

IN Transition

Journal of the New York State Middle School Association



Commissioner's Regulations, 1984 to 2004

Page 4

Illustrating the Essential Elements

Page 14

Seeing Each Individual in the Classroom

Page 20

NYSMSA GOALS

The New York State Middle School Association (NYSMSA), representing the interests of those who serve the educational needs of young adolescents, recognized the uniqueness of middle-level students. NYSMSA is committed to helping to create and support educational programs in which all young adolescents can develop their natural capabilities to their fullest extent, building upon personal strengths and the richness of our state's culturally diverse population. The Association encourages both middle-level educators and community stakeholders to work collaboratively to meet the needs of emerging adolescents in developmentally-appropriate programs founded in academic rigor, but dealing with the intellectual, physical, emotional, and social needs of students of this age.

NYSMSA's goals are listed below. Taking into consideration current research and available resources, these goals will assist the Association in fostering the creation of new curricula in support of the NYS learning standards and, in general, supporting the improvement of instruction for middle-level students in New York State.

AWARENESS AND RESPONSIVENESS

NYSMSA believes that we must:

- Promote a climate of acceptance and understanding of young adolescents;
- Stimulate and promote the development of the middle level as a distinct educational structure for young adolescents;
- Promote middle-level education and be a significant advocate for the appropriate education of young adolescents;
- Offer a variety of professional development activities that positively impact the attitudes, performances, and practices of middle-level educators.
- Compile, maintain, and respond to current research and development initiatives.

SUPPORT

NYSMSA believes that we must:

- Be a significant source of information and resources on young adolescents and their schooling;
- Offer consultant support to schools and districts in refining and strengthening their middle-level programs;
- Provide a variety of resources (video, publication, teleconferences, position papers, etc.) in support of appropriate programs for young adolescents;
- Seek, secure, and provide grants and other financial resources to support planing and implementation of effective middle-level practices;
- Provide, throughout the year, member services to public and non-public urban, suburban, and rural schools;
- Engage regional directors who provide, assist, and support regional and state activities;
- Support the ongoing importance of communication and interaction between State Education Department personnel and members of the Association.

CURRICULUM, INSTRUCTION, & ASSESSMENT

NYSMSA believes that we must:

- Influence the quality and content of pre-service and in-service education for prospective and practicing middle-level educators;
- Support teachers, schools, and districts in refining and strengthening their middle-level programs;
- Work with constituent groups to identify effective models for curricular, instructional, and assessment issues;
- Disseminate position papers that provide guidance on appropriate curricula, instruction, and assessment issues;
- Monitor the implementation of the NYS learning standards at the intermediate level, promoting programs with strong academic rigor within the framework of good middle-level practice;
- Monitor the intermediate assessment results, seeking to ensure the results measure good middle-level practice and are developmentally appropriate in scope, content, and administration.

COLLABORATION

NYSMSA believes that we must:

- Work with other associations in sponsoring professional development activities;
- Implement a collaborative relationship with universities, departments of higher education, SED, SMSA, parent-teacher organizations, and other groups that impact on the lives of young adolescents;
- Develop and expand cooperative ventures and relationships with corporations and businesses;
- Create networks of educators, parents, and others involved in the lives of young adolescents;
- Serve on the boards of supportive organizations;
- Engage in continuous planning through participation and shared decision-making;
- Provide for internal assessment of all major Association functions with provisions for external audit where appropriate.

Feature Articles

- 4** A Chronology of Commissioner's Regulations Related to the Middle Grades, 1984-2004
by David A. Payton, Ph.D.
- 14** Illustrating the Essential Elements of Middle-Level Reform
by Giselle O. Martin-Kniep, Ph.D.
- 20** Seeing Each Individual in the Classroom
by Linda Tilton
- 22** Road Trips: Taking Advisory on the Road
J. Thomas Kane, Jim Burns, and Jaynellen Behre Jenkins
- 24** Making the Home-School Connection More Apparent to a Parent
by Carolyn Hirst-Loucks and Kim P. Loucks

Statewide Network of Middle-Level Education Support Schools

- 26** Essential Element 2 Alive and Well in Suffolk County
by Andy Greene and Dr. Selena Smith
- 28** Charting a Course of Excellence through Social and Emotional Literacy
by Jericho Steering Committee and Student Team Advisors
- 32** Building Capacity: An Organizational Perspective
by Joseph P. Dragone and Cheryl H. Champ

In Every Issue

- 2 A few thoughts from the President...
- 3 The Executive Director's Message
- 9 Research at a Glance
- 12 Lea's Lessons
- 36 Submission of Articles

On The Cover

Corning Middle-Level Institute 2004 participants; photo by Brian Sherman, Region X Director and principal of Indian River Middle School, Philadelphia, NY.



A few thoughts from the President...

Jeannette Stern, Ed.D.



“Individuals, families, teams, and organizations shape their own future by creating a mental vision and purpose for any project, large or small. They don’t just live day to day

with no clear purpose in mind. They identify and commit themselves to the principles, relationships, and purposes that matter most to them.”

—Stephen R. Covey

The 2004-2005 school year promises to be a busy one at the middle level. On the state level, the Board of Regents is still meeting with the Commissioner and other SED middle-level personnel to determine what the new regulations should be for life at the middle. New York was accepted as a National Forum Schools to Watch state, enabling schools with solid middle-level programs to apply for “School to Watch” status. Check our Web site, www.nysmsa.org, for more information on this exciting and valuable program. The NYSMSA conference in Lake Placid, October 21-23, has many opportunities to learn about best practices around the state from practitioners and experts in the field. Watch for the registration brochure in your school, or download it from our Web site. Locally, NYSMSA regional directors will be hosting meetings around the state highlighting our new pamphlet series on The Essential Elements. Make sure you watch for your invitation...these are meetings not to be missed!

This issue of *In Transition* offers a smorgasbord of information, all related to the Essential Elements. Dr. David Payton, Supervisor of Middle-Level Education for the State Education Department, traces the history of reform at the middle, leading to our present Essential Elements. Jeff Craig, our research director, provides some research citations for these elements while Giselle Martin-Kniep, a nationally-recognized middle-level consultant, looks at them from an implementation point of view. Kim and Carolyn Loucks, regional directors, extol the critical importance of the parent-school partnership at this level. Two articles offer previews of workshop presentations from our upcoming conference. One, by Linda Tilton, shares some practical classroom strategies for differentiating instruction. The other article, by NYSMSA past president Tom Kane and his associates, looks at advisory, a critical affective part of any successful middle school.

A number of years ago, the State Education Department recognized almost 30 schools across the state and designated them as Demonstration Schools, based on their sound programs linked to the Essential Elements. Don’t miss the sagas of three of the schools, also in this issue. Other articles will be featured throughout this school year.

As the Covey quote suggests, no organization — team, school, or association — can be successful without following a plan and having a clear vision. All of us here at NYSMSA hope that these issues devoted to the Essential Elements and their implementation will help each of you improve middle-level across the state, thus, providing the best education possible for all “in the middle.”

The Executive Director's Message

Dennis M. Tosetto



To paraphrase the leader of the “A Team,” I love it when a good plan comes together. For the second consecutive year, evaluations of the NYSMSA/CMoG Institute were superb. By way of example, here is a cross section of the comments that

were submitted at the end of the 2004 Institute:

“(Instructors) Jim McIntyre and Janie Fitzgerald were a fantastic team, and they kept our group interested and active through our sessions.” — Amanda Sosnick, Wappingers JHS

“Very practical and worthwhile strategies.” — Sally Feinberg, Leslie B. Lehn MS

“The museum is a phenomenal place and glass making is an art to be appreciated... Jennifer (Borgioli) is so talented and makes the content understandable.” — Mary Ann White, Erie 1 BOCES/SETRC

“My hope was far exceeded through a combination of excellent instruction, process-oriented learning, and conference activities.” — Sharon Hance, Erie 1 BOCES/SETRC

“I feel that the entire experience was supportive...every part was creative and inspiring. Teachers need to include such wonderful instructional activities in order to grow.” — Beth Visintainer, The Harvey School

“It was great to hear other teachers’ points of view, suggestions, and comments about middle

school.” — Carmelina Myers, The Harvey School

“Presenters Kim and Carolyn (Loucks) were AWESOME!” — Jennifer Bartlett, Romulus CS

“Outstanding...excellent presenter (Jeff Craig)” — Sarah Romans, Northside Blodgett MS

“Worthwhile is truly an understatement!” — Constance D. Evelyn, George R. Staley MS

NYSMSA and the staff at the Corning Museum of Glass were aiming for success and, based on the comments from those who participated, we hit the mark! Much effort went into recruiting outstanding instructors, class size was held to approximately ten participants per class, special once-in-a-lifetime activities were experienced, and quality opportunities for networking were arranged.

Of course, what counts is the amount of cutting-edge skill and knowledge that each participating educator is now able to bring back to his or her classroom. The written assessments by participants indicate that much was learned. Moreover, what was learned was viewed as practical and important, and many of those who attended spoke with excitement about how they couldn’t wait to practice their newly-acquired skills with their students. Hearing the joy and excitement of teachers learning and sharing in a professional setting was deeply satisfying to me because I know from long experience that when teachers are excited about teaching, their middle-level students will be excited about learning.

Does it get any better than that?



A Chronology of Commissioner's Regulations Related to the Middle Grades, 1984 to 2004

David A. Payton, Ph.D.

Recognition of the middle grades in Commissioner's Regulation and the specification of mandated units of study for specific disciplines or courses in the middle grades reflect relatively recent actions by the New York State Board of Regents. As late as 1984, instructional requirements addressed grades one through eight (and in some cases grade nine) collectively and were more general than specific, more guidance than prescription. Commissioner's Regulations in effect at that time promoted either a grades 1-8, 9-12 or grades 1-6, 7-12 configuration and, if anything, reflected a traditional junior high school orientation. The only prescribed units of study/credit pertained to graduation requirements and applied only to the high school grades.

The course of study for the first eight years of full-time public day schools shall provide for instruction in at least the common school branches of music, visual arts, arithmetic, reading, spelling, writing, the English language, geography, United States history, civics, hygiene, physical training, the history of New York State and science (CR 100.1(e)).

The junior high school (or grades 7, 8 and 9 in the six-year secondary school) shall include in its curriculum English, social studies, science, mathematics, health education, visual arts, music and practical arts. There shall be partial or complete departmental organization. The school shall give recognition to individual differences in capacities, tastes and abilities in the organization and technique of class work... There shall be a definite and effective plan of pupil guidance, including the services of personnel certified for guidance service. (CR 100.1(d)).

Commissioner's Regulations 1984

The situation changed dramatically in the mid-1980's with the advent of the *Action Plan to Improve Elementary and Secondary Education Results in New York*. In an effort to inject additional rigor and purpose into the middle-grades program — and also to respond directly to the challenges laid out in the landmark national report, *A Nation At Risk* — the Board of Regents undertook a sweeping revision of Part 100 of Commissioner's Regulations. Part 100 regulations pertain directly to the elementary, middle, and secondary grades. The Regents promulgated a new set of regulations for pre-kindergarten through grade 6 (Section 100.3 of Commissioner's Regulations), grades 7 and 8 (Section 100.4), and grades 9 through 12 (Section 100.5). The elementary grades (grades pre-kindergarten through grade 6) were minimally affected by the new regulations.

During grades one through six, all students shall receive instruction in arithmetic, reading, spelling, writing, the English language, geography, United States history, science, health education, music, visual arts, physical education and, where student need is established, bilingual education and/or English as a second language. (CR 100.3(b)(1))."

