



MIDDLE SCHOOL IS NOT A BUILDING

Educating Vermont's Young Adolescents in the 21st Century

Vermont Middle Grades Task Force 2009

VERMONT MIDDLE GRADES TASK FORCE 2006-2009

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www.education.vermont.gov/new/html/pgm_elem_middle.html#roadmap

www.vamle.org

www.middlegradescollaborative.org



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State of Vermont
Vermont Department of Education
120 State Street
Montpelier, VT 05620-2501

June 2009

Dear Reader,

Middle School is Not a Building provides every school, regardless of grade configuration, with the necessary information for change. It is up to all of us to understand our own unique and vital role and responsibility in improving instruction for all students, and I expect all stakeholders to incorporate the elements outlined in this work. Included in the document is a matrix that is a true Vermont roadmap for school success, giving everyone involved a route to creating outstanding learning opportunities for adolescents:

- The **Learner** is our most crucial partner, and is not the same learner as our generation. For the Learner, having a voice and understanding his or her role is imperative for successful learning, transitions, and decision making.
- This document sets goals for **Teams and Teachers** to create effective learning environments so they can listen to their students and build meaningful relationships, hold them accountable to high standards, and use student data and research-based practices on a regular basis to drive instruction.
- The role of **School Leadership**, particularly within the middle grades, is important in order to ensure that all teachers working with adolescents are prepared. Leaders within the middle grades must incorporate these goals and expect teachers to demonstrate their ability and understanding of how to teach this most unique and valuable group of our student population.
- The **District/Supervisory Union** and **School Boards** must be aware of the social, emotional, physical, and academic needs of this age group and should make informed decisions based on the guidance of this work.
- Vermont's **Higher Education** institutions should begin to structure themselves and communicate with one another around how to best prepare our teachers.
- **Professional Organizations** can ali
- **State** organizations should use this as a platform for policy making and in conversations on how we can transform our educational system in order to meet the diverse needs of learners and support their success.

The voice of the middle level student is the voice of all students, preK–16. As we move forward, each school must work to create its vision and mission for student success. To that end, the Vermont Association for Middle Level Education and the Middle Grades Collaborative will create professional development opportunities in collaboration with others to provide support and guidance for implementing the elements of this document.

I expect schools to incorporate these goals, elements, and practices. I do not want to see “junior high school” models, whose time has gone by. I commend the hard work that has gone into this document and those who continue to keep the voice of our adolescents at the forefront of what is the best way for all Vermont students to learn. I look forward to working with you on this important effort.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads 'Armando Vilaseca'.

Armando Vilaseca
Commissioner



COLLEGE OF EDUCATION AND SOCIAL SERVICES

DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

533 Waterman, 85 South Prospect Street, Burlington VT 05405-0160

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June 2009

Dear Reader,

Early adolescence, ages 10-15, is a unique time of life, one filled with extraordinary potential, excitement, and challenge. The rapid and dramatic development that occurs during this stage of life – intellectual, socio-emotional, and physical – prompts students to ask rich questions about themselves and the world around them. Educators who work with this age group know that this is a special time indeed.

Three years ago, a group of dedicated individuals came together to examine the status of middle grades education in our state. The Vermont Middle Grades Task Force (VMGTF) spent three years examining relevant research, studying various practices, and considering national documents on effective middle level education. I am deeply appreciative of the members' collaborative and tireless efforts to ensure their recommendations were grounded in an accurate understanding of young adolescents' academic and affective needs.

This booklet is the result of those efforts. We in Vermont have a long history of innovative educational practice. As the 21st century stretches out before us, we know more than ever what constitutes effective educational practice in the middle grades. I can't imagine a better time to embrace our tradition of innovation and to come together for the continued improvement of Vermont's middle grades. Thank you for your sincere interest in promoting positive change for our state's young adolescents.

Best Wishes,

Penny A. Bishop

Co-Chair, Vermont Middle Grades Task Force

Director, Middle Level Teacher Education, University of Vermont

ESSEX MIDDLE SCHOOL

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June 2009

Dear Reader,

There is nothing like teaching young adolescents. It is different from elementary, high school, or university teaching. Next to ages zero to three, young adolescents are in the fastest metamorphosis of their lives – physically, emotionally, intellectually, and socially. As a practitioner, this makes for a wondrous and challenging journey.

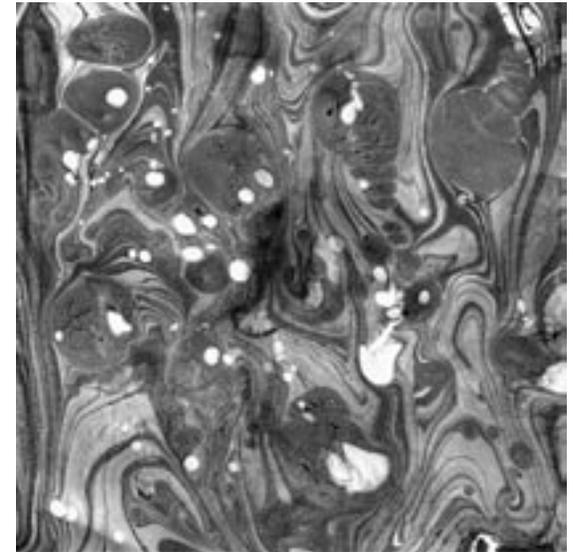
Furthermore, I am reminded that our state is distinctly unique when it comes to the middle level. “Middle school” takes many different shapes and forms when you consider that Vermont’s young adolescents are educated in K-6, K-8, and 5-8, 7-12 schools and numerous other building types. Middle School Is Not a Building reminds us that ten to fifteen year olds have distinctive needs that must be met with practices that are developmentally appropriate for this age group, despite the configuration of the school.

This document serves as a reflective and constructive tool for all professionals involved in shaping the future of young adolescents in Vermont. It will hopefully provoke thoughtful conversations about currently used practices and lead to change that will allow these learners to thrive in their educational experience. As you will see from the matrix, it is the learner that is, and should always be, first and foremost in our minds. It is critical that we honor the unique voice of young adolescents and support them with learning experiences that are developmentally appropriate, relevant, and challenging, so that they are prepared for a dynamic future.

Regards,



Lindsey Slan Halman
Facilitator, The Edge Academy, Essex Jct., VT
President, VAMLE



“We are trustworthy and our teachers trust us to do the right thing.”

Vermont 7th Grader



THE CRITICAL MIDDLE

The middle grades are exciting and fertile ground for students’ academic and social growth. Young adolescents are brimming with possibility and potential. They move from concrete to abstract thinking, take greater responsibility for their learning, and develop lasting attitudes about work and schooling. They begin planning for college and careers and make choices that will affect these goals later on. And they bring enthusiasm, humor, and energy to their learning.

