

# IN Transition

Journal of the New York State Middle School Association



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# 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.

## **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.

## **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.

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Original art by Ann Cantwell, a student at Saranac Lake Middle School, Saranac Lake, NY.



## A few thoughts from the President...

Jeannette Stern, Ed.D.



*Order is not pressure which is imposed on society from without, but an equilibrium which is set up from within.*  
— Jose Ortega y Gasset

Over the last decade, education at the middle level has seen some major changes, some considered beneficial, others not. We have seen two versions of the *Essential Elements of Standards-Focused Middle-Level Schools and Programs*, a new *Regents Policy Statement on Middle-Level Education and Schools with Middle-Level Grades*, and now multiple versions of what strategies should be used to implement the new policy statement. In addition to all of this work on the state level is the *No Child Left Behind* federal legislation that brings, among other things, testing in ELA and math in grades three through eight along with more modifications in curricula. If we then add other mandates from state and local agencies on what else needs to be taught at this level, including patriotism, nutrition and wellness, safety in society, and tolerance, it is no wonder that many educators feel frustrated and worry that the essence of middle level itself is being lost or at the very least compromised.

In this era of outside pressures, are there middle schools in the state and across the country with programs that are geared to the

needs and characteristics of the middle-level learner, regardless of state and federal mandates? The answer is a resounding YES! At the federal level, the *Schools to Watch* program, under the auspices of the National Forum to Accelerate Middle Grades Reform, annually recognizes schools that meet rigorous, research-based standards. New York State was recently accepted by the National Forum as a *Schools to Watch* state, enabling us to participate in this prestigious program to honor schools that meet this stringent national criteria. On the state level, the demonstration support schools reinforce the idea that a good middle-level program can exist in a world of mandates and obligations. They have contributed articles about their programs for this year's series of *In Transition*. At the last NYSMSA state conference in Lake Placid, practitioners conducted over 100 workshops highlighting good middle-level practices happening in classrooms around the state.

It is easy to fall prey to the increasing pressures and allow successful middle-level programs to be dismantled in the name of mandates and assessments. But, as the quote at the beginning of this message suggests, it is internal equilibrium — the balancing of academic and affective requirements — that will result in an orderly and successful program. External pressures are just that, external powers, but it is the internal core — the educators, with input and support of parents, community members, higher education professionals, and the students themselves — that has the power to create the kind of program that will result in future citizens who will be successful in everything they do.

# The Executive Director's Message

Dennis M. Tosetto



When you have something important to accomplish and the methods that you use are not getting the results you need, is it better to continue to do the same thing with more intensity or to stop what you're doing and use more effective

methods? Not long ago, I was asked to give a presentation on how to improve instruction at the middle level, something I had done successfully about a million times over the past twenty years. I arrived with extensive overheads and notes. However, as soon as I started to speak, I knew that the approach I had taken would not work in the current situation and was quickly becoming awful. Immediately it occurred to me that there were two choices: continue speaking ineffectively to a polite group of adults or take the risk of acknowledging that what I was doing was ineffective, dump what I had planned to do, and change the presentation to a format that would better fit the audience and the meeting setup.

It is our nature to stay with what we are comfortable with, rather than to risk doing something with which we have less familiarity. This is as true in the classroom as it is elsewhere. Additionally, unlike the field of medicine where we tend to not second-guess our doctors, many in the general public believe that they know what good education looks like because

they spent a dozen or so years going to school. Consequently, for many the standard of quality is what existed twenty or more years ago: work from a textbook almost exclusively, lecture the entire class, allow time for students to begin the next day's homework, and keep instruction orderly and predictable with students in their seats. While most middle-level schools have made changes in their organizational structure, this more traditional and less effective classroom model remains alive and well in many schools across New York State.

Twenty years ago we didn't know better. Today there is no good reason for not providing young adolescents with improved classroom instruction using cutting-edge methods. Competent educators understand that what constitutes quality instruction is not static. Each year new methods and information need to be added to our professional "tool boxes." New York State set a very specific standard for middle-level educators about fifteen years ago through SED's policy statement on middle-level education. More recently, SED adopted the *Essential Elements of Middle-Level Education* and, shortly, the Regents will include them in a new set of middle-level regulations that are about to be adopted. While school districts do have responsibility for providing in-service training opportunities for teachers, this does not preclude the responsibility of every middle-level educator to know these policies and regulations and to effectively utilize all that they entail in our state's schools and classrooms. Our students deserve nothing less.

A while ago, I had a teacher with whom I worked tell me that she had filed to retire because her ability to teach effectively and gener-

ate respectable test results was being politely but firmly questioned by parents and colleagues. She said that she couldn't understand what had happened, as twenty years ago she was considered to be an excellent teacher and she had not changed anything regarding how she taught young people over the years. While there wasn't much that I could say to help that teacher that day, our conversation did reinforce for me how important it is to constantly update professional skills. In the end, it doesn't pay to blame the students, SED, or others when results fall off. The lesson that I learned was not to be afraid to immediately change methods when what you're doing isn't working well and when something more effective is available. Putting this lesson to good use, I stopped my presentation, acknowledged that what I was doing wasn't working, and took the risk of changing to a more appropriate format that proved effective.

If I could, I would eliminate those first few uncomfortable minutes of that presentation from my life. However, it makes me shudder when I think that there have to be colleagues who wake up professionally after twenty years or so of

teaching to discover that if they had expended just a little more effort on professional self-improvement and had the courage to risk putting these new skills to good use, they could have been viewed by students and staff members as highly effective educators.

Are you up to speed when it comes to cutting-edge middle-level education? Are your students receiving the best education possible? This is a good time for personal introspection or even to complete an informal self-assessment. NYSMSA is your link to self-improvement with much of what you need to know available at [www.nysmsa.org](http://www.nysmsa.org). The NYSMSA Web site includes pertinent SED documents, research briefs, books, professional publications, and links to other Web sites. It also provides registration materials for professional meetings and information on both our annual conference and our Middle-Level Institute that is scheduled for June 26-28, 2005, at the Corning Museum of Glass. Join us in our effort to provide every young adolescent in New York State with the best education possible.

Do you have a colleague who has promoted good middle-level practice in your school, area, or region?

Is there a business partner or non-educator who helps you create the best opportunities for students in the middle?

Honor that person with one of NYSMSA's special awards:

- Connie Toepfer Award for Leadership
- Business & Community Partnership Award
- Ross M. Burkhardt Educator Award

Go to [www.nysmsa.org](http://www.nysmsa.org) and click on Awards Nomination on the home page menu for further information and nomination forms.

# Research at a Glance

Jeff Craig, NYSMSA Director of Research and Technology



*The Research at a Glance column is intended to provide timely updates about research and best practices. In order to help middle-level schools and programs across the state implement the Essential Elements, rubrics have been released (go to [www.nysmsa.org](http://www.nysmsa.org) to download the latest version). In October, NYSMSA began to issue a series of seven pamphlets, each aligned to one of the Essential Elements. Additionally, the topic of this Research at a Glance supports the implementation of the first of the seven Essential Elements: Mission and Vision.*

## The Importance of Mission and Vision

The first of the seven *Essential Elements of Standards-Focused Middle-Level Schools and Programs* codifies the importance of mission and vision for middle schools (see shaded column at right). This first Essential Element is not necessarily more important than the other six, but it could be considered a prerequisite to them. It is far more difficult to establish, maintain, and improve an effective middle-level program if a school has not first declared its mission and vision. Essential Element 1 provides schools with guidance about what should be contained in a mission and vision for a middle-level building. This *Research at a Glance* aims to make the case for why a mission and vision is important in the first place.

Quite simply, a mission statement describes why an organization exists. Judith Bardwick suggests: “The most important question in any organization has to be ‘What is the business of our business?’” (DuFour & Eaker, 1998). Although the “business” of a middle school might be obvious to some, chances are it is less than obvious to many members of the school

## Essential Element 1: Philosophy and Mission

A philosophy and mission that reflect the intellectual and developmental needs and characteristics of young adolescents (youth 10-14 years of age).

