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Investigation of the Process of Transition to Middle School Concepts in Illinois Lead Middle Schools

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Investigation of the Process of Transition to Middle
School Concepts in Illinois Lead Middle Schools
(TITLE)

BY

Janice L. Alka

Field Experience

THESIS

SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS
FOR THE DEGREE OF

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IN THE GRADUATE SCHOOL, EASTERN ILLINOIS UNIVERSITY
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I HEREBY RECOMMEND THIS THESIS BE ACCEPTED AS FULFILLING
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Abstract

The purpose of the study was to analyze the implementation process of middle level practices in selected Illinois middle schools. The result of the study will be of assistance to middle school staff members attempting to make the transition to middle level practices.

The researcher found theorists have agreed that middle level schools, regardless of their location, should consist of grades 6-8. The schools needed to open as middle schools or change slowly to middle school practices. The first steps in the transition process should include teachers attending conferences, workshops, or inservices on middle school practices. The research showed that it was easier to make the transition when the change involved only school personnel than when the change necessarily involved parents and other community members.

Chapter 1

Overview

Introduction

During the twentieth century, one of the accepted roles of public education was to prepare students for the world of work. As the country progressed through industrialization, the educational system did not make significant changes that were needed to prepare students to become members of the work force. In an effort to prepare students to function well in their future roles as responsible community members, members of the work force, and problem solvers, educators strove to meet that challenge by changing the way schools functioned.

The middle school provided a solid link in the continuum of education that was unique and developmentally responsive to young adolescents (Polite, 1995). Recognizing the importance of middle-grade schools in preparing youth for healthy, thoughtful, and productive adulthood, the Carnegie Corporation of New York established the Task Force on Education of Young Adolescents in 1987 to examine the effectiveness of middle-grade schools in this regard (Illinois, 1992). The Task Force published its findings and recommendations in a comprehensive report entitled *Turning Points: Preparing American Youth for the 21st Century*. This single document was described by the Executive Director of the National Middle School Association as the "shot heard round the

world" (Kasak, 1994). Based on this document, several states encouraged the implementation of middle school concepts as recommended in *Turning Points*, through organizations such as the Association of Illinois Middle Schools (AIMS) and Illinois State Board of Education .

The recommendations for middle level education based on the findings of the Task Force on Education of Young Adolescents established by the Carnegie Corporation of New York were that:

1. Large middle schools be divided into smaller communities for learning.
2. Middle grade schools transmit a core of common knowledge to all students.
3. Middle grade schools be organized to ensure success for all students.
4. Teachers and principals have the major responsibility and power to transform middle grade schools.
5. Teachers for the middle grades be specifically prepared to teach young adolescents.
6. Schools promote good health because the education and health of young adolescents are linked.
7. Families be allied with school staff through mutual respect, trust, and communication.

8. Schools and communities be partners in educating young adolescents (Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development, 1989).

The Illinois State Board of Education established a program called "Right in the Middle" to promote the initiative of middle school practices as described in *Turning Points*. Part of the initiative was the establishment of Lead Middle Schools. The Lead Middle Schools were recommended to the Illinois State Board of Education by the Educational Service Centers using the following guidelines:

1. The school was implementing or committed to implementing the middle school concepts as described in *Turning Points*.
2. Each Educational Service Center would receive \$2500 for staff development in this area.
3. There could be two Lead Middle Schools in each Educational Service Center.
4. Each Educational Service Center would have one contact person for middle school and these people would meet once a month to develop a framework for staff development.

There were 30 schools designated as Illinois Lead Middle Schools.

The staff members of Lead Middle Schools networked with two meetings a year to discuss common issues in the implementation

of middle level concepts and development of programs. AIMS had also established a network of demonstration schools and partnership schools to aid schools in learning about middle level practices. The state's Lead Middle Schools and AIMS demonstration and partnership schools combined in early 1995 to become the Illinois Middle Grade Network.

The number of middle grade schools investigating the transition to middle level concepts in Illinois increased during the years 1990-95. The faculties of these schools visited practicing middle level concept schools and attended conferences to prepare for the transition process. The results of the study will provide a view of Lead Middle Schools in Illinois. The research questions were:

1. What are the levels of implementation of middle level concepts in the Lead Middle Schools of Illinois?
2. What was the order of implementation of select middle level practices used in the Lead Middle Schools of Illinois?
3. What would be the desirable order of implementation of select middle level practices according to Illinois Lead Middle Schools?

Statement of Problem

The purpose of this field experience was to analyze the implementation process of middle level concepts in Illinois Lead Middle Schools. The intended use of this study was to generate directions in the implementation of middle level concepts for schools in transition to middle schools from junior high schools. The information generated from this study will provide direction to schools in formulating individualized plans of transition to middle school concepts.

Operational Limitations, Delimitations, and Definitions

Limitations. This research had limitations that may have influenced the findings:

1. The findings were limited by the validity of the instrument used to collect the data.
2. The findings were limited by the degree of accuracy which the principals exercised in completing the questionnaire.
3. The findings were limited by the understanding of the principals of middle level concepts.
4. The findings were limited by the total number of surveys completed and returned.

