

Teacher and Administrator Perspectives on a Good Middle School:

A Cross-Case Study

Lisa Skaggs Mercer

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David Parks, Committee Chair

Sue Magliaro, Committee Member

John Gratto, Committee Member

Douglas Arnold, Committee Member

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Abstract

Education for adolescents in middle-level schools is a topic of great interest for many educators. Reaching a consensus on what constitutes an effective education for middle-level learners has been a challenge. The purpose of this study was to contribute to this discussion. Although the study was designed to report on “effective middle schools,” the respondents reported their perspectives on “good middle schools.” The findings of this study about “good middle schools” may be beneficial to middle-level educators that are interested in improving educational environments and outcomes for the adolescent learner.

A cross-case study methodology was used to investigate the perspectives on a good middle school of teachers and administrators in two middle schools in a school system in a southeastern state. Seventeen face-to-face interviews were conducted with a researcher-developed protocol, and document analyses were conducted. Data were analyzed with the constant comparative method.

The perspectives of the participants were organized into ten categories of what they believed constitutes a good middle school: culture, personnel, the needs of diverse adolescent learners, organizational structures, transitions, instructional practices, parental involvement, curricular aspects, physical environment, and progress. The teacher and administrator perspectives on a good middle school were analyzed in three ways: (a) a descriptive analysis of the characteristics of a good middle school as viewed by the teachers and administrators of Dorchester Middle School and J. K. Walters Middle School; (b) a comparison of the characteristics of a good middle school as viewed by teachers and administrators of the two schools and the characteristics of a good middle school as identified by the National Association of Secondary School Principals’ Council on Middle Level Education in 1985, the Association for

Middle Level Education in 2010, and the Carnegie Corporation's Council on Adolescent Development in 1989; and (c) a comparison of the characteristics of a good middle school identified by the teachers and administrators of Dorchester Middle School and the characteristics of a good middle school identified by the teachers and administrators of J. K. Walters Middle School (pseudonyms).

Middle school educators have struggled with the nature of an appropriate education for middle-level learners for decades. When combined with other studies of the perspectives on middle-level schooling of practicing teachers and administrators, those who work with middle-level learners every day, the data in this study may help in efforts to reach a consensus on the elements that should be a part of a good middle school.

DEDICATION

To My Family

To Michael

Without your love and support through this journey, I could never have succeeded. The dedication you showed unconditionally to me and to our children was admired by many, most of all, me. Few husbands would have willingly “run the house” and “run the kids” with the enthusiasm and patience you had for the past four years. I thank you and I love you.

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Thank you for your never-ending support and encouragement. I am so proud of both of you. You are an inspiration to me each and every day.

To Dad

You are the foundation upon which I have built my life. Your love, strength, and faith continue to be inspirational to me.

To Mom

I miss you! Losing you during the first year of this journey was devastating. Although grieving is part of my daily life, it comforts me to know you are happy in the arms of our Lord. It will be a great day when I see you again. I doubt I will ever let you go from our first embrace. For now, I feel your strength and love, and thank you for being my mom and my kids’ Gee Gee.

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Chapter 1 Introduction to the Study

The crucial middle-level years of education can lead adolescent students to countless opportunities. This time of growth is one of rapid physical, social, and emotional development for youth. It can be a traumatic and trying time and one of great personal and social upheaval. The consequences of failing at the middle-level can be detrimental to a student's life possibilities. Trilling (2010), asserted, "Middle school is a crucial time when students grow their hopes and commitments for success in school, in future work, in family and community life—or not" (p. 8). Academic and personal futures are shaped during the middle-level years (Killion, 1999). "The middle school years are critical in setting the trajectories for subsequent life success" (Juvonen, Kaganoff, Augustine, & Constant, 2004, p. iii). Middle-level schools can either "increase individual vulnerabilities or promote resiliency" (Juvonen et al., 2004, p. 49). It is imperative for middle-level educators to embrace the promotion of resiliency and to provide adolescents with educational opportunities that promote positive outlooks for bright futures.

Definitions of Key Terms

Adolescence. Stage of life between puberty and maturity (Association for Middle-Level Education, 2010; Bossing & Cramer, 1965; Calhoun, 1983; National Middle School Association, 2001; Sax, 2007).

Junior Sugarloaf County Community Scholars (pseudonym). Middle school students who demonstrate a high level of citizenship and community services, academic excellence, and outstanding attendance.

Middle-level of education. Schools serving all students ages 10-15 (Association for Middle-Level Education, 2010).

Three influential documents in middle-level education. The three studies are: (a) *An Agenda for Excellence at the Middle Level*, written by the National Association of Secondary School Principals in 1985; (b) *This We Believe: Keys to Educating Young Adolescents*, a publication of the Association for Middle Level Education in 2010; and (c) *Turning Points: Preparing American Youth for the 21st Century*, written by Carnegie Corporation’s Council on Adolescent Development in 1989.

Context of the Study

Judging the effectiveness of schools is persistent across our nation (Bedard & Do, 2005; Hoy & Ferguson, 1985; Madaus, Airasian, & Kellaghan, 1980; Reynolds & Cuttance, 1992). Distinct levels of schooling require purposefully developed approaches and practices. Schools educating adolescents are no different. Middle-level education is an important rung in the ladder of education. The critical step of educating adolescents must be completed in a way that serves the unique needs of this diverse age group.

Academic Context

The history of middle-level education has been rife with discontent and reform (Lounsbury & Vars, 2005; Weiss & Kipnes, 2006). This history is “one of continual tinkering and persistent dissatisfaction” (Weiss & Kipnes, 2006, p. 239). In addressing school improvement, middle-level reform efforts have focused on students’ needs and better student outcomes (Sergiovanni, 1987; Weiss & Kipnes, 2006). Eagerness in the desire to make middle-level education more effective has driven the vision for reform efforts. Heeding lessons from the past, “educators have glimpsed the possibility of breaking from tradition and of trying-out their ideas of what ought to be” (Briggs, 1920, p. 73).

There has been no “magic recipe” for meeting the educational needs of adolescents, although many attempts have been made throughout the years (Association for Middle Level Education, 2010; Jackson, Davis, Abeel, & Bordonaro, 2000; National Association of Secondary School Principal’s Council on Middle Level Education, 1985). Scrutiny and dissatisfaction continue to exist in middle-level education (Association for Middle Level Education, 2010). How best to serve the needs of adolescents in a developmentally appropriate environment is a question that is yet to be answered.

Questions are frequently asked when addressing the effectiveness of middle-level education: How do effective middle-level schools meet the needs of adolescent learners? Do views of what makes an effective middle-level school differ among middle-level teachers and administrators? How do middle-level schools differ depending upon student population characteristics and community demographics? Are middle-level teachers and administrators implementing the recommendations made by the National Association of Secondary School Principal’s Council on Middle Level Education, the Association for Middle-Level Education, and the Carnegie Corporation’s Council on Adolescent Development?

Numerous individuals and groups have expressed their views on what constitutes an effective middle school (Alexander & George, 1981; Association for Middle Level Education, 2010; Bedard & Do, 2005; Jackson et al., 2000; National Association of Secondary School Principal’s Council on Middle Level Education, 1985). Individuals closest to education at the middle-level including administrators and teachers, may provide authentic insights into what makes a middle school effective. Their perspectives were the focus of this study. Views from these individuals within middle-level education had similarities and differences about what makes a school for adolescents effective.

Personal Context

As a middle school teacher at Granville Middle School (pseudonym) and aspiring middle school administrator, I was interested in learning more about the intricacies of educating adolescents. The research process for this paper has been beneficial to me. My hope is to turn the lessons I have learned from my research into a meaningful study that will help middle-level educators in reform and improvement efforts for schools serving adolescents.

I believe effectively educating adolescents at the middle-level is extremely important. Meeting the needs of adolescent students is a challenge, and it is a challenge I am happy to accept.

A deep and valuable education goes beyond curriculum and academics, as important as those things are. I believe the hopes and dreams of adolescent children matter, and they deserve the brightest of futures. Children can be lost or found within the confines of schoolhouse walls, and I recognize the significant role I play in their lives.

Unimaginable greatness can be achieved for students, and igniting the flame for their futures is such an important task. I personally wondered how other educators and administrators reach the needs of adolescent learners in their middle schools. What priorities do they hold dear? How do they ensure they are doing all they can to help their students?

This study helped me, and hopefully will help others, better understand the educational needs of adolescents at the middle-level and how best to meet those needs. There exists a need to further study middle-level education in hopes of providing adolescent students with the best education possible. I willingly accepted this challenge. I believe our future depends on the successes or failures at the middle-level.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to contribute to the discussion on what constitutes an effective education for middle-level learners. Three large national organizations have put forth their views on the nature of effective education for middle-level learners (Association for Middle Level Education, 2010; Carnegie Corporation's Council on Adolescent Development, 1989; National Association of Secondary School Principals' Council on Middle Level Education, 1985). Through face-to-face interviews, teacher and administrator perspectives on a good middle school were analyzed in three ways: (a) a descriptive analysis of the characteristics of a good middle school as viewed by the teachers and administrators of Dorchester Middle School and J. K. Walters Middle School (pseudonyms); (b) a comparison of the characteristics of a good middle school as viewed by teachers and administrators of the two schools in this study and the characteristics of a good middle school as identified by the National Association of Secondary School Principals' Council on Middle Level Education in 1985, the Association for Middle Level Education in 2010, and the Carnegie Corporation's Council on Adolescent Development in 1989; and (c) a comparison of the characteristics of a good middle school identified by the teachers and administrators of Dorchester Middle School and the characteristics of a good middle school identified by the teachers and administrators of J. K. Walters Middle School.

Significance of the Study

Middle school leaders continue to search for solutions to better educate adolescent youth in an environment conducive to their unique needs. Studying how best to meet the educational needs of adolescents in their middle-level years of schooling is an important issue. Adolescent students deserve an education that is socially, emotionally, and psychologically appropriate for

them. There are four ways this study may help educators improve serving the educational needs of adolescents.

The study has scholarly significance and practical implications for the field of middle-level education and may add to the empirical research base on middle-level education. The perceptions of faculty members working in middle schools were not currently available in the research base on middle-level education. This study tapped into this knowledge base and added to the literature on good middle schools by providing insights into the feelings and perceptions of middle-level teachers and administrators. The perspectives of the interview participants were contrasted and compared. Analyzing the experiences of the participants may help in understanding phenomena at the middle-level of education and may be valuable information for those interested in learning more about this school level.

The study may help in efforts to reach a consensus on the elements that should be a part of a good educational program for adolescents. The search continues to find a recipe that works. There is no consensus on what the ingredients of that recipe are although attempts have been made (Association for Middle Level Education, 2010; Carnegie Corporation's Council on Adolescent Development, 1989; Jackson et al., 2000; National Association of Secondary School Principal's Council on Middle Level Education, 1985). The uncertainty and confusion may stem from too many proposals that are not research-based. Studying the perspectives of individuals closest to the education of adolescents may help all stakeholders interested in the education of these children. Information that was gathered may help with improvement and reform efforts in middle-level education.

The study may help in identifying features recommended by the Association for Middle Level Education in 2010, Carnegie Corporation's Council on Adolescent Development in 1989,

and the National Association of Secondary School Principal's Council on Middle Level Education in 1985 that may be neglected or overlooked by middle-level teachers and administrators. Evaluating the responses of participants may show the priorities that exist within a school and whether or not these priorities coincide with the recommendations made by these influential organizations. Studying whether or not the views of teachers and administrators correspond with the recommendations made in the documents may lead to reconsideration of improvement and reform endeavors.

The study may help in identifying effective middle-level features that were not included in the recommendations made by the Association for Middle Level Education in 2010, Carnegie Corporation's Council on Adolescent Development in 1989, and the National Association of Secondary School Principal's Council on Middle Level Education in 1985. Those individuals closest to the education of adolescents, administrators and teachers, may provide thoughtful insights and perspectives that either enhance or contradict the recommendations made by these influential organizations.

Research Questions

The original research questions contained the words "effective middle-level education"; however, during the analysis of data, the perspectives of the participating teachers and administrators seemed to be more in line with the nature of a "good" middle school. The concept of a "good middle school" connotes a more general perspective on middle schools than an "effective middle school," which connotes more precise measurement of outcomes in the form of test scores and pass rates. Thus, the research questions were altered to the following to bring them in line with the data:

1. What are the perspectives of middle school teachers and administrators on a good middle school in two schools in a school system?
2. How do the perspectives of middle school teachers and administrators on a good middle school compare and contrast to the recommendations of the National Association of Secondary School Principals' Council on Middle Level Education in 1985, Carnegie Corporation's Council on Adolescent Development in 1989, and the Association for Middle Level Education in 2010?
3. How do the perspectives of middle school teachers and administrators compare and contrast in the two schools?

Potential Limitations of the Study

Limitations of a research study are features that “may negatively affect the results” or the “ability to generalize” the findings (Roberts, 2010, p. 162). The researcher recognized several limitations existed with the study and encourages readers to evaluate the results with the limitations in mind. The limitations were as follows:

1. The researcher was a vested, middle-level educator.
2. Data were collected through face-to-face interviews and were affected by the participants' honesty in sharing their true feelings.
3. The researcher knew some of the participants in the study.

Assumptions and Delimitations

This cross-case study was conducted at two middle schools in a school system in a southeastern state. Generalization of the findings are limited for other schools not matching the demographic characteristics of the schools chosen for this study. Freebody (2003) stated, “Case

studies show a strong sense of time and place; they represent a commitment to the overwhelming significance of localized experience” (p. 13).

Participants of this study included both middle school principals at the schools being researched and the assistant principal at J. K. Walters Middle School. Other participants from each of the two middle schools in the study were a guidance counselor, an English teacher, a mathematics teacher, a social science teacher, a science teacher, an exploratory teacher, and a special education teacher. The criterion for participation was for each to possess at least two years of administrative or teaching experience at the middle-level of education.

Organization of the Study

This study is organized into five chapters. Chapter 1 includes the context, problem, purpose, significance, and limitations of the study. Chapter 2 is a literature review associated with the problem that prompted the study. Chapter 3 is the methodology for the study and contains the research design, a description of the sites, the selection of participants, data collection, data management, and data analysis. Chapter 4 is a description of the findings of the study. Chapter 5 is a summary of the results of the study including conclusions and recommendations for further research.

Chapter 2 Literature Review

A Brief History of Middle-Level Education

History oftentimes is an effective teacher. How far we have come and the distance we have traveled as an educated society yield lessons from which we can continue to learn. Troubles, successes, turmoils, and triumphs are all a part of our nation's history. In the educational realm, historical struggles serve as beacons illuminating the areas in which change is needed for continued academic achievement. Such is the case with the ever-evolving educational needs in the middle-level grades. Understanding the past while forging successful middle-level education for the adolescent learner is crucial. Critical events in the development of education in the middle grades are represented in Figure 1.

Dissatisfaction and Reform Efforts in Middle-Level Education

In the first two decades of the twentieth century, the focus of reform for middle-grades education concentrated on the needs, changes, and troubles of educating adolescents (Briggs, 1920; Brough, 1995; Clark & Clark, 1993; Lounsbury & Vars, 2005). Writers (Briggs, 1920; Clark & Clark, 1993; Lounsbury & Vars, 2005; Weiss & Kipnes, 2006) recognized adolescence as a distinct and tumultuous phase requiring a specialized educational environment. Junior high schools were opened to educate children in the middle grades to meet their academic, social, and emotional needs during this difficult time in their lives (Weiss & Kipnes, 2006). During the early 1900s, high school dropout rates rose (Briggs, 1920; Lounsbury & Vars, 2005). These rising dropout rates (Briggs, 1920; Brough, 1995; Lounsbury & Vars, 2005) added to economic problems the United States was experiencing. "These deplorable results" in dropout rates (Briggs, 1920, p. 12) led to the study of schools, including schools at the middle-level. The way

of educating adolescents was scrutinized, and reform took hold to improve educational outcomes and service for these young individuals (Briggs, 1920; Dryfoos, 1990; Lounsbury & Vars, 2005).

As the twentieth century progressed, so too did the scrutiny of evaluating middle-level education and junior high schools. Oftentimes, researchers (Anfara, 2001; Briggs, 1920; Lounsbury & Vars, 2005) felt the needs of the adolescent student were not being met within the educational system. By the 1960s, there was a call to reform the junior high school, which evolved into a call for the creation of the middle school (Anfara, 2001). Dissatisfaction with the way in which adolescent students were being educated increased again shortly after the inception of middle schools (Anfara, 2001).

Discontent with the way adolescents were being served continued during the last decades of the twentieth century. In 1983, the National Commission on Excellence in Education expressed dissatisfaction with middle-level education. The Commission emphasized the failure of the United States' public school system and reinforced the claim that middle schools were not preparing students for life in a competitive global economy. The scrutiny of the middle school continued into the twenty-first century (Lounsbury & Vars, 2005).

Changing Grade Configurations

Throughout the past two centuries, differing grade configurations across the gamut of public education existed and caused much debate (Calhoun, 1983). A portion of this debate focused on the question of what grade configuration served adolescent students the best. This question resonated throughout research studies and educational literature. The placement of sixth and ninth grade was a common dispute. In this “tug-of-war” two sides existed, those wanting to pull middle-level students toward the elementary level and those wanting to pull them

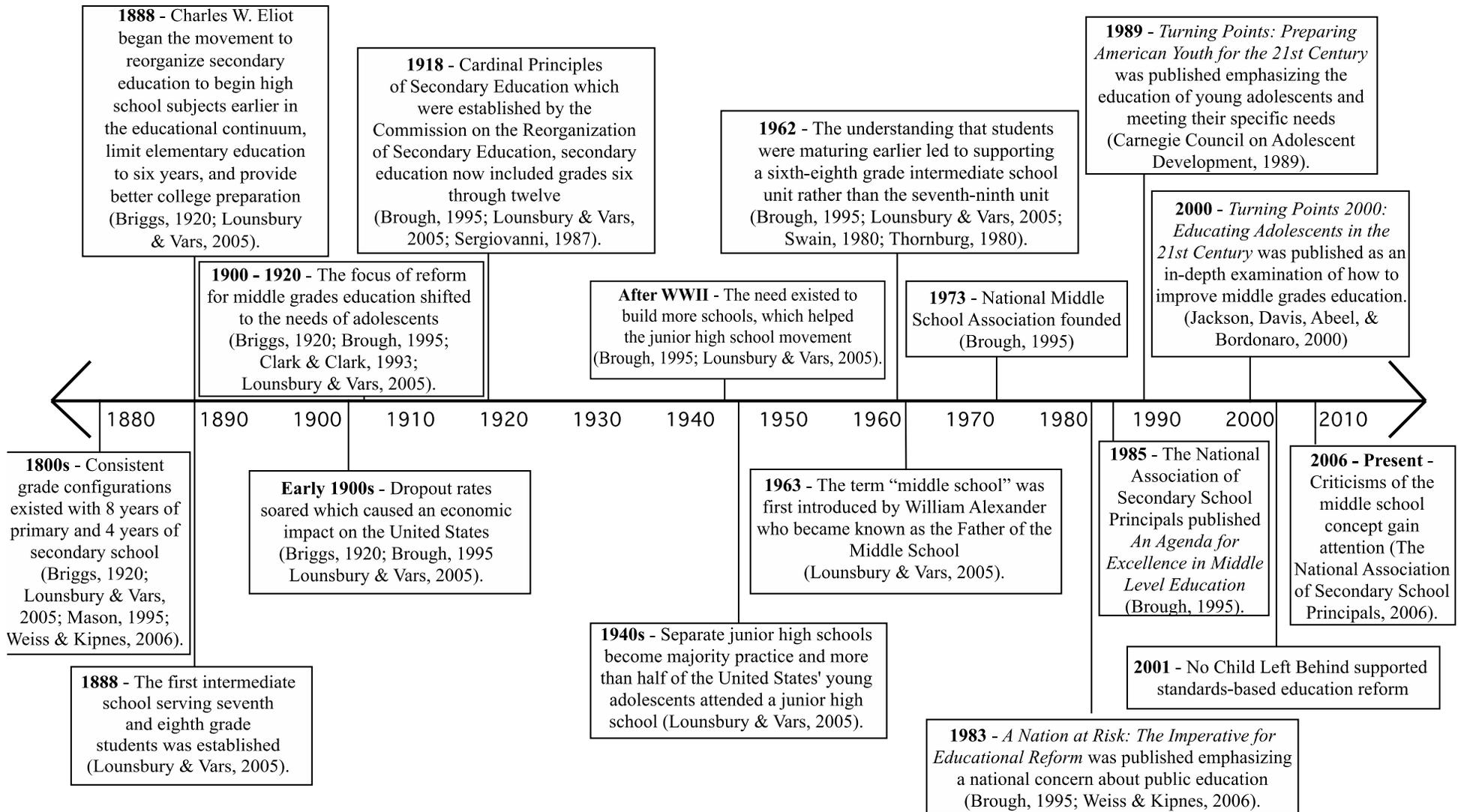


Figure 1. Middle-level education historical timeline: Critical events in the development of education in the middle grades.

toward the senior level of schooling (National Association of Secondary School Principals, 2006, p. xv). There is no clear-cut answer defining the best grade arrangement for adolescents (Calhoun, 1983; Conant, 1960; Gerson, 1968; Grieder, 1969; Howard & Stoumbis, 1970; Johnson, 1963; Vars, 1966, Weiss & Kipnes, 2006; Wilson, 1969; Zdanowicz, 1968). A brief account of the changes that took place in middle-level grade configurations since the birth of education in the United States follows.

During the 1800s, education was divided into primary and secondary education with an eight-four split, respectively (Briggs, 1920; Lounsbury & Vars, 2005; Mason, 1995; Weiss & Kipnes, 2006). Near the turn of the nineteenth century, Charles W. Eliot began a reorganization movement to address several concerns. Reorganizing secondary education to begin high school subjects earlier in the educational continuum, limiting elementary education to six years, and providing better college preparation were goals identified by Eliot (Lounsbury & Vars, 2005). It is noteworthy to state that the first intermediate school serving seventh and eighth grade students was established in 1888 (Lounsbury & Vars, 2005). This intermediate school was the forerunner of the middle-level schools that were to come later.

The beginning of the twentieth century brought with it changes in grade configurations. After the Cardinal Principles of Secondary Education were established in 1918 by the Commission on the Reorganization of Secondary Education, secondary education now included primarily grades six through twelve (Anfara, 2001; Brough, 1995; Lounsbury & Vars, 2005; Sergiovanni, 1987). Some districts chose to divide secondary education into two parts, thus forming an intermediate or middle-level stage of schooling set apart from the senior period (Anfara, 2001).

As the twentieth century progressed, more changes for grade configurations were made. By the 1940's, the typical middle-level grade configuration included grades seven through nine. Later in the twentieth century, the understanding that students were maturing earlier led to supporting a sixth-eighth grade intermediate school unit rather than the seventh-ninth grade unit, which had become majority practice during the preceding decades (Brough, 1995). During the 1960s, much research was conducted as a result of the middle school movement and the discussion of changing grade configurations. Through numerous attempts (Conant, 1960; Grieder, 1969; Johnson, 1963; Kohut, 1980; Lipsitz, 1977; Vars, 1966; Wilson, 1969), no clear evidence existed supporting the relationship between specific grade configurations and school effectiveness. In 1968, Gerson concluded "It is doubtful if sufficient data will ever be available which demonstrates that one type of school organization is superior to another" (Gerson, 1968, p. 295).

The twenty-first century has ushered in the repeated question of what grade configuration best serves the needs of adolescent students. There continues to be no certain answer. Many organizations of grades exist on the continuum of first through twelfth grade education.

Junior High Schools Emerge

Early in the twentieth century, the idea to educate students in transition from childhood to adolescence (Anfara, 2001) in a separate institution devoted to their needs was formed (Clark & Clark, 1993), and junior high schools began to open and gain momentum (Briggs, 1920). These junior high schools were initially acclaimed for preventing dropouts and preparing students for the job market (Anfara, 2001).

As World War II was ending, more schools were needed, which helped the junior high school movement that frequently included grades seven through nine (Brough, 1995; Lounsbury

& Vars, 2005). As the twentieth century progressed, adolescence was drawing increased attention, and separate junior high schools became majority practice (Lounsbury & Vars, 2005). Junior high schools grew rapidly between the years of 1917 and 1970 (see Figure 2). By the 1940s, more than half of the adolescents in the United States attended a junior high school. By 1960, four out of five adolescent students attended junior high (Lounsbury & Vars, 2005). The dramatic decrease in the number of junior high schools began after 1970 with the emergence of middle schools.

The Middle-School Movement Begins

In the early 1960s, our nation's adolescent youth once more became a focus of attention in education. Students were maturing earlier (Brough, 1995; Lounsbury & Vars, 2005; Swain, 1980). Emphasis was again placed on students entering sixth grade and educational institutions serving them by acknowledging their biological factors and social-emotional needs (Lounsbury & Vars, 2005).

In 1963, the term "middle school" was introduced by William Alexander, known as the Father of the Middle School (Lounsbury & Vars, 2005). While focusing on the needs of the middle-school learner, Alexander emphasized curriculum, instruction, and organization (Alexander, 1971; Calhoun 1983; Lounsbury & Vars, 2005). He thought that the establishment of middle schools meant far more than changing grade configurations and age groupings. He believed middle schools could facilitate "a fresh, revitalized approach to education" (Alexander, 1971, p. 136).

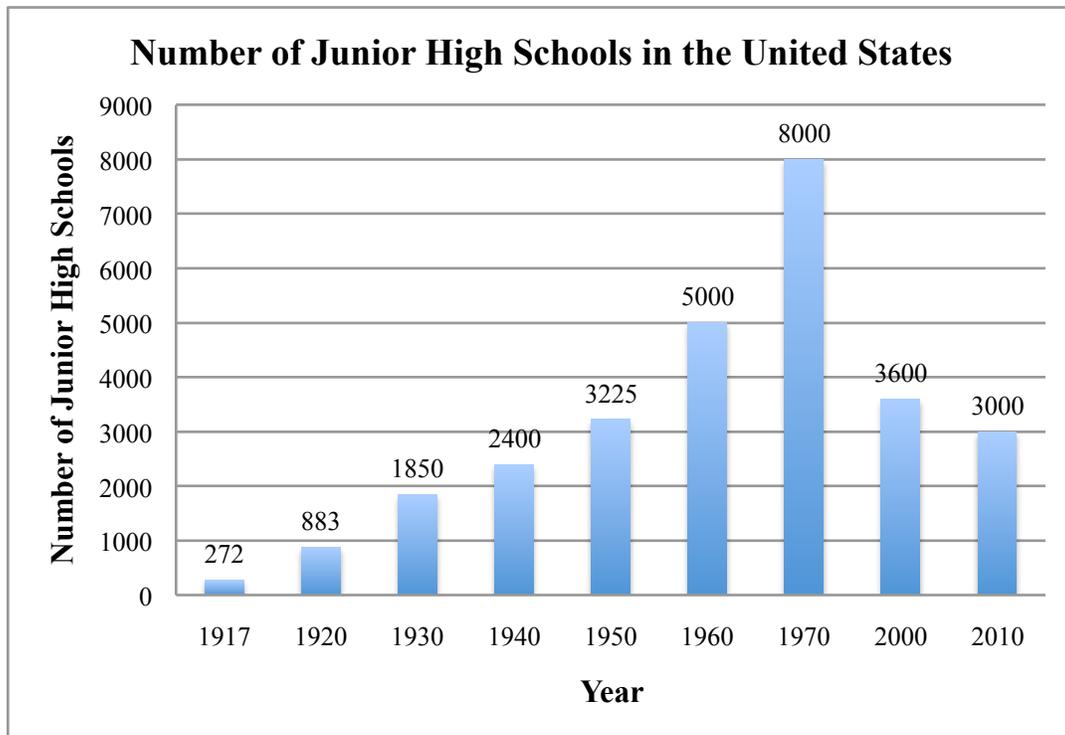


Figure 2. Number of junior high schools, 1917-2010 (Briggs, 1920; U.S. Department of Education, 2012).

There was an expansion of middle schools during the second half of the twentieth century, and their numbers rose substantially into the twenty-first century (Alexander & McEwin, 1989b; Anfara, 2001; Lounsbury & Vars, 2005). As represented in Figure 3, the number of middle schools nearly quadrupled between the years of 1968 and 1971 (Anfara, 2001; Lounsbury & Vars, 2005). Despite the continued controversy, the prevalence of middle schools continued to flourish as the United States headed into the twenty-first century. The reorganization movement that began in the 1960s continued to grow until early into the twenty-first century (Anfara, 2001; Lounsbury & Vars, 2005).

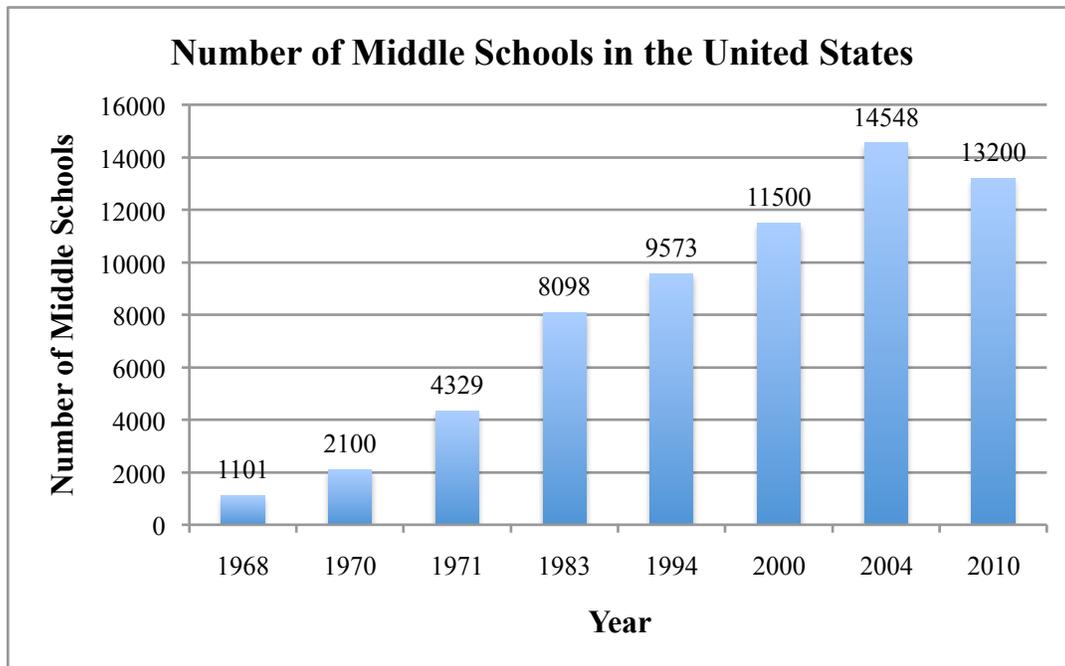


Figure 3. Number of middle schools, 1968-2010 (Anfara, 2001; Lounsbury & Vars, 2005; U.S. Department of Education, 2012).

What the Twenty-First Century Holds for Education in the Middle-Level

No one knows what the future holds for educating adolescents in the twenty-first century. One thing is for certain, uncertainty and scrutiny of middle-level education continues. The hope of finding that magic solution to educating adolescents is ever present. New challenges and opportunities exist for meeting the needs of adolescent students. Earlier maturation and increased accountability measures drive much of the current reform efforts made in middle-level education.

“Middle schools are at a crossroads” (Anfara, 2001, p. xvii). Grade configurations continue to be diverse. Choosing to embrace the middle school concept or reverting back to a junior high school philosophy of service for adolescent individuals is being debated by middle-level school advocates and stakeholders. Thoughtful consideration is being given to implementation practices at middle schools. Stakeholders everywhere are looking closely to find

solutions and answers to the middle-level school dilemma. The Association for Middle Level Education (2010) profoundly stated, adolescents “deserve an education that will enhance their healthy growth as lifelong learners, ethical and democratic citizens, and increasingly competent, self-sufficient individuals who are optimistic about the future and prepared to succeed in our ever-changing world (p. 3).

Today, middle-level educators are focused more on the educational programs offered to adolescents than grade configurations. The emphases are on the appropriateness of curriculum, pedagogy, process, and teacher preparation (Association for Middle Level Education, 2010; Brough, 1995). Meeting the unique needs of the learner is of utmost importance.

Adolescence as a Basis for Middle-Level Education

Human beings travel through different stages in their lives, each one distinct and challenging. “From birth to death, human intellectual, developmental, and social needs change” (National Association of Secondary School Principals, 2006, p. xv). Adolescence is a stage occurring between childhood and full physical maturity (Drash, 1980). Thornburg (1980) stated adolescence is “as difficult to understand as it is to experience” (p. 3). The distinct developmental phase of adolescence is “an age of sociability and activity, an age of exploration and risk-taking” (Sizer & Meier, 2006, p. vii). Throughout the literature on middle-level education, different words are used in place of the word adolescent (see Figure 4). Each word is used to describe children between the stages of childhood and adulthood.

Characteristics of Adolescence

The journey from childhood to adulthood is a monumental trip with dramatic physical, emotional, and psychological changes (Calhoun, 1983). “The facts of puberty, the changes in mental outlook, the turning to peers, and the phenomena of sexuality make the middle school

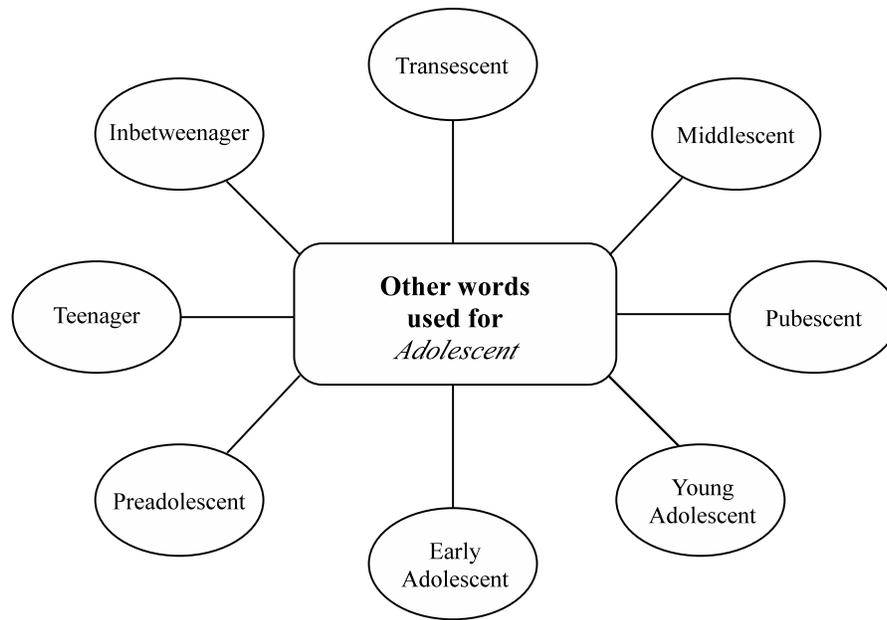


Figure 4. Words used in place of adolescent.

years a period of tremendous emotional turmoil” (Alexander & George, 1981, p. 8). Hormonal shifts and physical transformations resulting from puberty afflict adolescents, frequently resulting in emotional and social chaos (National Middle School Association, 2001).

“Nothing characterizes adolescence more than variability” (Drash, 1980, p. 18). The onset and duration of puberty are out of synch between girls and boys, lending uncertainty on how to educate this population in an effective way for all participants (Sax, 2007). As a result of accelerated puberty and earlier maturity both physically and socially in girls, and delayed puberty in boys, this disparity between the sexual development of girls and boys has caused middle-level schools to become a very diverse place (Bossing & Cramer, 1965; Calhoun, 1983; Sax, 2007). Physical and mental maturation of adolescent students in the middle-level setting greatly varies resulting in a wide range of student population characteristics (Calhoun, 1983).

This diverse population creates a challenge for educational institutions in determining how to best meet the needs of students in the middle grades (Calhoun, 1983).

Physical development characteristics of adolescents exist and can cause feelings of awkwardness and self-consciousness for the student (U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, 2008). Tremendous physical growth occurs between the ages of ten and fourteen. The transition into adolescence is clearly marked by the dramatic biological changes of puberty (Smetana, Campione-Barr, & Metzger, 2006). “Controlling and using a ‘new’ body” can be a great challenge for adolescents (Bossing & Cramer, 1965, p. 89). Adolescents have new thoughts and feelings about their changing bodies (Bossing & Cramer, 1965).

Social factors present intense challenges for educators of early adolescents (Killion, 1999). Many adolescents struggle with their sense of identity. They may struggle with their parents and begin to see faults in them leading to the desire to become independent. “The movement toward adolescence is one toward greater independence” (Alexander & George, 1981, p. 7). Adolescents are increasingly influenced by their peers and behave according to peer examples (Bossing & Cramer, 1965; U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, 2008). Adolescents begin exercising their “control over how and with whom they spend their time” (Feldman & Elliot, 1990, p. 4). Typically, they cultivate same-sex friendships and become sexually interested in intimate relationships (U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, 2008). These social qualities have implications for educators at the middle level. “The goal of schools in the middle should be to provide for each student the opportunity to become self-directing and self-sustaining in a friendly, positive and encouraging atmosphere” (Alexander & George, 1981, p. 3).

Educational Needs of the Adolescent

Igniting the fire for adolescent learners to become excited about learning in the middle grades must be made in accordance with their special characteristics and needs (Wick, 2006). Educational implications for programs and practices concerning adolescent students at the middle-level exist (Swain, 1980). Adolescents deserve an educational environment conducive to their unique needs (Alexander & George, 1981; Killion, 1999), which is developmentally appropriate (Anfara, 2001). Alexander and McEwin (1989a) stated, “The nature and education of young adolescents must be an integrated venture; physical, social, emotional, and intellectual development are each inexorably woven together in the fabric of early adolescent life” (p. 1). It is the uniqueness of the adolescent learner that justified the need for creating a distinct school (Capelluti & Stokes, 1991) separate from the elementary and senior levels (Swain, 1980).