*Every young adolescent deserves a school that values academic achievement and personal development and provides a supportive environment.*

The middle-level educational program has a purpose beyond linking the elementary grades and the high school. Its basic aims are to educate and nurture. It has a culture of collective and shared responsibility. To be successful, it must attend to both the intellectual development and the personal needs of young adolescents. The philosophy and mission of a standards-focused middle-level school or program must reflect a set of shared beliefs.

The school and staff within the school must commit to:

- Developing the whole child, intellectually and academically, personally and socially, physically, emotionally, and ethically.
- Working together to ensure that all students achieve at high levels and, with appropriate guidance and structure, develop independence and responsibility.
- Accepting — individually and collectively — responsibility for the educational and personal development of each and every student.
- Ensuring for each student a safe, inviting, trusting, and mutually respectful learning environment that offers both physical and psychological safety.
- Connecting each young adolescent in positive ways with the school and with caring adults within the school.
- Providing each student with a variety of learning experiences that are academically challenging, developmentally appropriate, and personally relevant in order for each of them to make informed educational and personal decisions.
- Providing a successful transition from the elementary grades to the middle grades to the high school grades and from childhood to adolescence.
- Establishing partnerships with the home and the community.

community. In our standards-based world, the work of establishing our mission has been done for us: All students must attain the highest academic and personal standards. The job of the school is to do whatever it takes to get there. Certainly a mission statement can be said more eloquently and we can add remarks about technology, citizenship, and life-long learning. Otherwise, our mission is common. The mission should be made explicit to all members of the community, in the hope that all can understand it and support it. *Developing a Mission Statement for a Middle-Level School* is a resource from the New York State Education Department that can help. It includes examples from schools. You can download it from [www.nysmsa.org](http://www.nysmsa.org) as well.

If a mission describes the “business” of a school, then what does a vision do? It is the vision that steers a school toward the future. Simply, Covey said: “Begin with the end in mind.” In fact, it is impossible to reach a destination or goal without first having that goal or destination in mind. It’s far easier to keep a ship afloat than it is to actually steer the boat to a destination. Burt Nanus observed: “There is no more powerful engine driving an organization toward excellence and long-range success than an attractive, worthwhile, and achievable vision of the future, widely shared” (DuFour & Eaker, 1998).

Most schools are striving to become a professional learning organization; the roots of learning organization theory can be traced to Peter Senge. In *The Fifth Discipline*, Senge promoted systems thinking as the key to becoming a learning organization (Senge, 1994). In that book, and the succeeding *Fifth Discipline Fieldbooks* and *Schools That Learn: A Fifth Discipline Fieldbook for Educators, Parents, and Everyone Who Cares About Education*, he defines five keys to becoming learning organizations. One key, or discipline as Senge calls it, is shared vision. In fact, Senge states: “One is hard pressed to think of any organization that has sustained some measure of greatness in the

absence of goals, values, and missions that become deeply shared within the organization (Senge, p. 9). Senge argues that people work harder, work smarter, collaborate more, and achieve more when they share a vision for the future. Furthermore, he maintains that individuals in an organization with a shared vision do more not because they are *told* to, but because they *want* to.

While it is hard to identify an individual with greater impact than Peter Senge on organizations of all sorts, Rick DuFour is the individual most credited with the application of organizational theory to schools. In fact, DuFour’s *Professional Learning Communities at Work* is considered the starting place for any examination of professional learning communities in schools. The foundation of learning communities, DuFour argues, is mission and vision (DuFour & Eaker, 1998). First, schools should agree on the reason why the school exists: the mission. Next, schools should overtly describe what they hope to become: the vision. DuFour concedes both that it is difficult to agree to mission and vision and that it has been problematic for some schools to actually use their vision to guide decision-making and school improvement. Nonetheless, shared vision is crucial and DuFour and Senge agree that no organization can achieve greatness without it.

Sound, practical advice about how to create a shared vision can be found in DuFour’s work. It can also be found in *Schools as Professional Learning Communities* (Roberts & Pruitt, 2003). Roberts and Pruitt give specific guidance to principals about how to lead a school in the establishment and communication of a shared vision. Included are structures, tips, questions, and organizers that detail possible paths to take.

Roland Barth, too, believes vision is important. He also believes that how a school arrives at its vision is important (2001). In his highly regarded book, *Learning by Heart*, Barth agrees with the importance of vision and goes on to explain different ways that schools can establish

their vision. Each way that he describes is applicable in different situations, but his conclusion is powerful and encouraging:

*In the process of coming to real visions, schools generate extraordinary new energy, good ideas, and hope. And there are no qualities more desperately needed in these days of reforming our schools than energy, good ideas, and hope. That is reason enough to engage and persist in the struggle toward an authentic school vision* (2001).

While little research has been done that explicitly connects student achievement with mission and vision, there is frequent reference to the importance of mission and vision among the leading thinkers in education, leadership, and management. The weight of the advice from the preeminent leaders is sufficient to warrant significant consideration of mission and vision by middle-level educators.

There is one recent reference in the literature worth highlighting: Robert Marzano has demonstrated a link between student achievement and the culture of a school in his recent work, *Balanced Leadership* (Waters et al, 2003). He has determined that the “extent to which the principal fosters shared beliefs and a sense of community and cooperation” has a statistically

significant impact on student achievement (with an effect size of 0.29). Developing a shared vision of what a school could (or should) be like is an example of the connection of mission and vision to student achievement.

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Have you visited NYSMSA's website lately?

Go to [www.nysmsa.org](http://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

## Don't Laugh at Me



*I'm a little boy in glasses, the one they call  
a geek. A little girl who never smiles, cause  
I've got braces on my teeth. And I know how it  
feels to cry myself to sleep... Don't laugh at  
me. Don't call me names. Don't get your  
pleasure from my pain.*

—from *Don't Laugh At Me* by Allen  
Shamblin & Steve Seskin

When Peter Yarrow and his daughter heard these words sung by Steve Seskin at a concert years ago, they were both touched by the passion and power of the lyrics. This song would plant a seed in Peter's mind, and a few years later the strength of his vision proved to be enormous with the creation of his brainchild, Operation Respect: Don't Laugh at Me. This project is based on his passionate belief that music has the power to build community. He believes that lyrics and music can be used in a classroom to build safer and more respectful school environments for children. Through music, video, and classroom

activities, the *Don't Laugh at Me* programs (DLAM) help teachers and children transform their classrooms and schools into "bully free zones". This program focuses on fostering four characteristics of a caring community:

- healthy expression of feelings
- caring, compassion, and cooperation
- creative resolution of conflicts
- celebrating diversity

For those of you who were fortunate to be present this year at NYSMSA's Annual Conference in Lake Placid and heard Peter Yarrow (pictured at left and below with conference participants) speak from his heart about creating caring communities within our middle schools, I'm sure you left with enthusiasm and hope for creating a more tolerant, bully-free school. If you didn't have the opportunity to hear Peter speak about the *Don't Laugh at Me* program, I'd



like to share with you how this unique character education project has transformed middle school communities since its creation. If you were there

and have implemented this program, please share your activities and this article with fellow colleagues.

The State Education Department's *Essential Elements* is the theme for this year's issues of *In Transition*. The DLAM project supports Essential Element 1: A philosophy and mission that reflect the intellectual and developmental needs and characteristics of young adolescents. *The school community operates in a culture where respect and caring for one another are pervasive.*

Peter Yarrow's *Don't Laugh at Me* project has been successful in many schools across the country in building a community of learners, the most critical strand in creating a caring, collaborative, developmentally responsive middle school. As part of Pleasantville Middle School's mission statement, we developed a school-wide effort to promote tolerance and respect for all. Over the past few years we have implemented the mission, philosophy, and activities from the DLAM program at our middle school through our advisory program.

We introduced the concept using the suggestions in the DLAM book and were successful in getting everyone on board. The activities in the DLAM book are carefully planned and easily adapted to a particular class or situation. We did the following:

- Students brainstormed the meaning of bullying in their homebase/advisory period and discussed the impact of "put downs" and "put ups".
- Faculty representatives created a student bullying survey to assess the level of bullying in our school.
- Students listened to the lyrics and music from the song, *Don't Laugh at Me*.
- Students made posters to hang in their grade level hallways, expressing their wishes for a bully-free school.

