MIDDLE SCHOOL IS NOT A BUILDING
Educating Vermont’s Young Adolescents in the 21st Century

Vermont Middle Grades Task Force 2009
VERMONT MIDDLE GRADES TASK FORCE 2006-2009

Penny Bishop, Co-Chair
Director, Middle Level Teacher Education
University of Vermont

Heather Schneider, Co-Chair
Middle Level Consultant
Vermont Department of Education

David Barnett, Co-Chair
Assistant Principal
Randolph Union High School

David Adams
Assistant Superintendent
Southwest Vermont Supervisory Union

Garet Allen-Malley
Faculty, Middle Level Teacher Education
University of Vermont

Leslie Beatson
Principal
Peoples Academy Middle Level

Wayne Bell
Middle Grades Teacher
Mt. Anthony Union Middle School

Ken Bergstrom
Faculty
Union Institute & University

Anne Bordonaro
Coordinator of Professional Standards
Vermont Department of Education

Linda Bourne
Executive Director
Vermont Association for Middle Level Education

Ken Brighton
Faculty
Johnson State College

John Downes
Doctoral Research Fellow
University of Vermont

Lindsey Slan Halman
Middle Grades Teacher
Essex Middle School

Ned Kirsch
Principal
Essex Middle School

Betsy Memoe
Guidance Coordinator
Manchester Elementary/Middle School

Matt Myers
Academic Support Coordinator
Vermont Student Assistance Corporation

James Nagle
Faculty
St. Michael’s College

Meg O’Donnell
Middle Grades Teacher
Shelburne Community School

Ken Page
Principal
Crossett Brook Middle School

Joe Rivers
Middle Grades Teacher
Brattleboro Area Middle School

Warren Roaf
Principal
Mt. Anthony Union Middle School

Laurie Singer
Principal
Albert D. Lawton Intermediate School

Robert Spear,
Executive Director
New England League of Middle Schools

Robert Stevens
Executive Director
Vermont Principals’ Association

Mary Jackman Sullivan
Faculty
University of Vermont

Stuart Weiss
Assistant Principal
Frederick H.Tuttle Middle School

Jackie Wilson
Principal
Manchester Elementary/Middle School

Mary Woodruff
Principal
Winooski Middle School
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Vermont Student Assistance Corporation
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www.education.vermont.gov/new/html/pgm_elem_middle.html#roadmap
www.vamle.org
www.middlegradescollaborative.org
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June 2009

Dear Reader,

Middle School is Not a Building provides every school, regardless of grade configuration, with the necessary information for change. It is up to all of us to understand our own unique and vital role and responsibility in improving instruction for all students, and I expect all stakeholders to incorporate the elements outlined in this work. Included in the document is a matrix that is a true Vermont roadmap for school success, giving everyone involved a route to creating outstanding learning opportunities for adolescents:

- The Learner is our most crucial partner, and is not the same learner as our generation. For the Learner, having a voice and understanding his or her role is imperative for successful learning, transitions, and decision making.
- This document sets goals for Teams and Teachers to create effective learning environments so they can listen to their students and build meaningful relationships, hold them accountable to high standards, and use student data and research-based practices on a regular basis to drive instruction.
- The role of School Leadership, particularly within the middle grades, is important in order to ensure that all teachers working with adolescents are prepared. Leaders within the middle grades must incorporate these goals and expect teachers to demonstrate their ability and understanding of how to teach this most unique and valuable group of our student population.
- The District/Supervisory Union and School Boards must be aware of the social, emotional, physical, and academic needs of this age group and should make informed decisions based on the guidance of this work.
- Vermont’s Higher Education institutions should begin to structure themselves and communicate with one another around how to best prepare our teachers.
- Professional Organizations can all
- State organizations should use this as a platform for policy making and in conversations on how we can transform our educational system in order to meet the diverse needs of learners and support their success.

The voice of the middle level student is the voice of all students, preK–16. As we move forward, each school must work to create its vision and mission for student success. To that end, the Vermont Association for Middle Level Education and the Middle Grades Collaborative will create professional development opportunities in collaboration with others to provide support and guidance for implementing the elements of this document.

I expect schools to incorporate these goals, elements, and practices. I do not want to see “junior high school” models, whose time has gone by. I commend the hard work that has gone into this document and those who continue to keep the voice of our adolescents at the forefront of what is the best way for all Vermont students to learn. I look forward to working with you on this important effort.

Sincerely,

Armando Vilaseca
Commissioner
June 2009

Dear Reader,

Early adolescence, ages 10-15, is a unique time of life, one filled with extraordinary potential, excitement, and challenge. The rapid and dramatic development that occurs during this stage of life – intellectual, socio-emotional, and physical – prompts students to ask rich questions about themselves and the world around them. Educators who work with this age group know that this is a special time indeed.

Three years ago, a group of dedicated individuals came together to examine the status of middle grades education in our state. The Vermont Middle Grades Task Force (VMGTF) spent three years examining relevant research, studying various practices, and considering national documents on effective middle level education. I am deeply appreciative of the members’ collaborative and tireless efforts to ensure their recommendations were grounded in an accurate understanding of young adolescents’ academic and affective needs.

This booklet is the result of those efforts. We in Vermont have a long history of innovative educational practice. As the 21st century stretches out before us, we know more than ever what constitutes effective educational practice in the middle grades. I can’t imagine a better time to embrace our tradition of innovation and to come together for the continued improvement of Vermont’s middle grades. Thank you for your sincere interest in promoting positive change for our state’s young adolescents.

Best Wishes,

Penny A. Bishop
Co-Chair, Vermont Middle Grades Task Force
Director, Middle Level Teacher Education, University of Vermont
June 2009

Dear Reader,

There is nothing like teaching young adolescents. It is different from elementary, high school, or university teaching. Next to ages zero to three, young adolescents are in the fastest metamorphosis of their lives – physically, emotionally, intellectually, and socially. As a practitioner, this makes for a wondrous and challenging journey.