Providing adolescents with a school environment developed specifically for students’ needs resonates throughout the literature time and again (Alexander & George, 1981; Bossing & Cramer, 1965; Killion, 1999; National Middle School Association, 2001; Swain, 1980). Multiple examples from the literature on middle-level schools follow. Emotional, physical, and cognitive needs of adolescents affect their learning (Swain, 1980). Middle-level schools must be sensitive to the needs of the individuals they serve. “Middle grade students are at a crossroad – emotionally, physically, academically, and socially” (Killion, 1999, p. 1). The challenge for educators is to create a learning environment conducive for adolescents, mingling each of their unique needs (National Middle School Association, 2001). “The heart of the middle school is the learner. The child’s uniqueness must always be considered” (Alexander & George, 1981). Middle schools must be sensitive to the special needs of their population, the “in-be-tweenager,” and provide educational opportunities that allow for intellectual, social, physical, and emotional

growth of each student (Alexander & George, 1981, p. 3). “The innate complexities of the early adolescent demand a program of education that is fully integrated and geared to the individual differences of the students” (Bossing & Cramer, 1965, p. 89).

Adolescent students need specialized educational opportunities and staff that are specifically trained to meet their needs. Each student requires opportunities for discovery and growth. Adolescents’ attention span, interests, and learning needs must be addressed (Brough, 1995). Allowing students the chance to explore various specialty classes helps to develop their interests, strengths, and aptitudes (Briggs, 1920). Learning from teachers that are knowledgeable and dedicated to adolescent youth is important. Adolescent students need teachers that facilitate learning in a student-centered learning environment and who are advocates for students (Williams-Boyd, 2003). Addressing social issues and helping students cope with challenges and frustrations are critical at the middle-level of education.

Cognitive developments of adolescents affect the educational environment they need. During the adolescent years, students acquire a larger capacity for abstract thought. Adolescent’s intellectual interests grow, and these interests become more important to them than in their previous years of schooling. (U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, 2008). Adolescents utilize more language than ever before to express and clarify more complex concepts (Bossing & Cramer, 1965). They have deeper moral reasoning. Adolescents focus on the present and do not have much concern for the future. These cognitive developments necessitate an educational environment that can nurture and positively influence these developments (U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, 2008).

Consequences for Failing to Meet the Needs of Adolescent Students

Addressing the special needs of students in the middle grades helps to shape lifelong habits of youths between the ages of ten and fourteen (Killion, 1999), either beneficially or detrimentally (Dryfoos, 1990). Potential life consequences exist. When middle schools fail to care for the developmental needs of adolescents, adolescents are placed at risk for harming their life chances (Dryfoos, 1990).

Negative affects can happen to adolescents that struggle in their middle-level years of education. “Young adolescents today make fateful choices, fateful for them and for our nation. The period of life from ages 10 to 15 represents for many young people the last best chance to choose a path toward productive and fulfilling lives” (George & Alexander, 1993, p. 3).

Adolescents can become at risk for dropping out of school during their middle-level years. In many instances, dropout rates of our nation’s youth increase or decrease as a result of the positive or negative experiences that adolescent youth encounter in their middle school years (Juvonen et al., 2004). Students dropping out of school, taking their place in the world prematurely, can be a costly societal problem with the potential to affect lifetime earnings, propensity for welfare dependence, and unlawfulness leading to prison (Finn, 1989; Wehlage & Rutter, 1986). “Lack of interest, negative attitudes toward school, social alienation, and disengagement are not only associated with poor grades but may also predict the ultimate school failure, dropping out” (Juvonen et al., 2004, p. 48). Alexander, Entwisle, and Kabanni (2001) concluded, “Standing out and not fitting in are especially detrimental during the middle school years” (p. 48). Although students dropping out of school typically do so during senior high school, the disengagement and alienation that commonly lead to these decisions often begin during their middle school years (Alexander, Entwisle, & Kabanni, 2001).

Preparing Adolescents for Their Futures

Preparing middle school students to meet the demands of society and the workplace is essential. As the Carnegie Corporation's Council on Adolescent Development found in 1989, by the time youth reach the age of fifteen, many young teens are at risk for reaching adulthood unprepared to meet life's challenges. Many will fail in the workplace, struggle with commitments and relationships, and lack the desire to participate in our nation's democratic society (Carnegie Corporation's Council on Adolescent Development, 1989; Fuller & Rasiah, 2005).

The "postmanufacturing age" (Anfara, Mertens, & Roney, 2009, p. 346) of the twenty-first century brought with it change concerning the important skills students must learn to achieve success (Wagner, 2008). "In today's highly competitive global 'knowledge economy,' all students need new skills for college, careers, and citizenship. The failure to give all students these new skills leaves today's youth--and our country--at an alarming competitive disadvantage" (Wagner, 2008, p. xxi). As our nation rethinks educational goals for the twenty-first century, teaching students "how to think" becomes an important component of effective schools and school reform (Wagner, 2008, p. xxiii), including the middle-level of education. "Effective communication, curiosity, and critical-thinking skills" are "essential competencies and habits of mind for life in the twenty-first century" (Wagner, 2008, p. xxiii). We must prepare all adolescent learners for the brightest of futures awaiting them.

Junior High Schools and Middle Schools: Differences in Emphases

The emphases between the two models of middle-level education, junior high schools and middle schools, are different. Researchers made comparisons between the emphases of the junior high school and the middle school during the 1970s (Howard & Stoumbis, 1970;

McCarthy, 1972). Much debate occurred between those favoring the junior high versus those favoring middle schools. What were the specific founding purposes of both types of schools? Below is a brief summary of each school's emphases and comparisons between both school models.

Detailed comparisons were made during the 1970s in two separate studies, one conducted by Howard and Stoumbis (1970) and the other by McCarthy (1972). The researchers identified different emphases for junior high and middle schools. A detailed synthesis is in Figure 5, which contains the differing purposes of the two school types.

Emphases for the Junior High School

Proponents of junior high schools emphasize the need for key elements when educating the adolescent learner. At the heart of this school type is the emphasis of preparing adolescents for high school in a rigid, highly departmentalized structure (Calhoun, 1983). Furthermore, the organization of the junior high school is based on a predetermined curriculum with little latitude given to students' interests (Calhoun, 1983). Commonly, a seventh-ninth grade configuration is adopted. Students are expected to learn from teacher-led activities with a focus on mastering skills in preparing them for future studies. George and Alexander (1993) indicated the junior high school originated to offer "a richer curriculum than the elementary school was able to offer and a more personal atmosphere than the high school was able to develop" (p. 285).

Emphases for the Middle School

Proponents of the middle school possess different views challenging the way junior high schools are arranged. The middle school movement signifies a deliberate commitment to the developmental needs of adolescent students (Anfara, 2001). Students constructing their own knowledge and being responsible for their own learning are at the heart of the middle school.

Middle schools are designed to specifically meet the needs of their diverse student population. Allowing adolescents the freedom to explore various interests in a child-centered environment while maintaining high expectations for all is imperative.

Defining Effectiveness

Effectiveness is an ambiguous concept, and when applied in the context of school outcomes, that ambiguity increases. Differences in perceptions can cause haziness and uncertainty to different individuals or groups when subjective opinions and perceptions are involved. A simple description of school effectiveness is problematic when considering the numerous factors that can affect a school's success. Clearly, effectiveness encompasses more than one component, and Hoy and Miskel (1987) stated that effectiveness cannot be accurately expressed as a one-dimensional definition. Precisely articulating the essential characteristics of effectiveness can be difficult, resulting in conflicting and uncertain meanings (Sergiovanni, 1987). The question resonates, how then, can educators and those interested in schools, develop an understanding of what effective schools are? Moreover, for the purpose of this paper, what is an effective middle-level school?

Through systematic analysis and synthesis, themes of common characteristics become apparent when reviewing the literature on effective schools as a whole. An operational definition can be constructed from the literature on schools (Hoy & Miskel, 1987; Sergiovanni, 1987). An effective school has oftentimes been recognized as a school with students that achieve well in academic skills as measured by standard student achievement tests (Sergiovanni, 1987). In general, excellent schools are identified through their ability to exceed common expectations and ordinary goals (Sergiovanni, 1987).

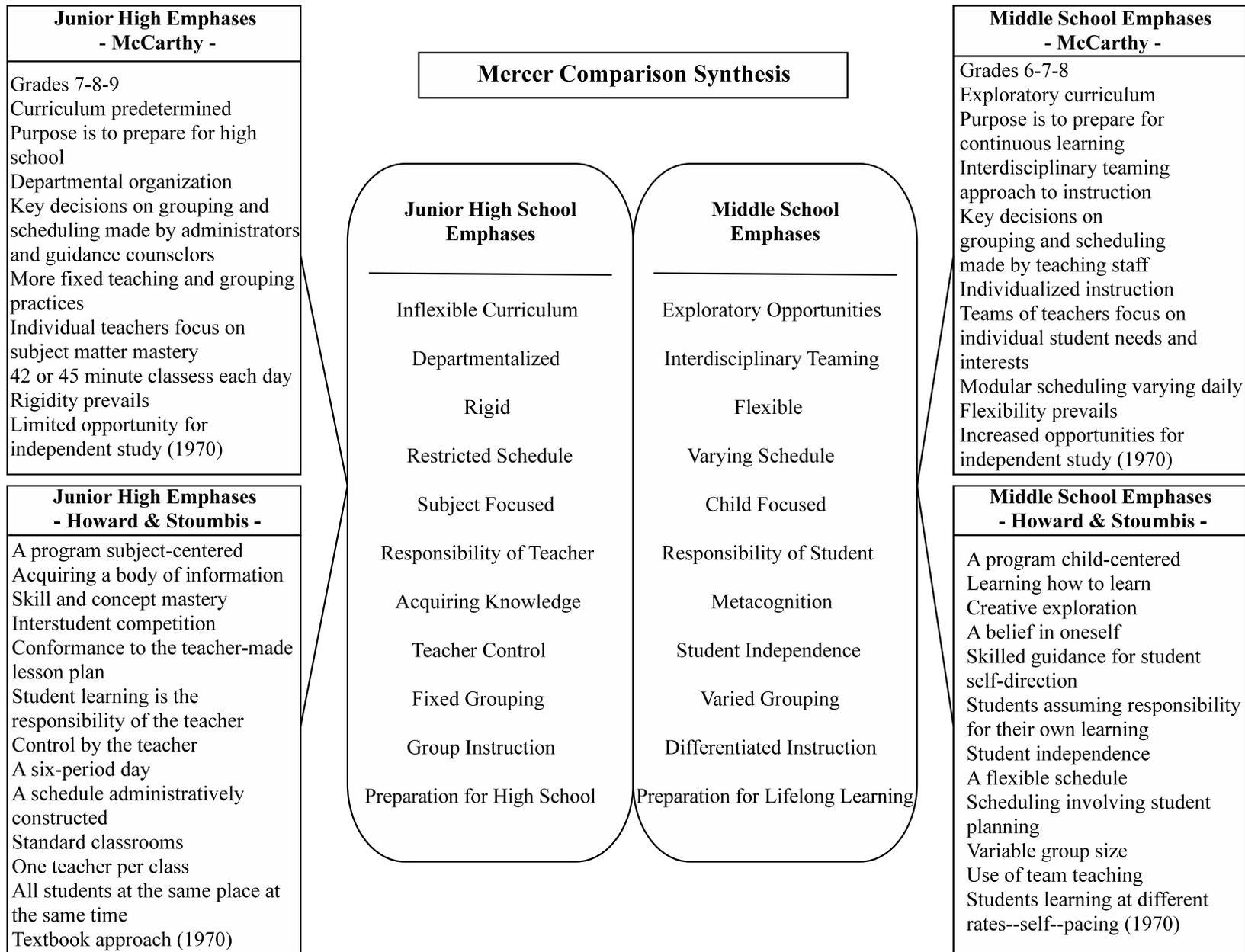


Figure 5. Mercer comparison of emphases in junior high schools and middle schools.

Identifying Factors of Effectiveness

Middle-level education researchers strive to answer challenging questions about middle-level learners and the educational environments they populate. They search for factors that affect the quality of middle-level education. Typical questions that they ask are:

- What is a good middle-level school?
- How do you know when you see a good middle-level school?
- What makes one middle-level school better than another?
- Can effectiveness be defined?
- What criteria are used to determine effectiveness?
- Who determines these criteria?
- Other than narrow, standardized test scores, what are measures of outcomes of effectiveness?
- How do middle schools differ?
- What accounts for these differences?
- How do middle schools adjust their programs to accommodate community demographics and student characteristics?

There are numerous measures of school effectiveness. Among these measures are: (a) productivity, (b) efficiency, (c) quality, (d) growth, (e) absenteeism, (f) turnover, (g) teacher job satisfaction, (h) student satisfaction, (i) motivation, (j) morale, (k) cohesion, (l) flexibility-adaptation, (m) planning and goal setting, (n) goal consensus, (o) internalization of organizational goals, (p) leadership-management skills, (q) information management and communications, (r) readiness, (s) utilization of the environment, (t) evaluation by external entities, (u) stability, (v) shared influence, (w) training and development emphasis, and (x)

achievement emphasis (Sergiovanni, 1987, pp. 34-35). Sergiovanni (1987) stated, “We know successful schools when we experience them, though we cannot always specify their precise components” (p. 31). Identifying the qualities and characteristics that comprise effective middle-level schools is a challenge.

Three Reports on Effective Middle-Level Education

Dimensions and aspects of effective middle-level schools have been identified and published by influential educators and associations that have focused their attention on this level of education (Association for Middle Level Education, 2010; Jackson et al., 2000; National Association of Secondary School Principal’s Council on Middle Level Education, 1985). The three reports that have helped to influence, shape, and describe effective middle schools are: (a) *An Agenda for Excellence at the Middle Level*, written by the National Association of Secondary School Principal’s Council on Middle Level Education in 1985; (b) *This We Believe: Keys to Educating Young Adolescents*, the publication of the Association for Middle Level Education in 2010; and (c) *Turning Points: Preparing American Youth for the 21st Century*, written by Carnegie Corporation’s Council on Adolescent Development in 1989. Identified characteristics for each publication are listed in Figure 6 as well as commonalities between the three.

Commonalities Among the Three Reports

Commonalities exist across the three influential reports, and each continues to help shape middle-level education (Anfara, 2001; Williams-Boyd, 2003). The goal of providing adolescents with developmentally responsive, challenging, empowering, and equitable schools is a common theme among the three influential publications. The documents provide a

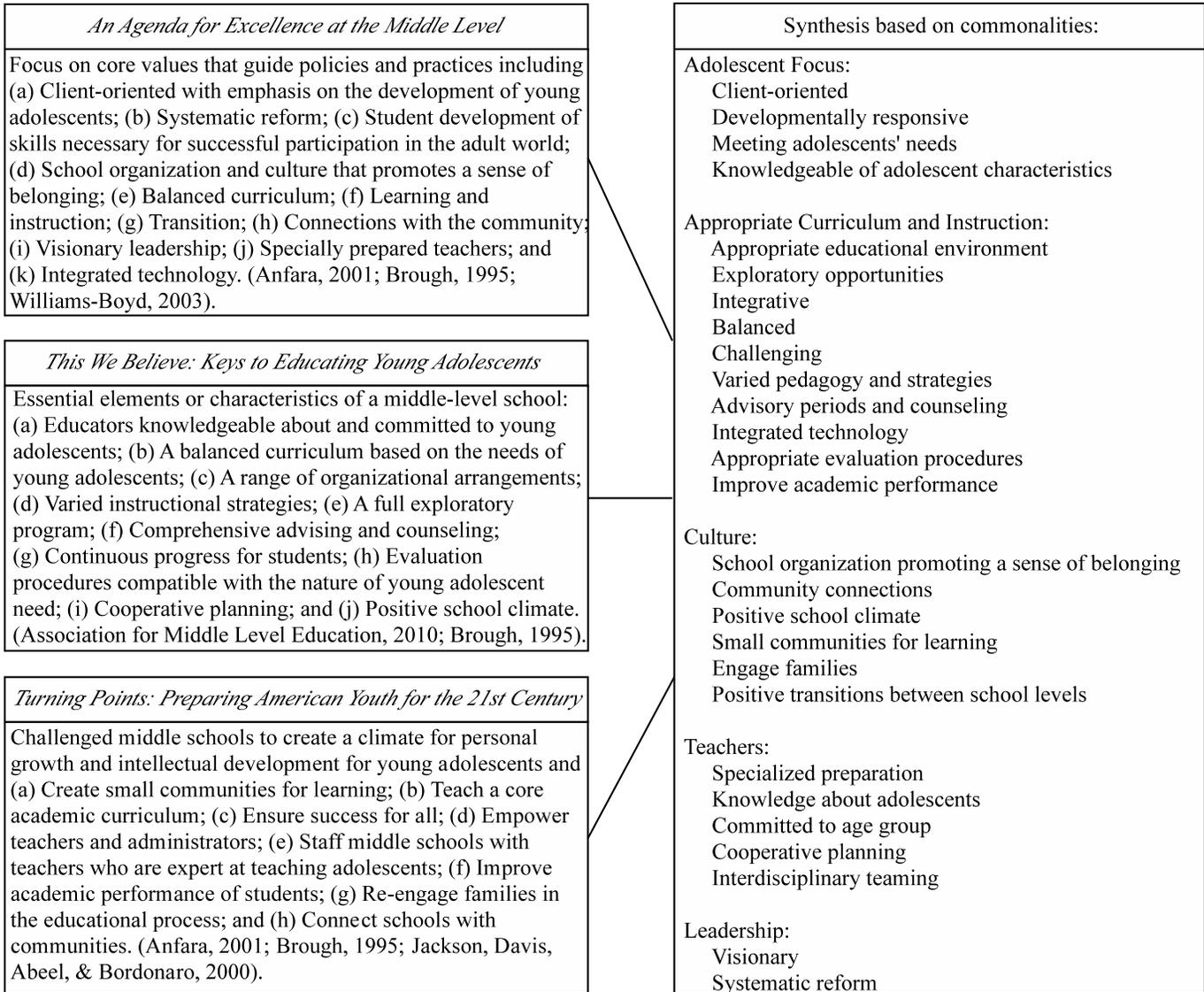


Figure 6: Commonalities in characteristics of effective middle schools among three influential documents in middle-level education.

foundation whereupon middle-level schools create programs, philosophies, policies, and practices (Williams-Boyd, 2003). They each continue to provide a valuable framework for middle grades education and prompt considerable interest on the subject of educating early adolescents (Jackson et al., 2000). The goal of each publication was to supply educators and various stakeholders with specific recommendations for middle-level school reform and

improvement efforts. Meeting the various needs of young adolescent learners and delivering to them an educational environment congruent with their unique characteristics is a clear purpose for middle schools.

Criticisms of Middle-Level Education

Disapproval, criticisms, and complaints have been voiced about middle-level education through the years. “Almost every aspect of secondary education has been the subject of dispute, bitter fighting, and uninformed debate” (Hargreaves, 1982, p. 77), and middle-level education is no different. “Sweeping statements have been made about the academic mediocrity of schools teaching young adolescents” (National Association of Secondary School Principals, 2006, p. xvi). Discontent has marred much of the history of middle-level education (Anfara, 2001; Lounsbury & Vars, 2005; Weiss & Kipnes, 2006).

Criticisms of the Junior High School

Dissatisfaction with education in the junior-high school has resonated since its earliest existence. By the 1960s, this dissatisfaction grew (Brough, 1995, p. 38). Educators, including John Lounsbury, Donald Eichhorn, and William Alexander, expressed their concerns about providing an appropriate education to the middle-level learner (Association for Middle Level Education, 2010; Eichhorn, 1980). Specific criticisms have been expressed about the junior-high school movement (Brough, 1995; Finn, 2006; Hargreaves, 1982).

One criticism was that the junior high school was nothing more than a miniature high school imitating the latter’s curriculum, pedagogy, and schedule (Alexander & George, 1981; Anfara, 2001; Grooms, 1967; Johnson, Dupuis, Musial, & Hall, 1994). Brough (1995) stated that the junior high school had adopted a “preparatory function” (p. 38) and operated similar

to a senior high with an emphasis on “content rather than exploration, departmentalization rather than integration, and an adherence to a rigid schedule” (p. 38).

Another criticism was that the junior high school was not meeting the unique needs of its student population (Brough, 1995; Noar, 1961). Noar stated that junior high schools were “falling short of helping children for whom they were designed” (p. 10). Helping students with social adjustment, emotional support, personal growth, and coping with adolescence was not part of the junior high curriculum. The developmental needs of the adolescent were overlooked (Alexander & George, 1981).

Some critics felt that the function of the junior high as a transitional bridge between elementary and senior high schools had been lost (Brough, 1995; Tirozzi, 2006). Tirozzi (2006) criticized middle-level reform efforts that paid no attention to the transition of students through the secondary grades. Tirozzi (2006) stated, “For too long middle level schools and high schools have operated in separate spheres” and referred to school leaders that have “been content to view the education of students as limited to the years when students grace their halls” (p. v). The “seamless track” (Tirozzi, 2006, p. v) between the two disparate entities of junior high and senior high did not exist.

Criticisms of the Middle School

Middle schools have been on the receiving end of criticisms and are on the defensive (Anfara, 2001). “Indictments that have been levied” against middle schools continue (Anfara, 2001; p. xv). The attack on middle schools and the flurry of disapproval and outspoken criticisms have resulted in middle school educators being defensive (Anfara, 2001). In 1998, the Southern Regional Education Board concluded that middle schools are “a ‘weak link’ in the K-12 education chain” (Anfara, 2001, p. xv). *Education Week* printed articles with candid

titles such as “A Crack in the Middle” and “Muddle in the Middle” in 1998, conveying an unimpressive view of middle-school education (Anfara, 2001). The word “wasteland” has been stated more than once when describing middle-school education (Anfara, 2001; Bradley, 1998). Tucker and Coddling (1998) referred to middle schools as “the wasteland of our primary and secondary landscape” (p. 153), and Felner, Shim, Brand, Favazza, and Seitsinger (2000) stated that some see the American middle school as a “vast wasteland” (p. 116).

Academic rigor, or lack thereof, and middle-level curricular choices, are sources of criticism in the middle school (Bradley, 1998). Bradley (1998) stated, “The middle school model has come under attack for supplanting academic rigor with a focus on students’ social, emotional, and physical needs” (p. 38). Curriculum has taken the brunt of the assault on middle schools (Powell & Van Zandt Allen, 2001) and has been characterized as “a mile wide and an inch deep” (Anfara, 2001, p. xvi). Powell and Van Zandt Allen (2001) stated that, “Few things are as complicated and debated as middle level curriculum” (p. 107). “The problem with middle school curriculum is that we ask students to give answers to questions they do not ask” (Brazee, 1997, p. 187). As The National Association of Secondary School Principals (2006) professed, making students feel welcomed and respected in schools with an emphasis on meeting the needs of the whole child can cause deficiencies in academic areas. Statements made by the National Association of Secondary School Principals (2006) included, “True respect for the whole student requires that a school take the next step to challenge students academically and intellectually” (p. xvi). The boldness in a statement such as this implores attention to the academic needs of the adolescent learner.

Not meeting the diverse needs of middle school students has been included in the attack on middle schools. Middle schools were developed to meet the needs of this unique

adolescent population, but criticisms have arisen that question this fulfillment. Anfara (2001) stated that middle schools have been “accused of falling short of helping the student for whom they were designed” (p. xv). Capelluti and Stokes (1991) stated, “Although there is considerable knowledge about the characteristics and interests of early adolescents, this information has not at all times been reflected in what and how we teach these students” (p. iii).

Achievement of middle school students has been criticized. The standards-based reform efforts and No Child Left Behind (NCLB) data confirm a decrease in achievement at the middle level. Finn (2006) claims that there is a “parade of evidence” that verifies the “fateful plunge” (p. I) in achievement in American schools that begins at the middle-level. During these middle school years, other nations begin to outpace the United States in the race for “a well-educated population, skilled workforce, and long-term prosperity” (Finn, 2006, p. I).

Implementation fidelity has been a topic of middle-level criticism. Oftentimes, actual middle school practices do not coincide with recommendations made from the middle school concept. In 1975, the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development criticized middle schools by reporting “The available research indicates a significant gap between the main tenets of the theoretical middle school concept proposed by leading middle school authorities and actual educational practices in most middle schools” (p. 3).

Research on Middle-Level Education

Research on middle-level education has taken varying paths using different methodologies, but always with the clear goal of improving educational outcomes for the adolescent learner. A large amount of this research has centered on student achievement as an

objective measure of success. Although much research exists investigating middle-level education, a narrow attempt is made below to provide an overview of studies specifically addressing the effectiveness of middle-level education, both with junior high schools and middle schools.

Research on the Effectiveness of the Junior High School

Educational researchers have attempted to determine the effectiveness of junior high schools throughout their history (Calhoun, 1983; Hays, 1966; Henderson, 1962; Howard, 1964; Lounsbury & Marani, 1964). Research efforts have been made to determine whether junior high schools met the goals that advocates of the junior high school movement had for it. Many of these studies were conducted during the 1960s when middle school advocates began to examine and scrutinize the effectiveness of junior high schools (Calhoun, 1983). Frequently, studies confirmed that junior high schools were failing in their attempt to meet the needs of their students (Calhoun, 1983).

An early study, conducted in 1918 by the North Central Association of Colleges and Secondary Schools, showed a wide discrepancy among existing junior high school programs. A survey was conducted that studied the practices of individual junior high schools to determine generalizations about this new school model. The 293 survey responses revealed substantial differences in programs, practices, and grade configurations in existing junior high schools. No clear purposes or goals of the junior high school were determined (Calhoun, 1983).

With the middle school movement gaining momentum in the 1960s, so too did the scrutiny of existing junior high school goals and practices. Many research studies conducted attempted to evaluate the effectiveness of junior high schools (Hays, 1966; Henderson, 1962;

Howard, 1964; Lounsbury & Marani, 1964). These studies sought to determine whether junior high schools were meeting the needs of their student populations and intended goals.

Lounsbury and Marani (1964) conducted a shadow study with the purpose of comparing the actual functions of junior high schools to the goals and purposes of the junior high school movement. To determine actual events occurring in each junior high location, they enlisted 102 observers to witness first-hand the experiences of eighth graders. Their sample consisted of 102 shadow studies in 94 schools across 26 states. The observers frequently found the schools they visited did not meet the needs and interests of the students they studied (Calhoun, 1983; Lounsbury & Marani, 1964).

Junior high school research continued along with the scrutiny of junior high schools. Another study, conducted by Howard (1964) in Austin, Texas, failed to demonstrate the effectiveness of junior high schools. Based on educational literature, Howard created a set of guiding principles based on the purposes, functions, and objectives of the junior high school. By surveying 89 randomly selected faculty members from ten junior high schools, Howard identified discrepancies between recommendations from the literature and actual practices. The discrepancies he found included the areas of curricular choices, philosophies, and policies (Calhoun, 1983; Howard, 1964).

In 1966, Hays conducted another qualitative study while investigating junior high schools. Through a questionnaire that he distributed to 100 junior high schools of which 82 were returned, Hays too concluded there were deficiencies in this level of schooling. Through the perceptions of principals and superintendents, Hays concluded that students' needs were not being fulfilled in the junior high school. Hays determined "Definite room for improvement in all areas" of junior high school functions (Calhoun, 1983, p. 65).

In yet another study investigating junior high school functions, Henderson (1962) found that schools did not meet the criteria set forth by the educational literature on junior high schools. Through a survey of 40 schools and personal visits to half of those, Henderson concluded that schools were not meeting the standards in providing students with educational environments that met their needs. He urged these schools to pay more attention to the recommendations from the literature and junior high school experts (Calhoun, 1983; Henderson, 1962).

Research on the Features and Effectiveness of the Middle School

Middle-level education research is “coming of age” (Irvin & Hough, 1997, p. 3). The focus of much of middle-level education research is on the relationship between the features of the middle school concept and student achievement (Flowers, Mertens, & Mulhall, 2003; Lee & Smith, 1993; Weiss & Kipnes, 2006). Van Zandt and Totten (1995) stated that prior to 1990, middle-level research focused on how to meet the needs of the adolescent learner. They further stated that current research represents “a shift toward the importance of documenting the *effectiveness* of these programs” (Van Zandt & Totten, 1995, p. 20). Some of the features of the middle school concept that have been researched are teacher preparation, instructional features, and grade configurations.

Research on middle-level teacher preparation and student outcomes. Specialized preparation of teachers is an important middle-school concept feature. Research has been conducted examining the relationship between middle school teacher preparation and school effectiveness (Brogdon, 1978; Walter & Fanslow, 1980). Researchers at the middle-level have not overlooked the important role that teachers play in their schools (Calhoun, 1983). They can positively or negatively affect the lives of students.

As middle schools began to gain in numbers, two studies were conducted to determine special qualifications and characteristics middle school teachers needed to serve students effectively (Brogdon, 1978; Walter & Fanslow, 1980). In 1978, Brogdon surveyed middle school teachers, administrators, and counselors and found 18 competencies or attributes middle school teachers needed. Interestingly, Brogdon's (1978) first three out of four attributes, listed in order of importance, focused on adolescent students' unique needs: understanding social and emotional development of the adolescent, recognizing individual learning levels and designing a teaching approach to meet individual needs, and understanding intellectual development stages of the adolescent.

Walter and Fanslow (1980) believed that improperly prepared middle school teachers were a major cause for middle schools failing adolescents. These researchers sought to define a list of necessary qualifications for middle school teachers. Walter and Fanslow (1980) developed a questionnaire based on middle school teachers' needed competencies and distributed it to 135 middle schools. From the results of the survey of middle school teachers, Walter and Fanslow (1980) found 14 qualifications middle school teachers needed, many of which specifically addressed the special needs of the adolescent learner.

Research on middle-level instructional practices and student outcomes.

Instructional features at the middle-level of schooling have been researched. Some of the topics have included departmentalization, grouping practices, and team or interdisciplinary teaching.

Early in the studies investigating the relationship between features of the middle school concept and student achievement was the quantitative work of Lee and Smith (1993). They were interested in the structural changes of America's middle schools and the effect

these changes have on student outcomes and student engagement. Lee and Smith examined restructuring elements: (a) less departmentalization; (b) more heterogeneous grouped instruction; (c) more team teaching; and (d) a composite restructuring index, consisting of 16 measures, all of which served as independent variables in the study. Dependent variables included student achievement, using existing data from the 1988 National Education Longitudinal Study (NELS) in reading and math; student academic engagement, including homework completion and preparing for class; and at-risk behaviors. Lee and Smith used a random sample of 8,845 eighth-grade students in 377 middle-grades schools. Through hierarchical linear modeling, Lee and Smith found that the restructuring elements of less departmentalization within schools resulted in higher achievement and less social-class differentiation. They also found that team teaching is associated with higher achievement. These findings by Lee and Smith lend empirical support to the movement to restructure schools for adolescent learners.

Interdisciplinary teaching, known as team teaching, and its relationship to school effectiveness has been examined by researchers. Much research on middle-level education has been conducted by Flowers, Mertens, and Mulhall throughout the past two decades (Flowers, Mertens, & Mulhall, 1999; Flowers, Mertens, & Mulhall, 2000a; Flowers, Mertens, & Mulhall, 2000b; Flowers, Mertens, & Mulhall, 2003; Mertens & Flowers, 2003a; Mertens & Flowers, 2003b; Mertens, Flowers, & Mulhall, 1998; Mertens, Flowers, & Mulhall, 2002). They have focused their research on schools that serve young adolescents. Their dedication to learning more about middle-level education is apparent in their research agenda, which includes: (a) analyzing how middle schools improve; (b) studying the impact that improvements have on teachers and students; and (c) exploring how successful outcomes can

be replicated in other schools (Flowers, Mertens, & Mulhall, 2003). Through their research, Flowers, Mertens, and Mulhall have provided to principals, teachers, and middle school advocates, practical lessons and direction for reform and improvement in the middle grades (Flowers, Mertens, & Mulhall, 2003). Specifically, Flowers, Mertens, and Mulhall made the following conclusion based on their numerous studies: “Interdisciplinary teams with regular common planning time, staffed by teachers prepared to teach young adolescents, tend to engage in classroom practices that result in better student behavior and higher achievement” (Flowers, Mertens, & Mulhall, 2003, p. 1).

Research on varying grade configurations at the middle-level and student outcomes. Much research has been conducted attempting to resolve the question of what best grade configuration serves adolescent students (Calhoun, 1983; Weiss & Kipnes, 2006). As Calhoun (1983) stated, “For many years, educators grappled with the question of the proper arrangement of grades for the middle years of schooling” (p. 6). This question continues to be unresolved. Various middle-level grade configurations currently exist. The studies shared below have each attempted to identify whether or not grade configurations have an effect on student outcomes.

During the 1960s, many educators researched varying grade configurations within middle-level schooling and reached the same conclusion: Grade arrangements were not as important as other relevant factors when teaching adolescents (Conant, 1960; Gerson, 1968; Grieder, 1969; Howard & Stoumbis, 1970; Johnson, 1963; Vars, 1966, Wilson, 1969; Zdanowicz, 1968). These educators did not support one grade configuration over another (Calhoun, 1983). Statements that came from their research included:

- “The place of grades 7, 8, and 9 in the organization of a school system is of less importance than the program provided for adolescent youth” (Conant, 1960, p. 61).
- “Any pattern is satisfactory that gives *identity* to youths” (Johnson, 1963, p. 51).
- Grade configurations were not important if students had “good teachers and a sound curriculum” (Vars, 1966, p. 110).
- “Grade combinations are much less important than the focus and spirit of the whole operation” (Wilson, 1969, p. 52).
- “It is doubtful if sufficient data will ever be available which demonstrates that one type of school organization is superior to another” (Gerson, 1968, p. 295).
- “The inescapable conclusion is that, so far as present knowledge indicates, it doesn’t make much if any difference how schools are organized by grades” (Grieder, 1969, p. 10).
- There is “little basis for supporting any one organizational pattern over another” (Howard & Stoumbis, 1970, p. 204).
- ”A specific grade organization is apparently not absolutely essential in meeting youngsters’ needs” (Zdanowicz, 1968, p. 17).

Grade configurations continue to be researched. Weiss and Kipnes (2006) conducted a quantitative study in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, investigating the effects of different grade configurations. The Philadelphia school district contained about equal numbers of middle schools and K-8 schools. One of the research questions in their investigation raised the

question of whether or not outcomes in eighth-grade varied based on students attending a middle school or a K-8 school. Survey responses were taken and analyzed through the use of multilevel analysis strategies, linear regression, and bivariate comparison. Weiss and Kipnes (2006) found differences in eighth-grade outcomes by school type. Grades were worse, more classes were failed, and a greater number of absences were discovered in middle schools than in K-8 schools (Weiss & Kipnes, 2006).

Methodologies Used to Study Middle-Level Education

There are five methodologies commonly used to study middle-level education. They are surveys, shadow studies, quantitative studies, action research studies, and case studies. Each method can be beneficial for the middle-level practitioner. Differences among the methods exist in procedures, analytical techniques, researcher role, and context. Each method may add valuable information for educators to better understand middle-level education.

Surveys

Survey methods are useful in obtaining information across large distances with large samples. Surveys have been used when studying movements, problems, practices, and issues across vast areas in a reasonable amount of time (Irvin & Hough, 1997). Surveys have been conducted at the middle-level of education to learn about collaboration practices, flexible scheduling, block scheduling, interdisciplinary teaming, meeting the needs of the adolescent learner, and curriculum (George & Oldaker, 1985a). Numerous surveys have been conducted studying the implementation of middle school programs and practices (Alexander & McEwin, 1989b; Epstein & Mac Iver, 1990; McEwin, Dickinson, & Jenkins, 1996; Valentine, Clark, Irvin, Keefe, & Melton, 1993; Valentine, Clark, Nickerson, & Keefe, 1981). The researchers investigated the degree of implementation of these signature practices in various middle

school settings. Through these surveys over a span of 27 years, practitioners have a better understanding of middle-level education through the descriptive data provided (Irvin & Hough, 1997).

Shadow Studies

Shadow studies enlist observers to follow participants in actual settings with the goal of revealing real happenings within various contexts (Irvin & Hough, 1997). This methodology has been used to study middle-level education. Numerous shadow studies have been completed, each providing a realistic glimpse into the life and experiences of adolescents in middle-level schools (Lounsbury & Clark, 1990; Lounsbury & Johnston, 1985; Lounsbury & Johnston, 1988; Lounsbury & Marani, 1964; Lounsbury, Marani, & Compton, 1980).

Lounsbury, working with other scholars for over 25 years, has conducted many shadow studies exposing adolescents' experiences in a typical school day. Their research during these years focused on sixth, seventh, eighth, and ninth grades. Their research agenda involved learning from real-life experiences of adolescents to help in school improvement and reform efforts.

Quantitative Studies

Quantitative research techniques have been used to study middle-level education. This method employs a deductive approach to analyzing data through the use of numbers and formulas (Irvin & Hough, 1997). Lee and Smith conducted a quantitative study in 1993 using a hierarchical linear model to investigate the relationship between middle school structures and student achievement. Weiss and Kipnes (2006) used multilevel regression and bivariate comparisons to study the effects of different grade configurations on student outcomes. Bedard and Do (2005) studied the effect of school structure, junior high versus middle, on

student outcomes measured by on-time high school completion through quantitative techniques. Studies like these help middle-level advocates gain knowledge of specific middle-level school characteristics such as school structures, grade configurations, interdisciplinary teaching, scheduling practices, and grouping characteristics and their relationship to student outcomes, often using standardized test scores as the dependent variable (Bedard & Do, 2005; Lee & Smith, 1993; Weiss & Kipnes, 2006).

Action Research Studies

Local school districts can use action research as a meaningful way to study specific instances or experiences in middle-level education at a particular site (Irvin & Hough, 1997; Powell & Faircloth, 1997). Collaboration is at the heart of this methodology. There is value when a collaborative form of inquiry is used to investigate questions of mutual concern. Participants tend to work together to find the answers (Powell & Faircloth, 1997). McLaughlin, Earle, Hall, Miller, and Wheeler (1995) emphasized that in action research, the research question is posed by the client, not the questions or notions of researchers. This methodology has been used to study middle-level learning environments. Qualitative or quantitative methods can be used in action research. Oftentimes, action research is used to study specific issues involving curriculum and instruction, each focusing on one particular situation in time. Burnaford, Beane, and Brodhagen (1994) used a site-based action research strategy to study and demonstrate how middle school teachers and university professors work together to explore curricular issues. Due to specific participants, generalizations are not normally made from the results of action research (Irvin & Hough, 1997).

