

## **Abstract**

### **2004 Survey of Middle Grades Public Schools of Arkansas Report**

**Gregory B. Meeks and Terry H. Stepka**

In the spring of 2004, the Arkansas Association of School Administrators and the Arkansas Association of Middle Level Education surveyed all public school middle school principals in the State of Arkansas as to the degree of implementation of middle school programming. This document reports the results of the survey. Conclusions are drawn from the research and “lessons learned” are presented at the end of the report. The survey instrument is included in the appendix.

**2004 Survey of Middle Grades  
Public Schools of Arkansas  
Report**

**Gregory B. Meeks, Terry H. Stepka  
Arkansas State University**

## **Introduction**

In effort to measure the progress made in implementing middle level programming in Arkansas, a survey was developed using a 1990 survey as the template. Most of the same questions were used on both surveys, but a few additions and deletions were incorporated into the update version. In the spring of 2004, the Arkansas Association of Middle Level Educators and the Arkansas Association of Middle Level Administrators surveyed all of the principals of Arkansas public schools housing fifth through ninth graders using the updated version. The 2004 mailing was distributed to 301 principals. Seventy-one surveys were returned for a return rate of 23.6%.

## **DISTRICT ORGANIZATION**

### **QUESTION 1: How many students are in your district?**

|        |                                 |
|--------|---------------------------------|
| Range  | 150 students to 25,000 students |
| Mean   | 3,723 students                  |
| Mode   | 3,000 students                  |
| Median | 1,885 students                  |

### **QUESTION 2: How are the middle grades in your district organized?**

| <b>Grade Configuration</b>                | <b>Number</b> | <b>Percent</b> |
|-------------------------------------------|---------------|----------------|
| 4 <sup>th</sup> – 6 <sup>th</sup> grades  | 2             | 2.9%           |
| 4 <sup>th</sup> – 7 <sup>th</sup> grades  | 1             | 1.5%           |
| 4 <sup>th</sup> – 9 <sup>th</sup> grades  | 1             | 1.5%           |
| 5 <sup>th</sup> – 6 <sup>th</sup> grades  | 7             | 10.4%          |
| 5 <sup>th</sup> – 7 <sup>th</sup> grades  | 1             | 1.5%           |
| 5 <sup>th</sup> – 8 <sup>th</sup> grades  | 11            | 16.4%          |
| 5 <sup>th</sup> – 9 <sup>th</sup> grades  | 5             | 7.5%           |
| 6 <sup>th</sup> grade                     | 2             | 2.9%           |
| 6 <sup>th</sup> – 7 <sup>th</sup> grades  | 8             | 10.4%          |
| 6 <sup>th</sup> – 8 <sup>th</sup> grades  | 22            | 32.8%          |
| 6 <sup>th</sup> – 9 <sup>th</sup> grades  | 1             | 1.5%           |
| 7 <sup>th</sup> – 8 <sup>th</sup> grades  | 2             | 2.9%           |
| 7 <sup>th</sup> – 9 <sup>th</sup> grades  | 4             | 6.0%           |
| 7 <sup>th</sup> – 12 <sup>th</sup> grades | 2             | 2.9%           |

#### **Number of students?**

Range – 30 students to 2,100 students

Mean – 719 students

Mode – 750 and 1,200 students (bimodal)