Furthermore, I am reminded that our state is distinctly unique when it comes to the middle level. “Middle school” takes many different shapes and forms when you consider that Vermont’s young adolescents are educated in K-6, K-8, and 5-8, 7-12 schools and numerous other building types. Middle School Is Not a Building reminds us that ten to fifteen year olds have distinctive needs that must be met with practices that are developmentally appropriate for this age group, despite the configuration of the school.

This document serves as a reflective and constructive tool for all professionals involved in shaping the future of young adolescents in Vermont. It will hopefully provoke thoughtful conversations about currently used practices and lead to change that will allow these learners to thrive in their educational experience. As you will see from the matrix, it is the learner that is, and should always be, first and foremost in our minds. It is critical that we honor the unique voice of young adolescents and support them with learning experiences that are developmentally appropriate, relevant, and challenging, so that they are prepared for a dynamic future.

Regards,

Lindsey Slan Halman
Facilitator, The Edge Academy, Essex Jct., VT
President, VAMLE
The middle grades are exciting and fertile ground for students’ academic and social growth. Young adolescents are brimming with possibility and potential. They move from concrete to abstract thinking, take greater responsibility for their learning, and develop lasting attitudes about work and schooling. They begin planning for college and careers and make choices that will affect these goals later on. And they bring enthusiasm, humor, and energy to their learning.

Ten to fifteen year olds are in the midst of tremendous change—physically, intellectually, socially, emotionally, and morally. They grapple with life’s quintessential questions, asking, “Who am I, and who do I want to be? What do I believe? How should I act?” They face big choices, many of them risky, and require strong role models and caring adults to accompany them on their journey through the middle years.

Teachers and administrators in the middle grades know the unique challenges and rewards of working with an age group that is intensely social, who constantly tries on new identities, embraces learning, and values a hands-on approach. Yet only recently has the public begun to appreciate the crucial role the middle years play in students’ later quality of life. The middle years are often called ‘the last best chance’ to reach students, and with good reason. Contrary to popular belief, “the level of academic achievement that students attain by eighth grade has a larger impact on their college and career readiness by the time they graduate from high school than anything that happens academically in high school.”

“We are trustworthy and our teachers trust us to do the right thing.”

Vermont 7th Grader

THE CRITICAL MIDDLE

1 Grasmick et al. 2008
Similarly, although demographic factors such as socioeconomic status, race/ethnicity, and parental education place certain students at greater risk than others for dropping out of school, we now know that students demonstrate important school-based factors that can help us identify these learners as early as the 6th grade. In fact, research indicates that if a 6th grader fails math or English, receives a suspension or poor final behavior grade or attends school less than 80% of the time, s/he has less than a 20% chance of graduating from high school on time. In other words, young adolescents make choices that are predictive of schooling success or failure a full six years later. And knowledgeable educators can identify students at risk of school failure in these critical middle years.

Dropping out of school has grave personal and societal implications. Not finishing high school places youth at significantly greater risk of incarceration, poverty, and substance abuse. Keeping kids in school holds implications for our state’s economy as well. Just a 5% reduction in Vermont’s male dropout rate, for example, would yield a combination of savings and revenue of over $9 million in reduced crime spending and increased earnings in Vermont each year. All of this underscores the critical nature of the middle schooling years and the important role middle grades educators play in preparing tomorrow’s citizens for this complex world.

Who are the middle grades learners in our state? What promises and challenges do they present? What unique academic and social needs do they possess? And how can Vermont’s schools rise to the challenge of meeting these needs? As educators work to keep young adolescents on track for school success, the challenge in contemporary schools is substantial, as illustrated by the following data on academic, behavioral, and affective outcomes.

“The teachers always ask the right questions. They’re always looking for the answer that they know you can give.”

Vermont 8th Grader
Vermont offers a relatively high standard of living in comparison to many other states, sporting high school graduation, health and wellness, college degree attainment, home ownership and median household income rates all above the national norms. At the same time, Vermont schools face significant challenges to ensuring success for all students. For example, approximately 8,000 Vermont families with children live in poverty—children who either do or will soon attend our schools. 

Additionally, in the past decade, Vermont schools have seen a 60% increase in the population of English Language Learners while the overall student population has decreased 13%. This increase in cultural and linguistic diversity creates new classroom opportunities, and it also presents educators with requirements and expectations many have never before faced.

Further, this generation of young adolescents is more “plugged in” than ever. Middle grades youth are among the most avid video and computer game players; eighth grade boys average 23 hours a week and girls average 12 hours. Tapping into the digital worlds these students inhabit requires educators to cross the digital native/digital immigrant divide, a skill that may be new for many teachers.
8th graders were more than twice as likely as 12th graders to have been in a physical fight during the past year (38% vs. 17%) and over two times more likely than 12th graders to fight on school property (20% vs. 8%).

8th graders were two and a half times more likely than 12th graders to have been a victim of bullying (26% vs. 10%).

26% of 8th graders reported that someone stole or deliberately damaged their property on school grounds.

20% of 8th graders felt so sad or hopeless almost every day for at least 2 weeks during the past 12 months that they stopped doing some usual activities.

38% of 8th graders spend three or more hours per school day watching TV, playing video games, or using the computer for fun – a level related to obesity and aggressive or violent behavior.

15% of 8th graders have had sexual intercourse and 6% of young adolescents have had sexual intercourse before the age of 13.

Significant gaps remain in the academic-success rates of Vermont ten to fourteen year olds. Boys struggle with reading more than girls, and low income students struggle more than their wealthier peers.

When scores are disaggregated by gender and SES and tracked across four years for the same cohort of students, evidence begins to emerge that the gender and poverty achievement gaps that have received much attention in the national press also exist for the young adolescents in our Vermont schools.

“[I] worry a lot about fitting in, wearing the right clothes, and saying the right thing.”

Vermont 8th Grader

Educating Vermont’s children, like all children, comes with both substantial challenge and great promise. According to the 2007 Vermont Youth Risk Behavior Survey,


9 Centers for Disease Control, 2008 http://apps.nccd.cdc.gov/yrbs/SelectYear.asp?Loc=VT&cat=4

10 National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), Hayes, 2008
While the challenges are great, the promise is greater. Middle level teachers, counselors, and administrators work closely with social services, mental health organizations, and family support services to provide wraparound services to students. Implementing this support structure, while time consuming, increases the potential for all students to meet academic goals. Many Vermont educators and other concerned citizens work hard to create schools that are safe, challenging, and engaging. And the benefits are apparent.