Case Studies

Case studies have been used to study middle-level education. Through a combination of data collected using interviews, observations, questionnaires, and various school artifacts, much can be learned about effective middle-level schooling for the adolescent learner. During 1980-1981, Lipsitz (1984) conducted case studies of four successful middle schools. They were located in Kentucky, Michigan, North Carolina, and New York; three of the case sites had grades six-eighth, and the fourth site had grades fifth-eighth. Lipsitz's added great detail in identifying characteristics of successful middle schools. She concluded, "Happy schools have distinct personalities; they achieve clear definition in the midst of confusion about schooling for young adolescents" (Lipsitz, 1984, p. 23).

Criticisms of Middle-Level Education Research

More than a century of research has been conducted on behalf of middle-level education, and greater understanding about the needs of the adolescent learner has been revealed. There remains much to be researched, learned, and discovered to improve educational outcomes for the middle-level learner. The implementation of middle school practices in other school levels make it essential to research both the positive and negative effects of the middle school concept (Irvin & Hough, 1997). The effectiveness of these practices must continue to be studied.

Multiple problems are inherent with this research. One problem exists with the definition of the middle school concept. Educators and researchers define the middle school and its features in varying ways. Inconsistent definitions lead to measurement and interpretation difficulties. Another problem exists when implementing the middle school concept. During the implementation process, the middle school features may vary in

implementation fidelity, intensity, and setting, creating problems in interpreting results of research studies (Nicely, 2012). Research conclusions, therefore, must be considered carefully. The difficulties encountered in middle-level research have not deterred researchers' efforts in better defining what makes a middle school successful.

Weaknesses in middle-level research exist. Educational writers point out that for some middle-level experts, the research available is "impractical, difficult to understand, and somewhat intimidating" (Irvin & Hough, 1997, p. 3). Van Zandt and Totten (1995) stated weaknesses of existing middle-level research:

Establishment of a solid research base remains crucial, not only for determining movement credibility but for learning how better to address the needs of today's young adolescent. Thus, future research efforts must focus on the identification of specific practices demonstrating positive, conclusive evidence of effectiveness with middle level students as well as discovering patterns of practices that best predict success for young adolescents. (p. 1)

Problems associated with middle-level research are: weak research designs, a shortage of comparable data, and the frequency of extraneous variables (Van Zandt & Totten, 1995). Van Zandt and Totten (1995) argued, "The research base remains sparse, weak, and inconclusive" (p. 1). Irvin and Hough (1997) point out that consumers of middle-level research are reluctant, intimidated, and hesitant when using research studies. Certainly, the goal of my research is not to fix all of the above-mentioned problems and shortcomings. However, it is my sincere goal to add to the knowledge base of middle-level education.

Chapter 3 Methods

One methodology used in educational research is qualitative techniques, including case studies, which were used in this study. The use of qualitative research methods may lead to rich, descriptive results when studying a specific topic or issue (Qualitative Research Consultants Association, 2014). Through the procedural sequences of conducting case studies, contributions to educational knowledge, practice, and policy can be made (Freebody, 2003). Qualitative research was used for this study with the goal of adding insightful knowledge to the research base in middle school education. Acquiring and analyzing educational experiences and insights from the participants may affect middle school practice. This chapter contains descriptions of the framework and procedures for this study.

Research Design

This was a qualitative, descriptive, cross-case study of the perspectives of middle-level school personnel in two middle schools in a public school system in a school system in a southeastern state. This qualitative approach was conducted to contribute to the discussion on what constitutes an effective education for middle-level learners through in-depth interviews of teachers and administrators and document analyses. The teachers and administrators' viewpoints, feelings, and outlooks on middle-level education were examined. "What," "how," and "why" questions were asked, and according to Yin (1994), these types of questions can be answered through the use of case studies (p.19). Maykut and Morehouse (1994) contended that a "deeper understanding of experience from the perspectives of the participants" can be made through qualitative approaches (p. 44). Rossman and Rallis (2012) portrayed a case study as reports filled with rich description that "illustrates the complexities

of a situation, depicts how the passage of time has shaped events, provides vivid material, and presents differing perspectives or opinions” (p. 103).

School System Selection

The Sugarloaf Public School System (pseudonym) in a southeastern state was chosen by the researcher as the site for the research. The researcher was interested in helping school systems in improvement efforts for the education of adolescent populations. Seven years of teaching in grades four, six, and seven have given me various experiences in education. Three of these years were within a middle school, serving adolescents. It is within the middle school that I found my true passion for teaching while meeting the needs of this age group.

By studying what constitutes good middle schools through in-depth interviews of teachers and administrators in Sugarloaf County Public Schools, I gained insights that may be of help in school improvement efforts. This study may benefit other school systems that want to improve methods for educating their adolescent populations.

Gaining Access to the School System and Schools

The following steps were completed by the researcher to gain access to the Sugarloaf Public School System and to receive permission to conduct the study:

1. The researcher obtained permission from the Virginia Tech Institutional Review Board by completing an IRB Research Application. Adjustments were made to the methods protocol to complete this process.
2. A letter was submitted to the Sugarloaf school system superintendent requesting permission to conduct the study, describing the purpose of the study, and explaining the interview process (see Appendix B).

3. A follow-up meeting with the Sugarloaf school system superintendent was scheduled to discuss questions and concerns regarding the proposed study.
4. Letters were sent to each of the middle school principals at the two middle schools in the study requesting access to their school, and explaining the purpose of the study and interview process (see Appendix B).

Descriptions of the Schools and Communities

Sugarloaf County Public Schools is a socio-economically diverse place located in a southeastern state. The two middle schools in the study, Dorchester Middle School and J. K. Walters Middle School, differ in student demographics (see Table 1) and staff's educational attainment (see Table 2).

Dorchester Middle School and J. K. Walters Middle School have both been identified by the National Forum to Accelerate Middle-Grades Reform as Schools-to-Watch (The National Forum to Accelerate Middle-Grades Reform, 2014). The Forum began identifying middle schools in the United States that were moving toward high performance in 1999. The Forum believes in academically excellent, developmentally responsive, and socially equitable schools that serve the educational needs of students in their adolescent years.

Populations

The researcher chose Dorchester Middle School and J. K. Walters Middle School because they are the smallest and largest middle schools in the school system.

Five populations were defined for this study: administrative staff, guidance staff, core instructional staff, exploratory instructional staff, and special education instructional staff.

The population for administrative staff included principals and assistant principals. The

Table 1

Dorchester Middle School and J. K. Walters Middle School: Student Demographics Matrix

Middle school	Students who receive free or reduced-price lunch	Minority students	Special education students	Gifted students	Sugarloaf County Junior Community Scholars
	%	%	%	%	%
Dorchester Middle School	59.06	< 4	18	20	18
J. K. Walters Middle School	37.02	6	17	11	21

Note. Sugarloaf County Junior Community Scholars are middle school students who demonstrate a high level of citizenship and community service, academic excellence, and outstanding attendance.

Table 2

Dorchester Middle School and J. K. Walters Middle School: Staff's Educational Attainment Matrix

Middle school	Bachelor's degree	Master's degree	Doctoral degree	Teachers not highly qualified
	%	%	%	%
Dorchester Middle School	46	54	0	0
J. K. Walters Middle School	58	40	2	0

population for guidance staff included guidance counselors. The population for core instructional staff included English, mathematics, social science, and science teachers. The population for exploratory instructional staff included band, Spanish, art, business/computers, technology explorations, chorus, and agriScience teachers. The population for special education instructional staff included special education teachers. See Table 3 for the years of

experience in education and education at the middle-level of participants from both middle schools.

Selection of administrative staff participants. Participants for the administrative staff population for this study included middle school principals and assistant principals at Dorchester Middle School and J. K. Walters Middle School. Two principals and one assistant principal were invited and participated in this study.

Selection of guidance staff participants. Participants for the guidance staff population for this study included guidance counselors at Dorchester Middle School and J. K. Walters Middle School. Two guidance counselors were invited and participated in this study.

Table 3

Years of Experience in Education and Education at the Middle-Level of Participants

Middle school and position	Years of experience in education	Years of experience in middle level education
Dorchester Middle School principal	36	11
Dorchester Middle School guidance counselor	10	2
Dorchester Middle School exploratory teacher	19	10
Dorchester Middle School English teacher	23	23
Dorchester Middle School mathematics teacher	7	7
Dorchester Middle School social science teacher	28	24
Dorchester Middle School science teacher	21	15
Dorchester Middle School special education teacher	13	13
J. K. Walters Middle School principal	18	9
J. K. Walters Middle School assistant principal	27	24
J. K. Walters Middle School guidance counselor	4	4
J. K. Walters Middle School exploratory teacher	16	8
J. K. Walters Middle School English teacher	22	20
J. K. Walters Middle School mathematics teacher	15	14
J. K. Walters Middle School social science teacher	12	7
J. K. Walters Middle School science teacher	5	5
J. K. Walters Middle School special education teacher	16	7

Selection of core instructional staff participants. Participants for the core instructional staff population for this study included English, mathematics, social science, and science teachers at Dorchester Middle School and J. K. Walters Middle School. One English teacher, one mathematics teacher, one social science teacher, and one science teacher were randomly selected from each of the two middle schools for participation. Eight core instructional staff members were invited and participated in this study.

Selection of exploratory instructional staff participants. Participants for the exploratory instructional staff population for this study included exploratory teachers at Dorchester Middle School and J. K. Walters Middle School. One exploratory teacher was randomly selected from each of the two middle schools for participation. Exploratory teachers included band, Spanish, art, business/computers, technology explorations, chorus, and agriScience. Two exploratory teachers were invited and participated in this study.

Selection of special education instructional staff participants. Participants for the special education instructional staff population for this study included special education teachers at Dorchester Middle School and J. K. Walters Middle School. One special education teacher was randomly selected from each of the two middle schools. Two special education teachers were invited and participated in this study.

Data Collection

Data for the study were collected from two sources: documents and individual interviews.

Data source: Documents. The researcher analyzed documents that provided evidence of school-level successes at Dorchester Middle School and J. K. Walters Middle School. The school documents analyzed were 2014-2015 school improvement plans, 2013-2014 annual

reports, and 2015 Schools to Watch re-designation applications. Yin (1994) stated, “For case studies, the most important use of documents is to corroborate and augment evidence from other sources” (p. 81).

Data source: Individual interviews. Face-to-face interviews with each participant were conducted to collect data. Individual interviews were used to gather information and descriptive data from the participants. Seidman (2013) described the power of interviews as responses that reflect other people’s stories, and their “stories are a way of knowing” (p. 7). Confidentiality was assured. A code was assigned to each participant and used on each page of the transcript. A list of the participants’ names and corresponding codes was kept in a word-processing file on a password-protected computer. The interviews provided the interview participants with an opportunity to “select details of their experience from their stream of consciousness” (Seidman, 2013, p. 7). Seidman (2013) stated, “The goal of the process is to understand how our participants understand and make meaning of their experience” (p. 27).

Development of the interview protocol. The research questions and domains were used to guide the development of interview items. Interview items are in Table 4. Additional probing questions were developed and used when more elaborate answers were needed.

Research Question 1: What are the perspectives of middle school teachers and administrators on a good middle school in two schools in a school system?

Table 4

Research Question 1 Interview Matrix

Domain	Subdomain	Interview questions / statements	Possible stems / probes
Personal perspective	Good middle school	What is your idea of a good middle school?	Would the words philosophy or perspective help? Tell me about your overall view of middle-level education.
Personal perspective	Effective middle school	How would you define an effective middle school?	
Personal perspective	Middle school design	If you were able to design a middle school, what would you include?	Why would you include (<u>each response</u>)? Is there anything else?
Personal perspective	Middle school curriculum	What would the curriculum be in your ideal middle school?	
Personal perspective	Middle school instruction	How would you organize your ideal middle school for instruction?	How would you structure your ideal middle school? For example, would you have departments?
Personal perspective	Schools to Watch	What do you think the Schools to Watch program would have to offer you in designing your ideal middle school?	
Personal perspective	Role of parents	What role would parents play in your ideal middle school?	How would you involve parents?
Personal	Grade	What do you think the	In what ways do you

perspective	configuration	appropriate grade configuration is for the adolescent student? Why?	think grade arrangements affect the learning environment at the middle-level?
Staff learning opportunities	Sources of information	Where do you get most of your information about middle-level education?	<p>In what types of professional development opportunities have you participated in?</p> <p>Conferences? Workshops? Webinars? Book studies? Websites? Others?</p> <p>What professional development opportunities have been focused on middle-level education that you have been a part of?</p> <p>How has this professional development influenced your views?</p> <p>What was the best professional development opportunity you have participated in? Why was it a great opportunity?</p>
Central office perspectives	Central office perspectives on middle-level education	Tell me what you think your central office professional personnel think about middle-level education.	<p>What does your superintendent think about middle-level education?</p> <p>How has the superintendent's views</p>

			<p>affected your views about middle-level education?</p> <p>What does your middle-level supervisor think about middle-level education?</p> <p>How has the middle-level supervisor's views affected your views about middle-level education?</p>
Board of education perspectives	School board perspectives on middle-level education	Tell me what you think your Board of Education thinks about middle-level education.	<p>Tell me about any members that may have views on middle-level education.</p> <p>What are those views?</p> <p>Tell me what your school board chairman thinks about middle-level education.</p> <p>How have their views affected your thinking about middle-level education?</p> <p>What are your school board's expectations for middle schools?</p> <p>What information comes to you from your school board in relation to middle-level education?</p>
DOE perspectives	DOE requirements	How have state requirements affected your thinking about middle-level education?	Can you think of any State Department of Education requirements that have

			<p>affected your views of middle-level education?</p> <p>What do you think the role of the State Board of Education should be in middle-level education?</p> <p>Application of consequences for not performing?</p> <p>Setting standards?</p> <p>Monitoring performance?</p>
Community perspectives	Other interest groups	Tell me who else you think is interested in middle-level education in your community.	How have these people affected your thinking about middle-level education?

Research Question 2: How do the perspectives of middle school teachers and administrators on a good middle school compare and contrast to the recommendations of the National Association of Secondary School Principals Council on Middle Level Education in 1985, Carnegie Corporation’s Council on Adolescent Development in 1989, and the Association for Middle Level Education in 2010?

The researcher compared and contrasted the participants’ responses to the recommendations made by these three influential organizations. Interview data were evaluated by identifying similarities and differences among the responses and reports.

Research Question 3: How do the perspectives of middle school teachers and administrators compare and contrast in the two schools?

The researcher compared and contrasted the participants' responses from teachers and administrators at Dorchester Middle School to the participants' responses from teachers and administrators at J. K. Walters Middle School. Interview data were evaluated by identifying similarities and differences between the two schools.

Content validation of the interview items. Interview items were reviewed by a panel of experienced educators in middle-level education for content validation. A panel of six experienced educators was formed that included two administrative staff members, two core instructional staff members, and two exploratory instructional staff members from another middle school in Sugarloaf County Public Schools. A content validation instrument was used (see Appendix C). An email was sent to the panel members asking them to participate in the study (see Appendix C). Upon their response, an email was sent containing the content validation instrument as an attachment (see Appendix C). Panel members were asked to complete the content validation instrument, and return it by email. The respondents were coded using numbers (1 through 6) in the order they were received. A list of the panel members' names and assigned codes was kept in a separate word-processing file on a password-protected personal computer. The researcher used the content validation instrument to assess the relationship between the research questions and interview items. The researcher checked for validation by assessing the alignment of interview questions to the domains of interest. The researcher checked for clarity of each interview item. See Table 5 for the changes that were made to the test interview protocol.

Table 5

Test Interview Protocol Changes

Interview protocol used during content validation	Test interview protocol
3. If you were able to design a middle school, what would you include?	3. If you were able to create your own middle school, what would you include?
6. What do you think the Schools to Watch program would have to offer you in designing your ideal middle school?	<p>6. What do you think the Schools to Watch program has to offer you in designing your ideal middle school?</p> <p>Probe: How about the program's emphasis on a school that is appropriate for the age group?</p> <p>Probe: How about the program's emphasis on fairness to all students?</p> <p>Probe: How about the program's emphasis on academic achievement?</p>
<p>8. What do you think the appropriate grade configuration is for the adolescent student? Why?</p> <p>Probe: In what ways do you think grade arrangements affect the learning environment at the middle-level?</p>	<p>8. What do you think is the appropriate combination of grades for the adolescent student? Why?</p> <p>Probe: Do you think the adolescent student needs a school with grades 5-6-7 or 6-7-8 or any other combination? Why did you select that combination?</p> <p>Probe: In what ways do you think grade configurations affect the learning environment at the middle-level?</p>
19. Do you have any other thoughts?	19. Do you have any other thoughts about education for middle-level learners?

Testing the interview protocol. The amended interview protocol was practiced and tested with one middle school administrator and one middle school teacher not included in the study. These two participants were randomly selected from the principals and teachers who completed the content validation instrument. By practicing the interview protocol before the actual interviews were conducted for this study, the researcher had an opportunity to make changes and modifications to the interview protocol.

The test interview participants were notified by email of available dates and times for the interview (see Appendix D). They were asked to select a preferred time and to respond by email. The researcher confirmed the date and time with the test interview participants by email (see Appendix D). The interviews were recorded with two devices: (1) a personal MacBook Pro computer owned by the researcher, and (2) a handheld recorder. Digitally recorded interviews were sent to and transcribed by Synergy Transcription Services. A code was assigned to each test interview participant. The principal participant was assigned the code IP, and the teacher participant was assigned the code IT. This assigned code was placed on each page of the transcript. A list containing the participants' names and codes was kept in a separate word-processing file on a password-protected computer.

Analyzing the test interview data. The researcher used the constant comparative method of Maykut and Morehouse (1994) to analyze the test interview data. The process for this method is detailed in the Data Analysis section.

The test interview data were coded by the researcher and used to identify potential interview item weaknesses and to assess whether the data collected were related to the domains of interest. The researcher determined the data gathered was meaningful for the proposed study, and these data could be used to answer the research questions. Testing the

interview process provided the researcher with an opportunity to practice her interviewing skills and techniques. The flow of the interview was also tested during this practice process. See Table 6 for the changes that were made to the interview protocol.

Table 6

Interview Protocol Changes

Test interview protocol	Interview protocol
<p>8. What do you think is the appropriate combination of grades for the adolescent student? Why?</p> <p>Probe: Do you think the adolescent student needs a school with grades 5-6-7 or 6-7-8 or any other combination? Why did you select that combination?</p> <p>Probe: In what ways do you think grade configurations affect the learning environment at the middle-level?</p>	<p>8. What do you think is the appropriate combination of grades for the adolescent student? For example a school with grades 5-6-7 or 6-7-8 or any other?</p> <p>Probe: Why did you select that combination of grades?</p> <p>Probe: In what ways do you think grade configurations affect the learning environment at the middle-level?</p>

Administering the interview protocol. The interviews were conducted in the two middle schools that were part of the study. The principal was asked to schedule a room that was private, quiet, and comfortable for the times of the interviews. The procedures used for administering the interviews follow:

Scheduling the interviews. The interview participants were notified by email of available dates and times for the interviews (see Appendix E). They were asked to select three preferred times and to respond by email. Interviews were scheduled on a first-come, first-served basis. The interviewer confirmed the date and time with the interview participant and the building principal by email (see Appendix E).

Informed consent acquisitions. At the beginning of each interview, the interviewer introduced herself, provided a brief explanation as to the purpose of the study, and reviewed the informed consent (see Appendix E). Following the introduction, written consent was obtained. A copy of this written consent was provided to the participant. A copy was kept for the researcher’s records.

Conducting the interviews. Individual interviews were conducted following the interview schedule using the final protocol. The interviews were recorded with two devices: (1) a personal MacBook Pro computer owned by the researcher, and (2) a handheld recorder.

Data Management

The researcher carefully managed the document analyses and interview data as follows:

Data source: Documents. The researcher labeled the data from the documents using the coding system in Table 7. The researcher assigned to each school document, three symbols from the document coding system indicating the source, the school, and the document name. See Table 8 for a complete list of document codes used for the study. The assigned code was placed on each page of the school improvement plan, the annual report, and the Schools-to-Watch re-designation application.

Table 7

Document Analyses Coding System

Symbol	Meaning
D	Document
1	Dorchester Middle School
2	J. K. Walters Middle School
SIP	School improvement plan
AR	Annual report 2013-2014
STW	Schools to Watch re-designation application

Table 8

Codes for Documents

Code	Middle school and document
D1SIP	Document, Dorchester Middle School, school improvement plan
D2SIP	Document, J. K. Walters Middle School, school improvement plan
D1AR	Document, Dorchester Middle School, annual report
D2AR	Document, J. K. Walters Middle School, annual report
D1STW	Document, Dorchester Middle School, Schools to Watch re-designation application
D2STW	Document, J. K. Walters Middle School, Schools to Watch re-designation application

Data source: Individual interviews. Digitally recorded interviews were sent to and transcribed by Synergy Transcription Services. Once the transcriptions were received, the researcher checked for accuracy of the transcriptions by listening to the digital recordings. Transcriptions were sent by email to each interview participant to check for accuracy (see Appendix E). Digital recordings of transcripts were stored in a secure location on a password-protected computer. Hardcopies of transcripts were kept securely in a lockbox in the researcher’s home. Upon completion of the study, all transcripts were destroyed.

The researcher labeled the data from the interviews using the coding system in Table 9. The researcher assigned to each interview, two symbols from the interview coding system. A number was assigned indicating the interview participant’s middle school in which he or she worked. A letter was assigned indicating the interview participant’s position. See Table 22 for a list of codes used in this study. Interviewees’ years of experience in education and years of experience at the middle level are shown in Table 10. The assigned code was placed on each page of the participant’s transcript. A list containing the participants’ names and codes was kept separate from the transcript files on a password-protected personal computer.

Table 9

Interview Coding System

Symbol	Middle school
1	Dorchester Middle School
2	J. K. Walters Middle School
Symbol	Interview participant position
P	Principal
A	Assistant principal
G	Guidance counselor
X	Exploratory teacher
E	English teacher
M	Mathematics teacher
H	Social science teacher
S	Science teacher
C	Special education teacher

Table 10

Codes for Interview Data

Code	Middle school and position
1P	Dorchester Middle School principal
1G	Dorchester Middle School guidance counselor
1X	Dorchester Middle School exploratory teacher
1E	Dorchester Middle School English teacher
1M	Dorchester Middle School mathematics teacher
1H	Dorchester Middle School social science teacher
1S	Dorchester Middle School science teacher
1C	Dorchester Middle School special education teacher
2P	J. K. Walters Middle School principal
2A	J. K. Walters Middle School assistant principal
2G	J. K. Walters Middle School guidance counselor
2X	J. K. Walters Middle School exploratory teacher
2E	J. K. Walters Middle School English teacher
2M	J. K. Walters Middle School mathematics teacher
2H	J. K. Walters Middle School social science teacher
2S	J. K. Walters Middle School science teacher
2C	J. K. Walters Middle School special education teacher

Data Analysis

The constant comparative method of analysis, described by Maykut and Morehouse (1994), was used to analyze the interview data. Maykut and Morehouse (1994) stated, "Words are the way that most people come to understand their situations; we create our world with words; we explain ourselves with words; we defend and hide ourselves with words" (p. 18). Qualitative research depends on making meaning from spoken words. "The task of the researcher is to find patterns within those words and to present those patterns for others to inspect while at the same time staying as close to the construction of the world as the participants originally experienced it" (Maykut & Morehouse, 1994, p. 18). The researcher adhered to the following steps for data analysis:

1. The researcher read the transcriptions several times, noting commonalities and themes.
2. The researcher identified themes and wrote them on separate pieces of chart paper.
3. Interview data were unitized into "units of meaning" (Maykut & Morehouse, 1994, p. 126). A double-spaced, hardcopy of each transcript was made. Units were cut and pasted onto index cards and sorted.
4. Once the data were unitized, the index cards were sorted according to meaning.
5. Each unit (index card) was taped onto the appropriate chart paper under the correct theme. Units that did not fit were posted under a miscellaneous heading.
6. The researcher looked for patterns and relationships in the data.
7. The data were displayed in raw data matrices.
8. A log was kept by the researcher noting ideas, themes, relationships, and thoughts which emerged from analyzing the data.

Chapter Summary

Chapter 3 is a description of the qualitative methods and processes used in this study. Descriptions in this chapter were: (a) school system selection, (b) access to school system and schools, (c) schools and communities, (d) populations, (e) data collection procedures, (f) interview protocol, (g) data management procedures, and (h) data analysis procedures. The intent of the researcher was to examine middle school administrators' and teachers' perspectives on what constitutes an effective education for middle-level learners; however, the interview protocol and resulting data collection were more closely associated with what the participants believed constituted a "good middle school." Their perspectives on a good middle school may contain information from which middle-level educators may learn for the benefit of adolescents.

Chapter 4 Results

The purpose of this cross-case study was to contribute to the discussion on what constitutes an effective education for middle-level learners. Although the study was designed to report on “effective middle-level education,” the interview protocol was developed around “good or effective middle schools.” Thus, during data collection, respondents reported their perspectives on “good middle schools.” This change resulted from the order of the questions in the interview protocol. The first question was about “good middle schools.” When a follow up question was asked about “effective middle schools,” the respondents elaborated on what they had said about good middle schools, reported that they had already answered the question and stated they had nothing further to share, or they repeated the same ideas they had shared for the first question.

The researcher conducted seventeen in-depth interviews and analyzed six documents. The face-to-face interviews with administrators and teachers were conducted at two middle schools in Sugarloaf County Public Schools (pseudonym). Document analyses were performed on each middle school’s 2014-2015 school improvement plan, 2013-2014 annual report, and 2015 Schools to Watch re-designation application.

Three perspectives on good middle schools were found in the interview data and documents for Dorchester Middle School and J. K. Walters Middle School: (a) perspectives on a good middle school, generally, from interviews with administrators and teachers; (b) perspectives on the operation of both schools as middle schools from interviews with administrators and teachers; and (c) perspectives on the operation of both schools as middle schools expressed in the schools’ documents; however, only the data on the perspectives of a good middle school, generally, are presented in the analysis to address the purpose of the

study. The operation of the schools and the expressions in the documents about how the schools function, which are often for public relations purposes, are beyond the scope of this study. Figure 7 is a visual representation of the perspectives. Table 11 contains the categories and subcategories of meaning found in the interview and document data from the two middle schools.

The teacher and administrator perspectives on a good middle school were analyzed in three ways: (a) a descriptive analysis of the characteristics of a good middle school as viewed by the teachers and administrators of Dorchester Middle School and J. K. Walters Middle School; (b) a comparison of the characteristics of a good middle school as viewed by teachers and administrators of the two schools and the characteristics of a good middle school as identified by the National Association of Secondary School Principal's Council on Middle Level Education in 1985, the Association for Middle Level Education in 2010, and the Carnegie Corporation's Council on Adolescent Development in 1989; and (c) a comparison of the characteristics of a good middle school identified by the teachers and administrators of Dorchester Middle School and the characteristics of a good middle school identified by the teachers and administrators of J. K. Walters Middle School.

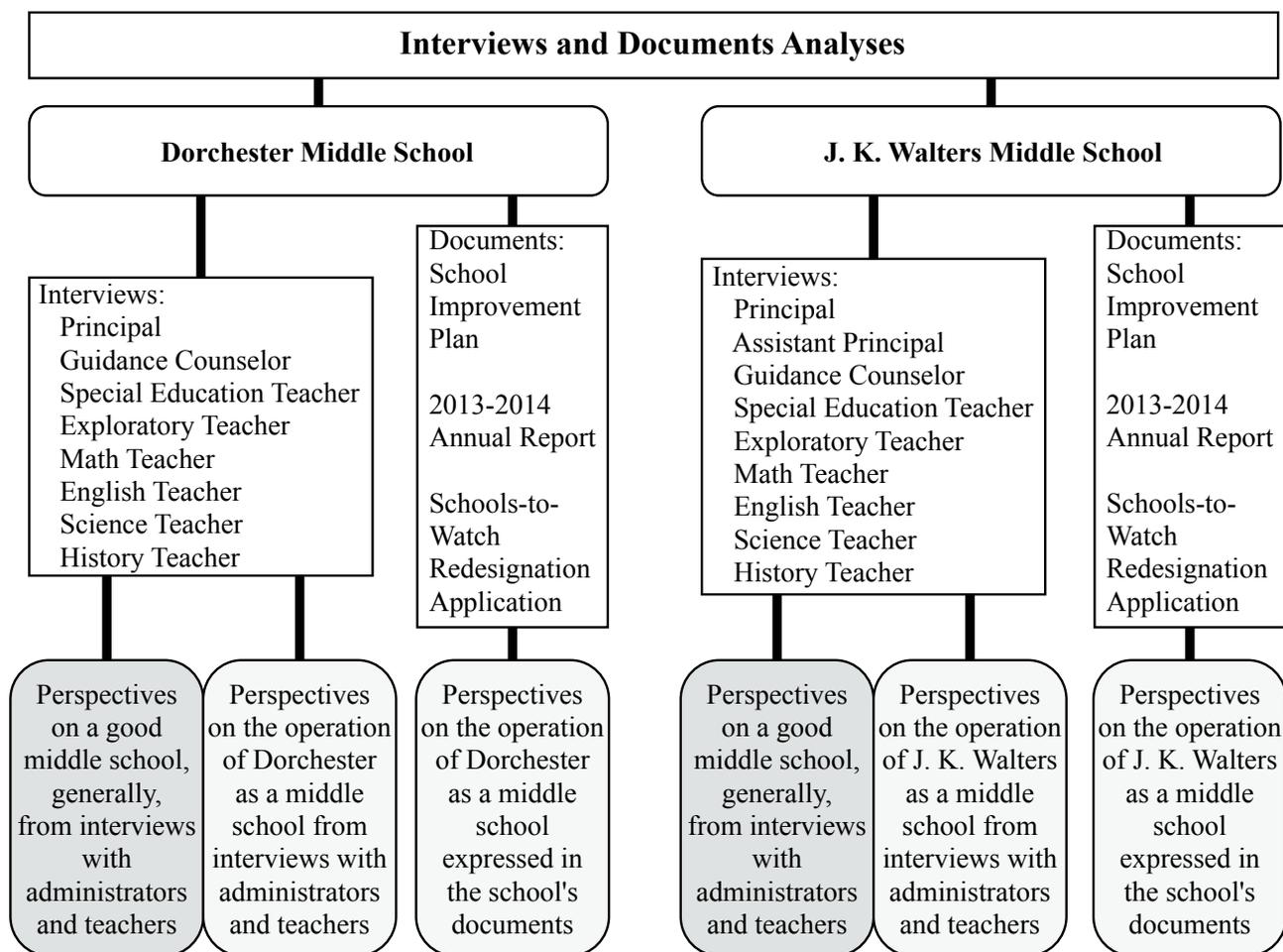


Figure 7. Perspectives from the interview and document data.

Table 11

Categories and Subcategories of Data Found in Interviews and Documents on a Good Middle School and on the Operation of the Two Middle Schools in This Study

Categories and subcategories of data found in interview transcripts and school documents	J. K. Walters middle school			Dorchester middle school		
	Perspectives on a good middle school, generally, from interviews with administrators and teachers	Perspectives on the operation of J. K. Walters as a middle school from interviews with administrators and teachers	Perspectives on the operation of J. K. Walters as a middle school expressed in the school's documents	Perspectives on a good middle school, generally, from interviews with administrators and teachers	Perspectives on the operation of Dorchester as a middle school from interviews with administrators and teachers	Perspectives on the operation of Dorchester as a middle school expressed in the school's documents
Middle school culture						
Team approach	x	x	x	x	x	x
Stakeholder relationships						
Student relationships with students	x		x			x
Student relationships with teachers	x		x	x		x
Teacher relationships with administration	x					
Discipline			x			x
School atmosphere	x			x		
School safety	x		x			x
Beyond academic achievement and scores	x					
Student population	x			x	x	
Teachers' input	x			x		
Personnel						

Categories and subcategories of data found in interview transcripts and school documents	J. K. Walters middle school			Dorchester middle school		
	Perspectives on a good middle school, generally, from interviews with administrators and teachers	Perspectives on the operation of J. K. Walters as a middle school from interviews with administrators and teachers	Perspectives on the operation of J. K. Walters as a middle school expressed in the school's documents	Perspectives on a good middle school, generally, from interviews with administrators and teachers	Perspectives on the operation of Dorchester as a middle school from interviews with administrators and teachers	Perspectives on the operation of Dorchester as a middle school expressed in the school's documents
Administration	x			x		
Teachers	x	x	x	x	x	x
Guidance staff	x			x		
Office staff	x	x				
Placing personnel	x	x		x		
Additional personnel				x		
School environment						
School ambiance			x			
The needs of diverse adolescent students						
Individualized	x			x		
Whole child	x		x	x		x
Developmental needs	x		x	x		x
Social needs	x			x		
Emotional needs	x			x		
Academic needs	x			x	x	
Students finding themselves	x					
Identifying and serving at-risk students and struggling learners	x		x			x
Remediation			x			x
English as a second language (ESL) students			x			

Categories and subcategories of data found in interview transcripts and school documents	J. K. Walters middle school			Dorchester middle school		
	Perspectives on a good middle school, generally, from interviews with administrators and teachers	Perspectives on the operation of J. K. Walters as a middle school from interviews with administrators and teachers	Perspectives on the operation of J. K. Walters as a middle school expressed in the school's documents	Perspectives on a good middle school, generally, from interviews with administrators and teachers	Perspectives on the operation of Dorchester as a middle school from interviews with administrators and teachers	Perspectives on the operation of Dorchester as a middle school expressed in the school's documents
Special education students		x	x			x
Special education strategies			x			x
Organizational structures						
Teams	x	x	x	x	x	x
Departments	x	x		x	x	x
Instructional time in the master schedule	x		x	x		x
Common planning time	x			x	x	
Extended school days	x					
Transitions						
Middle school transitions						
Grade configuration for transitions	x	x	x	x		x
Transitions after middle school						
Preparing students for the transition into high school	x		x	x		x
Career focus	x		x	x		x
Life skills				x		x
Instructional practices						
Pacing			x			x
Differentiated instruction			x			x
Best practices			x			

Categories and subcategories of data found in interview transcripts and school documents	J. K. Walters middle school			Dorchester middle school		
	Perspectives on a good middle school, generally, from interviews with administrators and teachers	Perspectives on the operation of J. K. Walters as a middle school from interviews with administrators and teachers	Perspectives on the operation of J. K. Walters as a middle school expressed in the school's documents	Perspectives on a good middle school, generally, from interviews with administrators and teachers	Perspectives on the operation of Dorchester as a middle school from interviews with administrators and teachers	Perspectives on the operation of Dorchester as a middle school expressed in the school's documents
Collaboration			x			x
Hands-on learning	x			x		
Technology	x					x
Using data		x	x	x		x
Instructional resources				x		
Assessment strategies		x	x			x
Parental involvement						
Realizing the struggles of involving parents at the middle level	x	x		x	x	
Involving parents	x	x	x	x	x	x
Communicating with parents	x	x	x	x	x	x
Curricular aspects						
Curricular emphases			x	x		x
Curricular opportunities						
Exploration opportunities	x		x	x		x
Interdisciplinary opportunities	x		x	x		
Advanced class opportunities	x			x		
Core curriculum opportunities	x			x		x
Club opportunities	x		x	x		x
Extracurricular opportunities	x			x		
High school credit	x			x		

Categories and subcategories of data found in interview transcripts and school documents	J. K. Walters middle school			Dorchester middle school		
	Perspectives on a good middle school, generally, from interviews with administrators and teachers	Perspectives on the operation of J. K. Walters as a middle school from interviews with administrators and teachers	Perspectives on the operation of J. K. Walters as a middle school expressed in the school's documents	Perspectives on a good middle school, generally, from interviews with administrators and teachers	Perspectives on the operation of Dorchester as a middle school from interviews with administrators and teachers	Perspectives on the operation of Dorchester as a middle school expressed in the school's documents
opportunities						
Cultural studies opportunities			x			
The Schools to Watch program						
Not helpful		x			x	
Learning from other schools		x			x	
Using the evaluative data		x			x	
The program's emphases		x			x	
Physical environment						
Updated library resources	x					
Resources	x					
Wish list	x			x	x	
Community relationships						
Community service		x	x		x	
Community partnerships		x	x		x	x
Understanding the community			x		x	x
School system involvement						
Involvement from the central office		x			x	
Involvement from the school board		x			x	
Progress						
Professional growth		x	x	x	x	x

Categories and subcategories of data found in interview transcripts and school documents	J. K. Walters middle school			Dorchester middle school		
	Perspectives on a good middle school, generally, from interviews with administrators and teachers	Perspectives on the operation of J. K. Walters as a middle school from interviews with administrators and teachers	Perspectives on the operation of J. K. Walters as a middle school expressed in the school's documents	Perspectives on a good middle school, generally, from interviews with administrators and teachers	Perspectives on the operation of Dorchester as a middle school from interviews with administrators and teachers	Perspectives on the operation of Dorchester as a middle school expressed in the school's documents
School improvement			x	x	x	x
Quality education						
Goals			x			x
Expectations			x			x
Responsibility for student learning			x			x
Student opportunities						
Opportunities for student recognition			x			x
Opportunities for student voice			x			
Perspectives on the SDOE Standards of Learning (SOLs)						
SDOE involvement		x			x	
Testing constraints		x			x	
Testing consequences		x			x	
Feelings about the standards		x			x	

A Descriptive Analysis of the Characteristics of a Good Middle School as Viewed by the Teachers and Administrators of Dorchester Middle School and J. K. Walters Middle School

Ten main categories were identified in the data on a good middle school: (a) culture, (b) personnel, (c) the needs of diverse adolescent students, (d) organizational structures, (e) transitions, (f) instructional practices, (g) parental involvement, (h) curricular aspects, (i) physical environment, and (j) progress. The ten categories are presented in no prearranged order, and no category is meant to be prioritized over another category. Figure 8 is a representation of the randomness of the categories that are addressed in this section. The researcher purposely did not neglect or omit any potential category that existed in the interview data, no matter how few participants may have commented on it. Each interviewee’s responses are treated with no known bias from the researcher.