- We held team assemblies to watch the video and see the visual images that made the song come to life.
- The eighth grade student council officers shared the "Torn Heart" activity with the lower grade levels to reinforce that all students deserve to be treated equally.
- Throughout the year, teachers implemented follow-up activities from the activity book that were geared for each grade level.

In schools across New York State one of the main goals is to differentiate instruction. In order to teach all learners in a classroom, students and teachers need to respect each other's differences and work together for a common goal. The *Don't Laugh at Me* program helps us to achieve that goal. A school in which "pervasive caring" is evident is a school where all children feel safe, respected and ready to learn. Peter Yarrow has clearly shown his dedication and belief in this essential element of middle school. In the 21<sup>st</sup> century where differences cause distrust, division and often wars, educators must help students understand the importance of caring, cooperation and tolerance.

I'd like to close with a powerful and poignant poem about pervasive caring and the importance of relationships. I've used this poem with my 7<sup>th</sup> graders and I'm sure you'll think of many ways to use it to get the message across to your students.

## THE COLD WITHIN

by James Patrick Kinney

Six humans trapped by happenstance  
In black and bitter cold,  
Each one possessed a stick of wood,  
Or so the story's told.

Their dying fire in need of logs,  
But the first one held hers back,  
For, of the faces around the fire,  
She noticed one was black.

The next man looking 'cross the way  
Saw one not of his church,  
And couldn't bring himself to give  
The fire his stick of birch.

The third one sat in tattered clothes,  
He gave his coat a hitch.  
Why should his log be put to use  
To warm the idle rich?

The rich man just sat back and thought  
Of the wealth he had in store.  
And how to keep what he had earned  
From the lazy, shiftless poor.

The black man's face bespoke revenge  
As the fire passed from his sight,  
For all he saw in his stick of wood  
Was a chance to spite the white.

And the last man of this forlorn group  
Did naught except for gain,  
Giving only to those who gave  
Was how he played the game.

The logs held tight in death's stilled hands  
Was proof of human sin.  
They didn't die from the cold without,  
They died from the cold within.

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## 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](mailto:editor@nysmsa.org).

# Statewide Network of Middle-Level Education Support Schools



## The Essential Elements — A Blueprint for Transformation

Peter Osroff

It was about two years ago that we were given the task of transforming our traditionally-structured school into one that would reflect best instructional practice and middle-level philosophy. Looking back, it was a daunting task, full of potential pitfalls and hostile constituency groups. But, we had a few things on our side: the research, a very supportive Board of Education, a superintendent strongly committed to school improvement, and a sympathetic middle school PTA and SEPTA. So, we began the journey (which is never really finished) and transformed our school into one congruent with the Essential Elements. The purpose of this article is to share how we did it.

It was clear from the outset of our restructuring process that we would be unable to achieve “full consensus” with all constituency groups. While our approach would be tailored for our community, as the educational leaders we insisted that the *Essential Elements of Middle-Level Education* be the basis of our reform effort.

Listed below are the fundamental concerns of each school community group that we sought to address within our restructuring.

### PTA

- Enhance sense of caring community
- Enhance communication between school and parents
- Academic excellence for all

- Ensure social and emotional health of all children
- Choices for students and parents
- Explore interests, strengths, gifts

### SEPTA

- Inclusion
- Differentiated instruction
- Enhance communication among parents, classroom teachers and SE instructional staff
- Subject-specific support classes for all children

### Gifted & Honors

- Opportunities for advanced-level classes
- High academic expectations

### Teachers

- Built-in structural opportunities to communicate with colleagues
- Flexibility in teaching and schedule
- Curriculum and assessment pressures
- Impact of restructuring on staffing
- New elective classes
- Restructuring emphasis on instructional change

For over ten years, the New York State Board of Regents has been intensively researching best practice middle schools and has continued to present middle-level philosophy as the best framework. We needed full congruence with the New York State Board of Regents model for improvement as stated within the *Essential Elements* (Kadamus, 2004):

1. *A philosophy and mission that reflect the intellectual and developmental needs and characteristics of young adolescents.*
2. *An educational program that is comprehensive, challenging, purposeful, integrated, relevant, and standards-based.*

3. *An organization and structure that support both academic excellence and personal development.*
4. *Classroom instruction appropriate to the needs and characteristics of young adolescents provided by skilled and knowledgeable teachers.*
5. *Strong educational leadership and a building administration that encourages, facilitates, and sustains involvement, participation, and partnerships.*
6. *A network of academic and personal support available for all students.*
7. *Professional learning for all staff that is ongoing, planned, purposeful, and collaboratively developed.*

In an earlier draft, dated January 27, 2003, Kadamus also identified the pitfalls of mandated academic “tracks”: *“Organization and structure can also influence the type and quality of education a student in the middle grades experiences. Students assigned to higher tracks are much more likely to be exposed to a challenging and stimulating curriculum than students assigned to lower tracks. Further: (tracking) ...interferes with middle grades students’ personal development...has a negative effect on lower-tracked students, motivation, opportunities to learn and life chances...”*

### **Mission Statement**

Using the *Essential Elements* as our model, one of our first steps was to establish our mission statement, *Leaving No Child Behind*: “The mission of Garden City Middle School is to create a caring learning community where all individuals are able to reach their highest potential academically, creatively, socially, physically, and emotionally. Within an atmosphere of warmth and support, we seek to enhance each student’s desire for life-long learning. As members of a school community, we affirm that we will reach academic success together, take responsibility for each other, and treat others as

we wish to be treated. Success does not come at the expense of others, but is reached with others.”

Our school would support an inclusive vision of success: **every** student reaching his/her highest potential. We made a number of changes, including the following highlights:

- Implemented teaming in ALL grades.
- Created comprehensive elective program in grades 7 and 8.
- Eliminated fixed tracks; established heterogeneously-grouped English and social studies sequences and “accelerated” option (flexible non-assigned ability grouping) in 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grade math and science.
- Established support class model in every major academic area.
- BRAVE Program (LIJ-North Shore Mental Health Alliance’s Bully Reduction Program)
- Enhanced Web presence, with **every** teacher utilizing his/her own Web page for daily updates on homework assignments, projects, and review.
- Provided comprehensive newsletters and interim report cards to parents (doubling the number of report cards mailed home).
- Created homework assistance program.
- Created parent handbook as dynamic Web-based resource.
- Increased congruence with state assessment formats.
- Enhanced security (expanded hours of front-desk greeter with before-school supervision of entrances and after-school hallway patrol, enhanced safety committee oversight, etc.).
- Established homework volume guidelines.
- Enhanced curricula expectations for ALL children.
- Implemented choice options for 8<sup>th</sup> grade physical education (dance, Project Adventure, fitness & wellness).

- Added new activities supporting middle-level philosophy, perspective and district goals — Students Against Destructive Decisions (SADD), Anti-Bias Consortium of Nassau County, Key Club, German Society, and Mock Trial Team.
- Integrated earth science lab as alternate-day class.
- Established a co-ed intramural program for 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grades.
- Expanded the 6<sup>th</sup> grade co-ed intramural program.
- Added athletic teams, providing increased play time for students.
- Set up a Friday evening recreation program for all grade levels.
- Added a Friday afternoon recreation program for 6<sup>th</sup> graders.
- Enhanced school Web page (<http://middleschool.gardencity.k12.ny.us/>) with daily updates (guidance department section, forms, athletic schedules, club meetings, extra help schedule, library page, daily announcements).
- Established social skills improvement group.

## Teaming

Our most fundamental change was the establishment of teaming in all grades. In sixth grade, our teams consist of three teachers for the four core subjects: English Language Arts (double period daily), math, science, and social studies. In seventh and eighth grades, our teams consist of four academic subject teachers (English, math, social studies and science) with a teacher of special education. Each inclusion SE teacher is assigned to a specific team, and each resource room SE teacher serves with two teams. Each team shares approximately 90 to 100 students.

Within seventh and eighth grade teams, teachers teach four teamed classes and one period of (alternate-day) elective class or (alter-

nate day) support class. All teams have the same number of accelerated and non-accelerated classes; support classes are organized within each team. Elective classes are not teamed and are alternate-day year long courses.

All teams have a daily “team meeting period” during which time teachers discuss individual student achievement and concerns; team interdisciplinary approaches and projects; coordination of curriculum, homework, exams, and assignments; exchange teaching techniques and strategies; and hold parent conferences.

