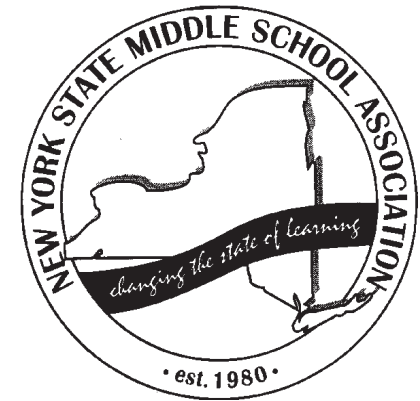


## Organization and Structure Resources

- Download *The Essential Elements of Standards-Focused Middle Level Schools and Programs* at [nysmsa.org](http://nysmsa.org), in the site's Middle Level Essentials section. This section also contains several presentations and a tutorial to help teach the Essential Elements.
- *The Exemplary Middle School*, by Paul George and William Alexander, has been the standard text in the field of middle school education for two decades. Its comprehensive coverage remains unparalleled and the authors have included a multitude of rich, real-world illustrations of exemplary middle school practice. This is **the** textbook on middle-level education.
- Elliot Merenbloom's *The Team Process: A Handbook for Teachers* covers all aspects of teams and teaming. It is based on the actual efforts of successful teams and describes procedures to replicate this success. In addition to describing the characteristics of effective middle-level schools and teams, it includes advice about schedules, grouping, conflict resolution, teaching strategies, and evaluation.

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NYSED's  
*The Essential Elements of Standards-Focused  
Middle Level Schools and Programs*  
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### **An Introduction to Essential Element 3 Organization and Structure**

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## Essential Element 3: Organization and Structure

### An organization and structure that support both academic excellence and personal development

**O**rganization alone does not a middle school make. Without a deliberate and intentional organization and structure, it can be very difficult to realize your vision for a standards-focused middle-level school.

Essential Element 1 tells us that we need a vision for our school that is based on the dual purposes of middle-level programs: academic and personal growth. Essential Element 2 identifies which components we should design into our school. Now it is time to integrate these ideas into a structure that promotes each of the above.

**F**irst and foremost, interdisciplinary teams are a must. Team teachers must share students and, importantly, a common planning time. It is difficult to envision a truly successful middle school without teams. The composition of teams typically includes math, science, social studies, and English language arts. Often, special education teachers are part of a team. Many schools have successfully implemented exploratory teams (the arts, technology, physical education/health, home and career skills, languages other than English) and still other schools have successfully expanded team membership to include exploratory subjects. Effective teams create a sense of belonging for students and work to provide

personal and academic support for all students on the team. In large schools, clusters of teams can be combined to form houses or schools-within-a-school.

The next most critical component is the building schedule. Ideally, decisions about time should be made by teacher teams and not by a bell. Middle-level programs should build in flexible-block schedules in which decisions about time are based on the needs of the students and on the needs of the curriculum.

**T**he list at the right articulates additional characteristics of an effective middle-level organization and structure. It is imperative that these features be designed into the program; they are most effective when they are incorporated into all aspects of the school.

Be sure to deliberately plan for a transition in your program from elementary to high. Make parents an integral part of your school. Ensure that students have opportunities to explore options via clubs, intramurals, extracurricular activities, field trips, service learning, etc. Research shows that varied experiences contribute to a successful school experience. While no single component makes a successful middle school, it is the synthesis of all of these components that provides the richest and most engaging experience for our middle schoolers.

### Developmentally responsive middle-level programs...

- **Have teacher teams sharing a common group of students**
- **Have common planning time for teachers**
- **Have schedules with flexible blocks**
- **Contain at least three grade levels**
- **Have comparatively small enrollments or have “houses” or schools-within-schools**
- **Are structured to create close, sustained relationships between students and teachers**
- **Provide Academic Intervention Services**
- **Provide a variety of co-curricular and extracurricular activities**
- **Provide opportunities for students to participate in youth service-learning activities**
- **Encourage active parent involvement**
- **Establish ties with the school community**
- **Integrate students with disabilities into the school program**
- **Provide support services to all students**
- **Integrate technology**
- **Provide a gradual transition**