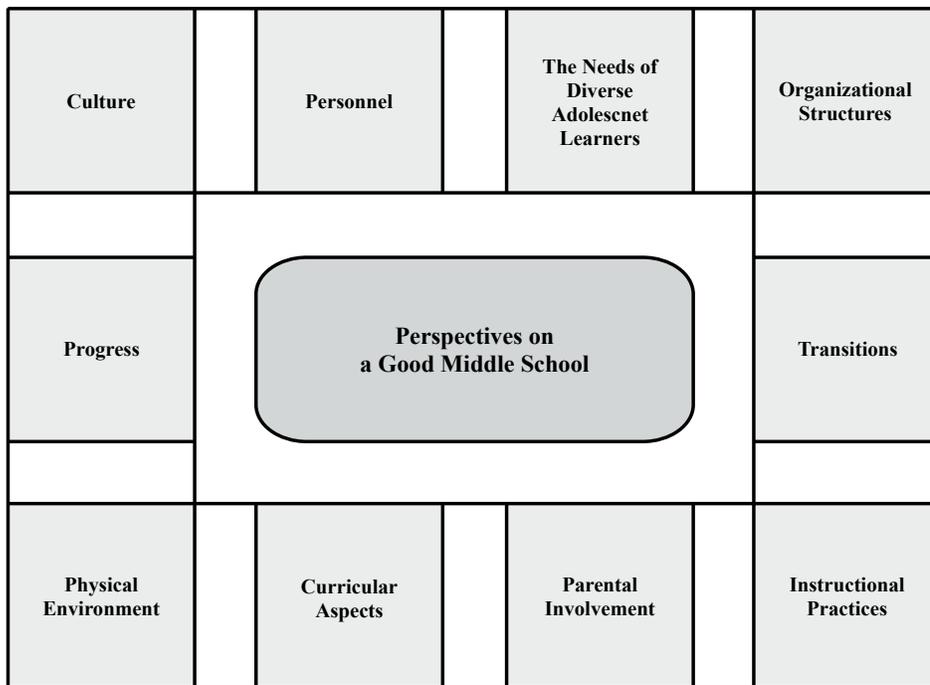


Figure 8. Ten categories of criteria for a good middle school.

Perspectives on the Culture of a Good Middle School

The culture of a good middle school consists of the following elements and are depicted in Figure 9: team approach; stakeholder relationships, including student relationships with other students, student relationships with teachers, and teacher relationships with administration; school atmosphere; school safety; beyond academic achievement and scores; student population; and teachers' input. The interview data that support these elements of culture are reported in this section.

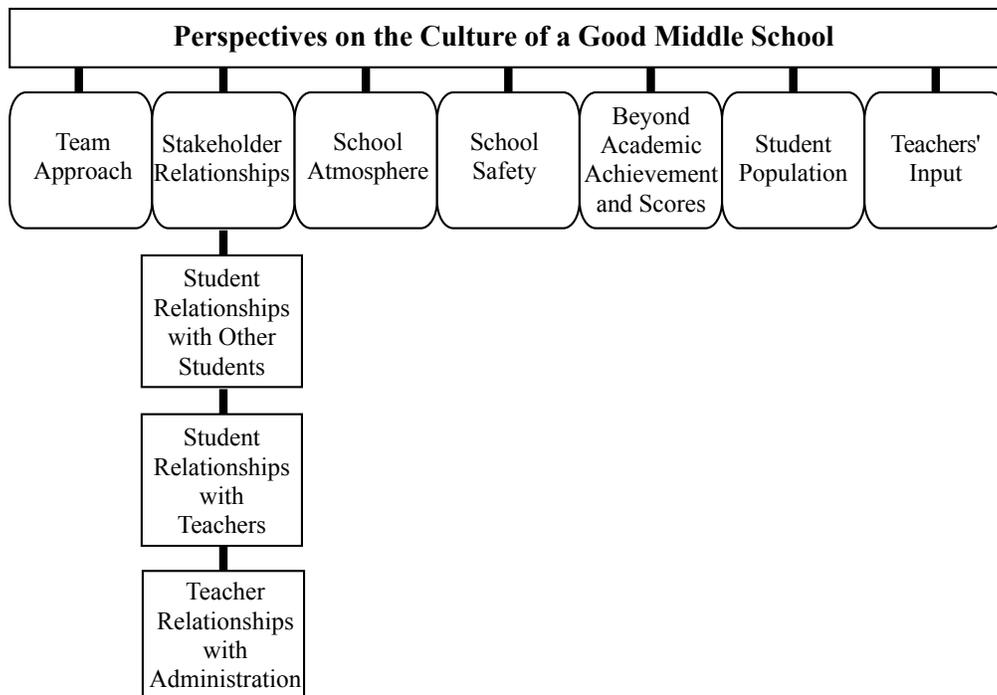


Figure 9. Elements for the culture of a good middle school.

Team approach. A good middle school has a team approach. A team approach is staff members working together, supporting each other while meeting the needs of their students, and providing the best education for them.

Administrators and teachers thought similarly about good middle schools having a team approach. Several statements emphasized the need for good middle schools to have staff

members that “work together” to meet the needs of students (I-1G, 1; I-2X, 1; I-1M, 1; I-2A, 1; & I-1E, 1). One participant shared,

It takes a whole village to raise a child. Well, that’s definitely what happens when it comes to K-12. We want to make sure that when we [a team of educators] work with our students that they know that we’re doing everything we can to help them. (I-2A, 1)

Another participant expressed, “I think that a good middle school is a group of people, whether it be teachers, staff, custodians, cafeteria, principals, administrators, whatever, that works together and provides the best education they can for the kids” (I-2X, 1). An additional interviewee shared that a good middle school would have “staff that supports each other and tries to help each other and shares ideas” (I-1M, 1). Another said, “I think a good middle school has [staff members] that have a common mission and work together” (I-1E, 1). Finally, another stated that staff members at a good middle school work together to “create that sense of unity” (I-1G, 1).

Stakeholder relationships. A good middle school is one that has stakeholders who value building relationships with other stakeholders. Stakeholder relationships at the middle level reported by the interviewees are student relationships with other students, student relationships with teachers, and teacher relationships with administration.

Student relationships with other students. Little interview data contained information about the importance of student relationships with each other; however, one participant expressed, “[In a good middle school, classes would give the opportunity for students] to get to know their peers ... in a more casual kind of way” (I-2C, 2).

Student relationships with teachers. Interview data contained thoughts about the importance of students’ relationships with their teachers. One interviewee made several statements about the value of faculty members building relationships with students: “A good

middle school ... combines academics with strong relationships with kids, knowing the kids, knowing something about their home lives and what they come to school with, and sometimes what they come to school without”; “[In a good middle school], ... that individual student piece is very important”; and “Even if it’s just a, ‘Hello, how are you?’ that sort of personal interaction with the kids, I think, is very important. If they feel valued, they are going to hopefully value what they’re doing here [at school]” (I-1C, 1). Another interviewee thought similarly and made numerous statements about the importance of faculty members building connections with students: “When the students walk in that door, they need to know that they’re not a number, that they are a part of our community”; “If they are unhappy, miserable, then we [educators] need to find out what’s going on and help them”; “They need to know that we are there, that we’re a person they can come and talk to”; “We’ve got to develop those relationships” (I-2A, 1); and “If you [staff members] don’t have that connection [relationship with students], the academics is not going to happen” (I-2A, 8). Lastly, one participant stated, “[A good middle school would have] teachers getting to know ... the students better in a more casual kind of way” (I-2C, 2).

Teacher relationships with administration. Little interview data contained information about the importance of the relationship that teachers and administration have with each other; however, one administrator expressed,

It’s all about the relationships. You [administration] really have to work with your teachers, first of all, to develop a good relationship knowing that you’re there to support them, to help them, to give them whatever resource they need to do their job effectively, then you develop those relationships. (I-2A, 1)

School atmosphere. A good middle school has a fitting atmosphere for middle level learners. Thoughts were revealed through the interviews about the importance of a good middle school's atmosphere. Multiple responses were made concerning the need for a good middle school to have an atmosphere that fosters a desire to learn and a sense of belonging, comfortableness, and friendship (I-1G, 1; I-2A, 2; & I-2M, 1). "A good middle school is a place where ... learning occurs" (I-2A, 1) was simply stated by one participant. Another stated, "[A good middle school is] one that when you walk in the door, you can tell that there is a sense of family and unity ... and that the students feel welcomed, and they feel comfortable in the building" (I-1G, 1). Another response was, "A good middle school is a place where students are happy to be here (I-2A, 1) ... and is one where the child feels fostered" (I-2A, 2). Later in the interview, the same participant added, "[In a good middle school], every single one of them [students] wants to be treated with respect, kindness, and care, and that's what we try to do" (I-2A, 8). When speaking about the atmosphere of a good middle school, this same participant shared that, "We call them [students] kids, because we spend our time with them to help them grow in every way possible, and they become ours. They are our kids" (I-2A, 16). Another interviewee felt similarly when stating, "A good middle school has ... kids that have fun. Middle school is where we realize that kids are still kids; they're learning while having fun, that's it" (I-2M, 1).

School safety. School safety is an important part of a good middle school. One participant stated, "A good middle school is one where the child feels ... safe and secure" (I-2A, 2). Another shared, "A good middle school would be a place where the students ... feel safe" (I-2S, 1).

Beyond academic achievement and scores. A good middle school stretches beyond academic achievement and test scores to meet the needs of students. Multiple responses related to this belief were found in the interview data (I-2P, 1; I-2M, 1; I-2A, 2; & I-2H, 1). Statements included, “Middle level education is just not only meeting academic needs that we know are there” (I-2P, 1), and “We just have to reach all these other areas that aren’t only academic” (I-2M, 1). One participant shared, “[A good middle school] is one that doesn’t just make the scores. It’s not one that you worry about what is AYP (Adequate Yearly Progress) for this year, what is our ranking when it comes to accreditation” (I-2A, 2). Another participant thought similarly by stating, “[A good middle school] would be one that works on not just the academic side to shoot up the test score” and “focuses on ... not just their [students’] test scores” (I-2G, 1). Another plainly stated, “I would not say [a good middle school] is based on test scores of course” (I-2H, 1). Another participant expressed,

I’m sure a lot of people may talk about academics, and the good school has this score and that score, and all of that is incredibly important, but I think looking at the kids as a whole, not just academic beings [is important]. (I-2C, 1)

Another statement was, “Academic achievement to me is also that they [students] made all district band, they made all state band, all state chorus -- that’s academic achievement to me” (I-2A, 8).

Student population. A good middle school has staff members that get to know their student population and are familiar with the circumstances that exist at home for students. One participant stated, “I think that it’s important to know the type of students you’ve got, and to try to know as many as you can,” and “When they [students] walk in the door, you need to know the community and kind of have that quick sense of where they’re coming from” (I-1G, 2).

Similarly, another participant stated, “A good middle school has to take into account that we’ve got kids from really great backgrounds and really diverse backgrounds, and they don’t have the same advantages” (I-2G, 1). One response was, “A good middle school . . . has a balance of different students” (I-2C, 1). This same participant went on to state that, “The kids, and adults, and the teachers, benefit from seeing, maybe not getting involved with, but at least seeing that there’s a whole different spectrum of kids,” and “I would hope that somewhere along the line that the other students in the building, the general education students in the building, learn some sort of empathy and acceptance for people who are different from them” (I-2C, 1).

Teachers’ input. A good middle school has an administration that solicits and values teachers’ input. One participant stated, “I wish [administrator’s decision making] was more about bringing teachers in and getting their feedback and asking what do teachers think” (I-1M, 4). One other participant thought similarly by stating,

I think there can be a little too much top-down as far as this is the way we’re going to do it, and that’s that. I think teachers need to have some say in what goes on. After all, they’re the ones down in the trenches, and often, we’re told you’ll do this, and you’ll do that, and we realize that that’s not a good idea or going to be detrimental or going to be so time consuming as to not being practical for various reasons. (I-2E, 1)

Perspectives on the Personnel of a Good Middle School

A good middle school has great faculty and staff members. Six personnel elements were found in the interview data and are depicted in Figure 10: administration, teachers, guidance staff, office staff, placing personnel, and additional personnel. The interview data that support these elements of personnel are reported in this section.

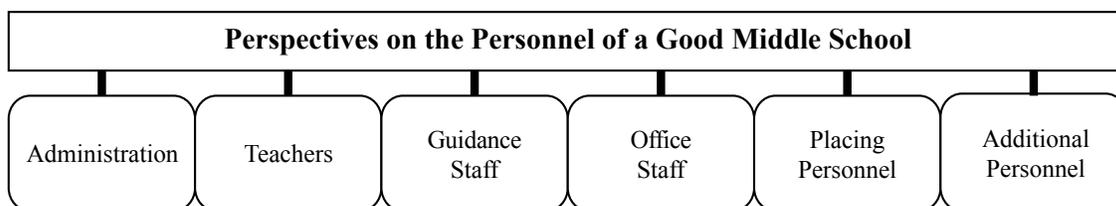


Figure 10. Elements for the personnel of a good middle school.

Administration. Numerous statements were made by teacher participants about the importance of a good middle school’s administration (I-1S, 1; I-2E, 1; I-1E, 1; I-1G, 1; & I-2M, 1). Middle school administrators must be effective, supportive, effective disciplinarians, and good communicators.

A good middle school has effective administrators. One interviewee made a direct statement in saying, “Effectiveness evolves around your administration” (I-1S, 1). Similar sentiments were expressed by other interviewees who stated, “I think a good middle school needs to have, starting off, a good leader” (I-1E, 1), and “A good middle school ... starts at the top” (I-2E, 1). Additional effective administrator characteristics were: availability to students (I-1E, 1), not to be feared (I-1E, 1), flexible (I-1G, 1), “[good] time management [skills]” (I-1G, 1), “good at building rapport” (I-1G, 1), “shows up early and stays late” (I-2E, 1), and “is well aware of what’s going on there [at school]” (I-2E, 1).

A good middle school has supportive administrators. Four teacher interviewees explicitly used the word “supportive” when sharing their ideas on what makes a good administrator at a good middle school (I-1S, 1; I-1X, 2; I-1E, 1; & I-2M, 1). Specifically, one spoke of the administrator being instructionally supportive by stating, “[It is important to have administrators] on board with your teaching and that they are supportive of you with teaching methods, ... and with the classroom management, ... and of your ideas that you want to try” (I-1S, 1). Another thought school administrators should give “autonomy in the classroom [to teachers],” and

continued by stating “I think we need to be allowed to teach what we know but have the respect and the support of the administration to know that we know what we’re doing” (I-1X, 1).

A good middle school has administrators who are consistent disciplinarians. The specific word “discipline” surfaced in several interviews (I-1S, 1; I-1E, 1; & I-1X, 2). One participant shared,

I think good middle schools have an effective leader, someone who is the backbone of the teachers. They’re supportive of teachers, and they really understand the problems that arise in the classroom and are willing to try and help as much as they can with that kind of stuff [discipline]. (I-1E, 1)

A good middle school has administrators who are good communicators. One participant stated, “[A good middle school has] good communication from the principal” (I-1M, 1).

Another shared, “[A good middle school is] one with good leadership who has open communication” (I-1G, 1).

Teachers. Numerous statements were made by participants about the teachers at a good middle school (I-2P, 1; I-1P, 2; I-2A, 8; & I-1H, 1). Middle school teachers are passionate about their jobs, possess leadership qualities, foster student progress, are caring, and are effective.

Multiple statements were made by administrative interviewees about hiring teachers that have a passion for teaching middle school (I-2P, 1 & I-1P, 2). Two interviewees explicitly used the words “passion” or “passionate” when sharing their ideas about good teachers (I-2P, 1 & I-1P, 2). One middle school administrator stated, “I think it takes special personnel to work with middle schoolers, and so I think it would have to include people who have a passion for that age group” (I-1P, 2). This same person went on to state, “Everyone can’t do it [teach middle school], either you love it or you don’t,” and “I think if you’ve got personnel with the passion for those

young adolescents, then you can conquer anything” (I-1P, 2). Towards the end of this interview, the participant stated once again, “I just think it takes somebody that loves that age group [to teach at a middle school]” (I-1P, 11). Another middle school administrator thought similarly and stated, “[A good middle school] has people who are passionate about middle-school-aged kids and what they’re going through in developmental stages” (I-2P, 1). This same person shared, “I think we have to continue to hire the right people ... quality, passionate people” (I-2P, 8).

A good middle school has teachers with leadership capabilities. Little interview data contained information about the importance of teachers possessing leadership qualities at a good middle school; however, one participant expressed that it is important to “make teachers leaders. We talk about leadership in the middle schools a lot, and it’s not just the principal. It has to be all of us” (I-2P, 8).

A good middle school has teachers who are able to foster student achievement and meet students’ needs. Simply stated, one participant shared, “You have to have the wonderful staff in place who know how to teach” (I-2A, 8). Another interviewee stated, “[A good middle school] has teachers that are willing to go the extra mile ... willing to spend extra time going slower to help these kids that need that accommodation” (I-1H, 1). This participant also stated,

[A good middle school] has teachers that are ready and prepared to take the kids and advance them to that next level. And with the ones [students] that are caught in the middle, be able to go at a pace that allows them to have success and yet get to that next level of success or achievement. (I-1H, 1)

Another participant shared, “A good middle school ... [has] teachers ... who are able to motivate to get the most out of their students” (I-2E, 1).

A good middle school has caring teachers. Three interviewees explicitly used the words “care” or “caring” when sharing their ideas on what makes a good teacher at a good middle school (I-1X, 1; I-2A, 8; & I-1M, 1). One interviewee stated, “The teachers caring about the children, that’s the main thing because you know your subject, you can teach them, but you have to care about them” (I-1X, 1). Another stated, “You can spot in a heartbeat the teacher, the one who cares about the kids and connects with them” (I-2A, 8). Similarly, another interviewee shared,

[Teachers need to be] checking in on the changes that they’re [students are] going through, just understand that it’s a difficult time and showing them that you care even sometimes when they have the wall up, the teenage years, and they are too cool for affection. (I-1M, 1)

Additional statements were made by another interviewee who shared that teachers at a good middle school “are involved with the students in the classroom as well as [in] extracurricular things that are available which requires a lot of time and dedication from the teachers for things that they aren’t necessarily compensated for,” and “I think that the kids need to see their teachers’ faces not only in the classroom but out in the community as well” (I-2C, 1).

A good middle has effective teachers. Effective teacher characteristics were contained in the data: “teachers who are well educated, and motivated, and have good people skills with students” (I-2E, 1); “teachers who enjoy what they do” (I-2A, 1); and teachers who are “flexible” (I-2X, 1).

Guidance staff. Guidance counselors are important at a good middle school. One participant shared, “I think counseling, the guidance counselor, is important in the classroom and in the school” (I-1E, 2). This interviewee continued by stating the importance of allowing

students opportunities “just to check in” with their guidance counselor and for the counselor to “meet with those kids fairly frequently so they can talk to them” (I-1E, 2). Another participant shared the need for “counselors to be available to talk to students ... and take five minutes and say, ‘Okay, let’s talk about this, and let’s come down from whatever is wrong,’ so we can go back to focusing on our school work” (I-2G, 1).

Office staff. A good middle school has good office staff members. Little interview data contained information about office staff at a good middle school; however, one participant expressed that it is important for a good middle school to have “good office staff” for the school to run effectively (I-2E, 1).

Placing personnel. A good middle school is one that has teachers placed in the right position. One interviewee stated the importance of “teachers assigned in areas that they’re passionate about” and that possess the appropriate licensure endorsement (I-2P, 2). Another participant shared, “I would definitely want to keep teachers with as less preps as possible,” and “If you keep a teacher teaching all the math or whatever their content is, you’re going to be a better teacher” (I-1S, 3).

Additional personnel. A good middle school is one that has enough teachers to meet the instructional needs of the school. One interviewee shared thoughts on sharing faculty members with other schools by stating, “Not having to share exploratory [teachers with other schools], not having to share personnel, that would be my ideal middle school” (I-1G, 2).

Perspectives on the Needs of Diverse Adolescent Students of a Good Middle School

A good middle school addresses the needs of a diverse, adolescent student population. Eight elements for meeting students’ needs were contained in the interview data and are depicted in Figure 11: individualized, whole child, developmental needs, social needs, emotional needs,

academic needs, students finding themselves, and identifying and serving at-risk students and struggling learners. The interview data that support these elements of the needs of diverse adolescent students are reported in this section.

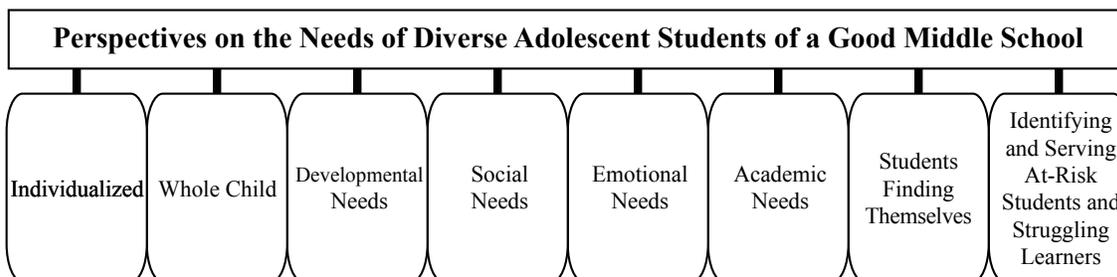


Figure 11. Elements for the needs of diverse adolescent students of a good middle school.

Individualized. A good middle school is one that focuses on individualized student needs. One participant stated, “[A good middle school] is centered around their [students’] needs as a person, as an individual” and “meets every need of the student so that they don’t get lost” (I-1S, 1). Another participant shared the importance of “[good middle schools] meeting the students where they’re at [individually]” (I-1M, 1). Similarly, another interviewee stated, “You have to be willing to do whatever that kid needs, that one kid” (I-2X, 1).

Whole child. A good middle school is one with staff members who focus on the needs of the whole child. Similar statements made were, “[A good middle school would have staff members who] think about all aspects of the child” (I-2A, 2) and “[who] focus ... and work ... on the whole student” (I-2G, 1). Another response was that staff members at a good middle school must “make sure that we support them [adolescent students] in all areas, not just one or two” (I-2P, 1). Another participant detailed helping the whole child by stating,

[A good middle school’s teachers] plan together to do what we think is best for our kids in all areas of their lives, not just what we’re teaching them. We have team meetings on

just problems that we know certain kids are having outside of school, inside of school, or whatever.” (I-1E, 1)

Developmental needs. A good middle school is one that meets the developmental needs of adolescent students. Interviewees shared thoughts about the unique developmental needs of adolescents, and two participants specifically used the word “developmental” when sharing their ideas (I-1P, 1 & I-2M, 3). One participant shared multiple statements about the developmental needs of adolescents: “[A good middle school must] be responsive to the developmental needs of students;” the middle school years are “such a critical time in the lives of young adolescents;” and “It’s very challenging to be able to meet all those needs, ups and downs, and like a pendulum, swing-swing.” Finally, this same participant shared that “Kids act like they want to be adults some days, and then the next day they’ll act like two year olds” (I-1P, 1).

Another participant shared their thoughts about a developmentally appropriate school environment by stating,

Because this age [adolescence] is ... just a very unique age. We have to focus ... on the other aspects of development, particularly, you know, 12, 13 year-olds. That’s why it’s so important to be age appropriate in the middle school particularly. (I-2M, 3)

Social needs. A good middle school is one that focuses on the social needs of students. Four interviewees specifically used the word “social” when discussing the needs of adolescent students (I-1S, 1; I-1P, 1; I-2P, 1; & I-2M, 1). One participant stated, “All these kids should have an opportunity ... to be able to socialize,” and “I love the idea of having some recess time for social time” (I-1S, 1). Similar statements included these feelings, “[A good middle school must] meet social needs [of students]” (I-1P, 1), “also the social ... side of kids as they develop in adolescence” (I-2P, 1), and “A good middle school is one in which our kids show growth ...

socially” (I-2M, 1). Another stated, “They [students] are more interested in social, ... and so, my philosophy is reach them on that level, ... and then the academics will come” (I-2M, 1).

Emotional needs. A good middle school is one that attends to the emotional needs of students. Five interviewees used the word “emotional” when speaking about the needs of adolescent students (I-2M, 1; I-1S, 1; I-1P, 1; I-2G, 1; & I-2C, 1). One participant shared, “They’re [young adolescents are] going through so many emotions,” and “A good middle school is one in which our kids show growth ... emotionally” (I-2M, 1). Another interviewee stated that, “[Teachers] have a hand in their [students’] emotional well-being” (I-1S, 1). Similar statements made included, “[A good middle school must] meet emotional, mental ... needs [of students]” (I-1P, 1) and “also the ... emotional side of kids as they develop in adolescence” (I-2P, 1). Other statements made were, “A good middle school would be one that focuses on ... their [students’] psychological well-being” (I-2G, 1), and “[Adolescent students] have a lot of things going on in their lives, and looking at ... the feelings that they’re going through, emotions, and things like that [is important]” (I-2C, 1).

Academic needs. A good middle school is one that attends to the academic needs of students. One participant shared that, “[A good middle school is one that is] academically challenging and meets the academic needs of students” (I-1P, 1). Another statement made was, “Academically, [a good middle school] provides students with the support if they’re struggling, and we give them a big push if they need it” (I-2A, 2). An additional participant shared, “A good middle school would probably be one that focuses on ... their [students’] learning” (I-2G, 1).

Students finding themselves. A good middle school is one that provides opportunities for students to find themselves. One interviewee shared, “Making sure that [school] programs

effectively support and encourage kids to find themselves and help them along the way as they grow up [is important]” (I-2P, 1). Another participant shared,

An age appropriate middle school is one where kids feel supported but yet have enough freedom to spread their wings. We don’t clip them, but sometimes we have to pull them back in, and say okay, let’s get back in the nest, and let’s talk about where you were going with that behavior. (I-2A, 7)

The same participant added that, “[A good middle school] is a place where kids have the opportunity to become the person they want to be” (I-2A, 7).

Identifying and serving at-risk students and struggling learners. A good middle school is one that identifies and serves at-risk students and struggling learners. One participant shared, “[A good middle school] has support systems available to [struggling] students to help them be successful,” and such a school must “focus a lot of times on meeting the needs of students who are struggling” (I-2P, 1). Another response was, “[A good middle school meets] what their [struggling learners] needs are, especially in your IEP kids and having what they need ... to really succeed” (I-2H, 1). Another participant shared, “I think a good middle school will be one that looks at the challenges of having different bridges for learners ... and looking at it as a challenge and seeing improvement in the students no matter how small it may be” (I-2C, 2).

Perspectives on Organizational Structures of a Good Middle School

The organizational structures of a good middle school consist of the following elements and are depicted in Figure 12: teams, departments, instructional time in the master schedule, common planning time, and extended school days. The interview data that support these elements of organizational structures are reported in this section.

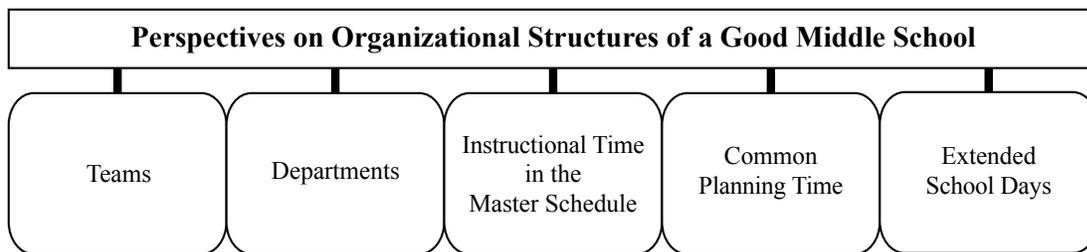


Figure 12. Elements for the organizational structures of a good middle school.

Teams. Organizational structures at a good middle school include teams. Numerous interviewees expressed their feelings about teams being an effective tool at the middle level (I-1E, 1; I-2M, 2; I-2S, 1; I-1S, 1; I-1M, 2; I-1G, 2; I-1C, 2; I-1P, 3; I-2P, 2; I-2G, 2; & I-2H, 2). Many thoughts were shared, but typical responses were, “A good middle school has teams that work together” (I-1E, 1), “I love the team concept of middle school” (I-2M, 2), and “Teams can be really effective” (I-2S, 1). Some interviewees discussed specific benefits of teaming: effective communication, collaboration, and relationship building.

Four interviewees felt teams help to facilitate effective communication at a good middle school (I-1M, 2; I-1G, 2; I-1P, 3; & I-2G, 2). One interviewee shared that organizing the ideal middle school for instruction would include, “great teams which are important for ... support and meeting the students’ and the parents’ needs, and for communication” (I-1M, 2). Comments about team communication made by another interviewee were, “As a team, you are able to know your students, ... you can even see your kids all through the day,” and “An effective team would communicate well, and they would be able to share [information such as] ‘This kid gets along with me, and this is what they tell me today, so you might have a little difficult time’ [with them]” (I-1G, 2). Another stated,

I think it [teams] doesn’t let kids fall through the cracks when you have teams. I mean you’ve got four people, and they work well together like they should. Everybody will know the kids. Nobody is going to fall through the cracks. They maintain the same

expectations for kids, and that's important as far as the team goes ... an effective team where they just work very closely together, with each other, and expectations are the same across the board. They communicate with each other. They have discussions, not only about curriculum, but about students and student needs, and I just think that's the way it ought to be. (I-1P, 3)

This sentiment was shared by another participant when stating, "If you are working with a team, then you are able to communicate what needs are not being met [and] what needs to be focused on" (I-2G, 2).

Three interviewees felt teams help with collaboration for students at a good middle school (I-1S, 1; I-1C, 2; & I-1E, 2). One participant shared, "A good middle school would have a team approach, where each grade would have its own group of teachers, and students would have a set number of teachers versus a whole bunch [for the] success [of students]" (I-1S, 1). Another participant shared, "I think that having a team, all teachers have input into all of the students and know all of the students, and it works beautifully" (I-1C, 2). Teams can be a "strength" and provide students with "somebody that they feel like they can go to if they need to, and I think in teaming, they see us [teachers] together as a group. They know that we're working together as a group for them" (I-1E, 2).

Two interviewees felt teams help with relationship building at a good middle school (I-2P, 2 & I-2H, 2). One participant stated, "Building relationships with kids through teams [is important]," and "There's real discussion that we have too about the relationships that can be built between two teachers and 40 kids compared to one teacher and a hundred kids" (I-2P, 2). Another participant stated that students can, "feel like they're part of a family [when they are organized by teams]" (I-2H, 2).

Departments. Organizational structures at a good middle school include departments. One participant shared that organizing the ideal middle school for instruction would include, “departments for subjects” which would have advantages in “making sure that you’re on the same page or you’re using the same vocabulary and teaching things the same way” (I-1M, 2). Another stated, “[Departments] encourage the teachers to build each other up and challenge each other to get to the next level for the kids so that there would be more options for the kids” (I-2H, 2). This participant continued in using a math department example by stating, “If they [math teachers] could all teach equalities the same way, then that would just be awesome for the students” (I-1M, 2). Another participant used math as an example when talking about departments by saying, “The math people could meet with the math people [as a department]” (I-2X, 2). Another interviewee thought similarly and shared,

Having departmental vertical alignment or even horizontal alignment is extremely important. They’ll know the students, and if you teach sixth grade and I teach seventh grade, then you can say, ‘They struggled a little bit with this,’ and then perhaps I can frontload that a little bit when they’re in seventh grade. (I-1C, 2)

Instructional time in the master schedule. Organizational structures at a good middle school allow for maximum instructional time in the master schedule. One participant stated, “Instructionally, I think you have to look at instruction time and making sure your teachers have enough time to cover the material ... and not just cover it, but cover it well” (I-2P, 2). Another participant stated, “If you’re expecting them [students] to do higher-level, high-thinking work, it may behoove them to get some of those higher-level math and language arts courses in the morning” (I-1S, 3). The same participant continued by stating, “If you’re already a struggling

learner, [it would be helpful] to get your math in the morning, although I know it is a struggle with scheduling” (I-1S, 3).

Common planning time. Organizational structures at a good middle school include common planning time for teachers. One participant shared, “[Organizing my ideal middle school for instruction would include] common planning” (I-1G, 2). Another stated, “Common planning time where [teachers] can meet, and talk, and discuss is wonderful” (I-2X, 2). Another participant shared, “[Teachers] should have a common time where you meet on students and their needs” (I-1S, 1). Another participant shared,

[It is important to find] time within your schedule to have common planning for teachers to collaborate and build tests and build formative assessments, summative tests where data can be generalized across not just the school but maybe a ... [school system] where teachers could have conversations about where kids are and what materials they are using to teach them. (I-2P, 2)

An additional interviewee stated, “[Teachers] should get together and just discuss what we hoped to accomplish, what we have accomplished ... just give out different ideas about what they have done and what could be done to help one another” (I-2X, 3). Another comment was, “I think there has to be good communication back and forth, up and down, and then also across [grade levels] I think teachers need to be able to have the time to confer” (I-2E, 1). This participant continued by stating, “[Common planning across grade levels would help] so that there’s not a lot of duplication of effort, and so that we slide seamlessly from one place to another” (I-2E, 1) and “to meet periodically because we need to know what holes [exist]” (I-2E, 1).

Extended school days. Organizational structures at a good middle school include extended school days. One participant commented on making school days longer to increase instructional time by stating,

[My ideal middle school would have] more time in the day ... extending time that the kids are actually in the building. If I have my ideal middle school setting, I would probably look at extending the day to include some additional time before the kids go home. I think a lot of them are by themselves [when they get home]. (I-2C, 3)

Perspectives on Transitions of a Good Middle School

The transitions of a good middle school consist of the following elements and are depicted in Figure 13: middle school transitions including grade configuration for transitions; and transitions after middle school, including preparing students for the transition to high school, career focus, and life skills. The interview data that support these elements of transitions are reported in this section.

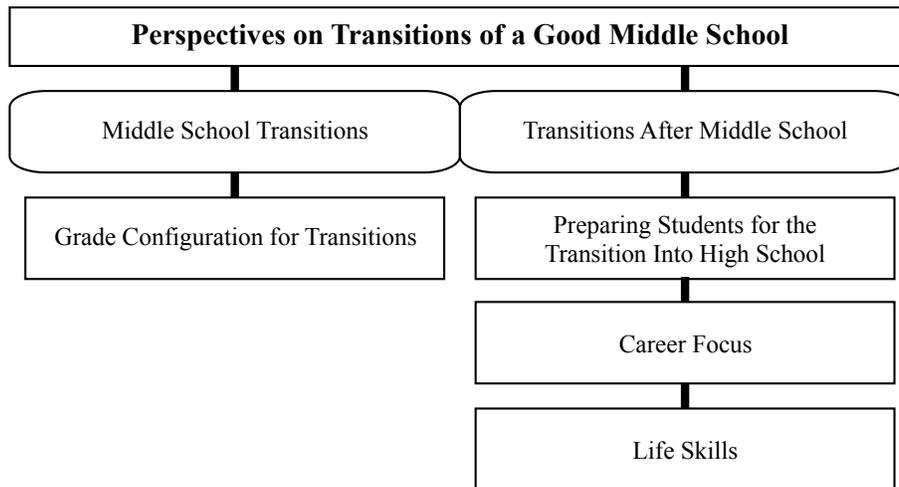


Figure 13. Elements for the transitions of a good middle school.

Middle school transitions. Transitions are important at a good middle school. One participant shared,

What we have to focus on is that [the middle school years are] transitions through adolescence, it's transition to things at home, body is changing, the ways they learn are changing, and so I think the reason it's so important is because it's definitely the middle; it's like where everything is starting to change over for them. (I-2H, 1)

Grade configuration for transitions. Grade configurations are important at a good middle school. All participants in the study that commented on grade configurations expressed they felt the best grade arrangement at the middle level was grades six through eight (I-1S, 4; I-1X, 4; I-2P, 1; I-2A, 9; I-2G, 3; I-2M, 4; I-2H, 3; I-2C, 4; & I-2X, 4). Numerous reasons were shared by participants about why they felt this grade configuration “is an effective grouping of students” (I-2P, 1) for middle school. One response was, “Sixth through eighth is the most frustrating years, because they're changing physically, they're changing emotionally. It's drama-trauma nonstop, and those are the most difficult years and the most fun” (I-2A, 9). “[The middle years of schooling are] really transition years so I think you have to keep that in mind [when considering the optimal grade configuration]” (I-2H, 1). Another participant shared, “There's definitely growth from sixth to eighth, but you also don't feel like they're so far apart from each other” (I-2H, 3). Another participant freely shared:

In the middle, you've got the opportunity to take a child who's coming in from an experience where they've been nurtured, and everything has just been kind and supportive, [where elementary staff members] dictate everything that they need to do from step one, to step two, to step three, and they walk in these lines down the hallways. They walk into the middle level, and it's a new place [The middle school] takes them from the child who's been pretty much regimented to a child that's a little nervous, a little scared, to the child in seventh grade who's hormonal and is still trying to find their place

and their control, to the child in the eighth grade who leaves us confident, self-assured, who has moved from insecurity, uncertainty to this, 'I can do this. I know what my path is. I've grown.' That's what middle school's about. They grow." (I-2A, 2)

Interviewees shared comments and reasons for including sixth grade in the optimal grade configuration for middle school. "I just think sixth grade is a good time to transition" (I-2P, 3). One participant felt strongly about making the transition into sixth grade as easy as possible by stating,

We work very hard to make that transition [into sixth grade] smooth, and we have a day where those students come and visit our school. And then the same day, that night, we have a parent night where parents come in and ask questions. We try to be very transparent about the way we operate and our structures and our philosophies. (I-2P, 3)

Other participants shared, "The sixth graders are not little children anymore, but they still have that innocence" (I-1X, 4), and "In sixth grade, they're [students are] still just sweetie pies" (I-1X, 1). Similarly, other interviewees stated, "Sixth graders, they come up here, and they're still not really babies, but we watch after them just a little bit more, and then they get that more maturity ... [and begin] doing things on their own" (I-2X, 4), and "I think sixth grade is a good transition year even with the challenges that it possesses" (I-2P, 3).