We offer alternate-day support classes in a small tutorial format in English, math, social studies, science and world languages. These additional classes provide our AIS students with opportunities to have materials pre-taught and reviewed, which better enables them to perform at a higher level in their regular class setting.

While we have eliminated “fixed academic tracks” through the elimination of “honors” and “gifted” classes, we instead instituted “accelerated” (self-selecting ability grouping) options in seventh and eighth grade math and science. This, coupled with our elective program, enables “stronger” students to take more challenging courses in their preferred areas. Critically, while the school makes placement recommendations, the parent has the final placement decision. Moreover, placement is not viewed as fixed, and students may move in and out of “accelerated classes” at the start of each school year. Our paradigm holds that every student who seeks opportunities for more rigorous coursework will have those opportunities.

All students take world language (Spanish, French, German or Italian) in grades 6 (alternate-day), 7 (daily) and 8 (daily). Each course culminates in a proficiency exam and high school credit.

## Elective Program

In order to excite students about their own learning, we implemented an elective program.

Teachers were asked to suggest courses that would be exciting for both teachers to teach and students to take. Parents selected the courses that they felt best met their own children's needs. All electives are required to stress critical reading, writing, and thinking skills when applicable. Additionally, teachers are paid to develop the curriculum guides.

Electives provide opportunities for subject enrichment; the exploration of new topics/ subjects; opportunities to expand the concept of "gifted" into non-traditional spheres such as art, music, and physical education; and opportunities within the school day to take subject-specific support classes (and other support services) without interfering with state-mandated subjects. Students may take one elective in seventh grade and from one to three electives in eighth grade. The following elective courses have been developed:

- Advanced Computer Applications
- Classroom Creature Culture: From Algae to Anoles and Beyond
- Creative Writing
- Criminal Justice
- Current Events
- Exploring Pseudoscience and the Supernatural
- Films and Theatre
- History and Hollywood
- Introduction to Law
- Introduction to Psychology
- Journalism
- Keyboard and Basic Computer Applications
- Latin 8
- Math Research
- Mystery Fiction in Print and Film
- Problem Solving in Mathematics
- Real Life Application of Mathematics
- Science Research
- Sign Language
- Speech and Debate
- Sports and History
- Survivor Study Skills
- Web Page Design

As part of our emphasis on health and wellness, we constructed a new Fitness Center and also introduced choices within eighth grade physical education such as Advanced Project Adventure, dance, and fitness and wellness.

In recognition of the critical importance of teacher development, we encourage teachers to attend professional development workshops — separate from our own district programs — at full district expense.

### **Social and Emotional Needs**

In order to better meet the social and emotional needs of students, we did the following:

- Expanded lunch time to thirty minutes.
- Implemented the BRAVE Program (Bully Prevention Anti-Violence Education program of LIJ-North Shore Hospital System's Mental Health Alliance).
- Expanded the peer mediation and peer leadership programs.
- Eliminated student elections — students will undertake leadership roles through rotating committee chairperson positions.
- Established new clubs, including the Key Club, Mock Trial Competition, Anti-Bias Consortium, and Students Against Destructive Decisions (SADD).
- Established co-ed intramural sports.
- Established additional teams for our inter-scholastic athletic program — "no-cut" and "all-play" when space, budget and safety allow.
- Added Friday night recreation program.
- Added Friday afternoon recreation program for 6<sup>th</sup> graders.

This upcoming school year, all students will start their day with Home Base. Some units to be covered will include study skills, time management, drug and alcohol resistance approaches, helping the handicapped, empathy, courtesy, loyalty, integrity, patriotism and respecting the rights of others.

## Other Initiatives

While we have accomplished a great deal, we understand that restructuring is a process, not a destination. Therefore, we will participate in the Accreditation for Growth protocol of the Middle States Association of Colleges and Schools. We have already achieved tentative candidacy status, and we anticipate achieving full accreditation next school year. Benefits of the accreditation process include greater clarity of purpose, stronger internal relationships, wider professional participation, more effective methods of planning for school improvement, and consistency between educational purpose and practice.

Dr. Susan K. Nicklas, the Executive Director of the Secondary Council of the Middle States Association, wrote in her tentative approval of our candidacy status, "...the Candidacy Visitor observed a sense of enthusiasm and excitement of what has been accomplished and what can be accomplished in the near future. It was remarkable to see the magnitude and impact of changes that have occurred in the last two years. There are many, many more programmatic and student activities choices for students."

As we reflect on the past two years, we can begin to assess our level of tentative success. We were very pleased that our school was selected by the NYS Department of Education as a Middle Level Support School for **two** Essential Elements: Essential Element 1 and Essential Element 2.

According to the State Education Department, in their letter awarding us this distinction, "Garden City Middle School warrants inclusion in this network because of their commitment to the younger adolescent. They have developed a framework for restructuring that supports their mission. This framework is the enhancement of partnerships and communication between school and home, emphasizing academic excellence with building of character, social and personal responsibility. In addition, it displays their

vision of success for all students to reach their highest potential."

Moreover, after only one year of our restructured program, we have reversed an earlier decline in assessment results under the traditional model and we have begun to see significant improvements.

<b>8<sup>th</sup> Grade NYS Assessment Results</b>				
	<b>Math</b>		<b>ELA</b>	
<b>Level</b>	<b>2002-03</b>	<b>2003-04</b>	<b>2002-03</b>	<b>2003-04</b>
One	1%	1%	—	—
Two	16%	6%	22%	15%
Three	63%	58%	54%	52%
Four	18%	33%	23%	32%

Importantly, our assessment results have improved within heterogeneously grouped English and social studies classes, and (flexible) self-selecting ability grouping in math and science. The concern of the "honors and gifted" parent group that we would see a decline in their children's results has not occurred. Instead, the higher achieving students' results have remained high while we have seen strong improvement with students who had been historically designated as lower track students. Now, as a school we seem to be on the right track.

As we move ahead we will continue to re-evaluate our programs and approaches. The job of school improvement is not yet done; it will not ever be done.

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# Curriculum Review and Educational Leadership

Steven Malkischer and  
Jill Berkowicz

Orville A. Todd Middle School was chosen as one of the twenty-eight schools in the state-wide network of middle-level education support groups. Todd received this recognition because we were able to demonstrate that our program addresses the social, physical, and emotional needs of our students; implements the seven *Essential Elements of a Standards-Based Middle-Level Program*; and has the full support of the district offices to do so successfully. Specifically, the two elements highlighted in our application were Essential Element 2: an educational program that is comprehensive, challenging, purposeful, integrated, relevant, and standards-based, and Essential Element 5: educational leadership that is knowledgeable, effective, and caring.

The curriculum review process in our school is ongoing. We continue to monitor the alignment of our curriculum with the NYS Learning Standards and review them on a regular basis. By communicating with our elementary schools and our high schools, we stay aware of our students' strengths and weaknesses and continue to use that information to raise the bar and infuse rigor on all levels of our program.

Each time a new unit is designed or a new twist is put on an old and worn topic, it is tested for its ability to make our students stretch and grow while meeting the aspects of the benchmarks along the way. Successes and failures alike are shared so teachers can learn from each other. One example is our comprehensive and challenging physical education curriculum, developed by our Director of Physical Education along with the middle school faculty, that incorporates low and high ropes, team building, risk-taking, decision and choice making. These same skills, already familiar to the teachers of

other subjects, are reinforced and expanded as part of our integrated curriculum.

Our curriculum is not only based on knowledge of information. We are also aware that middle-level students, sometimes more than any others, need to be taught the affective skills necessary to be successful in society as a whole. Our program is based on the concept that if students are respected, they will then learn to respect others as well. When we have an assembly program, we have 460 students sitting on bleachers in the gym. Our visitors always compliment us on the behavior of our students. This is the result of the demeanor and culture of the building. The two mighty cornerstones of Todd's behavior expectations are respect and responsibility. If anyone's behavior, child or adult, is not respectful and responsible, it is noted and addressed by the leadership in the building.

