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What happens in the middle grades really matters

What middle grades educators do matters—tremendously.

The middle grades are heir to a longstanding tradition that emphasizes engaging and responding to the developmental needs of young adolescents. The middle grades also build on a second tradition, more recent in policy emphasis, that focuses on academic standards and standards-based curricula as the foundation for evaluating and improving instruction and student achievement.

These traditions aspire to a common goal: that students will leave the middle grades equipped for a rigorous and successful high school experience. Researchers, policymakers, and school reformers alike are taking a new look at the middle grades as the last best chance to ensure students remain on such a path.

-Middle Grades Playbook, EdSource, 2011
Maryland Common Core

The Maryland Common Core Curriculum Frameworks in English/Language Arts and Mathematics define the essential skills and knowledge that students need to know and be able to do in order to achieve the academic goals of the Common Core State Standards. The Frameworks are the foundation of Maryland’s new Curriculum and will guide the development of curriculum resources (MSDE, 2011).

CCPS Core Statement

Carroll County Public Schools: Building the Future

CCPS Core Beliefs

All Schools:
- welcome their school community
- establish positive home and school relationships
- provide a safe and orderly learning environment for students and staff
- work to ensure that every child succeeds
- are culturally proficient
- prepare students with a global education
- place priority on the educational needs of students
- motivate students to learn

All Educators:
- recognize the unique learning styles of each student
- facilitate learning by encouraging, prompting, and interacting with students
- establish positive and appropriate relationships with students
- ensure learning by providing instruction that meets each student’s individual needs
- support student success
- encourage students to make choices that provide challenges
- assess student progress through both formal and informal methods and then provide appropriate and targeted instruction
- engage students in rigorous and relevant instruction

All Students:
- enroll in coursework that prepares them to be career and college ready
- obtain the skills to thrive as independent 21st century learners
- become knowledgeable, responsible, and caring citizens
- demonstrate respect for the learning environment and other individuals
- reach their potential
- develop effective communication, interpersonal, and leadership skills
- participate in varied co-curricular and extracurricular activities
Middle School Core Statement

Middle Grades are the vital link to prepare young adolescent students for rigorous high school courses – and, ultimately, for students to graduate and be college and career ready. In order to achieve this goal, emphasis will be placed on understanding the needs of the learner and educating the whole child.

When advising state education leaders on the middle grades, the Southern Regional Education Board insists: "Get the mission right. Set out to prepare students for challenging work in high school." It also counsels that states should monitor progress toward this goal and ensure that middle grades teachers have the content knowledge to achieve it.

-Improving the Middle Grades: Actions That Can Be Taken Now, 2003

Our Vision for Middle School Students

Recognizing that each child comes with unique strengths, challenges, and needs, Turning Points teachers maintain high expectations for all their students and hold a vision that their students will leave middle school able to:

- Think creatively
- Identify and solve complex and meaningful problems
- Know their passions, strengths, and challenges
- Communicate and work well with others
- Lead healthy lives
- Be ethical and caring citizens of a diverse world

Understanding the intellectual, social, physical, moral and emotional characteristics of the early adolescent can provide the foundation for a vision of learning and teaching in the middle grades. The developmental stage of young adolescence has been referred to as the "turning point" between childhood and adulthood (Carnegie, 1989). The risks young adolescents face as they navigate this phase of life can be considerable as they make decisions and choices that will affect their health, education, and who they will become.

Middle schools need to both strengthen their academic core, and establish caring, supportive environments that value the young people they serve. Above all, each and every middle school teacher needs to develop strong relationships with his or her students. Such relationships are the foundation for powerful learning.

Young adolescents are ready to be challenged to contribute in significant ways to society. With a growing awareness of the world outside the family, students at this age need to see and feel the relevance of their work and its connection to the outside world. The work they do in school should have intellectual depth and authentic purpose. Rather than seeing students’ need for social contact and their physical energy as liabilities, good middle schools harness these qualities for learning. Each student brings unique gifts and experiences, and a capacity for learning. It is the challenge of middle school faculty to create learning environments that will allow students to flourish.