Ten to fifteen year olds are in the midst of tremendous change – physically, intellectually, socially, emotionally, and morally. They grapple with life’s quintessential questions, asking, “Who am I, and who do I want to be? What do I believe? How should I act?” They face big choices, many of them risky, and require strong role models and caring adults to accompany them on their journey through the middle years.

Teachers and administrators in the middle grades know the unique challenges and rewards of working with an age group that is intensely social, who constantly tries on new identities, embraces learning, and values a hands-on approach. Yet only recently has the public begun to appreciate the crucial role the middle years play in students’ later quality of life. The middle years are often called ‘the last best chance’ to reach students, and with good reason. Contrary to popular belief, “the level of academic achievement that students attain by eighth grade has a larger impact on their college and career readiness by the time they graduate from high school than anything that happens academically in high school.”¹

¹Grasmick et al. 2008





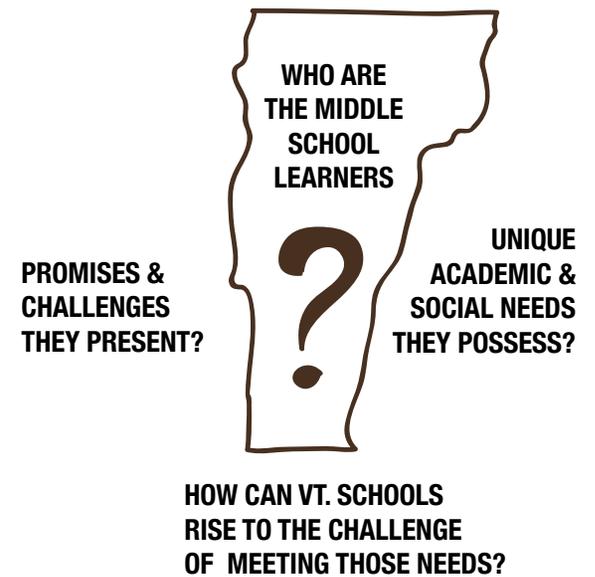
“The teachers always ask the right questions. They’re always looking for the answer that they know you can give.”

Vermont 8th Grader

Similarly, although demographic factors such as socioeconomic status, race/ethnicity, and parental education place certain students at greater risk than others for dropping out of school, we now know that students demonstrate important *school-based* factors that can help us identify these learners as early as the 6th grade. In fact, research indicates that if a 6th grader fails math or English, receives a suspension or poor final behavior grade or attends school less than 80% of the time, s/he has less than a 20% chance of graduating from high school on time.² In other words, young adolescents make choices that are predictive of schooling success or failure a full six years later. And knowledgeable educators can identify students at risk of school failure in these critical middle years.

Dropping out of school has grave personal and societal implications. Not finishing high school places youth at significantly greater risk of incarceration, poverty, and substance abuse. Keeping kids in school holds implications for our state’s economy as well. Just a 5% reduction in Vermont’s male dropout rate, for example, would yield a combination of savings and revenue of over \$9 million in reduced crime spending and increased earnings in Vermont each year.³ All of this underscores the critical nature of the middle schooling years and the important role middle grades educators play in preparing tomorrow’s citizens for this complex world.

Who are the middle grades learners in our state? What promises and challenges do they present? What unique academic and social needs do they possess? And how can Vermont’s schools rise to the challenge of meeting these needs? As educators work to keep young adolescents on track for school success, the challenge in contemporary schools is substantial, as illustrated by the following data on academic, behavioral, and affective outcomes.



²Balfanz & Herzog, 2006

³Alliance for Excellent Education, 2008, <http://www.all4ed.org/files/Econ2008.pdf>

THE STATUS OF VERMONT'S YOUNG ADOLESCENTS

"Whenever we work in groups, I feel like I learn better. Sometimes kids explain things in ways I understand."

Vermont 7th Grader



Vermont offers a relatively high standard of living in comparison to many other states, sporting high school graduation, health and wellness, college degree attainment, home ownership and median household income rates all above the national norms. At the same time, Vermont schools face significant challenges to ensuring success for all students. For example, approximately 8,000 Vermont families with children live in poverty – children who either do or will soon attend our schools.⁴

Additionally, in the past decade, Vermont schools have seen a 60% increase in the population of English Language Learners while the overall student population has decreased 13%.⁵ This increase in cultural and linguistic diversity creates new classroom opportunities, and it also presents educators with requirements and expectations many have never before faced.

Further, this generation of young adolescents is more “plugged in” than ever. Middle grades youth are among the most avid video and computer game players; eighth grade boys average 23 hours a week and girls average 12 hours.⁶ Tapping into the digital worlds these students inhabit requires educators to cross the digital native/digital immigrant divide,⁷ a skill that may be new for many teachers.

⁴ UVM Center for Rural Studies, 2008 http://maps.vcgi.org/indicators/cfhome/state_profile.cfm?Call_Program=INDICATORS

⁵ Office of English Language Acquisition (OELA), 2006

⁶ Simpson & Clem, 2008

⁷ Prensky, 2001

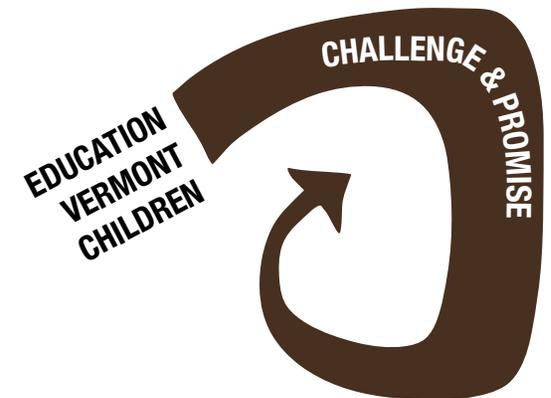


"I worry a lot about fitting in, wearing the right clothes, and saying the right thing."

Vermont 8th Grader

Educating Vermont's children, like all children, comes with both substantial challenge and great promise. According to the 2007 Vermont Youth Risk Behavior Survey,⁸

- 8th graders were more than twice as likely as 12th graders to have been in a physical fight during the past year (38% vs. 17%) and over two times more likely than 12th graders to fight on school property (20% vs. 8%).
- 8th graders were two and a half times more likely than 12th graders to have been a victim of bullying (26% vs. 10%).
- 26% of 8th graders reported that someone stole or deliberately damaged their property on school grounds.
- 20% of 8th graders felt so sad or hopeless almost every day for at least 2 weeks during the past 12 months that they stopped doing some usual activities.
- 38% of 8th graders spend three or more hours per school day watching TV, playing video games, or using the computer for fun – a level related to obesity and aggressive or violent behavior.
- 15% of 8th graders have had sexual intercourse and 6% of young adolescents have had sexual intercourse before the age of 13.⁹
- Significant gaps remain in the academic-success rates of Vermont ten to fourteen year olds. Boys struggle with reading more than girls, and low income students struggle more than their wealthier peers.¹⁰
- When scores are disaggregated by gender and SES- and tracked across four years for the same cohort of students, evidence begins to emerge that the gender and poverty achievement gaps that have received much attention in the national press also exist for the young adolescents in our Vermont schools.