Commissioner's Regulations 1985

The most radical regulatory changes were reserved for grades seven and eight. For the first time, Commissioner's Regulations prescribed specific units of study for each of the various disciplines for the grades immediately preceding high school.

Students completing grade 8 by June 1986 shall receive instruction in English, social studies, science, mathematics, physical edu-

cation, health education, visual arts, music and practical arts (CR 100.4(b)(1)).

Except as otherwise provided herein, students completing grade 8 in June 1987 or thereafter shall have completed, by the end of grade 8, the following required instruction or its equivalent:

- (i) English, 2 units of study;
- (ii) Social studies, 2 units of study;
- (iii) Science, 2 units of study;
- (iv) Mathematics, 2 units of study;
- (v) For students completing grade 8 in June 1988 or thereafter, technology education, 1 unit of study;
- (vi) For students completing grade 8 in June 1988 or thereafter, home and career skills, 3/4 of a unit of study;
- (vii) Physical education, as required by section 135.4(c)(2)(ii) of this Chapter;
- (viii) Health education, 1/2 unit of study, as required by section 135.3(c) of this Chapter;
- (ix) Art, 1/2 unit of study;
- (x) Music, 1/2 unit of study, and
- (xi) For students completing grade 8 in June 1988 or thereafter, library and information skills, the equivalent of one period per week in grades 7 and 8 (CR100.4(a)).

No later than September 1986, public school students in grade eight shall have the opportunity to take high school courses in at least five of the following areas: English, social studies, second languages, art, music, occupational education subjects, Regents mathematics courses, Regents science courses (CR100.4(c)).

Commissioner's Regulations 1985

The following explanatory notes accompanied the mid-1980's revisions of the regulations related to the middle grades (New York State Board of Regents, 1984):

- A unit [of study] is defined as at least 3 hours of instruction per week throughout the course of the school year or its equivalent. Schools are encouraged to maintain at least

40-minute periods.

- Second language instruction must be available for public school students in 7th and 8th grades beginning in September, 1988. All public school students starting with the class of 1992 would be required to have at least one unit of instruction in a second language during grades K-9. Starting with the class of 1994, this requirement would increase to at least 2 units.
- Technology, Home and Career Skills and Library will be required by September, 1986.
- The use of libraries should be taught by a library media specialist in cooperation with the classroom teachers. Schools will have flexibility in scheduling this requirement.
- The technology program shifts emphasis of the traditional industrial arts curriculum from learning to use tools and make products from woods, plastics, and metals to understanding systems of technology in the home and workplace. Systems of technology in fields such as production, transportation, construction, communications, and agriculture will be emphasized. The program will continue to emphasize hands-on, applied activities.
- Home and Career Skills is a transformation of the home economics program. The new course is designed to prepare students to meet their adult responsibilities as members of families, consumers, home managers and wage earners. The course emphasizes hands-on, applied activities. The content of Home and Career Skills will be organized in a modular format, which will give districts the flexibility to provide instruction at various times within the school schedule. The course will be developed and taught in close cooperation with a school's guidance program.
- Requirements for Technology and Home and Career Skills may be met by the integration or incorporation of these subjects into other courses to ensure flexibility in grades 7 and

8, provided that Education Department criteria are met. Unit time requirements for all subjects listed above must be met under this alternative.

- Grade 8 students demonstrating readiness to begin grade 9-12 sequences in English, social studies, mathematics, science, second languages, arts and/or occupational education will have the option of starting them in 8th grade. This will enable students to take additional courses or Advanced Placement courses in 12th Grade. Students are not precluded from initiating sequences in grades 9 or 10. High school graduation credit will only be granted for Regents-diploma-level courses or courses for which examinations establish pupil performance at high school level. The Superintendent or his or her designee will determine if a student has demonstrated readiness to begin grade 9 course-work in the 8th grade.¹
- If a student is in need of State-mandated remedial work in grades 7 and 8, the school district or school may adjust a student's schedule to provide for the necessary remedial work. In deciding which subject or subjects may be replaced by remedial work, a school district or school must consider a student's abilities, skills and interests, and must consult a student's parent.

The current regulations governing grades 6 through 8 are little changed from those that were developed in response to the 1984 *Action Plan to Improve Elementary and Secondary Education Results in New York*:

100.3 Program requirements for grades pre-kindergarten through six.

(b) Program requirements for grades one through six. During grades one through six, all students shall receive instruction that is

¹ Note that the grade eight acceleration provision was subsequently modified to require schools to provide the opportunity for qualified students to take Regents-level courses in two areas, mathematics and one other discipline, (rather than in all subject areas).

designed to facilitate their attainment of the relevant State learning standards in:

- (i) mathematics, including arithmetic, science, and technology;
- (ii) English language arts, including reading, writing, listening and speaking for purposes of information and understanding, literary response and expression, critical analysis and evaluation, and social interaction, with attention given to comprehension, vocabulary, word study, spelling, grammar, usage and punctuation;
- (iii) social studies, including geography and United States history;
- (iv) languages other than English, pursuant to section 100.2(d) of this Part;
- (v) the arts, including visual arts, music, dance and theatre;
- (vi) career development and occupational studies;
- (vii) where student need is established, bilingual education and/or English as a second language; and
- (viii) health education, physical education and family and consumer sciences.

Commissioner's Regulations 2004

100.4 Program requirements for grades seven and eight.

(a) Definitions.

(1) Technology education means a program of instruction designed to assist all students in meeting State intermediate standards for technology. Technology education uses concepts of science, mathematics, social science, and language arts in a hands-on, systems-based approach to problem solving that guides students in the understanding, design and development of systems, devices and products to serve human needs and wants.

(2) Home and career skills means a program of instruction designed to assist all students in meeting State intermediate learning standards for family and consumer sciences and to assist all students to develop strategies to manage multiple individual, family, career, and community roles and responsibilities through instructional activities which incorporate con-

cepts of science, mathematics, social science and language arts.

(b) Units of study in grades seven and eight.

(1) Except as otherwise provided herein, all students shall be provided instruction designed to enable them to achieve, by the end of grade eight, State intermediate learning standards through:

- (i) English language arts, two units of study;
- (ii) social studies, two units of study;
- (iii) science, two units of study;
- (iv) mathematics, two units of study;
- (v) technology education, one unit of study;
- (vi) home and career skills, three quarters of a unit of study;
- (vii) physical education, as required by section 135.4(c)(ii) of this Title;
- (viii) health education, one half unit of study, as required by section 135.3(c) of this Title;
- (ix) the arts, including one half unit of study in the visual arts, and one half unit of study in music;
- (x) library and information skills, the equivalent of one period per week in grade seven and eight;
- (xi) languages other than English pursuant to section 100.2 (d) of this Part; and
- (xii) career development and occupational studies...

(4) Students who have been determined to need academic intervention services as set forth in section 100.2(ee)(2)(i) of this Part may have the unit of study requirements for one or more of their subjects reduced, provided that:

- (i) academic intervention services shall be coordinated with and supplement instruction in the general curriculum;
- (ii) requirements for subjects set forth in paragraph (1) of this subdivision and for languages other than English instruction set forth in section 100.2(d) of this Part may be reduced but not eliminated. Academic intervention services shall be provided in a manner that does not diminish instructional time to a degree that may pre-

vent a student from achieving the State learning standards in any area required for graduation or from meeting local standards for promotion. A principal shall consider a student's abilities, skills and interests in determining the subjects for which the unit of study requirements may be reduced;

- (iii) a student's parent or guardian shall be notified in writing, by the principal, of a school's intention to implement the provisions of this paragraph; and
- (iv) the reduction of unit of study requirements shall remain in effect only to the extent that the provisions of subparagraph (i) of this paragraph are being met.

(c) Grade eight acceleration for diploma credit.

(1) Public school students in grade eight shall have the opportunity to take high school courses in mathematics and in at least one of the following areas: English, social studies, languages other than English, art, music, career and technical education subjects or science courses.

(2) Credit may be awarded for an accelerated course only when at least one of the following conditions has been met:

- (i) Accelerated students attend classes in a high school with high school students and pass the course on the same basis as the high school students. Credit is awarded by the high school; or
- (ii) The student passes the course and the associated State proficiency examination or Regents examination, where available. The credit must be accepted as a transfer credit by all registered New York State high schools; or
- (iii) In cases where no State proficiency examination or other appropriate state assessment is available, the student passes a course in the middle, junior high or intermediate school which has been approved for high school credit by the public school district

superintendent(s), or his or her designee(s), of the district(s) where the middle, junior high or intermediate school and the high school are located.

(3) Such opportunity shall be provided subject to the following conditions:

- (i) The superintendent, or his or her designee, shall determine whether a student has demonstrated readiness in each subject in which he or she asks to begin high school courses in the eighth grade leading to a diploma.
- (ii) A student shall be awarded high school credit for such courses only if such student passes a Regents examination, a second language proficiency examination, or a career and technical education proficiency examination, or, if no such examinations are available, a locally developed examination which establishes student performance at a high school level as determined by the principal.

(4) Courses taken pursuant to this subdivision may be substituted for the appropriate requirements set forth in subdivision (b) of this section.

Commissioner's Regulations 2004

References

New York State Board of Regents. (1984). *Action plan to improve elementary and secondary education in New York*. Albany, NY: State Education Department.

National Commission on Excellence in Education. (1983). *A nation at risk*.

David A. Payton is the Supervisor of Middle-Level Education for the New York State Education Department and serves on the NYSMSA Board of Directors as SED Liaison.

Membership and Publication Information

In Transition is a benefit of both individual and building membership in the New York State Middle School Association. Annual membership dues are \$50 for individual membership and \$150 for building membership. Memberships are on an "anniversary date" basis; renewal invoices are mailed approximately one month prior to end of membership.

For any changes in membership information, please contact Julie Schwartz at the NYSMSA office by e-mail (schwartz@nysmsa.org) or phone/fax (914-747-9241).

Individual and Building Membership applications can be downloaded from our web site: www.nysmsa.org. Additionally, new membership applications paid via credit card can be completed online.

NYSMSA gives permission to its membership to reprint any portion of this publication.

Research at a Glance

Jeff Craig, NYSMSA Director of Research and Technology



The purpose of this feature of In Transition is to provide a succinct research reference for middle level practitioners. Topics will reflect timely issues and best practices. To suggest a topic for a future Research at a Glance, send your suggestion to craig@nysmsa.org. This edition's column summarizes the research connecting student achievement and the Essential Elements. To read a more thorough analysis of this topic, you can find NYSMSA's paper at www.nysmsa.org.

The Essential Elements: What Does Research Say?

The *Essential Elements of Standards-Focused Middle Schools and Programs* describe the expectations for middle-level programs in New York State. The entire *Essential Elements* document is available as a Microsoft Word document at nysmsa.org. There are seven elements:

1. A philosophy and mission that reflect the intellectual and developmental needs and characteristics of young adolescents (youth 10-14 years of age).
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 encourage, facilitate, and sustain involvement, participation, and partnerships.

6. A network of academic and personal support available for all students.
7. Professional learning and staff development for all staff that are ongoing, planned, purposeful, and collaboratively developed.

The *Essential Elements* were developed as a coherent set of guidelines for middle schools. The *Essential Elements* are more than guidelines, however. They are research-based recommendations that result in increased student achievement. Two research studies have been conducted that demonstrate increased student achievement with greater *Essential Elements* implementation. In both of these studies the increased student achievement was measured on New York State Intermediate Level Assessments, which makes for a strong argument for implementation of the *Essential Elements* in all middle level programs in our state.