Delimitations. The area of support financially and administratively was outside the scope of this study that focused

on middle level practices -- the eight points identified in the Carnegie report.

The study did not investigate the quantity of the programs implemented in the Lead Middle Schools.

Definition of terms. The following terms have been defined to provide readers with an understanding of their contextual use:

Young Adolescent - Youth 10 to 15 years old.

Middle Level Concepts - The eight points which were characteristic of middle schools as identified in the Carnegie Foundation publication, Turning Points..

Creating a Community for Learning - Making the school become a place where close, trusting relationships with adults and peers create a climate for students' personal growth and intellectual development.

Teaching a Core of Common Knowledge - Teaching every student to think critically through mastery of an appropriate body of knowledge, to lead a healthy life, to behave ethically and lawfully, and to assume the responsibility of citizenship in the pluralistic society.

Ensuring Success for All Students - Giving all young adolescents the opportunity to succeed in every aspect of the middle grade program, regardless of previous achievement or the pace at which they learn.

Empowering Teachers and Administrators - Giving the decision - making power for policies concerning middle grade students to the adults who know them best.

Preparing Teachers for the Middle Grades - Selecting and educating teachers to teach young adolescents.

Improving Academic Performance Through Better Health and Fitness - Working toward better health and fitness for the improvement of learning.

Reengaging Families in the Education of Young Adolescents
Creating an alliance between the home and the school through trust and respect.

Connecting Schools with Communities - Creating a sense of the community's responsibility for the students and the students' responsibility to the community.

Integrated Curriculum - Teaching two or more subjects together through a theme.

IDU's - Interdisciplinary units which have a theme and several subjects and which are designed to teach learning outcomes through a selected theme.

Team planning - A common planning time to meet and discuss instructional strategies shared by the team of teachers having the same group of students.

Flex scheduling - The teachers vary the time allowed for various activities within the block schedule.

Block schedule - The team has the common students within a common time period.

Core Teachers - Teachers who teach the academic subjects, i.e. language arts, science, social studies, and math.

Chapter 2

Rationale, Related Literature, and Research

Rationale

The Middle School Concept was given major emphasis in Illinois with the Illinois State Board of Education seeking and receiving funds from the Carnegie Corporation of New York to support the Illinois Middle Grade Education Planning Initiative. The funds from the Carnegie Corporation were used initially for the Illinois State Board of Education Middle-Level School Initiative and Research staff to conduct a survey to assess the level of middle school practices in relation to the *Turning Points* recommendation. The second step was to network middle schools nationally by having state agencies select middle schools to receive grants from the Carnegie Corporation of New York for this network. The third step was to expand the national network of middle schools by increasing the number of Carnegie Middle Schools in each state involved in the initiative.

With the emphasis on changing these middle grade attendance centers to middle school practices, a need existed to investigate the steps of implementation of practicing middle schools to provide implementation recommendations for the transition to middle level schools.

Review of Literature and Research

Young adolescents face significant turning points. For many youth 10 to 15 years old, early adolescence offers opportunities to choose a path toward a productive and fulfilling life. For many others, it represents their last best chance to avoid a diminished future (Carnegie, 1989).

Today's young adolescent faces many challenges previous generations did not. By age 15, millions of American youth are at risk of reaching adulthood unable to adequately meet the requirements of the work place, the commitments of relationships in families and with peers, and the responsibilities of participation in a multicultural society and of citizenship in a democracy (Carnegie, 1989). The Carnegie report, Turning Points, examined the challenges facing young adolescents and challenged schools to change to meet the social, health, and academic needs of today's young adolescents. Not only did Turning Points challenge schools; it gave recommendations for change.

Middle school reforms were viewed as a comprehensive package rather than a menu from which schools could pick and choose (Oakes, 1993). There were eight goals recommended by the Carnegie report, Turning Points. These goals are identified below, together with the recommendations and supportive literature.

The first goal was to create a community for learning by creating smaller learning environments, forming teacher and student teams and assigning an adult advisor to each student (Carnegie, 1989). The smaller learning environments allowed teachers as well as students to form close associations with their peers reducing the teacher isolation created by departmentalization and the isolation students felt when they changed classrooms (Oakes, 1993).

Forming teacher and student teams allowed teachers to attend to students' social and physical needs (as well as to cultural differences), giving the connection between a student's well being and learning (Oakes, 1993). Working in teams, integrating curricula, and counseling students were to become valued skills (Oakes, 1993).

The assigning of an adult advisor to each student was a critical part of creating smaller learning environments. Fewer than 40 % of all children and youth in the United States lived with both natural parents, and more than 60 % (ages 6 to 16) were latchkey students who returned to empty homes after school and usually either sat in front of the television or roamed the streets with their friends (Ornstein, 1992). Prime time, an advisory program, was a daily block of time that provides students the opportunity to participate in a variety of school and community activities through which they could experience support, success, and recognition

(Bonomo, 1993). The role of the advisor, as the overseer of the advisee's academic progress, connected the advisory program to the classroom (Quattrone, 1990).

