



## Recommendation Six

### Transitions

"The transition into middle level schools is accomplished by intellectual, moral, social, emotional, and physical changes taking place in at least part of the transition group at any given time. Students making the transition into middle level schools need to receive assistance prior to, during, and after the move so that their social, psychological, and academic well-being is not compromised."<sup>1</sup>

**Recommendation 6—Transitions.** Work with elementary and high schools to inform students and families about academic and behavioral expectations and to promote seamless, articulated transitions.

Transitions is one of the Recommendations in the Focus Area on Developmental Responsiveness.

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### Footnote

<sup>1</sup>Donna Schumacher, *The Transition to Middle School*. Champaign, Ill.: ERIC Clearinghouse on Elementary and Early Childhood Education (#ED422119), 1998.

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## The importance of easing transitions for young adolescents

Change is never easy, particularly when the change involves moving from a secure environment to an unfamiliar one. External changes, such as the move from elementary school to middle school and from middle school to high school, combined with the internal changes of adolescence can be overwhelming for students if not handled with care and preparation.

Staff members of developmentally responsive middle schools understand the importance of easing the transition for young adolescents. Those schools use articulation agreements and transition programs **from** the elementary school, *to* the high school, and between classrooms and grade levels within the school.



### Information and Resources

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#### Essential Elements for Effective Middle Grades Transition Programs

The fall 2009 issue of *Focus on Middle School* (Outside Source) details a list of essential elements for effective middle grades transition programs. Dealing with the complexity of the transition experience requires a multi-faceted approach that includes ongoing communication with and input from all stakeholders involved and focuses on supporting the unique academic and social/emotional needs of young adolescents. The article emphasizes that the transition process for students is ongoing throughout the middle grades years demanding ongoing support versus a **one-shot** approach.

Creating Comprehensive Transition Programs: A Multi-Faceted Approach encourages educators to focus on the logistics behind program design, use developmentally appropriate practices, and address transition issues throughout the middle grades years. *Focus on Middle School*, published by the Association for Childhood Education International, is a quarterly publication that “brings together the voices of practitioners, administrators, researchers, and advocates around specific issues that impact teaching and learning for children ages 11 to 13.”

Transition programs and articulation agreements help minimize academic or social disruption by facilitating students’ adjustments to new surroundings. The UCLA School Mental Health Project lists transition programs as an effective strategy to reduce barriers to learning.<sup>1</sup> In this document, the terms *transition* and *articulation* will be defined as follows:

- **Transition** means passage from one place to another—thus referring to students and how well they can adapt to the change.
- **Articulation** refers to aligning curriculum so that one concept builds on a prior concept. As a result, articulation refers more to teacher, school, and district responsibilities for coordinating course work between grade levels. According to the *Merriam-Webster Dictionary* (Outside Source), **articulation** is “the action or manner of joining or interrelating.”

Articulation agreements and transition programs are common between effective middle schools and local elementary and high schools.

In a follow-up report on low-income students making the transition [from middle school] to a large, urban high school, (Ferner et al. 1993) found that a special counseling program led to a 50 percent reduction in dropout rates, as well as significant gains in school performance and attendance patterns. Furthermore, Hertzog and Morgan (1999), in a study of 56 Georgia and Florida high schools, found that schools that offered extensive transition programs had significantly lower failure and dropout rates than those that did not offer such programs. The authors concluded that the best programs were those that included a variety of activities, particularly counseling, school visits, and special summer courses to help introduce students to the new environment.<sup>2</sup>



### Information and Resources

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## Strategies to Aid Student Transition from Middle to High School

The transition from eighth grade to high school results in a higher drop-out rate and more grade retentions than any other grade. A 2010 briefing paper from the Texas Comprehensive Center describes research that found when districts and schools develop and implement a sound transition program, the outcomes for ninth graders are improved.

A sound transition program involves developing a plan where some activities take place prior to high school, some at the beginning of the ninth-grade year, and others throughout the ninth-grade year and beyond to build resilience and to provide support for students all through high school.

### Initial Action Steps for a Transition Program

In order for schools to develop strategies that prepare students for high school, this study suggests that the following three initial actions need to occur.

- Organize a transition team.  
The transition process starts during the eighth-grade year and continues throughout the entire ninth-grade year. A multi-level transition team composed of representatives from the middle and high school levels should consider this entire time period while planning supports and interventions.
- Develop a counseling team.  
In most high schools, the number of students assigned to a counselor often limits the time any one counselor can work with an individual student. The purpose of developing a counseling team, referred to as transition counselors, is to increase the amount of individual time each student receives. Transition counselors could include student peers, teachers, and other district and school staff, as well as parents and community volunteers.
- Create special programs and initiatives to prepare students and their families for the transition to high school.  
Ongoing, specially designed programs offer greater support for sustained intervention; however, there is also value in providing single events.

### Implementing a Transition Plan

In addition to the three initial action steps listed above, the following eight factors need to be considered when implementing a transition plan.

- Involve parents and families in the transition process.
- Promote collaboration among middle and high school staff to support the transition process.
- Increase awareness of academic programs offered at the high school level.
- Increase comfort and reduce anxiety through orientation activities.
- Provide resources designed to make the transition easier.
- Design activities for the first weeks of ninth grade.
- Continue the use of counseling teams to maintain support throughout the ninth grade year.
- Develop special interventions to support ninth graders who may be struggling academically or socially.

Supporting Student Transition From Middle to High School (PDF; Outside Source) provides strategies on how to implement each of the eight factors listed above in addition to an appendix that lists over 70 resources on middle-to-high-school transition.

The National Association of Secondary School Principals is a strong advocate for transition programs. In *Breaking Ranks in the Middle: Strategies for Leading Middle Level Reform* (PDF; Outside Source), Cornerstone Strategy number three calls on middle school administrators to “provide structured planning time for teachers to align curriculum across grades and schools and to **map** efforts that address the academic, developmental, social, and personal needs of students, especially at critical transition periods (e.g., elementary to middle grades to high school).”<sup>3</sup> According to a 2007 report called *Balancing Act: Best Practices in the Middle Grades*, effective middle schools focus on alignment in three key areas: with standards, between classrooms, and from grade level to grade level.<sup>4</sup> In California, alignment is easier since the content standards build from year to year.

Short- and long-term articulation with feeder elementary schools and destination high schools is particularly important in nonunified districts. To ensure that students make a steady progression from one grade level to the next, teachers and administrators need to discuss the following questions:

- What measures will best evaluate students' proficiency of standards as they exit elementary school, enter the middle grades, and move to high school?
  - How will students be identified who need immediate and ongoing interventions?
  - How can business and community resources help in this effort?<sup>5</sup>
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## In the Spotlight

### **Bernice Ayer Middle School, Capistrano Unified School District, a 2005 Schools to Watch™-Taking Center Stage Model School**

Monthly meetings of school leaders from seven elementary schools, three middle schools, and San Clemente High School help the school provide for vertical articulation and planning.