The first study was published in 2000 and it identified the positive correlation between implementation of the *Essential Elements* and student achievement as measured on the NYS Intermediate Assessments in mathematics and English Language Arts (Payton and Zeller, 2000). For the full text of the article describing this research, go to: <http://nysmsa.org/associations/611/files/Essential%20Elements%20Research%20Study.doc.doc>. The methodology of this study was straightforward: the implementation of the *Essential Elements* in high performing schools was compared to implementation in low performing schools. The definition of either high-performing or low-performing schools was

based on the scores on the 1999 administration of the ELA and Math 8 tests.

Two site evaluators went to each school and assessed the degree of *Essential Elements* implementation (the scale can be found at <http://nysmsa.org/associations/611/files/Essential%20Elements%20DI%20Scale.doc>). The inter-rater reliability for the two raters for each element was $r \geq .926$. The degrees of implementation were determined and are displayed in Chart 1.

As can be clearly seen, high-performing schools are doing more of the *Essential Elements* than low-performing schools. The advice for middle level schools and programs based on these findings is to implement the *Essential Elements*. A potential shortcoming of this study, however, is that no attention was paid to the resource levels of the schools included in the study. Obviously, this suggested the need for a second research effort.

A second study was undertaken to replicate the first study with one difference: differences in

needs and resources between schools would be considered (Payton, 2001). The study used the same methodology. More schools were identified in order to be able to compare schools within different needs and resource categories. These findings are displayed in Chart 2.

In each of the four Need/Resource Categories, the data clearly show that high achieving schools are implementing the *Essential Elements* to a greater degree than low achieving schools. In other words: the more schools implement the *Essential Elements*, the higher is their student achievement.

In conclusion, middle level schools and programs should work toward complete implementation of the *Essential Elements of Standards Focused Middle Level Schools and Programs*. Schools should implement the *Essential Elements* not only because the SED had told us to; we should implement the *Essential Elements* because they result in increased student achievement.

Chart 1: Degree of Implementation (DOI) of Essential Elements

Essential Element	DOI in High Performing Schools	DOI in Low Performing Schools	Difference
Essential Element 1: Philosophy and Mission	4.93	1.76	3.17
Essential Element 2: Educational Program	4.72	1.84	2.88
Essential Element 3: Organization and Structure	4.94	2.16	2.78
Essential Element 4: Classroom Instruction	4.71	2.18	2.53
Essential Element 5: Educational Leadership	5.22	2.58	2.65
Essential Element 6: Student Support	4.87	2.23	2.65
Essential Element 7: Professional Development	5.14	2.35	2.79
Average for the Seven Essential Elements	4.92	2.19	2.73

Chart 2: Degree of Implementation (DOI) of Essential Elements

Need/Resource Category	DOI in High Performing Schools	DOI in Low Performing Schools	Difference
High Need Urban/Suburban	3.76	2.92	0.84
High Need Rural	3.82	2.39	1.43
Average Need	4.64	3.33	1.31
Low Need	5.40	3.99	1.41
Average	4.41	3.16	1.25

Note: The data also contradict the belief held by some educators that the middle-level education approach fails to educate students to high levels. Instead, the research clearly suggests that most middle-level schools have not yet implemented the effective middle-level practices to any great degree and that those that have can demonstrate better student achievement than those that have not. It is logical to conclude that the achievement gap at the middle level is due to a less than complete implementation of best practices in middle level education rather than a failure of middle schools themselves.

References

Payton, David. (2001). *The New York State Education Department’s Research Study of the Essential Elements of Middle-Level Education, Spring 2001*. Albany, NY: State Education Department.

Payton, David and Zseller, Elaine. (2000). *The New York State Education Department’s Preliminary Research Study of the Essential Elements of Middle-Level Education, Spring 2000*. Albany, NY: State Education Department.

Have you visited NYSMSA’s website lately?

Go to www.nysmsa.org for...

- the latest information on what’s new “in the middle”
- updates on State Education Department discussions
 - articles of particular interest
 - the NYSMSA book store
- ways to contact your local regional director
 - conference materials
- membership renewal and more



Lea's Lessons

Lea Macdonald

Focus: Essential Element 4

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

“Combining knowledge of the developmental needs and characteristics of young adolescents and best practice of instruction offers exciting challenges and invigorating changes to middle-level classrooms.”

—Lea Macdonald

The student in transition from childhood to adolescence experiences a variety of physical, emotional and mental changes that demand middle school teachers to reassess their methods of instruction. The Regents Policy Statement on Middle-Level Education stresses the importance of making this transition a positive one. The middle school years are the gateway to the future for our young adolescents and teachers must use instructional strategies that capitalize on the developmental characteristics of this unique age group.

Because teachers in middle-level classrooms understand the changes that are occurring within their students, they continuously search for a variety of teaching strategies and activities to involve students in their learning, to develop social and interpersonal skills, to differentiate instruction to meet the needs of diverse learners and encourage them to become lifelong learners. In this article, I would like to share with you a powerful instructional strategy that fosters literacy, critical thinking, collaboration and student choice and voice in an interactive classroom. Literature Circles, a strategy created by Harvey Daniels from National Louis Univer-

sity and explained in detail in his book, *Literature Circles: Voice and Choice in a Student-Centered Classroom*, is a powerful strategy that can be used across the content areas.

According to Sandy Niemiera, a fourth-grade teacher, “This structure allowed me the freedom to turn ownership over to the students. Students gained greater insight by sharing literature instead of reading in isolation. Students who never participated before during whole-class discussion found a voice.”

Literature Circles: A Collaborative Reading/Writing Activity

Literature Circles are a very powerful, small-group structure for reading and discussing fiction or non-fiction at all grade levels, across the curriculum. Literature Circles combine two very important educational ideas: collaborative learning and independent reading. Literature Circles are discussion groups of three to five students who read the same article, book or novel. It can be free choice or a selection chosen by the teacher. While doing their reading (inside or outside of class) they prepare to play one of several specific discussion roles, and then come to the group with notes to help them carry out that job.

Other than the reading material, the most important ingredient of Literature Circles is the role sheets, which give a different task to each group member. All of these roles are designed to support genuine collaborative learning by giving students clearly-defined, interlocking tasks. Role sheets are transitional, temporary devices that help students to internalize through practice all the perspectives and habits the roles teach. In

mature Literature Circle classrooms, role sheets are usually abandoned when groups are capable of lively, text-centered, multifaceted book discussions drawn from open-ended entries in response logs.

The circles have regular meetings, with discussion roles rotating each session. When they finish the assigned reading, the circle may report briefly to the whole class or share their knowledge in a more formal presentations. The roles are: Questioner, Illustrator, Word Wizard, Literary Luminary, Connector, Summarizer, Researcher, Scene Setter.

Last year I introduced Literature Circles to my 7th grade class during the unit on the American Revolution. I divided the class into five literature circle teams, each team reading an historical fiction excerpt based on this time period.

On the first day I gave the students a set of role sheets. They discussed and debated the roles and worked in single-task teams (all the scene setters together, etc.), developing their responses to the excerpt. I put same-task kids together so they would have confidence in the basic focus of their roles and so they could help one another fill out the role sheets. I think this gave them the confidence to begin. The second day, the students discussed the excerpt in their Literature Circle teams, with each member taking a different role. I was amazed at the depth of their discussions.

Once they understand this best practice model of instruction, we move on to whole books. In English class last year, the students worked in Literature Circles reading historical fiction on the Civil War. They met once a week to discuss and analyze the book, taking turns at the various roles. As a culminating product, each Literature Circle team created a collaborative scrapbook based on their Civil War book.

My students love Literature Circles. They like the comfort of the structure, but also the

flexibility of the roles. They learn how to respect one another as discussers and analysts. As adults we enjoy book clubs; so do our students.

References

Daniels, Harvey. (1994). *Literature Circles: Voice and Choice in the Student-Centered Classroom*. Maine: Stenhouse Publishers.

Lea Macdonald is a social studies teacher and curriculum coordinator at Pleasantville Middle School; 40 Romer Avenue, Pleasantville, NY 10570; leamiddle@att.net. She served as NYSMSA Region VI Director from 1996-2003.

Looking for a staff development program designed for middle-level educators?

Look into the **Middle-Level Academy**, a six-session, thirty-hour program sponsored by NYSMSA in conjunction with SED. The sessions included in the program are: The Middle-Level School — An Introduction; Appropriate Instructional Strategies; Teacher Teams; Advisor-Advisee, Community Service and Service Learning; Curriculum, Assessment and Interdisciplinary Instruction; Developing a Model Middle-Level School — A Personal Plan. Sessions can be adapted to the needs of your school and staff. For more information, contact Dr. James Tobin, NYSMSA Director of Professional Development, (315) 597-3401 or tobin@nysmsa.org.



Illustrating the Essential Elements of Middle-Level Reform

Giselle O. Martin-Kniep, Ph.D.

“Why do we have to do this?”

“Boring!”

“I am just a number.”

“Nobody cares about what I think!”

“They don’t understand me.”

These are all phrases of alienation, more common than we think in the world of schools, and more specifically, in the middle and junior high school. Being caught in the middle is a metaphor that depicts in very real ways the experience of many adolescents when they transition from elementary schools to the next level.

Middle school students are unique. Their physical, social, and emotional needs are informed by a developmental stage that is characterized by deeply felt and destabilizing transitions. While some of these transitions are visible, as in physical changes, others are not, such as the changes going on in the adolescent’s brain. Recent advances in neurobiology suggest that the adolescent brain is far less finished and far more dynamic than previously believed. In fact, it is undergoing dramatic changes. These changes explain why adolescents struggle with goal-setting, making sound judgments, impulse control, and emotional control (Wolfe, 2003).

Middle schools are also unique. In some ways, these schools are as caught in the middle as their students are, living an existential impasse trying to decide whether they should treat students as elementary youngsters or as unfinished high schoolers. This impasse is fueled by

repeated and often contradictory efforts on the part of teachers to engage students or to get them to quiet down in a setting whose design and operation is in conflict with students’ needs.

Our work is informed by our beliefs and assumptions. These, in turn, support our philosophy. Schools vary greatly within a philosophical and practical continuum. In this article, I use the Essential Elements of Standards-Focused Middle Level Schools and Programs¹ to articulate extremes in which most schools operate related to beliefs and practice.

The seven Essential Elements are predicated on the core belief that young adolescents have specific needs and characteristics that the middle school should explicitly address. They are rich and elaborate, although varied in scope.

The value of the Essential Elements lies in the internalization of their meaning and in their transformation from words into actions. My intent is to make a small contribution towards this internalization by translating them into images and words that embody two buildings, representing the extremes between an undesirable but perhaps familiar reality, and a plausible, desirable future reality. Where appropriate, I suggest one or more steps or actions that would help a school meet the challenges posed by the Essential Elements.

¹ *These standards have been developed by the New York State Education Department’s Middle-Level Education Program in collaboration with the New York State Middle School Association, the Statewide Network of Middle-Level Education Liaisons and The New York City Forum to Accelerate Middle Grades Reform (Revised 2003).*

Essential Element 1: A philosophy and mission that reflect the intellectual and developmental needs and characteristics of young adolescents

Sycamore School operates with the belief that students and others are responsible for their own development and that high standards can be reached by only some students. Behavioral statements that depict this end of the continuum include: “These students can’t learn”, “Parents don’t care” or “It’s the student’s problem”. The immersion of students in an environment that is permeated by this belief can lead students to feel unsupported and disenfranchised from the school, while at the same time creating a vicious cycle in which students reinforce teachers’ beliefs.