Median – 548 students

### **QUESTION 3: Does your district have a “middle school building”?**

|     |        |
|-----|--------|
| YES | 92.53% |
| NO  | 12.67% |

**QUESTION 4: Has your district reorganized in the last ten years to an identified middle level grade organization?**

|     |        |
|-----|--------|
| YES | 60.56% |
| NO  | 38.02% |

**Did you build a new building to house it?**

YES - 45.07%  
 NO - 47.88%

**If more than one, how many buildings?**

1 building - 57.75%  
 2 buildings - 29.58%  
 3 buildings - 1.41%

**QUESTION 5: Are there any plans to change the current middle grades organization in your district?**

|     |        |
|-----|--------|
| YES | 21.12% |
| NO  | 71.83% |

**If YES, please describe:**

- 4<sup>th</sup> – 6<sup>th</sup> grade
- Two respondents – dependent upon enrollment
- Move grade 9 to high school; leaving 5-6/7-8 on two separate campuses
- New building which will house grades 5-8
- 9<sup>th</sup> grade move to high school/ K-1/ 2-6/ 7-8/ 9-12
- 5<sup>th</sup> – 6<sup>th</sup> grade schools
- Two respondents – 5<sup>th</sup> – 8<sup>th</sup> grades structure
- Two respondents – 6<sup>th</sup> – 8<sup>th</sup> grades structure
- Two respondents – 7<sup>th</sup> – 8<sup>th</sup> grades structure
- Second middle school (currently 6<sup>th</sup> – 8<sup>th</sup> grades)
- Move 5<sup>th</sup> grade to middle school (currently 6<sup>th</sup> – 8<sup>th</sup> grades)

**QUESTION 6: Is there a middle grades principal assigned to your middle grades organization(s)?**

|     |        |
|-----|--------|
| YES | 92.96% |
| NO  | 7.04%  |

**If YES, do they have an assistant?**

YES - 66.20%

NO - 0.98%

**How many?**

½ assistant principal - 4.35%

1 assistant principal - 52.17%

2 assistant principals - 41.30%

3 assistant principals - 4.35%

4 assistant principals - 2.17%

## **MIDDLE GRADES PROGRAM**

**QUESTION 1: Which of the following middle level concepts are contained in your middle grades program?**

**Percentages indicate the schools that contain the following middle level concepts**

|                             |        |
|-----------------------------|--------|
| Team Common Planning Time   | 78.87% |
| Interdisciplinary Teaming   | 71.83% |
| Athletics (Interscholastic) | 61.97% |
| Individual Planning Time    | 61.97% |
| Heterogeneous Grouping      | 60.56% |
| Integrated Curriculum       | 52.11% |
| Flexible Scheduling         | 50.70% |
| Student Portfolios          | 47.88% |
| Exploratory Curriculum      | 43.66% |
| Athletics (Intramural)      | 39.44% |
| Advisor/Advisee Program     | 36.62% |
| Peer Tutoring               | 32.39% |
| Homogeneous Grouping        | 25.35% |
| Peer Counseling             | 16.90% |
|                             |        |

**QUESTION 2: What type of scheduling does your middle grades use?**

|                  |        |
|------------------|--------|
| Seven-period day | 47.89% |
| Flexible Block*  | 16.90% |
| Eight-period day | 12.68% |
| Six-period day   | 9.86%  |
| A-B Block        | 5.63%  |
| Other            | 4.23%  |
| 4 X 4 Block      | 0%     |

**\* Please describe.**

- One-half day – one subject / one-half day – another subject / only change classes once
- Seven 48-minute period/ one 24-minute advising
- Three double periods each day with team flexibility
- 80-minute chunks
- Two respondents – going to flexible schedule
- Moving towards a larger block for English/Reading/Spelling
- Change classes at half day and have their activities period at the same time of day either morning or afternoon
- Teachers will determine the time needed for each subject per day
- Varies per grade level

- Teams determine their schedules
- Teachers have the discretion to block on days they need to. They have a set A-B block, however, they're allowed to flex those days as the curriculum needs
- Math/Literacy – 90 minutes daily/rest on regular 45 minute schedule
- 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> grades – 90 minute block in morning Monday through Thursday/ 7 periods on Friday/ 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grades – seven-period day
- 6<sup>th</sup> grade – math and language arts use 2 period blocks/ 7<sup>th</sup> grade language arts use 2 period blocks
- 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> grades divided into three 2-hour blocks
- 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grades core teacher have their team students 5 periods plus advising; they may schedule at their pleasure with this time.
- 90 minutes of literacy and math daily
- Several teams to an A-B block with a Fast Friday while others block as needed
- 9 periods
- 6<sup>th</sup> grade teams are able to block as needed around PE and “wheel classes.” 7<sup>th</sup> grade teams are restricted due to band classes