According to the 2007 Vermont Youth Risk Behavior Survey,\textsuperscript{11}

- Almost half (44%) of 8th graders report that students help decide what goes on at their school.
- 80% of middle and high school students have participated in some form of anti-bullying education.
- Middle school alcohol and drug use has declined in the past decade:
  - 8% of 8th graders smoked, down from 22% in 1999
  - 14% of students smoked prior to age 13, down from 28% in 1999
  - 19% of 8th graders drink alcohol, down from 31% in 1999
  - 16% of 8th graders have tried marijuana, down from 28% in 1999

So where does this leave Vermont middle grades educators? We must be ever diligent in our commitment to create learning opportunities that are academically challenging, developmentally responsive, and socially equitable\textsuperscript{12} for our students in the middle years.

In many areas of the United States, as well as other countries, middle schools are easily defined by their grade level configuration. Grades six through eight are often grouped together within a building for the purposes of teaching and learning. This is not so in Vermont. Instead, Vermont educators face the particular challenge of teaching young adolescents wherever they may be. And this means teaching them in a wide variety of settings, including K-6, K-8, 5-8, 6-8, 7-8, and 7-12 school structures, among others.

Because middle schooling in Vermont transcends structure, we must ask ourselves, “How can we ensure high quality learning experiences that meet the unique nature and needs of young adolescents regardless of the sign on the building?”

Everyone concerned with the education of ten to fourteen year olds should understand that effective middle grades practice is predicated on solid research on effective methods. These important ideas are outlined in several seminal documents, including *Turning Points, 2000*, *This We Believe*, *Breaking Ranks in the Middle*, and *Middle Still Matters*.

The Vermont Middle Grades Task Force offers ten recommendations that focus on three areas of improvement: curriculum, instruction, and assessment; school organization and community; and teacher education and development. These important components work together to ensure that every young adolescent attains a high degree of academic excellence and personal efficacy.
VERMONT MIDDLE GRADES TASK FORCE GOALS

Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment

1. All middle level learners participate in challenging, integrated, real world, standards based curriculum that promotes conceptual understanding, 21st-century skill development, and knowledge acquisition.

2. Instruction is engaging, personalized, and differentiated to meet individual student learning needs.

3. Student learning is measured by appropriate assessments, resulting in continual learning and high achievement.

School Organization and Community

4. Organizational structures and a school culture of high expectations enable all middle level students and educators to succeed.

5. Relationships for learning create a climate of intellectual development and a caring community that includes having an adult advocate for each student.

6. Ongoing family and community partnerships provide a supportive and enriched learning environment for each middle level student.

7. A supportive, safe, and healthy learning environment advances learning and promotes overall student and educator well being.

8. A democratic system of continual collaboration by all stakeholders allows for authentic student voice and a shared vision to guide decisions.

Teacher Education and Development

9. The recruitment, hiring, and preparation of teachers and administrators is based on knowledge of the developmental characteristics of young adolescents, strong content knowledge, and the ability to use research based instructional strategies and assessment practices appropriate for middle level students.

10. Research is generated, disseminated, and applied to identify and implement practices leading to continual student learning and high academic achievement at the middle level.

“I learn more when I’m active, using my hands, experiencing things.”

Vermont 8th Grader
Vermont has long promoted developmentally responsive practice for young adolescents. The Vermont Association for Middle Level Education, chartered in 1987, continually recognizes outstanding middle school practice through its annual Scholar Leader Banquet and its Middle Matters Recognition Award. The Vermont Student Assistance Corporation promotes student achievement and potential in the middle grades around the state. The Vermont Department of Education has issued a middle grades teaching endorsement since 1989 and staffs a consultant specific to that level. And the Vermont Middle Grades Collaborative, a formal union of Vermont colleges and universities, has hosted an annual summer institute since 1990, offering teacher professional development and graduate coursework.

On the school level, there is also a lineage of hard work in this area. More and more building leaders require the middle grades endorsement for hiring purposes, viewing it as a sign of strong preparation and a commitment to the age group. Many schools are organized into interdisciplinary or partner teams and conduct advisory, service learning, and mentoring programs. Several Vermont schools have been recognized as New England League of Middle Schools Spotlight Schools. And Vermont middle grades teams have received national recognition from the National Middle School Association for their outstanding work with young adolescents.

While these practices are promising, our state has a long way to go toward ensuring that all young adolescents have access to the type of education that promotes high achievement and personal efficacy. For example, research is clear that teachers who hold middle grades licensure are more likely to engage in research-based practices, such as interdisciplinary teaming and common planning time — practices that have been linked to increased student achievement. Yet Vermont’s middle grades teaching endorsement continues to be optional and overlaps entirely with the elementary and secondary endorsements. This means that hundreds of teachers work daily with Vermont middle grades students without the benefit of even one course about the unique nature and needs of the age group.

THE WAY FORWARD

Mertens, Flowers & Mulhall, 2002
To improve middle grades education in Vermont, educators must work in an integrated, coherent, and comprehensive manner. Within this document, the Vermont Middle Grades Task Force proposes ten recommendations for improving the education of Vermont’s 10 to 15 year olds. These goals, drawn from seminal research-based documents, point to curriculum, instruction, and assessment; school organization and community; and teacher education and development as the means to foster the healthy intellectual and socio-emotional development of Vermont’s young adolescents. Such development is essential to these learners’ efficacy, self-concept, and success and is also essential to a healthy and vibrant state economy and citizenry.

The research on schooling for young adolescents is clear. We know what is necessary to improve their schooling lives and chances for later life success. Curriculum must be rigorous, relevant, integrative, and suited to living and working in the 21st century. Schools need to be organized to meet the academic needs of ten to fifteen year olds. Teachers must be specially trained to work with young adolescents. And leaders should be prepared to provide momentum and guidance to each of these initiatives. When these are in place, there are clear gains in middle grades student outcomes.