One interviewee shared comments and reasons for including eighth grade in the optimal grade configuration for middle school by stating, "Eighth graders are really struggling to be adults, but still need that shoulder to lean on" (I-1X, 1). Another statement made by the same participant was, "[Including eighth graders] gives them a chance to be the head honchos, so to speak, for a little bit before they become low man on the totem pole in high school" (I-1X, 4).

Interviewees shared comments and reasons for not including grades other than sixth through eighth in the optimal grade configuration for middle school: “In other configurations [other than grades 6-8], there’s such a gap between [grades] if it’s a K-8 model” (I-2P, 3), and “[Having] all kinds of age groups to mix in [is not ideal]” (I-2G, 4). Another participant shared,

I could not imagine being in an elementary school, K through eight, because eighth graders simply do not need to be in the bathroom with a second grader or a first grader because sometimes that leads to mischief, and a little bit of intimidation, and some fear. Kids are kids, and they don’t always behave the way we want them to. (I-2A, 9)

Another interviewee similarly stated, “I just don’t see the benefit of kindergarteners being in transition with eighth graders or first or second grade” (I-2P, 3).

Participants who made statements about grade configurations for middle school excluded fifth grade. One participant commented on the reasons for not including fifth grade in the optimal grade configuration for middle school by stating,

[Keeping] fifth grade [in the elementary school] gives them the opportunity at the elementary level to be the top man on campus, to be the queen of the pie all to say, ‘Look, I made it. I have accomplished, I’m leaving here just feeling so proud of myself.’ (I-2A, 9)

Another participant similarly stated, “If you were to include fifth graders, I feel like that’s a much younger age bracket, and I feel like that would not necessarily match” (I-2H, 3). “I don’t think you should add fifth really. They’re still kind of little” (I-2X, 4), and “Fifth grade is a little young” (I-2M, 4) were additional statements made by other interviewees.

Transitions after middle school. Preparing students for transitions after middle school is important at a good middle school.

Preparing students for the transition into high school. Preparing students for the transition into high school is important at a good middle school. Three participants felt similarly about the importance of getting students “ready for high school” (I-1S, 1; I-2H, 1; & I-1H, 1).

One participant shared,

Eighth grade students need to be prepared to go to the high school and to get them ready to take some of those high school credit courses and let them mature from being a middle school student to a high-schooler, and helping with that transition. (I-1H, 1)

Another comment made by this participant was, “[A good middle school should] start really departmentalizing in the eighth grade as they [students] get into that older age group [in preparation for high school]” (I-2H, 1).

Career focus. Preparing students for their futures is important at a good middle school. One participant shared, “A good middle school is a school that prepares the students ... for college” (I-1H, 1). Another interviewee commented, “[A good middle school has] to offer what they [students] need to make the right transition into who they’re going to be as an adult” (I-2H, 1). Another participant had a different view when sharing about preparing middle school students for a career by stating,

[A good middle school would allow students] to be planning what they wanted to do, and, I would even have like for kids who are really struggling in the academic classrooms who really feel like they’re going to go the way of auto-repair, that we would get them on track now and that they didn’t waste a lot of time in stuff that maybe they just zone out on and kind of zone them into a place where they’re going to be successful already starting in middle school. (I-1E, 2)

Life skills. Preparing students for life is important at a good middle school. One interviewee stated, “A good middle school is a school that prepares the students ... for daily life” and “provides the students with a well-rounded environment that teaches them about morals, values, traditions, and the basic needs to function in today’s world” (I-1H, 1). The same participant continued by stating, “[A good middle school] needs to prepare them [students] for the future, such as jobs, interests in life, ... and overall achievement and success” (I-1H, 1).

Perspectives on Instructional Practices of a Good Middle School

The instructional practices of a good middle school consist of the following elements and are depicted in Figure 14: hands-on learning, technology, using data, and instructional resources. The interview data that support these elements of instructional practices are reported in this section.

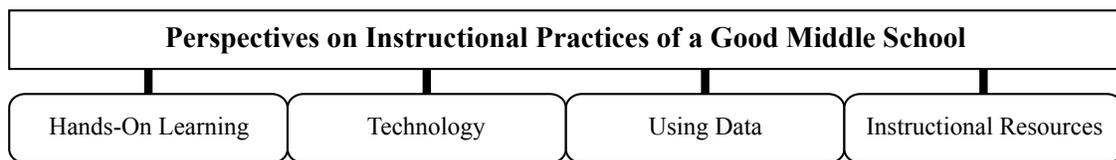


Figure 14. Elements for the instructional practices of a good middle school.

Hands-on learning. Instructional practices at a good middle school include hands-on learning experiences for students. Four interviewees addressed the need for students to have hands-on, active learning opportunities in their interview responses (I-1H, 1; I-1S, 2; I-1C, 2; & I-2A, 5). One participant stated, “I’d like to see more hands-on things and field trips” (I-1H, 1). Another similarly stated, “[Wanting instructional opportunities for students] where kids can actually work and build things” (I-1S, 2). Another participant stated,

I’d like to see more hands-on experiences for middle school kids. Some kids are academically inclined, you can give them all the abstract work in the world, and they’re

going to sail right through it. Other kids need the hands-on, and that component is somewhat lacking in the middle school. (I-1C, 2)

Another interviewee stated, “I love the idea of classrooms to be hands-on. That’s where a sage on the stage steps to the side and becomes the guide. Yes, we have to be the sage, but we also can do that when we’re on the sidelines” (I-2A, 5).

Technology. Instructional practices at a good middle school include students being afforded the opportunities to use technology in their learning experiences. One interviewee stated, “I would want the teachers to all have the latest technology, but more importantly, to use it effectively. What good is it to have a Smartboard when they use it as a screen?” (I-2A, 3).

Using data. Instructional practices at a good middle school include teachers using data to help drive instruction and remediation needs of students. One participant stated, “A good middle school ... has teachers who are willing ... to look at data” (I-1E, 1). The same participant continued by stating,

[Teachers must] look at test scores, you have to look at your data. We have to sit down together as a group of teachers. We sit down a lot and look at our test scores and say, ‘Right here, they’re [students are] really missing this. Why were we missing that?’ And then, once we figure out where we’re missing it, and then we try to really make sure that we’re getting that the next year or the next semester. I think good schools are able to do that. (I-1E, 1)

Instructional resources. Instructional practices at a good middle school include having the appropriate instructional resources to aid in teaching. One participant expressed,

I would get rid of textbooks. I think too often it is the go-to for the curriculum. I really think that there should be content specialists working at the school board to create the

curriculum, and then it's on the internet for us to access, and that's our go-to curriculum, that's the one with the framework. Textbooks are relied on too heavily I think. (I-1M, 2)

Perspectives on Parental Involvement of a Good Middle School

The parental involvement of a good middle school consists of the following elements and are depicted in Figure 15: realizing the struggles of involving parents, involving parents, and communicating with parents. The interview data that support these elements of parental involvement are reported in this section.

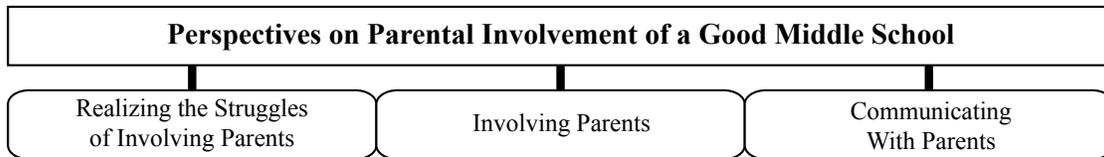


Figure 15. Elements for parental involvement of a good middle school.

Realizing the struggles of involving parents at the middle level. A good middle school has staff members that realize the struggles of involving parents. Common thoughts were contained in the interviews about the reasons parents do not become involved at the middle level. Reasons included: students not wanting their parents to be involved once they enter middle school (I-1P, 5), parents with transportation issues (I-1S, 4 & I-1P, 4), difficulty with getting parents to walk inside the building (I-1P, 4), and parents not feeling “comfortable” coming to school (I-2M, 4).

Another reason revealed for poor parental involvement was poor attitudes of parents about education. One interviewee believed parents not valuing the education process and passing “that mentality on to their children” (I-1X, 3) were reasons parents chose not to become involved. Another stated that even though parental involvement is important, “The desire has to be there, and I just don’t know that it is with a lot of our parents” (I-1E, 3). This same participant also shared that some parents do not understand that “their help is needed at home”

(I-1E, 3). Another participant shared that some parents only “show up” when they are notified about their child’s discipline issues (I-2A, 8). Another stated, “[A good middle school would have parents that] would know what was going on, they would want to know what’s going on, you know some don’t,” and “They [parents] didn’t like school, and they’re passing that onto their kids” (I-2M, 4).

Another reason revealed for poor parental involvement pertained to parents’ work affecting their involvement at school (I-1X, 4 & I-2E, 3). One interviewee stated that oftentimes, parents “are basically trying to make a living,” and “The child goes home to an empty house,” which prevents those parents from becoming involved in school processes for their child (I-1X, 4).

Another reason revealed for poor parental involvement was understanding that students do not all have the same parental circumstances at home. At a good middle school, staff members must “understand what might be going on at home” (I-2X, 4). Having students from “broken homes” can affect parental involvement (I-2C, 3). One interviewee shared, “We have helicopter parents, those who hover, and we have absentee parents, and we have grandparents raising kids, and we have foster parents raising kids, and we have kids raising themselves” (I-2A, 9). In some instances, these varying home situations can affect parental involvement in negative ways. The interviewee that expressed this concern concluded this topic by stating, “I want every kid to have at least one loving parent in their life” (I-2A, 9).

Involving parents. A good middle school has staff members that make efforts to include and involve parents, and “encourage parental involvement every step of the way” (I-2A, 2). Multiple thoughts were shared about the importance of involving parents and specific ideas to help promote parental involvement. One participant felt strongly that parents “could be our [the

school's] strongest advocates but then a lot of times, they're one of our biggest problems" (I-1E, 3). The daunting question that arose from multiple interviews was the challenge of how to get parents involved in the process of educating their adolescent children (I-1E, 3; I-1S, 4; I-1M, 2; I-1C, 3; I-2P, 8; I-2H, 2; I-2G, 3; & I-2S, 2). One participant stated, "Ideally, they [parents] would be involved and be wanting to come [to school]" (I-1P, 5). Another shared, "We can talk about [poor] parental involvement, we need to talk about what we're doing to change it" (I-2P, 8).

One way to get parents involved was mentioned by several participants about simply inviting parents into the school for various reasons. One participant stated, "Anytime you can get middle school parents in the building, that's good" (I-1P, 5). Another shared, "[A good middle school] tries to build those bridges with parents" (I-2P, 1). The wide-range of invitations to parents could include: volunteer work with possibilities of parents serving for bus duty, lunch duty, classroom help (I-1M, 2), clerical help, reading groups, math games (I-1C, 3), or a helpful band parent that comes at other times than actual concerts (I-2A, 9); career days and field trips (I-2H, 2); opportunities to "see how some of the children act that's theirs" (I-1H, 3), see what happens in the classroom (I-2X, 4), "to be able to come [to school] and sit with their kids, especially the ones that are struggling" (I-1E, 3); family night activities (I-1S, 4); fundraising activities (I-2X, 4); PTA meetings (I-1X, 4; I-1P, 4; & I-2A, 9); parent courses and workshops to help parents understand curricular needs (I-1S, 4 & I-2A, 9); parental input opportunities (I-2E, 3); and opportunities for staff members and parents to work together (I-2X, 4). Expressly stated by one individual, "I'd love to see parents in here nonstop" (I-2A, 9).

Another way mentioned by interviewees to involve parents would be for them to help with school needs, specifically, supplying needed resources (I-1H, 3; I-1G, 3; & I-2A, 8). One

participant believed that parents could be valuable partners in the education process by donating clothes and supplies to the school (I-1G, 3). Other ways stated to involve parents were to provide parents with bus transportation and to offer parents incentives to come to school (I-1S, 4).

Communicating with parents. A good middle school has staff members who communicate with parents. Common thoughts shared about parental involvement at the middle level included feelings on the importance of good parent communication (I-1H, 3; I-1X, 4; I-1M, 1; I-1E, 3; I-2P, 3; I-2M, 4; & I-2X, 4). One participant stated, “The line of communication [with parents] would be huge [at a good middle school]” (I-2M, 4). Another participant shared, “I would love to see parents who feel that they can walk in that door at any time and be able to talk to us at any time to discuss any problem” (I-2A, 8).

Concerns were raised by several participants about communication problems with parents at the middle level. One interviewee shared the difficulty with communicating with parents when parents do not answer or return phone calls made (I-1G, 3). One participant similarly shared, “Parents are hard to reach” (I-2M, 4). Another participant stated the need and difficulty of “getting information back and forth to our parents” (I-1E, 3). Another participant expressed concerns about parents sharing with the school community only about school struggles and not school accomplishments by stating, “It seems like the bad things always tend to be what’s talked about and not all the good things that are happening at schools” (I-2P, 3). This participant continued by stating, “Having those communication channels open with parents ... to discuss challenges for their students but also celebrate the successes of those students and just having support for our teachers and our faculty in the community [is important]” (I-2P, 3).

Perspectives on Curricular Aspects of a Good Middle School

The curricular aspects of a good middle school consist of the following elements and are depicted in Figure 16: curricular emphases; and curricular opportunities including exploration opportunities, interdisciplinary opportunities, advanced class opportunities, core curriculum opportunities, club opportunities, extracurricular opportunities, and high school credit opportunities. The interview data that support these elements of curricular aspects are reported in this section.

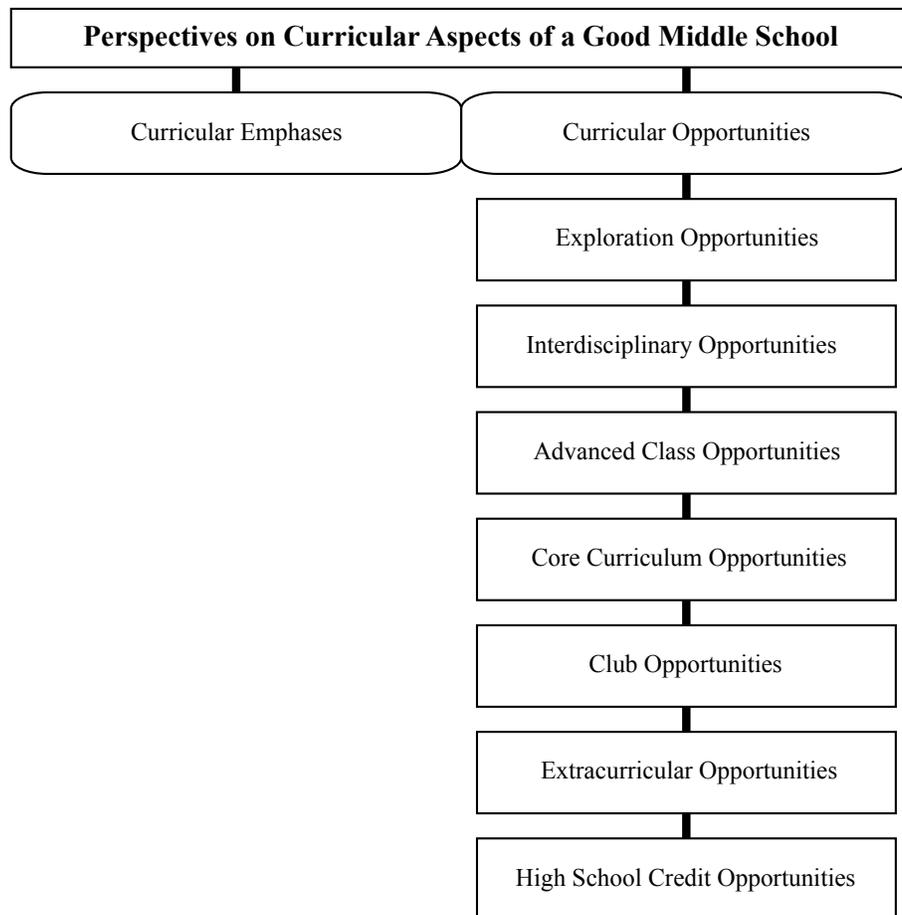


Figure 16. Elements for curricular aspects of a good middle school.

Curricular emphases. The curricular emphases at a good middle school should meet the needs of its adolescent learners. One participant shared concern about curricular emphases

directed at standardized tests by stating, “I would really like to see a curriculum that allows professional teachers to be professional and to teach what they think the kids need to know rather than the tests” (I-1E, 2). This participant believed in the importance of not basing the curriculum solely on what was being tested but also on reasoning and thinking skills (I-1E, 2). Another participant felt similarly and stated, “The curriculum in my ideal middle school would include some social skills” to teach students struggling to communicate and not be “so focused on some other things like teaching to the [standardized] tests” (I-1G, 2). Another felt the curriculum “would be one that has life skills and stuff wrapped into it ... how to balance a checkbook, how to cook their own food, how to wash their own clothes” (I-2G, 2).

Curricular opportunities. The curricular opportunities at a good middle school should provide adolescent students with a variety of options: exploration opportunities, interdisciplinary opportunities, advanced class opportunities, core curriculum opportunities, club opportunities, extracurricular opportunities, and high school credit opportunities.

Exploration opportunities. Curricular opportunities at a good middle school include exploration opportunities for students. Providing students with opportunities to be exposed to different possibilities, “try new things” (I-2P, 1), “experiment ... with different class offerings (I-2A, 2), and “discover things they have never seen before [and] see options for their futures before they get to the big world” (I-2H, 1) to see what they like and what interests them are important (I-1P, 2; I-2P, 1; I-2A, 3; & I-2H, 1). One participant stated, “I’m a big advocate for the exploratory [opportunities], and sometimes the extras are just as important as the core things” (I-2X, 1). Numerous interviewees expressed the importance of offering a variety of exploratory opportunities to middle-level students. Exploration classes suggested by participants included: physical education (I-1S, 2 & I-1E, 2), band (I-1E, 2; I-2P, 1; & I-2A, 3), chorus (I-1E, 2 & I-2A,

3), music appreciation (I-2P, 1 & I-2A, 4), art (I-1E, 2; I-2P, 1; & I-2A, 3), exploratory opportunities that “promote skills they [students] will use later” (I-1S, 2), home economics (I-2C, 2), guidance (I-2G, 2), foreign language classes (I-1S, 3; I-2P, 1; & I-2A, 3), agro-science (I-1C, 2 & I-2A, 3), computers and technology (I-1C, 2; I-2P, 1; I-2A, 3; & I-2M, 2), health (I-2A, 4), and fine arts (I-1P, 2 & I-2M, 2). One participant expressed the reason exploration opportunities are important by stating, “Kids who aren’t so successful in the classroom, when they get into band or chorus, or art ... that’s a place that they can shine” (I-1E, 2). Similarly, another participant believed exploratory classes are sometimes “where that’s the only place some kids succeed. It’s the place where they find success” (I-1P, 2)

Interdisciplinary opportunities. Curricular opportunities at a good middle school include interdisciplinary opportunities for students. Two participants stated the need for students to have opportunities to “work across the curriculum” (I-1H, 2) and to have “cross-curricular” opportunities (I-2A, 4).

Advanced class opportunities. Curricular opportunities at a good middle school include advanced class opportunities for students (I-1S, 2; I-1H, 2; I-2P, 2; & I-2A, 4). One interviewee shared the importance of providing higher learning opportunities for advanced learners “to allow them to have that interaction with other kids who are on that same level” and “to give them access to kids that are on that same path and have the same interests” (I-1H, 2). Another participant believed good middle schools would not “cap out” at predetermined math levels when some students may be ready for a more accelerated track and advanced classes (I-2P, 2).

Core curriculum opportunities. Curricular opportunities at a good middle school include core curriculum opportunities for students. Numerous interviewees expressed the importance of a good middle school providing core instructional classes: mathematics, language arts, science,

and social science (I-1H, 1; I-1E, 2; I-1P, 2; I-2P, 1; I-2A, 3; I-2H, 1; I-2C, 2; I-2X, 2; & I-1G, 2). Multiple responses included the importance of teaching students how to count money (I-1H, 1; I-1G, 2; & I-2X, 2). Some felt that schools were moving away from the focus on core subjects and that “the traditional curriculum [was being] left behind” (I-1H, 1) and expressed their desire to redirect curricular emphases back onto the core areas of mathematics, language arts, science, and social science (I-1H, 1 & I-1G, 2).

Club opportunities. Curricular opportunities at a good middle school include club opportunities for students. One participant shared, [A good middle school is] a place where students can explore new opportunities through ... clubs” (I-2A, 2) and “do things outside of the regular classroom” (I-2A, 5). Club opportunities are important to offer (I-1E, 2 & I-2X, 1) and can be places “where kids who don’t necessarily shine in the classroom really can find their niche somewhere else and have a place where they’re really successful” (I-1E, 2).

Extracurricular opportunities. Curricular opportunities at a good middle school include extracurricular opportunities for students. One participant shared the importance of offering students opportunities for extra-curricular sports (I-1E, 2), and others stated the importance of students participating in athletics (I-2A, 2 & I-2X, 1).

High school credit opportunities. Curricular opportunities at a good middle school include high school credit opportunities for students. Specifically, one interviewee participant shared the desire to offer Earth science to eighth grade students in order to earn a high-school credit towards graduation (I-1S, 2). Another generally shared the importance of giving eighth grade students more opportunities to earn verified credits towards their high-school diploma (I-2P, 2).

Perspectives on the Physical Environment of a Good Middle School

The physical environment of a good middle school consists of the following elements and are depicted in Figure 17: updated library, additional resources, and wish list. The interview data that support these elements of physical environment are reported in this section.

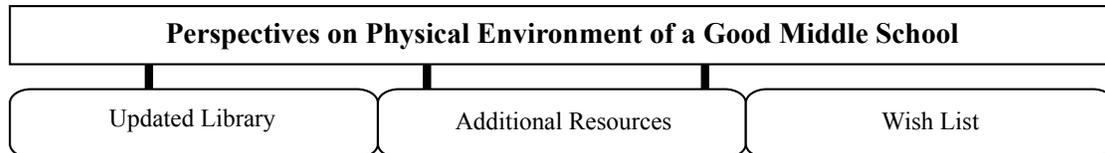


Figure 17. Elements for the physical environment of a good middle school.

Updated library resources. The physical environment at a good middle school has updated library resources. One participant believed that a good middle school has a library that is a “maker space” and has “the awesomeness of a beautiful collection of resources not only physically in the room, but also electronically available” (I-2A, 3).

Resources. The physical environment at a good middle school has ample resources. One interviewee commented on the resources needed by teachers and stated, “We don’t have to have all those fancy-dancy tools, but what they [teachers] want and what they’ll use then definitely put in place” (I-2A, 3). Another participant thought similarly and stated teachers need “good equipment ... decent textbooks ... and other resource materials” (I-2E, 1).

Wish list. The physical environment at a good middle school includes the wish list of staff members. One participant expressed, “A perfect middle school would have more technology that would be personalized where each student would be allowed to have access [to it] or their own personal iPads or laptops” (I-1H, 1). Similarly, another participant stated that teachers should “all have the latest in technology” (I-2A, 3) and another stated, “[A good middle school would] have plenty of technology available to all students at the ready” (I-2S, 1).

Another participant wanted additional transportation provided to students for those wishing to stay after school for additional academic support and sports opportunities (I-1C, 1). Another participant wanted a television studio for students for morning and afternoon announcements where they “would be in charge of their own learning” (I-2A, 3). More space was mentioned by two participants (I-2H, 1 & I-2C, 2). Finally, two participants shared their wishes of having uniforms for students where every child would wear the same outfit to prevent distractions and prevent teasing by others more fortunate (I-1C, 2 & I-2G, 2).

Perspectives on Progress of a Good Middle School

The progress of a good middle school consists of the following elements and are depicted in Figure 18: professional growth and school improvement. The interview data that support these elements of progress are reported in this section.

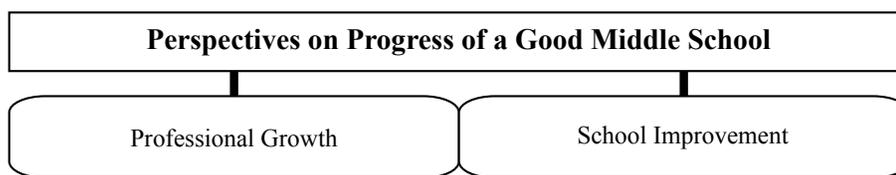


Figure 18. Elements for the progress of a good middle school.

Professional growth. A good middle school is one that focuses on professional growth for teachers. One participant shared this belief by stating, “A good middle school has to have continuing training and teachers who are willing to go to professional development” (I-1E, 1).

School improvement. A good middle school is one that focuses on school improvement in order to make the learning environment as beneficial as possible for the students. One participant stated,

If we’re not doing what we need to be doing, to change it, to feel like it’s okay to change it, and not feel if someone says, ‘Well, maybe you should try it this way,’ not to feel

offended. Just be able to be flexible and to do those things that we need to do to make our middle school successful. (I-1E, 1)

While speaking about school improvement, the same participant also stated, “I think a good middle school is one that takes the time to figure out what the problems are, the problems we’re facing, and try to figure out solutions for them” (I-1E, 1). Finally, the same participant shared this, “I think good middle schools are able to sit and talk with each other ... [about] where we’re falling short, where we need to improve, and that we get a plan, and take care of that very quickly” (I-1E, 1).

A Comparison of the Characteristics of a Good Middle School as Viewed by Teachers and Administrators of the Two Schools in this Study and the Characteristics of a Good Middle School as Identified by the National Association of Secondary School Principal’s Council on Middle Level Education in 1985, the Association for Middle Level Education in 2010, and the Carnegie Corporation’s Council on Adolescent Development in 1989

Comparisons and contrasts are presented in table format between the characteristics of a good middle school as viewed by teachers and administrators of Dorchester Middle School and J. K. Walters Middle School and the characteristics of a good middle school as identified by the National Association of Secondary School Principal’s Council, the Association for Middle Level Education, and the Carnegie Corporation’s Council on Adolescent Development. Table 12 depicts this comparison by representing differences and commonalities that exist across the identified characteristics. Each row in the table represents a specific characteristic and shows where data can be found across the five sources of data.

Table 12

Data Summary Table for An Agenda for Excellence at the Middle Level, This We Believe: Keys to Educating Young Adolescents, and Turning Points: Preparing American Youth for the 21st Century

Middle school documents			Middle schools	
An agenda for excellence at the middle level	This we believe: Keys to educating young adolescents	Turning points: Preparing American youth for the 21 st century	Dorchester middle school	J. K. Walters middle school
Middle school transitions				
Positive transitions between school levels	Not reported	Not reported	<p>A good middle school:</p> <p>prepares students for high school;</p> <p>helps eighth graders mature from being a middle school student to a high-schooler;</p>	<p>A good middle school:</p> <p>has smooth transitions between elementary and high school levels;</p> <p>has students that are confident and self-assured;</p> <p>has students that feel like they are ready for high school;</p> <p>serves as a bridge between school levels;</p> <p>has administration that is transparent about their operations, structures, and philosophies;</p> <p>has administration that invites parents to visit the school and encourages them to ask</p>

Middle school documents			Middle schools	
An agenda for excellence at the middle level	This we believe: Keys to educating young adolescents	Turning points: Preparing American youth for the 21 st century	Dorchester middle school	J. K. Walters middle school
				<p>questions;</p> <p>has administration that schedules a school visit for rising, middle level students;</p> <p>has faculty that vertically discusses, communicates, and has contact with elementary and high school staff members;</p> <p>has communication between the school levels to find gaps in the curriculum;</p> <p>has offerings to meet the needs of students as they transition into becoming adults;</p> <p>and has departmentalization in the eighth grade to help with the transition into high school.</p>
Middle school culture				
School organization and culture that promotes a sense of	Positive school climate	Not reported	A good middle school: has staff that supports each other;	A good middle school is a place where students: are happy to be

Middle school documents			Middle schools	
An agenda for excellence at the middle level	This we believe: Keys to educating young adolescents	Turning points: Preparing American youth for the 21 st century	Dorchester middle school	J. K. Walters middle school
belonging			<p>has staff that tries to help each other;</p> <p>has staff members that share ideas;</p> <p>has staff that works together;</p> <p>has staff members that have a common mission which is to do the best for students;</p> <p>creates a sense of unity;</p> <p>has a sense of family;</p> <p>has teachers building strong relationships with students;</p> <p>has teachers knowing the students, knowing something about their home lives and what they come to school with, and sometimes what they come to school without;</p> <p>and has staff members that have</p>	<p>there;</p> <p>are provided a caring education and know that staff members are there for them;</p> <p>are learning while having fun;</p> <p>are comfortable in being themselves;</p> <p>feel fostered;</p> <p>are treated with respect, kindness, and care;</p> <p>feel like they are part of the community;</p> <p>feel like everything possible is being done to help them;</p> <p>and feel safe.</p> <p>A good middle school has:</p> <p>everyone working together to provide the best education for students: teachers, staff, custodians, cafeteria workers, principals,</p>

Middle school documents			Middle schools	
An agenda for excellence at the middle level	This we believe: Keys to educating young adolescents	Turning points: Preparing American youth for the 21 st century	Dorchester middle school	J. K. Walters middle school
			<p>personal interactions with the students;</p> <p>A good middle school is a place where students:</p> <p>feel valued and value what they are doing at school;</p> <p>and feel welcomed and they feel comfortable in the building;</p>	<p>and administrators;</p> <p>and has staff members that make connections and build relationships with students and one another, and who recognize improvement in students no matter how small it may be.</p>
Connections with the community	Not reported	Connect schools with communities	Not included in interview data	Not included in interview data
Not reported	Not reported	Create small communities for learning	Not included in interview data	Not included in interview data
Not reported	Not reported	Empower teachers and administrators	<p>A good middle school has:</p> <p>administration that is on board with your teaching and are supportive of your teaching methods;</p>	<p>A good middle school has:</p> <p>administration that allows teachers to have input and some say in what goes on.</p>

Middle school documents			Middle schools	
An agenda for excellence at the middle level	This we believe: Keys to educating young adolescents	Turning points: Preparing American youth for the 21 st century	Dorchester middle school	J. K. Walters middle school
			<p>administration that is supportive of teachers' discipline decisions;</p> <p>administration that is supportive of teachers' classroom management;</p> <p>administration that is supportive of the ideas teachers want to try;</p> <p>administration that gives autonomy in the classroom to teachers;</p> <p>administration that respects and supports teachers;</p> <p>administration that brings teachers in to get their feedback and what do they think about school issues.</p>	
Not reported	Not reported	Re-engage families in the educational process	A good middle school: has parents become	A good middle school: develops

Middle school documents			Middle schools	
An agenda for excellence at the middle level	This we believe: Keys to educating young adolescents	Turning points: Preparing American youth for the 21 st century	Dorchester middle school	J. K. Walters middle school
			<p>more involved in making sure the school has the necessary and proper resources;</p> <p>communicates with parents;</p> <p>offers incentives to get parents into the school;</p> <p>offers bus transportation to get parents to the school;</p> <p>has large parent teacher organizations;</p> <p>offers family nights for students and families to attend together;</p> <p>offers parent classes to help parents with learning what their students are learning;</p> <p>parents who volunteer on a regular basis;</p> <p>parents that donate supplies and clothing;</p>	<p>relationships with parents;</p> <p>has parents involved in the day-to-day activities;</p> <p>has staff members that talk about ways to increase parental involvement;</p> <p>has parents that feel comfortable and can walk in the door at any time and discuss any problems;</p> <p>has parents that share resources they have with the school;</p> <p>has open communication channels with parents to celebrate successes and discuss challenges;</p> <p>has parental support of teachers and faculty in the community;</p> <p>builds bridges with parents;</p> <p>has staff members</p>

Middle school documents			Middle schools	
An agenda for excellence at the middle level	This we believe: Keys to educating young adolescents	Turning points: Preparing American youth for the 21 st century	Dorchester middle school	J. K. Walters middle school
			parents involved in the school and wanting to come to the school for various activities;	that work together with parents; has parental input; has parents that want to be involved; has parents that are involved with career days and fundraising activities; has teachers that understand the struggles a student may be facing at home; and invites parents into the school on a regular basis and on field trips.
The needs of diverse adolescent students				
Client-oriented with emphasis on the development of young adolescents	Continuous progress for students	Ensure success for all	A good middle school is: a place where the age group of students can be very trying and very rewarding; a place where students who are caught in the middle, are given opportunities for an	A good middle school is: an age appropriate environment; a place where learning occurs and students show growth in many aspects; a place where the most important

Middle school documents			Middle schools	
An agenda for excellence at the middle level	This we believe: Keys to educating young adolescents	Turning points: Preparing American youth for the 21 st century	Dorchester middle school	J. K. Walters middle school
			<p>instructional pace that allows them to have success and get to that next level of success or achievement;</p> <p>a place that focuses on all aspects of the whole child: academic, social, psychological well-being, and emotional needs;</p> <p>a place that provides students with a well-rounded environment that teaches them about morals, values, traditions, and the basic needs to function in today's world;</p> <p>a place that is centered around students' needs as an individual;</p> <p>a place where students don't get lost;</p> <p>a place where staff members check in on the changes that adolescent students are going through</p>	<p>thing are the students;</p> <p>a place where students are engaged, encouraged, and challenged;</p> <p>a place with support systems available for struggling students to help them be successful;</p> <p>a place that helps special education students be successful;</p> <p>a place that focuses on all aspects of the whole child: academic, social, psychological well-being, and emotional needs;</p> <p>a place that has programs to support and help students find themselves, give students freedom, and give students opportunities to become the person they want to be;</p> <p>and a place where</p>

Middle school documents			Middle schools	
An agenda for excellence at the middle level	This we believe: Keys to educating young adolescents	Turning points: Preparing American youth for the 21 st century	Dorchester middle school	J. K. Walters middle school
			<p>and providing support;</p> <p>a place where staff members help students with problems both inside and outside of school;</p> <p>a place that is responsive to developmental needs of students;</p>	students' needs are met on their level.
Student development of skills necessary for successful participation in the adult world	Comprehensive advising and counseling	Not reported	<p>A good middle school has:</p> <p>guidance counselors that meet frequently with students to talk with them;</p> <p>programs to prepare students for college;</p> <p>programs to prepare students for daily life;</p>	<p>A good middle school would have:</p> <p>rotations in guidance for career focus;</p> <p>have ways to teach students common sense skills;</p> <p>have more counselors available for various student needs;</p>

Middle school documents			Middle schools	
An agenda for excellence at the middle level	This we believe: Keys to educating young adolescents	Turning points: Preparing American youth for the 21 st century	Dorchester middle school	J. K. Walters middle school
			<p>programs to prepare students for the future, such as jobs, interest in life, and overall achievement and success;</p> <p>provide opportunities for students to plan what they would like to do for a career;</p>	and teach ethical skills to students.
Organizational structures				
Not reported	A range of organizational arrangements	Not reported	<p>A good middle school has:</p> <p>teacher teams or departmentalization;</p> <p>a block schedule or a traditional schedule, depending on the school;</p> <p>interdisciplinary learning activities for students to work across the curriculum;</p>	<p>A good middle school has:</p> <p>teacher teams or departmentalization;</p> <p>a block schedule or a traditional schedule, depending on the school;</p> <p>and a schedule that extends instructional time in math and language and allows for enough time in the schedule for teachers to cover the material.</p>

Middle school documents			Middle schools	
An agenda for excellence at the middle level	This we believe: Keys to educating young adolescents	Turning points: Preparing American youth for the 21 st century	Dorchester middle school	J. K. Walters middle school
Not reported	Cooperative planning	Not reported	<p>A good middle school has:</p> <p>time within the schedule for teachers to have common planning time to meet on students and their needs;</p>	<p>A good middle school has:</p> <p>time within the schedule for teachers to have common planning;</p> <p>collaboration opportunities for teachers to share ideas that can help one another;</p> <p>time for teachers to build tests and formative assessments with other teachers;</p> <p>time for teachers to analyze summative test data with other teachers;</p> <p>time for teachers to communicate with other teachers about the instructional materials they use;</p> <p>and time for teachers to share ideas with each other about what they have accomplished and what they hope to accomplish.</p>

Middle school documents			Middle schools	
An agenda for excellence at the middle level	This we believe: Keys to educating young adolescents	Turning points: Preparing American youth for the 21 st century	Dorchester middle school	J. K. Walters middle school
The change process				
Systematic reform	Not reported	Not reported	<p>A good middle school:</p> <p>is alright with making changes if the need arises to make the school more successful;</p> <p>has staff members that are not offended with changes;</p> <p>takes the time to figure out what the problems are and tries to figure out solutions for them;</p> <p>takes the time to find out where the shortfalls are, where improvements are necessary, and develop a plan to remedy the problems very quickly</p>	Not included in interview data
Instructional practices				
Integrated technology	Not reported	Not reported	<p>A good middle school has:</p> <p>more technology that would be personalized where each student would</p>	<p>A good middle school has:</p> <p>the latest technology;</p> <p>and good computer</p>

Middle school documents			Middle schools	
An agenda for excellence at the middle level	This we believe: Keys to educating young adolescents	Turning points: Preparing American youth for the 21 st century	Dorchester middle school	J. K. Walters middle school
			be allowed to have access	equipment that is used effectively.
Learning and instruction	Varied instructional strategies	Improve academic performance of students	A good middle school has: hands-on learning opportunities; and opportunities for children to learn by building things.	A good middle school: meets the instructional needs of diverse learners; and provides students with hands-on learning opportunities.
Not reported	Evaluation procedures compatible with the nature of young adolescent needs	Not reported	Not included in interview data	Not included in interview data
Curriculum design				
Not reported	A full exploratory program	Not reported	A good middle school provides students with opportunities to: try new things so they can learn of different options for their futures such as art, band, life skills, chorus, foreign languages, agro-science, technology, health, home economics, robotics, and	A good middle school provides students with opportunities to: explore, experiment, and discover new areas of interest; and try new things so they can learn of different options for their futures such as art, band, life skills, trade, chorus,

Middle school documents			Middle schools	
An agenda for excellence at the middle level	This we believe: Keys to educating young adolescents	Turning points: Preparing American youth for the 21 st century	Dorchester middle school	J. K. Walters middle school
			computer programming; attend exploratory classes that promote skills they'll use in the future; find success in a class that are not successful in the regular classroom;	foreign languages, music appreciation, agro-science, technology, health, home economics, robotics, and computer programming.
Balanced curriculum	A balanced curriculum based on the needs of young adolescents	Teach a core academic curriculum	A good middle school provides students with: academic opportunities in the core subject areas: mathematics, language arts, science, and social science; a variety of classes that reach the needs of different levels of learners; and cross-curricular opportunities.	A good middle school provides students with: academic opportunities in the core subject areas: mathematics, language arts, science, and social science; a variety of classes that reach the needs of different levels of learners; and cross-curricular opportunities.
Personnel				
Specially prepared teachers	Educators knowledgeable about and committed to young adolescents	Staff middle schools with teachers who are experts at teaching adolescents	A good middle school has: teachers that are flexible;	A good middle school has: teachers that are passionate about middle school aged

Middle school documents			Middle schools	
An agenda for excellence at the middle level	This we believe: Keys to educating young adolescents	Turning points: Preparing American youth for the 21 st century	Dorchester middle school	J. K. Walters middle school
			<p>teachers that are caring;</p> <p>teachers who are willing to go the extra mile;</p> <p>teachers that are willing to spend extra time going slower to help kids that need that accommodation;</p> <p>teachers that are ready and prepared to take students and advance them to that next level;</p> <p>teachers that have a passion for the adolescent age group;</p>	<p>students;</p> <p>has teachers that are flexible;</p> <p>has teachers that understand the developmental stages of adolescence;</p> <p>has teachers that are well-educated;</p> <p>has teachers that are motivated</p> <p>has teachers that have good people skills with students;</p> <p>has teachers that know how to teach;</p> <p>has teachers that enjoy what they do;</p> <p>has teachers that are assigned to a subject that they are passionate about;</p> <p>has teachers that connect with their students;</p> <p>has teachers that care about their students;</p>

Middle school documents			Middle schools	
An agenda for excellence at the middle level	This we believe: Keys to educating young adolescents	Turning points: Preparing American youth for the 21 st century	Dorchester middle school	J. K. Walters middle school
				has teachers that are involved with students' extracurricular activities outside of school; and has teachers that are able to motivate to get the most out of their students.