Elm School has made an explicit commitment to enact programs, policies and practices based on their success in promoting each student’s learning and attainment of high standards. Statements overheard include: “We are responsible for providing every student with needed opportunities to succeed.” “Success can be attained by everyone given appropriate support systems,” and “What do we need to do to maximize the experience and learning of this student?”

For Sycamore School to behave like Elm School would require a commitment to the idea that school is an interdependent system where everyone (teachers, students, administrators, support staff, and parents) is responsible for students’ learning and success. This commitment is necessary if we want students to ultimately develop a sense of responsibility and empowerment for their own learning.

Essential Element 2: An educational program that is comprehensive, challenging, purposeful, integrated, relevant, and standards-based

Elm School offers a rigorous, purposeful, integrated program with subjects that co-mingle when necessary within a balanced comprehensive program that addresses students’ social, personal, and physical needs. The classroom day has four or five extended periods. The curriculum is comprised of integrated learning units and authentic learning and assessment experiences which provide students with opportunities to address real-life and community-relevant problems for an audience that can benefit from their resolution. Such experiences may include designing a play area, planning and undertaking an environmental study, or writing a handbook for new students. As a result, students perceive their educational program as both relevant and meaningful to their lives and challenging to their intellect.

In Elm School, teachers pay special attention to helping students become strategic learners by teaching and reinforcing learning skills (e.g., *how to study, how to conduct research, how to read for understanding, how to take notes, etc.*) in every subject and grade level. Students routinely analyze their own work against criteria, reflect on their progress, and identify strengths and weaknesses.

Sycamore School functions very much like a shopping mall of disparate offerings. These offerings are often compartmentalized with little if any articulation among them. Teachers tend to emphasize subject-specific knowledge and skills and have little time to help students acquire generic skills related to learning how to learn. Assessment consists of testing low-level recall of material learned and is not used as a means to diagnose or improve student learning. The day has seven to nine periods, each subject with a clear beginning and end. In schools with such programs, students may struggle to find the value and relevance of what they are learning.

There are multiple first steps in addressing the standards posed by this Essential Ele-

ment. One lies in helping teachers understand and articulate their curriculum by identifying concepts, skills, content, and assessments addressed in the different subjects so that they can make explicit linkages between subjects and increase the overall program integration and coherence.

Another step involves teaching students learning-to-learn skills and strategies, emphasizing the use of process assessment, reflection prompts and engaging students in self- and peer-assessment activities. This would increase students' ability to derive greater meaning from what they learn, as well as enhance their capacity to learn from others.

Essential Element 3. An organization and structure that support both academic excellence and personal development

Sycamore School has a departmental structure in which teachers are responsible for large numbers of students contributing to feelings of anonymity among students, and to a lack of curriculum integration among teachers of different subjects. This structure promotes tracking and grouping arrangements that result in uneven experiences for students. Some students have access to a challenging and rigorous curriculum, others are bombarded with decontextualized activities, and a few have neither. Sycamore School operates in isolation from the community at large.

Elm School is strategically laid out and arranged to promote synergy between practices and behaviors and a clear sense of identity. Students are grouped in heterogeneous classes that experience a variety of learning configurations throughout the day (individual, small group, cooperative, competitive). Formal learning is encouraged in and out of school through activities and relationships with the community, the workforce and other educational institutions.

One of the actions that would help schools address this element is the re-organization of school into smaller units or teams that enable a core group of teachers to develop rich relationships with a small group of students. If possible, this re-organization could be enhanced by an allocation of physical space that gives each team a sense of boundaries and community.

Essential Element 4. Classroom instruction appropriate to the needs of and characteristics of young adolescents provided by skilled and knowledgeable teachers

At Elm School, teachers are facilitators using hands-on instructional and assessment strategies which are informed by state standards and a deep understanding of the subjects they teach. They emphasize integrated curriculum, use technology as a resource for teaching and learning, and group students in ways that maximize learning for all. Teachers use assessments to promote learning by adjusting their teaching on the basis of what they learn from students' work. The reporting process is comprehensive and includes a wide range of standards-based assessment information.

At Sycamore School, there is an exclusive focus on teacher-directed learning and the memorization of facts, terms and algorithms. Rote learning is the norm, and teachers direct themselves at the class in general without attending to different students' needs. Students sit in individual chairs facing the front of the room. Teachers rely primarily on content- or skill-specific, and recall-based assessments.

Shifting teachers' practices from teacher-directed to student-centered is a long-term process, but there are many ways to begin that journey. One of them is by introducing an element of choice in the assignments teachers give students. Another involves the use of

different learning configurations and groups within the school day or week.

Essential Element 5. Strong educational leadership and a building administration that encourage, facilitate and sustain involvement, participation, and partnerships

The principal of Sycamore School values compliance, order and discipline. He does not provide any instructional leadership to his teachers nor does he value or promote any collaboration among them or between the school and the community.

In Elm School, the principal promotes the Essential Elements in the service of a sound education for students. She understands and fosters best teaching practices and standards-based instruction and teachers are encouraged to work collaboratively with parents and the community to maximize the overall coherence of the middle school program.

One of the most powerful ways to move towards the standards embodied by this Essential Element involves beginning a process of shared problem solving and decision making among teachers and administrators centered around perceived needs.

Essential Element 6. A network of academic and personal support available for all students

At Elm School, students have access to a network of trained professionals who support their varied academic, social, physical and emotional needs. They have multiple opportunities within courses and programs to explore, discuss, and understand changes associated with early adolescence. The school fosters two-way communication with parents, the community,

and with professional services that promote youth development.

Sycamore School lacks formal opportunities for students to examine or discuss changes associated with early adolescence. Guidance and counseling services are insufficient to address the needs of students, and one-way communication with parents and with the community is the norm.

In addition to seeking needed human resources and professionals to guide and assist students, schools can embody the standards presented by this Essential Element by establishing strategic partnerships with community-based and other agencies that could fill the school's gaps.

Essential Element 7. Professional learning and staff development for all staff that are ongoing, planned, purposeful, and collaboratively developed

Many teachers and administrators at Sycamore School lack an understanding of the Essential Elements and of the State Standards, and are not well versed in their subject or curriculum. They are unaware of ways of using assessments to diagnose and support student needs and lack opportunities to engage in meaningful professional development activities.

The majority of the teachers and administrators at Elm School value and promote best practices. The principal understands the Essential Elements and State Standards and their implications for the school's organization and design of programs. Teachers have ongoing opportunities to participate in professional development opportunities that enhance their instructional and assessment practices, support State Standards, and are designed based on a careful and ongoing analysis of teachers' needs.

Professional development does not need to be an externally-based or expensive proposition. Collegial circles, study groups, or action research teams can be used to develop a school-based professional learning community which can go a long way toward weaving the Essential Elements into the fabric of a middle school.

Why bother?

The arguments for embracing the Essential Elements range from common sense to recent advances in neuroscience and neuropsychology. We learn by incorporating new information and skills into our existing repertoire of schemas. What we perceive as disconnected bits of information is rarely processed or preserved. Young adolescents need engaging and meaningful sensorimotor experiences, such as problem-based learning and authentic learning experiences to focus on maintain interest (Kwon & Lawson, 2000; Montgomery and Whiting, 2000; Wilson & Wilson Horch, 2002). They, like us, thrive on experiences that promote meaning making and need to make explicit connections between the new and the familiar. Relevance matters.

Schools compete with numerous contexts and forces which young adolescents actively seek and question on a regular basis, constantly feeling that they do not really fit or belong in any of them. Schools can either be safe havens that counteract students' instability or they can exacerbate their alienation and lack of perceived control.

Most schools have some work to do if they are to fully address the intellectual and personal needs of young adolescents. This work will take time, patience and persistence. In the absence of making that investment we, as educators and parents, stand to lose our children and to short-change our contributions to their future.

References

- Kwon, Y., & Lawson, A.E. (2000). Linking brain growth with the development of scientific reasoning ability and conceptual change during adolescence. *Journal of Research in Science Teaching* 37(1), 44-62.
- Montgomery, L., & Whiting, D. (2000). Teachers under construction — incorporating principles of engaged and brain-based learning into a constructivist “technology of education” program. *Society for Information Technology & Technology Education International Conference: Proceedings of SITE 2000* (11th, San Diego, CA, February 8-12), 1-3.
- Wilson, L.M., Wilson, H.W., & Irvin, J. (2002). Implications of brain research for teaching young adolescents. *Middle School Journal Research Articles*. Retrieved from the research section of www.nmsa.org
- Wolfe, Pat. (March 2003). The adolescent brain: A work in progress. *Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development Annual Conference*, San Antonio, TX, March.

Giselle O. Martin-Kniep is the president of Learner-Centered Initiatives, Ltd.; 20 Elm Place, Sea Cliff, NY 11579; (516) 671-2991; gmkhci@aol.com. She is working with SED and middle-level professionals on the rubrics for the Essential Elements.

NYSMSA's 24th Annual Conference

Reaching New Heights in Middle-Level Education

Lake Placid, New York
October 21-23, 2004



Olympic-quality events include...

- Full-Day Pre-Conference Sessions
 - * Operation Respect
 - * Helping All Students Succeed with Linda Tilton
 - * Middle-Level Leadership with Susan Allen and Jeff Craig
 - * Meeting the Developmental Needs of Middle-Level Learners with Linda Ruest
- Banquet with Keynote by literacy expert Janet Allen
- General Assembly with Keynote by Peter Yarrow of Peter, Paul, and Mary
- Practitioner Workshops
- Feature Presentations
- SED Updates on NYS Middle-Level Initiative
- Breakfast with Champions
- Networking Opportunities

For more information, visit www.nysmsa.org or contact...

Local Committee Co-Chairs:

Brian Sherman
sherman@nysmsa.org

Teal Abel
abel@nysmsa.org

Conference Director:

Linda Ruest
ruest@nysmsa.org



Seeing Each Individual in the Classroom

Linda Tilton

Differentiating instruction happens in a myriad of ways. It offers countless opportunities to celebrate our students' strengths. Often there is more than one right answer in how we teach and in how our students show what they know. We say that "One size does not fit all," but putting that into daily practice is complicated. What does it take to make it all work? Successful differentiated classrooms are made up of learning communities that share three critical keys to success:

- Each individual is valued and respected
- Each individual assumes personal responsibility for learning and managing tasks
- Celebrating success motivates and energizes every learner

Let me share some practical classroom strategies that support each of these keys.

Valuing the Individual

The Photo Bulletin Board is one way to truly see each individual! Let me explain. During a high school classroom visit, I noticed that students rushed in and gathered around a bulletin board. They were laughing, talking and seemed very excited. The teacher explained that he had just changed his photo display. He frequently took candid pictures of his students in a variety of situations such as working in groups, talking, entering or leaving class or just being kids. The message to each student was simple: You are important. The sense of community in that classroom was palpable!

Mystery Student takes less than a minute and is a quick way to help students get to know

each other. On a note card, each student lists three things such as hobbies, interests, sports, or other information. The cards are dropped into a bag. Periodically or as a transition between activities, a Mystery Student card is drawn and read. Classmates guess the identity. Abraham Lincoln said it so well, "I don't like that fellow. Maybe I ought to get to know him better."

Personal Responsibility

The **N-A-T** Strategy focuses on the difference between *owning* a daily planner and *using* it effectively. Homework may not be completed because a student "forgets" the book or folder or study guide. The N-A-T Strategy encourages the student to write three things each assignment square:

N stands for Need. What is needed to complete the assignment?

A refers to the Assignment.

T is the Turn in date. When is the assignment due?

Standing at the locker at the end of the day, the student can quickly check the daily planner to see what to bring home, what to do and when.

