

Components of the Middle Level Education Concept That are
Implemented in Arkansas Middle Level School

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Abstract

Arkansas added middle level licensure for teachers in the 1999 – 2000 school year. This project surveys schools in Arkansas that encompass grades 5 – 8 to see if implementation of part or all of the components of the middle level education concept and the addition of highly qualified teachers in middle level education has been effective in increasing student achievement.

Objectives

To survey schools encompassing grades 5 – 8 in Arkansas and identifies how many of the 14 characteristics of middle level schools are being implemented.

To compare student achievement of schools that identify themselves with the middle level concept and schools that do not.

Significance/Need

The traditional configuration for middle level schools nations wide has been grades six through eight. The primary components for effective middle level schools are advisor/advisee programs, team teaching, exploratory classes, and flexible scheduling. In addition, effective middle schools develop interdisciplinary and integrated teaching units for student center classrooms. (NMSA 2003) “Best practices” in effective middle schools focus on student achievement by addressing the developmental characteristics of the young adolescent.

Since Arkansas’s change of licensure from grades K-6 to P-4 and 4-8, there has not been a definitive study on where or how this change has been effective. Although research indicates that implementing parts of the middle level concepts results in improved student achievement, it is not recommended. Full implementation of the middle level concept is the only way to fairly judge it effectiveness. The discussions regarding middle level education in Arkansas has been overshadowed by personnel administrators seeking to fill classrooms with teachers that would not be considered “highly qualified” in the circles of knowledgeable middle level educators.

Turning Points: Preparing American Youth for the 21st Century, Published in 1989 made eight recommendations for creating effective middle schools. Four of these recommendations are significant to this study:

- Middle grades schools should transmit a core of common, substantial knowledge to all students in ways that foster curiosity, problem solving, and critical thinking.
- Large middle grades schools should be divided into smaller communities for learning so each student will receive sustained individual attention.

- Teachers and principals, not distant administrative or political organizations should have major responsibility and authority to transform middle grades schools.
- Teachers for the middle grades should be specifically prepared to teach young adolescents and be recognized distinctively for this accomplishment. (Jackson, 2000)

“Like its predecessor, Turning Points 2000 aims to help bridge the gap between current, unacceptable levels of intellectual development and a future in which every middle grades student meets or exceeds high academic standards and other key indicators of a successful school experience. (Jackson 2000)

The number of schools in Arkansas carrying the name middle school has increased since 1999. However, there is increased pressure in several states, as well as in Arkansas to regress to either K-8 models or K-6 models that were the norm prior to the 1960’s middle level movement. (McEwin 2004)

There is no research at this point that indicates whether or not young adolescents have higher achievement in a middle school or in grades K-8. (McEwin 2004) Middle level education is an area that is still under researched. There are repeated calls for more research on Middle Level Education and especially research by practioners and individuals who have worked in the area of middle level education.

The information gained through this data will create many additional questions about Middle level Education and its effectiveness or lack of in Arkansas and other states. What are the implications for rural schools that try to implement middle level education? How have teachers trained especially to be middle level teachers from middle level education programs affected middle level education in schools? Are teaching strategies identified by research as “best practice” used in Arkansas middle level schools? How has issues of accountability hurt or hindered the middle level programs?

E. Process for Attainment of Objectives/Goals

- I. Identify school with grades 5 – 8 in Arkansas through the state department of education by January 31, 2006.
- II. Develop Survey From November until January 2006.
- III. Survey these schools on their implementation of the 14 characteristics of effective middle level education. January to February 2006.
- IV. Analyze Data March 2006.
- V. Completion of analysis by April 2006.

Research Question	Data Source	Data Source	Data Source
Middle Level Characteristics	School Survey	Arkansas Department of Education	Principal Interviews

Dissemination of Results

I plan to apply to several National Conferences to make presentations on the results of this study.

National Middle School Association Conferences in 2006 and 2007
Association of Teacher Educators 2006
National Middle School Association Symposium in 2007

Bibliography

National Middle School Association. (1998). *This we believe*. (5th ed.).

National Middle School Association (2003) *This We Believe: successful Schools for Young Adolescents*

Jackson, A. & Davis, G. (2000): *Turning points 2000*. New York, NY: Teachers College Press

Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development. (1990). *Turning points: preparing American youth for the 21st century*. New York. NY: Carnegie Corporation.

McEwin, K.C. & Dickinson, T. (2004). *Programs and Practices in K-8 Schools: Do They Meet the Educational Needs of Young Adolescents?* Columbus, Ohio: NMSA.

Professional Organizations and Journals

National Middle School Association

Journals: Middle School Journal
Middle Ground

Web site: <http://nmsa.org>

Arkansas Association of Middle Level Education

Web site: AAMLE.org

Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development (ASCD)

Journal: Educational Leadership

Web site: ASCD.org

Arkansas Department of Education

Web site: arkedu.state.ar.us

Research

The research was done primarily through article review, and searching the National Middle School Association website. On this website I found the most important document of this research. In 2004, Arkansas had commissioned a Survey of Middle Grades Public Schools of Arkansas. Gregory Meeks, and Terry Stepka at Arkansas State University did this research. Their survey was based on a 1990 Survey

Summary

1. Schools were identified from the Arkansas Department of Education Website.
2. Only 16.4% of the Middle Level Schools in Arkansas are 5 – 8 and changing.
3. The survey done by Meeks and Stepka was fairly inclusive. It needs updating, but there was one particular area not addressed.

Conclusions and Recommendations

1. The Survey from 2004 needs updating because of the change and realignment of schools in many school districts in Arkansas in 2005/2006.
2. The middle level programs are constantly under fire to provide teachers through a generalist type of program that would decrease the primary focus of two content subject areas. I am currently developing a survey that will assess principal's concerns about content knowledge of middle level teachers. Through informal conversations, the concern usually how to address the "highly qualified" issue, and how can the licensure can be changed so that more teachers can be hired.
3. Articles and Presentations Developed

Smith, V. Carole. "Pre-Service Teacher Organizations: An Extension of the University Classroom and Field Experience." Association of Teacher Educators. Philadelphia, PA. July 2006.

Smith, V. Carole and Tim Carter. "Teacher Professionalism: Preparing Middle Level Teachers to Meet the Pathwise Domain D Criteria." MIDPOINT: The Journal of the Arkansas Association of Middle Level Education. April 2006.

Smith V. Carole. "Home to School Communication: Parent Involvement." Middle Level SIG. Association of Teacher Educators. Atlanta, Georgia. February 2006.

Smith V. Carole and Kandis Croom. "The Lost Concept: Middle Level Advisory Programs." Submitted to MIDPOINT: The Journal of the Arkansas Association of Middle Level Education, January 2007.