Teaching a common core of knowledge was the second goal. Adolescents could be taught to think critically, to develop healthful life-styles, to be active citizens, and to learn, as well as to test successfully by integrating subject matter across disciplines (Carnegie, 1989). One of the techniques to achieve this goal was cooperative learning which used the natural desire of young adolescents to interact with peers.

Another technique was the use of interdisciplinary units. Interdisciplinary units benefited students as they gained greater understanding of the interrelationships among the various subject areas (Jung, 1990). Integrating learning and knowledge also meant integrating the sources of that knowledge, including the guarantee that each member of the school community would learn with a cross-section of the whole community, undifferentiated by tracking and unaffected by gender, first language, race, family income, or handicap (Oakes, 1993). Team teaching, thematic instruction, and detracking combatted the fragmentation of school experiences (Oakes, 1993).

The third goal was to ensure the success of all students by using cooperative learning and flexible grouping. Cooperative learning was a strategy for putting learners together in small

groups to enhance both learning and social processes. It was an additional strategy to lower the level of difficulty of a task and to increase motivation through interest and reward (Evans, 1993). The match between cooperative learning goals and techniques and young adolescent social, emotional, and intellectual characteristics was almost uncanny (Evans, 1993). Cooperative learning, with its emphasis on mixed ability groups and individual accountability and growth, found a complementary partner in this element of middle school philosophy (Evans, 1993). Cooperative learning made necessary a very different management role for the teacher; direct supervision of students' activities in groups became impractical. The teacher delegated to the students the authority for group management, for completion of the task, and for ensuring one another's learning (Lotan, 1992). The teacher, through feedback and questioning, encouraged students to move beyond the procedural aspects of the task and to interact with one another at a higher conceptual level (Lotan 1992).

The diverse patterns of early adolescent development cried out for the kind of education that opened rather than closed doors and encouraged rather than discouraged intellectual and social exploration (Wheelock, 1993). Teacher teams were able to create blocks of instructional time to meet the needs of students, rather than tailoring learning to fit a rigid schedule (Carnegie, 1989).

Empowering teachers and administrators was the fourth goal. The means of accomplishing this were giving teachers greater influence in the classroom, establishing building-governance committees, and designating leaders for the teaching process (Carnegie, 1989). Although the move toward school - based governance was difficult, the process certainly gave teachers a feeling of shared responsibility and power (Taylor, 1991). This process built better communications and trust which allowed for overall school improvement (Taylor, 1991).

Preparing teachers for the middle grades was the fifth Carnegie goal. Expert teachers of young adolescents needed to be developed (Carnegie, 1989). Staffing practices in middle grades varied along a continuum from completely self-contained classrooms to a completely departmentalized approach (McPartland, 1990). Teachers with secondary subject matter certification predominated on middle grade faculties. Contrast between subject matter orientation and student orientation pointed to some potential conflicts in school goals created by staffing patterns (McPartland, 1990). The teaching staff was the foundation on which a successful learning environment for early adolescents was built, and the way in which a staff was assembled and deployed could make a major difference in student outcomes (McPartland, 1990).

The sixth goal was to improve academic performance through better health and fitness by ensuring students the access to health

services and establishing the school as a health-promoting environment. Students who were hungry, drug-involved, or diseased could not direct their full attention to learning. They needed access to medical services and effective interventions. Health concerns had curricular components -- decision making skills, problem solving, and critical thinking (Quattrone, 1990). Schools addressed this goal by integrating health concerns throughout the curriculum or providing school linked or school based health clinics (Dryfoos, 1993).

Reengaging families in the education of young adolescents was the seventh goal. This could be accomplished by offering parents meaningful roles in school governance, keeping parents informed, and offering families opportunities to support the learning process at home and at school. Parental involvement was essential if schools were to educate the whole child successfully (Uebbing, 1992). Uebbing conducted a study which made it clear that parents cared more about how children felt about themselves than about how children performed in the school setting. Secondly, parents wanted their children to be strong in basic academic skills (Uebbing, 1992).

When teachers differed culturally from their students, or when they taught greater numbers of students, they were less likely to know the students' parents, and, therefore more likely to believe parents were uninterested or uninvolved (Lewis, 1992).

Newsletters were not so effective with parents with less education (Lewis, 1992). More effective were efforts by schools to help such parents locate and use community resources, a special room set aside in the school for parent activities, programs to help parents increase their own educational skills, and a person designated to coordinate parent involvement with teachers (Lewis, 1993).

The last Carnegie goal was connecting schools with communities which could include placing students in youth services, ensuring student access to health and social services, supporting the middle grade education program, augmenting resources for teachers and students, and expanding career guidance for students (Carnegie, 1989). With the Industrial Age, adolescence become a period of confusion between childhood and adulthood and society often confused schooling with learning (Abbott, 1995). Connecting schools with communities allowed communities to capture the imagination, involvement, and active enthusiasm of young people (Abbott, 1995). The new middle school movement suggested that close links between families, schools, and community agencies could provide students with the emotional and physical support needed to augment what the school could directly provide (Oakes, 1993). The partnership was also a vehicle for soliciting paying partners from the community. Just as member schools are partners, local businesses and

institutions of higher education could become partners (Montle, 1993).

