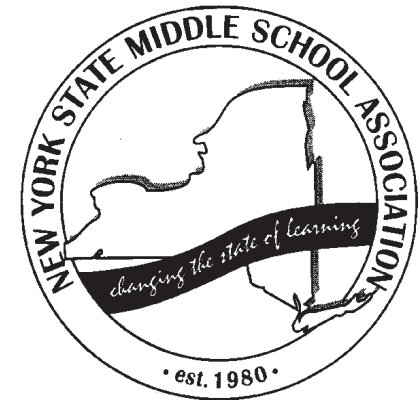


Philosophy and Mission Resources

- The complete *The Essential Elements of Standards-Focused Middle Level Schools and Programs* can be downloaded as a MS Word document at nysmsa.org in the Middle Level Essentials section of that web site.
- *This We Believe*, the position paper of the National Middle School Association, is frequently used as a guide for middle schools. It is available for order from most middle level sources, including the NYSMSA web site.
- Rick DuFour's *Professional Learning Communities at Work* is a great primer for establishing a Learning Community in your school. Naturally, mission and vision come first. This book is published by National Educational Service.
- The seminal book on the importance of mission and vision, in addition to creating learning organizations, is *The Fifth Discipline* by Peter Senge. This is available at any bookstore or book outlet, published by Doubleday Currency.
- *Developing a Mission Statement for a Middle Level School* is a resource from SED that can help. It includes examples from schools. You can download it from nysmsa.org.

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

An Introduction to Essential Element 1

Philosophy and Mission

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Essential Element 1: Philosophy and Mission

A philosophy and mission that reflect the intellectual and developmental needs and characteristics of young adolescents

We are trying to do something that has never been done before! Never have we expected all students to meet the same high standards. So, middle schools are charged not only with assisting students in their transition from childhood to adolescence, but also with meeting higher standards of achievement. As a result, our students need academic support and challenge unlike any we've experienced before.

High achieving middle schools know that it takes a focus on both academic achievement **and** personal development. These goals are not mutually exclusive; they are completely dependent upon each other!

High achieving middle schools deliberately build and maintain a vision for their students and their school that reflects an ethos of respect, caring, and support. These schools know that the middle-level grades serve as special places for students — a refuge and a support during a time of dramatic change.

The middle grades must serve multiple purposes. They must continue to emphasize skill development (an elementary

concern) while at the same time providing substantive instruction in specific disciplines (a high school imperative). **And** they also must provide a supportive environment for students who are undergoing a profound life change (a middle-level priority). Developmentally-appropriate middle schools stress the development of the whole child, including his or her self-esteem and sense of personal identity and intellectual challenge and growth. Educators, parents, and all other stakeholders must collaborate to instill in students a sense of positive self-worth, self-respect, and self-confidence, as well as a belief that all can succeed academically.

What should a middle school do? Schools should work with stakeholders to develop an explicit **philosophy** and **mission** that publicly and purposefully articulate and stress the importance of an intellectual *and* personal focus. This mission should be constructed from an examination of research, best practice, demonstration schools, and community interests. It should serve as the fundamental philosophical foundation for all school improvement efforts. The mission is the public commitment to the students and community. Other decisions about program, structure, and leadership spring from this.

Developmentally responsive middle-level programs...

- **Reflect shared beliefs of multiple stakeholders**
- **Commit to whole child development — intellectually, academically, personally, socially, physically, emotionally**
- **Include responsibility for the educational and personal development of ALL children**
- **Provide a variety of learning experiences and opportunities to enable them to make informed life decisions**
- **Establish partnerships with home and community**

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