A Comparison of the Characteristics of a Good Middle School Identified by the Teachers and Administrators of Dorchester Middle School and the Characteristics of a Good Middle School Identified by the Teachers and Administrators of J. K. Walters Middle School

Throughout the data analysis process, the researcher found both similarities and differences in the responses between the administrators and teachers at both middle schools in the study on what constitutes a good middle school. In this section, the ten main categories identified in the data on a good middle school are revisited with an emphasis on the similarities and differences that exist. The comparison information will be presented in tables. Two tables are presented for each category. One table depicts where the data exists for the elements of the category. This table shows whether data exists for elements solely in one school (Dorchester or J. K. Walters), representing differences in perspectives of participants from each school, or if data exists for elements in both schools (Dorchester and J. K. Walters), representing common views of participants from each school. The other table depicts the number and percentages of

interviewees from Dorchester Middle School and J. K. Walters Middle School who responded on the elements of the category. Specific quotes made by participants from each middle school can be found in the descriptive analysis section at the beginning of this chapter.

A Comparison Between the Two Schools for the Culture of a Good Middle School

The interview data from middle school teachers and administrators from both middle schools in this study contained similarities and differences for the culture of a good middle school. See Table 13 for where interview data exist between and across Dorchester Middle School and J. K. Walter Middle School.

Table 13

Categories and Elements of Data Found in Interview Transcripts for the Culture of a Good Middle School and Where the Data Exist

Culture of a good middle school			
Categories and elements of data found in interview transcripts	Interview data existing for only Dorchester middle school	Interview data existing for both middle schools	Interview data existing for only J. K. Walters middle school
Team approach		x	
Stakeholder relationships			
Student relationships with other students			x
Student relationships with teachers		x	
Teacher relationships with administration			x
School atmosphere		x	
School safety			x
Beyond academic achievement and scores			x
Student population		x	
Teachers' input		x	

Participants from both middle schools shared responses on the culture of a good middle school. The number and percentages of interviewees from Dorchester Middle School and J. K.

Walters Middle School who responded with cultural elements in a good middle school are in Table 14.

Table 14

Interview Data Summary Table for Participants' Responses on the Culture of a Good Middle School

Middle school	Interviewees	Team approach		Stakeholder relationships		School atmosphere		School safety		Beyond academic achievement and scores		Student population		Teachers' input	
		<i>N</i>	%	<i>N</i>	%	<i>N</i>	%	<i>N</i>	%	<i>N</i>	%	<i>N</i>	%	<i>N</i>	%
Dorchester Middle School	8	3	38	1	13	1	13	0	0	0	0	1	13	1	13
J. K. Walters Middle School	9	2	22	2	22	2	22	2	22	6	67	2	22	1	11

A Comparison Between the Two Schools for the Personnel of a Good Middle School

The interview data from middle school teachers and administrators from both middle schools in this study contained similarities and differences for the personnel of a good middle school. See Table 15 for where interview data exist between and across Dorchester Middle School and J. K. Walter Middle School.

Table 15

Categories and Elements of Data Found in Interview Transcripts for the Personnel of a Good Middle School and Where the Data Exist

Personnel of a good middle school			
Categories and elements of data found in interview transcripts	Interview data existing for only Dorchester middle school	Commonalities of interview data existing for both middle schools	Interview data existing for only J. K. Walters middle school
Administration		x	
Teachers		x	
Guidance staff		x	
Office staff			x
Placing personnel in the right position		x	
Additional personnel	x		

Participants from both middle schools shared responses on the personnel of a good middle school. The number and percentages of interviewees from Dorchester Middle School and J. K. Walters Middle School who responded on personnel elements in a good middle school are in Table 16.

Table 16

Interview Data Summary Table for Participants' Responses on Personnel of a Good Middle School

Middle school	Interviewees	Administration		Teachers		Guidance staff		Office staff		Placing personnel		Additional personnel	
		N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Dorchester Middle School	8	5	63	4	50	1	13	0	0	1	13	1	13
J. K. Walters Middle School	9	2	22	5	56	1	11	1	11	1	11	0	0

A Comparison Between the Two Schools for the Needs of Diverse Adolescent Students of a Good Middle School

The interview data from middle school teachers and administrators from both middle schools in this study contained similarities and differences for the needs of diverse adolescent students of a good middle school. See Table 17 for where interview data exist between and across Dorchester Middle School and J. K. Walter Middle School.

Table 17

Categories and Elements of Data Found in Interview Transcripts for the Needs of Diverse Adolescent Students of a Good Middle School and Where the Data Exist

The needs of diverse adolescent students of a good middle school			
Categories and elements of data found in interview transcripts	Interview data existing for only Dorchester middle school	Commonalities of interview data existing for both middle schools	Interview data existing for only J. K. Walters middle school
Individualized		x	
Whole child		x	
Developmental needs		x	
Social needs		x	
Emotional needs		x	
Academic needs		x	
Students finding themselves			x
Identifying and serving at-risk students and struggling learners			x

Participants from both middle schools shared responses on the needs of diverse adolescent students in a good middle school. The number and percentages of interviewees from Dorchester Middle School and J. K. Walters Middle School who responded on the needs of diverse adolescent learners in a good middle school are in Table 18.

Table 18

Interview Data Summary Table for Participants' Responses on the Needs of Diverse Adolescent Students of a Good Middle School

Middle school	Interviewees	Individualized		Whole child		Developmental needs		Social needs		Emotional needs		Academic needs		Students finding themselves		Identifying and serving at-risk students and struggling learners	
		N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Dorchester Middle School	8	2	25	1	13	1	13	2	25	2	25	1	13	0	0	0	0
J. K. Walters Middle School	9	1	11	3	33	1	11	2	22	4	44	2	22	2	22	3	33

A Comparison Between the Two Schools for the Organizational Structures of a Good Middle School

The interview data from middle school teachers and administrators from both middle schools in this study contained similarities and differences for the organizational structures of a good middle school. See Table 19 for where interview data exist between and across Dorchester Middle School and J. K. Walter Middle School.

Table 19

Categories and Elements of Data Found in Interview Transcripts for the Organizational Structures of a Good Middle School and Where the Data Exist

Organizational structures of a good middle school			
Categories and elements of data found in interview transcripts	Interview data existing for only Dorchester middle school	Commonalities of interview data existing for both middle schools	Interview data existing for only J. K. Walters middle school
Teams		x	
Departments		x	
Instructional time in the master schedule		x	
Common planning time		x	
Extended school days			x

Participants from both middle schools shared responses on organizational structures of a good middle school. The number and percentages of interviewees from Dorchester Middle School and J. K. Walters Middle School who responded on organizational structure elements in a good middle school are in Table 20.

Table 20

Interview Data Summary Table for Participants' Responses on Organizational Structures of a Good Middle School

Middle school	Interviewees	Teams		Departments		Instructional time in the master schedule		Common planning time		Extended school days	
		<i>N</i>	%	<i>N</i>	%	<i>N</i>	%	<i>N</i>	%	<i>N</i>	%
Dorchester Middle School	8	6	75	2	25	1	13	2	25	0	0
J. K. Walters Middle School	9	5	56	2	22	1	11	3	33	1	11

A Comparison Between the Two Schools for the Transitions of a Good Middle School

The interview data from middle school teachers and administrators from both middle schools in this study contained similarities and differences for the transitions of a good middle school. See Table 21 for where interview data exist between and across Dorchester Middle School and J. K. Walter Middle School.

Table 21

Categories and Elements of Data Found in Interview Transcripts for Transitions of a Good Middle School and Where the Data Exist

Transitions of a good middle school			
Categories and elements of data found in interview transcripts	Interview data existing for only Dorchester middle school	Interview data existing for both middle schools	Interview data existing for only J. K. Walters middle school
Middle school transitions			
Grade configuration for transitions		x	
Transitions after middle school			
Preparing students for the transition into high school		x	
Career focus		x	
Life skills	x		

Participants from both middle schools shared responses on transitions of a good middle school. The number and percentages of interviewees from Dorchester Middle School and J. K. Walters Middle School who responded on transition elements in a good middle school are in Table 22.

Table 22

Interview Data Summary Table for Participants' Responses on Transitions of a Good Middle School

Middle school	Interviewees	Middle school transitions		Transitions after middle school	
		N	%	N	%
Dorchester Middle School	8	2	25	3	38
J. K. Walters Middle School	9	7	78	1	11

A Comparison Between the Two Schools for the Instructional Practices of a Good Middle School

The interview data from middle school teachers and administrators from both middle schools in this study contained similarities and differences for the instructional practices of a good middle school. See Table 23 for where interview data exist between and across Dorchester Middle School and J. K. Walter Middle School.

Table 23

Categories and Elements of Data Found in Interview Transcripts for Instructional Practices of a Good Middle School and Where the Data Exist

Instructional practices of a good middle school			
Categories and elements of data found in interview transcripts	Interview data existing for only Dorchester middle school	Interview data existing for both middle schools	Interview data existing for only J. K. Walters middle school
Hands-on learning		x	
Technology			x
Using data	x		
Instructional resources	x		

Participants from both middle schools shared responses on instructional practices of a good middle school. The number and percentages of interviewees from Dorchester Middle School and J. K. Walters Middle School who responded on instructional practices elements in a good middle school are in Table 24.

Table 24

Interview Data Summary Table for Participants' Responses on Instructional Practices of a Good Middle School

Middle school	Interviewees	Hands-on learning		Technology		Using data		Instructional resources	
		<i>N</i>	%	<i>N</i>	%	<i>N</i>	%	<i>N</i>	%
Dorchester Middle School	8	3	38	0	0	1	13	1	13
J. K. Walters Middle School	9	1	11	1	11	0	0	0	0

A Comparison Between the Two Schools for Parental Involvement of a Good Middle School

The interview data from middle school teachers and administrators from both middle schools in this study contained similarities and differences for parental involvement of a good middle school. See Table 25 for where interview data exist between and across Dorchester Middle School and J. K. Walter Middle School.

Table 25

Categories and Elements of Data Found in Interview Transcripts for Parental Involvement of a Good Middle School and Where the Data Exist

Parental involvement of a good middle school			
Categories and elements of data found in interview transcripts	Interview data existing for only Dorchester middle school	Interview data existing for both middle schools	Interview data existing for only J. K. Walters middle school
Realizing the struggles of involving parents at the middle level		x	
Involving parents		x	
Communicating with parents		x	

Participants from both middle schools shared responses on parental involvement of a good middle school. The number and percentages of interviewees from Dorchester Middle School and J. K. Walters Middle School who responded on parental involvement elements in a good middle school are in Table 26.

Table 26

Interview Data Summary Table for Participants' Responses on Parental Involvement of a Good Middle School

Middle school	Interviewees	Realizing the struggles of involving parents		Involving parents		Communicating with parents	
		N	%	N	%	N	%
Dorchester Middle School	8	4	50	8	100	5	63
J. K. Walters Middle School	9	5	56	7	78	4	44

A Comparison Between the Two Schools for the Curricular Aspects of a Good Middle School

The interview data from middle school teachers and administrators from both middle schools in this study contained similarities and differences for the curricular aspects of a good middle school. See Table 27 for where interview data exist between and across Dorchester Middle School and J. K. Walter Middle School.

Table 27

Categories and Elements of Data Found in Interview Transcripts for Curricular Aspects of a Good Middle School and Where the Data Exist

Curricular aspects of a good middle school			
Categories and elements of data found in interview transcripts	Interview data existing for only Dorchester middle school	Interview data existing for both middle schools	Interview data existing for only J. K. Walters middle school
Curricular emphases	x		
Curricular opportunities			
Exploration opportunities		x	
Interdisciplinary opportunities		x	
Advanced class opportunities		x	
Core curriculum opportunities		x	
Club opportunities		x	
Extracurricular opportunities		x	
High school credit opportunities		x	

Participants from both middle schools shared responses on curricular aspects of a good middle school. The number and percentages of interviewees from Dorchester Middle School and J. K. Walters Middle School who responded on curricular aspects elements in a good middle school are in Table 28.

Table 28

Interview Data Summary Table for Participants' Responses on Curricular Aspects of a Good Middle School

Middle school	Interviewees	Curricular emphases		Curricular opportunities	
		<i>N</i>	%	<i>N</i>	%
Dorchester Middle School	8	2	25	6	75
J. K. Walters Middle School	9	1	11	7	78

A Comparison Between the Two Schools for the Physical Environment of a Good Middle School

The interview data from middle school teachers and administrators from both middle schools in this study contained similarities and differences for the physical environment of a good middle school. See Table 29 for where interview data exist between and across Dorchester Middle School and J. K. Walter Middle School.

Table 29

Categories and Elements of Data Found in Interview Transcripts for the Physical Environment of a Good Middle School and Where the Data Exist

Physical environment of a good middle school			
Categories and elements of data found in interview transcripts	Interview data existing for only Dorchester middle school	Interview data existing for both middle schools	Interview data existing for only J. K. Walters middle school
Updated library resources			x
Resources			x
Wish list		x	

Participants from both middle schools shared responses on the physical environment of a good middle school. The number and percentages of interviewees from Dorchester Middle School and J. K. Walters Middle School who responded on physical environment elements in a good middle school are in Table 30.

Table 30

Interview Data Summary Table for Participants' Responses on the Physical Environment of a Good Middle School

Middle school	Interviewees	Updated library		Additional resources		Wish list	
		<i>N</i>	%	<i>N</i>	%	<i>N</i>	%
Dorchester Middle School	8	0	0	0	0	2	25
J. K. Walters Middle School	9	1	11	2	22	5	56

A Comparison Between the Two Schools for the Progress of a Good Middle School

The interview data from middle school teachers and administrators from both middle schools in this study contained differences for the progress of a good middle school. See Table 31 for where interview data exist between and across Dorchester Middle School and J. K. Walter Middle School.

Table 31

Categories and Elements of Data Found in Interview Transcripts for Progress of a Good Middle School and Where the Data Exist

Progress of a good middle school			
Categories and elements of data found in interview transcripts	Interview data existing for only Dorchester middle school	Interview data existing for both middle schools	Interview data existing for only J. K. Walters middle school
Professional growth	x		
School improvement	x		

Participants from both middle schools shared responses on the progress of a good middle school. The number and percentages of interviewees from Dorchester Middle School and J. K. Walters Middle School who responded on progress elements in a good middle school are in Table 32.

Table 32

Interview Data Summary Table for Participants' Responses on Progress of a Good Middle School

Middle school	Interviewees	Professional growth		School improvement	
		N	%	N	%
Dorchester Middle School	8	1	13	1	13
J. K. Walters Middle School	9	0	0	0	0

Chapter 5

Summary, Conclusions, Discussion, Recommendations, and Reflections

This chapter has five sections: (a) a summary of the cross-case study, (b) conclusions, (c) a discussion of the findings based on the data from the study, (d) recommendations, and (e) the researcher's reflections on the study.

Summary

The purpose of this cross-case study was to contribute to the discussion on what constitutes an effective education for middle-level learners. Although the study was designed to report on "effective middle-level education," the participants stated their perspectives on "good middle schools." The first question in the interview protocol asked participants about "good middle schools," and the second question asked about "effective middle schools." When responding to the second question, participants elaborated on what they had said about good middle schools, reported that they had already answered the question and stated they had nothing further to share, or they repeated the same ideas they had shared for the first question. Therefore, the researcher used this qualitative study to tap into the knowledge of middle-level educators by collecting and analyzing data on their perspectives on the elements of a "good middle school."

From the interviews, data were presented on the elements of a good middle school. Ten main categories associated with a good middle school were identified in the data: (a) culture, (b) personnel, (c) the needs of diverse adolescent students, (d) organizational structures, (e) transitions, (f) instructional practices, (g) parental involvement, (h) curricular aspects, (i) physical environment, and (j) progress.

The researcher analyzed three documents from each school using the constant comparative method of analysis (Maykut & Morehouse, 1994). The documents included each

middle school's 2014-2015 school improvement plan, 2013-2014 annual report, and 2015 Schools to Watch re-designation application. Data were not presented from these document analyses. The researcher found the data contained in the documents did not suit the purpose of the study. The purpose for writing the documents was unclear to the researcher, and she felt they portrayed the public face of the schools.

The three research questions used to guide the study were altered to coincide with the data reported on "good middle schools." The revised research questions are: (1) What are the perspectives of middle school teachers and administrators on a good middle school in two schools in a school system? (2) How do the perspectives of middle school teachers and administrators on a good middle school compare and contrast to the recommendations of the National Association of Secondary School Principals' Council on Middle Level Education in 1985, Carnegie Corporation's Council on Adolescent Development in 1989, and the Association for Middle Level Education in 2010? and (3) How do the perspectives of middle school teachers and administrators compare and contrast in the two schools?

Conclusions

Interview data were used to identify the major findings and conclusions of this study. In this section, each research question is revisited, and corresponding conclusions are shared.

Research Question 1: What are the perspectives of middle school teachers and administrators on a good middle school in two schools in a school system? The perspectives of middle school teachers and administrators contained ten components of a good middle school: (a) culture, (b) personnel, (c) the needs of diverse adolescent students, (d) organizational structures, (e) transitions, (f) instructional practices, (g) parental involvement, (h) curricular aspects, (i) physical environment, and (j) progress.

- A good middle school has a culture that consists of the following elements: team approach; stakeholder relationships including student relationships with other students, student relationships with teachers, and teacher relationships with administration; school atmosphere; school safety; beyond academic achievement and scores; student population; and teachers' input.
- A good middle school has great faculty and staff members. Six personnel categories were identified: administration, teachers, guidance staff, office staff, placing personnel, and additional personnel.
- A good middle school addresses the needs of its diverse, adolescent student population. Eight elements are present at good middle schools for meeting students' needs: individual needs, needs of the whole child, developmental needs, social needs, emotional needs, academic needs, need for students to find themselves, and needs of at-risk students and struggling learners.
- A good middle school has organizational structures that consist of the following elements: teams, departments, instructional time in the master schedule, common planning time, and extended school days.
- A good middle school has smooth transitions for students that consist of the following elements: middle school transitions including grade configuration for transitions; and transitions after middle school including preparing students for the transition into high school, career focus, and life skills.
- A good middle school has instructional practices that consist of the following elements: hands-on learning, technology, using data, and instructional resources.

- A good middle school has parental involvement that consists of the following elements: realizing the struggles of involving parents, involving parents, and communicating with parents.
- A good middle school has curricular aspects that consist of the following elements: curricular emphases; and curricular opportunities including exploration opportunities, interdisciplinary opportunities, advanced class opportunities, core curriculum opportunities, club opportunities, extracurricular opportunities, and high school credit opportunities.
- A good middle school has the physical environment that consists of the following elements: updated library, additional resources, and wish list.
- A good middle school makes great progress and includes two elements: professional growth and school improvement.

Research Question 2: How do the perspectives of middle school teachers and administrators on a good middle school compare and contrast to the recommendations of the National Association of Secondary School Principal’s Council on Middle Level Education in 1985, Carnegie Corporation’s Council on Adolescent Development in 1989, and the Association for Middle Level Education in 2010? Participants’ responses regarding what constitutes a good middle school compared and contrasted to the recommendations made by the National Association of Secondary School Principal’s Council on Middle Level Education in the publication *An Agenda for Excellence at the Middle Level*, the Association for Middle Level Education in the publication *This We Believe: Keys to Educating Young Adolescents*, and Carnegie Corporation’s Council on Adolescent Development in the publication *Turning Points: Preparing American Youth for the 21st Century* revealed the following conclusions:

Commonalities. The teachers and administrators at Dorchester Middle School and J. K. Walters Middle School are in agreement with the National Association of Secondary School Principal's Council on Middle Level Education, the Association for Middle Level Education, and Carnegie Corporation's Council on Adolescent Development on the following recommendations:

- A good middle school is: client-oriented, with an emphasis on the development of young adolescents; a place that promotes continuous progress for students; and a place that ensures success for all.
- A good middle school is a place that focuses on: learning and instruction, varied instructional strategies, and the improvement of academic performance of students.
- A good middle school has: a balanced curriculum, a balanced curriculum based on the needs of young adolescents, and a core academic curriculum.
- A good middle school has: specially prepared teachers, educators knowledgeable about and committed to young adolescents, and teachers who are experts at teaching adolescents.

The teachers and administrators at Dorchester Middle School and J. K. Walters Middle School are in agreement with the National Association of Secondary School Principal's Council on Middle Level Education and the Association for Middle Level Education on the following recommendations:

- A good middle school has an organization and culture that promotes a sense of belonging and a positive school climate.

- A good middle school is a place that promotes students' development of skills necessary for successful participation in the adult world and has comprehensive advising and counseling.

The teachers and administrators at Dorchester Middle School and J. K. Walters Middle School are in agreement with the National Association of Secondary School Principals' Council on Middle Level Education on the following recommendations:

- A good middle school has positive transitions between school levels.
- A good middle school has systematic reform.
- A good middle school has integrated technology.

The teachers and administrators at Dorchester Middle School and J. K. Walters Middle School are in agreement with the Association for Middle Level Education on the following recommendations:

- A good middle school has a range of organizational arrangements.
- A good middle school has cooperative planning.
- A good middle school has a full exploratory program.

The teachers and administrators at Dorchester Middle School and J. K. Walters Middle School are in agreement with Carnegie Corporation's Council on Adolescent Development on the following recommendations:

- A good middle school is a place that empowers teachers and administrators.
- A good middle school is a place that re-engages families in the educational process.

Differences. The teachers and administrators at Dorchester Middle School and J. K. Walters Middle School did not comment on the following recommendation made by the National

Association of Secondary School Principal's Council on Middle Level Education and Carnegie Corporation's Council on Adolescent Development:

- A good middle school has connections with the community.

The teachers and administrators at Dorchester Middle School and J. K. Walters Middle School did not comment on the following recommendation made by the Association for Middle Level Education:

- A good middle school has evaluation procedures compatible with the nature of young adolescent needs.

The teachers and administrators at Dorchester Middle School and J. K. Walters Middle School did not comment on the following recommendation made by Carnegie Corporation's Council on Adolescent Development:

- A good middle school is a place that creates small communities for learning.

Research Question 3: How do the perspectives of middle school teachers and administrators compare and contrast in the two schools? Participants' responses from Dorchester Middle School and J. K. Walters Middle School on what constitutes a good middle school revealed similarities and differences.

Similarities among the perspectives of teachers and administrators of the two middle schools in the study are presented in Table 33. Differences between the perspectives of teachers and administrators of the two middle schools in the study are presented in Table 34.

Table 33

Similarities Among Perspectives of Teachers and Administrators from Dorchester Middle School and J. K. Walters Middle School

Similarities among Dorchester Middle School and J. K. Walters Middle School	
Element	Commonalities in the data
Culture of a good middle school	
Team approach	All staff members working together and supporting each other while meeting the needs of their students
Student relationships with teachers	Value in teachers building connections with students; teachers knowing the students; having personal interaction with students other than only through academics; teachers being available for students to talk to
School atmosphere	Fosters learning, a sense of belonging, comfortableness, friendship; a sense of family and unity; students feel welcomed and are happy to be at school; students are treated with respect, kindness, and care
Student population	Staff members knowing the student population, realizing the struggles of students, knowing that students are diverse in their circumstances
Teachers' input	Leaders that solicit and value teachers' ideas and suggestions
Personnel of a good middle school	
Administration	Effective and supportive
Teachers	Passionate about middle-level education, foster student progress, caring, and effective
Guidance staff	Routinely meet with students to discuss problems and provide the emotional support that students need
The needs of diverse adolescent students of a good middle school	
Individualized	Focus on students' individual needs

Similarities among Dorchester Middle School and J. K. Walters Middle School	
Element	Commonalities in the data
Whole child	Focus on all aspects of the student and supports them in all areas
Developmental needs	Focus on the unique developmental needs of adolescent students
Social needs	Focus on students' social needs allowing opportunities for social activities
Emotional needs	Focus on students' emotional needs and psychological well-being
Academic needs	Meets the academic needs of students and is academically challenging
Organizational structures of a good middle school	
Teams	Teams to help facilitate effective communication about students' needs
Departments	Departments to help teachers communicate and encourage each other who teach the same subject area, and share ideas
Common planning time	Teachers planning together to collaborate with one another about instructional aspects and students' needs
Transitions of a good middle school	
Grade configuration for transitions	Sixth through eighth grade identified as the best grade configuration for adolescent learners at the middle-level
Preparing students for the transition into high school	Getting students ready for high school
Career focus	Preparing students for their futures including college and employment
Instructional practices of a good middle school	
Hands-on learning	Opportunities for students to learn through hands-on activities
Parental involvement of a good middle school	

Similarities among Dorchester Middle School and J. K. Walters Middle School	
Element	Commonalities in the data
Realizing the struggles of involving parents at the middle level	Difficulties: poor attitudes of parents, working parents, and differing home situations
Involving parents	Making efforts to include and involve parents at school
Communicating with parents	The importance of communicating well with parents about students' needs and school programs and the difficulty of reaching some parents
Curricular aspects of a good middle school	
Exploration opportunities	Curricular opportunities to allow students opportunities to explore and be exposed to new things
Interdisciplinary opportunities	Cross curricular opportunities for students to learn
Advanced class opportunities	Providing higher learning opportunities for advanced students
Core curriculum opportunities	Offering core curricular opportunities: mathematics, language arts, science, and social science
Club opportunities	Opportunities outside the classroom through club opportunities to explore new things
Extracurricular opportunities	Students' opportunities for sports and athletics
High school credit opportunities	Opportunities for eighth grade students to earn high school credits before transitioning to high school
Physical environment of a good middle school	
Wish list	More technology and student uniforms

Table 34

Differences Between Perspectives of Teachers and Administrators from Dorchester Middle School and J. K. Walters Middle School

Differences between Dorchester Middle School and J. K. Walters Middle School			
Dorchester Middle School Differences		J. K. Walters Middle School Differences	
Element	Data	Element	Data
Culture of a good middle school			
		Student relationships with other students	Students getting to know their peers in a casual way
		Teacher relationships with administration	The importance of administration developing relationships with teachers
		School safety	Students feel safe and secure
		Beyond academic achievement and scores	Not only about meeting the academic needs of students and having high standardized test scores, achievement can be band and chorus accomplishments
Personnel of a good middle school			
Administration	Consistent disciplinarian and good communicator		
		Teachers	Possess leadership qualities
		Office staff	Good office staff
Placing personnel	Keeping teachers with as few preps as	Placing personnel	Teaching what they are passionate about

Differences between Dorchester Middle School and J. K. Walters Middle School			
Dorchester Middle School Differences		J. K. Walters Middle School Differences	
Element	Data	Element	Data
	possible		and licensed in
Additional personnel	Having enough faculty members to not share between schools		
The needs of diverse adolescent students of a good middle school			
		Students finding themselves	Supporting and encouraging students to find themselves and figure out what kind of person they want to be
		Identifying and serving at-risk students and struggling learners	Has support systems and programs available to help struggling learners
Organizational structures of a good middle school			
Teams	Teams to help with collaborations efforts to meet students' needs	Teams	Teams help teachers build relationships with students and help students feel like they are part of a family
Instructional time in the master schedule	Scheduling higher-level subjects in the morning	Instructional time in the master schedule	A schedule that allows for maximum instructional time
		Extended school days	Additional time in the day that students are at school
Transitions of a good middle school			
Life skills	Teach students skills for daily life: morals, values, and traditions		
Instructional practices of a good middle school			

Differences between Dorchester Middle School and J. K. Walters Middle School			
Dorchester Middle School Differences		J. K. Walters Middle School Differences	
Element	Data	Element	Data
		Technology	Opportunities for students to learn using technology and for teachers to use technology appropriately
Using data	Teachers using data to assist in driving instructional and remediation needs		
Instructional resources	Teachers having appropriate resources to aid in their instruction		
Parental involvement of a good middle school			
Realizing the struggles of involving parents at the middle level	Parents with transportation issues and students not wanting their parents involved	Realizing the struggles of involving parents at the middle level	Parents not feeling comfortable coming to school
Curricular aspects of a good middle school			
Curricular emphases	A curriculum that meets the needs of adolescent learners and allows teachers freedom in teaching		
Physical environment of a good middle school			
		Updated library resources	Availability of electronic and physical library resources
		Resources	Good equipment, decent textbooks, and ample resource materials

Differences between Dorchester Middle School and J. K. Walters Middle School			
Dorchester Middle School Differences		J. K. Walters Middle School Differences	
Element	Data	Element	Data
Wish list	Additional transportation provided for students to stay after school for academic help and sports	Wish list	More space in the building
Progress of a good middle school			
Professional growth	Focus on the professional growth of teachers by providing ongoing training opportunities		
School improvement	Figuring out what the problems are and developing a plan for improvement		

Discussion

Numerous areas of interest to the researcher were recognized throughout the study. In this section, a discussion of the following topics is included: (a) the document analyses; (b) the similarities in perspectives between teachers and administrators; and (c) the characteristics of a good middle school as identified by the National Association of Secondary School Principals’ Council on Middle Level Education in 1985, the Association for Middle Level Education in 2010, and the Carnegie Corporation’s Council on Adolescent Development in 1989.

The document analyses. Document analyses were performed on each middle school’s 2014-2015 school improvement plan, 2013-2014 annual report, and 2015 Schools to Watch re-designation application. The researcher quickly learned that the data found in these documents

did not suit the purpose of the study. Questions arose to the researcher about the purposes for which these documents were constructed. Although the information contained in each document is worthwhile and beneficial to the schools, the researcher believes that the content of these documents presents to the public, the priorities that should exist within each middle school which may or may not align with perspectives of teachers and administrators who daily work at the middle-level to ensure everything possible is being done to ensure success for adolescent students. For this reason, the document analyses are not included in the results or conclusions sections of this study.

The similarities in perspectives between teachers and administrators. It was interesting for the researcher to learn that perspectives from both teachers and administrators about what constitutes a good middle school were similar. The characteristics identified by teacher and administrator participants of a “good” middle school included elements pertaining to culture, personnel, the needs of diverse adolescent learners, organizational structures, transitions, instructional practices, parental involvement, curricular aspects, physical environment, and progress. Each of these areas was represented by responses made from both teachers and administrators in the study. The researcher believes the reasons for these similarities are: Effective communication exists between and among various stakeholders in Sugarloaf County Public Schools, including central office personnel, middle-level administrators, and middle-level teachers; priorities are established within the school system to meet the needs of adolescent learners, and these priorities are accepted by stakeholders; and middle-level stakeholders in the school system take on the responsibility for educating adolescent students in beneficial ways. It was no surprise to the researcher that the perspectives of teachers and administrators who participated in this study shared similar perspectives about good middle schools.

The characteristics of a good middle school as identified by the National Association of Secondary School Principal’s Council on Middle Level Education in 1985, the Association for Middle Level Education in 2010, and the Carnegie Corporation’s Council on Adolescent Development in 1989. The researcher believes the recommendations made by the National Association of Secondary School Principal’s Council on Middle Level Education, the Association for Middle Level Education, and Carnegie Corporation’s Council on Adolescent Development are useful to those interested in school improvement efforts at the middle-level of education. The research-based practices recommended in each report could help to guide middle-level implementation efforts. The researcher wonders if stakeholders in Sugarloaf County Public Schools are aware of these recommendations, and if so, how they are being prioritized within the school system. As a middle-level educator, the researcher was not aware the documents existed containing these recommendations. Only through conducting this study has the researcher gained insights into the recommendations made in *An Agenda for Excellence at the Middle Level*, *This We Believe: Keys to Educating Young Adolescents*, and *Turning Points: Preparing American Youth for the 21st Century*. Informing others of these documents and implementing the recommendations may help Sugarloaf County Public Schools and other school systems in middle school improvement endeavors.

Recommendations

Based on the research findings, the researcher makes the following recommendations to Sugarloaf County Public Schools and for further study.

Recommendations for Sugarloaf County Public Schools. The following recommendations are made to the school system:

1. It is recommended for middle-level administrators and teachers in the school system to know and understand the recommendations made by the National Association of Secondary School Principals' Council on Middle Level Education in the publication *An Agenda for Excellence at the Middle Level*, Carnegie Corporation's Council on Adolescent Development in the publication *Turning Points: Preparing American Youth for the 21st Century*, and the Association for Middle Level Education in the publication *This We Believe: Keys to Educating Young Adolescents*.
2. It is recommended for central office leaders in the school system to actively solicit and encourage middle-level educators to share their ideas about what constitutes a good middle school. These highly skilled educators possess a unique vantage point from within middle schools to help guide school improvement efforts.
3. It is recommended that middle school educators develop a school culture that includes the following elements:
 - A team approach in educating adolescent students
 - Opportunities for students to build relationships with other students
 - Teachers building relationships with students
 - Administrators building relationships with teachers
 - A positive school atmosphere
 - A safe environment
 - A focus on the needs of students beyond academic achievement and scores
 - Staff members familiar with the school's student population characteristics
 - Teacher input on school policies and practices

4. It is recommended that middle school human resource staff members choose personnel with the following characteristics:
 - Supportive administrators
 - Teachers who have a passion for adolescent students and are specially trained for becoming middle-level educators
 - Knowledgeable guidance counselors
 - High performing office staff
 - Personnel placed in the right position
 - An adequate number of staff members
5. It is recommended that middle school staff members strive to meet the needs of diverse adolescent students by doing the following:
 - Individualizing educational opportunities
 - Meeting the needs of the whole child
 - Meeting the developmental needs of adolescents
 - Meeting the social needs of adolescents
 - Meeting the emotional needs of adolescents
 - Meeting the academic needs of adolescents
 - Providing opportunities for students to find themselves
 - Identifying and serving at-risk students and struggling adolescent learners
6. It is recommended for middle schools to have organizational structures with the following elements:
 - Teams of teachers working together to meet the needs of adolescent students

- Content departments for teachers to learn from other teachers in their content area and for vertical collaboration purposes
 - Preservation of instructional time in the master schedule
 - Common planning time for teachers
 - Consideration of extending school days to provide longer instruction
7. It is recommended that middle schools have smooth transitions, including the following elements:
- An optimal grade configuration for adolescent learners (Grades 6-8)
 - Preparation of students for the transition into high school
 - Career counseling opportunities for adolescent students
 - Life skills opportunities for adolescent students
8. It is recommended that middle schools implement instructional practices with the following elements:
- Hands-on learning opportunities for students
 - Teachers actively using technology for instructional purposes
 - Teachers using data to inform instructional decisions
 - Supply of needed instructional resources
9. It is recommended that middle schools have parental involvement with the following elements:
- Staff members who realize the struggles of involving parents at the middle-level
 - Staff members who encourage parental involvement
 - Staff members who communicate with parents about school functions and activities

10. It is recommended for middle schools to have a curriculum with the following elements:
 - Curricular emphases that meet the needs of adolescent learners
 - A wide range of exploratory opportunities
 - Interdisciplinary and cross-curricular opportunities
 - Advanced class opportunities for accelerated learners
 - Core curricular opportunities
 - A wide range of club opportunities
 - A wide range of extracurricular opportunities
 - Opportunities for students to earn high school credits
11. It is recommended that middle schools have a physical environment with the following elements:
 - A library with wonderful electronic and physical resources
 - Adequate instructional resources for teachers
 - Consideration of “wish list” items of teachers for instructional purposes
12. It is recommended that middle schools implement strategies for personnel and school improvement, including the following:
 - Opportunities for staff members’ professional growth for improvement purposes
 - Active school improvement efforts

Recommendations for further study. The following recommendations are made for further study to aid in making additions to the research base on middle-level education:

1. Research should be conducted to include perspectives of middle-level parents, middle-level students, central office leaders, and school board members on what constitutes a good middle school. The perspectives of each of these groups are unique. From their

differing vantage points on middle-level education, additional knowledge may be gained in efforts to improve educational outcomes for middle-level learners. Parents possess a unique perspective on the personal life of adolescents and how it affects middle school elements. Middle-level students possess real middle-level experiences and have opinions that may be worthwhile in improvement efforts. Central office leaders and school board members possess unique perspectives about middle-level education from accountability and improvement viewpoints.