Teacher empowerment was key to making these improvements. Leadership is needed throughout the organization. Anyone willing to take on that role — whether it be in the realm of curriculum, teacher-training, student behavior, or new program development — is encouraged and supported. At Todd, some of the principal's major responsibilities are to recognize potential in teachers, provide the necessary support and tools, and maintain the momentum to make teacher-driven change come to fruition. However, all ideas, programs, or curricula must fit within the bigger picture of what is good for our students.

We continue to monitor our progress in preparing our students, constantly raising the bar, adjusting, and growing to meet their needs.

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# The Use of SMART-Board Technology as an Essential Element of a Middle-Level Support School

Team 7C, Van Wyck JHS

In today's ever-changing school structure, how do educators meet all of the educational needs of the diverse learning population relative to content standards and encourage active parent and community involvement, while engendering feelings of self confidence and personal efficacy in their students as referenced in the *Essential Elements of Standards-Focused Middle-Level Schools and Middle-Level Programs* (1998)? In this article, members of one seventh grade team at VanWyck Junior High School summarize specific anecdotal accounts of how their implementation of SMART Board technology assisted them in achieving these lofty goals.

At the beginning of the 2003-2004 school year, Team 7C was given SMART Technology: an interactive electronic whiteboard, an LCD Projector, an IBM ThinkPad, and a variety of supplemental components that included a printer, a scanner, a VCR, and a set of speakers. The technology was introduced as a learning tool for both the students and the team staff. This initiative was a pilot program to view the educational benefits of a technology-integrated learning environment.

Incorporating technology-based lessons had significant impacts on our teaching experiences and was seen through a variety of perspectives. Improvements noted were increased student and teacher enthusiasm, overall student motivation and engagement, and improved teacher efficiency. SMART Technology enhanced communication among students, teachers, and parents and was an excellent vehicle for differentiated instruction.

The SMART Board is a visually-appealing tool that demands the students' attention. The first things the students see upon entering the classroom are attractive 'Do Now' instructions, homework assignments, and specific directions for gathering needed materials. Rather than the traditional several minutes of verbal instructions, this structured format immediately assisted our students to organize their thoughts, perform independent tasks, and prepare for the day's lesson. According to Wheeler et al (1999), technology provides more efficient ways to display and to organize information. This technology established the introductory tone and assisted in keeping the timely flow of the class, making ample use of teaching time constraints.

SMART Technology is a powerful tool that enabled us to transform our traditional-teaching-style lessons into creative ones as we effectively embraced the vast array of student learning styles (Bell, 2002; Weimer, 2001). It gave us a plenitude of differentiated instructional strategies to correlate to the diversity of our students. The newly-created lessons provided options to understand the material in a manner that was the most comfortable for the learner. Examples of technology-incorporated tools used to enhance the standards-based curricula include: colorful diagrams and charts, graphing calculator images, continual Internet access to an abundance of related material, animated virtual dissections, and geographical maps. We had the ability to scan text material, worksheets, and laboratory handouts. Bell (2002) noted that this can be a great advantage as hand-written text can then be added, saved and easily recalled. Lessons could be as elementary as changing the background color or as extravagant as our imagination would allow.

In using multimedia, we were able to better meet the requirements formulated by national and state standards. We were easily able to include stimulating sound clips and eye-appealing images that added dimension to the learners' schema and knowledge base, making unclear

topics more understandable and relevant to real-life situations. An additional benefit was the ease of printing material for students who had been absent, permitting them to keep active with the class and up-to-date with the curriculum.

Teachers sometimes have difficulty getting students at this age level to participate in class as well as getting academically weak or shy students to engage. The SMART Board gave students the courage to be active participants, giving them the opportunity to manipulate words or shapes around the Board. All of the students were eager to interact with the Board (Wheeler et al, 1999) regardless of their academic standing in the class. We saw a direct correlation between the technological application and the motivation of our students (Ballakermeen High School, 2004; FERL; Smith & MirandaNet Fellows; *The Essential Elements of Standards-Focused Middle-Level Schools and Middle-Level Programs*, 1998; Weimer, 2001). Students who once were quiet and passive became animated, raising their hands for permission to come to the Board. Students enjoyed using their fingers to touch and drag corresponding material. Their hands virtually became the cursor (Romeo, 2004), making them the teachers. This entire constructivist approach (Bell, 2002) depicts the teacher as a facilitator of knowledge rather than just a giver of knowledge (Wilson, 2004). It transformed the students into instructors, which engaged them to be proactive in their education.

Teaching today is extremely challenging, as it must meet the academic needs of the entire learning population. The SMART Board enforces differentiated instruction. This type of technology provides a myriad of ways to motivate students with special needs and to make them feel comfortable in general education classrooms (Salinitri, Smith, & Clovis, 2002). Special education students were found to participate more, with less anxiety about making mistakes (Salinitri et al, 2002). They were able to illustrate what they knew without exposing

their weaknesses. In reducing their anxieties, confidence and overall attitudes toward learning were increased (Salinitri et al, 2002). Activities could be varied according to the ability levels of the students in order to challenge, not to frustrate them. Research indicates that students respond when color is used and that adding vivid colors assists with multi-sensory learning (Bell, 2002; Salinitri et al, 2002).

The technology integration in our classrooms assisted us in monitoring the academic and personal growth of our students by providing, as stated in *The Essential Elements of Standards-Focused Middle-Level School and Middle-Level Programs* (1998), “an educational program that is comprehensive, challenging, purposeful, integrated, and standards-based.” We made connections between our school and the larger community by presenting our technology-based lessons at middle school symposiums, school board meetings, and for local newspapers. Parents frequently communicated that SMART Board technology had increased their children’s interest and fascination in regard to specific contents.

Team 7C realized the overwhelming benefits of implementing technology in their classrooms and, through their collaborative efforts, effectively met several of the essential elements of middle-level programs, which increased the cohesiveness of the entire program (*The Essential Elements of Standards-Focused Middle-Level Schools and Middle-Level Programs*, 1998). Many of the technology-integrated lessons illustrated interdisciplinary themes. The SMART Board’s broad range of versatility (Romeo, 2004) allowed us to be flexible, imaginative, and innovative. Using this technology was a way to pedagogically enhance the teaching and learning process.

Technology in the classroom allows educators to escape the linear nature of textbook use for content coverage and incites students to learn because they find so many of its features

compelling (Richardson & Morgan, 2000, p.71-72). This type of technology brings visual learning environments to life (Sipe, 2004). While the students were enthusiastic about learning (Smith & MirandaNet Fellows; *The Essential Elements of Standards-Focused Middle-Level Schools and Middle-Level Programs*, 1998), we were equally motivated about the opportunities that still lie ahead for us. All of us unanimously agree that, having worked with the SMART Board, we cannot go back to working without it. Ultimately, the SMART Board made our teaching more effective and made us realize that we are bound only by our imagination and creativity.

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## New York State's Essential Elements: Schools-to-Watch Recognition Program, 2005-2006

**Do you believe your middle-level school is a model for others? If so, please consider completing the application for New York State's Essential Elements: Schools-to-Watch Recognition Program.**

New York State is seeking to identify a small number of diverse, high-performing model middle-level schools. These schools must be academically excellent, developmentally appropriate, socially equitable, and organized to ensure continuous improvement, as they will serve as exemplars for the implementation of the *Regents Policy Statement on Middle-Level Education* and the State Education Department's *Essential Elements of Standards-Focused Middle-Level Schools and Programs*.

An EE: STW State Leadership Team consisting of representatives from the New York State Education Department, the New York State Middle School Association, the New York State Parent-Teacher Association (NYS-PTA), New York State United Teachers (NYSUT), the School Administrators Association of New York State (SAANYS), the New York State Association of Teacher Educators, the New York Association of Colleges of Teacher Education, the Statewide Network of Middle-Level Education Liaisons, and the New York City Forum to Accelerate Middle Grades Reform is directing this initiative. The National Forum to Accelerate Middle Grades Reform developed the project prototype — the nationally recognized Schools-to-Watch Program — in 1999. New York State's *Essential Elements: Schools-to-Watch Recognition Program* is a State-level adaptation of the National Forum's model.

