



The National Forum to Accelerate Middle-Grades Reform

Schools-to-Watch[®] Criteria Organizational Structures and Processes

High-performing schools with middle grades are learning organizations that establish norms, structures, and organizational arrangements to support and sustain their trajectory toward excellence.

- 1. A shared vision of what a high-performing school is and does drives every facet of school change.**
 - The shared vision drives constant improvement.
 - Shared, distributed, and sustained leadership propels the school forward and preserves its institutional memory and purpose.
 - Everyone knows what the plan is and the vision is posted and evidenced by actions.
- 2. The principal has the responsibility and authority to hold the school-improvement enterprise together, including day-to-day know-how, coordination, strategic planning, and communication.**
 - Lines of leadership for the school's improvement efforts are clear.
 - The school leadership team has the responsibility to make things happen.
 - The principal makes sure that assignments are completed.
- 3. The school is a community of practice in which learning, experimentation, and time and opportunity for reflection are the norm.**
 - School leadership fosters and supports interdependent collaboration.
 - Expectations of continuous improvement permeate the school culture.
 - Everyone's job is to learn.
- 4. The school and district devote resources to content-rich professional development, which is connected to reaching and sustaining the school vision and increasing student achievement.**
 - Professional development is intensive, of high quality, ongoing, and relevant to middle-grades education.
 - Teachers get professional support to improve instructional practice (i.e. classroom visitations, peer coaching, demonstration lessons, etc.)
 - Opportunities for learning increase knowledge and skills, challenge outmoded beliefs and practices, and provide support in the classroom.
- 5. The school is not an island unto itself; it is a part of a larger educational system, i.e., districts, networks and community partnerships.**
 - There are deliberate vertical articulation and transition programs between feeder elementary schools and destination high schools.
 - The district supports (funding and time) its schools' participation in best practice networks, associations, learning communities, and professional development focused on middle grades improvement and achievement.
 - School and district work collaboratively to bring coherence to curriculum, instruction, assessment, intervention, data collection, analysis, and accountability for student achievement.

- 6. The school staff holds itself accountable for the students' success.**
 - The school collects, analyzes, and uses data as a basis for making decisions.
 - The administrators and faculty grapple with school-generated evaluation data to identify areas for more extensive and intensive improvement.
 - The staff delineates benchmarks, and insists upon evidence and results.
 - The school staff intentionally and explicitly reconsiders its vision and practices when data call them into question.

- 7. District and school staff possess and cultivate the collective will to persevere, believing it is their business to produce increased achievement and enhanced development of all students.**
 - The faculty and administrators see barriers as challenges, not problems.

- 8. The school and district staffs work with colleges and universities to recruit, prepare, and mentor novice and experienced teachers.**
 - Principals insist on having teachers who promote young adolescents' intellectual, social, emotional, physical, and ethical growth.

- 9. The school includes families and community members in setting and supporting the school's trajectory toward high performance.**
 - The administrators and teachers inform families and community members about the school's goals for student success and the students' responsibility for meeting those goals.
 - The administrators and teachers engage all stakeholders in ongoing and reflective conversation, consensus building, and decision making about governance to promote school improvement.