⁸ Vermont Department of Health http://healthvermont.gov/pubs/yrbs2005/yrbs2005_5.pdf

⁹ Centers for Disease Control, 2008 <http://apps.nccd.cdc.gov/yrbs/Sel-QuestYear.asp?Loc=VT&cat=4>

¹⁰ National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), Hayes, 2008



While the challenges are great, the promise is greater. Middle level teachers, counselors, and administrators work closely with social services, mental health organizations, and family support services to provide wraparound services to students. Implementing this support structure, while time consuming, increases the potential for all students to meet academic goals. Many Vermont educators and other concerned citizens work hard to create schools that are safe, challenging, and engaging. And the benefits are apparent.

According to the 2007 Vermont Youth Risk Behavior Survey,¹¹

- Almost half (44%) of 8th graders report that students help decide what goes on at their school.
- 80% of middle and high school students have participated in some form of anti-bullying education.
- Middle school alcohol and drug use has declined in the past decade:
 - 8% of 8th graders smoked, down from 22% in 1999
 - 14% of students smoked prior to age 13, down from 28% in 1999
 - 19% of 8th graders drink alcohol, down from 31% in 1999
 - 16% of 8th graders have tried marijuana, down from 28% in 1999

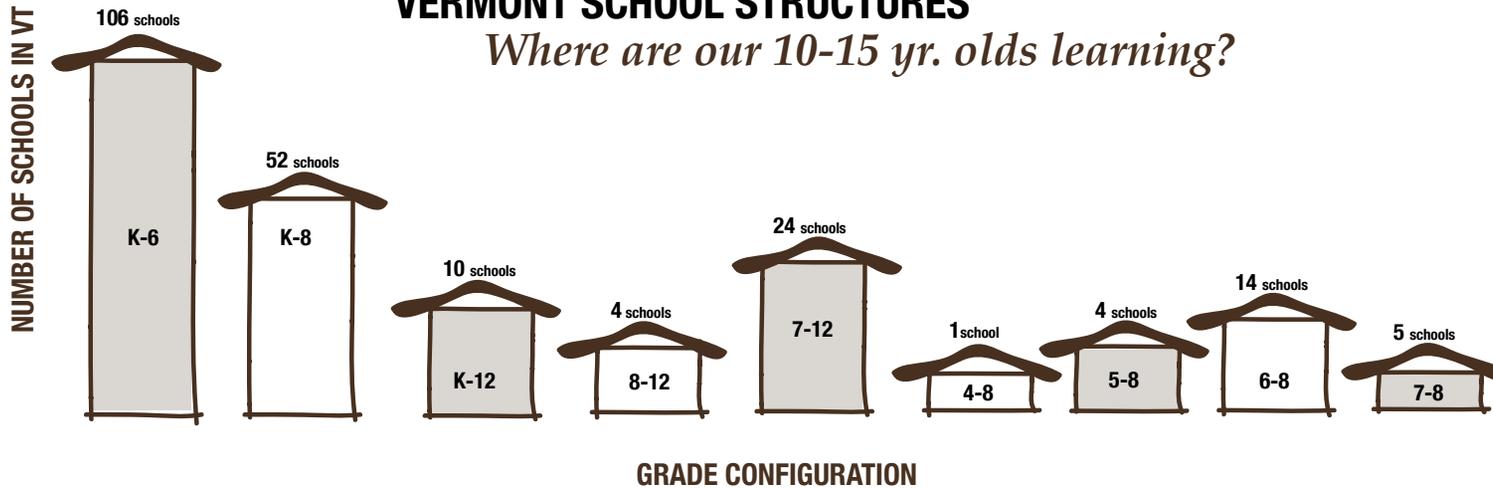
So where does this leave Vermont middle grades educators? We must be ever diligent in our commitment to create learning opportunities that are academically challenging, developmentally responsive, and socially equitable¹² for our students in the middle years.

¹¹ Vermont Department of Health http://healthvermont.gov/pubs/yrbs2005/yrbs2005_5.pdf

¹² National Forum to Accelerate Middle Grades Reform, 2009, <http://www.mgforum.org/AbouttheForum/OurVisionStatement/tabid/99/Default.aspx>

VERMONT SCHOOL STRUCTURES

Where are our 10-15 yr. olds learning?



MIDDLE SCHOOL IS NOT A BUILDING

In many areas of the United States, as well as other countries, middle schools are easily defined by their grade level configuration. Grades six through eight are often grouped together within a building for the purposes of teaching and learning. This is not so in Vermont. Instead, Vermont educators face the particular challenge of teaching young adolescents wherever they may be. And this means teaching them in a wide variety of settings, including K-6, K-8, 5-8, 6-8, 7-8, and 7-12 school structures, among others.

Because middle schooling in Vermont transcends structure, we must ask ourselves, “How can we ensure high quality learning experiences that meet the unique nature and needs of young adolescents *regardless of the sign on the building?*”

Everyone concerned with the education of ten to fourteen year olds should understand that effective middle grades practice is predicated on solid research on effective methods. These important ideas are outlined in several seminal documents, including *Turning Points, 2000*,¹⁴ *This We Believe*,¹⁵ *Breaking Ranks in the Middle*,¹⁶ and *Middle Still Matters*.¹⁷

The Vermont Middle Grades Task Force offers ten recommendations that focus on three areas of improvement: curriculum, instruction, and assessment; school organization and community; and teacher education and development. These important components work together to ensure that every young adolescent attains a high degree of academic excellence and personal efficacy.



¹³This graphic illustrates VT middle level grade configurations in 2008.

¹⁴Jackson & Davis, 2000

¹⁵National Middle School Association, 2005

¹⁶National Association of Secondary School Principals, 2007

¹⁷Vermont Association for Middle Level Education, 2001

VERMONT MIDDLE GRADES TASK FORCE GOALS

Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment

1. All middle level learners participate in challenging, integrated, real world, standards based curriculum that promotes conceptual understanding, 21st-century skill development, and knowledge acquisition.
2. Instruction is engaging, personalized, and differentiated to meet individual student learning needs.
3. Student learning is measured by appropriate assessments, resulting in continual learning and high achievement.

School Organization and Community

4. Organizational structures and a school culture of high expectations enable all middle level students and educators to succeed.
5. Relationships for learning create a climate of intellectual development and a caring community that includes having an adult advocate for each student.
6. Ongoing family and community partnerships provide a supportive and enriched learning environment for each middle level student.
7. A supportive, safe, and healthy learning environment advances learning and promotes overall student and educator well being.
8. A democratic system of continual collaboration by all stakeholders allows for authentic student voice and a shared vision to guide decisions.