The Accordion Folder is a simple organizational tool for managing papers. A six pocket version of the expandable file can be even more effective when color-coded file folders are inserted into the pockets. Every math paper goes into the green folder, science is filed in the yellow folder and social studies work is filed in red. Folders are arranged in the order of each student's class schedule.

Goal Setting helps each student map out a destination that is attainable. Encouraging each student to write personal goals at the outset of each unit can be a powerful process in attaining results.

Celebrating Success

Address Labels are not just for envelopes anymore! Most of us receive flyers for address labels in the Sunday newspaper and in our mail. Instead of ordering address labels, use the label to celebrate “personal best.” My own say:

*Linda Tilton’s Award for Your Best Work
Believe in Yourself
Congratulations!*

These awards reinforce and recognize the value of individual effort.

The BUG Award affirms personal progress in Bringing Up Grades. “BUG” any student who shows improvement during a week or month or grading period with this simple form of recognition.

The differentiated classroom is a student-centered environment where creating positive relationships is a core value. The individual is truly seen and celebrated in a variety of ways.

You are invited to join me in a celebration of both academic and affective strategies at NYSMSA’s Fall Conference in Lake Placid. This full-day preconference session will offer dozens of “take back and use ideas” for differentiating instruction in the middle school classroom.

Linda Tilton is a middle-level consultant and author. She can be contacted through Covington Cove Publications, 5620 Covington Road, Shorewood MN 55331; 1-888-LEARN-11.

New postings at www.nysmsa.org

- New York is now a **Schools to Watch** state. Learn how your school can become a part of this recognition program.
- The role of exploratory courses cannot be overemphasized. Read the current research on the role of exploratories as part of a successful middle-level program.
- Follow the latest in the Board of Regents discussion on middle level.
- Download the newest versions of the Essential Elements and the Regents Policy Statement.



Road Trips: Taking Advisory on the Road

J. Thomas Kane, Jim Burns, and
Jaynellen Behre Jenkins

We three authors really enjoy each other's company and have been a working trio for the past six years or so, traveling around the country working with middle-level educators on creating better programs in their schools. We have always felt that advisory and advocacy are essential for a successful program and have shared our thoughts and expertise in such places as Denver, Niagara Falls, St. Louis, Seattle, Syracuse, Washington, DC, Bronx, NY and Newark, NJ.

As we travel around the country, the same questions seem to come up. We'd like to share with you here some of these critical issues concerning advisory and the answers we share.

Q: Is there an ideal model for middle school advisory programs?

A: No! There are several best practices that can be incorporated into an advisory program but each school needs to set its own goals and address needs that best serve the uniqueness of its school community.

Q: How much training do middle school teachers need to orchestrate an effective advisory program?

A: The essential elements of an advisory program can be effectively presented in a half or whole-day presentation to a faculty. Incorporated into such presentations are demonstrations of activities that can be used in an advisory program. However, the training does not end there. Once trained and out and about presenting advisory sessions, middle school teachers need to regroup and periodically engage in what we

like to call clinics. Clinics address what's working, and what may not be as successful. Teachers can share themes they have chosen and activities that successfully delivered those themes.

Q: What can be done for or with a middle school teacher who is reluctant to be an advisor?

A: It is our firm belief that the skills needed by a middle school teacher to be an effective advisor must be part of every middle school teacher's repertoire of skills and abilities. Educators at this level must be cognizant of the characteristics of the middle-level learner and understanding of the dramatic changes occurring at this time, must be good listeners, understanding when to just listen and when to refer to other professionals, and must be empathetic and caring, understanding that this does not result in compromising standards for academic excellence. It sometimes helps to team up a reluctant teacher with a skilled advisor until such time as that teacher gains confidence. Any middle school teacher who absolutely refuses to serve as an advisor to middle school youngsters should not be a middle school teacher!

Q: How much funding or resources are needed to launch an advisory program?

A: We believe some of the best activities come through minimal expenses: a piece of rope, a pile of newspapers, or your imagination. When in doubt, some schools like to browse through *The Definitive Middle School Guide* for ideas and leads.

Q: What can a Principal do to launch and keep an effective advisory invigorated?

A: Principals and other middle school administrators are key to an effective advisory program. Where the principal is indifferent to the school's advisory program, such a program is doomed to failure. A keen interest in the program is essential for a principal. Such a principal insures that there is a professional library of current middle-level educational literature including materials on advisory and advocacy and that this collection is updated regularly. That same principal explores effective advisory programs in the area and provides opportunities for staff to visit others schools to witness them. Likewise, after initial training of staff, the principal orchestrates follow up clinics and an end-of-year evaluation of the entire advisory program. The middle school principal must be assured that new staff members who join the faculty each year are properly trained and initiated into the school's advisory program.

Q: What should I be reading to enrich my knowledge and ability to be an effective advisor?

A: Check out the NMSA web site, www.nmsa.org. Click on the bookstore and

review offerings on advisory and advocacy. Two of our favorite recommendations are: *Advisory: Definitions, Descriptions, Decisions, Directions* by Galassi, Gullede & Cox (1998) and *The Definitive Middle School Guide* by Forte & Schurr (1993), pages 117-153.

As our trio continues its road trips, we hope we'll cross paths with you and be able to answer your advisory questions in person.

J. Thomas Kane, a Past President of NYSMSA as well as NJMSA, is currently an educational consultant specializing in middle schools; **Jim Burns**, President of the New Mexico Middle School Association, is a college professor and middle school consultant; **Jaynellen Behre Jenkins**, President-elect of the New Jersey Middle School Association, is principal of Holdrum Middle School in River Vale, NJ. Contact information for the trio: J. Thomas Kane; 30 Woodmere Lane, Tenafly NJ 07670; (201) 568-4311; TIFKANE@aol.com.

NYSMSA Regional Meetings Planned

NYSMSA will be holding regional meetings in the fall to provide an update on middle-level issues. Attendees will receive NYSMSA's new pamphlet series on the Essential Elements as well as a computer CD filled with all the pertinent middle-level documents one could want.

Contact your regional director for details on when and where this important meeting will take place. Regions and directors are listed on the inside back cover of this publication and at www.nysmsa.org.



Making the Home-School Connection More Apparent to a Parent

Carolyn Hirst-Loucks and Kim P. Loucks

A parent or guardian is a child's first teacher. Up to age ten, the beginning of adolescence, children have spent approximately 85% of their time with these "teachers". Critically important learnings are taught in the home before a child ever walks through any school door. Before entering kindergarten children are expected to be able to function independently and cooperatively, internalize a value system, and exhibit good social and interpersonal skills. These must be firmly in place so that the task of knowledge acquisition can begin in earnest. To successfully develop student learning, our middle schools must foster and strengthen the working partnership between the school and home. To paraphrase Kappan, trying to do otherwise, is like "raking leaves in a high wind"; a lot of hard work with few, if any, favorable results.

As you think about your favorite adolescent you might wonder, "What happened?" They entered school with all of their ducks in a row and somewhere along the line, they quacked up. Very often, frantic phone calls from parents and guardians make teachers aware that these same behaviors observed in school are also occurring in the home. To effectively educate the whole child we must involve and encourage the family to stay the course. It may not come as much of a surprise but a number of researchers have found that the most important non-instructional influence on student achievement in school is the involvement of the family. Virtually any type of parental involvement boosts student success. Research and our own experience show that as students progress through the school years, parent/guardian participation wanes. It is no doubt that on Open House night, there are many more cars in the parking lot at the elementary

school than at the middle school. A focus of schools must be to provide parents and guardians with programs that meet their needs, are encompassing, on going, well planned, and carefully evaluated.

One of the essential elements of a standards-focused middle-level program is to have the school's leadership and staff commit to and establish strong partnerships between the school, home, and community. As far back as 1989 in *Turning Points*, one of the primary recommendations was to re-engage families. That same year, in support of the Carnegie Report, the New York State Regents Policy Statement on Middle-Level Education suggested that it was essential to inform and involve parents of middle-level students. It is crucial that schools work to help parents and guardians understand the instructional program, their children's progress, and specific ways to help their children at home with school work, school decision, and successful development through early adolescence.

For many schools, this type of programming means a change in the school climate and culture. School can be a very intimidating place for many parents and guardians, and it is the school's responsibility to allay those fears. A first step in this process might be to gather a group of stakeholders together. This group would be composed of administrators, teachers, parents, and students who would envision a school that welcomes open communication and involvement between the school and home. From this vision, goals and objectives could be developed and plans made.

According to the Regents Policy Statement parents and guardians must understand the instructional program so that they can support the school's efforts at home. A school might want to provide multiple opportunities to welcome adults into the building. This can be done through:

- Open houses;
- Allowing parents and guardians to observe classes;
- Parental participation in the school, using the parent/guardian's knowledge and expertise as an instructional aid or tool; and
- Providing workshops that focus on specific topics that are geared toward parents and guardians, such as information regarding curricular issues, standards, and assessments.

Parents and guardians have to be made constantly aware of their child's progress. We must make sure that these connections are positive in nature, helping the adults to be comfortable and supportive of the school. This might be accomplished through:

- Frequent phone calls, emphasizing the good things happening in school;
- Written reports on a regular basis;
- "Good news" post cards;
- Newsletters;
- Student recognition programs;
- Use of the media;
- Conferences, both teacher and student led;
- Homework hotlines; and
- Showcases of student learning and work, such as math nights and science fairs.

Finally, we can help parents and guardians at home. This is best accomplished through school-led activities such as:

- Newsletters with parenting ideas and strategies;
- Workshops based on topics generated from

parent/guardian needs and/or requests;

- Involvement in projects that are an integral part of student learning;
- Providing checklists that monitor specific study strategies;
- Providing lists of helpful resources and bibliographies;
- Having open access to school counselors, teachers, and administrators; and
- Making the building accessible to all.

In developing such a program, we must continually go back to our original stakeholder committee. It is from this group that we will find the match or fit with our community. Just as our adolescents are unique and different, our schools are as well. What might work best for one school building may not be appropriate for another, even within the same district.

The key element to being a truly effective partnership is to remember that the program should be comprehensive, long lasting, and well planned. These things take time. For many schools we are literally trying to change the school culture. We want to do so in such a way that parent involvement is the norm and not the exception. Making what happens in our schools more apparent to parents and guardians will strengthen the bond between the home and school. This will help us to reach the ultimate goal of students achieving success in school and in the years beyond.

Carolyn Hirst-Loucks is Assistant Superintendent of Instruction for the Auburn Enlarged City School District; 78 Thornton Avenue; Auburn NY 13021; Carolyn_Hirst-Loucks@auburn.cnyric.org. **Kim P. Loucks**, NYSMSA Region II Director, is a Staff Development Specialist at Onondaga-Cortland-Madison BOCES; 6820 Thompson Road, Syracuse NY 13221; (315) 433-2662; kloucks@ocmboces.org.



Statewide Network of Middle-Level Education Support Schools

Essential Element 2 Alive and Well in Suffolk County

Andy Greene and Dr. Selena Smith

Candlewood and West Hollow are middle schools in the Half Hollow Hills Central School District on Long Island. As middle level support schools, we have worked hard at constantly refining our programs. Our mantra has always been “continuous improvement.” The organization and structure that exists at Candlewood and West Hollow, 6-8 middle schools, helps us successfully meet the needs of our students. This article will describe some specific information with regards to Essential Element 2: The Educational Program. We feel that this one area helps make Candlewood and West Hollow successful. It is also the area in which we were selected as support schools.

