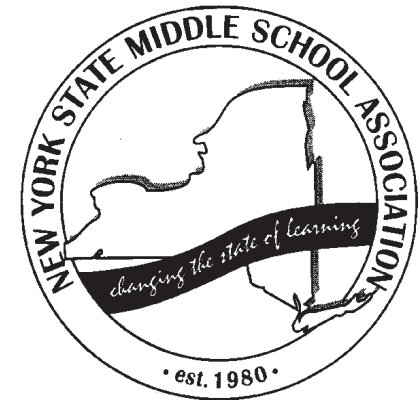


## Professional Learning Resources

- The New York State Middle School Association sponsors a statewide conference each year. The location of the conference varies from year to year. Each conference includes keynote presentations by national middle-level authorities, day-long sessions, social interaction, and dozens of practitioner workshops. The best way to learn about upcoming conferences is by visiting [nysmsa.org](http://nysmsa.org).
- The National Staff Development Council (NSDC) is a professional association dedicated to effective professional learning. Learn more at [nsdc.org](http://nsdc.org).
- Middle-Level Academies are held across New York state each year. Each Middle-Level Academy consists of five or six days of intensive study about the Essential Elements and about the research and best practices that middle schools need to embrace to become successful and effective. Information about upcoming academies can be accessed by contacting NYSMSA's Director of Professional Development. Middle-Level Academies also can be scheduled at your site.

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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 7 Professional Learning**

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## Essential Element 7: Professional Learning

Professional learning and staff development for all staff that are ongoing, planned, purposeful, and collaboratively developed

Each of the Essential Elements one through six deals with a specific component of an effective, standards-based middle school. Element seven is uniquely different. In fact, there are some official documents that specifically mention only the first six elements. This is because Essential Element 7 is an integral component of every other element, for the only way schools can successfully plan, implement, evaluate, and maintain an effective program is through ongoing professional learning.

Before even beginning to formalize a proposed plan, the educational community of a middle-level school or program must learn about effective research and best practices for standards-focused middle-level programs. Each of the previous pamphlets in this series can serve as an introduction to these Essential Elements. Actual use of the resources mentioned in each pamphlet will take that introductory knowledge further toward the application level. More must be done with the teachers and staff of a school, though, to make sure a common understanding and vocabulary are in place.

Once this common understanding has been established, necessary professional learning should occur based on an examination of best practices. This will form the

foundation for the implementation stage. Look around for exemplary middle-level schools and programs and go visit them. Look at the State Education Department Web site to find the list of the Middle-Level Support Schools, recognized for their programs. Contact them, and visit. There is no substitute for school visitations.

Perhaps the toughest part comes once implementation has begun. It is important to build a program of professional development and training that is ongoing. The knowledge about how people learn and what constitutes effective pedagogy is expanding; educators must stay current or they will be passed by. This is not an acceptable option for those charged with educating our students in today's standards-based environment. The attitude must be one of continuous improvement with ongoing and embedded staff development.

How can all of the Essential Elements be realized and how can the necessary professional learning occur? There is an answer: as a professional learning community. There is consensus among the best thinkers and researchers in education that schools must act as professional learning communities. It is only through ongoing, meaningful collaboration and hard work that an effective, standards-focused middle school can emerge and be sustained.

### Teachers, administrators, and staff need to...

- **Know the needs and characteristics of students in the middle grades and appropriate instructional strategies**
- **Understand the philosophy and mission of the standards-driven middle school**
- **Be familiar with each of the state's 28 learning standards and incorporate educational experiences that will help students achieve all standards**
- **Know and understand their subject matter and course curriculum**
- **Know and understand the state's assessment system and routinely monitor and evaluate student learning**
- **Collaborate and cooperate in planning and professional training and staff development opportunities**

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