Teacher Education and Development

9. The recruitment, hiring, and preparation of teachers and administrators is based on knowledge of the developmental characteristics of young adolescents, strong content knowledge, and the ability to use research based instructional strategies and assessment practices appropriate for middle level students.
10. Research is generated, disseminated, and applied to identify and implement practices leading to continual student learning and high academic achievement at the middle level.



“I learn more when I’m active, using my hands, experiencing things.”

Vermont 8th Grader

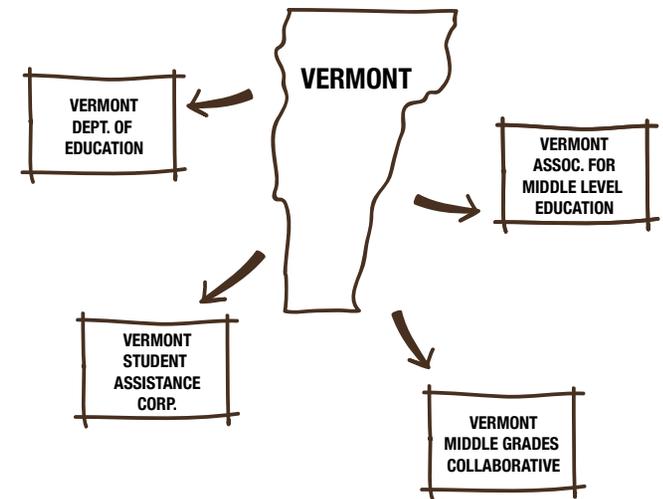


THE WAY FORWARD

Vermont has long promoted developmentally responsive practice for young adolescents. The Vermont Association for Middle Level Education, chartered in 1987, continually recognizes outstanding middle school practice through its annual Scholar Leader Banquet and its Middle Matters Recognition Award. The Vermont Student Assistance Corporation promotes student achievement and potential in the middle grades around the state. The Vermont Department of Education has issued a middle grades teaching endorsement since 1989 and staffs a consultant specific to that level. And the Vermont Middle Grades Collaborative, a formal union of Vermont colleges and universities, has hosted an annual summer institute since 1990, offering teacher professional development and graduate coursework.

On the school level, there is also a lineage of hard work in this area. More and more building leaders require the middle grades endorsement for hiring purposes, viewing it as a sign of strong preparation and a commitment to the age group. Many schools are organized into interdisciplinary or partner teams and conduct advisory, service learning, and mentoring programs. Several Vermont schools have been recognized as New England League of Middle Schools Spotlight Schools. And Vermont middle grades teams have received national recognition from the National Middle School Association for their outstanding work with young adolescents.

While these practices are promising, our state has a long way to go toward ensuring that all young adolescents have access to the type of education that promotes high achievement and personal efficacy. For example, research is clear that teachers who hold middle grades licensure are more likely to engage in research-based practices, such as interdisciplinary teaming and common planning time – practices that have been linked to increased student achievement.¹⁸ Yet Vermont's middle grades teaching endorsement continues to be optional and overlaps entirely with the elementary and secondary endorsements. This means that hundreds of teachers work daily with Vermont middle grades students without the benefit of even one course about the unique nature and needs of the age group.



¹⁸Mertens, Flowers & Mulhall, 2002



To improve middle grades education in Vermont, educators must work in an integrated, coherent, and comprehensive manner. Within this document, the Vermont Middle Grades Task Force proposes ten recommendations for improving the education of Vermont's 10 to 15 year olds. These goals, drawn from seminal research-based documents, point to curriculum, instruction, and assessment; school organization and community; and teacher education and development as the means to foster the healthy intellectual and socio-emotional development of Vermont's young adolescents. Such development is essential to these learners' efficacy, self-concept, and success and is also essential to a healthy and vibrant state economy and citizenry.



The research on schooling for young adolescents is clear. We know what is necessary to improve their schooling lives and chances for later life success. Curriculum must be rigorous, relevant, integrative, and suited to living and working in the 21st century. Schools need to be organized to meet the academic needs of ten to fifteen year olds. Teachers must be specially trained to work with young adolescents. And leaders should be prepared to provide momentum and guidance to each of these initiatives. When these are in place, there are clear gains in middle grades student outcomes.¹⁹

Moreover, we know that such recommendations work in concert with one another. In order to fully realize the increased student achievement and well-being that accompanies such a learning environment, school leaders must work toward the implementation of all recommendations as a cohesive whole.²⁰

The pages that follow provide the task force's ten recommended goals with proposed actions for state, professional organization, post secondary, district, school, classroom, and learner level considerations. These are not meant to be limiting in nature, but to offer steps that lead to research-based practices supported by our best available data. While actions implemented in schools and districts may vary depending on size and grade or building configuration, the Vermont Middle Grades Task Force feels that all goals are attainable in schools and districts throughout the state.

¹⁹ Felner, 1997; Mertens & Anfara, 2006

²⁰ Erb & Stevenson, 1999



“Choosing your own questions makes you more into whatever you are doing, and more aware of what you are doing.”

Vermont 6th Grader

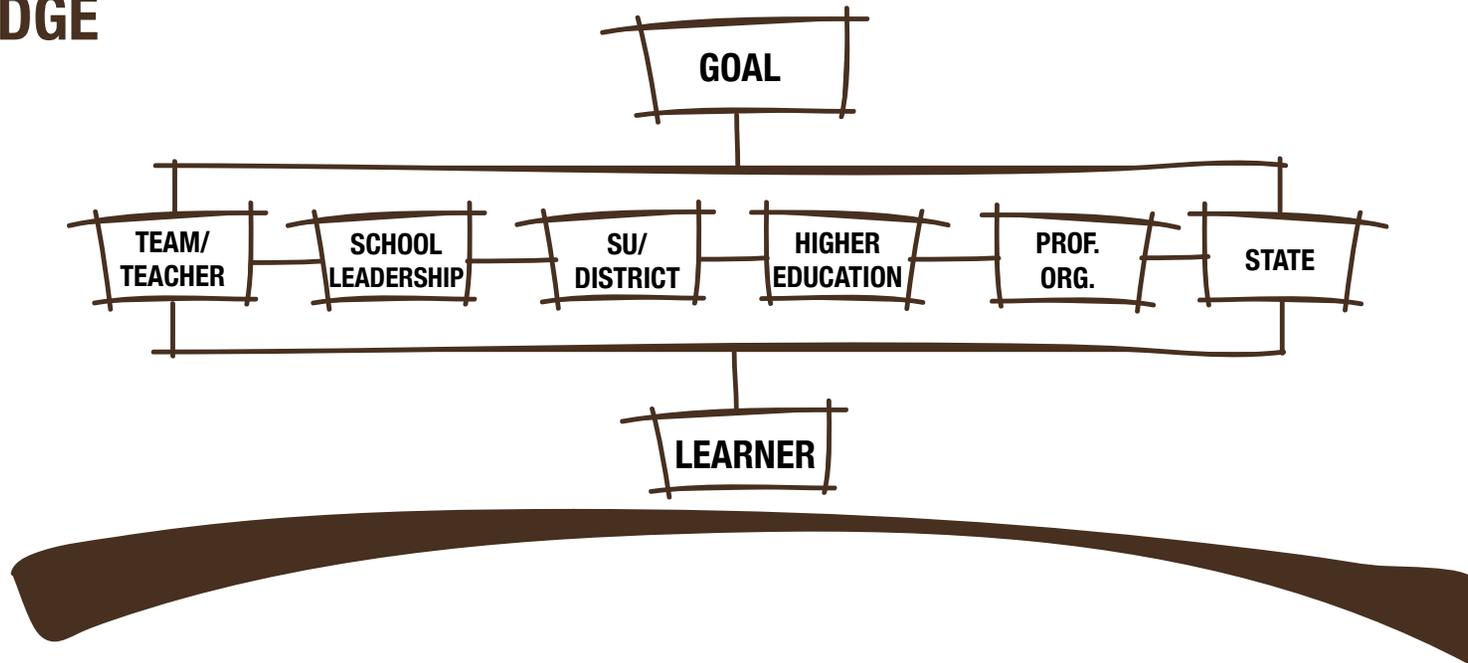
Young adolescents are filled with hope and promise of things to come. Their capacity for meaningful, authentic work is immense, and we only do them justice when we engage them in real learning about topics and questions that matter to them. Teachers who understand the unique characteristics of young adolescents appreciate the challenges of identity development and build opportunities for such exploration within the curriculum. Contemporary curriculum often fails to engage young adolescents because it expects students to give answers to questions they do not ask.²¹