[Bernice Ayer DataQuest School Profile](#)

[Bernice Ayer Middle School \(Outside Source\)](#)

[Schools to Watch™-Taking Center Stage Model School—Visitor's Guide: Bernice Ayer Middle School \(PDF; Outside Source\)](#)

[Schools to Watch™-Taking Center Stage](#)

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[Articulation Agreements with Elementary Schools](#)

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### **Footnotes**

<sup>1</sup>"Ideas into Practice: Helping New Students Overcome Barriers," *Addressing Barriers to Learning* (Outside Source), Vol. 1, (2), (Spring 1996), 2.

<sup>2</sup>Academic Achievement in the Middle Grades: What Does the Research Tell Us? (PDF; Outside Source) Atlanta, Ga.: Southern Regional Education Board, 2003, 10.

<sup>3</sup>Breaking Ranks in the Middle: Strategies for Leading Middle Level Reform (Outside Source) Alexandria, Va.: National Association of Secondary School Principals, 2006, 8.

<sup>4</sup>Balancing Act: Best Practices in the Middle Grades (Executive Summary). San Francisco: Springboard Schools, 2007, 3.

<sup>5</sup>*Taking Center Stage*. Sacramento: California Department of Education, 2001, 27.

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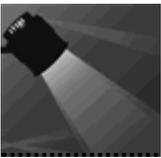
## Articulation Agreements with Elementary Schools

Articulation agreements with area elementary schools help to ensure that incoming middle grades students have achieved grade-level standards, recognize the rigor expected in middle school, and understand the social, academic, and citizenship skills needed for success in middle school.

Structured discussions between teachers at the elementary and middle grades level are crucial to the success of student transitions. For example, subject-matter teachers review the academic and study skills necessary for elementary students to successfully do middle grades work. Such discussions also help to minimize the use of scare tactics such as threats uttered by elementary teachers: “Those middle school teachers won’t let you do things over,” or “You’d better shape up, or you’ll never make it in middle school!”<sup>1</sup>

Some young adolescents experience anxiety disorders that increase with a move to a new school. Effective transition programs help youths to feel comfortable with the new school setting and introduce them to peer helpers and older friends who welcome them and help when they are lost.<sup>2</sup>

The following sections outline many aspects of articulation agreements that help to ensure smooth transitions to middle school.



### In the Spotlight

#### **Granite Oaks Middle School, Rocklin Unified School District, a California Middle Grades Partnership Network School**

Members of this high-achieving middle school faculty place a priority on articulation with incoming sixth graders. Principals from feeder schools meet with the Granite Oaks principal to discuss articulation. One of the agreements is to host an after-school sixth-grade math academy at Granite Oaks to prepare incoming sixth graders. Elementary schools advertise the program and recruit students who need help. Summer school intervention funds help pay for the part-time math teachers who run the program.

#### **Toby Johnson Middle School, Elk Grove Unified School District, a 2006 Schools to Watch™-Taking Center Stage Model School**

Through its Jump Start program, Toby Johnson Middle School conducts outreach to sixth graders in feeder schools to promote a seamless transition to seventh grade. All incoming students receive an invitation (in their sixth grade feeder elementary school) to come to the week-long Jump Start program in August. Members of the Toby Johnson student leadership team greet the students, help them find their classes (a shortened schedule), and answer questions about middle school. The leadership team members receive training during a leadership class in the previous year. During that course, they developed a PowerPoint slide show to demystify middle school.

Granite Oaks DataQuest School Profile  
Granite Oaks Middle School (Outside Source)  
California Middle Grades Partnership Network School

Toby Johnson DataQuest School Profile  
Toby Johnson Middle School (Outside Source)  
Schools to Watch™-Taking Center Stage Model School—Visitor’s Guide: Toby Johnson Middle School (PDF; Outside Source)  
Schools to Watch™-Taking Center Stage

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Course articulation

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**Footnotes**

<sup>1</sup>Judith Baenen, "Using the Next Grade as a Threat," *Middle E-Connections*, March 2006.

<sup>2</sup>Jane Brody, "Help for the Child Who Says No to School" (Outside Source), *New York Times*, August 29, 2006.



## Course articulation

In a well-articulated, standards-based system, subject-area teachers from a range of grade spans meet several times a year to discuss textbooks, pacing schedules, common assessments, and the standards to ensure that students progress in standards-based knowledge from one grade level to the next.

To ensure cross-grade articulation, professionals at all levels of the district play a role:

- The superintendent and school board expect and encourage articulation by providing regularly scheduled district days for content specialists to compare textbook choices, develop benchmark tests, and map curriculum.
- Principals meet on a regular basis to coordinate articulation activities among school staff members and between schools.
- Middle grades teachers from content teams (departments) meet with area elementary teachers in their field (and separately with high school content specialists) to ensure that texts and curriculum planning prepare students to move from one level to the next. Ideally, these meetings occur once or twice each year.
- Counselors from area schools meet to plan articulation activities that will help prepare students for the transition to the next grade level.
- Subject-matter teachers throughout the district work together to develop and score standard-based benchmark assessments. Working in collaborative teams, the teachers score sample student work from below and above their own grade level to familiarize them with the expectations for course work at adjoining grade levels. They become more aware of student weaknesses and foundational skills that need to be built for student success the following year.
- Teachers and counselors from the middle school meet with elementary teachers to administer and review the results of end-of-year assessments that assist them in placing students in summer bridge classes and English language development (ELD), reading, and mathematic classes.
- The Advancement Via Individual Determination (AVID) Program, and The Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Programs (GEAR UP), provide teacher training to help fourth-, fifth-, and sixth-grade teachers prepare their students for transitions to the middle grades.



### In the Spotlight

#### **Kennedy Middle School, El Centro Elementary School District, a 2005 Schools to Watch™-Taking Center Stage Model School**

To ensure articulation with elementary schools, Kennedy provides GEAR UP, grant funds to the feeder schools to help coordinate the upper elementary curriculum with middle grades expectations. In the articulation meetings, teachers discuss common expectations in science and math.

#### **Rio Norte Junior High School, William S. Hart Union High School District**

Sixth-grade teachers from feeder elementary schools are invited to the Rio Norte campus to meet with middle grades teachers by department at least once each year. Teachers from the sixth grade have refreshments provided by the Rio Norte Parent Teacher Student Association and discuss articulation issues about course content and how to prepare students to succeed in middle school.

