

Position Statement on Middle-Level Education

Adopted June 5, 1996

The Connecticut State Board of Education recognizes that the period of early adolescence is characterized by significant personal growth and change. Students at this stage of development (from 10 to 14 years of age) undergo changes in physical, social, emotional and intellectual development that are more rapid than in any other period in life except infancy. This period, which encompasses the transition from childhood to adolescence, is one of the most important phases of an individual's development.

Early Adolescents:

- learn best in schools that are organized into small clusters of caring teams of teachers who represent all subject disciplines and pupil personnel services, and who share responsibility for meeting the needs of a common group of students;
- need to be actively involved in hands-on, thought-provoking and challenging learning experiences scheduled into large blocks of time;
- need the support of at least one adult educator as role model and mentor, in addition to a guidance counselor;
- need to develop a sense of belonging and personal identification with their team, their school and the educational program being provided; and
- need the opportunity to work in flexible student groups which address their diverse needs and interests.

The Board, therefore, believes that the following school and program characteristics are essential components of high-quality middle school education:

Students and Learning

- High expectations for student academic performance and responsible behavior are clearly articulated and implemented within a rigorous and challenging educational program which emphasizes and promotes the essential knowledge, basic skills and attributes needed by all students to succeed in school and beyond.
- Students learn to read and write better by reading a wide variety of materials which appeal to them, by writing often about what they read and experience, and by having multiple opportunities for writing short, directed pieces which receive significant review and comment from teachers.
- Students solve mathematical problems which are based on real-life situations. They are required to explain, orally or in writing, how they solved the problems. Math basics are taught rigorously, incorporating manipulative materials and the calculator as part of instruction, when appropriate. Moreover, every student has the opportunity to experience learning in algebra and geometry.

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- Students have opportunities to learn and explore life, earth and physical sciences during their middle-grade experience, incorporating laboratory experiences which require them to both use scientific equipment and think critically about scientific concepts.
- Students have opportunities to learn and explore what it means to be a citizen in a democratic society through the study of history, geography and government in the social studies and foreign languages. They also gain an understanding of other places and cultures in the world.
- Students have ample opportunities to develop skills and respect for artistic expression in each of the arts through creating, performing and evaluating their own artistic products and developing critical understanding of the artistic products of others.
- Students are given a wide range of exploratory activities in physical education and health that develop skills, promote socialization, develop interests and enrich leisure time to promote a healthy, active lifestyle.
- Students have multiple opportunities to take part in community service and career exploration activities.
- Students have increasing opportunities to expand their knowledge, understanding and practical application of skills and competencies for using a wide range of print, nonprint and electronic resources for research, communication and personal enjoyment. Instruction in and application of these skills are thoroughly integrated into and across all disciplines.

Teachers and Teaching

High-quality middle-level programs:

- provide instruction — both disciplinary and interdisciplinary — through high-interest, thematic units which provide all students with opportunities to read, write, use technology, work collaboratively and apply learning to real-life problems and situations;
- are staffed with educators who know, understand and respond to the unique characteristics and needs of early adolescents, and who create a humane, vibrant learning environment in which there is respect for individual and cultural differences, students assume responsibility for their own learning and behavior, and the climate fosters the development of positive character;
- are organized to provide ongoing opportunities for professional interaction, including common planning time for interdisciplinary teams of teachers as well as disciplinary colleagues, team teaching, and professional discussions of student work, student accomplishment and student behavior. In addition, time is provided to make decisions about curriculum content, instructional strategies, scheduling of time and student assessment techniques. Furthermore, decisions regarding these

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- issues ensure that there is articulation between the middle school program and the elementary and high school programs;
- are supported by Connecticut colleges and universities offering both preservice and in-service education programs (including clinical experiences in middle-grade settings) which lead to attainment of the middle-grades teaching certificate and the middle-grades endorsement. Moreover, teachers are given the opportunity to participate in ongoing staff development programs which are specifically designed to meet the unique needs of middle-level teachers, support staff members and administrators, and which result in increased student achievement.

The School Community

The responsibility for meeting the expectations set for students is shared by the entire school community, i.e., teachers, administrators, pupil personnel specialists, support personnel, parents and students who regularly engage in discussions and collaborative decision making about improving the achievement of all students in the school. Moreover, schools offer families and community members meaningful opportunities to support learning both in school and at home.