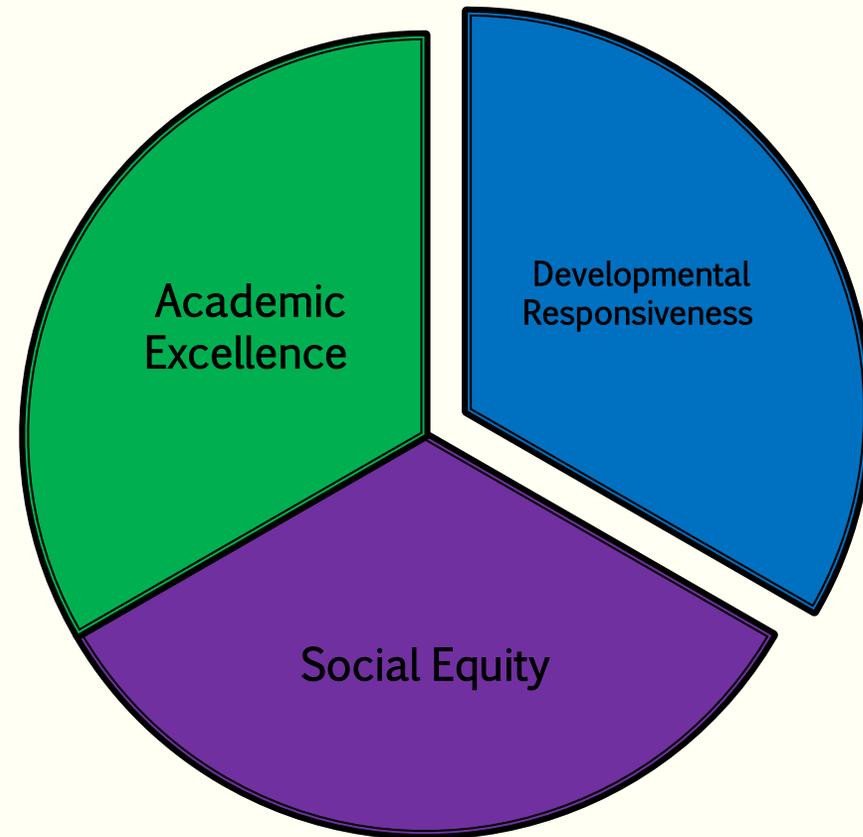# ACSD RECONFIGURATION:

Designing Middle-Level Schools of Excellence

High Quality Middle Schools

The success of students in the middle-level grades often is the forerunner of success in high school and later in life.

There is a pressing need to assure *high quality instruction*, *course content* and *support services* as well as *high expectations* for all students.

Comparison

Junior High

Philosophy
- Emphasis on Knowledge
- Treats Learner as Adolescent

Curriculum
- Focus on Learning a Body of Knowledge
- Competition Between Learners & Mastery of Content

Instruction
- Teacher-Centered
- Group-Paced

Middle School

Philosophy
- Emphasis on Positive Self-Concept
- Considers the Uniqueness of Each Student

Curriculum
- Focus on Learning HOW to Learn a Body of Knowledge
- Exploration of Content and Creativity

Instruction
- Flexible and Variable
- Individualized

Transition from Childhood to Adolescence

The early adolescent stage is marked by:

- Accelerated physical growth

- Increased importance of the peer group

- Need for frequent affirmation and heightened sensitivity to comments about personal attributes

- Desire and need for direction and regulation as well as for independence and autonomy

- Array of intellectual skills and abilities ranging from concrete to abstract thinking

- Inconsistency in behavior

- Preference for active in contrast to passive learning activities

- Desire to explore, to try new things, to experiment

Review of the Research (National Middle School Assn., 1995)

Developmentally responsive middle schools have:

- ✓Educators who are committed to young adolescents
- ✓A shared vision
- ✓High expectations for all
- ✓An adult advocate for every student
- ✓Family and community partnerships
- ✓A positive school climate
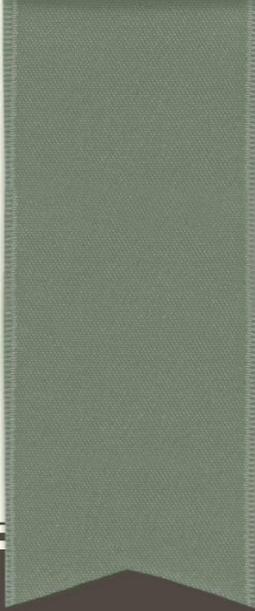
SEVEN ESSENTIAL ELEMENTS OF STANDARDS-FOCUSED MIDDLE-LEVEL SCHOOLS AND PROGRAMS

Review of the Research (NYSED, 2000)

Philosophy and Mission

❖ Philosophy and mission must reflect intellectual and developmental needs of young adolescents