Inviting our students into the conversation about schooling is an essential first-step toward ensuring their attainment of high achievement and personal efficacy. As a state, we owe them nothing less.



²¹ Brazee, 1997

THE BRIDGE



The above graphic illustrates how the following Matrix “bridges” the middle school goals to the roles and responsibilities of the various stakeholders. The Matrix outlines specific steps necessary to implement a coordinated and strategic plan to continually improve both academic and social success for all 10 to 15 year olds as they gain the skills needed to be lifelong learners in the 21st century.

The best way to use the Matrix is to look at which of the ten goals you wish to assess or work on. Find your stakeholder group and begin to look at the recommendations. You also may want to look at the other groups that you work with directly. Teachers should look at the learner and school columns, while Administrators might examine the teacher and district columns. The authors of this unique resource would like you to utilize it as a living document from which to build.

We know that full implementation of middle school practice is a long and involved process. We also know that many schools are at different places in terms of best practices. Finally, we realize that in order to have the middle school situations that best serve the students of Vermont, it will take all the stakeholders working together to bring their special voices and expertise to the table.



MIDDLE LEVEL GOAL I

All middle level learners participate in challenging, integrated, real world, standards based curriculum that promotes conceptual understanding, 21st century skill development, and knowledge acquisition.

Learner

1. Participate actively in the planning, implementation, and assessment of curriculum
2. Apply prior knowledge and new learning to further one's understanding
3. Collaborate with peers to generate information that will move learning forward
4. Be knowledgeable of one's own learning style and other learning styles

Team/Teacher

1. Plan, implement, and assess curricula for the wide range of diverse learners
2. Collaborate with peers in teams and professional learning communities to develop curriculum
3. Actively involve students in curriculum development, implementation and assessment
4. Use backwards design and differentiated instruction to ensure alignment of standards, objectives and activities
5. Promote constructivist learning investigations where students learn through inquiry, research and experience
6. Use a variety of student data to make teacher/team decisions
7. Participate in professional development throughout the year

School Leadership

1. Hire teachers knowledgeable about standards and GLE's and trained specifically in middle level curriculum development
2. Apply supervision and evaluation tools that reflect teachers' use of standards and GE's with an understanding of how middle level learners learn
3. Promote and support teachers' professional development throughout the year
4. Build a school-wide commitment to collaborative teaching by providing time for collaboration on integrated curriculum

SU / District

1. Design standards and GE-based integrated curricula that are conceptual, challenging, and flexible
2. Align conceptual standards and GE-based curricula to the comprehensive local assessment plan
3. Engage district personnel, local boards of education, and the superintendents in learning experiences that increase their knowledge of the developmental and academic needs of middle level students
4. Require vertical alignment of curricula among elementary, middle, and secondary schools

Higher Ed.

1. Design preparation programs to address integrated, interdisciplinary standards-based curricula that incorporate 21st century skills and knowledge
2. Model appropriate curricula in teacher education classrooms to include 21st century learning contexts
3. Provide professional development to schools on middle level appropriate curriculum
4. Conduct research on the effectiveness of middle level appropriate curriculum
5. Disseminate research-based practices through publication and presentation
6. Collaborate with middle level partners

Prof. Org.

1. Provide professional development and resources that are responsive to middle level curriculum and practices
2. Develop partnerships with schools to promote awareness around available programs, and resources
3. Collaborate with middle level partners
4. Promote schools identified as "best practice sites" for experiencing effective middle level learning environments in action

State

1. Provide support and embedded professional development models on instruction and assessment that align with rich curriculum and are responsive to student learning
2. Coordinate school support/improvement efforts of the DOE to support schools that teach young adolescents regardless of the school grade configurations
3. Ensure that school reform initiatives have a specific focus on the needs of young adolescents
4. Coordinate state-wide partnerships to support middle level initiatives
5. Identify "best practice sites" so educators can experience effective middle level learning environments in action

MIDDLE LEVEL GOAL II

Instruction is engaging, personalized, and differentiated to meet individual student learning needs.

Learner

1. Know how to advocate for one's own learning
2. Engage in peer and self reflection for personal achievement and improved understanding of oneself as a learner
3. Understand the various types of learning styles and how those styles impact one's own learning as well as the learning of others
4. Take responsibility for learning by demonstrating what is learned, why it is learned, and what constitutes success throughout all learning opportunities

Team/Teacher

1. Implement differentiated instructional strategies that challenge the wide range of diverse students and engage each student while using formative assessment to adjust instruction
2. Use common planning time to share proven instructional strategies and to develop individualized strategies to support all students
3. Incorporate students' concerns, opinions, and perspectives and align with learning goals and outcomes
4. Participate and help facilitate professional learning communities that incorporate differentiated instruction, integrated instruction, and student-centered learning

School Leadership

1. Create professional learning communities that incorporate differentiated instruction and student-centered learning
2. Implement a system for personalizing education for all students
3. Hire teachers who know, understand, and can engage young adolescents in the learning process

SU / District

1. Provide and promote professional learning communities that incorporate differentiated instruction and student-centered learning
2. Develop a system for implementation of personalized learning for all students
3. Provide professional development opportunities that address differentiated instruction and personalized education

Higher Ed.