Moreover, we know that such recommendations work in concert with one another. In order to fully realize the increased student achievement and well-being that accompanies such a learning environment, school leaders must work toward the implementation of all recommendations as a cohesive whole.

The pages that follow provide the task force’s ten recommended goals with proposed actions for state, professional organization, post secondary, district, school, classroom, and learner level considerations. These are not meant to be limiting in nature, but to offer steps that lead to research-based practices supported by our best available data. While actions implemented in schools and districts may vary depending on size and grade or building configuration, the Vermont Middle Grades Task Force feels that all goals are attainable in schools and districts throughout the state.
Young adolescents are filled with hope and promise of things to come. Their capacity for meaningful, authentic work is immense, and we only do them justice when we engage them in real learning about topics and questions that matter to them. Teachers who understand the unique characteristics of young adolescents appreciate the challenges of identity development and build opportunities for such exploration within the curriculum. Contemporary curriculum often fails to engage young adolescents because it expects students to give answers to questions they do not ask.

Inviting our students into the conversation about schooling is an essential first-step toward ensuring their attainment of high achievement and personal efficacy. As a state, we owe them nothing less.
The above graphic illustrates how the following Matrix “bridges” the middle school goals to the roles and responsibilities of the various stakeholders. The Matrix outlines specific steps necessary to implement a coordinated and strategic plan to continually improve both academic and social success for all 10 to 15 year olds as they gain the skills needed to be lifelong learners in the 21st century.

The best way to use the Matrix is to look at which of the ten goals you wish to assess or work on. Find your stakeholder group and begin to look at the recommendations. You also may want to look at the other groups that you work with directly. Teachers should look at the learner and school columns, while Administrators might examine the teacher and district columns. The authors of this unique resource would like you to utilize it as a living document from which to build.

We know that full implementation of middle school practice is a long and involved process. We also know that many schools are at different places in terms of best practices. Finally, we realize that in order to have the middle school situations that best serve the students of Vermont, it will take all the stakeholders working together to bring their special voices and expertise to the table.
# MIDDLE LEVEL GOAL I

All middle level learners participate in challenging, integrated, real world, standards based curriculum that promotes conceptual understanding, 21st century skill development, and knowledge acquisition.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Learner</th>
<th>Team/Teacher</th>
<th>School Leadership</th>
<th>SU / District</th>
<th>Higher Ed.</th>
<th>Prof. Org.</th>
<th>State</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Participate actively in the planning, implementation, and assessment of curriculum</td>
<td>1. Plan, implement, and assess curricula for the wide range of diverse learners</td>
<td>1. Hire teachers knowledgeable about standards and GLE’s and trained specifically in middle level curriculum development</td>
<td>1. Design standards and GE-based integrated curricula that are conceptual, challenging, and flexible</td>
<td>1. Design preparation programs to address integrated, interdisciplinary standards-based curricula that incorporate 21st century skills and knowledge</td>
<td>1. Provide professional development and resources that are responsive to middle level curriculum and practices</td>
<td>1. Provide support and embedded professional development models on instruction and assessment that align with rich curriculum and are responsive to student learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Apply prior knowledge and new learning to further one’s understanding</td>
<td>2. Collaborate with peers in teams and professional learning communities to develop curriculum</td>
<td>2. Apply supervision and evaluation tools that reflect teachers’ use of standards and GE’s with an understanding of how middle level learners learn</td>
<td>2. Align conceptual standards and GE-based curricula to the comprehensive local assessment plan</td>
<td>2. Model appropriate curricula in teacher education classrooms to include 21st century learning contexts</td>
<td>2. Develop partnerships with schools to promote awareness around available programs, and resources</td>
<td>2. Coordinate school support/improvement efforts of the DOE to support schools that teach young adolescents regardless of the school grade configurations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Collaborate with peers to generate information that will move learning forward</td>
<td>3. Actively involve students in curriculum development, implementation and assessment</td>
<td>3. Promote and support teachers’ professional development throughout the year</td>
<td>3. Engage district personnel, local boards of education, and the superintendents in learning experiences that increase their knowledge of the developmental and academic needs of middle level students</td>
<td>3. Provide professional development to schools on middle level appropriate curriculum</td>
<td>3. Collaborate with middle level partners</td>
<td>3. Ensure that school reform initiatives have a specific focus on the needs of young adolescents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Be knowledgeable of one’s own learning style and other learning styles</td>
<td>4. Use backwards design and differentiated instruction to ensure alignment of standards, objectives and activities</td>
<td>4. Build a school-wide commitment to collaborative teaching by providing time for collaboration on integrated curriculum</td>
<td>4. Build a school-wide commitment to collaborative teaching by providing time for collaboration on integrated curriculum</td>
<td>4. Conduct research on the effectiveness of middle level appropriate curriculum</td>
<td>4. Promote schools identified as “best practice sites” for experiencing effective middle level learning environments in action</td>
<td>4. Coordinate statewide partnerships to support middle level initiatives</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Promote constructivist learning investigations where students learn through inquiry, research and experience</td>
<td>5. Promote and support teachers’ professional development throughout the year</td>
<td>5. Build a school-wide commitment to collaborative teaching by providing time for collaboration on integrated curriculum</td>
<td>5. Build a school-wide commitment to collaborative teaching by providing time for collaboration on integrated curriculum</td>
<td>5. Disseminate research-based practices through publication and presentation</td>
<td>5. Identify “best practice sites” so educators can experience effective middle level learning environments in action</td>
<td>5. Identify “best practice sites” so educators can experience effective middle level learning environments in action</td>
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<tr>
<td>7. Participate in professional development throughout the year</td>
<td>7. Participate in professional development throughout the year</td>
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<td>7. Participate in professional development throughout the year</td>
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</table>
# MIDDLE LEVEL GOAL II