In New York State, selection criteria for the Essential Elements: Schools-to-Watch Recognition Program are aligned with the *Regents Policy Statement on Middle-Level Education*, the State Education Department's seven *Essential Elements of Standards-Focused Middle-Level Schools and Programs*, and the National Forum's four tenets of a model middle-level school: academic excellence, developmental responsiveness, social equity, and organizational structures and processes aimed at continuous improvement.

Benefits to participating schools and districts that elect to complete and submit an application include:

- A thorough, research-based review of the middle-level school and its programs consistent with the *Regents Policy Statement on Middle-Level Education*, the State Education Department's *Essential Elements of Standards-Focused Middle-Level Schools and Programs*, and Commissioner's Regulations related to the middle grades.
- Engagement of the educational community in a constructive school improvement activity.
- Identification of school/program strengths as well as areas in need of improvement.
- Development of a research-based continuous improvement plan for the school.
- Collection of research-based, baseline data to substantiate requests to the State Education Department to implement innovative programs and practices (as per Commissioner's Regulations).
- Complimentary registration for a site team at

the New York State Middle School Association's Annual Conference.

Additional benefits to those schools and districts ultimately selected to be New York State's Essential Elements: Schools-to-Watch schools include:

- National and state recognition for the district, school, and staff.
- Membership in a small, select pantheon of nationally recognized middle-level schools.
- Priority recipients of targeted grants for research and special projects.
- Professional development opportunities and networking through complimentary Building Membership to the New York State Middle School Association.
- Participation in the prestigious National Center for Public Education and Social Policy's School Improvement Self-Study.
- Coaching towards continued success.

The minimum eligibility criteria are:

- I.** Schools making application must have **at least TWO of the following grades:** grade six, grade seven, grade eight **and**
- II.** Schools making application may satisfy the minimum student performance eligibility requirements in one of two ways:
  - Possess a 2004-05 Performance Index of 155 or higher, **OR**
  - With a 2004-05 Performance Index of less than 155, have met all Annual Yearly Progress (AYP) growth targets for both the 2003-04 and 2004-05 school years.

Eligible schools and districts interested in New York State's Essential Elements: Schools-to-Watch Recognition Program should view and download the application announcement and related information at the New York State Middle School Association's Web site ([www.nysmsa.org](http://www.nysmsa.org)), then follow the directions to complete the school self-rating and the formal

application. **Note that completed applications must be postmarked no later than Friday, October 14, 2005.**

Questions about New York State's Essential Elements: Schools-to-Watch Recognition Program should be directed to a member of the EE: STW State Leadership Team.

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# Time-on-Task: A 17 Percent Increase in Eighth Grade Math Scores

Gordon L. Dean and Donald F. Weinstein, Ph.D.



Middle schools across New York State face the challenge of raising assessment results to meet the State Benchmarks and Annual Measurable Objectives set forth by the New York State Education Department as well as the accountability provisions of the No Child Left Behind Act. The statewide low performance by students on the intermediate state assessments in English and Math continues to frustrate educators at both the local and state level.

Twin Towers Middle School is one of two middle schools in the Enlarged City School District of Middletown located in Middletown, New York. The school has 840 students enrolled in grades six, seven, and eight. The student body is 33% white, 24% African-American, 40% Hispanic, and 3% Asian and/or Native American. Ten percent of the students are classified with disabilities and 54% are classified as economically disadvantaged. At Twin Towers, we felt that in order to improve our student scores on the state assessments, we needed to analyze hard data on how specific standards and performance indicators are delivered (for further information, go to [dfwesa.com](http://dfwesa.com)).

The goal for our mathematics time-on-task program was to assist math teachers in the delivery of instruction as a means for improving student outcomes on the New York State Intermediate Assessments in mathematics. The objective was to gather data on the instructional time each teacher spent on each of the mathematics standards and performance indicators. The rationale underlying the program was that gathering, organizing, and interpreting data on teachers' delivery of instruction on specific standards and performance indicators would

allow them to better focus their instruction on the standards and performance indicators assessed on the state assessments.

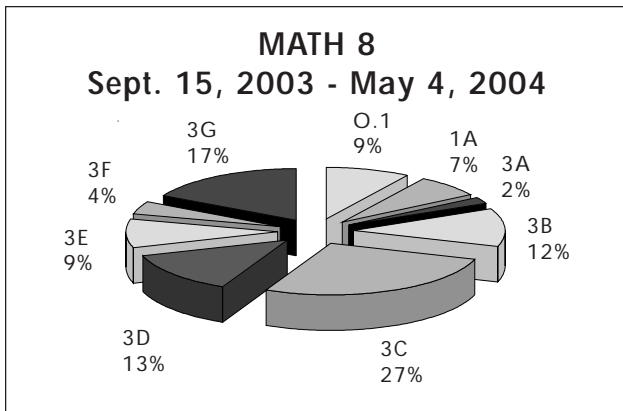
As a result of teachers taking two minutes per class each day, both the teachers and administrators were able to quantify the delivery of math instruction daily, weekly, and yearly. With these data, teachers were able to communicate their actual curriculum experience to decision-makers and other teachers in an objective manner. Through the final summary data reflecting the experience of all teachers in the system, each teacher was able to get a realistic picture of the curriculum outside his or her classroom. This information documented whether students entering their classes were properly prepared; whether teachers had adequate time and resources to meet school and state standards and performance indicators; and whether tests and textbooks were appropriate in light of the real curriculum.

Although we have been using the time-on-task program for two years (for further information, see [dfwesa.com](http://dfwesa.com)), for clarity of focus, this article is an overview of the 2003-2004 school year. One inclusion, one special education, and ten regular education math teachers participated in the program. For each period of instruction, each teacher logged the number of minutes he or she spent teaching to specific standards and performance indicators. There were 135 days from the program's start to its end (September 15, 2003 to May 4, 2004). Each classroom teacher had a total of 5,400 minutes to deliver the standards and performance indicators needed to prepare students for the state assessments. Data was collected anonymously and teachers

were assured that the data would not be used in a punitive way by the administration.

Whereas data for over 150,000 minutes of math instruction was collected, there were some limitations to our collection of data. Only full-time classroom teachers recorded time; substitute teachers did not log time, nor was time logged when teachers attended conferences, class trips, assembly programs, or administered state tests. Collected data was organized into reports for dissemination to the teachers through the district's e-mail system. The reports were analyzed and discussed in monthly department meetings as well as during weekly grade-level meetings. Teachers used these formative reports to help them adjust their instructional delivery to ensure that all grade-appropriate standards and performance indicators were taught to all students.

Every six weeks, collected data was presented to the teachers. Data was presented on an individual, grade-level, and school-wide basis. The graph below represents the percent of instructional time for the year spent by our eighth grade teachers on each of the standards.



Data was also presented in table form for individual teachers (anonymously) and across grade levels for each component of the standards.

**Table of Minutes Spent on Standards  
September 15, 2003 – May 4, 2004**

Standard	Grade Level		
	6 <sup>th</sup>	7 <sup>th</sup>	8 <sup>th</sup>
<b>ST3B01</b> understand, represent, and use numbers in a variety of equivalent forms (integer, fraction, decimal, percent)	8715	2028	1971
<b>ST3B02</b> understand and apply ratios, proportions, and percents through a wide variety of hands-on explorations	1230	2307	1442
<b>ST3B03</b> develop an understanding of number theory (primes, factors, and multiples)	3100	1520	1138
<b>ST3B04</b> recognize order relations for decimals, integers, and rational numbers	610	858	909

The wealth of information provided by the time-on-task program allowed for administrators and teachers to identify those standards and performance indicators delivered and learned by sixth, seventh, and eighth grade students. In our evaluation of the data, we first looked to see if the teachers were delivering the math program at the same pace and in the same sequence. Next, we looked to see the extent daily instruction was aligned with the state standards and performance indicators. Lastly, we looked to see the emphasis (number of minutes) teachers placed on each standard and performance indicator.

Our evaluation of the data collected through the time-on-task program (for further information, go to [dfwesa.com](http://dfwesa.com)) has indicated that our delivery of instruction was not as closely aligned with the state standards as suggested by the New York State Education

Department (New York State Testing Program Mathematics 01/04/02). For example, the percentage of instructional time spent on “Operations” at each grade level exceeded the state’s suggestion while the percentage of instructional time spent on “Patterns and Functions” at each grade level fell below the state’s suggestions. The evaluation of the data served as a guide for the changes our teachers made in our instructional program. The two major changes we initiated were a grade level realignment of topics and an increase in the emphasis of instruction on the state standards that are emphasized on the state assessment.