**QUESTION 3: Is your school building represented by membership in any of the following organizations?**

**Percentage indicates membership by respondents.**

|                                                              |        |
|--------------------------------------------------------------|--------|
| National Middle School Association (NMSA)                    | 59.15% |
| Arkansas Association of Middle Level Education (AAMLE)       | 63.38% |
| Arkansas Association of Middle Level Administrators (AAMLA)  | 73.24% |
| Arkansas Association of Elementary School Principals (AAESP) | 25.54% |
| Arkansas Association of Secondary School Principals (AASSP)  | 21.13% |



## **PLANNING OPPORTUNITIES**

**QUESTION 1: Would you support the development of a middle level program in your current structure?**

|                                   |        |
|-----------------------------------|--------|
| YES                               | 40.85% |
| NO                                | 2.82%  |
| Not applicable (have one already) | 50.70% |

**QUESTION 2: Do you agree with the concept that early adolescents (10-15 years old) are unique in reference to other age groups emotionally, intellectually, physically, and socially?**

|     |        |
|-----|--------|
| YES | 98.59% |
| NO  | 1.41%  |

**QUESTION 3: Academically, do you think any variation of a 5-6-7-8 organization pattern would best support and promote the current accountability standard?**

|           |        |
|-----------|--------|
| YES       | 54.93% |
| NO        | 18.31% |
| UNDECIDED | 21.13% |

**QUESTION 4: Does your staff need training/in-service in middle level programs?**

|     |        |
|-----|--------|
| YES | 80.28% |
| NO  | 19.72% |

**QUESTION 5: Would your staff be willing to receive training in middle level programming?**

|     |        |
|-----|--------|
| YES | 92.96% |
| NO  | 7.04%  |

**QUESTION 6: What areas of middle level training would your staff benefit from the most? List 5 in order of preference (1 is highest) Refer to question 1 – under “Middle Grades Program.”**

|                                                                       | Ranked<br>1 <sup>st</sup> | Ranked<br>2 <sup>nd</sup> | Ranked<br>3 <sup>rd</sup> | Ranked<br>4 <sup>th</sup> | Ranked<br>5 <sup>th</sup> |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------|---------------------------|---------------------------|---------------------------|---------------------------|
| <b>Interdisciplinary Teaming</b>                                      | <b>24%</b>                | <b>11%</b>                | <b>4%</b>                 | <b>1%</b>                 | <b>0%</b>                 |
| <b>Team Common Planning Time</b>                                      | <b>1%</b>                 | <b>4%</b>                 | <b>0%</b>                 | <b>1%</b>                 | <b>0%</b>                 |
| Homogeneous Grouping                                                  | 0%                        | 0%                        | 1%                        | 1%                        | 1%                        |
| Athletics (Interscholastic)                                           | 0%                        | 0%                        | 0%                        | 0%                        | 0%                        |
| <b>Flexible Scheduling</b>                                            | <b>7%</b>                 | <b>6%</b>                 | <b>6%</b>                 | <b>4%</b>                 | <b>0%</b>                 |
| <b>Integrated Curriculum</b>                                          | <b>10%</b>                | <b>15%</b>                | <b>6%</b>                 | <b>6%</b>                 | <b>3%</b>                 |
| <b>Student Portfolios</b>                                             | <b>0%</b>                 | <b>1%</b>                 | <b>6%</b>                 | <b>1%</b>                 | <b>1%</b>                 |
| <b>Advisor/Advisee Program</b>                                        | <b>4%</b>                 | <b>6%</b>                 | <b>7%</b>                 | <b>1%</b>                 | <b>1%</b>                 |
| Individual Planning Time                                              | 0%                        | 0%                        | 0%                        | 0%                        | 1%                        |
| Heterogeneous Grouping                                                | 0%                        | 0%                        | 0%                        | 0%                        | 0%                        |
| Athletics (Intramural)                                                | 0%                        | 0%                        | 0%                        | 0%                        | 0%                        |
|                                                                       |                           |                           |                           |                           |                           |
| <b>Exploratory Curriculum</b>                                         | <b>0%</b>                 | <b>1%</b>                 | <b>3%</b>                 | <b>3%</b>                 | <b>1%</b>                 |
| <b>Peer Tutoring</b>                                                  | <b>3%</b>                 | <b>0%</b>                 | <b>1%</b>                 | <b>3%</b>                 | <b>4%</b>                 |
| Peer Counseling                                                       | 0%                        | 1%                        | 1%                        | 1%                        | 1%                        |
| <b>Adolescent Characteristics*</b>                                    | <b>10%</b>                | <b>1%</b>                 | <b>0%</b>                 | <b>1%</b>                 | <b>0%</b>                 |
| Differentiated Instruction*                                           | 4%                        | 3%                        | 4%                        | 0%                        | 0%                        |
| Reading/Writing/Math/Problem Solving Strategies*                      | 3%                        | 2%                        | 1%                        | 1%                        | 0%                        |
| Family Relations and Parental Involvement*                            | 0%                        | 1%                        | 1%                        | 0%                        | 3%                        |
| Assessment and Use of Data*                                           | 0%                        | 1%                        | 0%                        | 1%                        | 0%                        |
| Motivation of Students*                                               | 0%                        | 4%                        | 4%                        | 0%                        | 0%                        |
| Study Skills, Test Taking Skills, Student Achievement*                | 3%                        | 1%                        | 1%                        | 1%                        | 1%                        |
| Cooperative Learning, Inclusion, Remediation, Special Needs Students* | 1%                        | 3%                        | 3%                        | 4%                        | 0%                        |
| Laws and Accountability*                                              | 0%                        | 0%                        | 1%                        | 0%                        | 3%                        |
| <b>Middle Level Philosophy and Curriculum</b>                         | <b>1%</b>                 | <b>6%</b>                 | <b>3%</b>                 | <b>4%</b>                 | <b>3%</b>                 |
| <b>Classroom Management and Teaching Styles*</b>                      | <b>3%</b>                 | <b>6%</b>                 | <b>3%</b>                 | <b>3%</b>                 | <b>3%</b>                 |
| Technology in the Classroom*                                          | 0%                        | 0%                        | 3%                        | 0%                        | 3%                        |

