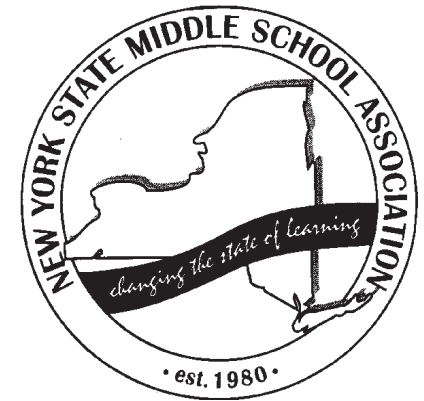


Classroom Instruction Resources

- Robert Marzano and colleagues at McRel examined what research says are the best instructional strategies to increase student achievement. They are described in *Classroom Instruction that Works*. There is also a handbook that goes along with it that describes practical classroom implementation of the research.
- *How to Meet Standards, Motivate Students, and Still Enjoy Teaching!*, by Barbara Benson, provides a clear perspective on what the standards mean for daily practice. It's a book that describes four practices that help teachers meet the demands of standards-based practice.
- A book that describes effective classroom strategies is *Becoming a Better Teacher: Eight Innovations that Work*, by Giselle Martin-Kniep. This book describes innovations that are worth implementing in all schools, including middle schools.
- Doug Reeves has written many books about standards-focused instruction. One in particular, *Making Standards Work*, succinctly tackles many of the issues and questions that educators ask as they make the transition from standards-referenced to standards-based. It is available from the Center for Performance Assessment.

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NYSED's
*The Essential Elements of Standards-Focused
Middle Level Schools and Programs*
Adopted July 2003

An Introduction to Essential Element 4 Classroom Instruction

**Professional Pamphlet
Series 10 Issue 4
2004-2005**

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Essential Element 4: Classroom Instruction

Classroom instruction appropriate to the needs and characteristics of young adolescents provided by skilled and knowledgeable teachers

The research on student achievement at the middle level tells us that all of the Essential Elements should be implemented to realize achievement gains. Nonetheless, Essential Element 4: Classroom Instruction may, in fact, be the most important one of them all. It's difficult to imagine a high student achievement without classroom instruction that is challenging, engaging, and purposeful.

We know more about how people learn than we ever did before; this knowledge must inform teacher practice. We know that people learn best when they are actively involved in the construction of meaning. We know that people learn best when they are able to connect new learning to old. We know that learning occurs at the edge of our abilities — that's why expectations must be high and instruction must be rigorous. We know that people learn in different ways and at different speeds, and that's why we must differentiate instruction to meet the needs of all students.

The challenge for educators is to seamlessly and logically connect what research tells us about effective instruction and assessment in the classroom. A paradigm shift of sorts is required, too: educators have to become standards-based rather than standards-

referenced. This means we look at instruction from a different perspective. Instead of looking at our lessons and units from the past to see which standards we “hit,” we must begin with the standards and what we want students to understand and be able to do. Once that's been identified, we construct performance assessments and assessment instruments that will tell us whether students are reaching the standards. Finally, we plan learning opportunities that are designed to get students to the standards — learning opportunities that incorporate the ever-expanding pedagogical knowledge base.

To accomplish all of this, teachers must work together; it cannot be done alone. Teachers should collaborate on curriculum mapping, pacing guides, unit plans, assessment strategies, etc. Teachers should also collaboratively look at student work for the purpose of educational decision-making.

There's a great deal that goes into effective classroom instruction. The references in this pamphlet provide practical advice for teachers and administrators. There's more to an effective middle school than great classroom instruction, but it's hard to envision an effective middle school without it. Perhaps effective, standards-based classroom instruction can be considered a prerequisite for the other Essential Elements.

Developmentally responsive middle-level teachers...

- **Provide instruction that is challenging, rigorous, and purposeful**
- **Understand the needs and developmental characteristics of young adolescents**
- **Have a deep content and pedagogical understanding**
- **Know and understand each of the state's 28 learning standards**
- **Use a range of successful, research-based teaching strategies**
- **Involve students in their learning**
- **Vary activities to maintain student interest**
- **Use technology purposefully to support and enhance learning**
- **Focus instruction on thinking, reasoning, and problem solving and, at the same time, ensure that students acquire necessary content and subject matter**
- **Use interdisciplinary approaches to integrate learning**
- **Use flexible grouping practices**
- **Use classroom assessments effectively and for multiple purposes**
- **Use cooperative learning groups and peer-tutoring opportunities**
- **Consult with each other and with school personnel**
- **Inform and involve parents of middle-level students**
- **Are themselves learners who are constantly engaged in professional growth**
- **Work together cooperatively and collaboratively**