



The National Forum to Accelerate Middle-Grades Reform

Schools-to-Watch[®] Criteria Academic Excellence

High-performing schools with middle grades are academically excellent. They challenge all students to use their minds well.

- 1. All students are expected to meet high academic standards.**
 - Expectations are clear for students and parents.
 - Prior to students beginning an assignment, teachers supply students with exemplars of high quality work that meet the performance standard or level.
 - Students know what high quality work should be like.
 - Students revise their work based on meaningful feedback until they meet or exceed the performance standard or level.
- 2. Curriculum, instruction, assessment, and appropriate academic interventions are aligned with high standards.**
 - They provide a coherent vision for what students should know and be able to do.
 - Students, teachers and families understand what students are learning and why. In any class and at any time, students can explain the importance of what they are learning.
 - The curriculum is rigorous, non-repetitive, and moves forward substantially.
 - Work is demanding and steadily progresses.
- 3. The curriculum emphasizes deep understanding of important concepts and the development of essential skills.**
 - Teachers make connections across the disciplines to reinforce important concepts and assist students in thinking critically and applying what they have learned to solve real-world problems.
 - All teachers incorporate academic and informational literacy into their course work (i.e. reading, writing, note taking, researching, listening, and speaking)
- 4. Instructional strategies include a variety of challenging and engaging activities that are clearly related to the grade-level standards, concepts, and skills being taught.**
 - To reach students, all teachers draw from a common subset of instructional strategies and activities such as direct instruction, cooperative learning, project-based learning, simulations, hands-on learning, and integrated technology
- 5. Teachers use a variety of methods to assess and monitor the progress of student learning (e.g., tests, quizzes, assignments, exhibitions, projects, performance tasks, portfolios).**
 - All teachers use frequent assessments to benchmark key concepts and the achievement of their students.
 - Students learn how to assess their own and others' work against the performance standards, expectations, or levels.

- 6. The faculty and master schedule provide students time to meet rigorous academic standards.**
 - Students are provided more time to learn the content, concepts or skills if needed.
 - Flexible scheduling enables students to engage in academic interventions, extended projects, hands-on experiences, and inquiry-based learning.

- 7. Teachers know what each student has learned and still needs to learn.**
 - Students are provided the support they need to meet rigorous academic standards.
 - Students have multiple opportunities to succeed and receive extra help as needed, such as: co-teaching or collaborative resource model, support and intervention classes, before- and after-school tutoring, and homework centers.

- 8. The adults in the school are provided time and frequent opportunities to enhance student achievement by working with colleagues to deepen their knowledge and to improve their standards-based practice.**
 - They collaborate in analyzing student achievement data and making decisions about rigorous curriculum, standards-based assessment practice, effective instructional methods, and evaluation of student work.
 - The professional learning community employs coaching, mentoring, and peer observation as a means of continuous instructional improvement.