\*Other Topics Listed by Respondents

**QUESTION 7: What percentage of your staff has received training in and/or has studied middle level philosophy?**

| Percent of Staff Trained | Number/Percent of Responses |
|--------------------------|-----------------------------|
| 0%                       | 7 / 9.8%                    |
| 1%-10%                   | 3 / 4.2%                    |
| 11%-20%                  | 5 / 7.0%                    |
| 21%-30%                  | 5 / 7.0%                    |
| 31%-40%                  | 4 / 5.6%                    |
| 41%-50%                  | 11 / 15.5%                  |
| 51%-60%                  | 4 / 5.6%                    |
| 61%-70%                  | 1 / 1.4%                    |
| 71%-80%                  | 9 / 12.6%                   |
| 81%-90%                  | 5 / 7.0%                    |
| 91%-100%                 | 17 / 23.9%                  |

**QUESTION 8: How many teachers on your staff have received recent licensure specifically for middle level math/science or middle level language/social studies?**

| Number of Staff with ML Licensure | Number/Percent of Responses |
|-----------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| 0                                 | 18 25.4%                    |
| 1                                 | 7 9.8%                      |
| 2                                 | 5 7.0%                      |
| 3                                 | 6 8.5%                      |
| 4                                 | 9 12.7%                     |
| 5                                 | 2 2.8%                      |
| 6                                 | 4 5.6%                      |

Twenty-eight percent of principals chose to answer this question with a percent of staff rather than the actual number. Principals may have chosen to respond in a percent because the previous question asked for a percent. The table above includes those responses from principals answering the question correctly.

**QUESTION 9: Would you or your staff be interested in visiting an exemplary middle level program?**

|     |        |
|-----|--------|
| YES | 81.69% |
| NO  | 14.08% |

**QUESTION 10: Would or does your district office support making changes deemed appropriate for early adolescents?**

|     |        |
|-----|--------|
| YES | 88.73% |
| NO  | 5.60%  |

**QUESTION 11: What do you perceive as the most difficult task in designing, implementing, or improving a middle level education program?**