2. Research should be conducted to replicate this study in other school systems to establish generalizations across middle-level schools.
3. Research should be conducted to replicate this study at the elementary and high school levels of schooling.
4. Research should be conducted to investigate the effects of implementing the recommendations made by the National Association of Secondary School Principals' Council on Middle Level Education in the publication *An Agenda for Excellence at the Middle Level*, Carnegie Corporation's Council on Adolescent Development in the publication *Turning Points: Preparing American Youth for the 21st Century*, and the Association for Middle Level Education in the publication *This We Believe: Keys to Educating Young Adolescents* on measures of progress and outcomes in middle-level education.

Reflections

This section contains the researcher's reflections on (a) the differences among *An Agenda for Excellence at the Middle Level*, *Turning Points: Preparing American Youth for the 21st Century*, and *This We Believe: Keys to Educating Young Adolescents*; (b) the quality of the

perspectives of teachers and administrators in the study; (c) the quality of the interview protocol used in the study; and (d) the researcher's perspectives on a good middle school.

The differences among *An Agenda for Excellence at the Middle Level, Turning Points: Preparing American Youth for the 21st Century*, and *This We Believe: Keys to Educating Young Adolescents* and the similarities across the two schools. The researcher observed inconsistencies and differences among the three reports and commonalities across the two schools. After analyzing the three reports, the researcher believes no consensus has been reached in identifying the characteristics of a good middle school. Interestingly, the researcher found numerous similarities across the two schools of the perspectives of teachers and administrators on a good middle school. The researcher believes a strong culture exists in the school system, and this may have contributed to the consistent perspectives of the participants. The researcher found more consistency within the two schools than among the three reports.

The quality of the perspectives of teachers and administrators in the study. The researcher believes that those educators "in the trenches" of middle-level education possess insights into the nuances of educating adolescents. The researcher believes that middle-level teachers and administrators have a comprehensive view of middle-level education and that their perspectives can be of value to middle school reform and improvement efforts. These middle-level teachers and administrators are the ones devoting their professional lives to adolescent students' needs. These individuals witness first hand the successes and struggles at the middle-level. Through their experiences, these educators learn a great deal about serving the needs of adolescent learners. The perspectives they possess are real and genuine when facing the triumphs and struggles of middle-level education. The researcher believes the perspectives of

these individuals should be sought on a regular basis to help in a better understanding of middle-level needs in ensuring the best education for adolescent students.

The quality of the interview protocol used in the study. The researcher believes that improvements should be made to the interview protocol if the study is replicated. Although the quality of the interview questions was good, the researcher believes the following changes should be made.

In the current study, the researcher realized afterwards that confusion exists in the distinction between the words “good” and “effective” when describing middle schools. The first two questions in the protocol were: (1) What is your idea of a good middle school? and (2) How would you define an effective middle school? The researcher believes the interviewees made no distinction between “good” and “effective” in their responses. In several interviews, the participant shared thoughts about the first question posed and made no additional comments when asked the second question. Those participants that did respond to the second question added little detail in addition to what they shared about the first question. The researcher believes that the interview protocol can be changed to alleviate this problem in the future by omitting the first question. The purpose of the study was to add to the knowledge base on effective middle schools, therefore, this should be the verbiage used consistently in additional studies.

Another change in the interview protocol that the researcher suggests is elimination of “leading questions” such as, “What would the curriculum be in your ideal middle school?” and “What role would parents play in your ideal middle school?” The researcher believes these questions led participants to respond to these elements that may not have otherwise surfaced in the more open questions on what constitutes a good middle school. The researcher would find it

interesting to know if participants would have eventually included these elements with their own beliefs without being prompted by a question to do so.

The researcher's perspectives on a good middle school. To conclude this study, the researcher wonders about several things.

Before conducting this study, if I had participated in a study such as this one, what would my views have been on what constitutes a good middle school? Looking back to the beginning pages of my researcher's log which were written close to three years ago, I had listed several ideas of my own about good middle schools: great teachers, a safe environment, supportive administration, ample resources, and preserving instructional time. What was I missing? The answer was, a tremendous amount.

After completing this study, how have my views changed on what constitutes a good middle school? I believe I now possess a more comprehensive view of what elements are a part of a good middle school. I have grown tremendously with my knowledge and understanding of what constitutes a good middle school for adolescent learners.

How will I become a better middle-level educator with the deeper understandings I have gained through this study? I believe in continuous improvement in my ability to educate adolescents, and knowledge is a large component of this growth. I believe adolescents deserve an education that will prepare them for the brightest of futures. The part I play in this important journey for them I take very seriously. Through this study, my eyes have been opened to the important components of what a good middle school needs desperately to offer its learners. As a future administrator, the lessons I have learned through this study will serve me well in meeting the diverse educational needs of young adolescents.

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Appendix A

IRB APPROVAL



Office of Research Compliance
Institutional Review Board
North End Center, Suite 4120, Virginia Tech
300 Turner Street NW
Blacksburg, Virginia 24061
540/231-4606 Fax 540/231-0959
email irb@vt.edu
website <http://www.irb.vt.edu>

MEMORANDUM

DATE: March 6, 2015
TO: David Parks, Lisa Skaggs Mercer
FROM: Virginia Tech Institutional Review Board (FWA00000572, expires April 25, 2018)
PROTOCOL TITLE: A Cross-Case Study of Two Effective Middle Schools Identified by Schools-to-Watch in Southwest Virginia: What Constitutes an Effective Education for Middle-Level Learners?
IRB NUMBER: 15-077

Effective March 6, 2015, the Virginia Tech Institutional Review Board (IRB) Chair, David M Moore, approved the Amendment request for the above-mentioned research protocol.

This approval provides permission to begin the human subject activities outlined in the IRB-approved protocol and supporting documents.

Plans to deviate from the approved protocol and/or supporting documents must be submitted to the IRB as an amendment request and approved by the IRB prior to the implementation of any changes, regardless of how minor, except where necessary to eliminate apparent immediate hazards to the subjects. Report within 5 business days to the IRB any injuries or other unanticipated or adverse events involving risks or harms to human research subjects or others.

All investigators (listed above) are required to comply with the researcher requirements outlined at:

<http://www.irb.vt.edu/pages/responsibilities.htm>

(Please review responsibilities before the commencement of your research.)

PROTOCOL INFORMATION:

Approved As: **Expedited, under 45 CFR 46.110 category(ies) 5,6,7**
Protocol Approval Date: **February 6, 2015**
Protocol Expiration Date: **February 5, 2016**
Continuing Review Due Date*: **January 22, 2016**

*Date a Continuing Review application is due to the IRB office if human subject activities covered under this protocol, including data analysis, are to continue beyond the Protocol Expiration Date.

FEDERALLY FUNDED RESEARCH REQUIREMENTS:

Per federal regulations, 45 CFR 46.103(f), the IRB is required to compare all federally funded grant proposals/work statements to the IRB protocol(s) which cover the human research activities included in the proposal / work statement before funds are released. Note that this requirement does not apply to Exempt and Interim IRB protocols, or grants for which VT is not the primary awardee.

The table on the following page indicates whether grant proposals are related to this IRB protocol, and which of the listed proposals, if any, have been compared to this IRB protocol, if required.

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Appendix B

GAINING ACCESS TO THE SCHOOL SYSTEM AND SCHOOLS

Letter to the Superintendent Requesting Permission to Conduct the Study

Dear Superintendent,

I am a doctoral student at Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University and my advisor is Dr. David Parks. My doctoral study is on what constitutes an effective school for middle-level learners. In this study, the perspectives of middle-level administrators and teachers on what constitutes an effective middle-level education will be collected and analyzed. I am respectfully requesting permission to conduct this study in Sugarloaf County Public Schools.

I am interested in conducting a total of 17 staff member interviews from Dorchester Middle School and J. K. Walters Middle School. Interviews for Dorchester Middle School will include the principal, guidance counselor, one English teacher, one mathematics teacher, one social science teacher, one science teacher, one exploratory teacher, and one special education teacher for a total of eight interviews. Interviews for J. K. Walters Middle School will include the principal, assistant principal, one guidance counselor, one English teacher, one mathematics teacher, one social science teacher, one science teacher, one exploratory teacher, and one special education teacher for a total of nine interviews. You will receive a written report of my findings at the conclusion of the study.

Please feel free to contact me either at the email provided below or by reaching me by phone at Granville Middle School at xxx-xxx-xxxx if you have any questions or concerns regarding this study. I would also be more than happy to meet with you in person to further discuss this study if you feel this time is needed. Otherwise, I am asking permission to conduct the study that involves the two middle schools in Sugarloaf County. Please let me know of your decision as soon as possible at LisaMercerEmail. I appreciate your consideration of this request.

Sincerely,

Lisa S. Mercer

Email to Dorchester Middle School in Sugarloaf County Requesting a Meeting

Dear Principal,

I am a doctoral student at Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University and my advisor is Dr. David Parks. My doctoral study is on what constitutes an effective school for middle-level learners. In this study, the perspectives of middle-level administrators and teachers on what constitutes an effective middle-level education will be collected and analyzed.

I am writing to ask permission to conduct this study at your school and to ask you to be a participant in the study. I am interested in interviewing you, the guidance counselor, one English teacher, one mathematics teacher, one social science teacher, one science teacher, one exploratory teacher, and one special education teacher. You will receive a written report of my findings at the conclusion of the study.

I would appreciate the opportunity to speak to you personally to further describe the research proposal and to ask for your permission to conduct the study in your school. Please let me know of a meeting time that will be convenient for you by emailing me at LisaMercerEmail or by reaching me by phone at Granville Middle School at xxx-xxx-xxxx. I look forward to speaking with you about this study and appreciate your time.

Sincerely,

Lisa S. Mercer

Email to J. K. Walters Middle School in Sugarloaf County Requesting a Meeting

Dear Principal,

I am a doctoral student at Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University and my advisor is Dr. David Parks. My doctoral study is on what constitutes an effective school for middle-level learners. In this study, the perspectives of middle-level administrators and teachers on what constitutes an effective middle-level education will be collected and analyzed.

I am writing to ask permission to conduct this study at your school and to ask you to be a participant in the study. I am interested in interviewing you, the assistant principal, one guidance counselor, one English teacher, one mathematics teacher, one social science teacher, one science teacher, one exploratory teacher, and one special education teacher. You will receive a written report of my findings at the conclusion of the study.

I would appreciate the opportunity to speak to you personally to further describe the research proposal and to ask for your permission to conduct the study in your school. Please let me know of a meeting time that will be convenient for you by emailing me at LisaMercerEmail or by reaching me by phone at Granville Middle School at xxx-xxx-xxxx. I look forward to speaking with you about this study and appreciate your time.

Sincerely,

Lisa S. Mercer

Appendix C

CONTENT VALIDATION OF THE INTERVIEW ITEMS

Email Requesting Participation

Dear Administrator or Teacher,

I am a doctoral student at Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University and my advisor is Dr. David Parks. My doctoral study is on what constitutes an effective school for middle-level learners. In this study, the perspectives of middle-level administrators and teachers on what constitutes an effective middle-level education will be collected and analyzed. I am writing to you to be a participant in the study by completing a questionnaire that will serve as the content validation instrument.

By completing the content validation instrument, you will be helping in the development of the interview questions used to collect data for the study. The interview questions are designed to obtain data from middle school administrators and teachers about effective middle-level education. Your insights will be of great help to me.

If you choose to participate, you will be asked to complete the content validation instrument that should not take more than thirty minutes of your time. Your confidentiality will be ensured throughout the duration of the study.

Please let me know of your decision as soon as possible at LisaMercerEmail. If you agree to participate, I will forward to you by an email attachment, the content validation instrument for you to complete. I appreciate your consideration of this request.

Sincerely,

Lisa S. Mercer

Email to Participants (contains informed consent and content validation instrument)

Dear Administrator or Teacher,

Thank you for agreeing to be a part of my study! I appreciate very much the time you will spend in completing the attached content validation instrument.

The content validation instrument has twenty interview items and eleven domains of interest. You are asked to choose the domains each interview item is most closely related to. You are asked to rate each interview item for association to indicate how strongly you feel the question or statement is associated with the domain(s). You are asked to rate each interview question for clarity to indicate how clear you think the question or statement is. The feedback I receive will be used to further develop the interview items.

Please download the Word document that is attached and follow the detailed instructions that are included. Please save the document to your desktop and return it by email to me at LisaMercerEmail.

I thank you again for agreeing to participate in the study.

Sincerely,

Lisa S. Mercer

(attach Word document – Content Validation Instrument)

Instrument for Validating the Content of an Interview Protocol on Perspectives of Middle-Level Educators for Middle-Level Learners

Title of Project: *Teacher and Administrator Perspectives on a Good Middle School: A Cross-Case Study*

Informed Consent for Content Validation

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this study. This form reviews the purpose of this study, the nature of your involvement, and your rights as a participant.

The purpose of this study is to contribute to the discussion on what constitutes an effective education for middle-level learners. Perspectives of middle-level administrators and teachers on what constitutes an effective middle-level education will be collected and analyzed.

You will remain anonymous throughout the entire process. You will not be identified when completing the content validation instrument.

You are only being asked to participate by completing the content validation instrument. This process should not last longer than one hour. Your time is very much appreciated.

You may withdraw from participation at any time during the study. If you choose to withdraw from the study, all information will be destroyed.

By signing this consent form, I agree to be a willing participant in this study. I understand the purpose of the study, how data will be collected, and that I may withdraw at any time with no consequence.

Participant's Signature

Date

If you have any questions about this study, please feel free to contact the researcher (include contact information).

If questions arise concerning: (1) the study's conduct, (2) your rights as a research subject, or (3) your need to report a research-related injury or event, please contact the VT IRB Chair, Dr. David M. Moore at moored@vt.edu or (540) 231-4991.

Content Validation Instrument

Instructions:

- A. Please read each interview question below carefully.
- B. Select the domain that you believe is most closely related to the item. Domain definitions are below.
- C. Indicate how clear you believe the interview question is (unclear, somewhat clear, very clear).
 - Unclear*: Indicates that you think the interview question should be omitted.
 - Somewhat Clear*: Indicates that you think the interview question needs revision.
 - Very Clear*: Indicates that you think the interview item should remain as is.
- D. By completing this survey, you are agreeing to be a participant in this study. Thank you for your assistance.

VIRGINIA POLYTECHNIC INSTITUTE AND STATE UNIVERSITY Informed Consent Instrument for Participants

Title of Project: *Teacher and Administrator Perspectives on a Good Middle School: A Cross-Case Study*

Researcher(s): David Parks, Professor Emeritus, Educational Leadership and Policy Studies, Virginia Tech

Lisa S. Mercer, Doctoral Student, Educational Leadership and Policy Studies, Virginia Tech

What is the purpose of this research study?

The purpose of this research is to contribute to the discussion on what constitutes an effective education for middle-level learners.

What is the purpose of this questionnaire in the study?

The questionnaire that you have been asked to complete is a content validation of the interview protocol. Through the content validation process, the researchers will assess the relationship between the research questions and interview items. Clarity of each interview item will be assessed.

What will I be expected to do if I choose to be in this study?

Should you agree to become part of the study, you will be asked to complete the content-validation instrument. By completing this questionnaire, you are consenting to participate in the study.

What are the possible risks or discomforts for participating in the study?

Your participation is voluntary and the risks and discomforts are minimal. Completing the content validation instrument will take approximately thirty minutes of your time. Your responses are confidential. The data obtained through the content validation instrument will have no participant names associated with it. The researchers will at no time release identifiable results of the study to anyone without your written consent.

Are there any benefits to participating in this study?

There are no tangible, personal benefits for participating in this study. No monetary compensation is awarded for participating. However, the benefits of participating may be in improving middle-level education. Each participant should have the satisfaction of knowing that he or she is contributing to the research on what constitutes an effective education for middle-level learners.

Freedom to Withdraw from the Research Study

At any time during the study, you may decide to withdraw without penalty of any kind.

Please understand under certain circumstances, that the researchers may decide that a participant should not continue as a participant. If this need arises, you will be notified immediately by email.

Questions or Concerns about the Research Study

If you have any questions about this study, please feel free to contact one of the researchers. Contact information is included at the beginning of this document.

If questions arise concerning: (1) the study's conduct, (2) your rights as a research subject, or (3) your need to report a research-related injury or event, please contact the VT IRB Chair, Dr. David M. Moore at moored@vt.edu or (540) 231-4991.

Content Validation Instrument for the Research Study

Introduction

The purpose of this content validation instrument is to assist the researchers with the development of questions for an interview protocol to be used in interviewing middle-level educators in a school system in a southeastern state. The questions for the interview are designed to gather data on the perspectives that middle-level educators have on effective middle-level education.

Instructions

There are six steps for completing the content validation instrument: (1) preparation, (2) domain placement, (3) association ratings, (4) clarity ratings, (5) additional thoughts, and (6) submission.

(1). Preparation. Please print a copy of the domains and definitions table on page 4 of this document to serve as a helpful reference as you continue. Read the domains and definitions carefully.

(2). Domain Placement. There are eleven domains numbered 1 through 11. Please review each question or statement on the instrument and **highlight** the numbers of **ALL of the domains on which data may be collected with that question or statement.**

EXAMPLE:

Question or statement	Domain	Association	Clarity
1. First question.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11	1 2 3 4	1 2 3

Domain and Domain Definitions

A Multiple Case Study of Sugarloaf County Public Schools: Perspectives from Middle-Level Educators on What Constitutes an Effective Education for Middle-Level Learners

Domain	Domain definition
1. Personal perspectives	The ideas of the participants about middle-level education, including, but not limited to, a good middle school, an effective middle school, the design of middle schools, the curriculum of middle schools, the instruction in middle schools, middle Schools to Watch, the role of parents, and grade configurations.
2. Personal philosophy	The beliefs and attitudes of the participants about middle-level education (general feelings about the middle school).
3. Staff learning opportunities	All of the sources of knowledge and skills used by the participant to learn about middle schools, including, but not limited to, professional development opportunities and individual learning.
4. Central office perspectives	The participants' thoughts about how their central office administrators and supervisors view middle-level education.
5. Board of education perspectives	The participants' thoughts about how their board of education views middle-level education.
6. SDOE perspectives	The participants' thoughts on how the SDOE views middle-level education, including, but not limited to, consequences for not performing, standard setting, and monitoring performance.
7. Community perspectives	The participants' thoughts about the views of groups within the community that may have an interest in middle-level education.
8. Personal experience	The participants' knowledge of middle-level education gained through their personal experiences as a student, parent of a middle-level student, teacher, or administrator.
9. Pre-service education	The participants' training in middle-level education at either the undergraduate or graduate level.
10. Memberships	The subscriptions and memberships of the participant related to middle-level education, including, but not limited to, middle-level organizations, electronic periodicals, and

	journals.
11. Other	Any domain not listed that surfaces as a result of the interview process.

(3). Association Ratings. In the column labeled “Association,” please indicate how strongly you feel the question or statement is associated with the domain(s) you have selected by **highlighting** the appropriate number. Please use the following scale:

(1) Very Weak (2) Weak (3) Strong (4) Very Strong

(4). Clarity Ratings. In the column labeled “Clarity,” please indicate how clear you think the question or statement is by **highlighting** the appropriate number. Please use the following scale:

(1) Unclear, omit or revise (2) Somewhat clear, omit or revise (3) Very clear

Note: For any item you rated a one (1) or two (2) for **either Association or Clarity**, please write your recommendations for improving the item by entering **bold red text** within the item’s cell.

Question or statement	Domain	Association	Clarity
1. What is your idea of a good middle school? Probe: Would the words philosophy or perspective help? Probe: Tell me about your overall view of middle-level education.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11	1 2 3 4	1 2 3
2. How would you define an effective middle school?	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11	1 2 3 4	1 2 3
3. If you were able to design a middle school, what would you include? Probe: Why would you include (each response)? Probe: Is there anything else?	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11	1 2 3 4	1 2 3
4. What would the curriculum be in your ideal middle school?	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11	1 2 3 4	1 2 3
5. How would you organize your ideal middle school for instruction? Probe: How would you structure your ideal middle school? Probe: For example, would you have departments?	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11	1 2 3 4	1 2 3
6. What do you think the Schools to Watch program would have to offer	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11	1 2 3 4	1 2 3

you in designing your ideal middle school?			
7. What role would parents play in your ideal middle school? Probe: How would you involve parents?	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11	1 2 3 4	1 2 3
8. What do you think the appropriate grade configuration is for the adolescent student? Why? Probe: In what ways do you think grade arrangements affect the learning environment at the middle-level?	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11	1 2 3 4	1 2 3
9. Where do you get most of your information about middle-level education? Probe: In what types of professional development opportunities have you participated in? Probe: Conferences? Workshops? Webinars? Book studies? Websites? Others? Probe: What professional development opportunities have been focused on middle-level education that you have been a part of? How has this professional development influenced your views? Probe: What was the best professional development opportunity you have participated in? Why was it a great opportunity?	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11	1 2 3 4	1 2 3
10. Tell me what you think your central office professional personnel think about middle-level education. Probe: What does your superintendent think about middle-level education? Probe: How has the superintendent's views affected your views about middle-level education? Probe: What does your middle-level supervisor think about middle-level education? Probe: How has the middle-level supervisor's views affected your views about middle-level education?	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11	1 2 3 4	1 2 3
11. Tell me what you think your Board	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11	1 2 3 4	1 2 3

<p>of Education thinks about middle-level education.</p> <p>Probe: Tell me about any members that may have views on middle-level education.</p> <p>Probe: What are those views?</p> <p>Probe: Tell me what your school board chairman thinks about middle-level education.</p> <p>Probe: How have their views affected your thinking about middle-level education?</p> <p>Probe: What are your school board's expectations for middle schools?</p> <p>Probe: What information comes to you from your school board in relation to middle-level education?</p>			
<p>12. How have state requirements affect your thinking about middle-level education?</p> <p>Probe: Can you think of any State Department of Education requirements that have affected your views of middle-level education?</p> <p>Probe: What do you think the role of the State Board of Education should be in middle-level education?</p> <p>Probe: Application of consequences for not performing?</p> <p>Probe: Setting standards?</p> <p>Probe: Monitoring performance?</p>	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11	1 2 3 4	1 2 3
<p>13. Tell me who else you think is interested in middle-level education in your community.</p> <p>Probe: How have these people affected your thinking about middle-level education?</p>	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11	1 2 3 4	1 2 3
<p>14. How many years have you worked as a teacher, guidance counselor, or principal?</p> <p>Probe: What types of positions?</p>	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11	1 2 3 4	1 2 3
<p>15. How many years have you worked in middle-level education?</p> <p>Probe: What types of positions?</p>	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11	1 2 3 4	1 2 3
<p>16. How did you prepare for your career in education?</p>	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11	1 2 3 4	1 2 3

Probe: How did you prepare for your career in middle-level education?			
17. What middle-level associations or groups do you join? Probe: How has each membership affected your thinking about middle-level education? Probe: Through journals? Through conferences? Through websites? Through other venues?	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11	1 2 3 4	1 2 3
18. Tell me about your own middle-level educational experience.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11	1 2 3 4	1 2 3
19. Do you have any other thoughts?	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11	1 2 3 4	1 2 3
20. What ideas have we missed that are important parts of your thinking about middle-level education?	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11	1 2 3 4	1 2 3

(5). Additional Thoughts.

Please add any items that you think would be helpful in identifying variables that may influence the perspectives middle-level educators have about effective middle-level education:

Please add any comments that you think may be helpful in improving the interview protocol:

(6). Submission.

Please download the completed content validation instrument to your desktop and return it as an email attachment to LisaMercerEmail.

*Thank you for becoming a part of the study.
I truly appreciate the time you have taken to complete this questionnaire.*

Content Validation Responses Summary

Item	Intended domain(s)	N	Domain placement by respondents (n)											Association with selected domain by respondents (M)											Clarity (M)		
			1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11			
1. What is your idea of a good middle school? Probe: Would the words philosophy or perspective help? Probe: Tell me about your overall view of middle-level education.	1, 2	6	6	6		2	2	1	1	5	3				3.50	3.50		3.00	3.00	3.00	3.00	3.60	3.33				2.67
Suggestions	This is going to be difficult to quantify given the many stakeholder's perspectives. Also, what defines good? Climate, scores...?																										
2. How would you define an effective middle school?	1, 2	6	6	5	2	2	2	2	3	6	3	1			3.67	3.60	3.00	3.50	3.50	3.50	3.33	3.67	3.67	3.00			3.00
Suggestions																											
3. If you were able to design a middle school, what would you include? Probe: Why would you include (each response)? Probe: Is there anything else?	1, 2	6	6	4	2	2	1	2	2	5	4	1			3.50	3.50	3.00	3.50	4.00	3.50	3.50	3.60	3.50	3.00			2.50
Suggestions	What does design mean? Physically, organizationally, or curriculum?; Are you asking holistically, as in the physical design of the school with rooms, lights, furniture, etc...and the curriculum and programs offered? Or is the question focused on just one of these areas?																										
4. What would the curriculum	1, 2	6	4	2	1	3	2	4		3	3	1	1	4.00	3.50	3.00	3.33	3.00	3.50		3.67	3.67	3.00	3.00		3.00	

Item	Intended domain(s)	N	Domain placement by respondents (n)											Association with selected domain by respondents (M)											Clarity (M)
			1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	
be in your ideal middle school?																									
Suggestions	organizational structure																								
5. How would you organize your ideal middle school for instruction? Probe: How would you structure your ideal middle school? Probe: For example, would you have departments?	1, 2	6	6	5	1	3	3	3	2	5	3	1	1	3.67	3.60	3.00	3.33	3.33	3.33	3.50	3.60	3.33	3.00	3.00	3.00
Suggestions	organizational structure																								
6. What do you think the Schools to Watch program would have to offer you in designing your ideal middle school?	1, 2	6	4	2	2	1	1	2	4	3	1	4	3.50	3.00	3.50	3.00	3.00	2.50	3.50	3.33	4.00	3.25		2.83	
Suggestions	It may help to include a clear definition of what a Schools to Watch is and how schools attain this accreditation.																								
7. What role would parents play in your ideal middle school? Probe: How would you involve parents?	1, 2	6	4	3		2	2	2	5	4	1		1	3.25	3.33		3.50	3.50	3.50	3.60	3.50	4.00		4.00	3.00

Item	Intended domain(s)	N	Domain placement by respondents (n)											Association with selected domain by respondents (M)											Clarity (M)	
			1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11		
Suggestions																										
8. What do you think the appropriate grade configuration is for the adolescent student? Why? Probe: In what ways do you think grade arrangements affect the learning environment at the middle-level?	1, 2	6	4	4	1	3	2	2	2	4	4	2			3.25	3.25	3.00	3.00	3.00	3.00	3.00	3.00	3.25	3.50		2.33
Suggestions																										
What is meant by “grade configuration?”; The probe questions are more clear than the survey question.																										
9. Where do you get most of your information about middle-level education? Probe: In what types of professional development opportunities have you participated in? Probe: Conferences? Workshops?	3, 9	6	2	1	6	2	1	3	1	3	5	5	2	4.00	4.00	3.67	3.50	4.00	3.67	4.00	3.67	3.60	3.80	4.00	3.00	

Item	Intended domain(s)	N	Domain placement by respondents (n)											Association with selected domain by respondents (M)											Clarity (M)
			1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	
Webinars? Book studies? Websites? Others? Probe: What professional development opportunities have been focused on middle-level education that you have been a part of? How has this professional development influenced your views? Probe: What was the best professional development opportunity you have participated in? Why was it a great opportunity?																									
Suggestions																									
10. Tell me what you think your central office professional personnel think	4	6	4	2	2	5	2	1	1	1	1			3.25	3.50	3.50	3.40	3.50	4.00	4.00	4.00	4.00			2.83

Item	Intended domain(s)	N	Domain placement by respondents (n)											Association with selected domain by respondents (M)											Clarity (M)	
			1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11		
about middle-level education. Probe: What does your superintendent think about middle-level education? Probe: How has the superintendent's views affected your views about middle-level education? Probe: What does your middle-level supervisor think about middle-level education? Probe: How has the middle-level supervisor's views affected your views about middle-level education?																										
Suggestions																										
11. Tell me what you think your Board of Education thinks about middle-level education.	5	6	2	1	1	2	5		1	1	1			3.50	4.00	4.00	3.50	3.40		4.00	4.00	4.00				2.67

Item	Intended domain(s)	N	Domain placement by respondents (n)											Association with selected domain by respondents (M)											Clarity (M)	
			1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11		
Probe: Tell me about any members that may have views on middle-level education. Probe: What are those views? Probe: Tell me what your school board chairman thinks about middle-level education. Probe: How have their views affected your thinking about middle-level education? Probe: What are your school board's expectations for middle schools? Probe: What information comes to you from your school board in relation to middle-level education?																										
Suggestions	Again, the probe questions are more exact. The original question is very broad. Not sure how you could tease out the answers given the different domains.																									
12. How have	6	6	2	2	1	3	3	5	1	2	3	2		3.50	3.50	4.00	3.33	3.33	3.80	4.00	3.50	3.33	3.50		3.00	

Item	Intended domain(s)	N	Domain placement by respondents (n)											Association with selected domain by respondents (M)											Clarity (M)	
			1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11		
state requirements affect your thinking about middle-level education? Probe: Can you think of any State Department of Education requirements that have affected your views of middle-level education? Probe: What do you think the role of the State Board of Education should be in middle-level education? Probe: Application of consequences for not performing? Probe: Setting standards? Probe: Monitoring performance?																										
Suggestions																										

Item	Intended domain(s)	N	Domain placement by respondents (n)											Association with selected domain by respondents (M)											Clarity (M)
			1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	
13. Tell me who else you think is interested in middle-level education in your community. Probe: How have these people affected your thinking about middle-level education?	7	6	3	2	1	1	1	1	6	4	1	2	3.33	3.00	3.00	3.00	3.00	3.00	3.33	3.25	3.00	3.00	3.00		
Suggestions																									
14. How many years have you worked as a teacher, guidance counselor, or principal? Probe: What types of positions?	8	6	2	2	1	1	6	1	4.00	4.00	4.00	4.00	4.00	4.00	4.00	3.67	4.00	3.00							
Suggestions																									
15. How many years have you worked in middle-level education? Probe: What types of positions?	8	6	2	1	6	4.00	4.00	3.67	3.00																
Suggestions																									

Item	Intended domain(s)	N	Domain placement by respondents (n)											Association with selected domain by respondents (M)											Clarity (M)									
			1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11										
16. How did you prepare for your career in education? Probe: How did you prepare for your career in middle-level education?	3, 9	6	4	3	2	1	1	2	1	4	6	3												3.50	3.67	3.50	4.00	4.00	3.50	4.00	3.50	3.67	3.33	3.00
Suggestions																																		
17. What middle-level associations or groups do you join? Probe: How has each membership affected your thinking about middle-level education? Probe: Through journals? Through conferences? Through websites? Through other venues?	10	6	1	2	2	1	1	1		2	3	6												4.00	3.50	3.50	4.00	4.00	4.00		4.00	3.67	3.50	3.00
Suggestions																																		
18. Tell me about your own middle-level educational experience.	8	6	6	3	2	1	1	2	1	6	2	1												3.67	3.33	3.00	3.00	3.00	3.00	3.00	3.33	3.00	3.00	3.00

Item	Intended domain(s)	N	Domain placement by respondents (n)											Association with selected domain by respondents (M)											Clarity (M)	
			1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11		
Suggestions																										
19. Do you have any other thoughts?	11	6	5	4	1	1	1	1	2	3	2	2	3	3.60	3.50	4.00	4.00	4.00	4.00	3.50	3.33	3.50	3.50	3.67	2.50	
Suggestions	Thoughts on what? Education in general? Middle level education? Schools to Watch influenced on Middle Level Education?; I think this question could be clarified and rewritten to be more topic specific.																									
20. What ideas have we missed that are important parts of your thinking about middle-level education?	11	6	5	3	2	1	1	1	2	3	2	2	3	3.40	3.33	3.00	3.00	3.00	3.00	3.00	3.00	3.00	3.00	3.33	2.83	
Suggestions																										

Appendix D

TESTING THE INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Email to Interview Participants

Dear Administrator or Teacher,

I am a doctoral student at Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University and my advisor is Dr. David Parks. My doctoral study is on what constitutes an effective school for middle-level learners. In this study, the perspectives of administrators and teachers on what constitutes an effective middle-level education will be collected and analyzed. I am interested in your perspectives of middle-level education and am writing to ask you to become a test participant in this study.

I will be conducting the interview and will ensure your confidentiality. Your responses will be recorded and transcribed by an outside company. You will not be identified in the transcripts or in the study in any way. Individual, face-to-face interviews should not last longer than one hour. Written consent will be obtained before the interview.

I do hope that you will consider becoming a test participant in this study. Possible dates and times for an interview follow:

Month, Day, Year: Time
Month, Day, Year: Time
Month, Day, Year: Time
Month, Day, Year: Time
Month, Day, Year: Time

Please respond to me if one of the above dates will fit into your schedule. If these dates are not convenient, please let me know and I will forward to you some additional times. You will receive an email confirmation from me indicating your interview date and time. I appreciate your consideration of this request and look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

Lisa S. Mercer

Email to Test Interview Participants Confirming Date and Time

Dear Principal or Teacher,

Thank you very much for agreeing to become part of my doctoral study by playing a vital role in the interview process! I am excited knowing that soon I will be able to meet with you in person to conduct your interview. You are scheduled for (insert day, date, and time). If you need to reschedule this appointment, please feel free to contact me at LisaMercerEmail or call me directly at Granville Middle School at xxx-xxx-xxxx.

Thank you again for your willingness to become a test participant in this study. I look forward to meeting with you soon.

Sincerely,

Lisa S. Mercer

Informed Consent for Test Interviews

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this study. This form reviews the purpose of this study, the nature of your involvement, and your rights as a participant.

The purpose of this study is to contribute to the discussion on what constitutes an effective education for middle-level learners. Perspectives of middle-level administrators and teachers on what constitutes an effective middle-level education will be collected and analyzed. Information will be gathered from administrators and teachers through face-to-face interviews. The interviews will be recorded and sent to an outside company for transcription.

You will remain anonymous throughout the entire process. You will not be identified in the transcripts. Your recording and digital transcript will be stored on a password-protected personal computer and will be deleted at the completion of the study. Hard-copy transcripts will be shredded at the conclusion of the study.

You are only being asked to participate in this face-to-face interview. The interview should not last longer than one hour. Your time is very much appreciated.

You may withdraw from participation at any time during the study. If you choose to withdraw from the study, all information, including digital recordings, digital transcripts, and hard-copy transcripts, will be destroyed.

By signing this consent form, I agree to be a willing participant in this study. I understand the purpose of the study, how data will be collected, and that I may withdraw at any time with no consequence.

Participant's Signature

Date

(Participant will sign two copies, one to keep for themselves and one for the researcher.)