Instruction is engaging, personalized, and differentiated to meet individual student learning needs.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Learner</th>
<th>Team/Teacher</th>
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<th>State</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Know how to advocate for one’s own learning</td>
<td>1. Implement differentiated instructional strategies that challenge the wide range of diverse students and engage each student while using formative assessment to adjust instruction</td>
<td>1. Create professional learning communities that incorporate differentiated instruction and student-centered learning</td>
<td>1. Design programs to address middle level appropriate instruction</td>
<td>1. Provide professional development that will help middle level administrators and teachers use data to inform instruction and refine practice</td>
<td>1. Provide professional development to schools in engaging and differentiated instruction</td>
<td>1. Provide embedded professional development that will help middle level administrators and teachers use data to inform instruction and refine practice to address student learning needs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Engage in peer and self reflection for personal achievement and improved understanding of oneself as a learner</td>
<td>2. Use common planning time to share proven instructional strategies and to develop individualized strategies to support all students</td>
<td>2. Implement a system for personalizing education for all students</td>
<td>2. Model appropriate instructional strategies that are student centered</td>
<td>2. Provide professional development to schools in engaging and differentiated instruction</td>
<td>2. Coordinate school support/improvement efforts of the DOE to support schools that teach young adolescents regardless of the school grade configurations</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Understand the various types of learning styles and how those styles impact one’s own learning as well as the learning of others</td>
<td>3. Incorporate students’ concerns, opinions, and perspectives and align with learning goals and outcomes</td>
<td>3. Hire teachers who know, understand, and can engage young adolescents in the learning process</td>
<td>3. Provide professional development opportunities that address differentiated instruction and personalized education</td>
<td>3. Help identify “best practice sites” and promote these sites so educators can see quality instruction in action</td>
<td>3. Ensure that school reform initiatives have a specific focus on the needs of young adolescents</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Take responsibility for learning by demonstrating what is learned, why it is learned, and what constitutes success throughout all learning opportunities</td>
<td>4. Participate and help facilitate professional learning communities that incorporate differentiated instruction, integrated instruction, and student-centered learning</td>
<td>4. Provide professional development opportunities that address differentiated instruction and personalized education</td>
<td>4. Conduct research on the effectiveness of differentiated and engaging instruction</td>
<td>4. Identify “best practice sites” so educators can experience effective middle level learning environments in action</td>
<td>4. Identify “best practice sites” so educators can experience effective middle level learning environments in action</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
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</table>
### MIDDLE LEVEL GOAL III
Student learning is measured by appropriate assessments, resulting in continual learning and high achievement.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Learner</th>
<th>Team/Teacher</th>
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<th>Prof. Org.</th>
<th>State</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Participate actively in the development of the assessments that document one’s learning and growth</td>
<td>1. Understand how formative assessment can be used to improve student learning</td>
<td>1. Support a collaboration model that develops common assessments and school-wide rubrics</td>
<td>1. Develop a comprehensive local assessment plan</td>
<td>1. Design programs to address middle-level appropriate assessment</td>
<td>1. Provide professional development for the use of assessment that aligns with middle level curriculum and is responsive to student learning</td>
<td>1. Provide support for embedded professional development for the use of assessment that aligns with 21st century skills and knowledge and are responsive to student learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Use self and peer assessment tools to gain understanding of academic growth</td>
<td>2. Actively involve students</td>
<td>2. Support the training and implementation of formative assessment techniques and strategies</td>
<td>2. Create a system that teachers and leadership can access to input and analyze student data</td>
<td>2. Model appropriate assessment that is student centered and reflective of 21st century skills and knowledge</td>
<td>2. Provide professional development to schools in formative and summative assessment based on Vermont's framework of standards and GLE's</td>
<td>2. Coordinate school support/improvement efforts of the DOE to support schools that teach young adolescents regardless of the school grade configurations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Understand one’s own data and how it relates to personal learning</td>
<td>3. Implement assessment strategies that challenge and engage each student while using formative assessment to adjust instruction to meet student learning needs</td>
<td>3. Collect and create a school-wide process that uses data to improve instruction</td>
<td>3. Support a balanced range of assessments that emphasize formative as well as summative feedback embedded into everyday learning</td>
<td>3. Provide professional development to schools in formative and summative assessment</td>
<td>3. Align professional development opportunities with middle level practice</td>
<td>3. Ensure that school-reform initiatives include understanding of the needs of young adolescents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Use and communicate this data through student-led conferences centered on their personalized education</td>
<td>4. Use classroom assessments and other data to measure and improve students’ progress</td>
<td>4. Create a system of local competency-based assessments and data collection to assist in developing and monitoring instructional strategies</td>
<td>4. Provide opportunities for all stakeholders based on assessment data</td>
<td>4. Conduct research on the effectiveness of various assessment techniques</td>
<td>4. Provide professional development opportunities that model and offer strategies for actively involving students in educational improvement</td>
<td>4. Identify “best practice sites” so educators can experience effective middle level learning environments in action</td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
<td>5. Design student-led conferences that assess the goals of personalized learning</td>
<td>5. Participate in professional development opportunities which model and offer strategies for actively involving students in educational improvement</td>
<td>5. Disseminate research-based practices through publication and presentation</td>
<td></td>
<td>5. Promote schools identified as “best practice sites” for experiencing effective middle level learning environments in action</td>
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</table>
# MIDDLE LEVEL GOAL IV

Organizational structures and a school culture of high expectations enable all middle level students and educators to succeed.