[Kennedy DataQuest School Profile](#)

[Kennedy Middle School \(Outside Source\)](#)

[Schools to Watch™-Taking Center Stage Visitor's Guide: Kennedy Middle School \(PDF; Outside Source\)](#)

In a 2007 report on best practices in middle schools, Springboard Schools, a nonprofit network, studied what it called HP2 schools—those that are both high performing and high poverty.<sup>1</sup> Springboard found that both average- and high-performing middle schools are working to align curriculum and instruction in the following ways:

- With standards
- Between classrooms
- From grade level to grade level
- With feeder and destination schools
- Between English language arts and ELD

Some of the high performers extended the goal of **alignment** beyond curriculum to include the schoolwide use of common instructional strategies.

## Related Links

- AVID (Outside Source)
- Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Programs (GEAR UP), (Outside Source) U.S. Department of Education.

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Academic counseling to prepare for transitions

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### Footnote

<sup>1</sup> *Balancing Act: Best Practices in the Middle Grades* (PDF; Outside Source), San Francisco: Springboard Schools, Spring 2007, 3.

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## Academic counseling to prepare for transitions

Middle school counselors play a critical role in preparing students for their new environment. Often, one of their jobs is to make a **tour** of area elementary schools. Through classroom discussions or after-school forums that include parents, the counselors help elementary students discuss their fears about middle school. They also explain what to expect and how to prepare for the transition.



### In the Spotlight

**John Glenn Middle School of International Studies, Desert Sands Unified School District, a 2004 Schools to Watch™-Taking Center Stage Model School**

Each spring, John Glenn counselors visit the fifth-grade classrooms at feeder elementary schools to talk with students about middle school. They help dispel **myths** and misconceptions about the middle grades and answer questions to allay fears.

- [John Glenn DataQuest School Profile](#)
- [John Glenn Middle School of International Studies, \(Outside Source\)](#)
- [Schools to Watch™-Taking Center Stage—Visitor's Guide: John Glenn Middle School of International Studies \(PDF; Outside Source\)](#)
- [Schools to Watch™-Taking Center Stage](#)

Incoming middle grades students frequently voice the following types of fears about the transition to the middle grades:

- Getting to class on time
- Bringing the right materials to class
- Finding and using lockers
- Finding lunchrooms and bathrooms
- Getting through crowded halls
- Remembering which class to go to next
- Dealing with older students
- Having tougher teachers
- Having harder schoolwork
- Making new friends
- Attending a school located far from home<sup>1</sup>

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#### Footnote

<sup>1</sup>Transition from Elementary to Middle School, in Works in Progress: A Report on Middle and High School Improvement Programs (PDF; Outside Source), Washington, D.C.: The Comprehensive School Reform Quality Center, American Institutes of Research, January 2005, 9.



## Elementary school visits

Frequently, articulation agreements include special days when elementary school students visit the middle-level school they will attend in the fall. There the middle school counselors, students, and staff members familiarize the visiting students (and, in some cases, their parents) with the setting and the programs offered. The middle school leadership students and peer counselors often play an active role in the visitation, serving as tour guides, demonstrating the school rules through skits, playing confidence-building games, and assigning incoming students to peer buddies who will be available to answer questions at the middle school when the new students enter in the fall.



### In the Spotlight

#### **Alice C. Stelle Middle School, Las Virgenes Unified School District, a 2009 California Distinguished Schools**

Stelle Middle School is featured on the California Department of Education's (CDE) Closing the Achievement Gap Web site for its Signature Practice, Community Building—Creating a Middle Grades Culture. This exemplary practice addresses several of the CDE's 12 Recommendations for Middle Grades Success, including transitions, rigor, and relationships.

At Stelle Middle School, the practice of community building is systemic and includes a three-tiered process that begins before the students enroll and extends through their promotion into high school. The process includes transitions, character education, and student involvement on campus. A primary goal is the cultivation of a seamless transition from elementary school and to high school and involves parents, students, and staff.

Activities include:

- Visitation days and tours for prospective students and parents
- Special assemblies
- New student matching with current students
- Counselor visits and focus on **at risk** and special needs students
- Relationship building activities

Alice M. Stelle Middle School is also one of the schools featured on the California Department of Education's (CDE) Closing the Achievement Gap Web site. The site contains helpful information, research, and success stories including "Signature" Practices from some of California's Distinguished Schools.

- Alice C. Stelle Middle School DataQuest Profile
- Alice C. Stelle Middle School (Outside Source)
- Signature Practice: Community Building—Creating a Middle Grades Culture (PDF; Outside Source)
- Closing the Achievement Gap's School Profile: Alice C. Stelle Middle School (Outside Source)
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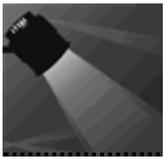
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## Mentor/buddies for incoming students

Developmentally responsive middle schools provide service-learning opportunities. Serving as a mentor for incoming students helps older students develop responsibility, compassion, and leadership skills. Often, eighth-grade mentors served as peer counselors during their seventh-grade year. Counselors typically train new mentors in a late summer training session.<sup>1</sup> Teachers from both feeder and destination schools may share student e-mail addresses to foster assigned e-buddy relationships.



### In the Spotlight

#### **John Glenn Middle School of International Studies, Desert Sands Unified School District, a 2004 Schools to Watch™-Taking Center Stage Model School**

During a half-day session before school starts, eighth-grade student leaders receive training to serve as mentors for groups of ten sixth graders. On the pre-session day when sixth graders come to get their schedules, they meet in teams with their mentors to learn about the transition to middle school.

#### **Rio Norte Junior High School, William S. Hart Union High School District**

Trained as **Wings Ambassadors**, eighth-grade students call a list of **their** incoming sixth-grade buddies to tell them about the before-school visiting day and to introduce themselves as the person to look for on the day of the visit. When sixth graders arrive, they meet the mentors, who continue to serve as a contact person for them during their first week.

- John Glenn DataQuest School Profile
- John Glenn Middle School of International Studies (Outside Source)
- Schools to Watch™-Taking Center Stage—Visitor's Guide: John Glenn Middle School (PDF; Outside Source)
- Schools to Watch™-Taking Center Stage
  
- Rio Norte DataQuest School Profile
- Rio Norte Junior High School (Outside Source)

In lieu of a formal transition program, middle schools can allow incoming sixth- or seventh-grade students to start school one day earlier than the **bigger** eighth-graders. It takes some of the stress out of the first day of middle school. Students can meet their teachers, take school tours, and get a sense of orientation in a less-congested campus.

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#### **Footnote**

<sup>1</sup> *Taking Center Stage*. Sacramento: California Department of Education, 2001, 101.

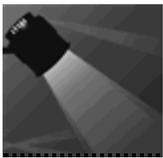
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# Newsletters, newspapers, school Web sites, and plays to demystify the middle grade

Many elementary schools agree to send home newsletters from area middle schools to alert parents to Open House opportunities, school visitations, and middle school profiles. Inviting middle grades students to contribute to the newsletters can create another opportunity for real-world connections, writing practice, and service-learning. For example, a middle school newspaper, written entirely by students, provides fifth graders at the elementary school with an opportunity to catch a glimpse of the fun and enrichment activities ahead. Likewise, if the middle school has a Web site with photographs of student activities, teacher profiles, and elective offerings, incoming students can virtually tour the school from home with their peers and parents.