1. Design programs to address middle level appropriate instruction
2. Model appropriate instructional strategies that are student centered
3. Provide professional development to schools in engaging, personalized, and differentiated instruction
4. Conduct research on the effectiveness of differentiated and engaging instruction
5. Disseminate research-based practices through publication and presentation

Prof. Org.

1. Provide professional development that will help middle level administrators and teachers use data to inform instruction and refine practice
2. Provide professional development to schools in engaging and differentiated instruction
3. Help identify "best practice sites" and promote these sites so educators can see quality instruction in action

State

1. Provide embedded professional development that will help middle level administrators and teachers use data to inform instruction and refine practice to address student learning needs
2. Coordinate school support/improvement efforts of the DOE to support schools that teach young adolescents regardless of the school grade configurations
3. Ensure that school reform initiatives have a specific focus on the needs of young adolescents
4. Identify "best practice sites" so educators can experience effective middle level learning environments in action

MIDDLE LEVEL GOAL III

Student learning is measured by appropriate assessments, resulting in continual learning and high achievement.

Learner

1. Participate actively in the development of the assessments that document one's learning and growth
2. Use self and peer assessment tools to gain understanding of academic growth
3. Understand one's own data and how it relates to personal learning
4. Use and communicate this data through student-led conferences centered on their personalized education

Team/Teacher

1. Understand how formative assessment can be used to improve student learning
2. Actively involve students
3. Implement assessment strategies that challenge and engage each student while using formative assessment to adjust instruction to meet student learning needs
4. Use classroom assessments and other data to measure and improve students' progress
5. Design student-led conferences that assess the goals of personalized learning

School Leadership

1. Support a collaboration model that develops common assessments and school-wide rubrics
2. Support the training and implementation of formative assessment techniques and strategies
3. Collect and create a school-wide process that uses data to improve instruction
4. Create a system of local competency-based assessments and data collection to assist in developing and monitoring instructional strategies
5. Provide time and support for the development and implementation of student-led conferences

SU / District

1. Develop a comprehensive local assessment plan
2. Create a system that teachers and leadership can access to input and analyze student data
3. Support a balanced range of assessments that emphasize formative as well as summative feedback embedded into everyday learning
4. Provide opportunities for all stakeholders based on assessment data
5. Participate in professional development opportunities which model and offer strategies for actively involving students in educational improvement

Higher Ed.

1. Design programs to address middle-level appropriate assessment
2. Model appropriate assessment that is student centered and reflective of 21st century skills and knowledge
3. Provide professional development to schools in formative and summative assessment
4. Conduct research on the effectiveness of various assessment techniques
5. Disseminate research-based practices through publication and presentation

Prof. Org.

1. Provide professional development for the use of assessment that aligns with middle level curriculum and is responsive to student learning
2. Provide professional development to schools in formative and summative assessment based on Vermont's framework of standards and GLE's
3. Align professional development opportunities with middle level practice
4. Provide professional development opportunities that model and offer strategies for actively involving students in educational improvement
5. Promote schools identified as "best practice sites" for experiencing effective middle level learning environments in action

State

1. Provide support for embedded professional development for the use of assessment that aligns with 21st century skills and knowledge and are responsive to student learning
2. Coordinate school support/improvement efforts of the DOE to support schools that teach young adolescents regardless of the school grade configurations
3. Ensure that school-reform initiatives include understanding of the needs of young adolescents
4. Identify "best practice sites" so educators can experience effective middle level learning environments in action

MIDDLE LEVEL GOAL IV

Organizational structures and a school culture of high expectations enable all middle level students and educators to succeed.

Learner

1. Understand one's own role in the organizational structure of a school or team
2. Actively participate in those structures that enhance student culture
3. Recognize the relationship between one's own participation and academic success

Team/Teacher

1. Participate in professional development that supports organizational structures, such as integrated curriculum, flexible grouping, flexible scheduling, and interdisciplinary teaming
2. Operate in an interdisciplinary teaming structure that meets regularly to discuss curriculum, instruction, and assessment, in order to ensure student success
3. Implement structures and systems that support a culture of high expectations for all
4. Allow and encourage students to participate in the design and implementation of the organizational structure and culture of the team

School Leadership

1. Create a safe, respectful, and healthy school culture that promotes high achievement for all
2. Craft a vision and strategic plan that promotes effective teaching practices and high student achievement aligned with district policy
3. Provide professional development on, and support implementation of, effective middle level structures, including flexible grouping and scheduling and interdisciplinary teaming
4. Provide team teachers with consistent common planning time multiple times per week
5. Provide teachers with maximum control over team scheduling

SU / District

1. Design and coordinate transition practices that support students as they enter and exit the structures and cultures of a middle school
2. Develop a vision and mission statement that is aligned to district policy, sets a clear course for school growth and supports effective teaching practices and high achievement
3. Support professional development initiatives and opportunities that reflect effective teaching practices around organizational structures and culture

Higher Ed.

1. Work in partnership with schools to model organizational structures and healthy school climate and provide professional development in these areas
2. Educate pre-service and in-service teachers in the creation and support of an appropriate organizational structure.
3. Disseminate research-based practices through publication and presentation

Prof. Org.

1. Provide professional development that will help leadership teams and teachers to successfully develop effective organizational structures
2. Provide professional development to schools to effectively utilize recommended organizational structures
3. Identify "best practice sites" so educators can see effective organizational structures in action
4. Advocate for effective middle level practices
5. Promote schools identified as "best practice sites" for experiencing effective middle level learning environments in action

State

1. Educate schools and districts on the implementation of middle level best practices within the various sizes and grade configurations in Vermont schools
2. Coordinate school support/improvement efforts of the DOE to support schools that teach young adolescents regardless of the school grade configurations
3. Ensure that school reform initiatives include the understanding of the needs of young adolescents
4. Identify "best practice sites" so educators can experience effective middle level learning environments in action

MIDDLE LEVEL GOAL V

Relationships for learning create a climate of intellectual development and a caring community that includes having an adult advocate for each student.

Learner

1. Use effective communication and collaboration skills to actively participate in the learning community
2. Understand the importance of positive relationships by participating in partnerships, small group and whole group learning opportunities
3. Engage in positive relationships through peer leadership and advocacy for self and others
4. Demonstrate that these skills are transferable throughout all arenas

Team/Teacher

1. Implement strategies that support student intellectual, social, and emotional development through teacher-based guidance, advisory, and/or small-learning communities
2. Model collaboration by sharing resources and ideas with colleagues and students
3. Maintain positive relationships with colleagues and students by employing effective communication skills and problem-solving strategies
4. Practice caring and ethical advising and teaching

School Leadership

1. Develop a school-wide advocacy model with an appropriately low student/teacher ratio and adequate professional development to ensure supportive relationships
2. Build interdisciplinary teams that maintain the same students and teachers for two or more years
3. Provide on-going professional development on advisories and teaming
4. Provide life-skills and counseling-support programs for students

SU / District

1. Advise schools to develop a schedule that provides common team planning time and professional development for student advocacy
2. Promote a collaborative decision-making process throughout the district by including teachers
3. Allow multi-year teams to be formed that stay consistent from year to year

Higher Ed.