Personal and Social Development

Academic rigor is critically important to maintaining a successful middle school. We also feel that the intellectual, personal, social, and physical developments of middle level students are equally important. To accomplish this goal, we have instituted a character education program that is conducted primarily through our advisory program. On a weekly or biweekly schedule, both schools provide an extended advisory that enables teachers to discuss important issues with students at length. Teachers are encouraged to continue the dialogue in their content area classes as the need arises. Additionally, the counseling department runs many different groups aimed at helping students

confront the myriad of changes that adolescents experience. We have also modified our physical education program to balance the amount of life-long fitness issues with competitive team sports. Finally, we work hard at providing students with consequences that also “teach.”

Teaming

A critical aspect of our program is the focus on teaming. In grades six and seven, we have teams consisting of teachers in English, math, social studies and science. The schools operate on a nine-period day in which teachers teach five classes, are assigned a duty, and have an individual preparation period. The teachers also have a common daily team-planning period.

The eighth grade program is departmental in nature. Students follow a schedule that is similar to what they might find in a high school. We feel that it is important to transition students into the kind of culture they would experience at the next level. One programmatic decision we made to foster collaboration among the teachers was to give the eighth grade teachers a common preparation or lunch period. A nice outgrowth of this has been that the eighth grade teachers meet together. They share strategies, discuss programs, and brainstorm ways to reach the needs of the students. Teachers do this on a voluntary basis and they have found this meeting time to be extremely successful.

One final piece that we have found to be a critical component of our program is the fact that we have assigned a guidance counselor to each 6th and 7th grade team. The counselors serve as a liaison between teachers, parents, and administration. By assigning counselors to

teams, we are able to effectively maintain open lines of communication with all constituencies.

Blended Program

At Candlewood and West Hollow, we have a blended program in each grade and in all four major content areas. The blended team has fewer students assigned to it to accommodate the needs of the special education students. This also allows the teachers to more effectively meet the needs of the individual student, while ensuring they have the best chance to do well on the state assessments. One of the reasons why our blended program is so successful is the training that is offered for the teachers who volunteer to be in the program. Additionally, a consultant meets with the blended teachers on a regular basis to offer ideas and to problem-solve situations as they arise.

Whole Child

One of the critical components of Essential Element 2 is the development of an educational program that recognizes the need to address the whole child. To accomplish this goal, we offer numerous opportunities for students to become involved with clubs, activities, and subject area challenges. We also have a peer-mentoring program that is designed to have students help one another resolve their problems. As an outgrowth of our Counseling Centers, and through the efforts of our school nurse, we have established a mentoring program in which adults from various fields in business meet with a select group of students once a week in a “big brother, big sister” type of role. We also offer an extensive extra-curricular program ranging from chess club to a spring musical.

Another aspect of addressing the needs of the whole child is the responsibility that is shared for student success by all the team members. The team meeting time affords teachers an opportunity to plan instruction, meet with parents, and discuss the specific needs of the students. In addition, we work hard at articulat-

ing our program across the grade levels, by providing faculty and department meeting time for teachers to discuss concerns related to their particular content area. Finally, team teachers plan integrated units, organize team recognition activities, and involve special area teachers in their planning.

Articulation

Sixth grade teachers primarily teach one of the major content areas. As a result of this, articulation between teachers within the buildings is very good. Teachers in the same department are able to share numerous strategies and ideas. There is also articulation between the elementary feeder schools and the middle school staff. Counselors meet with each 5th grade teacher to get specific information on individual students. This information is used when our counselors configure the teams for grades six. We do our best to balance teams to ensure no team is “labeled.”

Performance Expectations

To help create consistency among our teachers, we encourage our staff to create some common grading criteria for teachers who teach the same subject area. This helps us to ensure that our grading policy is equitable for all students. Additionally, teachers are constantly sharing lesson plans, assessments, and scoring criteria. We differentiate the manner in which we offer AIS services for all students in grades 6-8. Each grade level has its own unique program. Between the counselors meeting with any student who fails a class, to the manner in which we offer academic support for our students, we continuously strive to meet the individual needs of our students.

Professional Development

Under the direction of our superintendent, the district has created a “house” plan that guides the efforts of our Professional Development Plan. The “house” adds consistency to the

types of courses, workshops, and consultants that the district offers. It has focused the staff on the critical attributes that our district feels will ultimately help students achieve success. Contractually, teachers must take 15 hours of professional development in courses that are aligned with the “house.” Principals have the obligation to approve all courses, and there are numerous conversations about instruction and assessment. Notables that include, Grant Wiggins, Charlotte Danielson, and experts in Differentiated Instruction work with the staff in order for them to become proficient in the attributes of the house.

Curricula

During the summer, there are many curriculum committees that meet to refine the various courses of study. We are currently looking to include the Understanding by Design framework into our curricular design, and teachers have been encouraged to integrate differentiated instruction strategies into their lesson plans. Many of the departments collaboratively create assignments that are aligned with the state assessments. Teachers use these diagnostic tools to monitor the learning of each student.

The above description of our program gives you a glimpse of how we address Essential Element 2: The Educational Program. As principals, we are blessed to work with caring, committed teachers and support staff. Please do not hesitate to contact us if we can be of assistance.

Andy Greene is principal of Candlewood Middle School, 1200 Carls Straight Path, Dix Hills NY 11746; (631) 592-3300.

Dr. Selena Smith is principal of West Hollow Middle School, 250 Old East Neck Road, Melville NY 11747; (631) 592-3400.

Charting a Course of Excellence through Social and Emotional Literacy

Jericho Steering Committee and Student Team Advisors

Carol Dell’Erban and Kathleen Rittel (Eds.)

Middle school years are a time of turmoil and change, even under the best circumstances. Increasing academic pressures, hormonal changes, and concerns about peer relationships all contribute to stress in early adolescence. As such, middle schools must be sensitive to these needs and develop a comprehensive plan. Charting a Course of Excellence, a multi-year action plan, allows Jericho Middle School to effectively meet the social and emotional needs of all students during this turbulent period, in addition to encompassing the Essential Elements.

Essential Element 1: Philosophy and Mission

The Jericho Middle School’s mission statement emphasizes the social, emotional, and intellectual growth of our students. According to this mission statement, administrators, teachers, support staff, and parents work together to ensure student success. The mission statement is aligned with the Board of Education’s resolution to promote the social and emotional development of all students. Faculty and staff work cooperatively in an ongoing effort to assess the effectiveness of programs, with revision and restructuring as an outgrowth of this process.

The Jericho Middle School’s vision is developmentally appropriate and educationally sound. Social and emotional literacy programs allow students to develop the necessary strategies to resolve conflicts peacefully, to solve problems creatively, to develop an awareness of diversity, and to deal successfully with societal issues. Our programs are integrated courses of

study reflecting current research, best practices, and the shared vision of faculty and staff. The development of a comprehensive program ensures academic excellence, as well as the social and emotional growth of our students. As a result, Jericho Middle School students benefit from a comprehensive network of academic and emotional support. Faculty, staff, community representatives, and peer mentors assist students with their educational and developmental challenges. Programs that promote social and emotional literacy include guidance support groups, classroom-based bully prevention initiatives, character education activities, and school mentor programs. Through these efforts, our school's philosophy and mission statement reflect the needs and characteristics of young adolescents.

Essential Element 3: Organization and Structure

Flexible organizational structures provide a framework that allow for the creative use of time, organization, staff, space, and instructional groupings. This organizational design provides faculty with an opportunity to utilize varied teaching approaches. These ongoing efforts allow faculty to refine the delivery of instruction to meet the New York State Learning Standards, as well as the individual needs of students.

In order to meet the ever-changing academic, social, and emotional needs of the school culture and the growth in population, the teaming concept has assumed many forms. This is most evident in Grade Six where each teacher on a team teaches two core subjects. Math and science are linked, as are social studies and English Language Arts. The teams are clustered to create a more intimate environment that supports a successful transition from the elementary schools. In addition, this configuration allows for coordination of field trips, team-building activities, and at-risk/child study team (CST) meetings. Grade Seven and Eight teams consist of math, science, social studies, and

English Language Arts teachers. The modifications to their teaming configuration include the adoption of elective exploratories and the Student Team Advisor position. The elective exploratory program allows teachers to teach beyond their traditional content areas. Middle school faculty members are encouraged to explore professional interests in the creation of electives, while allowing students to enroll in courses relevant to their personal needs, interests, or talents.

The organization and structure of the Jericho Middle School supports academic excellence and the personal development of all students. This is reflected through the ongoing commitment to teaming among the professional staff. Teams of administrators, support staff, classroom teachers, special education faculty, and counseling center staff collaborate with one another at regularly scheduled meetings to examine the whole child and to foster an atmosphere conducive to learning. The implementation of a Student Team Advisor (STA) position reflects the school's evolving efforts to provide essential support for all students. The Student Team Advisor serves as a liaison to encore teachers, Learning Center staff, administrators, and parents. The Student Team Advisor further serves as a child advocate and a coordinator of team activities.

The Student Team Advisor coordinates the Social and Emotional Literacy programs for the team. The teaming concept hinges upon a sense of belonging as fostered by a team identity. Examples of programs which have been successfully implemented include many team building activities throughout the year. Some activities which STAs have created in order to develop a team's identity include designing logos, creating logo tee-shirts, and producing newsletters.

Further Social and Emotional Literacy (SEL) programs coordinated by the STA include the following: Voices of Love and Freedom, a

literature-based program that promotes tolerance; Bully Reduction Anti-Violence Education (B.R.A.V.E.), a program which promotes a safe and bully-proof school climate; and Words of Wisdom, a program of inspirational quotations desired to encourage students to reflect upon their behavior.