Another strategy that helps demystify middle school is for teams of middle grades leaders to prepare skits and present them at elementary school assemblies. The skits can calm fears, highlight fun activities, and give students a sense of middle school life.



## In the Spotlight

### **Olive Peirce Middle School, Ramona City Unified School District**

Students at Olive Peirce Middle School developed videos to provide incoming students with a **virtual tour** of the school and to show new students what to expect in middle school.

- [Olive Peirce DataQuest School Profile](#)
- [Olive Peirce Middle School \(Outside Source\)](#)

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## Bridge to the Middle

The ending summer days between elementary school and middle school can provide an opportunity to bridge academically and socially into the new environment. Sometimes middle schools offer a summer school program for incoming students who need additional help in English and mathematics or who are interested in enrichment courses. The summer programs give younger students a more relaxed opportunity to become familiar with the campus and some of the teachers.

Some schools host a pre-registration day for students and parents. The school's multipurpose room is turned into a fair with booths hosted by older students, teachers, and parents. Incoming students pick up their schedules and student planners; check out their books; visit the student store to purchase supplies; buy their bus pass; fill in their emergency registration cards; sign up for clubs; intramural sports, and after-school activities; buy their yearbooks; visit the computer lab and library; and see the past year's top entries for History Day, Science Fair, and the art show. They use the map on the back of their planners to go on a scavenger hunt or wander around the school and find their classrooms. The parent club, English language advisory council, site council, and community partners host booths that educate, offer adult classes, and recruit parent participation. On the opening day of instruction, students are ready and prepared to learn immediately.

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## Integration into middle grades life

After the school year begins, many mentors/buddies get involved in their own activities and the relationships with incoming students naturally decreases. As a result, many schools continue to foster the transition for incoming students by structuring the day differently for the younger students.

Often schools operate the sixth-grade classes in a separate section of the school in self-contained or semi-self-contained classes. In some cases, the school also provides separate lunch hours and passing periods. The goal is usually to provide sixth-grade students with a modified, more sheltered middle school experience in their first year. Younger students may appreciate the semi-contained environment, but they also need activities making them an integral part of the school.



### In the Spotlight

**Castaic Middle School, Castaic Union Elementary School District, a 2003 Schools to Watch™-Taking Center Stage Model School**

To help incoming sixth graders adjust to middle school, they begin the year in a six-week core group. At the end of the six-week period, teachers move the students into classes based on assessment results.

[Castaic DataQuest School Profile](#)

[Castaic Middle School \(Outside Source\)](#)

[Schools to Watch™-Taking Center Stage—Visitor's Guide: Castaic Middle School, \(PDF; Outside Source\)](#)

[Schools to Watch™-Taking Center Stage](#)

Seventh- and eighth-grade classes in a developmentally responsive middle school become progressively more departmentalized as students become more mature. While sixth-grade students may be in self-contained classes, seventh-grade students may be in semi-self-contained classes such as a humanities core that includes language, literature, and social studies or in interdisciplinary teams where they travel within a small pack. By eighth grade, students are ready for more frequent class changes and ready to bridge to high school.

In the middle grades, teachers, parents, and other significant adults work to help adolescents begin with the end in mind. Planning ahead poses a challenge to young adolescents, particularly when most of them are not thinking more than a couple of days in advance. Because the end in mind for many young adolescents may be connected with their current interests and talents, middle school counselors and teachers can facilitate the **end in mind** by exposing students through electives and integrated career explorations to begin thinking about their futures. Use of personalized learning plans that help students think about interests, goals, and achievement of standards can become the foundation for successful transitions to a high school that will meet their learning needs and give wings to their future dreams.



### In the Spotlight

**Edna Hill Middle School, Brentwood Union Elementary School District, a 2007 Schools to Watch™-Taking Center Stage Model School**

Each student at Edna Hill Middle School receives help in developing an Individual Learning Plan in sixth grade. Teachers,

counselors, and parent/guardians help the students keep their learning plans updated until they promote to ninth grade.

- Edna Hill DataQuest School Profile
- Edna Hill Middle School (Outside Source)
- Schools to Watch™-Taking Center Stage—Visitor's Guide: Edna Hill Middle School (PDF; Outside Source)
- Schools to Watch™-Taking Center Stage

Developmentally responsive practices help incoming students adjust to their new peer group successfully and make new friends. Clubs, organized lunch activities, sports, service-learning opportunities, and after-school offerings all help younger students to experience the excitement of exploration, making new friends, and developing competence in new skills.

Teachers help younger students by becoming familiar with student communities and then encouraging new students to get involved in school activities. For example, if a teacher learns that a student loves to doodle, the teacher can encourage that student to take the art elective or exploratory wheel that includes art. Teachers also support the integration of new students and development of good peer relationships through small advisory groups and morning meetings.

Relationships are a key element in the transition to middle school. Peer counselors and peer mediators can help students work through misunderstandings among friends or address incidents of bullying.



## In the Spotlight

### **John Glenn Middle School of International Studies, Desert Sands Unified School District, a 2004 Schools to Watch™-Taking Center Stage Model School**

The ATLAS (Approaches to Learning Academic Seminar) class for sixth-grade students helps involve them in the International Baccalaureate (IB) culture at John Glenn. The yearlong class meets daily and teaches them skills needed for success: planning, note taking, communication, and a positive sense of self. To reinforce the student culture of respect, the school administrator meets with the class in early September. Students attend monthly meetings with the counselor in workshops addressing important social and academic topics. In addition, fall academic rallies reinforce and recognize the school's academic culture. Providing opportunities for the students to follow the school culture is critical since one-third of the population is new each year.

- John Glenn DataQuest School Profile
- John Glenn Middle School of International Studies (Outside Source)
- Schools to Watch™-Taking Center Stage—Visitor's Guide: John Glenn Middle School (PDF; Outside Source)
- Schools to Watch™-Taking Center Stage

## Related Links

- Relevance—Recommendation 4, TCSII.
- Relationships—Recommendation 5, TCSII.
- Safety, Resilience, and Health—Recommendation 8, TCSII.

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**Footnote**

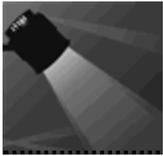
<sup>1</sup>"Eureka School Delays Onset of 'Teen Attitude'," *California Educator*, Vol. 10, Issue 6 (March 2006).

