CONTENTS

Meeting Changing Demands ................................................................. 2
Why Middle Grades Education Must Change .................................. 2
Mission ............................................................................................ 3
Beliefs ............................................................................................... 3
Vision ............................................................................................... 3

Essential Elements of Quality Middle Grades Education
For Tennessee Schools ..................................................................... 4
  1. Commitment to High Standards ............................................. 4
  2. Curriculum ............................................................................. 6
  3. Climate ................................................................................... 7
  4. Active Learning ................................................................. 7
  5. Ensure Success for All ....................................................... 8
  6. Extra Support ...................................................................... 9
  7. School Wide Continuous Improvement ............................. 9
  8. Professional Development ................................................. 10
  9. Assessment ......................................................................... 11

Appendix A: Middle Grades Policy Advisory Committee .............. 13

Appendix B: Sources of Information ............................................. 15

Adopted: 10/15/1998
Revised: 2.102 Middle Grades Policy
MEETING CHANGING Demands

Tennessee middle grades students need to become responsible learners prepared to participate in our democratic society and ready to meet the challenges of a global, information-based society, we must begin restructuring our schools now. While there is no question that students need to be educated to higher levels, the challenge of how to accomplish this while providing an appropriate learning environment for middle grade students is considerable.

WHY MIDDLE GRADES EDUCATION MUST CHANGE

Too many students are leaving the middle grades underachieving, intellectually deficient in basic academic and critical thinking skills, and lacking in strong social and ethical values. Statistics from the 1996 Tennessee Data Summary Report show a significant increase in suspensions and expulsions beginning in grade six. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, students in grades six through nine demonstrate an increased use of drugs and alcohol and more teens under the age of 16 are becoming sexually active, leading to unacceptably high teenage pregnancy rates. Clearly, today’s pre-adolescent student is at-risk.

Since the state, local school systems, and individual schools share responsibility for addressing the needs of young adolescents, it is important to remember that improvement cannot be achieved piecemeal nor without a large investment of time, training and cooperation among all stakeholders. Research has shown that reforms implemented independently of one another are likely to produce little or no significant rise in student achievement; therefore, changes in both the structure and practice of middle grades education must be comprehensive.

Early adolescence is a period of extremely rapid change - intellectual, physical, social, and emotional. As students attempt to make the transition from childhood to adulthood, schools must offer programs which reflect what is known about young adolescents - their physical growth patterns, emerging intellect, social sophistication and emotional vulnerability. Regardless of the grade configuration of the school, today middle grades educators must plan programs that address the special characteristics of 10-14 year olds. Research done over the past 25 years shows that high performing schools for young adolescents are developmentally responsive and academically excellent and provide access to a rich curriculum to all students.
MISSION

To provide a world class education for all of Tennessee’s middle grade students, ages 10-14.

BELIEFS

Young adolescents are capable, curious learners who need challenging, content rich, and developmentally responsive learning experiences. These experiences should build on the skills and attitudes developed in the elementary grades and prepare all students for the challenges of high school and their future as life-long learners in the work force.

VISION

Middle grade schools will provide a quality education program that is academically rigorous and developmentally appropriate and is available to all young adolescents in Tennessee.

The following practices are essential to achieving this vision.
1. **Commitment to High Standards**

- Schools will establish high expectations and standards for all students.
- Schools will accept only teachers and administrators who are academically prepared and are committed to working with middle grades students.
- Administrators will communicate a unified community wide philosophy that all students can learn and reach high academic expectations and standards.
- All stakeholders - teachers, students, parents, administrators and, community members - will participate in the development, implementation and assessment of acceptable standards.
- Teachers and administrators will consistently and effectively communicate learning goals to students, parents, and community members.
- The State Department of Education will establish a statewide network of exemplary schools by identifying schools attaining 100% on one or more of the school performance indicators.
- The State Department of Education will develop a plan for using exemplary schools and educators as a resource for other schools.
- Educators at the middle grades and high school levels, parents, students, and community members will define a set of learning expectations for successful transition into high school. A transition program will be established that includes a plan with strategies and interventions for students not meeting the learning goals.
- All students will leave the eighth grade ready for high school. The indicators of High School readiness are as follows.
## Indicators of High School Readiness