❖ Purpose beyond linking elementary grades and high school

❖ Culture of collective and shared responsibility

❖ Must reflect a set of shared beliefs

Intellectual Development

Personal & Social Development
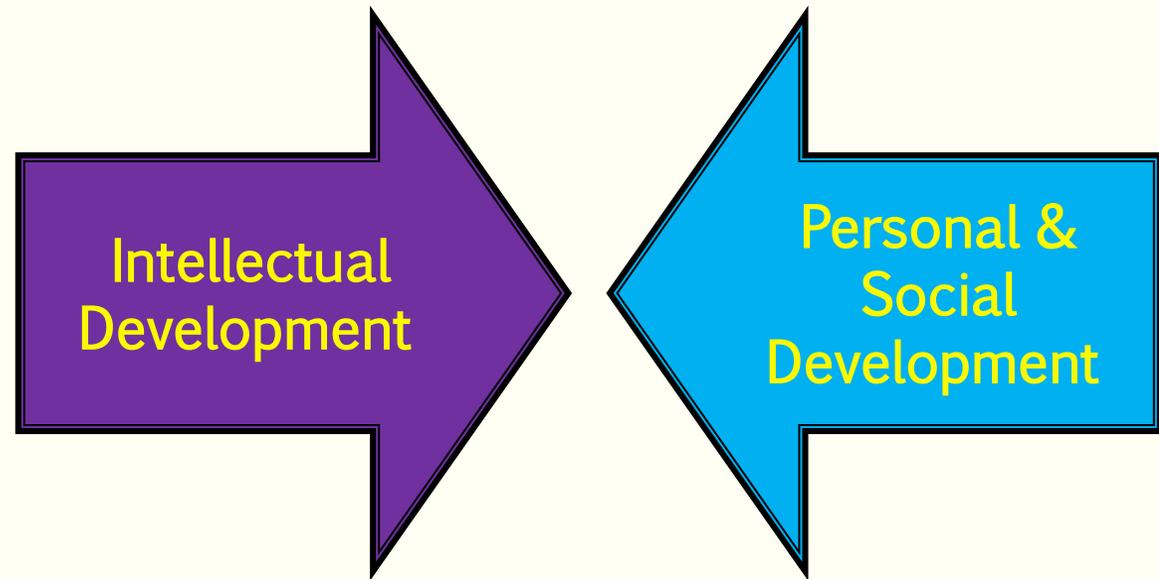
Educational Program

Excellent middle-level schools are:

❖ Comprehensive

❖ Challenging

❖ Purposeful

❖ Integrated

❖ Standards-Based

NY Schools To Watch Program

- New York State is a member of the National Forum to Accelerate Middle Grades Reform, National Schools-to-Watch Program.

- The program, adopted in 2004, focuses on school improvement and recognition and recognizes schools that demonstrate continuous improvement and excel in the following four domains;

    - Academic Excellence
    - Developmental Responsiveness
    - Social Equity
    - Organizational Structure

Best Practices: Academic Excellence

- Interdisciplinary approach with grade-level teaming as a focus

- Use of multiple teaching and assessment strategies to target various learning styles

- AIS works in conjunction with all academic courses and has a number of programs in place to provide students the support they need (Mentor Program, guided study halls, after-school homework support)

- 5 year curriculum review cycle in all subject areas

- Multiple opportunities for mastery/success such as test corrections and revised writing pieces

- Time built in for students to solve real world problems and develop research skills

- Curriculum is modified to meet the needs of all students

Organization and Structure

❖ Organization and structure must support both academic excellence and personal development

❖ Establish within staff and students a feeling of belonging and a sense of personal identification with the school and its purposes

Best Practices: Organizational Support

- Development of a philosophy statement through a shared decision-making process

- Teachers and co-teachers have common planning time

- District mentor program for all first year teachers

- Peer teaching observations

- Curriculum and best practice are discussed during department meeting

- Clear school-wide and individual faculty goals are set and discussed at the opening of each school year

- Staff members hold themselves accountable for students' success

Classroom Instruction

❖ Appropriate to the needs and characteristics of young adolescents

❖ Provided by skilled and knowledgeable teachers

❖ Teachers understand and appreciate the emotional, intellectual, physical, psychological and social changes that are occurring within their students

❖ Instructional techniques capitalize on the unique needs of students

Best Practices: Developmental Responsiveness

- Teaming at all grade-levels

- Deliberate teaching of organizational skills and note taking

- Use of teacher websites

- Collaborative work daily in classrooms

- Whole-school community service opportunities and activities which provide students with a sense of the global community

- Goal setting meetings with school counselors

- Student voices are heard (Student Council, Building Planning Team, etc.)

- Student clubs and activities are established based on student interest

Educational Leadership

❖ Building administration encourages, facilitates and sustains involvement, participation and partnerships

❖ Strong leadership is essential if a middle school is to be effective

Network of Academic and Personal Support

Academic and personal support include:

❖ Adults and older students to provide positive role models and affirmation

❖ Respect and caring to foster self-worth and self-confidence

❖ Opportunities to examine, explore, discuss and understand the changes associated with early adolescence

❖ Counseling and guidance services regarding life, career and educational choices

❖ Two-way communication between school and families

❖ Collaboration with the community

Best Practices: Social Equity

- Co-teaching model

- Field trips

- Classroom guests

- All students may enroll in enrichment offerings

- Program for at-risk students whom are not identified as having a disability

- Transition program to assist students entering and exiting the school

- Financial support for students for curricular and leisure activities

- Awards given that recognize citizenship and responsibility to the community

Professional Learning

❖ Know the needs and characteristics of students and instructional strategies that work best

❖ Understand philosophy and mission

❖ Understand and implement the Regents Policy Statement

❖ High expectations for all students

❖ Be familiar with the CCLS's

❖ Know and understand how to use data to make curricular and instructional decisions

❖ Collaborate and cooperate in planning and providing professional learning opportunities

Two Largest Barriers to Creating Effective Middle Schools

Balance of Purpose

- Over-emphasis on personal development and de-emphasis of academic development

Comprehensive Fidelity

- When reforms are implemented in a limited, scattershot manner, improvement in student outcomes is more limited