- Aligning the curriculum with assessments – 2 respondents
- **Administrative support – 6 respondents**
- Financial support for joint planning time
- Physical space – 2 respondents
- Teaming – 2 respondents
- For most schools, it is athletics – short and simple – 2 respondents
- Subgroup needs
- Parent involvement – 2 respondents
- Student motivation – 2 respondents
- Learning levels – 3 respondents
- Money – 3 respondents
- Time – 4 respondents
- Understanding adolescents and the instructional techniques that are successful with this age group – 5 respondents
- **Scheduling conflicts – 12 respondents**
- **Middle school philosophy – 12 respondents**
- Staff and room to house this group of students together – 3 respondents
- **Shortage of personnel – 10 respondents**
- No state teacher organization that operates effectively to help teachers
- Training/Professional Development – 2 respondents
- Teacher turnover
- Staff “buy in” – 3 respondents
- Exploratory and extracurricular activities
- Moving from secondary content-oriented to holistic approach to academic learning
- Lack of content knowledge for elementary people in middle grades
- Creating an organization that balances affective needs of middle level students and academic rigor of NCLB – 2 respondents
- Aligning the curriculum with the Arkansas Frameworks
- Getting our students on grade level
- Discipline

**QUESTION 12: Other than money, what further assistance would you make use to make your middle grades program more thorough and effective in all areas?**

- **Useful staff development /content areas – 15 respondents**
- Support from state department for development of middle level department
- Technology training – 2 respondents
- Field trip opportunities – transportation – 2 respondents
- Community participation
- Effective usage of teaching and assessment strategies
- Small staff/student ratio
- Better preparation of students in elementary school
- Curriculum alignment – 2 respondents
- **Middle school concepts training and implementation of concepts – 3 respondents**
- Literacy and math coaches
- Observation of exemplary middle school
- **Personnel – 3 respondents**
- **Obtain a listing of schools who are similar in grade level and configurations and academic programs; collaboration with someone facing the same challenges would be very beneficial, as a beginning (networking) – 4 respondents**
- **Parent involvement – 3 respondents**
- Get APSCN straight!
- Middle school advocates across the state
- Time for teacher planning and teaching during the school day
- Reduce the number of things outside the testing curriculum
- Separate buildings
- More mid-level certified teachers
- **Discipline – 3 respondents**
- After school program for middle level students
- Newsletter/ best practice strategies on the web to all AAMLE school and staff can access
- Teaming
- Student motivation
- Consultant services
- Instructional specialist

## Number of Respondents By Counties

|            |   |              |   |
|------------|---|--------------|---|
| Arkansas   | 2 | Grant        | 1 |
| Baxter     | 1 | Hempstead    | 1 |
| Benton     | 5 | Hot Springs  | 1 |
| Boone      | 2 | Independence | 1 |
| Bradley    | 1 | Jefferson    | 2 |
| Carroll    | 2 | Lonoke       | 2 |
| Chicot     | 1 | Marion       | 1 |
| Clark      | 2 | Miller       | 2 |
| Clay       | 1 | Mississippi  | 1 |
| Cleburne   | 1 | Ouachita     | 4 |
| Cleveland  | 1 | Polk         | 2 |
| Conway     | 1 | Pulaski      | 3 |
| Craighead  | 2 | Saline       | 2 |
| Crawford   | 2 | Sebastian    | 1 |
| Crittenden | 1 | Van Buren    | 1 |
| Drew       | 2 | Washington   | 6 |
| Faulkner   | 2 | White        | 2 |
| Garland    | 3 | Yell         | 2 |

## Conclusions

Many factors have helped contribute to the progress in implementing the middle level concept in the State of Arkansas since the publication of *Turning Points*. Behind each of these initiatives are people who care about early adolescents and who seek to promote a school environment that will educate them in a more caring and supportive way. As a result of their efforts, good progress has been made in accomplishing this goal. Currently, over fifty percent of principals report having implemented middle level programs and of those who have not implemented it, almost forty-one percent are supportive of doing so.

Not only is administrative support present, but there are a number of other things that contribute to conditions being ripe for additional progress. By the fall of 2004, eighty percent of schools will be configured in some combination of fifth through eighth grade. The

organizational structure of these Arkansas schools is poised to support a middle level program if they have not already implemented one. There is also the perception of support at the district level, which is critical when it comes to committing resources for successful and sustainable change. Principals report that they feel teachers are willing to be trained in middle level programming. To take advantage of this situation and to avoid the growth of the middle level movement in Arkansas from plateauing, it is critical that teachers receive sufficient and appropriate staff development. Increases in middle level professional organization membership since 1990 indicates that educators see value in being kept abreast of what is happening in middle level education.