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## Family welcome and involvement

Although many parents of adolescents welcome a break from intense parent involvement requirements of elementary school, others express frustration when their son or daughter suggests that parents are no longer welcome participants at school. Despite students' growing need for independence, however, high-impact middle schools find ways to involve parents so that they can continue to support their child's success. One of the ways that middle schools do that is to host welcome events for the parents as well as for the incoming students.



### In the Spotlight

**John Glenn Middle School of International Studies, Desert Sands Unified School District, a 2004 Schools to Watch™-Taking Center Stage Model School**

The school works hard to involve parents in the school culture through an orientation event that introduces them to other parents.

**La Mesa Middle School, La Mesa-Spring Valley School District**

The La Mesa PTSA Web site (Outside Source) provides parents with easy access to information about the school, activities, clubs, and district activities. In this way, if students forget to give parents fliers about upcoming events, family members can easily check on what is happening by visiting the PTSA Web site. Schools can connect parents, although the school community must provide other ways to obtain the information since not all parents have Internet connections.

**Rio Norte Junior High School, William S. Hart Union High School District**

Members of Rio Norte's active PTSA (Parent, Teacher, Student Association) host welcome events to help parents of incoming middle grades students understand what to expect in middle school. The PTSA also tries to involve parents in service at the school so that they have a role and feel like a part of the community.

[John Glenn DataQuest School Profile](#)

[John Glenn Middle School \(Outside Source\)](#)

[Schools to Watch™-Taking Center Stage—Visitor's Guide: John Glenn Middle School \(PDF; Outside Source\)](#)

[Schools to Watch™-Taking Center Stage](#)

[La Mesa DataQuest School Profile](#)

[La Mesa Middle School \(Outside Source\)](#)

[La Mesa PTSA Web site \(Outside Source\)](#)

[Rio Norte DataQuest School Profile](#)

[Rio Norte Junior High School \(Outside Source\)](#)

Another time-tested way to involve families in the middle grades is to host a Back to School night in the early fall. At that time, teachers can assure anxious parents that they both know and welcome their children, as well as outline curriculum expectations and provide information about the school culture.

Spring Open House offers a chance to involve parents *before* their children attend the new school. By working with feeder elementary schools, middle schools can announce upcoming Open House events and invite incoming parents to meet the teachers, view student work,

and ask questions about how to prepare their students.

Another successful strategy is to offer a Parents Night in the spring, separate from Open House, when parents of incoming (the next fall) students can meet administrators, counselors, and teachers to learn about various programs and electives, and have a chance to have their questions answered. Some schools also have separate meetings for parents of GATE and EL students before the main sessions begin.

## Related Link

- [Partnerships—Recommendation 12, TCSII.](#)

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## Articulation Agreements with Destination High Schools

Just as elementary students fear the changes involved in moving to middle school, some middle grades students may develop anxieties about moving on to high school. However, in non-K-12 unified districts, open enrollment agreements often mean that middle school students transition to high schools in a different district in which there may be little, if any, articulation with the feeder middle school. If this is the case, the middle school will need to initiate articulation with the most likely destination high schools. Again, counselors can work with students to develop personalized learning plans that help narrow the choice of a potential high school to one that will best meet individual student needs and goals. In spite of the difficulties, there are many ways middle grades staff members can develop transition programs that will help students make a successful move to high school.

Researchers find that social, emotional, and academic factors contribute to the difficulties associated with students' transition from middle school to high school. Among other things, students worry about:

- Having friends
- Feeling comfortable in a large school
- Finding classrooms
- Succeeding in difficult classes
- Understanding teacher expectations
- Interacting with older, more mature students
- Interpreting block schedules
- Managing time
- Finding time for social activities<sup>1</sup>

In one survey, former middle grades students listed four things that would have helped with their transition to high school:

- Regular connections with high school students so they could learn more about what to expect.
- Preparation with the skills and strategies needed for high school success.
- Development of strong connections with adults (for planning and goal setting).
- Summer bridge options during the eighth-grade summer.<sup>2</sup>

The following sections include some of the many creative ways that middle grades teachers and administrators work with area high schools to help their students prepare for success.



### In the Spotlight

#### Los Angeles Unified School District

The school district hosts **Transitions Institutes** that are a unique collaboration between the district and a number of individuals and agencies throughout southern California, including professors from California State University, Dominguez Hills; representatives from the Los Angeles City Human Relations Commission; and district psychiatric social workers and counselors. The goals of the institutes are as follows:

1. Ease the transition from eighth to ninth grade by positively inculcating freshman into their respective high schools as evidenced by a measurable reduction in aversive behavior.
2. Promote interpersonal and intergroup understanding between and among diverse student populations.
3. Support the small learning communities model by empowering advisories to create and follow through on service-learning projects.
4. Create postsecondary awareness through structured activities on a university campus.

### **San Francisco Unified School District**

The district's 17 public and charter high schools offer an array of exciting academic and extra-curricular options. However, yet many of the city's eighth graders do not know about the schools or their programs. For example, one high school sends students on monthly camping trips; another offers after-school skateboarding; a third brings in professional chefs to teach students to cook; and a fourth guarantees a college acceptance letter upon graduation.

### **Toby Johnson Middle School, Elk Grove Unified School District, a 2006 Schools to Watch™-Taking Center Stage Model School**

The school's modified 4x4 block schedule mirrors that of the adjacent high school campus. This arrangement allows students to cross from the middle to the high school class to take higher-level courses.

- Los Angeles DataQuest District Profile
- Los Angeles Unified School District (Outside Source)
  
- San Francisco DataQuest District Profile
- San Francisco Unified School District (Outside Source)
  
- Toby Johnson DataQuest School Profile
- Toby Johnson Middle School (Outside Source)
- Schools to Watch™-Taking Center Stage—Visitor's Guide: Toby Johnson Middle School (PDF; Outside Source)
- Schools to Watch™-Taking Center Stage

## **Related Link**

- Transition from Middle School to High School (September 2006), (Outside Source) The National Middle School Association.

### **Previous**

Family welcome and involvement

### **Next**

Course articulation

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### **Footnotes**

<sup>1</sup>Transition from Middle to High School, in *Works in Progress: A Report on Middle and High School Improvement Programs* (PDF; Outside Source). Washington, D.C.: The Comprehensive School Reform Quality Center, American Institutes of Research, January 2005, 41.

<sup>2</sup>Kathleen Cushman, "Help Us Make the 9th Grade Transition" (Outside Source), *Educational Leadership*, Vol. 63, No. 7 (April 2006), 47-52.

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## Course articulation

Credit for middle grades algebra or geometry is one of the questions that teams discuss in articulation meetings between middle and high school content specialists (currently many middle grades students must repeat courses such as algebra or geometry since they do not receive high school credit needed for college applications). Other topics needing discussion include:

- **Instructional materials articulation:** Do the middle grades texts match those used at the high school to prepare students for the next step in learning?
- **Articulated assessment:** Refer to the following discussion.
- **Standards-based skills:** Do middle grades students have research skills required by ninth-grade teachers? Do they know how to follow guidelines for writing ninth-grade term papers?
- **Homework expectations:** Do middle grades teachers know enough about high school homework expectations to prepare students to meet them?