The Carnegie report declined to recommend a specific age range or size for middle schools (Quattrone, 1990). Other researchers, though, expressed some definite opinions. The types of schools and the patterns of attendance varied by region (Epstein, 1990). Also, the size of the school was not so important as the creation of small communities with responsive environments that provided students with care and support, as well as challenging programs that increased their learning (Epstein, 1990). Overall, middle schools with 6-8 and 7-8 configurations used more of the practices that were recommended for responsive middle grade education than did other schools (Epstein, 1990).

Epstein and Salinas canvassed the field to identify and examine programs that could help middle school teachers and administrators improve all students' learning opportunities (Epstein, 1991). Common components of promising programs included:

1. Individualized instruction and progress reports
2. Efficient and comprehensive management system
3. Groups with temporary memberships
4. Attention to different styles of learning
5. Involving families in children's education
6. Students' responsibility for learning

7. Extra staff and resources
8. Staff development.

Common themes included:

1. All students could learn.
2. Schools were communities of learners.
3. Promising programs were evaluated as to whether they reached their goals.

Summarizing the implementation process, it can be stated that middle school educators have primarily these tasks to perform. The first is to decide on their goals for all students. Secondly, gather information should be gathered on promising programs. The third task is to review materials and costs. After these initial steps in the process, the educators select programs, provide necessary staff development to implement them, and evaluate the effects of programs in their own schools (Epstein, 1991).

Chapter 3

Design of the Study

General Design

As stated in Chapter I, the purpose of this study was to investigate the following research questions:

1. What were the existing levels of implementation of middle level concepts in the Lead Middle Schools of Illinois?
2. What was the order of implementation of select middle level practices in the Lead Middle Schools of Illinois?
3. What would be the desirable order of implementation of select middle level practices according to Illinois Lead Middle Schools

There had been little research in the transition process of implementing middle level concepts. Therefore, the intent of the study was to discern the most desirable process of transition for implementing middle level concepts.

Data were collected from middle schools identified by the Illinois State Board of Education as Lead Middle Schools. A survey instrument (Appendix A) was developed by the researcher to seek demographic information, current status of implementation, information regarding the implementation process used, and what was perceived as the best process for implementation of middle

level concepts. Demographic information included present enrollment, grades represented, and location.

Sample and Population

The population for the study was 30 middle schools in Illinois. The 30 middle schools were identified as Lead Middle Schools by the Illinois State Board of Education. A list of the Lead Middle Schools was obtained from the Illinois State Board of Education. The Illinois State Board of Education list contained school addresses, names of administrators, and telephone numbers.

Once schools were selected, a cover letter explaining the project (see Appendix B) was created and attached to the survey questionnaire, along with a self-addressed, stamped return envelope.

Each questionnaire was coded with a number to make it possible to monitor which schools did not return the questionnaire before the designated date. A follow-up letter (Appendix C) along with a stamped, addressed envelope was mailed to those schools which did not return the questionnaire.

Collection and Instrumentation

The survey questionnaire (see Appendix A) was designed by the researcher of this study. Demographic information (Questions 1-6) included present enrollment, location, grade configuration, and how the school had made the transition to middle school concepts. Also included was what the principal considered to be the best

configuration and most desirable way to change to the middle school concept.

The second part of the questionnaire sought the level of implementation of the eight points of the Carnegie report *Turning Points*. A scale of 1 to 5 with 1 being the lowest level of implementation and 5 being the highest level of implementation was provided. This section sought information on the present level of implementation of the middle level concepts in the Lead Schools.

The third part of the survey questionnaire listed 13 common middle level practices. Each participant was asked to identify the order of implementation as it had occurred in his or her school. Then the participant was asked to identify the order of preference if the transition were to be done again.

The survey instrument, cover letter, and addressed stamped return envelopes were mailed to the Lead Middle Schools during May, 1995. The cover letter included a request to return the survey by the specified date of May 19, 1995. One week following the date to have the questionnaire returned, a follow-up letter was sent to people who did not respond by the date requested.

- Data Analysis

Data from the questionnaire were analyzed to determine the desired grade configuration of the middle schools, transition process, level of middle school concept implementation, and

practiced and desired order of implementation of middle level practices.

Responses to the survey questionnaire were hand tabulated by the researcher. The demographic information and level of implementation results were expressed in frequencies and percentages. The middle school practices results were expressed in average of the respondents' answers.

Chapter 4

Results

General Information

The purpose of this study was to analyze the implementation process of middle level concepts in Illinois Lead Middle Schools. The information generated from this study will aid schools making the transition to middle schools from junior high schools. The intended use of this study was to generate directions as schools formulate individualized transition plans to middle level practices.

The survey was mailed to 30 Illinois Lead Middle Schools. Twenty-three were returned. The total survey percentage received was 77%.

This chapter presents the data in three sections. The first section highlights relevant demographic and desired demographics. The second section presents the level of implementation of the Lead Middle Schools. Finally, findings of the research deal with the order and desired order of implementation of middle level practices.