In addition to the CCPS Core Beliefs, middle schools believe:

- in the 21st Century Learning Goals

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Middle School Educators...

- value, understand, and appreciate the unique characteristics of young adolescents.

- create dynamic, interdisciplinary teams that are afforded common planning time to help organize and improve the quality and quantity of interactions between teachers and students.

- provide structured planning time for teachers to align the curriculum across grades and schools, to promote the use of transdisciplinary lessons, and to map efforts that address the academic, developmental, social, and personal needs of students.

- implement a program that ensures that each student has frequent and meaningful opportunities to meet with an adult to plan and assess the student’s academic, personal, and social development (examples: second chance learning opportunities, advisory, flex time, character education, ...)

- provide seamless transitions from elementary to middle grades and middle grades to high school to continue to meet the changing academic, developmental, and social needs of the student.
Policies and Regulations

For more information, please reference the following policies and regulations:

http://www.boarddocs.com/mabe/ccps/Board.nsf/Public#

- IGAB – FAMILY LIFE AND HUMAN DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMS
- IHAA – READING POLICY
- IHAK – CHARACTER EDUCATION
- IHB – WRITING POLICY
- IKAB - GRADING, HOMEWORK, AND COMMUNICATING STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT
- IKE - PLACEMENT, PROMOTION, INTERVENTION, AND RETENTION
- IKF - REQUIREMENTS FOR GRADUATION FROM CARROLL COUNTY HIGH SCHOOLS
Academics

Rationale of Middle School Organization
Increased instructional time for students should be met with increased learning time for teachers, so that interdisciplinary teams may engage in collaborative work, plan instruction, and monitor their use of a transdisciplinary curriculum, and so that content teams may schedule subject specific professional development, collaborate on lesson design, examine student work, and analyze assessment data.

- The Critical Middle, Maryland Middle School Steering Committee, 2008

Academic Student Grouping

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Delivery Model</th>
<th>Characteristics of a typical class</th>
<th>Characteristics of a typical student</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Foundational (Level 3)</td>
<td>Smaller class sizes&lt;br&gt;Pacing is more easily adjusted to learners’ needs&lt;br&gt;Extra support staff available in the class&lt;br&gt;Increased opportunities for individualized instruction</td>
<td>Often, but do not always, requires additional support and/or time for academic success&lt;br&gt;Benefits from increased support for organization&lt;br&gt;Summative and formative assessments indicate student is showing growth toward meeting grade-level standards</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic (Level 6)</td>
<td>Instruction is geared toward on-grade level learners&lt;br&gt;Increased independence is expected</td>
<td>Requires little additional support and/or time for academic success&lt;br&gt;Summative and formative assessments indicate that the student meets grade-level standards</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Honors (Level 8)</td>
<td>Instruction is geared toward above grade-level learners&lt;br&gt;High level of independence and motivation required&lt;br&gt;More opportunities for independent learning&lt;br&gt;Expansion of topics for greater analysis, synthesis, and evaluation</td>
<td>Rarely requires additional support and/or time for academic success&lt;br&gt;Summative and formative assessments indicate student exceeds grade-level standards&lt;br&gt;Demonstrates high level of intrinsic motivation</td>
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Guidelines

Scheduling
As schools begin to plan for scheduling over time the following should be considered:

Core Academics
- Teachers and students will be grouped in interdisciplinary teams to maximize student success.
- Interdisciplinary teams include the following disciplines: ELA, Mathematics, Science, and Social Studies.
- Maximize the opportunity for equitable instructional time based on student need in core content areas throughout the year.
- Maximize common planning time for grade level teams and grade level discipline teams.
- Intervention should be scheduled in addition to the core academic program.

