



Middle Level Curriculum

*A Position Paper
of the*

New England League of Middle Schools

In the early years, renewal in middle level schools focused primarily on organization and climate issues to ensure powerful student learning. Thousands of middle schools made significant changes in improving educational opportunities for young adolescents. Over the past two decades, many schools have focused on developing standards based curriculum that is aligned with state tests. The challenge for many middle level educators is to develop curriculum that is consistent and compatible with both state mandates and the developmental nature of 10 to 14 year olds.

Middle level schools have a major responsibility to prepare young adolescents to be successful, productive, and contributing members of a changing global society. A standards based curriculum that better prepares students intellectually, physically, socially and emotionally for their diverse futures must include, but go beyond traditional school subjects.

Such a responsive curriculum will provide opportunities for students to develop strong communication and leadership skills, to work cooperatively with others, to apply problem solving and decision-making skills, to utilize technology in order to facilitate learning, to practice civic responsibility, and demonstrate wellness. Such a curriculum is relevant and responsive to the learning needs of young adolescents and helps motivate them to work through the challenges of the vigorous learning they are engaged in and to benefit from and continue powerful learning into high school and beyond.

Underlying these beliefs are the following assumptions:

- Each student is capable of learning and must be actively acquiring and applying skills, knowledge and attitudes.
- Students should be held to high standards and provided with support necessary to reach them.
- Curriculum develops critical thinking and the skills necessary to score well on state assessments.
- Curriculum should be integrated and connected not separated by single subject boundaries.
- Curriculum is based on state standards and best articulated by those most closely affected -students, teachers and administrators with input from parents, business, and the community-at-large.
- Curriculum must incorporate questions students ask about themselves and society's expectations of them.
- Curriculum is connected to others levels and is mapped both vertically up and down grade levels and horizontally, across the disciplines on a team.
- Curriculum is team-based with educators developing varieties of approaches, activities, and use of flexible time to enhance learning, knowledge of the facts, and deep understanding associated with the major intentions and concepts of the curriculum.
- Within an integrated curriculum, students and teachers serve as facilitators, coaches, and/or directors and assume the role of co-learners through a variety of instructional strategies.
- Learning experiences must be developmentally responsive, reflect the interests and needs of the students and community, celebrate cultural diversity and honor the dignity of individuals.
- Diverse instructional strategies emphasizing active learning requires new ways to assess student learning. A variety of assessment strategies, both formative and summative are an integral part of this process.

Learning is a lifelong process! A strategic goal of NELMS is to continue to engage educators from the elementary, middle, secondary, and university levels, students, parents, business and the community-at-large to develop a consensus for appropriate, motivating, and meaningful middle level curriculum. Through conferences, seminars, publications, fieldwork, and networking, the New England League of Middle Schools will serve as a catalyst for action to ensure that these beliefs become a driving force in middle level education.