



Measuring Middle Level School Effectiveness

A Position Paper of the New England League of Middle Schools

The New England League of Middle Schools believes that comprehensive school assessment should be data-driven, research based, and utilize a variety of indicators. Assessment tools should be performance based. Examples include test data, surveys, questionnaires, focus groups, interviews, case studies, existing school records and portfolios. Assessment should be an on-going process in which results are disseminated and used to enhance school improvement and celebrate success.

Research has demonstrated that the implementation of effective middle school practices leads to high academic achievement. Numerous studies have arrived at similar conclusions. The beliefs and assumptions that follow are based on the Carnegie Foundations Turning Points 2000, the National Middle School Association's This We Believe, Breaking Ranks In The Middle, and ongoing research that fundamentally support effective middle level practices.

In order to measure the effectiveness of middle level schools, valid, reliable and appropriate assessments are necessary to determine the quality and impact of each student's education. A successful school is defined by clearly identified goals and standards that reflect effective middle level practice. An appropriate on-going school assessment process can be of great assistance to educators, parents and the community to help determine current status and future directions. Information gained will also assist educators to communicate clearly with parents and the larger community.

Underlying these beliefs are the following assumptions:

- The school assessment process must be based upon widely known and accepted research about best middle level classroom practice and effective organizational components.
- Assessments must be based upon indicators and researched based practices that are both comprehensive and thorough as well as enjoy wide support as opposed to the interests of a few.
- Flexible instructional methods that prepare all students to achieve high standards are consistently evident.
- Parents and communities should develop measures and standards to support student learning.
- Results of on-going assessment should be regularly communicated to the larger school community in a clear and concise manner.
- Action plans should be developed for areas in need of improvement.

Developing Standards and Performance Indicators:

Structured within a framework of effective middle level practice, NELMS suggests that the following questions serve as indicators to measure school effectiveness. We believe they can be helpful to the local school community in developing school-based standards and performance indicators.

Are Students Learning at High Levels Through an Appropriate Curriculum, Instruction, Assessment, as well as Organization?

- Do students, parents, and teachers regularly monitor school and individual goals with results reported statistically?
- Are state assessment and other test data results shared, analyzed, and utilized?
- Are individual stories from students, parents, community members and teachers collected and reported?
- Is there documentation that learning challenges each individual and goes beyond the stated curriculum?
- Are students asked to assess learning activities? Are the results acted on, summarized and reported?
- Are both teacher and student teams, together for instruction and not regularly pulled “off team” for other classes or teaching assignments?
- Do teachers have at least 45 minutes per day of both individual *and* team planning time?
- Is data gathered on the use of active/hands-on learning experience, the extent of curriculum integration, and the use of alternative assessment measured?

Do Parents, Students, Teachers, and Administrators Create an Appropriate Climate for Learning?

- Is there descriptive as well as statistical data to show how safe and supportive the learning climate is?
- Is school pride evident in halls, classrooms, bathrooms, common areas, and on the outside of the building?
- Are student and parent perceptions collected and collated?
- Are teachers organized by teams?
- Are incidents of staff development activities and their effectiveness measured and reported?
- Are referral statistics (personal, interpersonal, and academic) collected and analyzed?
- Are discipline statistics reported, categorized, and compared?
- Are student and teacher attendance records reported, categorized, and compared?
- Are transitions into, through, and out of the middle level school assessed, reported, and compared?

Do Parents and the Wider Community Support Student Learning?

- Is data collected to demonstrate that parents take the time via workshops to learn about the school, its programs, and the developmental stages their child is going through?
- Do all parents and appropriate community members attend school functions?
- Do educators in the school, in partnership with parents, offer interesting and informative programs that build support for the school?
- Do parents create conditions in the home that enhance learning?

Through conferences, seminars, publications, fieldwork and networking, the New England League of Middle Schools will serve as a catalyst for action to ensure that each student is educated to his/her highest level and that these beliefs outlined in this position statement become a reality for each young adolescent