In January of 2002, the Arkansas licensure requirement for middle level was implemented. This will provide a long-term impact on the sustainability and on-going development of middle level programs in the State of Arkansas. For veteran teachers that were initially certified 1-8 or K-8, incentives to work toward early adolescence National Board Certification will also contribute to many teachers being more knowledgeable about and better prepared to work with middle level students. Beginning the fall of 2004, Arkansas has designated an additional three hundred seventy million new dollars into education. This new money will allow districts to commit the resources necessary to initiate and sustain change. Given this environment in the State of Arkansas, further advances in middle level program implementation are possible.

In spite of the progress that has been made in Arkansas implementing the middle level concept, eighty percent of principals responded that their staffs needed training in middle level programs. Almost ninety-three percent indicated their staffs would be willing to receive such training. Many principals indicating that their staff needed training are in schools that have implemented middle level programs and in schools that staff are knowledgeable about the needs

of the middle level learner and knowledgeable about middle level concepts. Training is not needed just to implement middle level programs, but it is also needed to sustain and refine those changes. One or two sessions of staff development that focuses on middle level programming is inadequate to institutionalize the needed changes in middle level education. Training must be on-going until the middle level concept is firmly institutionalized. It is important that educators be familiar with adolescent development and middle level philosophy, so as to provide a foundation, which will support middle level concepts and programming. Principals often do not have the resources to provide meaningful middle level staff development. District offices, educational co-ops and universities need to be made aware of this perceived need and must position themselves to help meet this need.

Deciding on a focus for training, more principals identified interdisciplinary teaming and integrated curriculum as the two areas that their staff would most benefit. Concentrating staff development efforts on these two interrelated concepts would have the potential for paying high dividends. “Research shows that effective teams lead to improved student achievement, increased parental contacts, an enhanced school climate, and positive student attitudes.” (This We Believe, 2003)

Training in flexible scheduling, advisory/advisee program, middle level philosophy, adolescent development, peer tutoring, student portfolios, and exploratory curriculum were also areas that were identified as being beneficial for faculty.

Training in classroom management was identified as being beneficial to staff even though it is not considered a middle level program. Nevertheless, if principals and staff do not have a clear understanding of early adolescent development, then classroom management can become more of a challenge. Therefore, classroom management training taking into consideration the



unique needs of the early adolescent could help teachers to be more effective in managing their classrooms. Again, it is imperative that principals and staff have adequate training in early adolescent development and middle level philosophy. This will lead to a deeper understanding of the rationale behind each of the middle level programs.

It is not enough, to focus all efforts on teacher training. If the middle level concept is to be implemented with a strong measure of fidelity, then the principal must be knowledgeable and have strong buy-in to the middle level concept. Blumberg and Greenfield (1980) speak to the importance of the principal's role in any school initiative. "It takes a unique person to help give a school, first an image of what it can be and, second, to provide the drive, support, and skills to make that image approximate reality." Morris and others (1984) identify the principal as the key decision maker, problem solver and agent of change at the school site. In order for the middle level concept to thrive the building principal must play a central leadership role.

The building level principal must be familiar with early adolescent development and with the middle level philosophy and programming. Furthermore, the principal must be proactive in promoting and supporting the middle level concept in his/her school. Like many other states, Arkansas does not offer a middle level administrative licensure, but rather a K-8 and 7-12 licensure. As a result, there are no guarantees that a middle level principal is knowledgeable about early adolescent development, middle level philosophy and programming. Therefore, it is imperative that principals take it upon themselves to become educated about the middle level, so that they can cast a vision of what the middle school should look like and provide the necessary support to realize that vision.

Almost eighty-nine percent of principals indicated that they felt support from the district office. However, some principals clearly were not afforded the same level of support. One area

that this is evident is in problems created by the demands of shared personnel on the schedule. The time constraints placed on the schedule by shared personnel has an adverse effect on adding flexibility to the schedule. District office administrators may be able to work with middle level principals in assigning shared personnel to better accommodate a flexible schedule.