Demographic Information

The first six questions of the questionnaire obtained present demographic information and desired demographic information from the respondents. First, respondents were asked to check their current student enrollment. Table 1 reveals data on student enrollment of schools responding to the survey.

Table 1

Student Enrollment

Enrollment	Frequency	Percent
Between 50-250	3	13%
Between 251-500	8	35%
Between 501-800	10	43%
Over 800	2	9%

Of the 23 questionnaires returned, 3 (13%) schools had an enrollment between 50 - 250 students. Eight (35%) schools had an enrollment between 251-500 students. Ten (43%) had an enrollment between 501-800 students. Two (9%) schools had an enrollment of over 800 students.

Next, respondents were asked which best described their school - rural, suburban, or urban. Data regarding school description are found in Table 2.

Table 2

Location of School

Location	Frequency	Percent
Rural	8	35%
Suburban	6	26%
Urban	9	39%

Eight (35%) of the schools responding to the survey described their location as rural. Six (26%) schools stated their location was

suburban. Finally, nine (39%) of the schools described themselves as being located in urban areas.

The third question asked what grades were in the school. The respondents were given four choices, 5-8, 6-8, 7-8, and other. Table 3 displays data indicating grade configuration. One (4%) marked other indicating the school was a grade 4-8 while two (9%) schools were grade 5-8 configurations. The grade 6-8 configuration had eleven (48%) school indicating this grade configuration, and nine (39%) schools indicated grade 7-8 configuration.

Table 3

Grade Configuration

Grade	Frequency	Percent
4-8	1	4%
5-8	2	9%
6-8	11	48%
7-8	9	39%

The fourth question asked what the principal considered to be the most desirable grade configuration for a middle school. Table 4 shows the data for this question. One (4%) of the principals felt the 5-8 grade configuration was the best. Seventeen (74%) of the respondents found the grade 6-8 configuration the most desirable.

Finally, five (22%) responded with 7-8 being the most desirable grade configuration.

Table 4

Most Desirable Grade Configuration

Grade	Frequency	Percent
5-8	1	4%
6-8	17	74%
7-8	5	22%

Asking how the school made the transition to a middle school was the fifth question. The choices were opened as a middle school, moved to the middle level concept all at once, and made a slow transition to the middle level concepts. Table 5 shows the data for the process used to transition to a middle level school.

Table 5

Style of Transition

Transition	Frequency	Percent
Opened	4	17%
Moved all at once	5	22%
Slow transition	14	61%

The respondents indicated four (17%) opened as a middle school. Five (22%) of the schools moved to the middle level concept all at once. Finally, fourteen (61%) moved slowly to the middle level concepts.

The last question asked the respondents which was the most desirable transition. The same choices were given - open as a middle school, move to the middle level concept all at once, and change slowly to the middle level concept. Of the twenty-three respondents, one did not respond to this question. Table 6 displays the data on the desirable approach to transition.

Table 6

Desirable Approach to Transition

Transition	Frequency	Percent
Open	12	45%
Move all at once	1	4%
Slow transition	9	41%

Twelve (45%) of the respondents indicated the desire to open as a middle school. One (4%) preferred to move to the middle level concept all at once. Finally, nine (41%) indicated the desire to change slowly to the middle level concepts.

Demographic information revealed the majority of the responding schools had a student enrollment of 251-500 or 501-800. The schools were fairly evenly divided by location. The majority of the school had grade configurations of 6-8 or 7-8. Most respondents preferred to move slowly toward the middle level concept having grades 6-8 or open as a middle school having grades 6-8.

Level of Implementation of Middle Level Concepts

The survey questions 1 - 8 asked the respondents to indicate the level of implementation of middle level concepts based on the eight recommendations of the Carnegie report, *Turning Points*, on a scale 1 to 5, with 1 being the lowest level of implementation and 5 being the highest level of implementation. All but one of the 23 respondents completed this section. None of the respondents completing this section indicated being at level 1 on any recommendation.

The concepts of creating smaller communities for learning was the first concept. Table 7 shows the data for this concept.

Table 7

Create Smaller Communities for Learning

Rating	Frequency	Percent
1 - low	0	0
2	0	0
3	4	18%
4	5	23%
5 - high	13	59%

None of the schools indicated a rating of 1 or 2 in creating smaller communities for learning. Four (18%) rated themselves at 3, five (23%) rated themselves at 4, and thirteen (59%) rated themselves at 5 for creating smaller communities for learning.

The second concept rated was teaching a core of common knowledge to all students. Table 8 reveals the data for this concept. None of the respondents indicated a 1 or 2 rating. Three (14%) respondents marked a rating of 3. Ten (45%) of the respondents marked a rating of 4, while nine (41%) respondents marked the rating of 5.

Table 8

Teach a Core of Common Knowledge to All Students

Rate	Frequency	Percent
1 - low	0	0
2	0	0
3	3	14%
4	10	45%
5 - high	9	41%

Ensuring success for all students was the third concept rated by the respondents. Table 9 reveals the data for this concept. No respondent indicated a rating of 1. One (5%) respondent indicated a rating of 2, while six (27%) of the respondents indicated a rating of 3. Eleven (50%) of the respondents marked a rating of 4. The highest rating, 5, was marked by four (18%).