Related Arts
- All students will be provided a program in Health education on a yearly basis. (COMAR)
  - 45 minutes for 45 days is the goal for the delivery of the curriculum.
- All students will be provided a program in Physical Education on a yearly basis. (COMAR)
  - 45 minutes for 90 days is the goal for the delivery of the curriculum.
- All students will be provided a program in Fine Arts (Art, Chorus, Instrumental Music, Orchestra, and/or General Music) on a yearly basis. (COMAR)
  - 45 minutes for 90 days is the goal for delivery of the curriculum of Instrumental Music.
  - 45 minutes for 45 days should be the minimum amount of instructional time for Chorus.
  - 45 minutes for 45 days is the goal for delivery of the General Music and Art curriculum.
- All students will receive a program in Family and Consumer Science and Technology Education during the middle school years.
  - 45 minutes for 45 days is the goal for delivery of these courses.
  - COMAR requires instruction in Financial Literacy in middle school.
**World Languages**

- World Language must be offered in the middle years.
- To maximize core content instructional time, World Language should be an elective offering during the related arts rotations.
- 45 minutes for 180 days is required for the delivery of the curriculum and the credit.
- A student should have exposure to every related arts course over the middle school experience.
  - All students do not need to take Art and Music in the same year.
  - All students do not need FACS and Tech Ed every year.

**Interventions**

**Programmatic Interventions**

- Middle Schools implement the three tier model of intervention. (Whole Group, Small Group, Individual)
- Interventions (ie. Wilson, READ180, math intervention) should be scheduled in addition to the core academic program.
- Interventions must be data driven and delivered at the school level for all students demonstrating a need.
- Programs to promote second chance learning are essential to meet the needs of the students within the instructional program.
  - Flex mod, SET program, etc.
- Progress monitoring for, and of, the intervention is essential to maximize student growth.
- An alternate plan will be implemented for students who are not meeting with success in their present intervention.
- Planning for intervention is a team effort that should include, but is not limited to, administration, teachers, counselor, families, and the student.
- A student should have exposure to every related arts course over the middle school experience.
  - All students do not need to take Art and Music in the same year.
  - All students do not need FACS and Tech Ed every year.
Transitions

Elementary to Middle

- Promote ongoing two way communication and collaboration.
  - For example:
    - Sixth grade teachers visiting 5th grade classrooms.
    - Reading Specialists communicate to facilitate vertical alignment.
    - Special Education Teachers and administration attend transition meetings for 5th grade students.
    - Promote tours for students and parents prior to the end of the year.
    - Provide parent informational meetings regarding scheduling, expectations, and transitions.

- Middle to High
  - Provide high schools with student data.
  - Support the articulation meetings to address the academic needs of students transitioning to the high school.
  - Promote ongoing two way communication and collaboration.
    - Facilitate shared professional development focusing on alignment of curriculum and instruction.
      - School visitation by teachers
      - Regional Administrative Meetings
    - Facilitate school activities through shared calendars.
  - Tours of the high school and Career & Technology Center.
  - Exposure and awareness of the high school experience.
  - Facilitate Family Informational Night for smooth transitions for families
  - Identify 6th grade students that need intervention.
Recommendations for Future Consideration

Scheduling Recommendations
- Explore new and innovative fine arts programs to meet the needs of the 21st Century learner.
- Provide opportunity for students to demonstrate mastery of required knowledge and skills without enrolling in the course to accelerate learning. An example would be having students test out of financial literacy, foreign language, etc.
- Middle schools should provide a consistent foreign language program throughout the county.
- Students receiving interventions may need a modified related arts rotation.
- Provide all students direct access to the appropriate technology.

Programmatic Recommendations
- STEM specialist for every school
- Math specialist for every school
- At-Risk specialist for every school
- G&T Specialist for every school

Transitions Recommendations
- Career and Technology Center fieldtrips should be scheduled later in the school year
- High school recommendations should be completed later in the school year

Intervention Recommendations
- Extended learning time is essential to student success in meeting the core standards.
- Develop a one rotation course that provides exposure to all of the areas of fine arts for students in need of multiple interventions.