One final note, schools that have a high degree of fidelity in the implementation of middle level programming should be identified and recognized for their efforts. A state roster of exemplary middle level schools should be kept for easy reference. Faculty from schools that are interested in promoting or refining their middle level program should afford themselves of the opportunity to visit these schools and collaborate with them.

Many people think that middle school is just an organizational change from 7-9 to 6-8 grades. Those more intimately involved in the middle level movement understand the fundamental differences between a junior high program and a middle level program. Good progress has been made in the State of Arkansas on the journey from junior high programming to middle level programming and there are lessons that can be learned from this State's journey. Some of these lessons include:

#### **Lessons for the State**

- Adequate funding is needed
- Requiring middle level teacher licensure will enhance the quality of teachers working with young adolescents
- Identify and keep a database of exemplary middle schools in the state that schools can visit and collaborate with

#### **Lessons for the District**

- District personnel must be supportive of the middle level concept and programming

- Hire principals and staff who are trained in middle level and who want to work with middle level students
- Minimize or lessen the effects of shared personnel that would limit the flexibility of the schedule
- In collaboration with the principal arrange for appropriate staff development

### **Lessons for the School**

- Principal support is critical
- If the principal is not trained in middle level, he/she must take it upon him/herself to become familiar with the concept
- Non-mid-level licensure staff should be encouraged to work toward early adolescent National Board Certification
- Staff should be involved in meaningful and relevant staff development
- Provide adequate common planning time for interdisciplinary teams

### **Lessons for Staff Developers**

- Training should include not only the staff, but also the principal
- Training is needed to transition from a junior high focus to a middle level focus
- Training is needed to sustain and refine the middle level concept
- Training in early adolescent development and middle level philosophy are critical for building a foundation that will support all middle level concepts and middle level programming
- Training in interdisciplinary teaming should be a priority
- Training in other middle level programming should be available as the need arises

## References

Blumberg, A. and Greenfield, W. (1980). *The effective principal: Perspectives on school leadership*. Massachusetts: Allyn and Bacon.

Morris, V.C., Crowson, R.L., Porter-Gehrie, C., Hurwitz, E., Jr., (1984).

*Principals in action: The reality of managing schools*. Ohio: Bell and Howell.

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National Middle Schools Association.

## **Appendix**

## Public Schools of Arkansas: Survey of Middle Grades

The following questions are specific to the “middle school concept” and may need some clarification of terms. Any questions may be directed to Danny Barnett, Effective Strategies, Inc. at (501)281-0392 or [dbarnet1@ipa.net](mailto:dbarnet1@ipa.net).

### District Organization

- Question 1: How many students are in your district? \_\_\_\_\_
- Question 2: How are the middle grades in your district organized?(i.e. 5-6, 5-8, 6-7, etc.)  
\_\_\_\_\_ Number of students? \_\_\_\_\_
- Question 3: Does your district have a “middle school building”?  
\_\_\_\_\_ YES \_\_\_\_\_ NO If YES, how many? \_\_\_\_\_
- Question 4: Has your district reorganized in the last ten years to an identified middle level grade organization? \_\_\_\_\_ YES \_\_\_\_\_ NO  
Did you build a new building to house it? \_\_\_\_\_ YES \_\_\_\_\_ NO  
If more than one, how many buildings? \_\_\_\_\_
- Question 5: Are there any plans to change the current middle grades organization in your district? \_\_\_\_\_ YES \_\_\_\_\_ NO  
If YES, please describe: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
If NO, please go to section on **Planning Opportunities**.
- Question 6: Is there a middle grades principal assigned to your middle grades organization(s)?  
\_\_\_\_\_ YES \_\_\_\_\_ NO  
If YES, do they have an assistant(s)? \_\_\_\_\_ YES \_\_\_\_\_ NO  
How many? \_\_\_\_\_

## **Middle Grades Program**

Question 1: Which of the following middle level concepts are contained in your middle grades program?