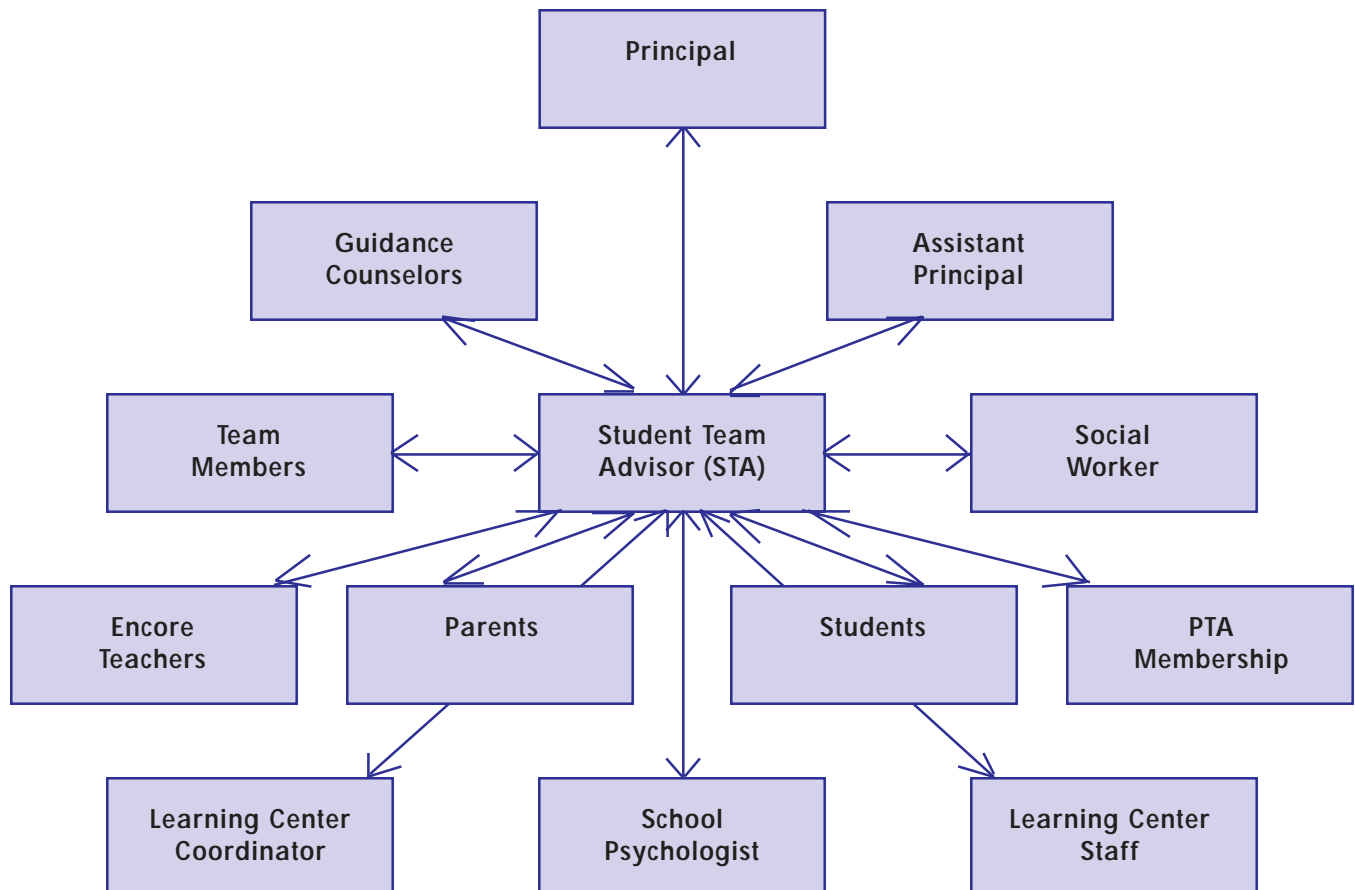
In terms of recognizing the social/emotional needs of the team's students, the STA program has expanded student recognition programs to include Catch-A-Rising Star postcards, student of the month certificates, and positive reinforcement coupons. Along with recognizing student achievement, the STA carefully monitors student attendance and lateness as early indicators of academic and emotional concerns.

The STA is also responsible for integrating the team into the broader spectrum of school-wide events. The STA facilitates the develop-

ment of 9/11 memorial activities, coordination of the mission statement slogan contest, and implementation of the school-wide theme. STAs ensure participation in the Quality Circle Training Program, allowing students to discuss personal concerns within the confines of a non-threatening environment. Ultimately, the STA promotes the alignment of district, team, and individual student goals.

As the Jericho School District grows, the role of the STA as a communication facilitator becomes even more important. The STA reconfigures parent conferences to increase communication with encore teachers in order to maintain optimum success. The STA also serves as a parent contact, often reaching out to parents in order to address team concerns. The STA has a visible role as a team leader through involvement with incoming grade-level parent meetings and representation at PTSA meetings.

The STA's Role in the Communication Process



In addition, the STA works to foster team communication with encore teachers through the revision of protocol, posting of team activities, team exam schedules, team newsletters, and invitations to team meetings. Furthermore, a partnership exists between the STA and the guidance counselors, psychologists, speech therapists, and other support personnel. These integral members meet both formally and informally to address student concerns and to share important information. Having the responsibility for monitoring each student's SEL and academic progress, the STA is an active participant in CSE, CST, at-risk meetings and annual reviews. At the aforementioned meetings, the STA often offers input to IEP and 504 modifications.

Many organizational issues arise other than student achievement. The STA serves as a professional guide by coordinating routine procedures to enhance safety, communication, data collection, and organizational procedures. For example, the STAs create grade-level supply lists, implement schedules to support special projects and activities, and coordinate the team calendar of events. One avenue the STA uses to maintain the organization of the team is the coordination and facilitation of team meetings. Teams meet several times a week, with all necessary support staff. Agenda items include student concerns, professional responsibilities, transitioning new faculty to the teaming concept, middle school philosophy, and district goals.

Jericho Middle School successfully involves parents, staff, and students for the purposes of communication and planning. Various committees and organizations such as the Steering Committee, School-Safety Committee, Shared-Decision Making team, Student Council, PTSA, and SEPTA all act as forums for communication. All constituents have input in the decision-making process and the Jericho Middle School Action Plan embodies this concept.

In order for educators to perform at a high level, it is necessary for all administrators and teachers to be reflective practitioners. Thus, there is a constant effort to explore curriculum that is challenging, integrative, and exploratory; to encourage a variety of teaching and learning approaches; to design assessments and evaluations that promote learning; to expand advocacy programs; and to articulate a shared vision to each constituency. This ongoing commitment to middle-level education is evidenced by the collaborative efforts of parents, students, staff, and administrators. Ongoing communication, support, and commitment all reflect a shared vision that is consistent, developmentally appropriate, and educationally sound. The academic, social, and emotional growth of students, as well as the professional development of all staff members, is encouraged continuously. The Jericho Middle School program fosters an educationally sound program for students and a professionally satisfying environment for all staff.

References

- Adler, Judith, et al. (2004). *A student team advisor and social emotional development handbook*. Jericho, NY: Jericho Public Schools.
- The State Education Department. (2003). *Essential elements of standards-focused middle-level schools and programs*. Albany, NY: The University of the State of New York.
- This we believe: Developmentally responsive middle-level schools* (1995). Columbus, OH: National Middle School Association.

For further information, contact **Cecile Wren** (cwren@jerichoschools.org), the principal of Jericho Middle School; 99 Cedar Swamp Road, Jericho NY 11753; (516) 203-3620.

Building Capacity: An Organizational Perspective

Joseph P. Dragone and
Cheryl H. Champ

In continuing to build capacity within Middle Level Education (MLE) organizations, *The Essential Elements of Standards-Focused Middle Schools* offers a unique framework to implement and assess current educational practices that address all components of a complete middle-level program. Although the strength of the Elements regarding holistic program is in their interdependence, there is significant value in realizing each of the elements independently, as they each provide a distinct perspective for self-assessment. How MLE is structured and organized can have a direct impact on supporting all of the related essential elements.

Essential Element 3: Organization and Structure

From the body of literature concerning modern-structural organizational analyses, Bolman and Deal (1997, 2002), Blau and Scott (1962), Burns and Stalker (1961) and others identify organizational perspectives that support developing structures that respond to the dynamic needs of organizations. This perspective lends itself to application within the context of educational organizations. Essentially, understanding the macro application of organizational analysis enables micro application at the building, team and individual teacher level. As organic systems, schools must consider both the formal and informal structures that reflect the goals and values of the organization as well as the needs of its members. Building capacity via organizational analyses not only emphasizes formal structures that support daily functions and activities, but broader structures that provide support for the professional growth of individuals as well as the organization as a whole. This concurrent growth based on needs

assessment, implementation and reassessment contributes to the individual's ability and the organization's ability to adapt to the changing needs of its population while remaining focused on core values. An understanding of this perspective, with an emphasis on the tenet of building capacity, underscores the value of implementing Essential Element 3, developing an organizational structure that promotes academic achievement and personal development.

Using this element as a self-assessment tool, organizational structures can be examined with regard to the degree that they support the goals of a standards-focused middle-level program. Over the past three years, this process has allowed the administration and faculty of Cohoes Middle School (CMS) to develop and adapt different structures supporting a program that is shaped to support the holistic development of young adolescents.

Formal Structures

A needs assessment conducted by the CMS Leadership Team noted several concerns regarding the teaming process. By restructuring the master schedule to address these concerns, the team approach is now fostered throughout the building at all grade levels. To reinforce the correlate emphasizing the need to support the gradual transition of students from the self-contained classrooms of elementary school, four sixth grade teams (as opposed to 1.5 in 2001) have been created, which maintain a sense of classroom community while providing opportunity for independent learning experiences. As a building of 540 students, CMS now has a total of seven teams as opposed to the four teams building-wide that were functioning in 2001.

To support team effectiveness (Dickinson and Erb, 1998; Kain, 1998; Merenbloom, 1991) and to foster the creative use of time, all teams have flexible blocks of common instructional periods for lesson implementation using various pedagogical approaches based on student need. To support the correlate of common planning

time, all teams have a daily common period to facilitate interdisciplinary planning and to provide parents the structure to meet with all of their child's teachers simultaneously.

Whereas the team structures support and facilitate horizontal pathways among grade levels and interdisciplinary approaches to instruction, an emphasis is also placed on strengthening vertical articulation of curriculum across grade levels within content areas. Program effectiveness is centered on these two processes operating concurrently. As teams meet daily, departments also meet every three weeks to develop, align and assess curriculum applying the Learning Standards. Exit outcomes have been developed for all core areas, and formal structures based on the work of Tina Blythe and Grant Wiggins are used as the building curricular model.

The CMS consultant-teaching model for special education is rooted in the application of co-teaching, and students with special needs are integrated throughout the various academic programs. The co-teaching structure emphasizes the interdependence between the classroom teacher and the special education teacher in meeting the needs of special education students while strengthening instruction for all students.

Creating Time for Learning

Since *A Nation at Risk*, the debate has remained unsettled regarding the need for creating time for learning. At CMS, initial building-wide programmatic changes attempted to maximize student time on task and to minimize time needed for non-instructional activities. Eliminating a 15-minute homeroom period and shorting student lunch periods added 37 minutes of instructional time within the school day.

In an effort to support students who need additional help to meet the standards, different models were developed to create additional instructional opportunities. A new eighth grade

team called MAGIC (Morning Academic Group In Cohoes) was established that observes an extended school day model consisting of a period of academic support taught before the start of the regular school day by the teachers on that team. As this period is in addition to regular classroom study, it has provided the opportunity to supplement as well as support current curricular programs. Through a collaborative effort with Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute (RPI), we have included a robotics component in this program to support the MST standards. Using an interdisciplinary approach, students have an additional opportunity to realize abstract mathematical concepts via the authentic application of skills and prior knowledge.

Other teams throughout the building have classes that run beyond the school day. Students who have been determined to be in danger of not meeting the standards are enrolled in after school classes that are taught by their core team of teachers, and all teams also run Homework Clubs on a weekly basis. During the school day, a STEP (Student Teacher Enrichment Program) was added, with an emphasis in sixth grade, to support habits of successful learning and to foster close, sustained relationships between students and their related teachers.

Structural Integrating of Technology

In an effort to integrate technology into the educational program, all rooms have access to the local server for student folders as well as for the Internet. All classrooms are also equipped with a varying degree of hardware and different applications. Through support from The Oracle Foundation and the Beaumont Foundation of America, wireless capability is available throughout the building. Additionally, the computer lab and media center are equipped with access to support the regular academic program as well as the differentiated needs of English Language Learners and special education students.

Beyond the robotics program, which has expanded throughout the building, we have integrated other technological applications to address the correlate that emphasizes this approach to support student learning. Using interactive Smartboards, students and teachers have the ability to transform whiteboard materials into notes, post classroom images to the Internet, manipulate graphs and maps and edit student work in a fully supported, technological environment. Applying handheld technology using PALM Pilots and Web-based technology, teachers can administer assessments that are immediately scored at the individual student level; feedback allows teachers to adapt instruction accordingly. Additionally, by administering Web-based criterion referenced assessments, teachers immediately have access to the strengths and weaknesses of individual student achievement as well as potential gaps in curriculum and instruction.

Formal Structures for Professional Growth

As mentioned earlier, the growth of the individuals within the organization contributes to the growth of the organization as a whole. Structures can be created to foster this approach, which essentially commits time to professional growth and self-assessment on a regular basis. Essential Element 7 addresses the need for continued professional development; the premise of effectively and efficiently applying this Element falls within creating organizational structures that address this need. That is, from an organizational perspective, appropriate structures can be created to support the implementation of successful professional growth.