### Previous Section

Articulation Agreements with Destination High Schools

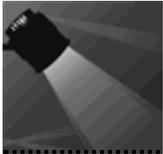
### Next Section

Articulated assessments



## Articulated assessments

When middle school teachers work with local high school teachers in the same subject area to develop common benchmark tests, students know ahead of time how well they are progressing toward the standards required in ninth grade.



### In the Spotlight

#### **Perris Union High School District**

Articulation agreements with feeder middle schools address all math sequences offered by the district's high school. For example, middle schools that offer algebra use the high school benchmark and final exams. All student data are entered into a common electronic data and management system (EDAMS) so that incoming freshmen grades are consistent with high school grades. This practice helps in making more accurate placement in freshman math. The district uses the same system for English/language arts. The high school staff also gives eighth-grade students a spelling and reading test that, along with CST results, helps place them in the appropriate ninth-grade English program.

#### **Rancho Cucamonga Middle School, Cucamonga Elementary School District, a 2006 On the Right Track School**

Working closely with nearby Chaffee High school on course articulation and standards-based curriculum helps Rancho Cucamonga Middle School teachers prepare students for high school rigor. For example, Rancho Cucamonga Middle School uses an algebra readiness test developed by the CSU and UC systems called the Mathematics Diagnostic Testing Project, to check the math readiness of incoming students.

[Perris Union DataQuest District Profile](#)  
[Perris Union High School District \(Outside Source\)](#)

[Rancho Cucamonga DataQuest School Profile](#)  
[Rancho Cucamonga Middle School \(Outside Source\)](#)  
[On the Right Track 6](#)  
[Mathematics Diagnostic Testing Project \(Outside Source\)](#)

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## Academic counseling to prepare for transitions to high school

High-performing middle schools help prepare their eighth-grade students for high school by providing counseling sessions that explain course expectations, career readiness options, and behavioral considerations for success in high school. In addition to informing students about the University of California's a-g requirements (Outside Source), counselors and teachers help struggling students set goals to get on track with grade-level standards.

California *Education Code* Section 52378 et seq. provides funding for school districts to increase the number of school counselors in California's high schools and middle schools. The law provides funds for districts if they develop a program to provide individualized counseling that includes the following provisions:

- Schools serving pupils in grade seven must develop a list of course work and experience necessary to assist each pupil in grade seven who is deemed to be at the Far Below Basic level in English language arts or mathematics based on sixth-grade California Standards Tests results. The goal of the course work is to help pupils successfully make the transition to high school and meet all graduation requirements, including passing the high school exit examination.
- Each pupil in grade seven should have a counseling conference before January of that school year in which the pupil is enrolled in grade seven to inform the pupil, and his or her parent or guardian, of the following:
  - ◆ Consequences of not passing the high school exit examination.
  - ◆ Programs, courses, and career technical education options available for pupils in need for satisfactory completion of middle or high school.
  - ◆ Cumulative records and transcripts of the pupil.
  - ◆ Performance on standardized and diagnostic assessments of the pupil.
  - ◆ Recommendations on strategies, high school courses, and alternative education options available to the pupil.
  - ◆ Information on postsecondary education and training.
  - ◆ The pupil's score on the English language arts or mathematics portion of the California Standards Test administered in grade six, as applicable.

For more information about the Middle and High School Counseling Program, visit the CDE Web site, or refer to the *California Results-Based School Counseling and Student Support Guidelines (2007)* (PDF; 873KB; 88pp).

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Articulated assessments

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High school visits



## High school visits

Although it is rare for middle schools to give students time off to visit area high schools, many high schools do offer Open House for prospective students and their parents. Close articulation between area schools allows the middle school staff to feature news about upcoming visitation opportunities at local high schools and to encourage students and their parents to attend.

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Academic counseling to prepare for transitions to high school

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Interventions to prepare students for the transition to high school



# Interventions to prepare students for the transition to high school

Continuous progress monitoring (refer to the section in Recommendation 2 — Instruction, Assessment, and Instruction, called Assessment for continual progress monitoring) helps middle grades teachers see when students are not on track to meet high school standards. Early, accelerated interventions (refer to section in Recommendation 2 — Instruction, Assessment, and Intervention, called Benchmark interventions - reinforcement) help ensure that struggling students have a chance to catch up, increasing their chances of staying in school through ninth grade and beyond. Currently, a large and disproportionately poor and minority group of students tend to drop out in ninth grade. Early, intensive preparation of those students may help to close the achievement gap.

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High school visits

### **Next**

Intervention courses and after-school programs

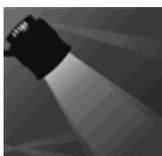


## Intervention courses and after-school programs

Struggling students receive additional support to prepare for high school through accelerated intervention classes, tutoring, and after-school programs. To be effective, these programs offer standards-based, grade-level supports taught by skilled professionals. This support presents another articulation challenge: how to ensure that teachers coordinate assignments, standards, and lessons with the paraprofessionals or other staff members who run the after-school programs or intervention classes.

For example, teachers can articulate assignments with after-school staff in the following ways:

- Daily e-mail correspondence can list student assignments and attach work sheets, handouts, and even PowerPoint lessons.
- Flexible scheduling can ensure that after-school and intervention teachers are included in team planning and progress-monitoring analysis sessions on a regular basis.
- Teacher Web pages can provide links to daily assignments, work sheets, and PowerPoint lessons so that after-school and intervention teachers have instant access to materials from all teachers in the school.



### In the Spotlight

#### **Alvarado Intermediate School, Rowland Unified School District, a 2004 Schools to Watch-Taking Center Stage Model School**

Alvarado offers after-school support programs to ensure that all students meet state standards. These programs include after-school tutoring, the English Learners Club, the Phonics Club (teaches literacy to the lowest-performing students), and academies (mini-courses that target specific learning gaps found by a careful analysis of the school's standardized tests scores). Alvarado's intent is to provide all students with the support and interventions they need to make successful transitions into and out of middle school.

[Alvarado DataQuest School Profile](#)

[Alvarado Intermediate School \(Outside Source\)](#)

[Schools to Watch-Taking Center Stage—Visitor's Guide: Alvarado Intermediate School \(PDF; Outside Source\)](#)

[Schools to Watch-Taking Center Stage](#)

Both Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Programs (GEAR UP), and Advancement Via Individual Determination (AVID), provide models for helping low-income and minority students prepare for success. Through support classes and after-school activities, educators and student tutors from local colleges inspire students to attend college, learn important study skills, and set goals. The programs also provide students with the motivation and support needed to reach their goals.