1. Instruct and model caring and ethical teaching strategies that support student intellectual, socio-emotional, moral, and physical development, including teaming, advisory, and learning communities.
2. Create opportunities for teacher candidates to mentor middle grade learners
3. Provide instruction on how to develop appropriate climates for student learning.

Prof. Org.

1. Provide professional development that will help leadership teams and teachers to successfully develop appropriate climates for student learning
2. Identify “best practice sites” so educators can see examples of effective middle level learning climates in action
3. Advocate for effective middle level practices
4. Promote schools identified as “best practice sites” for experiencing effective middle level learning environments in action

State

1. Collect and provide assessment data to schools along the lines of student advocacy and affiliation
2. Create policies/procedures that reflect expectations that schools will promote student advocacy and voice
3. Coordinate school support/improvement efforts of the DOE to support schools that teach young adolescents regardless of the school grade configurations
4. Ensure that school reform initiatives have a specific focus on the needs of young adolescents
5. Identify “best practice sites” so educators can experience effective middle level learning environments in action

MIDDLE LEVEL GOAL VI

Ongoing family and community partnerships provide a supportive and enriched learning environment for each middle level student

Learner

1. Understand one's own role and responsibility in learning by communicating successes and challenges with parents and teachers
2. Develop civic responsibility through project based and relevant learning experiences
3. Develop technology skills to extend learning opportunities and to support community connections
4. Actively participate in opportunities around service learning

Team/Teacher

1. Include students as active participants in parent/teacher conferences
2. Utilize secondary-school students as mentors to middle grades students
3. Develop a process and opportunities that involve parents/guardians and community members to support students and the school on a regular basis
4. Include in the classroom curriculum career topics, service learning, and community service opportunities
5. Institute a daily/weekly means of communication between the classroom and the home
6. Utilize technology to increase opportunities for parent/teacher communication
7. Develop and promote career awareness and entrepreneurship activities through partnerships

School Leadership

1. Engage students and families as partners in education and encourage ongoing family participation in school events
2. Utilize communication mechanisms to inform families of the availability of school services and promote the use of these services
3. Ensure consistent and well-developed initiatives to assist young adolescents and their families as they transition in and out of middle school
4. Build partnerships within the larger community that celebrate achievement and effort for all students.
5. Develop and promote career awareness and entrepreneurship activities through partnerships
6. Establish connections with the business community to promote apprenticeships, community based learning, and service learning

SU / District

1. Involve parents and the community in the development of effective middle level practice
2. Develop initiatives to assist young adolescents and their families as they transition in and out of middle school regardless of grade configuration
3. Provide middle level educators with professional development that specifically helps them build family and community partnerships
4. Mobilize communities to ensure that all students and their families have access to technology critical for 21st century communications and commerce
5. Foster community support for career exploration, creating meaningful service opportunities

Higher Ed.

1. Model and provide instruction that engages and facilitates community partnerships beyond the classroom
2. Design programs that address the importance of families as partners in student learning
3. Conduct research on the benefits and effectiveness of service learning
4. Develop and promote career awareness and entrepreneurship activities

Prof. Org.

1. Align programs that address the importance of families as partners in student learning
2. Provide professional development on the effective implementation of family/community partnerships and the relationship to student learning
3. Advocate for effective middle level practices
4. Promote career awareness and entrepreneurship activities
5. Identify and promote "best practice sites" so educators can see effective community partnerships and service-learning opportunities in action

State

1. Support initiatives that bring parents and community members together to improve educational opportunities for middle level students
2. Support community-based learning (e.g. service learning; place-based education, and career exploration) for middle level students
3. Declare October of each year as the Month of the Young Adolescent to raise public awareness about the importance of improving the education, health, and well being of young adolescents
4. Coordinate school improvement efforts of the DOE to incorporate effective middle level best practices
5. Identify "best practice sites" so educators can experience effective middle level learning environments in action

MIDDLE LEVEL GOAL VII

A supportive, safe, and healthy learning environment advances learning and promotes overall student and educator well-being.

Learner

1. Contribute to a community where all learners feel safe and individually valued regardless of differences, including but not limited to economic, cultural, and linguistic status
2. Demonstrate awareness around the safety and well-being of self and others
3. Understand how respect, responsibility, trust, and risk-taking are critical to a healthy learning environment
4. Make healthy choices that promote physical, emotional, and social wellness
5. Engage in healthy and safe behaviors

Team/Teacher

1. Collaborate with students to develop norms for safe and respectful learning for all
2. Implement best practices that promote clear and consistent expectations around positive student behavior
3. Keep classrooms clean and inviting
4. Participate in professional development that promotes best practices around safe and healthy learning environments

School Leadership

1. Develop and implement policies and procedures around building a safe and healthy learning environment
2. Engage all members of the learning community, especially students, in decisions to promote a climate of inclusion and professionalism
3. Create a system that encourages faculty and staff feedback and positive voice, and use feedback to guide decision making

SU / District

1. Develop and implement policies that do not tolerate bullying and harassment
2. Budget funds and seek grants to keep buildings safe, healthy, and clean
3. Include all members of the learning community in major decisions to promote a climate of inclusion and professionalism
4. Adopt supervision and evaluation models that outline best practices and are implemented clearly and consistently
5. Foster connections between community health agencies and schools

Higher Ed.

1. Maintain high standards within the program for teacher candidates
2. Include clear and multiple gates for progressing toward degree completion
3. Where necessary, counsel teacher candidates out of the field

Prof. Org.

1. Provide professional development that will help leadership teams and teachers develop inviting, supportive, safe, and healthy environments for improved student learning
2. Identify and promote “best practice sites” so educators can experience safe, supportive and healthy learning environments in action
3. Advocate for effective middle level practices.

State

1. Coordinate initiatives with stakeholders that support and promote healthy and safe learning environments
2. Create policy/procedures that reflect expectations that schools will promote student advocacy and voice
3. Coordinate school support/improvement efforts of the DOE to support schools that teach young adolescents regardless of the school grade configurations
4. Ensure that school reform initiatives have a specific focus on the needs of young adolescents
5. Identify “best practice sites” so educators can experience effective middle level learning environments in action

MIDDLE LEVEL GOAL VIII

A democratic system of continual collaboration by all stakeholders allows for authentic student voice and a shared vision to guide decisions.