Rooted in the work of Carlene Murphy (2001), all faculty members at CMS are divided into study groups that meet biweekly to address essential questions based on building-wide needs assessments as outlined by the Building Planning Team and the Leadership Team. Professional development structured in this manner

keeps the focus at the building level based on current needs and allows all faculty to contribute to individual and organizational growth. Each group addresses different needs by conducting action research in their identified area. Reflecting upon student work collaboratively allows teachers to discuss what if any change is occurring with regard to student achievement and the different strategies that they are implementing. For the past two years, many groups have been exploring different essential questions including developing reading comprehension strategies, fostering the fifth-to-sixth-grade transition, identifying necessary student organizational skills and creating structures to support character education. Groups collect pre- and post-test data, and their work is discussed at monthly Instructional Council meetings that are attended by all faculty. Effective strategies are then implemented building-wide via the Building Planning Team. This holistic approach helps develop consistency among grade levels and teams.

Exploring and understanding broader concepts of organizational analysis lends itself to creating applications for supporting Essential Element 3. In sum, organizational structures can be examined with regard to the degree that they support the goals of a standards-focused middle level program. Using an organizational perspective to address building capacity not only focuses on creating formal structures that impact the actual school day based on student need, but also on structures that create opportunities for collaborative professional development. In unison, these two structures work together to support individual and organizational growth with regard to *The Essential Elements of Standards-Focused Middle Schools*. The following suggestions are starting points for applying this perspective to middle-level organizations:

- Work collaboratively with collective bargaining units to develop a schedule that supports Middle Level Education.
- Look for opportunities to minimize or

eliminate non-instructional time.

- You don't necessarily need a "block" schedule to create extended instructional periods. Focus on creating a schedule that provides teachers and teams with flexibility based on instructional approach and student need. Try to avoid a "one size fits all" approach to the master schedule.
- Provide teachers the consistent opportunity to collaborate for professional growth. Allow staff development to become an organizational structure, not something that is reserved for staff development days or work beyond the school day or school year.
- Create opportunities for successful co-teaching to benefit all students. Integrating this model allows many opportunities for varied instructional strategies.
- Strive for consistency within structures regarding curriculum design across all content areas.
- Develop opportunities for establishing partnerships with higher education, private and public enterprise.
- Assessment and evaluation are part of the organizational growth cycle. Use feedback loops and other formal and informal structures to monitor organizational change and to help develop new opportunities for building capacity.

References

- Blau, P. M. and Scott, W.R. (1962). *Formal organizations: A comparative approach*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Bolman, L. G. and Deal, T. E. (1997). *Reframing organizations: Artistry, choice and leadership*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Bolman, L. G. and Deal, T. E. (2002). *Reframing the path to school leadership*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.

Blythe, Tina. (1998). *The teaching for understanding guide*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Burns, T. and Stalker, G. M. (1961). *The management of innovation*. London: Tavistock Publications.

Dickinson, Thomas S. and Erb, Thomas O. (1998). *We gain more than we give: Teaming in middle schools*. Columbus, OH: National Middle School Association.

Kain, Daniel L. (1998). *Camel makers: Building effective teams together*. Columbus, OH: National Middle School Association.

Merenbloom, Elliot Y. (1991). *The team process*. Columbus, OH: National Middle School Association.

Murphy, Carlene U. and Lick, Dale W. (2001). *Whole-faculty study groups: Creating student based professional development*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.

Joseph P. Dragone (jdragone@cohoes.org) is the principal and **Cheryl H. Champ** (cchamp@cohoes.org) is the assistant principal of Cohoes Middle School; 7 Bevan Street, Cohoes, NY 12047; (518) 237-4131.

Share YOUR Best Practices.

NYSMSA is interested in collecting examples of Best Practices from middle-level teachers. These will be distributed in paper publications and posted on NYSMSA's website. SHARE the wealth! Submit your experiences to editor@nysmsa.org.

Submission of Articles

In Transition accepts manuscripts for publication consideration. Our journal is produced by the New York State Middle School Association and is dedicated to those teachers, counselors, administrators, parents, and others serving the needs of students aged 10-15. *In Transition* is a juried publication; all manuscripts are reviewed and approved for publication by a panel of members from the NYSMSA Board of Directors.

Manuscripts describing successful programs, stimulating projects, exemplary teaching techniques, unique team concepts, action research, and promising practices are welcome! We are particularly interested in articles on implementing the new Standards, teaming, interdisciplinary instruction, authentic assessment, flexible scheduling, integrating technology into instructional programs, and application of the *Essential Elements*.

Please note the following format guidelines:

LENGTH: 400-2,000 words (two to eight pages)

FORMAT: MS Word or compatible, double space, Times New Roman 12, 1-inch margins. Citations of referenced works should follow current APA standards.

ILLUSTRATIONS: All illustrations, tables, charts, photographs, etc. must be high quality, black and white or grayscale. Photographs must be in JPEG format and include captions identifying subjects, activity, and source or photographer. All illustrations become the property of NYSMSA.

COVER PAGE: Each article submitted must include a cover page with the following information: Title, Author, Position, School OR Home Address (please indicate which), Telephone Number/s, E-Mail Address, AND a brief synopsis of the content of the manuscript.

SUBMIT TO: All documents must be submitted as e-mail attachments to:
editor@nysmsa.org

Please note: Only e-mail submissions will be considered; do not send fax or paper copies of manuscripts.

DEADLINES: To be considered for publication, manuscripts must be received by August 15 for the fall issue, December 15 for the winter issue, and March 15 for the spring issue.

NYSMSA Board of Directors 2003-2004

Officers

President

Jeannette Stern
Wantagh MS
3299 Beltagh Avenue
Wantagh, NY 11793
(516) 679-6350
stern@nysmsa.org

Executive Director

Dennis Tosetto
NYSMSA West
2201 Pine Avenue
Niagara Falls, NY 14301
(716) 282-6511
tosetto@nysmsa.org

Vice President

Susan Allen
Hilton CSD
225 West Avenue
Hilton, NY 14468
(585) 392-1000
allen@nysmsa.org

Recording Secretary / Historian

Teal Abel
Indian River MS
32735A County Route 29
Philadelphia, NY 13673
(315) 642-0125
abel@nysmsa.org

Treasurer / Conference Director

Linda Ruest
WNY SSC; Erie 1 BOCES
1050 Maryvale Avenue
Cheektowaga, NY 14225
(716) 630-4200
ruest@nysmsa.org

Director of Professional Development

James Tobin
Palmyra-Macedon CSD
151 Hyde Parkway
Palmyra, NY 14522
(315) 597-3401
tobin@nysmsa.org

Director of Research and Technology

Jeff Craig
Jamesville-DeWitt MS
6280 Randall Road
Jamesville, NY 13078
(315) 445-8360
craig@nysmsa.org

SED Liaison

David Payton
NYSED 462 EBA
Albany, NY 12234
(518) 474-5923
payton@nysmsa.org

NYSMSA Office

Administrative Assistant

Julie Schwartz
NYSMSA
P.O. Box 53
Pleasantville, NY 10570
(914) 747-9241
schwartz@nysmsa.org

Regions & Directors

Region 1 BOCES

Monroe #1
Monroe 2-Orleans
Wayne-Finger Lakes
Steuben-Allegany
and ALL Livingston County

Acting Region 1 Director

Jeff Craig (see **Director of
Research and Technology**)

Region 2 BOCES

Cayuga-Onondaga
Madison-Oneida
Oneida-Herkimer-Madison
Onondaga-Cortland-Madison
Oswego

Region 2 Director

Kim Loucks
OCM BOCES
6820 Thompson Road
Syracuse, NY 13221
(315) 433-2662
loucks@nysmsa.org

Region 3 BOCES

Hamilton-Fulton-Montgomery
Herkimer
Washington-Saratoga-Warren-
Hamilton-Essex

Region 3 Director

Chris Reed
Glens Falls MS
20 Quade Street
Glens Falls, NY 12801
(518) 793-3418
reed@nysmsa.org

Region 4 BOCES

Broome-Tioga
Delaware-Chenango-
Madison-Otsego (except

Delaware County; see
Region 5)

Schuyler-Chemung-Tioga
Tompkins-Seneca-Tioga

Region 4 Director

Tom Phillips
South Seneca MS
7263 Main Street
Ovid, NY 14521
(607) 869-9636
phillips@nysmsa.org

Region 5 BOCES

Capital Region
Otsego-Northern Catskills
Questar III
and ALL Delaware County

Region 5 Director

Randall Squier
Delhi MS
2 Sheldon Drive
Delhi, NY 13753
(607) 746-8775
squier@nysmsa.org

Region 6 BOCES

Dutchess
Orange-Ulster
Putnam-Northern Westchester
Rockland
Sullivan
Ulster
Southern Westchester

Region 6 Co-Directors

Janie Fitzgerald
Scarsdale MS
134 Mamaroneck Road
Scarsdale, NY 10583
(914) 721-2600
fitzgerald@nysmsa.org

Jim McIntyre

Crispell MS
PO Box 780
Pine Bush, NY 12566
(845) 744-2031
mcintyre@nysmsa.org

Region 7

ALL New York City Districts

Region 7 Co-Directors

Maria T. Esponda
Region One Learning Support
Center
One Fordham Plaza; Rm. 816
Bronx, NY 10458
(718) 741-7075
esponda@nysmsa.org

Philip Steinberg
IS 218 J.P. Sinnott
370 Fountain Avenue
Brooklyn, NY 11208
(718) 847-9050
steinberg@nysmsa.org

Region 8 BOCES

Nassau
Eastern Suffolk
Western Suffolk
Region 8 Director
Maryann Fletcher
Hauppauge MS
600 Town Line Road
Hauppauge, NY 11788
(631) 761-8230
fletcher@nysmsa.org

Region 9 BOCES

Cattaraugus-Allegany
Erie #1
Erie #2-Chautauqua-
Cattaraugus
Genesee Valley (except
Livingston County; see
Region 1)
Orleans-Niagara
Region 9 Director
Nancy Sampson
Cuba-Rushford MS
5476 Route 305 N
Cuba, NY 14727
(585) 968-2650
sampson@nysmsa.org

Region 10 BOCES

Champlain Valley
Franklin-Essex-Hamilton
Jefferson-Lewis
St. Lawrence-Lewis

Region 10 Director

Brian Sherman
Indian River MS
32735A County Route 29
Philadelphia, NY 13673
(315) 642-0125
sherman@nysmsa.org

*Your region is determined by
your school's BOCES; for
retirees and businesses, it is
based on place of residence
or business location.*

NYSMSA's 24th Annual Conference

Reaching New Heights in Middle-Level Education

Lake Placid, New York
October 21-23, 2004



Thursday, October 21

- Pre-Conference Sessions
 - * Operation Respect
 - * Helping All Students Succeed with Linda Tilton
 - * Middle-Level Leadership with Susan Allen and Jeff Craig
 - * Meeting the Developmental Needs of Middle-Level Learners with Linda Ruest
- Banquet with Keynote by literacy expert Janet Allen

Friday, October 22

- General Assembly with Keynote by Peter Yarrow of Peter, Paul, and Mary
- Practitioner Workshops
- Feature Presentations
- SED Updates on NYS Middle-Level Initiative
- Trade Exhibit

Saturday, October 23

- Breakfast with Champions

For more information, visit www.nysmsa.org



NYSMSA
P.O. Box 53
Pleasantville, NY 10570