

Unique Developmental Needs of Young Adolescents

Research and experience confirm that middle level students, ages 10-15, are very different from students immediately older or younger.

Middle level students typically experience many personal challenges, including physical transitions associated with puberty, powerful social needs to find personal validation and support in peer groups, and a broad assortment of emotional vulnerabilities and insecurities.

Quality middle schools implement programs that support the needs of the ever-changing developmental stages of this group. Middle schools develop educational programs that are both academically sound and developmentally responsive.

The middle school model fosters the creation of an atmosphere or culture that addresses the needs of the whole student, with special attention to the unique intellectual and emotional needs of this age group.

In 1973, there were 2,308 public middle schools and 7,878 public junior high schools. Twenty years later, there were approximately three middle schools for every junior high (Digest of Educational Statistics, 1995).



A middle school provides:

- A friendly, inviting, and academically challenging school climate.
- Abundant opportunities to build positive relationships between and among students and teachers.
- Small communities of learners where groups know each other well and where learning experiences are interrelated and meaningful.
- A caring adult advisor or mentor who knows and is concerned about each student's academic progress and adjustment to school and life.
- An enthusiastic staff that provides programs designed to help students reach their potential.
- An environment that capitalizes on the curiosity and creativity of students and displays student projects, art work, and reports.
- Flexible grouping of students to provide the best learning environment for students of varying abilities, interests, and rates of learning.
- An activity program that encourages student participation in sports and interest-centered activities.
- Extensive opportunities for students to explore, experiment, and discover.
- A positive discipline program that guides students in becoming responsible for their own behavior.
- Social experiences appropriate for the age level.
- Partnerships with families and communities.
- A culture that celebrates human diversity and promotes tolerance among students and adults from diverse backgrounds.

(Source: National Middle School Association)

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What is a Middle School?



Moorhead Area Public Schools

Our mission is to develop the maximum potential of every learner to thrive in a changing world.

Small Learning Communities Create Supportive Environment

Developmentally responsive middle schools provide a safe, inviting, caring environment for all students.

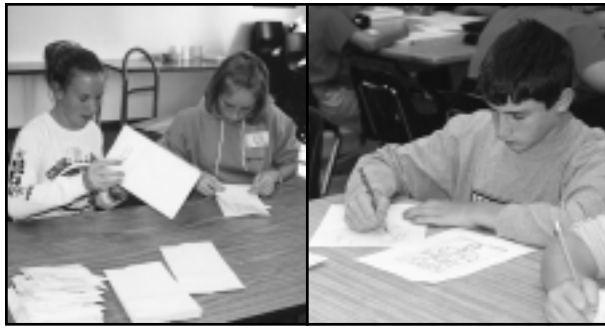
Smaller learning communities such as “houses,” where students and teachers are grouped together, create a more personalized and supportive environment in which teachers and students get to know and value one another. The teams create a sense of family within the larger school community.

The interdisciplinary team organization fosters feelings of belonging to a group of students in an academic setting, while advisory groups allow time and a small group for discussion of issues.

Advisory programs connect students and

teachers, giving the student the opportunity to get to know an adult well outside of the classroom setting. A topical curriculum taught within the advisory program can address unique social, emotional and intellectual needs of this age group.

According to the National Middle



School Association’s report “This We Believe: Developmentally Responsive Middle Level Schools,” an adult advocate is a key characteristic of a developmentally responsive middle school. Middle level students need assistance in resolving both educational and personal issues they face during these transitional years.

Curriculum Emphasizes Active Learning to Engage Students

Developmentally responsive middle schools provide challenging curriculum which is interdisciplinary and exploratory in nature.

Effective middle schools must provide a balance between attention to the basics, coverage of necessary skills and knowledge, and the need for students to explore a wide variety of interests and experiences. Effective middle schools provide a strong academic program that is developmentally responsive to the unique needs of the young adolescents. Exploratory classes in areas of art, music, drama, technology, foreign languages, and others offer students opportunities to explore their interests.

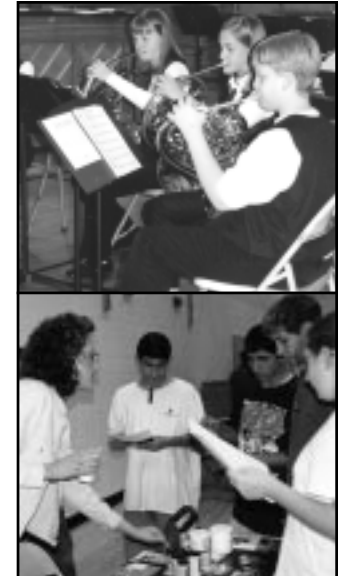
Middle school education is organized around teams of teachers from different subject areas

providing instruction on a common set of issues or ideas. The team of teachers instructs a common set of students, making possible small communities of learners which enhance personal connections between students and teachers.

Flexible scheduling enables teaching teams to cover topics at whatever speed is appropriate for their students. Teaching teams can vary the length of class periods and vary the size of class groups. Class periods, through team cooperation and coordination, can be lengthened, shortened, or eliminated to provide time for lab work, guest speakers, and interdisciplinary activities.

“This We Believe” states that young adolescents learn best through engagement and interaction. Research cites the need for middle level students to learn by discussing and reflecting on new learning with others and then applying learning in real-life settings.

Therefore, middle school teachers use many different teaching strategies such as individual and group projects, problem-solving activities, cooperative learning groups, lectures, demonstrations, and utilization of community resources.



*For more information contact the
Office of Teaching and Learning at (218) 284-3310.*