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<tr>
<th>Learner</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Understand one’s own role in the organizational structure of a school or team</td>
<td>1. Participate in professional development that supports organizational structures, such as integrated curriculum, flexible grouping, flexible scheduling, and interdisciplinary teaming</td>
<td>1. Create a safe, respectful, and healthy school culture that promotes high achievement for all</td>
<td>1. Design and coordinate transition practices that support students as they enter and exit the structures and cultures of a middle school</td>
<td>1. Provide professional development that will help leadership teams and teachers to successfully develop effective organizational structures</td>
<td>1. Provide professional development to schools to model organizational structures and healthy school climate and provide professional development in these areas</td>
<td>1. Educate schools and districts on the implementation of middle level best practices within the various sizes and grade configurations in Vermont schools</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Actively participate in those structures that enhance student culture</td>
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<td>2. Craft a vision and strategic plan that promotes effective teaching practices and high student achievement aligned with district policy</td>
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<td>2. Develop a vision and mission statement that is aligned to district policy, sets a clear course for school growth and supports effective teaching practices and high achievement</td>
<td>2. Develop a vision and mission statement that is aligned to district policy, sets a clear course for school growth and supports effective teaching practices and high achievement</td>
<td>2. Coordinate school support/improvement efforts of the DOE to support schools that teach young adolescents regardless of the school grade configurations</td>
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<tr>
<td>3. Recognize the relationship between one’s own participation and academic success</td>
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<td>3. Provide professional development on, and support implementation of, effective middle level structures, including flexible grouping and scheduling and interdisciplinary teaming</td>
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<td>3. Support professional development initiatives and opportunities that reflect effective teaching practices around organizational structures and culture</td>
<td>3. Disseminate research-based practices through publication and presentation</td>
<td>3. Ensure that school reform initiatives include the understanding of the needs of young adolescents</td>
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<td></td>
<td>2. Operate in an interdisciplinary teaming structure that meets regularly to discuss curriculum, instruction, and assessment, in order to ensure student success</td>
<td>4. Provide team teachers with consistent common planning time multiple times per week</td>
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<td>3. Support professional development initiatives and opportunities that reflect effective teaching practices around organizational structures and culture</td>
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<td>3. Identify “best practice sites” so educators can experience effective middle level learning environments in action</td>
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<td>5. Provide teachers with maximum control over team scheduling</td>
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<td>4. Promote schools identified as “best practice sites” for experiencing effective middle level learning environments in action</td>
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<td>4. Advocate for effective middle level practices</td>
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<td>5. Promote schools identified as “best practice sites” for experiencing effective middle level learning environments in action</td>
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<td>5. Promote schools identified as “best practice sites” for experiencing effective middle level learning environments in action</td>
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## MIDDLE LEVEL GOAL V

Relationships for learning create a climate of intellectual development and a caring community that includes having an adult advocate for each student.

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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Use effective communication and collaboration skills to actively participate in the learning community&lt;br&gt;2. Understand the importance of positive relationships by participating in partnerships, small group and whole group learning opportunities&lt;br&gt;3. Engage in positive relationships through peer leadership and advocacy for self and others&lt;br&gt;4. Demonstrate that these skills are transferable throughout all arenas</td>
<td>1. Implement strategies that support student intellectual, social, and emotional development through teacher-based guidance, advisory, and/or small-learning communities&lt;br&gt;2. Model collaboration by sharing resources and ideas with colleagues and students&lt;br&gt;3. Maintain positive relationships with colleagues and students by employing effective communication skills and problem-solving strategies&lt;br&gt;4. Practice caring and ethical advising and teaching</td>
<td>1. Develop a school-wide advocacy model with an appropriately low student/teacher ratio and adequate professional development to ensure supportive relationships&lt;br&gt;2. Build interdisciplinary teams that maintain the same students and teachers for two or more years&lt;br&gt;3. Provide on-going professional development on advisories and teaming&lt;br&gt;4. Provide life-skills and counseling-support programs for students</td>
<td>1. Advise schools to develop a schedule that provides common team planning time and professional development for student advocacy&lt;br&gt;2. Promote a collaborative decision-making process throughout the district by including teachers&lt;br&gt;3. Allow multi-year teams to be formed that stay consistent from year to year</td>
<td>1. Instruct and model caring and ethical teaching strategies that support student intellectual, socio-emotional, moral, and physical development, including teaming, advisory, and learning communities.</td>
<td>1. Provide professional development that will help leadership teams and teachers to successfully develop appropriate climates for student learning&lt;br&gt;2. Identify “best practice sites” so educators can see examples of effective middle level learning climates in action&lt;br&gt;3. Advocate for effective middle level practices&lt;br&gt;4. Promote schools identified as “best practice sites” for experiencing effective middle level learning environments in action</td>
<td>1. Collect and provide assessment data to schools along the lines of student advocacy and affiliation&lt;br&gt;2. Create policies/procedures that reflect expectations that schools will promote student advocacy and voice&lt;br&gt;3. Coordinate school support/improvement efforts of the DOE to support schools that teach young adolescents regardless of the school grade configurations&lt;br&gt;4. Ensure that school reform initiatives have a specific focus on the needs of young adolescents&lt;br&gt;5. Identify “best practice sites” so educators can experience effective middle level learning environments in action</td>
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### MIDDLE LEVEL GOAL VI

Ongoing family and community partnerships provide a supportive and enriched learning environment for each middle level student

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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Understand one’s own role and responsibility in learning by communicating successes and challenges with parents and teachers</td>
<td>1. Include students as active participants in parent/teacher conferences</td>
<td>1. Engage students and families as partners in education and encourage ongoing family participation in school events</td>
<td>1. Model and provide instruction that engages and facilitates community partnerships beyond the classroom</td>
<td>1. Align programs that address the importance of families as partners in student learning</td>
<td>1. Support initiatives that bring parents and community members together to improve educational opportunities for middle level students</td>
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<tr>
<td>2. Develop civic responsibility through project based and relevant learning experiences</td>
<td>2. Utilize secondary-school students as mentors to middle grades students</td>
<td>2. Utilize communication mechanisms to inform families of the availability of school services and promote the use of these services</td>
<td>2. Develop initiatives to assist young adolescents and their families as they transition in and out of middle school regardless of grade configuration</td>
<td>2. Design programs that address the importance of families as partners in student learning</td>
<td>2. Support community-based learning (e.g. service learning; place-based education, and career exploration) for middle level students</td>
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<tr>
<td>3. Develop technology skills to extend learning opportunities and to support community connections</td>
<td>3. Develop a process and opportunities that involve parents/guardians and community members to support students and the school on a regular basis</td>
<td>3. Ensure consistent and well-developed initiatives to assist young adolescents and their families as they transition in and out of middle school</td>
<td>3. Provide middle level educators with professional development that specifically helps them build family and community partnerships</td>
<td>3. Conduct research on the benefits and effectiveness of service learning</td>
<td>3. Declare October of each year as the Month of the Young Adolescent to raise public awareness about the importance of improving the education, health, and well being of young adolescents</td>
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<tr>
<td>4. Actively participate in opportunities around service learning</td>
<td>4. Include in the classroom curriculum career topics, service learning, and community service opportunities</td>
<td>4. Build partnerships within the larger community that celebrate achievement and effort for all students.</td>
<td>4. Develop and promote career awareness and entrepreneurship activities</td>
<td>4. Develop and promote career awareness and entrepreneurship activities</td>
<td>4. Coordinate school improvement efforts of the DOE to incorporate effective middle level best practices</td>
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<td>5. Institute a daily/weekly means of communication between the classroom and the home</td>
<td>5. Mobilize communities to ensure that all students and their families have access to technology critical for 21st century communications and commerce</td>
<td>5. Foster community support for career exploration, creating meaningful service opportunities</td>
<td>5. Identify and promote “best practice sites” so educators can see effective community partnerships and service-learning opportunities in action</td>
<td>5. Identify “best practice sites” so educators can experience effective middle level learning environments in action</td>
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MIDDLE LEVEL GOAL VII
A supportive, safe, and healthy learning environment advances learning and promotes overall student
and educator well-being.