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Standard</th>
<th>Readiness Indicators</th>
<th>School Performance Indicators</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The student is able to read, comprehend and utilize print material at the 8th grade reading level.</td>
<td>The student has reached the proficient level on the 8th grade TCAP reading assessment.</td>
<td>% of 8th grade students who score in the proficient or higher levels on the 8th grade TCAP reading assessment.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The student reads widely to gain new information and ideas through a wide variety of books and printed materials.</td>
<td>The student has read books and utilized printed materials at the 8th grade level – including non-fiction and technical selections.</td>
<td>% of 8th grade students who during their 8th grade year have read and utilized at least 30 books and printed selections from across the curriculum – including non-fiction and technical subjects.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The student is able to find, organize and analyze information to answer a question or solve a problem.</td>
<td>The student has researched and written a report to solve a problem or answer a question.</td>
<td>% of 8th grade students who demonstrate proficiency in finding, organizing and analyzing information to answer a question or solve a problem. Evaluated using a locally developed scoring rubric providing for consistent evaluation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The student is able to communicate the results of a research report.</td>
<td>The student has presented the results of a research report in several ways.</td>
<td>% of 8th grade students who demonstrate proficiency in presenting researched materials verbally and in writing. Educators at both the middle grades and high school levels establish models of acceptable performance. Standards of acceptable achievement are consistent and understood by all.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The student is able to apply the process of science to design and conduct experiments and analyze and communicate the results.</td>
<td>The student has demonstrated the ability to apply the process of science and has conducted an experiment and analyzed and presented the results.</td>
<td>% of 8th grade students who demonstrate the ability to apply the process of science to conduct an experiment and analyze and communicate the results. Educators at both the middle grades and high school levels establish models of acceptable performance. Standards of acceptable achievement are consistent and well communicated.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Standard</td>
<td>Readiness Indicators</td>
<td>School Performance Indicators</td>
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<tr>
<td>The student is able to write competently for a variety of purposes.</td>
<td>The student has attained a score of proficient on the 7th grade writing assessment. The student has examples of writing in several styles for a variety of purposes.</td>
<td>% of 7th grade students who score in the proficient or higher levels on the 7th grade writing assessment. A cross curricular file is maintained for each student, including teacher and student evaluated writing selections and a development plan for those students who score less than proficient.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The student is ready for or has completed Algebra I or Integrated Mathematics I or Mathematics for Technology I.</td>
<td>The student has reached the proficient level on 8th grade TCAP mathematics or Algebra I end of course test.</td>
<td>% of 8th grade students who score in the proficient or higher levels on the 8th grade TCAP mathematics test or the Algebra I assessment.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The student will explore career opportunities and clusters and propose a plan to attain career goals.</td>
<td>The student has participated in career exploration and has written a six-year high school and post secondary career preparation plan.</td>
<td>% of 8th grade students who participate in a career exploration. All students have a written high school transition plan and a six-year high school through post secondary education plan.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The student will achieve a set of locally defined learning expectations for successful transition into high school.</td>
<td>The student has achieved a set of locally defined learning expectations for successful transition into high school.</td>
<td>% of 8th grade students who have satisfactorily achieved a set of locally defined learning expectations for successful transition into high school.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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2. Curriculum

- Schools will ensure that every planned aspect of the school’s educational program supports the curriculum.

- Schools will provide a meaningful, rigorous, integrated curriculum that is consistent with state and national standards, supportive of local learning goals and objectives, and challenging to all students.
♦ Teachers will weave technology, problem-solving and real world applications throughout the curriculum.

♦ Schools will use the annual school improvement planning process to re-evaluate the curriculum.

♦ School teams will use evaluation data to realign the curriculum, eliminate content repetition, and identify student knowledge and skill gaps.

♦ The state will use technology to gather and showcase exemplary local curriculum guides that integrate state curriculum frameworks with state and national standards.