Test Interview Raw Data Matrices

Raw Data Matrix for Principal's Views on Qualities of Teachers at the Middle-Level

Source of data	Traits	Leadership preparation	Part of a good middle school	Helping students
TI-P	<p>“I think having that strong core of teachers, those positive teachers that know how to teach and know how to inspire students to want to learn, that’s critical” (TI-P, T2)</p> <p>“I think the most important part of that would be sound effective teachers that are lifelong learners and want to offer that trait to their students” (TI-P, T2)</p> <p>“I recognize the need for those positive teachers in the middles schools as well” (TI-P, T11)</p>	<p>“When you have those effective teachers in place that you develop leadership capacity for those individuals so that they have say, and they feel valued, and they want to be a part of that growth process, and that’s very important as well” (TI-P, T2)</p>	<p>“You find a good school or a good middle school then you’ve got great teachers, so I think that’s one of the focuses that you need to look in” (TI-P, T2)</p>	<p>“I just think that teachers change lives” (TI-P, T11)</p> <p>“From day one when they’re in kindergarten and so forth, we see the reports of positive teachers” (TI-P, T11)</p> <p>“Knowing that there are students that need compassion, and guidance, and direction, and that they want to be successful but yet they’re able to identify the barriers. And sometimes it looks overwhelming to them. So I think we have to understand that we have to help tear down those barriers, and to lift them up, and let them know that they can be successful. They</p>

				<p>will be successful” (TI-P, T11)</p> <p>“Here to develop powerful, encouraged young people that want to go on and do great things” (TI-P, T11)</p> <p>“Teachers utilize data to determine needs, and strengths, and weaknesses” (TI-P, T2)</p>
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Raw Data Matrix for Principal’s Views on a Safe Environment in Middle-Level Education

Source of data	Student learning
TI-P	<p>“If you have students coming into your middle school and they don’t feel safe there, then learning is not going to take place for that student” (TI-P, T2)</p> <p>“Every student will have an opportunity to learn and learn in a safe caring environment” (TI-P, T8)</p>

Raw Data Matrix for Principal's Views on Adolescents' Needs in Middle-Level Education

Source of data	Students' characteristics	Meeting needs	Time of transition
TI-P	<p>“It’s very important to have that positive approach for your students, and it seems like at that age I’ll use the word vulnerable and they seem to be vulnerable in the area of where I’m at and who am I” (TI-P, T1)</p> <p>“Our students at the middle level have social, and emotional, and physical needs as well” (TI-P, T1)</p>	<p>“It’s safe to say that our students’ needs are put first” (TI-P, T3)</p> <p>“Trying to develop a plan to help our students grow” (TI-P, T1)</p> <p>“Offering student support in many different ways” (TI-P, T2)</p> <p>“A place to meet the needs of the students” (TI-P, T2)</p>	<p>“All I know at this point is a 6th, 7th, and 8th grade approach, and I like that. I think when you start talking about transitioning and you have those programs from fifth grade to sixth grade, those sixth grade students are at the age, I think, that they are able to understand then move forward. If you started talking about a fifth grader transitioning to middle school, I think you can have some issues there. I think they would do better more in the elementary level. The same thing with eighth grade. You know my daughter is in ninth grade now, and it was time for her to go to the next level. Academically, she was ready, emotionally, and socially. And I think that 6th-7th-8th grade combination gives you the time to where the students are at an age to where they’re able to grow to transition to the next level.” (TI-P, T5)</p>

Raw Data Matrix for Principal's Views on Standards of Learning in Middle-Level Education

Source of data	SDOE curriculum	Different views	Academic progress
<p>TI-P</p>	<p>“I think what we’re using now in the state is a positive curriculum.” (TI-P, T2)</p> <p>“I think when you look at it our state provides a well-rounded academic approach” (TI-P, T2)</p>	<p>“Of course those questions always are going to be asked, and that’s okay” (TI-P, T2)</p> <p>“What you might feel about SOLs it is a way to measure growth and then offers accountability” (TI-P, T2)</p> <p>“I’m proud to be a part of the State education system, and I like what they offer” (TI-P, T2)</p> <p>“But again, we have those standards that you have to meet, and it is what it is, and you have to move forward with it” (TI-P, T9)</p> <p>“We all have views about those state requirements, but there has to be accountability piece, and I think our state’s provided that” (TI-P, T8)</p> <p>“I think it’s important that we recognize that we might not always agree, but it’s in place, and in their mind they put it in place to benefit</p>	<p>“I think as long as you’re able to show them that we’re growing or we’re working hard toward that goal that that should be viewed as an accomplishment and that should be viewed as, All right, they’ve done this. That particular school has improved this percentage” (TI-P, T9)</p> <p>“As long as you show that growth, I think that should be seen, and appreciated, and applauded” (TI-P, T9)</p>

		education and benefit students and then we have to try to move forward” (TI-P, T8)	
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Raw Data Matrix for Principal’s Views on Schools to Watch in Middle-Level Education

Source of data	Feedback and change	School visits	Becoming a <i>School to Watch</i>
TI-P	<p>“Well, this is my first opportunity to work with Schools to Watch, and I do know that from the get-go, from the first survey, we’ve taken that information, and we’ve changed, I guess, approaches and some situations within our school” (TI-P, T3)</p> <p>“I guess, first of all, it provided us some feedback so that we can look at wow this is really going well but we need to address some needs as far as student voice, differentiated instruction, and so forth” (TI-P, T3)</p> <p>“It offers an opportunity for you to look back and to evaluate what’s working well, what needs to be considered, I guess, as far as maybe change in the future” (TI-P, T3)</p> <p>“I think Schools to</p>	<p>“I like the collaboration piece of that where you get to go and visit other schools and get ideas from other schools and building relationships with other administrators and teachers building relationships with other teachers” (TI-P, T3)</p> <p>“The collaboration with other administrators, it’s important” (TI-P, T4)</p>	<p>“If Glade Spring Middle School wasn’t recognized as a School to Watch, I would definitely seek that because of the opportunities it provides for middle school teachers, middle school administrators, middle school parents, and middle school students. It’s a wide variety of opportunities” (TI-P, T3)</p>

	Watch is another opportunity for you to stop and reflect on are you truly offering that? The feedback from the visiting teams” (TI-P, T4)		
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Raw Data Matrix for Principal’s Views on Professional Development in Middle-Level Education

Source of data	Professional development	Resources for professional development	Memberships in organizations
TI-P	<p>“They’re working very hard to make sure that those professional development opportunities are geared toward that specific age group or middle school or high school, so I think they recognize, well, I say that means central office personnel, they recognize the need to make sure that we’re all taking part of those growth and professional development opportunities” (TI-P, T6)</p> <p>“The information that he’s sharing wit us, professional development opportunities that he’s communicating that Hey this is something that you want to be a part of” (TI-P, T7)</p>	<p>“Through the school and through the county, I mean there’s a lot of journals that we have come in” (TI-P, T10)</p> <p>“Every chance I get, I attend conferences, constantly reading about information, it’s just anything that you can take and apply to schools” (TI-P, T6)</p> <p>“I like even doing observations and, for example, we’re working heavily on inclusion, so any time I have a chance to take a class or read an article or anything along the same lines, I try to do that” (TI-P, T6)</p> <p>“I think it has to be widespread from various resources” (TI-P, T6)</p>	<p>“I’m in the process of joining the National Association of Secondary School Principals, but I’ve been a part of many, many organizations” (TI-P, T10)</p> <p>“When I was a teacher I started joining really different organizations and communities there” (TI-P, T10)</p> <p>“Using resources from Emory and Henry to the higher ed center to community colleges to make sure that we’re staying on board and doing everything that we need to do to make sure our students are successful” (TI-P, T7)</p>

		<p>“It has to be something that is proven and something that you’re going to be able to utilize to become a better teacher, administrator, student, or whatever you may be” (TI-P, T6)</p> <p>“I think it’s from a variety of resources, and I think it has to be that way” (TI-P, T6)</p> <p>“I’m just going to say this conversation with you, at a team meeting, by developing a thought or idea, reading articles, research, taking classes, being able to talk with other colleagues, talking with parents is important” (TI-P, T6)</p> <p>“I think if you try to narrow it down to even just two or three resources, you’re going to be cutting yourself short” (TI-P, T6)</p> <p>“I think, again, as an educator, as an administrator, it’s something that you have to seek, and there are many resources out there, so you have to take all of</p>	
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		that in” (TI-P, T6)	
		“It’s important that you get information from a variety of resources” (TI-P, T6)	

Raw Data Matrix for Principal’s Personal Experience in Middle-Level Education

Source of data	Wanting to become an educator	Middle school experience	Education attainment	Work experience
TI-P	<p>“I’ve always known I wanted to be in education from the time I was in elementary school, so I guess when I started young helping teachers and willing to do the extra duties that teachers at that time allowed students” (TI-P, T10)</p> <p>“When I got into high school, I had a teacher that offered me some guidance and helped me out through that. She would bring articles to me and say hey, here’s an article I read about this particular situation at a school” (TI-P, T10)</p>	<p>“I went to a small school in Buchanan County, so we went K through seven was elementary, and then eight through 12 was at the high school. So I didn’t really have a middle school experience in that sense. But growing up at that time, I guess that the teachers were awesome. Students at that age – they can be mean, and I had to overcome some issues there just like students today do. But I feel very blessed that that educational career from the time I was in the elementary school and all that, I really</p>	<p>“I went to Concord University which was Concord Teachers College at that time. They had a strong program so from there I just graduated from Concord, started working on my Master’s” (TI-P, T10)</p>	<p>“I served six years as a teacher, and then I’ve been in education a total of 21 years, so the first six years as a teacher and then in administration” (TI-P, T9)</p> <p>“I was an assistant principal at a middle school, and then I was a principal at two elementary schools. I served as a transportation supervisor. As I said, this is my second year in Glade Spring Middle School” (TI-P, T9)</p>

	<p>“When I went to college I knew right from the get-go I wanted to prepare to be a teacher” (TI-P, T10)</p>	<p>enjoyed school. I was very active, took part in a lot of activities. But my father was a coal miner that valued education but my mother, the same and they worked very hard to make sure my brother and I had opportunities that they never had. So my father, unfortunately, quit school when he was in the sixth grade, and his father passed away, he went to work and supported his mother, and brothers, and sisters. So from the Get Go, time of me being a young boy, my father communicated to me that “You will get good grades, and you will go to college.” So I guess that was kind of set for me, but that is a positive thing.” (TI-P, T11)</p>		
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Raw Data Matrix for Principal's Views on Parental Involvement in Middle-Level Education

Source of data	Importance of parental involvement	Communication with parents	Feedback from parents	Teacher involvement with parents
TI-P	<p>“I think parents are very, very important” (TI-P, T4)</p> <p>“We talked about how important teachers are to a successful middle school. Parents are right there in the mix of all of that. (TI-P, T4)</p>	<p>“Conversation, them knowing that you care” (TI-P, T4)</p> <p>“I had a principal I worked for that used to tell us that no one cares about how much you know until they know about how much you care. I hold on to that. That’s true with parents. (TI-P, T4)</p> <p>“Well, I think making sure they’re in the know, making sure they know when events are happening, making sure they know how their students are performing, making sure they’re aware of their student’s strengths and weaknesses” (TI-P, T4)</p>	<p>“They want the school to be successful. Parents want their kids to be successful” (TI-P, T4)</p> <p>“We want that feedback” (TI-P, T4)</p> <p>“We want them to be honest with us and to offer their suggestions and comments” (TI-P, T4)</p>	<p>“I think a lot’s to be said when a parent sees a teacher at a rec-league basketball game, and they’re only there just because that’s a student in their class. So I mean it’s not just saying hey you guys come to the school. We want you to come to the school. It’s about the teachers reaching out, too, and building those relationships. Once you build those relationships, then parent involvement is going to increase” (TI-P, T4)</p>

Raw Data Matrix for Principal's Views on Having an Academic Curriculum in Middle-Level Education

Source of data	An academic curriculum	Improvement	Importance	A basics curriculum
TI-P	<p>“A well rounded opportunity for student growth, and academics is a very, very important part of that” (TI-P, T1)</p> <p>“That’s the number one reason why we’re here, it’s academic progress for our students and you know that they continue to learn” (TI-P, T4)</p> <p>“That they would be provided every resource to make sure that that happens” (TI-P, T8)</p>	<p>“Academically, it is very important that we continue to look into what we need to do to improve reading, writing, science, math” (TI-P, T1)</p>	<p>“Developing that strong academic program” (TI-P, T2)</p>	<p>“A lot of times, when you talk about middle level education people think that it’s more of a science based approach where for me it’s very, very important that you continue to focus on the writing and the reading because of the importance of that trait to be successful in high school and also in the higher level education as well” (TI-P, T1)</p>

Raw Data Matrix for Principal's Views on Purposes of Middle Level Education

Source of data	Preparation for high school success	Preparation for citizenship
TI-P	<p>“Academically, if you see a successful high school student, most of the time that’s a student who was successful in middle school as well” (TI-P, T1)</p> <p>“Values highly the opportunity for our middle school students to grow and</p>	<p>“And not just to high school, that would go as far as students to grow and to become productive citizens be it going to a trade, or higher level education, or whatever it may be” (TI-P, T7)</p>

	to, I guess, ready themselves for the transition to high school” (TI-P, T7)	
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Raw Data Matrix for Principal’s Views on Different Groups Working Together in Middle-Level Education

Source of data	Team approach to middle-level education	Shared vision among stakeholders	Central office commitment to middle-level education	School board relations
TI-P	<p>“Working together to do whatever we can to help” (TI-P, T8)</p> <p>“We’re all in this together, and we’re going to do whatever we can do to make sure our students are successful” (TI-P, T7)</p> <p>“I think we all have to be a team and then it goes from the board of education to your school board to your superintendent to your middle level supervisors. I mean it all has to be that team approach” (TI-P, T8)</p> <p>“I think it’s very much a team approach” (TI-P, T7)</p>	<p>“It is a shared vision. I mean it’s something that we’re all working toward” (TI-P, T8)</p> <p>“That we have a shared vision, and that we’re all working together to move forward” (TI-P, T7)</p>	<p>“Communicates and has the shared vision of where you’re at that point in time and what do you need to do to provide growth for students” (TI-P, T2)</p> <p>“I know that they understand and value the importance of middle level education. And the reason why I say this is because, for example, this year what we’re doing curriculum meetings with our administrators along with the administrative meetings, so in those curriculum meetings it’s not just about a specific approach; it’s about “Hey, here</p>	<p>“I’ve had school board members come into the school and speak individually to students” (TI-P, T8)</p> <p>“This year, each administrator has been asked to present to the school board about curriculum and scheduling and what are we doing to try to make sure that we have everybody on board” (TI-P, T7)</p>

	<p>“I think that it’s important that all stakeholders will take a part in the development of that and that they have an option to weigh in and to discuss, I guess, a team approach to the needs of our students. And I think it’s very important that we all, from parents to community leaders to teachers to administration, that we all sit and talk about the needs of our students and develop a plan to meet them.” (TI-P, T1)</p> <p>“We’re fortunate to have our community, local colleges demonstrating an interest, “Hey, you know, I mean we would like to come in and take part in this and help your kids with this.” Businesses, I mean we’ve had business partnerships that’s been very,</p>		<p>we are, and this is what we’ve been working on, and this is the approach we’re willing to take.” They’re very active in those meetings, very active in the conversations, so I know that they value that tremendously.” (TI-P, T6)</p>	
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	<p>very helpful. And as you've already mentioned, our school board, our superintendent, our parents, our teachers -- we have amazing teachers that care greatly about our students. So we were blessed in that aspect. I think we have a lot of people that want to see us do well. And I do think, too, at Glade Spring middle school -- it's kind of the hub of the community. People want to be a part of it for the most part and they want to see growth in their kids." (TI-P, T9)</p>			
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Raw Data Matrix for Teacher's Views on Involvement of Others in Middle-Level Education

Source of data	Central office	School board	Community
TI-T	<p>"I'm going to be very quite honest here; I really don't know what either of them thinks because I've had very little contact with both of them. Of course, the superintendent has been here for two years and I have seen him in library -- no, I</p>	<p>"They don't often visit our school" (TI-T, T6)</p> <p>"I think my local school board member is involved in my school. I see him quite often in the hallways and he occasionally stops in just to say hello. So, I</p>	<p>"I would say a lot of local businesses are interested because -- banks, and I can't think of good examples, but other parts of the community are definitely interested because they're willing to give time, a lot of times, they send</p>

	<p>haven't. I've seen him in my school maybe four times total, and he did not enter my work area for any of those. He was in more like common areas of the school. The middle-level education supervisor, I never see him. So, I don't know. That makes me sad but it's true. I really couldn't tell you what they think" (TI-T, T6)</p> <p>"The observation part of it to me is the most important component and I think there's no substitute. All the written information, all the things I typed in to a computer program that collects that information and puts it into a format that can be read, I don't think there's any substitute for actually come and to see what I do in my classroom, if that makes sense. I think that the monitoring should be more building level" (TI-T, T7)</p>	<p>would say, to him, middle-level education is very important" (TI-T, T6)</p> <p>"I believe they probably think it's important. I would think they think all levels are important because they're willing to give their time to observe and give a lot of time to serve on the school board. I don't know if they're compensated for their time but, even if there are, they're probably not compensated enough because I know it takes a lot to serve on a board" (TI-T, T6)</p> <p>"I think probably we just all assumed, all the teachers and staff assumed, that they expect us to come and do our very best everyday and provide top level of education opportunities for our students but I don't think that that's really communicated to us in any kind of definite specific way" (TI-T, T6)</p>	<p>money for middle school things, they donate prizes, and they give incentives for students to do well with character education program and honor rolls. I definitely think they have a role to play because, on the very end, I believe they are trying to prepare these students to be adults in this community, hopefully adults that will return to this small community, and give back to the community. So, I would say their stake is to build future customers and possibly employees" (TI-T, T8)</p> <p>"Involves not only students but the faculty, the staff, and the community as a whole to help the kids" (TI-T, T1)</p>
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Raw Data Matrix for Teacher's Views on Basing a Middle School on the Needs of Students in Middle-Level Education

Source of data	Students' characteristics	Meeting needs	Time of transition	Teachers and staff members
TI-T	<p>“They have their days when they seemed like little babies and then they have days when they seemed like they're more mature than the adults in the building” (TI-T, T9)</p>	<p>“I think the ideal middle school then would cater to the needs out of the kid's growth and their needs change from sixth, seventh, and eighth grade. It would cater to all those different needs of theirs” (TI-T, T1)</p> <p>“Where they get to explore the social aspect of the world, making friends and how to behave and just mature not only physically but also emotionally and I guess socially too” (TI-T, T1)</p> <p>“I would say an effective middle school educates the whole child” (TI-T, T1)</p> <p>“I guess what it boils down to is I just think that middle school should be a place</p>	<p>“For me, a middle school is a place where kids can make the transition from elementary school to high school” (TI-T, T1)</p> <p>“It's kind of a transition phase in my mind. It's a perfect place to transition” (TI-T, T1)</p> <p>“I think the grade levels set up that way, again, it's all about transition. They can't really jump into things before they're ready” (TI-T, T5)</p> <p>“It's important for it to be a time of transition and careful, slow, thoughtful transition” (TI-T, T9)</p> <p>“Make that transition from sixth grade, seventh grade and then eighth</p>	<p>“With adults who are accustomed to working with that age” (TI-T, T9)</p> <p>“A really caring faculty and staff that know the kids” (TI-T, T1)</p>

		<p>to grow” (TI-T, T9)</p> <p>“We still kind of have a captive audience that we can teach things to social skills and other things as well as academics” (TI-T, T3)</p>	<p>and then be ready for what lies beyond, because of course, elementary school and high school are so different from middle school and I always think of sixth graders still being a lot of like elementary kids whereas the eighth graders are more like high school kids but they're not quite there yet” (TI-T, T1)</p> <p>“I believe that having a sixth, seventh, and eighth grade, it gives the kids a chance to make the transition a little more slowly and probably would feel like a little safely to the adolescents from elementary where you're a child to middle school where you're getting into your adolescent years” (TI-T, T5)</p> <p>“I'm a firm believer that</p>	
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			<p>sixth grade should still be sort of like elementary school and then seventh grade, the students have a little more personal responsibility and a great amount of homework, just more responsibility in general. And then eighth graders, even more still and so that they can make that transition to high school. I think middle school is a time for us to still hold their hands a little as adults because once they get into high school, they're either not going to have their hands held or they're not going to want their hands to be held" (TI-T, T3)</p>	
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Raw Data Matrix for Teacher's Views on Standards of Learning in Middle-Level Education

Source of data	SDOE curriculum	Role of SDOE	Academic progress	Stress and testing
TI-T	"Since I don't teach an SOL related subject, it doesn't affect me	"I think they need to offer support" (TI-T, T7)	"I guess there has to be some assessment for whether the	"Indirectly, it affects me just because of the stress that's put

	<p>as much as it does a classroom teacher, especially the core classes” (TI-T, T7)</p> <p>“Sometimes, I don’t know where they pull their standards from” (TI-T, T7)</p>	<p>“I definitely think that they need to provide some consistency which I guess is really same standards” (TI-T, T7)</p> <p>“The standards I guess have to come from the state” (TI-T, T7)</p>	<p>standards are being taught and being met” (TI-T, T7)</p> <p>“I think that that is an important part but that’s not the only part” (TI-T, T4)</p> <p>“I think a school is more than its academic achievement” (TI-T, T4)</p> <p>“I would say even though the emphasis on academic achievements is important, it’s not the only thing that a school should be judged by” (TI-T, T4)</p>	<p>on the school due to those standards” (TI-T, T7)</p> <p>“I would like to see more standards and less testing” (TI-T, T7)</p> <p>“Of course, in America, have tested and tested and we just keep on testing and we’re beginning to look more like a place – the school is looking more like a place to teach kids to take a test and teach teachers how to give test” (TI-T, T4)</p> <p>“I think we’ve kind of gotten away from some of the academic focus that we wanted and now, we’re all focused on grades and scores and test results” (TI-T, T4)</p>
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Raw Data Matrix for Teacher's Views on Schools to Watch in Middle-Level Education

Source of data	Feedback and change	Cultural studies
TI-T	<p>“It’s almost like notebooks full of ideas of best practices, and I think that there’s a wealth of knowledge. A lot of teachers have made changes that were recommended by that team and so, I would say Schools to Watch is very beneficial. It basically provides an assessment and you can kind of see where you’re at for your goals for your school because they certainly pick up on things that you may not realize because you see it everyday and when they point those things out, the good and the bad, it really helps you grow. I think our school has grown a lot and people have changed the way they do things in their classrooms and most of it for the better. There might have some ideas that didn’t work out so well but, in some suggestions, we just can’t do. But I think going to the application process and the visitation, I think, every middle school should do it” (TI-T, T3)</p>	<p>“I believe Schools to Watch probably, just the application process, force me to look at how much do we offer in a way of multi-cultural studies or do we know where the kids to live in the whole world or just their small local world. And of course, we want all the kids to be part of, I think, the world not just one little part of it. So, Schools to Watch definitely offers you a way to evaluate what you’re doing with cultural studies and – I can’t find the word I’m looking for. It’s not tolerance but just the ways the students work together and the way that people work together in society” (TI-T, T3)</p>

Raw Data Matrix for Teacher's Views on Professional Development and Learning Resources in Middle-Level Education

Source of data	Professional development	Learning resources	Organizations	Benefit and ideas
TI-T	“I’ve attended professional development from the VLA	“I read a lot of journals specifically School Library	“The State Association of School Librarians, we	“It definitely inspires me to trust some things and step out of

	<p>which is the State Library Association” (TI-T, T8)</p> <p>“I also get information from professional development conducted by both at the school level and at the county level and have recently attended a conference that was a state level conference” (TI-T, T5)</p>	<p>Journal, Library Media Connection, and a couple of others. They have a lot of information about all levels of libraries but I usually read a lot of articles that are focused on middle-level education related to libraries” (TI-T, T5)</p> <p>“I also get information from some newsletters that are mailed to me like AMLE Newsletter” (TI-T, T5)</p> <p>“So I would definitely say professional development and journals, and also from my colleagues when they travel to conferences. They’re often expected to and willingly contribute what they’ve learned in faculty meetings or professional development and opportunities at school” (TI-T, T5)</p>	<p>call that VAASL, which is a subset of the American Library Association, and that’s our organization, so I do belong to that” (TI-T, T8)</p> <p>“The AMLE, which I think is the Association for Middle Level Education, and that is a national organization for middle school” (TI-T, T5)</p>	<p>my shell a little bit” (TI-T, T5)</p> <p>“It was very beneficial” (TI-T, T5)</p> <p>“Really tried things and getting out of your comfort zone and that, to me, seemed to be the thing that you do to kind of reinvent yourself” (TI-T, T5)</p> <p>“It’s given me a lot of inspiration for how to teach classes on research and information retrieval for the students and certainly it has inspired me to be more creative in my library environment” (TI-T, T8)</p> <p>“The speakers really did encourage teachers to do things as drastic as moving the room around, flipping their desk upside down, wearing costumes everyday, and</p>
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				then there are probably less crazy ideas that they expressed but it was all about getting kids engaged and having a good interactive learning environment in your classroom” (TI-T, T6)
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Raw Data Matrix for Teacher’s Personal Experience in Middle-Level Education

Source of data	Middle school experience	Education attainment	Work experience
TI-T	<p>“When I was there in seventh grade as a junior high, it was more like high school. There was a tremendous amount of homework, there wasn’t a team approach from – or at least it wasn’t called that. Everything was just kind of seventh grade was seventh grade, and then when I transition into eighth grade and we change to middle school” (TI-T, T9)</p> <p>“When I was in seventh grade, it was a junior high, seventh and eighth grade are freely mixed in the hallways. And now, that school which is three-floor levels, it’s more like sixth grade</p>	<p>“Initially, I went to a four-year college and obtain my Bachelors of Arts in teaching English 9 through 12, so secondary. And then, I return to get my Master’s Degree in Information Science which is another way of saying Library Science, and then my emphasis was school media, so I obtain my post-graduate professional license in School Library Media pre-K through 12. So, I have dual licensures” (TI-T, T8)</p>	<p>“I’ve been a school librarian for 11 years” (TI-T, T8)</p>

	<p>on one floor, seventh grade on one floor, eighth on one floor, and it wasn't like that when I was a student there. It was all intermingled" (TI-T, T9)</p> <p>"There was a sixth grade there at that point and the sixth grade did have recess but the seventh and eighth didn't and then that cause a lot of animosity between the grade levels because they felt seventh and the eight teachers felt it was not fair the sixth grades got recess and sixth grade teachers fought for because they felt like their children, their students were too immature and they needed that" (TI-T, T9)</p>		
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Raw Data Matrix for Teacher's Views on Parental Involvement in Middle-Level Education

Source of data	PTA	Communication	Role of parents	Lack of parents' presence
TI-T	"I'd like to see greater involvement in the PTA. I think a lot of times the year starts out really well and all of the teachers and parents are at the first meeting and it dwindles,	"I think if you have strong communication with the parents and keep them informed of what's coming up" (TI-T, T4)	<p>"Where every parent has a stake" (TI-T, T4)</p> <p>"Offer them a variety of ways that they can contribute because, let's face this, some parents don't</p>	"It's sad to see, I think at the elementary level, parents are always there, they're at the little classroom parties, they're volunteering to help kids with the reading, but

	dwindles, dwindles and it just seems like as the year comes along parents lose interest” (TI-T, T4)		<p>have time where they just can’t be there during the school day, but give them other ways that they can contribute in other ways to give their talents in times at the school” (TI-T, T4)</p> <p>“I think in the ideal middle school, the parents play a big role” (TI-T, T4)</p> <p>“I think they should be involved” (TI-T, T4)</p>	<p>then when you get to middle school, I don’t know if it’s because the culture of middle school, the kids are getting older and they don’t want their parents around or maybe, I don’t know. I’m not really sure what causes it but I think we get a lot less parent involvement. You don’t see them as much at the lunch table with the kids and they do help out but I would like to see a greater emphasis on that” (TI-T, T4)</p>
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Raw Data Matrix for Teacher’s Views on Characteristics for the Curriculum in Middle-Level Education

Source of data	Core classes	Exploratory opportunities	Types of learning opportunities
TI-T	<p>“I would definitely want to stick with the basics of course” (TI-T, T2)</p> <p>“I think the kids do need the reading, writing, math, and science, and of course the social studies” (TI-T, T2)</p>	<p>“I would definitely want to see more emphasis on exploratory-type classes but I would like to see kids be able to focus in those and see more exploratory classes that are full year versus 6 weeks or 12 weeks because I think for a lot of kids, they</p>	<p>“Have a place set up in every classroom to kind of cater to project-based learning because I think that really helps kids. I think they enjoy that. It’s more enjoyable for the teachers to grade than just papers and workbook stuff, so I definitely want a school that reflected</p>

		<p>need more than that in sixth and seventh grades especially seventh grade, I feel like they're ready for a whole year of art or a whole year of technology but they don't quite get that, not at our school anyway it is divided up so I think that to in turn offer more exploratory so that the kids have a chance to branch out and definitely make sure that they can take music, chorus and band, and not have to take those exclusively but be able to do all of those if that's what they wanted" (TI-T, T2)</p> <p>"I used to be an exploratory teachers so I feel like I know that – but like for example, for Spanish, in sixth grade they get six weeks. I mean it's just basic rudimentary, not a lot of Spanish that you can learn in 30 days in short class periods. And then in seventh grade, they have it for, I believe 9 to 12 weeks and so they have a little more time. And then, in eighth grade, they can take it full year and,</p>	<p>the creativity of the students" (TI-T, T1)</p> <p>"Give them more real-world examples of learning" (TI-T, T1)</p> <p>"A place where they have a chance to try lots of things and be creative" (TI-T, T1)</p> <p>"I definitely would like to see a greater emphasis on the arts and expand an after-school program that would explore things like drama and more of the creative things" (TI-T, T2)</p>
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		of course, it's a high school credit which is great" (TI-T, T5)	
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Raw Data Matrix for Teacher's Views on Approaches to Instruction in Middle-Level Education

Source of data	Role of the student	Teaching approaches
TI-T	<p>"Put a lot of the responsibility for learning on the students" (TI-T, T1)</p> <p>"They also get settled into routine of good study habits and good organizational skills that will help them in high school, college, and beyond" (TI-T, T1)</p>	<p>"I would want it to be a lot of hands-on spaces, not just in the classroom but also the library, places where they can tinker with robotics and toys, and Legos, and crafty things like yarn and paint" (TI-T, T1)</p> <p>"And to help the kids make good decisions and learn from the mistakes they make from the not so good decisions" (TI-T, T9)</p> <p>"Know how to apply all these neat things and technologies that they have in the school and actually use with the kids" (TI-T, T1)</p>

Raw Data Matrix for Teacher's Views on Designing a School in Middle-Level Education

Source of data	Physical environment	Teacher needs	Departments
TI-T	<p>"With lots of spaces to display their work" (TI-T, T1)</p> <p>"I would definitely want classrooms that were state-of-the-art, that had technology" (TI-T, T1)</p> <p>"Top of line everything" (TI-T, T1)</p> <p>"A huge library,</p>	<p>"There needs to be lots of common planning time. That seems to be an area every school struggles with though, the scheduling" (TI-T, T2)</p>	<p>"I believe departments do work. I think it definitely serves a purpose to have an English department, social students department, and so on. I definitely think there needs to be a department that is dedicated to all of the exploratory teachers with a common planning for those people, and certainly</p>

	<p>which would be the hub of the school, to be the center of – well, it would be a learning commons and it would not be only for the students but also for the faculty and staff, so that they continue growing in their learning process, life-long learning” (TI-T, T1)</p> <p>“I really like having sixth grade in one wing, eighth grade in one wing, seventh grade in one wing. I think that is good. I think keeping the grades from mingling is helpful and I like the fact that the school has a wing that’s devoted mostly to exploratory classes and the art programming, I like that. I think I would put the library at the center of the school instead of the very back right out of the course in man rooms, so it’d be a little more effective and a little quieter. Same with the cafeteria, I think I would rather see those things be in the center of the school than often to the things because this tends to generate noise like the gym and the cafeteria</p>		<p>opportunities. I’ve been at schools where there are departments and the departments competed against each other for things which sounds very childish but I think in certain environment, that happens. So, I would like to see that structured so that their common planning for those departments to work together. So, it’s not always the English department versus the math department versus whatever” (TI-T, T2)</p>
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	especially doing a lot of noise and there'd be noise at those could be away from the classrooms" (TI-T, T2)		
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Appendix E

INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Email to Interview Participants

Dear Administrator or Teacher,

I am a doctoral student at Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University and my advisor is Dr. David Parks. My doctoral study is on what constitutes an effective school for middle-level learners. In this study, the perspectives of middle-level administrators and teachers on what constitutes an effective middle-level education will be collected and analyzed. I am interested in your perspectives of middle-level education and am writing to ask you to become a participant in this study.

I will be conducting the interview and will ensure your confidentiality. Your responses will be recorded and transcribed by an outside company. You will have an opportunity to review your transcript for accuracy and make comments. You will not be identified in the transcripts or in the study in any way. Individual, face-to-face interviews should not last longer than one hour. Written consent will be obtained before the interview.

I do hope that you will consider becoming a participant in this study. If you agree to participate, please see the attached Word document containing possible dates and times to schedule your interview. You may select up to three preferred times and I will do my very best to accommodate you. By completing the attached document and returning it to me by email to LisaMercerEmail, you are agreeing to be a participant in this study. You will receive an email indicating your interview date and time. I appreciate your consideration of this request and look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

Lisa S. Mercer

Attachment: Interview Dates and Times Document

Interview Dates and Times

Instructions: Please indicate your preferred interview times by highlighting 1st, 2nd, and 3rd below:

Date: Time	1 st , 2 nd , 3 rd Choice
Example: January 5, 2015: 3:30 pm	1 st 2 nd 3 rd
Date: Time	1 st 2 nd 3 rd
Date: Time	1 st 2 nd 3 rd
Date: Time	1 st 2 nd 3 rd
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Date: Time	1 st 2 nd 3 rd

Email to Interview Participants (2nd and 3rd requests)

Dear Administrator or Teacher,

I would like to ask you once again to become a part of my doctoral study involving perspectives about middle-level education. Your participation will be greatly appreciated and may help in improvement efforts for educating adolescent students.

I am a doctoral student at Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University and my advisor is Dr. David Parks. My doctoral study is on what constitutes an effective school for middle-level learners. In this study, the perspectives of administrators and teachers on what constitutes an effective middle-level education will be collected and analyzed. I am interested in your perspectives of middle-level education and am writing you again to ask you to become a participant in this study.

I will be conducting the interview and will ensure your confidentiality. Your responses will be recorded and transcribed by an outside company. You will have an opportunity to review your transcript for accuracy and make comments. You will not be identified in the transcripts or in the study in any way. Individual, face-to-face interviews should not last longer than one hour. Written consent will be obtained before the interview.

I do hope that you will consider becoming a participant in this study. If you agree to participate, please see the attached Word document containing possible dates and times to schedule your interview. You may select up to three preferred times and I will do my very best to accommodate you. By completing the attached document and returning it to me by email to LisaMercerEmail, you are agreeing to be a participant in this study. You will receive an email indicating your interview date and time. I appreciate your consideration of this request and look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

Lisa S. Mercer

Attachment: Interview Dates and Times Document

Interview Dates and Times

Instructions: Please indicate your preferred interview times by highlighting 1st, 2nd, and 3rd below:

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Email to Interview Participants Confirming Date and Time

Dear Administrator or Teacher,

Thank you very much for agreeing to become part of my doctoral study by playing a vital role in the interview process! I am excited knowing that soon I will be able to meet with you in person to conduct your interview. You are scheduled for (insert day, date, and time). If you need to reschedule this appointment, please feel free to contact me at LisaMercerEmail or call me directly at Granville Middle School at xxx-xxx-xxxx.

Thank you again for your willingness to become a participant in this study. I look forward to meeting with you soon.

Sincerely,

Lisa S. Mercer

Email to Interview Participants with Transcription Attachment

Dear Administrator or Teacher,

Thank you very much for taking the time to meet with me for your interview. I enjoyed our time together. Your interview transcription is attached. Please take some time to review it carefully and respond to me through email at LisaMercerEmail if you would like to make any additional comments, offer further clarity, or address any inconsistencies or mistakes. By not responding to this email, I will assume you feel no comments are needed.

I thank you once again for being a vital part of my doctoral study!

Sincerely,

Lisa S. Mercer

Attachment: Participant's Interview Transcription

Informed Consent

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this study. This form reviews the purpose of this study, the nature of your involvement, and your rights as a participant.

The purpose of this study is to contribute to the discussion on what constitutes an effective education for middle-level learners. Perspectives of middle-level administrators and teachers on what constitutes an effective middle-level education will be collected and analyzed. Information will be gathered from administrators and teachers through face-to-face interviews. The interviews will be recorded and sent to an outside company for transcription.

You will remain anonymous throughout the entire process. You will not be identified in the transcripts. Your recording and digital transcript will be stored on a password-protected personal computer and will be deleted at the completion of the study. Hard-copy transcripts will be shredded at the conclusion of the study.

You are only being asked to participate in this face-to-face interview. The interview should not last longer than one hour. Your time is very much appreciated.

You may withdraw from participation at any time during the study. If you choose to withdraw from the study, all information, including digital recordings, digital transcripts, and hard-copy transcripts, will be destroyed.

By signing this consent form, I agree to be a willing participant in this study. I understand the purpose of the study, how data will be collected, and that I may withdraw at any time with no consequence.

Participant's Signature

Date

(Participant will sign two copies, one to keep for themselves and one for the researcher.)

Interview Protocol

Interview questions / statements	Possible stems / probes
1. What is your idea of a good middle school?	<p>Would the words philosophy or perspective help?</p> <p>Tell me about your overall view of middle-level education.</p>
2. How would you define an effective middle school?	
3. If you were able to create your own middle school, what would you include?	<p>Why would you include (<u>each response</u>)?</p> <p>Is there anything else?</p>
4. What would the curriculum be in your ideal middle school?	
5. How would you organize your ideal middle school for instruction?	<p>How would you structure your ideal middle school?</p> <p>For example, would you have departments?</p>
6. What do you think the Schools to Watch program has to offer you in designing your ideal middle school?	<p>How about the program's emphasis on a school that is appropriate for the age group?</p> <p>How about the program's emphasis on fairness to all students?</p> <p>How about the program's emphasis on academic achievement?</p>
7. What role would parents play in your ideal middle school?	How would you involve parents?
8. What do you think is the appropriate combination of grades for the adolescent student? For example a school with grades 5-6-7 or 6-7-8 or any other?	<p>Why did you select that combination of grades?</p> <p>In what ways do you think grade configurations affect the learning environment at the middle-level?</p>
9. Where do you get most of your information about middle-level education?	In what types of professional development opportunities have you participated in?

	<p>Conferences? Workshops? Webinars? Book studies? Websites? Others?</p> <p>What professional development opportunities have been focused on middle-level education that you have been a part of?</p> <p>How has this professional development influenced your views?</p> <p>What was the best professional development opportunity you have participated in? Why was it a great opportunity?</p>
<p>10. Tell me what you think your central office professional personnel think about middle-level education.</p>	<p>What does your superintendent think about middle-level education?</p> <p>How has the superintendent's views affected your views about middle-level education?</p> <p>What does your middle-level supervisor think about middle-level education?</p> <p>How has the middle-level supervisor's views affected your views about middle-level education?</p>
<p>11. Tell me what you think your Board of Education thinks about middle-level education.</p>	<p>Tell me about any members that may have views on middle-level education.</p> <p>What are those views?</p> <p>Tell me what your school board chairman thinks about middle-level education.</p> <p>How have their views affected your thinking about middle-level education?</p> <p>What are your school board's expectations for middle schools?</p> <p>What information comes to you from your</p>

	school board in relation to middle-level education?
12. How have state requirements affected your thinking about middle-level education?	<p>Can you think of any State Department of Education requirements that have affected your views of middle-level education?</p> <p>What do you think the role of the State Board of Education should be in middle-level education?</p> <p>Application of consequences for not performing?</p> <p>Setting standards?</p> <p>Monitoring performance?</p>
13. Tell me who else you think is interested in middle-level education in your community.	How have these people affected your thinking about middle-level education?
14. How many years have you worked as a teacher, guidance counselor, or principal?	What types of positions?
15. How many years have you worked in middle-level education?	What types of positions?
16. How did you prepare for your career in education?	How did you prepare for your career in middle-level education?
17. What middle-level associations or groups do you join?	<p>How has this membership affected your thinking about middle-level education?</p> <p>Through journals?</p> <p>Through conferences?</p> <p>Through websites?</p> <p>Through other venues?</p>
18. Tell me about your own middle-level educational experience.	

19. Do you have any other thoughts about education for middle-level learners?	
20. What ideas have we missed that are important parts of your thinking about middle-level education?	