Table 9

Ensuring Success for All Students

Rating	Frequency	Percent
1 - low	0	0
2	1	5%
3	6	27%
4	11	50%
5 - high	4	18%

The fourth concept rated was empowering teachers and administrators in the school. Table 10 shows the data for the implementation of this concept.

Table 10

Empowering Teachers and Administrators

Rating	Frequency	Percent
1 - low	0	0
2	0	0
3	0	0
4	12	55%
5 - high	10	45%

Twelve (55%) of the respondents rated their school at 4. Ten (45%) of the respondents rated their school at 5. The ratings of 1,2, and 3 were not marked by the respondents.

Preparing teachers for the middle grades was the fifth concept rated by the respondents. Table 11 shows the data for this concept. No one marked the rating of 1. Two (9%) of the respondents marked the rating of 2, while eight (36%) of the respondents marked the rating of 3. Eight (36%) of the respondents marked the rating of 4, and four (18%) of the respondents marked the rating of 5.

Table 11

Preparing Teachers for the Middle Grades

Rating	Frequency	Percent
1 - low	0	0
2	2	9%
3	8	36%
4	8	36%
5 - high	4	18%

The sixth concept was improving academic performance through better health and fitness. No respondents indicated a rating of 1. Three (14%) respondents indicated a rating of 2. Ten (45%) respondents indicated a rating of 3. Six (27%) respondents indicated a rating of 4. Finally, three (14%) respondents indicated a rating of 5. Table 12 reveals the above data.

Table 12

Improving Academics Performance Though Better Health and Fitness

Rating	Frequency	Percent
1 - low	0	0
2	3	14%
3	10	45%
4	6	27%
5 - high	3	14%

Reengaging families in the education of young adolescents was the seventh concept. Table 13 shows the data for this concept. The respondents rated the implementation of this concept with none at level 1, four (18%) at level 2, eleven (50%) at level 3, six (27%) at level 4, and one (5%) at level 5.

Table 13

Reengaging Families in the Education of Young Adolescents

Rating	Frequency	Percent
1 - low	0	0
2	4	18%
3	11	50%
4	6	27%
5 - high	1	5%

Finally, the last concept was connecting schools with communities. Table 14 shows the data of rating this concept.

Table 14

Connecting Schools with Communities

Rating	Frequency	Percent
1 - low	0	0
2	2	9%
3	10	45%
4	7	32%
5 - high	3	14%

No respondent marked the rating of 1. Two (9%) of the respondents marked the rating of 2, while ten (45%) respondents marked the rating of 3. Seven (32%) respondents marked the rating of 4, and three (14%) of the respondents indicated the highest rating of 5.

The levels of implementation of middle level concepts based on the Carnegie report, *Turning Points*, were highest in the concepts of creating smaller communities for learning and empowering teachers and administrators. Reengaging families in the education of young adolescents was the concept reportedly having the lowest level of implementation.

Chronological Order of Implementation

The third part of the questionnaire listed 13 middle level practices reflected in the eight middle level concepts. The respondents were asked to indicate the order in which these practices were implemented in their schools. The respondents were then asked to rank the practices by the order they would use if starting over. The data were reported by the average ranking of the respondents. Practices that were not ranked were given the rank of 13 for computation purposes. Table 15 shows the data for the actual order of implementation of middle level practices.

The practice ranked first was teachers attending conferences, workshops, and inservices on middle level practices. Team planning plus personal planning every day for core teachers was ranked second in practices implemented. The third ranked practice implemented was block scheduling. Advisory and including special education teachers on teams received the same average rank, placing both in the fourth ranking. Interdisciplinary units ranked as being implemented fifth in the process. The sixth ranked practice was flexing the schedule. Integrated curriculum was ranked seventh in the implementation process, while integration of health in the curriculum was ranked eighth. The ninth practice implemented was involving parents in the students' school day. Providing health services, school linked or school

Table 15

Order of Implementation of Middle Level Practices

Practice	Actual Order	Average
Teachers attend conferences, workshops inservices, and on middle level practices	1	1.7
Team planning plus personal planning every day for core teachers	2	2.2
Block scheduling	3	4.5
Advisory	4	4.6
Include special education teachers on the teams	4	4.6
Interdisciplinary units	5	4.8
Flexing the schedule	6	5.0
Integrated curriculum	7	5.3
Integration of health in the curriculum	8	6.5
Involving parents in the students' school day	9	7.2
Provide health services, school linked or school based	10	8.4
Intramurals for all students	11	9.1
No interscholastic competitions	12	10.4

based, was the tenth practice in the order of implementation of middle level practices. Intramurals for all students was ranked eleventh, and no interscholastic competitions was ranked twelfth in the order of implementation of middle level practices.

Table 16 shows the data of ranking the desired order of implementation of the thirteen middle level practices. The ranking was based on the average of all respondents' rankings.

