intermediate assessments)
64	Superintendent
45	Board of Education Member
223	Middle-Level Administrator
100	Other School Administrator
91	School Counselor (pupil services)
31	Other Instructional or Non-Instructional Staff Member
11	Community Member
47	BOCES Staff Member
15	Professional Education Organization/Association Representative
24	Community Organization/Agency Representative
2	State Agency Representative
30	Other (e.g., higher education representative)

**Big Four City School Districts:** The Buffalo City School District organized and conducted on May 1, 2003, a day-long public engagement session involving over 80 people, representing parents, students, teachers, administrators, community members, board of education members, and others interested in the education of young adolescents. Mixed-role teams from the other Big Four Cities (Rochester, Syracuse, and Yonkers) participated in the public engagement sessions organized by their local BOCES, rather than conducting their own meetings.

**New York City:** State Education Department staff:

- met with the New York City Department of Education's School Improvement Liaisons and requested their assistance in reviewing and reacting to the draft policy statement;
- helped organize public engagement meetings involving over 200 middle-level educators in three Boroughs to react to the draft policy statement;
- worked with the United Parents Associations of New York City to gather input from parents of young adolescents;
- worked with the Young Citizens, Inc. program to ensure that the voices of students were a part of the conversation; and
- invited comment from the United Federation of Teachers, which was presented at the Public Hearing on April 29, 2003.

**Students:** In addition to the 50 students who were members of local school district teams or who completed the on-line survey, 271 other students reacted to the draft policy statement:

- |     |  |
|-----|--|
| 23  | From New York City participated in a discussion group hosted by Young Citizens, Inc.;  |
| 215 | Representing upstate schools (including Buffalo and Syracuse), in three different forums, used the student public engagement tool kit materials to provide commentary; and |
| 33  | Offered commentary through the designated e-mailbox or sent letters.   |

**Parents:** In addition to the 127 parents who were members of local school district teams or who completed the on-line survey, 150 other parents reacted to the draft policy statement:

- |     |   |
|-----|---|
| 110 | From New York City participated in a series of 14 discussion groups hosted by the United Parents Associations of New York City, an unaffiliated Staten Island PTA and the State Education Department's Parent Advisory Committee, using the parents public engagement tool kit materials (which included a Spanish version) to solicit reactions to the draft policy statement; |
| 20  | representing upstate schools (including Syracuse), participated in two forums and used the parents public engagement tool kit materials to  |

- provide commentary; and
- 20 offered commentary through the designated e-mailbox or sent letters.

**Middle-Level Teachers:** In addition to participating in the mixed-role BOCES public engagement sessions, submitting individual comments using the on-line survey and e-mailbox, and sending in letters, the positions and feelings of middle-level teachers were expressed in a variety of other ways:

- the New York State Council of Educational Associations (NYSCEA) convened a special day-long meeting of its membership (42 professional organizations) on May 1, 2003, to review and critique the draft policy statement;
- the voices of teachers were heard at the public hearing (e.g., NYSUT, technology education teachers, art teachers, music teachers, home and career skills teachers, physical education teachers, etc.); and
- a Teacher Center in the Mid-Hudson Region, on its own volition, convened its board of directors to review and react to the policy paper.

**Organizations, Agencies, and Other Groups:** Department staff:

- attended the New York Association of Colleges of Teacher Education's fall conference in Saratoga Springs and engaged a dozen higher education representatives in a discussion of the draft policy statement;
- met three times with the Department's Professional Standards and Practices Board to discuss the draft policy statement and to solicit reactions;
- contacted the Deans of Schools of Education in the State by e-mail and requested that they have their faculty review and comment on the draft policy statement (two representatives from higher education spoke at the Public Hearing on April 29);
- encouraged professional organizations to review and react to the draft policy statement (a number did including the NYS Middle School Association, the District Superintendents, NYSUT, the NYS Association for Health, Physical Education, Recreation and Dance, and the NYS Technology Education Association);
- convened a meeting of representatives of social services and health services organizations (six organizations – two from within the State Education Department, VESID and Higher Education, and four from without) to react to the draft policy statement; and
- at numerous conferences and regional meetings, urged middle-level educators to access the Department's website and complete the electronic survey;

**Statewide Educational Groups and Organizations:** On Tuesday, April 29, 2003, the Education Department held a structured statewide hearing in Albany on the draft Regents Policy Statement on Middle-Level Education. Twenty-four people, representing a variety of perspectives, presented testimony.

**Additional Commentary:** In addition to the above, the Education Department received commentary in several other ways:

- One hundred eighty-two people completed on-line surveys. The demographics of respondents were:
  - 4 Middle-Level /High School Student
  - 30 Parent
  - 47 Teacher (of a subject area assessed by NYS intermediate assessments)
  - 61 Teacher (of a subject area not assessed by NYS intermediate assessments)
  - 1 Superintendent
  - 1 Board of Education Member
  - 6 Middle-Level Administrator
  - 13 Other School Administrator
  - 2 School Counselor (pupil services)
  - 3 Other Instructional or Non-Instructional Staff Member
  - 8 Community Member
  - 1 BOCES Staff Member
  - 5 Other (including higher education representatives)
  
- Eighty-four individuals provided commentary using the Department's e-mailbox or wrote letters. Of these, 33 were students, 20 were parents, 13 were educators, 14 were association or group representatives, and 4 were from higher education institutions.