## Related Links

- [After-school academies, Recommendation 2—Instruction, Assessment, and Intervention, TCSII.](#)
- [AVID, California Department of Education.](#)
- [Before, during, and after school programs, Recommendation 2—Instruction, Assessment, and Intervention, TCSII.](#)
- [Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Programs, \(Outside Source\)](#)

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## Social promotion versus summer school and bridge programs

Students who meet grade-level standards **promote** from eighth grade to ninth, sometimes with full graduation ceremonies (refer to the section on Promotions in Recommendation 5—Relationships)

However, the question about what to do with students who are not ready for ninth grade is a troubling one. The current debate about how to measure the dropout rate does not alter the fact that approximately 30 percent of students who begin ninth grade do not complete high school, yet a review of the literature shows little support for grade retention. In fact, retention is one of the factors found to increase the likelihood of students dropping out.<sup>1</sup> Grade retention also appears to affect later career success.<sup>2</sup> “Systematic reviews and meta-analysis examining research over the past century (studies between 1911-1999) conclude that the cumulative evidence does not support the use of grade retention as an intervention for academic achievement or socio-emotional adjustment.”<sup>3</sup>

Social promotion, however, is not the solution, as it merely postpones failure for most students. Mandatory summer school is one option. Another promising alternative is the concept of a bridge program. Like Saturday school, summer school and bridge programs offer students an intensive opportunity to catch up to grade-level standards without the stigma of retention. Summer bridge programs for middle school often serve as a second chance for students who do not have the grade-level skills needed for promotion.

In 2006, Superintendent of Public Instruction Jack O’Connell’s P-16 Council (Subcommittee Four) made the following recommendation about eighth-grade bridge programs: “Districts shall provide research-based, state-funded bridge programs for exiting eighth graders who are below or far below basic on the California Standard Tests (CST) in English-language arts (ELA) and/or mathematics. Participation is mandatory for those students who are far below basic.”



### In the Spotlight

#### **Perris High School, Perris Union High School District**

The district articulation agreement helps Perris High School staff members work with feeder middle schools to require an eighth-grade non-promote summer school for students who do not have adequate grades for high school. (Note: this is not a state requirement, although it is a P-16 Council recommendation from Subcommittee Four.) The agreement requires students to attend a five-week summer program in math and language arts. If the student passes the summer program, he or she passes to regular ninth grade. If the student fails the program, he or she attends a school-within-a-school to focus on math and language arts before becoming a fully integrated member of the high school community.

Perris DataQuest School Profile  
Perris High School (Outside Source)

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Intervention courses and after-school programs

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Enrichment options to prepare for high school

#### **Footnotes**

<sup>1</sup>“High School Dropouts,” in *Works in Progress: A Report on Middle and High School Improvement Programs* (PDF; Outside Source). Washington, D.C: The Comprehensive School Reform Quality Center, American Institutes of Research, January 2005, 58.

<sup>2</sup>S. R. Jimerson, “On the Failure of Failure: Examining the Association Between Early Grade Retention and Education and Employment

Outcomes During Late Adolescence" (Outside Source), *Journal of School Psychology*, Vol. 37, No. 3 (Autumn 1999) 243-272.

<sup>3</sup>Gabrielle E. Anderson, Angela D. Whipple, and Shane R. Jimerson, *Grade Retention: Achievement and Mental Health Outcomes* (Outside Source). Bethesda, Md.: National Association of School Psychologists, 2002.

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## Enrichment options to prepare for high school

Another type of bridge program, called either “JumpStart” or “Summer bridge,” provides enrichment for highly motivated students. The Breakthrough Collaborative (Outside Source), is one model for summer transitions programs. Breakthrough attributes its success to a combination of elements:

- The program serves motivated, underserved students at the critical age when they are searching for role models and making choices that will dramatically affect their futures.
- Enthusiastic and talented teachers serve as mentors and role models and personify the idea that “it’s cool to be smart.”
- An academically rigorous program is supplemented by creative arts, multicultural programs, and public speaking opportunities.
- Activities include an infectious spirit of fun and a celebration of excellence.

For more information on a JumpStart program, go to the previous section on articulation agreements with elementary schools and read the box “In the Spotlight” (Toby Johnson Middle School JumpStart example).

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## Moving at-risk youths into the middle school setting

Most districts offer educational options to provide students with the environment, curriculum, and support systems needed to ensure that they achieve their full academic potential. For example, incarcerated or expelled students attend juvenile court schools or community day schools. Students who have health, social, or emotional issues sometimes make a transition to independent study programs. However, schools that either refer students to alternative educational options or receive students who have been to alternative programs need to put special transition programs in place to help these students succeed in new settings.

For example, each incoming student will benefit from time with a counselor on setting goals for success in the new middle school. This discussion needs to include a frank discussion about the problems that led to the student being in an alternative setting, as well as specific strategies for meeting specific challenges. In addition, pairing incoming students with trained **peer helpers** or buddies and placing newcomers in a small learning community or advisory class will help them adjust to the new school. Ideally, each of the students can make a successful transition with the additional support from all members of the faculty. For more on interventions for at-risk youths, refer to the section on interventions in Recommendation 2—Instruction, Assessment, and Intervention.

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Grade-Level Configuration and the Connection to Transitions



# Grade-Level Configuration and the Connection to Transitions

In California, there are many middle grades configurations, although the sixth-through-eighth combination is most common (in 2006, 65 percent of the schools serving middle grades students were grade six through eight combinations<sup>1</sup>). Other common configurations include grades 7-8, 7-9, 6-9, 5-8, and K-8.

In recent years, debate has raged over which type of middle school configuration is most effective in serving young adolescents. Proponents of kindergarten-through-eighth-grade schools (K-8) cite the value of more nurturing elementary school settings. Middle school proponents cite the value of specialized subject-matter teaching, electives, and more advanced facilities for sciences, sports, and academic rigor.

In his article, "Pickle in the Middle," Professor Beane refocuses on the essence of the middle school philosophy.

For the record, just what is this middle school concept? Most middle level educators refer to two sources for a definition: the Carnegie Council's 1989 report, *Turning Points: Preparing American Youth for the 21st Century*, and the National Middle School Association's policy statement, *This We Believe: Successful Schools for Young Adolescents*, most recently revised in 2003. These two statements offer a set of guidelines and priorities for high-quality middle-level schools, including improved academic achievement for *all* students, a challenging and engaging curriculum, supportive and safe environments, better teacher preparation, and improved relationships with families and communities. And, for the record, both recognize that schools for young adolescents can be found inside a variety of grade configurations including 6-8, 5-8, 7-8, K-8, 7-12, K-12, and more.<sup>2</sup>

The RAND Corporation's report, *Focus on the Wonder Years* (PDF; Outside Source), was one of the publications that examined how schools address the middle-grade configuration. Like others, RAND criticized middle schools because the configuration moves students from a K-5 elementary to a 6-8 middle and then on to a 9-12 high school. Research indicates that student performance suffers after transitions; therefore, RAND and others suggested that a K-8 or 7-12 system might be better because those structures reduce the number of student transitions.