- |                                                     |                                                   |
|-----------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Interdisciplinary teaming  | <input type="checkbox"/> Adviser/Advisee program  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Team Common Planning Time  | <input type="checkbox"/> Individual Planning Time |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Homogeneous Grouping       | <input type="checkbox"/> Heterogeneous Grouping   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Athletics(interscholastic) | <input type="checkbox"/> Athletics(Intramural)    |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Flexible Scheduling        | <input type="checkbox"/> Exploratory Curriculum   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Integrated Curriculum      | <input type="checkbox"/> Peer Tutoring            |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Student Portfolios         | <input type="checkbox"/> Peer Counseling          |

Question 2: What type of scheduling do your middle grades use?

- |                                         |                                           |                                           |
|-----------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> six period day | <input type="checkbox"/> seven period day | <input type="checkbox"/> eight period day |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 4x4 Block      | <input type="checkbox"/> A-B Block        | <input type="checkbox"/> Flexible Block*  |

\*Please describe \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Question 3: Is your school building represented by membership in any of the following organizations?

- National Middle School Association(NMSA)
- Arkansas Association of Middle Level Education(AAMLE)
- Arkansas Association of Middle Level Administrators(AAMLA)
- Arkansas Association of Elementary School Principals(AAESP)
- Arkansas Association of Secondary School Principals(AASSP)

## **Planning Opportunities**

Question 1: Would you support the development of a middle level program in your current structure? \_\_\_\_\_ YES \_\_\_\_\_ NO \_\_\_\_\_ Not applicable(have one already)

Question 2: Do you agree with the concept that early adolescents(10-15 years old) are unique in reference to other age groups emotionally, intellectually, physically, and socially? \_\_\_\_\_ YES \_\_\_\_\_ NO

Question 3: Academically, do you think any variation of a 5-6-7-8 organization pattern would best support and promote the current accountability standards?  
\_\_\_\_\_ YES \_\_\_\_\_ NO \_\_\_\_\_ UNDECIDED

Question 4: Does your staff need training/in-service in middle level programs?  
\_\_\_\_\_ YES \_\_\_\_\_ NO

Question 5: Would your staff be willing to receive training in middle level programming?  
\_\_\_\_\_ YES \_\_\_\_\_ NO

Question 6: What areas of middle level training would your staff benefit the most from?  
List 5 in order of preference(1 is highest) Refer to question 1-MGs Program

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_
4. \_\_\_\_\_
5. \_\_\_\_\_

Question 7: What percentage of your staff has received training in and/or has studied middle level philosophy? \_\_\_\_\_

Question 8: How many teachers on your staff have received recent licensure specifically for middle level math/science or middle level language/social studies?\_\_\_\_\_

Question 9: Would you or your staff be interested in visiting an exemplary middle level program? \_\_\_\_\_YES \_\_\_\_\_NO

Question 10: Would or does your district office support making changes deemed appropriate for early adolescents? \_\_\_\_\_YES \_\_\_\_\_NO

Question 11: What do you perceive as the most difficult task in either designing, implementing, or improving a middle level education program?

\_\_\_\_\_

Question 12: Other than money, what further assistance would you use to make your middle grades program more thorough and effective in all areas?

\_\_\_\_\_

Please mail this completed survey to:

Dr. Greg Meeks  
Arkansas State University  
P.O. Box 2350  
State University, Arkansas 72467

5/2/04



To Middle Level Educators in Arkansas:

During the 1990's, the middle level educators of Arkansas made major changes in how middle level schools (grades 5-9) were organized and how students were taught. We saw the number of 'middle schools' grow to outnumber the traditional 'junior high school.' Districts began to realize that the traditional organization was not appropriate for the type of instruction and programs the adolescent child needed. There was much support for the staffs of the schools to receive training and assistance from entities such as the Arkansas Association of Middle Level Education, The Center for Middle Level Education at the University of Arkansas/Fayetteville, and the Arkansas Department of Education.

With the continuing desire for change and success in the middle grades, we are interested in the make-up of the districts regarding organization patterns and desires to make any changes that will be developmentally appropriate for the staffs and students in grades 4-8. Therefore, we ask that this survey be completed and returned as soon as possible. We hope that you will see a need for and will benefit from this opportunity. Please respond.

This is a cooperative effort between various educational organizations in Arkansas and several universities. An analysis will be presented in the fall of 2004.

5/2/04