



The National Forum to Accelerate Middle-Grades Reform

Schools-to-Watch[®] Criteria

Developmental

Responsiveness

High-performing schools with middle grades are sensitive to the unique developmental challenges of early adolescence.

- 1. The staff creates a personalized environment that supports each student's intellectual, ethical, social, and physical development.**
 - Adults and students are grouped into smaller communities (i.e. teams, houses, academies) for enhanced teaching and learning.
 - These small learning communities are characterized by stable, close, and mutually respectful relationships.
 - Every student has a mentor, advisor, advocate, or other adult he/she trusts and stays in relationship with throughout the middle school experience.
- 2. The school provides access to comprehensive services to foster healthy physical, social, emotional, and intellectual development.**
 - Teachers are trained to recognize and handle student problems.
 - Students with difficulties, and their families, can get help.
 - The school houses a wide range of support—nurses, counselors, resource teachers—to help students and families who need special assistance.
 - The school staff members offer parent education activities involving families.
- 3. Teachers foster curiosity, creativity and the development of social skills in a structured and supportive environment. All Teachers:**
 - Enhance standards-based learning by using a wide variety of instructional strategies
 - Incorporate well-developed procedures and routines for effective classroom management
 - Facilitate learning by deliberately teaching study and organizational skills
 - Integrate creative activities in the lessons, e.g., current technologies, visual and performing arts, etc.
- 4. The curriculum is both socially significant and relevant to the personal and career interests of young adolescents.**
 - Students talk about daily issues in their own lives, their community and their world.
 - Students take action, make informed choices, work collaboratively, and learn to resolve conflicts.
- 5. Teachers use an interdisciplinary approach to reinforce important concepts, skills, and address real-world problems.**
 - For example, students may read a historical novel for language arts and history and then study music from the same time period in music class.
 - Students can work on the same project in several different classes.

- 6. Students are provided multiple opportunities to explore a rich variety of topics and interests in order to develop their identity, learn about their strengths, discover and demonstrate their own competence, and plan for their future.**
 - Teachers and counselors push students to challenge themselves and set high academic and career goals for their future.
- 7. All students have opportunities for voice—posing questions, reflecting on experiences, and participating in decisions and leadership activities.**
 - All students have a real say, or have legitimate representation, in what happens at school.
 - School staff members have an “open-door” policy to encourage student involvement and connection.
 - Students take an active role in school-family conferences.
- 8. The school staff members develop alliances with families to enhance and support the well-being of the children.**
 - Parents are more than just volunteers or fund-raisers; they are meaningfully involved in all aspects of the school.
 - Parents are informed, included, and involved as partners and decision-makers in their children’s education.
- 9. Staff members provide all students with opportunities to develop citizenship skills, to use the community as a classroom, and to engage the community in providing resources and support.**
 - Students take on projects to improve their school, community, state, nation, and world.
- 10. The school provides age-appropriate, co-curricular activities to foster social skills and character, and to develop interests beyond the classroom environment.**
 - Student co-curricular activities cover a wide range of interests—team sports, clubs, exploratory opportunities, service opportunities, and a rich program in the visual and performing arts.
 - Activities include both boys and girls and students of all skill levels.