Recent criticisms of middle schools as an *institution* tend to focus on poor practices carried out in individual middle schools. "While a move to K-8 schools may eliminate the harmful effect of transitioning between schools, three additional factors can affect student learning: school size, student SES, and instructional delivery. There is evidence that smaller schools and fewer transitions are good for students, but so is the middle school concept of organizing and delivering developmentally-appropriate programs for young adolescents. However, only the negative effect of the number of times a student transitions from one school to the next is **solved** by a move to K-8 schools."<sup>3</sup> Other variables contribute to the success or failure of schools, such as school size, socioeconomic challenges, and how the middle grades are organized to deliver instruction. Poorly orchestrated transitions from one school to another can be traumatic and negatively affect student learning. However, moving from a small intimate environment to a large impersonal environment has more to do with the environment than the transition between the two. The best transition plans or instructional models take young adolescent needs into account.

The reports criticizing middle schools underscore the need for middle grades professionals to make every effort to ensure that they work closely with both elementary and secondary peers to ensure that students do not experience educational mismatches and relational trauma as they move from one grade level to the next.

The difficulties experienced in middle school are remarkably similar to those students encounter in other schooling configurations. Those difficulties have come to be seen as a problem with middle schools in large part because of research that has found middle school effects in the absence of comparisons with student outcomes in other types of schooling for the middle grades.<sup>4</sup>

Paul George, professor at University of Florida and author of *The Exemplary Middle School*, worries that young adolescents may be slighted in the headlong rush to K-8 schools. He argues that students in grades six, seven, and eight "need well-trained teachers, cohesive learning communities, mentoring programs, and a rich and rigorous curriculum focused on their interests and needs."<sup>5</sup> Such resources are not always available in K-8 schools.

For example, sixth graders in a middle school environment have access to electives they would not have in the majority of elementary school settings. In some K-8 schools, music is a pullout program, which means students miss their regular classes to go to music and have to make up what they missed. "It adds more work for the kids and teachers that way. But in a middle school situation, music is an elective, so they don't have to miss out on anything."<sup>6</sup>

The September 2005 issue of the *Middle School Journal* focused on the following question: “K-8 Settings or Separate Schools: Is There a Best Way to Educate Young Adolescents?” (Outside Source). In that issue, Vincent Anfara, Jr., and Alison Buehler review the research evidence against middle schools and find that it is sparse and rarely takes into account whether grades 6-8 schools are faithfully implementing the basic tenets of effective middle schools. They suggest that a district answer the following questions before abandoning middle schools:

- Will the grade configuration increase or decrease parental involvement?
- How many students will be at each grade level, and what implications will this have for course offerings and instructional grouping?
- How will the presence or absence of older students affect younger students?
- What are the opportunities for interaction between age groups?
- Is the design of the school building suited to this grade configuration?
- What is the cost and length of student travel?
- How will grade configuration affect the continuity and articulation of the curriculum?<sup>7</sup>

Researchers found that when schools faithfully implement middle school philosophy, the advantages between one grade configuration over another disappear.<sup>8</sup> In short, a high-impact middle grades program—regardless of school configuration—will respond to the developmental needs of adolescents through caring relationships, high expectations and support to reach them, enrichment and exploratory options, and socially relevant learning opportunities. In developmentally responsive middle schools, educators go out of their way to help students handle new pressures, including new perceptions of gender, changing roles in their communities, and the conflicting messages they receive through popular culture. Successful middle grades educators make sure students feel that they belong.<sup>9</sup>

## Related Links

Brian V. Carolan & Nataly Z. Chesky, The Relationship among Grade Configuration, School Attachment, and Achievement: Focusing on middle grades students' sense of school attachment may be more effective than reorganizing school grade configuration, *Middle School Journal*, Vol. 43, No. 4, Pages 32-29, March 2012.

Mary Tamer, Do Middle Schools Make Sense?, Ed.: The Magazine of the Harvard Graduate School of Education, Fall 2012.

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### Footnotes

<sup>1</sup> *Fact Book 2006: Handbook of Education Information*, Sacramento: California Department of Education, 2006, 20.

<sup>2</sup> James A. Beane, “Pickle in the Middle,” *California English*, California Association of Teachers of English (September 2006).

<sup>3</sup> Tom Erb, “The Making of a New Urban Myth,” *Middle School Journal*, Vol. 37, No.1 (September 2005), 2-3.

<sup>4</sup> Christopher C. Weiss and Lindsay Kipnes, “Reexamining Middle School Effects: A Comparison of Middle Grades Students in Middle Schools and K-8 Schools” (Outside Source) *American Journal of Education*, Vol. 112 (February 2006).

<sup>5</sup> Paul George, “K-8 or Not? Reconfiguring the Middle Grades” (Outside Source), *Middle School Journal*, Vol. 37, No.1 (September 2005), 6-13.

<sup>6</sup> “Eureka School Delays Onset of ‘Teen Attitude,’” *California Educator*, Vol. 10, Issue 6 (March 2006).

<sup>7</sup> Vincent Anfara, Jr., and Allison Buehler, “Grade Configuration and the Education of Young ... What Research Says,” *Middle School Journal*, Vol. 37, No. 1 (September 2005).

<sup>8</sup> V. Anfara, and R. Lipka. “Relating the Middle School Concept to School Achievement,” *Middle School Journal*, Vol. 35, No. 1, (2003) 24-32.

<sup>9</sup> Rick Wormeli, “Misleading in the Middle: A Rebuttal to Cheri Pierson Yecke” (Outside Source), *Educational Leadership online*, Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, Vol. 63 (Summer 2006).

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## Conclusion

Research and experience show that transitions from elementary to middle and middle to high school can be particularly difficult for young adolescents. The National Forum to Accelerate Middle Grades Reform developed criteria for high performance. The School Self-Study and Rating Rubric (DOC; 413KB; 9pp.), is a tool designed by the California Schools to Watch™-Taking Center Stage program to help schools analyze their progress toward excellence based on the National Forum's criteria. When faithfully implemented, the rubric provides schools with a blueprint for developmentally responsive practices that will help students successfully navigate the academic and social transitions between grade levels.

Although Recommendation 6 has focused on the transitions from elementary to middle schools rather than on changing grades within configurations such as K-8 schools, most of the practices would require only minor adjustments for them to work in helping students make the transition from one grade level to the next. In the final analysis, the problem is not so much about the configuration of the school as it is about serving the needs of young adolescents regardless of the configuration.

Appendices at the end contain a recommendation and various resources on the topic of transitions.

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