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Contribute to a community where all learners feel safe and individually valued regardless of differences, including but not limited to economic, cultural, and linguistic status</td>
<td>1. Collaborate with students to develop norms for safe and respectful learning for all</td>
<td>1. Develop and implement policies and procedures around building a safe and healthy learning environment</td>
<td>1. Develop and implement policies that do not tolerate bullying and harassment</td>
<td>1. Maintain high standards within the program for teacher candidates</td>
<td>1. Provide professional development that will help leadership teams and teachers develop inviting, supportive, and healthy environments for improved student learning</td>
<td>1. Coordinate initiatives with stakeholders that support and promote healthy and safe learning environments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Demonstrate awareness around the safety and well-being of self and others</td>
<td>2. Implement best practices that promote clear and consistent expectations around positive student behavior</td>
<td>2. Engage all members of the learning community, especially students, in decisions to promote a climate of inclusion and professionalism</td>
<td>2. Budget funds and seek grants to keep buildings safe, healthy, and clean</td>
<td>2. Include clear and multiple gates for progressing toward degree completion</td>
<td>2. Identify and promote “best practice sites” so educators can experience safe, supportive and healthy learning environments in action</td>
<td>2. Create policy/procedures that reflect expectations that schools will promote student advocacy and voice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Understand how respect, responsibility, trust, and risk-taking are critical to a healthy learning environment</td>
<td>3. Keep classrooms clean and inviting</td>
<td>3. Create a system that encourages faculty and staff feedback and positive voice, and use feedback to guide decision making</td>
<td>3. Include all members of the learning community in major decisions to promote a climate of inclusion and professionalism</td>
<td>3. Where necessary, counsel teacher candidates out of the field</td>
<td>3. Advocate for effective middle level practices.</td>
<td>3. Coordinate school support/improvement efforts of the DOE to support schools that teach young adolescents regardless of the school grade configurations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Make healthy choices that promote physical, emotional, and social wellness</td>
<td>4. Participate in professional development that promotes best practices around safe and healthy learning environments</td>
<td>4. Adopt supervision and evaluation models that outline best practices and are implemented clearly and consistently</td>
<td>4. Foster connections between community health agencies and schools</td>
<td>5. Foster connections between community health agencies and schools</td>
<td>4. Ensure that school reform initiatives have a specific focus on the needs of young adolescents</td>
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<tr>
<td>5. Engage in healthy and safe behaviors</td>
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<td>5. Identify “best practice sites” so educators can experience effective middle level learning environments in action</td>
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MIDDLE LEVEL GOAL VIII
A democratic system of continual collaboration by all stakeholders allows for authentic student voice and a shared vision to guide decisions.

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Understand the power of one’s voice in a democratic system and participate actively</td>
<td>1. Take an active role in the governance and change process within the school</td>
<td>1. Facilitate professional learning communities for collaborative decision-making</td>
<td>1. Design programs that address the role of democratic schooling and authentic student and teacher voice in engagement</td>
<td>1. Provide professional development to schools in democratic schooling</td>
<td>1. Create policy/procedures that reflect expectations that schools will promote student advocacy and voice</td>
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<tr>
<td>2. Collaborate in the design and implementation of authentic learning experiences</td>
<td>2. Offer students individual choice whenever possible for research, activities, and demonstration of student learning</td>
<td>2. Include student voice in all aspects of decision-making related to student learning</td>
<td>2. Model democratic learning environments; the engagement of student voice in teacher education classrooms; and the engagement of teacher voice in administrator coursework</td>
<td>2. Bring multiple stakeholder groups (e.g. students, educators, state board members) together to semi-annually review actions relative to the implementation of these middle level goals and make recommendations for change</td>
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<tr>
<td>3. Engage in school and community organizations and events</td>
<td>3. Involve students in developing classroom and team tools, such as rubrics, class norms, and curriculum.</td>
<td>3. Include educators, parents, community members and students on committees dealing with SU issues</td>
<td>3. Advocate for effective middle level practices</td>
<td>3. Ensure that school reform initiatives have a specific focus on the needs of young adolescents</td>
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<tr>
<td>4. Participate in the school's decision-making process</td>
<td>4. Serve as facilitators and coaches to learners</td>
<td>4. Provide professional development on democratic schooling</td>
<td>4. Promote schools identified as “best practice sites” for experiencing effective middle level learning environments in action</td>
<td>4. Identify “best practice sites” so educators can experience effective middle level learning environments in action</td>
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<td></td>
<td>5. Participate in professional development to support authentic student voice</td>
<td>5. Disseminate research-based practices through publication and presentation</td>
<td>5. Conduct research on the effectiveness of democratic schooling</td>
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</table>
# MIDDLE LEVEL GOAL IX

The recruitment, hiring, and preparation of teachers and administrators is based on knowledge of the developmental characteristics of young adolescents, strong content knowledge, and the ability to use research-based instructional strategies and assessment practices appropriate for middle level students.