Over the course of the two years we have been using the time-on-task program, we have increased the percentage of students scoring at Levels 3 and 4 from 25 to 42 percent.

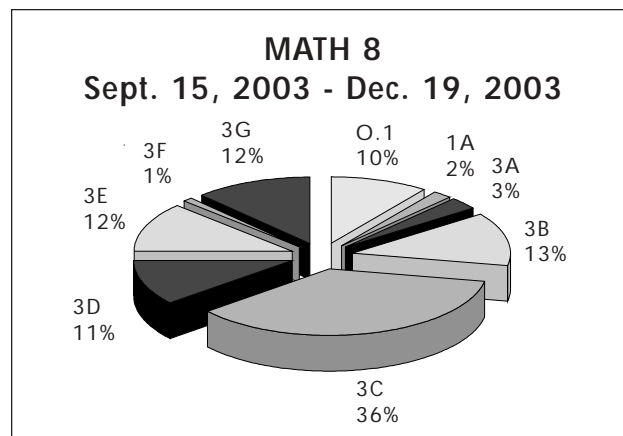
Level	2002	2003	2004
4	2%	3%	5%
3	23%	27%	37%
2	40%	45%	37%
1	35%	24%	21%

We have certainly celebrated our success in improving our assessment results. However, the data indicates that we still have a way to go in improving our math instructional program. We are investigating grade-level curriculum maps and benchmark assessments as processes to ensure that our daily instructional program is tightly matched to the expectations of the state. The data collected through the time-on-task program has proved invaluable to our examination of our instructional practices. The program has allowed us to examine our daily instructional practice as it really happens in the classroom. Accurate “front line” data in the hands of the professionals responsible for initiating change provides a firm foundation on which to build improvements in an instructional program.

The charts and table shown below are examples of data received by the teachers. The teachers received this data a few days prior to a

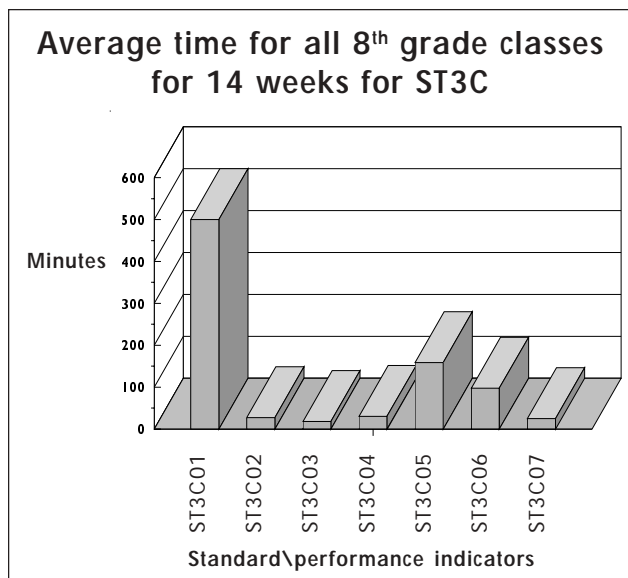
department meeting. The data served to guide the discussion among the teachers and the principal. Graph 1 indicates that during the first fourteen weeks of the school year, our two eighth grade teachers used 36% of their instructional time to teach standard 3C (Operations). Reflecting on this data, the teachers questioned their spending over one-third of their instructional time on the one standard.

**Graph 1**



A further breakdown of the data revealed that the vast majority of time spent on ST3C was spent on one Performance Indicator, ST3C01 (add, subtract, multiply, and divide fractions, decimals, and integers). The breakdown of time spent on the performance indicators is shown in Graph 2. The teachers felt the discrepancy between the instructional time spent on specific performance indicators was acceptable due to the emphasis placed on the performance indicators in other grade levels and at other points in the year. They did, however, agree that they needed to balance the instructional time better across those performance indicators emphasized in the eighth grade curriculum and on the State Assessment.

**Graph 2**



Although the teachers attributed some of the discrepancies to differences in rates of learning between classes, they could readily see that all eighth grade students were not receiving balanced instruction. It was clear the teachers needed time together to review and plan their instructional program. This they were able to do through the establishment of weekly grade-level department meetings.

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In addition, the teachers discovered discrepancies in the instructional time each devoted to teaching ST3C01 (add, subtract, multiply, and divide fractions, decimals, and integers). Table 1 shows the number of minutes spent each week delivering ST3C01 (for further information, go to [dfwesa.com](http://dfwesa.com)).

**Table 1**

Week	Teacher I	Teacher II
1	60	110
2	105	160
3	20	90
4	35	0
5	120	60
6	70	100
7	15	20
8	0	0
9	0	0
10	50	0
11	10	20
12	37	40
13	30	80
14	30	0

## Middle-Level Educators Speak Out: The Op Ed Page



### **The Most Important Piece of Life's Puzzle, Family and Consumer Sciences: We TEACH Life Skills!**

Professionally speaking, our goal is to develop strategies to teach students to manage individual, family, career, and community roles and responsibilities through educational activities that incorporate various concepts of science, mathematics, language arts, technology, and family & consumer sciences.

Practically speaking, our goal is to translate words and thoughts from research and our life experiences into an understanding of how academic and personal student development, knowledge, social interaction, and adolescent career goals can all fuse together to shape a productive, functional adolescent member of our contemporary society. It matters a great deal to our Family and Consumer Science Department to develop professional strategies and lessons in order to teach students to better manage their individual, family, career, and community roles.

Family dynamics and interpersonal relationships, we believe, influence our adolescent society the most. Interpersonal relationships are the cogs in the wheel of intellectual and emotional stability. Parent-child relationships, sibling relationships, beginning-dating relationships, and implementing healthy interpersonal relationships are presented, discussed, and eventually assimilated by our 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grade student population.

Presently at Merton Williams, the FACS and Technology Departments initiate interdisciplinary curriculum instruction through classes involving student preparation of meals using the

power of solar energy. Students build small (simple) box-like convection ovens from cardboard that are lined with aluminum foil, with a platform (a baking rack of sorts) to hold hot dogs. On a sunny day, we all enjoy an outdoor cookout utilizing solar power, combined with an upbeat discussion of good nutrition and how certain foods affect student performance at school.

The Merton Williams Health and FACS Departments also routinely discuss and evaluate the benefits of good nutritional eating habits and how what we eat may directly influence our behavior. Our departments highlight the differences between the concepts of diet and dieting. We focus on the current social climate which promotes an inclination for sugar, fast food, and abundant carbohydrates. Our staff contends that adolescent physical and emotional development is not accidental, but directly influenced by what nutritional guidelines are followed and practiced by our students throughout their student lives. We strongly believe that the subject of food and nutrition is an educational area that is as important to our students as any academic (core) subject!

Interactive teaching and observation between teachers and classrooms affords educators the opportunity to explore other avenues of instruction, by appreciating how other educational professionals get their message out. Along with the Health Department, we also utilize the expertise of the Merton Williams Science Department to teach the inner workings and importance of maintaining healthy circulatory and digestive systems which ensure proper student physical development. By observing and

participating in other curriculum areas, we as professional educators can begin to discover the connections among the critical areas of health, science, and family & consumer sciences.

Finally, our instructional objectives include the effects that family dynamics and peer pressures have on student learning and motivation and, most importantly, how all staff members teach students positive interpersonal skills that ultimately may reinforce healthy family dynamics. Middle school can be a time when many students detach themselves from their parents and seek emotional connections with their peers. It can hopefully be a time of great discovery about personal identity, family and social values, and personal goals and aspirations. Each day, we all see how individual insecurity plays out in behaviors such as jealousy, ambivalence, establishment of cliques, and a preoccupation with personal appearance. Understanding the dynamics of peer pressure and its overwhelming influence in our students' interpersonal relationships is an area of opportunity. Discover what works, teach your subject matter with enthusiasm, and use the experience and expertise of your fellow comrades in the educational fraternity.