♦ The state will use technology to facilitate the sharing of curriculum units that have challenging content, are based on research, connect several elements of instruction, and bridge to real life situations.

3. Climate

♦ Schools will establish a climate that is emotionally safe, encouraging students and adults to ask questions, discuss ideas, take risks, make decisions, and learn from mistakes.

♦ Schools will develop, communicate, and enforce a school wide discipline policy that is appropriate for middle grades students.

♦ Schools will establish a school culture of mutual respect by teaching, practicing, and modeling appropriate behavior.

♦ School communities will honor cultural diversity and provide for the dignity of all individuals.

♦ Schools will celebrate successes of students and staff.

4. Active Learning

♦ School systems will support learning opportunities for all members of the school community.
Teachers and community members will provide hands-on experiences that actively involve the student in the learning process.

Teachers will use a variety of instructional techniques, approaches and tools to engage students in the learning process.

Teachers will use community resources and community service projects to incorporate real world learning experiences and add relevance to student learning.

Schools will provide all students with career information and exploration activities to prepare them for choices in high school programs of study.

5. Ensure Success for All

Schools will develop a systematic way for adults to support and assist students in meeting high academic and behavioral expectations.

School and community support services will establish collaborative relationships to provide resources for young adolescents and the adults who guide them.

Teachers will write learning goals and strategies for all students.

Teachers will communicate with students, parents and colleagues so all understand what is required to ensure that academic standards are reached.

Teachers will develop and adopt school wide scoring rubrics to provide the basis for a well communicated, consistent evaluation system.

Teachers will provide evaluated samples of student work to allow students and parents to understand when academic standards are met.
6. Extra Support

♦ Teachers will regularly use a variety of assessment information to identify students who would benefit from interventions.

♦ Schools will provide research-based interventions to help all students meet the standards.

♦ Schools will provide interventions as additional and supplemental support avoiding long term ability grouping and tracking of students.

♦ Schools will use time creatively to provide extended learning opportunities, effective interventions and support services.

7. School Wide Continuous Improvement

♦ Schools will develop yearly transition plans for all students as they move between grades and buildings.

♦ School teams will address the following questions, using data from a variety of sources to annually review progress and to identify areas of student learning which need to be improved.

   a) What is the school’s academic purpose?
   b) What standards are all students expected to achieve?
   c) How do standards at the school compare with the rest of the state? nation? world?
   d) How does the school make sure that everyone – teachers, students, parents, community members – know what the standards are?
   e) Are there samples of student work that model what is expected for every standard?
   f) What indicators or evidence of readiness for high school are required of every 8th grade student?
   g) What other indicators of grade readiness are required of every student?
   h) What steps are being taken to ensure that all students achieve the standards?
   i) Is data disaggregated to identify trends or achievement differences among groups of students? Male? Female? Ethnic?
j) Is student work evaluated consistently according to known criteria across subjects? classrooms? schools?
k) Are high academic standards used to help adults strive for improved student outcomes?
l) What is the school doing, specifically, to enable students to learn more eagerly, extensively, and deeply?
m) What help is provided to students having difficulty?
n) What formal academic intervention programs have been identified?
o) How are teachers helped to use standards in planning and delivering instruction?
p) What changes in curriculum, instruction, and school services have been introduced as intentional strategies for improving academic outcomes?
q) How will these changes in curriculum, instruction and assessment better prepare students for challenging high school work?
r) What benchmarks have been delineated, and how is the school holding itself accountable for attaining those specific results?

8. Professional Development

♦ All stakeholders will have opportunities to learn what educating early adolescents requires.

♦ Teachers and administrator must learn to balance the standards of academic excellence with the demand for a supportive active learning environment.

♦ The state will encourage schools to recruit and assign to middle grades, teachers who have a middle grades endorsement, National Board for Professional Teaching Certificate or a 7-12 endorsement in a field related directly to the teacher’s middle grades assignment.

♦ The state and local school systems should provide incentives for middle grade teachers to attain National Board of Professional Teacher Certification.

♦ Administrators and teachers will develop individual professional growth plans based on information from the Tennessee Framework for Evaluation and Professional Growth, including
value added assessment data and other student performance information.