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Participate in the hiring process by sharing one’s own concerns, interests, and ideas around effective learning and instruction.</td>
<td>1. Complete requirements for a middle level endorsement.</td>
<td>1. Support current teachers to complete requirements for middle level endorsement.</td>
<td>1. Hire middle level teachers and administrators who understand early adolescent development and who can implement middle level best practices for the 21st century.</td>
<td>1. Prepare teachers and administrators specifically for the needs of students ages 10-15 and 21st century skills and knowledge.</td>
<td>1. Support teachers of young adolescents to be specifically prepared for that age group; understand the developmental, social, emotional and academic needs of this particular age; and be able to create effective learning opportunities for the diverse range of learners within the middle grades.</td>
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<tr>
<td>2. Provide school leadership with a variety of perspectives around both the social and academic needs of young adolescents.</td>
<td>2. Seek out and take part in ongoing professional development related to effective middle level best practices and 21st century skills and knowledge</td>
<td>2. Hire educators who hold middle level endorsements or demonstrate an understanding of middle level instructional best practices, assessment, and development of 21st century skills and knowledge.</td>
<td>2. Provide and fund professional development and graduate courses for educators to work toward middle grades teaching endorsement, on both content knowledge and developmentally appropriate teaching practices to address the needs of diverse learners.</td>
<td>2. Create and adopt stand-alone middle grades programs for the preparation of middle level teachers and administrators.</td>
<td>2. Define ‘Highly Qualified Teacher’ to include appropriate pedagogy for adolescents’ needs and 21st century skills and knowledge.</td>
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<td>3. Work with State and Regional agencies to increase training and expertise of staff, provide a schedule that is conducive to a developmentally appropriate middle level program, and create a system of local assessment and data collection to assist in developing and monitoring instructional tactics that work.</td>
<td>3. Provide and fund professional development and graduate courses for middle level administrators on effective middle grades leadership.</td>
<td>3. Recruit high quality undergraduate teacher candidates in middle level education.</td>
<td>3. Advocate for effective middle level practices.</td>
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<td>4. Institute on-site professional learning communities to provide relevant ongoing professional development in best middle level practices.</td>
<td>4. Work with state and regional agencies to assess current middle level programs at district level.</td>
<td>4. Recruit high quality graduate-level teacher candidates in middle level education.</td>
<td>4. Promote schools identified as “best practice sites” for experiencing effective middle level learning environments.</td>
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<td>4. Work with state and regional agencies to assess current middle level programs at district level.</td>
<td>5. Provide first-year mentoring and follow-up as incentives to work in Vermont schools.</td>
<td>5. Work collaboratively with schools, state and regional agencies.</td>
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<td>6. Create networks for recruitment and hiring purposes.</td>
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<td>6. Create networks for recruitment and hiring purposes.</td>
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<td>7. Work collaboratively with schools, state and regional agencies.</td>
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<td>7. Work collaboratively with schools, state and regional agencies.</td>
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**MIDDLE LEVEL GOAL X**

Research is generated, disseminated, and applied to identify and implement practices leading to continual student learning and high academic achievement at the middle level.

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<tr>
<td>1. Incorporate one’s own concerns, opinions, and perspectives into research initiatives related to learning and achievement</td>
<td>1. In professional learning communities – identify, read, and use current research in middle level education to improve practice</td>
<td>1. Use multiple measures (such as common local assessments) to monitor student progress</td>
<td>1. Develop professional partnerships with post-secondary institutions to assist administrators in implementing research-based best practices in middle level education.</td>
<td>1. Lead the planning and implementation of research geared at Vermont schooling practices and student outcomes</td>
<td>1. Disseminate research-based practices through publication, presentation, and via technology on a state and regional level</td>
<td>1. Build professional partnerships with Vermont post-secondary institutions and other stakeholders to develop a robust Vermont-based body of research around best practices for middle level effectiveness (intellectual, affective, and physical)</td>
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<tr>
<td>2. Serve as sites for gathering of research data on effective middle level practices</td>
<td>2. Provide and support time for teams to research, administer, collect, and analyze student data and a cohesive system for teachers to make informed decisions around their middle level instructional practices</td>
<td>2. Know and understand the needs of the students and community in order to align and implement research-based best practices with effective, middle level instruction and learning opportunities</td>
<td>2. Seek grant funding to support above endeavors</td>
<td>2. Create and sustain networks to disseminate and discuss current research that relates to middle level education</td>
<td>2. Encourage districts to support middle level practices that have a sufficient research base demonstrating improved student achievement</td>
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<tr>
<td>3. Collect, maintain, and utilize classroom and team data to improve student, classroom, and school practices</td>
<td>3. Provide and support the practice of collaboratively reading and discussing current articles and research related to middle level practices</td>
<td>3. Collect data around middle level education as it relates to best practices and student achievement</td>
<td>3. Disseminate research-based practices through publication and presentation on state and national levels</td>
<td>3. Advocate for effective middle level practices.</td>
<td>3. Support multi-stakeholder, state-level professional learning communities to examine best practices and research</td>
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<tr>
<td>4. Engage in learning communities to review current research and articles related to middle level practices</td>
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<td>4. Collaborate with stakeholders to develop a Vermont-based body of evidence around best practices for middle level effectiveness (intellectual, affective, and physical)</td>
<td>4. Collaborate with stakeholders to develop a Vermont-based body of evidence around best practices for middle level effectiveness (intellectual, affective, and physical)</td>
<td>4. Seek grant funding to support above endeavors</td>
<td>4. Identify “best practice sites” so educators can experience effective middle level learning environments in action</td>
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</tbody>
</table>


Hayes, S. (2008). National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), VT Department of Education


Funding Partners of **MIDDLE SCHOOL IS NOT A BUILDING**

**Vermont Department of Education**

**VAMLE** Vermont Association for Middle Level Education

**Vermont Middle Grades Collaborative**