The desired order of implementation of middle level practices was based on the average of the ranking of the respondents. Teachers attending conferences, workshops and inservices was ranked in the first place of implementation while team planning plus personal planning every day for core teachers was ranked second. The third ranked practice was block scheduling, followed by advisory as the fourth ranked practice. Including special education teachers on teams was the practice ranked fifth. Flexing the schedule and involving parents in the students' school day were ranked sixth and seventh in the desired order of implementation of middle level practices. The eleventh ranked practice was providing health services, school linked or school based. Intramurals for all students and no interscholastic competitions were ranked twelfth and thirteenth in the desired order of implementation of middle level practices.

The comparison of the actual order of implementation of middle level practices and the desired order of implementation of

Table 16

Desired Order of Implementation of Middle Level Practices

Practice	Desired Order	Average Rank
Teachers attend conferences, workshops, and inservices on middle level practices	1	1.2
Team Planning plus personal planning every day for core teachers	2	2.5
Block scheduling	3	3.1
Advisory	4	4.3
Include special education teachers on team	5	4.4
Interdisciplinary units	6	5.0
Integrated curriculum	7	5.1
Flexing the schedule	8	5.4
Integration of health in the curriculum	9	6.7
Involving parents in the students' school day	10	7.0
Provide health services school linked or school based	11	7.9
Intramurals for all students	12	8.2
No interscholastic competitions	13	9.9

middle level practices varied only in the areas of integrated curriculum and flexing the schedule. The number one practice was having teachers attend conferences, workshops, and inservices on middle level practices while having no interscholastic competitions was ranked last.

Chapter 5

Summary, Findings, and Recommendations

Summary

This study focused on the implementation process of middle level practices. A review of literature disclosed that many educators, including staff members of the Illinois State Board of Education, theorize that middle level practices constituted a major restructuring strategy in middle grades across the state.

The middle level practices were given major emphasis in Illinois by the grant given to the state to study such practices by the Carnegie Foundation of New York and the publication *Turning Points, Preparing America's Youth for the 21st Century*. However, there had not yet been a study regarding the steps of the implementation process of middle level education in the Lead Schools in Illinois.

In order to determine the desired steps of the implementation of middle level practices in the Lead Schools in Illinois the research questions to be answered by this study were:

1. What level of implementation of middle level concepts existed in Illinois Lead Schools?
2. What order of implementation of select middle level practices were used by Illinois Lead Schools?

3. What order of implementation of select middle level practices would be most desirable in transition to middle level according to the Illinois Lead Middle Schools?

Answers to these questions should assist middle grade staff members in the transition process to middle level practices. The data could also provide rationale for some districts to move forward with middle level practices and strategies.

Findings

A brief summary of the demographic information in this survey revealed that the Lead Middle Schools were evenly divided in location among rural, suburban, and urban. Most of the Lead Middle Schools had student enrollments of 251-800 and consisted of two grade configurations, 6-8 and 7-8. A few opened as middle schools and a few moved to the middle level concept all at once, but the majority changed gradually to the middle level concept.

Research question one. What level of implementation of middle level concepts are in Illinois Lead Schools? The data revealed that 100% of the Lead Schools which participated in the study had implemented, to some degree, the eight points recommended by the Carnegie Report, *Turning Points*. The points with the highest degree of implementation were:

1. Creating smaller communities of learning.
2. Teaching a core of common knowledge to all students.
3. Empowering teachers and administrators.

The points with the lowest degree of implementation were:

1. Improving academic performance through better health and fitness.
2. Reengaging families in the education of young adolescents.
3. Connecting schools with communities.

These data reveal that implementation of middle school practices progressed faster when the practices were contained generally within the school, while the practices dealing with external factors required the school to move toward change more slowly.

Research question two. What order of implementation of select middle level practices was used by Illinois Lead Middle Schools? This study revealed the first step in the implementation of middle school practices was to have teachers attend conferences, workshops, or inservices on middle practices. The second step, which followed closely, was team planning plus personal planning every day for core teachers. Grouped closely together in the middle were the following practices: block scheduling, advisory, including special education teachers on teams, interdisciplinary units, flexing the schedule, integrating the curriculum and integrating health in the curriculum. The practices which were implemented more slowly involved external factors, as indicated in research question one. The practices implemented more slowly were involving parents in the students' day, providing health services (

school linked or school based), having intramurals for all students, and participating in no interscholastic competitions.

Research question three. What order of implementation of select middle level practices would be the most desirable in transition to middle level by the Illinois Lead Middle Schools? Data indicated the way middle schools implemented the middle level practices was also the desired order, with the exception of reversing the order of integrated curriculum and flexing the schedule. The respondents from Illinois Lead Middle Schools indicated the practice of teachers attending conferences, workshops, or inservices on middle level practice was by far the most desirable first practice. Team planning plus personal planning every day for core teachers and block scheduling were closely grouped together in the second and third rank of desirable practices. The fourth and fifth ranked practices, advisory and including special education teachers on teams, differed just one-tenth in rank. The same was found true for the sixth and seventh ranked practices of interdisciplinary units and integrated curriculum. Flexing the schedule came closely following in the eighth ranked position. The last practices in ranking involved external factors, the same as the actual order of implementation. The last practices were involving parents in the students' school day, providing health services (school linked or school based),

having intramurals for all students, and participating in no interscholastic competitions.