♦ Schools will provide time and opportunities for teachers to increase their content knowledge to support high expectations for students.

♦ Schools will provide time and opportunities for teachers to learn, practice, and share successful teaching strategies to address a wide variety of student learning needs.

♦ Schools will encourage and provide teachers with opportunities for workplace experiences that will enable them to relate the curriculum to career opportunities and workplace expectations.

♦ Schools will ensure that professional development opportunities meet the following standards:

  a) Focus on curriculum consistent with national standards and state frameworks,
  b) Demonstrate pedagogy that reflects current research about teaching and learning,
  c) Incorporate content knowledge that relates to student experiences, environment, and workforce needs,
  d) Last long enough and provide sufficient follow-up support to constitute a powerful intervention, and
  e) Form part of a long-term, system-wide effort to improve the performance of teachers, schools, and students.

♦ Professional development opportunities – including all mandated professional development days – will be assessed by documenting changes that are evident in teacher behavior as a result of staff development and recording how those changes affect student learning.

9. Assessment

♦ Schools will use assessment data for program evaluation and accountability.

♦ Administrators and teachers will use a variety of assessment data to ensure that the written curriculum is what is taught.
♦ The State Department of Education, local school systems, and schools will provide opportunities for administrators and teachers to learn how to gather, analyze, and use a wide variety of assessment data to improve student learning.

♦ Schools will engage in continuous program review, evaluation, and accountability through the school improvement planning process, as required by the State Board of Education.
# APPENDIX A
## MIDDLE GRADES ADVISORY COMMITTEE

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Position</th>
<th>School/Department</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yvonne Allen</td>
<td>Principal</td>
<td>Whiteville Elementary School</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Laura Atkins</td>
<td>Mathematics Consultant</td>
<td>State Department of Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amy Bearman</td>
<td>Executive Admin. Assistant</td>
<td>State Department of Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Charlotte Blassingame</td>
<td>Teacher</td>
<td>White Station Middle School</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rick Denning</td>
<td>Superintendent</td>
<td>Cleveland City Schools</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marsha Denton</td>
<td>Teacher</td>
<td>Buena Vista/Jones Paideia Magnet School</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joel Giffin (Chairman)</td>
<td>Principal</td>
<td>Maryville Middle School</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eleanor Hayes</td>
<td>Middle School Supervisor</td>
<td>Sevier County Schools</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mary Jo Howland</td>
<td>Research Associate</td>
<td>State Board of Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brenda Hughey</td>
<td>Instruction Facilitator for Special Populations</td>
<td>Franklin Special School District</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Angeline Kern</td>
<td>Principal</td>
<td>Cordova School</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lacee Mallard</td>
<td>Guidance Counselor</td>
<td>Milan Middle School</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Judith Morgan</td>
<td>Executive Assistant</td>
<td>State Department of Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ann Nero</td>
<td>Middle School Coordinator</td>
<td>Memphis City Schools</td>
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<tr>
<td>Bruce Opie</td>
<td>Executive Director, Curriculum and Instruction</td>
<td>State Department of Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Margaret Phelps</td>
<td>Director of Rural Education</td>
<td>Tennessee Technological University</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wilma Proctor</td>
<td>Assistant Commissioner</td>
<td>State Department of Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Richard Ray</td>
<td>Chairman</td>
<td>State Board of Education</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Adopted: 10/15/1998
Revised:
J. V. Sailors  
Executive Director  
State Board of Education

Janice Shelby  
Superintendent  
Franklin Special School District

Ashley Smith, Jr.  
Principal  
Cleveland Middle School

Martell Souder  
Teacher, Special Education  
Two Rivers Middle School

Donna Spalding  
Administrative Assistant  
State Department of Education

Tina Spielberg  
Parent/Community Volunteer

Jane Walters  
Commissioner of Education  
State Department of Education

Claudette Williams  
Director of Elementary & Middle  
Grades Education  
State Deparment of Education

Donna Wright  
Principal  
West High School
APPENDIX B

SOURCES OF INFORMATION


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