Learner

1. Understand the power of one's voice in a democratic system and participate actively
2. Collaborate in the design and implementation of authentic learning experiences
3. Engage in school and community organizations and events
4. Participate in the school's decision-making process

Team/Teacher

1. Take an active role in the governance and change process within the school
2. Offer students individual choice whenever possible for research, activities, and demonstration of student learning
3. Involve students in developing classroom and team tools, such as rubrics, class norms, and curriculum.
4. Serve as facilitators and coaches to learners
5. Participate in professional development to support authentic student voice

School Leadership

1. Facilitate professional learning communities for collaborative decision-making
2. Include student voice in all aspects of decision-making related to student learning

SU / District

1. Understand and promote professional learning communities to improve all aspects of student learning
2. Allow schools to use a professional learning community model to ensure teacher voice in decision making
3. Include educators, parents, community members and students on committees dealing with SU issues

Higher Ed.

1. Design programs that address the role of democratic schooling and authentic student and teacher voice in engagement
2. Model democratic learning environments; the engagement of student voice in teacher education classrooms; and the engagement of teacher voice in administrator coursework
3. Provide professional development on democratic schooling
4. Conduct research on the effectiveness of democratic schooling
5. Disseminate research-based practices through publication and presentation

Prof. Org.

1. Provide professional development to schools in democratic schooling
2. Bring multiple stakeholder groups (e.g. students, educators, state board members) together to semi-annually review actions relative to the implementation of these middle level goals and make recommendations for change
3. Advocate for effective middle level practices
4. Promote schools identified as "best practice sites" for experiencing effective middle level learning environments in action

State

1. Create policy/procedures that reflect expectations that schools will promote student advocacy and voice
2. Coordinate school support/improvement efforts of the DOE to support schools that teach young adolescents regardless of the school grade configurations
3. Ensure that school reform initiatives have a specific focus on the needs of young adolescents
4. Identify "best practice sites" so educators can experience effective middle level learning environments in action

MIDDLE LEVEL GOAL IX

The recruitment, hiring, and preparation of teachers and administrators is based on knowledge of the developmental characteristics of young adolescents, strong content knowledge, and the ability to use research-based instructional strategies and assessment practices appropriate for middle level students.

Learner

1. Participate in the hiring process by sharing one's own concerns, interests, and ideas around effective learning and instruction
2. Provide school leadership with a variety of perspectives around both the social and academic needs of young adolescents

Team/Teacher

1. Complete requirements for a middle level endorsement
2. Seek out and take part in ongoing professional development related to effective middle level best practices and 21st century skills and knowledge

School Leadership

1. Support current teachers to complete requirements for middle level endorsement
2. Hire educators who hold middle level endorsements or demonstrate an understanding of middle level instructional best practices, assessment, and development of 21st century skills and knowledge
3. Work with State and Regional agencies to increase training and expertise of staff, provide a schedule that is conducive to a developmentally appropriate middle level program, and create a system of local assessment and data collection to assist in developing and monitoring instructional tactics that work
4. Institute on-site professional learning communities to provide relevant ongoing professional development in best middle level practices

SU / District

1. Hire middle level teachers and administrators who understand early adolescent development and who can implement middle level best practices for the 21st century
2. Provide and fund professional development and graduate courses for educators to work toward middle grades teaching endorsement, on both content knowledge and developmentally appropriate teaching practices to address the needs of diverse learners
3. Provide and fund professional development and graduate courses for middle level administrators on effective middle grades leadership.
4. Work with state and regional agencies to assess current middle level programs at district level

Higher Ed.

1. Prepare teachers and administrators specifically for the needs of students ages 10-15 and 21st century skills and knowledge
2. Create and adopt stand-alone middle grades programs for the preparation of middle level teachers and administrators
3. Recruit high quality undergraduate teacher candidates in middle level education
4. Recruit high quality graduate-level teacher candidates in middle level education
5. Provide first-year mentoring and follow-up as incentives to work in Vermont schools
6. Create networks for recruitment and hiring purposes
7. Work collaboratively with schools, state and regional agencies

Prof. Org.

1. Provide ongoing relevant professional development so that educators can maintain and improve their skills
2. Work with partners to build a middle level leadership training program that focuses on research-based best practices and models effective leadership practices for middle level education
3. Advocate for effective middle level practices
4. Promote schools identified as "best practice sites" for experiencing effective middle level learning environments

State

1. Support teachers of young adolescents to be specifically prepared for that age group; understand the developmental, social, emotional and academic needs of this particular age; and be able to create effective learning opportunities for the diverse range of learners within the middle grades
2. Define 'Highly Qualified Teacher' to include appropriate pedagogy for adolescents' needs and 21st century skills and knowledge
3. Work with partners to build a middle level leadership training program that focuses on research based best practices and models effective leadership practices for middle level education

MIDDLE LEVEL GOAL X

Research is generated, disseminated, and applied to identify and implement practices leading to continual student learning and high academic achievement at the middle level.

Learner

1. Incorporate one's own concerns, opinions, and perspectives into research initiatives related to learning and achievement

Team/Teacher

1. In professional learning communities – identify, read, and use current research in middle level education to improve practice
2. Serve as sites for gathering of research data on effective middle level practices
3. Collect, maintain, and utilize classroom and team data to improve student, classroom, and school practices
4. Engage in learning communities to review current research and articles related to middle level practices

School Leadership

1. Use multiple measures (such as common local assessments) to monitor student progress
2. Provide and support time for teams to research, administer, collect, and analyze student data and a cohesive system for teachers to make informed decisions around their middle level instructional practices
3. Provide and support the practice of collaboratively reading and discussing current articles and research related to middle level practices

SU / District

1. Develop professional partnerships with post-secondary institutions to assist administrators in implementing research-based best practices in middle level education.
2. Know and understand the needs of the students and community in order to align and implement research-based best practices with effective, middle level instruction and learning opportunities
3. Collect data around middle level education as it relates to best practices and student achievement

Higher Ed.

1. Lead the planning and implementation of research geared at Vermont schooling practices and student outcomes
2. Seek grant funding to support above endeavors
3. Disseminate research-based practices through publication and presentation on state and national levels
4. Collaborate with stakeholders to develop a Vermont-based body of evidence around best practices for middle level effectiveness (intellectual, affective, and physical)

Prof. Org.

1. Disseminate research-based practices through publication, presentation, and via technology on a state and regional level
2. Create and sustain networks to disseminate and discuss current research that relates to middle level education
3. Advocate for effective middle level practices.
4. Seek grant funding to support above endeavors
5. Collaborate with stakeholders to develop a Vermont-based body of evidence around best practices for middle level effectiveness (intellectual, affective, and physical)
6. Promote schools identified as “best practice sites” for experiencing effective middle level learning environments

State

1. Build professional partnerships with Vermont post-secondary institutions and other stakeholders to develop a robust Vermont-based body of research around best practices for middle level effectiveness (intellectual, affective, and physical)
2. Encourage districts to support middle level practices that have a sufficient research base demonstrating improved student achievement
3. Support multi-stakeholder, state-level professional learning communities to examine best practices and research
4. Identify “best practice sites” so educators can experience effective middle level learning environments in action



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