A primary area of responsibility for us as professional educators is the management of the classroom and the control of the students. At Merton Williams, our philosophy of mingling curriculums has shown that students can begin to genuinely appreciate the relevance between science, health, and life skills through teacher-directed lesson plans that are interactive, fun, and student-friendly. Fundamentally, when our students begin to recognize the attributes of positive communication with adults and peers, they can begin to realize their importance in relation to their school, their teachers, and themselves.

What are the most effectual ways to teach family & consumer science skills in our contemporary society? At Merton Williams Middle

School, we believe in and enjoy the support of a strong student- and staff-friendly administration and an interactive professional teaching staff whose members talk to each other and freely share ideas that work in the classroom. Finally, we believe in our student population. Our goal of becoming a "Model Middle School" involves the interactions among all of academia, school administration, and most importantly...the kids!

Warren T. Bacon  
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### Op-Ed Submission Guidelines

Readers may submit Letters to the Editor and other opinion pieces for *Middle-Level Educators Speak Out: The Op Ed Page* for possible inclusion in future issues of *In Transition*. Use MS Word or a compatible word processor to create your document and send it as an e-mail attachment to [editor@nysmsa.org](mailto:editor@nysmsa.org).

All letters and opinion pieces must include the author's name, address, and telephone number or e-mail address. NYSMSA will notify authors whose letters/pieces are chosen for publication and reserves the right to edit all submissions.

# Six Crucial Factors in Teaching Middle School

Rick Heckendorn, Ed.D.



After more than thirty years as a public school educator, my combined practical and theoretical knowledge serves to enrich the Fundamentals of Middle School course I teach to undergraduate and graduate students at Manhattanville College. All methods of instruction in these two courses at either level are comparable to what my college students should consider doing as the teachers of tomorrow with their own future middle school classes. The key to my experiential teaching method is to model six factors that are crucial to excellent teaching and to ask my students to consider incorporating them into their professional practice to make it more likely that their students will feel comfortable and learn successfully in the classroom. The six factors are: planning, content, strategies, caring, flexibility, and assessment.

Teachers prepare their planning and content before they enter the room, while caring, flexibility, and (even formative) assessment occur in the classroom. (Although summative assessments like tests are planned before class, the more important and often overlooked ongoing formative assessments occur as class unfolds.) Teaching strategies bridge the gap, as they take place before and within the classroom. I bring to each college course my advance organizers and my knowledge of the curriculum. This corresponds to the lesson planning and content knowledge that middle-school teachers prepare before the class begins. Our content most often comes alive for students only when teachers openly share their enthusiasm and excitement; otherwise it most often remains dead on arrival. Caring, flexibility, and assessment occur as the class unfolds; they are there in the present. They focus on human attributes where individual

differences are addressed, if done correctly. Along with teaching strategies, they are part of the art of teaching, while planning and content are more objective components.

**Planning.** The teacher/professor should share with students what he or she has organized to help them understand the material that will be the focus of study. My syllabus and daily advance organizers serve this purpose. Students should know that the teacher/professor strives to make the material more manageable, interesting, and achievable through this thoughtful and challenging work. Our plans reveal our intentions for the class, the lessons, and the unit of work. Students should know what those plans are. Teachers should reveal the diligence expended on preparation, the first crucial step in a successful lesson or unit.

**Content.** The master teacher/professor is constantly learning more about the subject matter as a life-long learner and can demonstrate strong content knowledge in the planning process. Strong content knowledge enables the teacher to make comparisons, question deeply, and see into the possibilities that the subject matter presents. It is not equated with telling too much that invariably bores students and turns them off to learning. Strong content knowledge enables the teacher to move the lesson along briskly at times and permits the pauses necessary to bring everyone along during the class lesson. Key to my presentation of content is deferring to a student to tell the information and encouraging students to repeat information when needed. As teachers listen more, they have

opportunities to correct and help students think their way through the material.

**Caring.** Every teacher/professor should learn the students' names as soon as possible. This is a sign of caring and respect. It provides students with a participatory role in the classroom. It allows them to have a legitimate avenue to travel to make positive contributions to the class discussions and activities. In the college class, students begin to listen and respond to each other more. The value of each person's contribution is enhanced. College students will want this for their own middle-school students.

**Flexibility.** To the degree that teachers/professors can listen to the concerns of their students, they will allow themselves to deviate from their plans to meet students' needs. Although this sounds like a conflict between planning and flexibility, it is not. Just as the palm tree demonstrates its strength by being able to bend with the wind, teachers strengthen their plans as they deviate from them to provide for the voices of the students, because teachers' prime concern is to help students make connections with the subject matter. This shows caring about the students and the subject. In my classes, students learn more as they discuss the material and focus on what most interests them.

**Assessment.** To the degree that we can focus on our students' actions and responses during our lessons, we will be assessing their understanding and actions to intervene to correct misunderstandings and push them to think more deeply about the subject matter. To carry out this formative assessment successfully, students should be actively involved in the instruction process. To accomplish this, we have to show our caring for the students, demonstrate the flexibility to allow them to have input, and know our content!

**Strategies.** The teacher/professor has to know the subject matter so well and be so well

planned that the focus rests entirely on the students. The student-centered classroom is key to creating an exciting classroom community where everyone is involved in learning and supporting one another in the common quest to understand more about each other and the subject matter. Strategies are planned beforehand, but also evolve during the class in the most effective classrooms. Teachers plan an agenda but always allow for students' input. Respect for each other is key. Reflecting about what we are doing is imperative. This open communication relies upon planning, solid knowledge of content, caring about the students, flexibility in lesson design, formative assessment to support students, and varied teaching strategies that are student centered.

These six factors have enabled my graduate and undergraduate classes to create effective classroom communities where everyone has a voice and supports others in their understanding. The teacher/professor sets the stage through planning and knowledge of content, but demonstrates the value of caring, flexibility, and assessment during the unfolding of class. Strategies focus on the students, whether they are forty or twenty or twelve years old. Each deserves the respect to be included. This is the hope for our middle schools.

---

**Rick Heckendorn** is an Assistant Professor of Education at Manhattanville College, Purchase NY; heckendorn@mville.edu

Are you looking for a staff development program designed for middle-level educators?

Then look into the **Middle-Level Academy!**

The Middle-Level Academy is a six-session, thirty-hour program sponsored by NYSMSA in conjunction with SED. The sessions included 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  
tobin@nysmsa.org.



## 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](http://www.nysmsa.org). Additionally, new membership applications paid via credit card can be completed online.

**NYSMSA gives permission to its membership to reprint  
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## 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 mail or fax 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.

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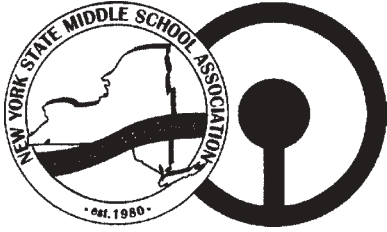
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# Third Annual Middle-Level Institute

at The Corning Museum of Glass

**Sunday, June 26- Tuesday, June 28, 2005**

You are invited to join your middle-level colleagues from across New York State at the third annual NYSMSA/CMoG Middle-Level Institute.

The New York State Middle School Association and the Corning Museum of Glass are proud to host the third annual NYSMSA/CMoG Middle-Level Institute in Corning, New York. This highly acclaimed Institute will be held in the Corning Museum of Glass' ultra-modern facility. In addition to receiving ten hours of intensive hands-on middle-level instruction in a workshop of their choosing, participants will be able to spend time perusing the extensive glass exhibits that extend back to antiquity, as well as actually creating their own unique art forms from glass.

Participants will select **one** of six instructional strands taught by practitioner experts, focusing on the areas of *middle-level leadership*, *instructional strategies*, *using data to make informed decisions*, *writing*, and more. Each session will provide participants with the tools needed to apply what is taught in practical ways. Instruction will include hands-on components, with twenty-five or fewer individuals in each session.

Special activities are also scheduled to encourage all participants, including instructors and presenters, to form lasting collegial networks that will continue to support new and creative middle-level instructional endeavors long into the future.

NYSMSA/CMoG Middle-Level Institute brochures and registration forms will be mailed to all NYSMSA members and middle-level principals in the near future. This material will also be available at [www.nysmsa.org](http://www.nysmsa.org) at that time.

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