It would appear that full implementation of middle school concepts has not yet been completed in the Illinois Lead Middle Schools. Since the implementation level was indicated at degrees by the Illinois Lead Middle Schools, the implementation of middle level practices was a continuing process whether the schools opened as middle schools, or changed rapidly or slowly to the middle level concepts.

The data revealed the most desired and important practice in transition to middle level practices was having teachers attend conferences, workshops, and inservices on middle level practices. The least desired practice was having no interscholastic competitions.

Recommendations

The study revealed that while schools moved to middle level practices in three ways -- opened as, changed rapidly, and moved slowly -- the desired practices ranked the same. The size, grade configuration, and location of the schools did not affect the ranking of the desired order of implementation of middle level practices. Therefore, the following order of implementation for middle level practices may be beneficial in making the transition to middle grades:

1. Teachers attend conferences, workshops, or inservices on middle level practices.
2. Team planning plus personal planning every day for core teachers.
3. Block scheduling.
4. Advisory.
5. Include special education teachers on teams.
6. Interdisciplinary units.
7. Integrating the curriculum
8. Flexing the schedule.
9. Integration of health in the curriculum.
10. Involving parents in the students' school day.
11. Providing health services, school-linked or school-based.
12. Intramurals for all students.
13. No interscholastic competitions.

The study also revealed the most desirable way to implement middle level practices was to open as a middle school (52%) followed closely by making a gradual change to the middle level concepts (39%). The grade configuration found most desirable was 6-8 (74%).

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Appendices

Appendix A
Survey Questionnaire

Investigation of the Implementation
of Middle Level Concepts

Questionnaire to principals of middle schools: Check the appropriate responses.

1. The student enrollment of this school is:

- ☐ between 50-250.
- ☐ between 251-500.
- ☐ between 501-800.
- ☐ more than 800.

2. This school is best described as

- ☐ rural.
- ☐ suburban.
- ☐ urban.

3. This school consist of grades

- ☐ 5-8.
- ☐ 6-8.
- ☐ 7-8.
- ☐ other (please indicate grade configuration)

4. In your consideration, the most desirable grade configuration for a middle school is

- ☐ 5-8
- ☐ 6-8
- ☐ 7-8
- ☐ other (please indicate grade configuration)

5. This school

- ☐ opened as a middle school.
- ☐ moved to the middle level concept all at once.
- ☐ moved slowly to the middle level concept.

6. In your consideration, it is most desirable to

- ☐ open as a middle school.
- ☐ move to the middle level concept all at once.
- ☐ moved slowly to the middle level concept.

Level of Implementation of Middle Level Concepts

Please circle the number to indicate the level of implementation of middle level concepts with 1 being the lowest level of implementation and 5 being the highest level of implementation.

1 Creating smaller communities for learning.

1 2 3 4 5

2. Teaching a core of common knowledge to all students.

1 2 3 4 5

3. Ensuring success for all students.

1 2 3 4 5

4. Empowering teachers and administrators.

1 2 3 4 5

5. Preparing teachers for the middle grades.

1 2 3 4 5

6. Improving academics performance through better health and fitness.

1 2 3 4 5

7. Reengaging families in the education of young adolescents.

1 2 3 4 5

8. Connecting schools with communities.

1 2 3 4 5

Chronological Order of Implementation

Please number the following middle level concepts by order of implementation on the left side. On the right side number the concepts by the order you would use if you were starting over.

Actual Order of
Implementation

Better Order of
Implementation

- | | | |
|---|-------|-------|
| Team planning plus personal planning every day for core teachers. | _____ | _____ |
| _____Advisory | | _____ |
| _____Block scheduling | | _____ |
| _____Integrated curriculum | | _____ |
| _____Interdisciplinary units | | _____ |
| _____Include special education teachers on teams | | _____ |
| _____Provide health services school linked or school based | | _____ |
| _____Integration of health in the curriculum | | _____ |
| _____Flexing the schedule | | _____ |
| _____Involving parents in the students' school day | | _____ |
| _____Intramurals for all students | | _____ |
| _____No interscholastic competitions | | _____ |
| _____Teachers attend conferences/workshops/in-services on middle level practices. | | _____ |

Appendix B
Cover Letter to Principals

Janice L. Alka
Route 4, Box 86
Mount Carmel, Illinois 62863

May 1, 1995

Principal, 1

2 -

3 -

Dear Principal,

Your middle school has been selected to participate in a study to determine the implementation practices and desired implementation practices of middle school concepts. This study is being conducted to fulfill requirements for my Specialists Degree at Eastern Illinois University.

The code number on the envelope and the questionnaire will only provide information as to who returned the surveys and to provide report summaries. All responses will be treated confidentially, and the individual schools will not be identified.

Please take about 20 minutes of your time to complete the questionnaire regarding level of implemented middle level concepts, implementation strategy of middle level concepts, desired implementation strategy of middle level concepts, and demographic information. A stamped, self - addressed envelope is enclosed for you to return the questionnaire.

Thank you for your help and cooperation with this project. It would be of great assistance to me if the questionnaire could be completed and returned by May 19, 1995.

Sincerely,

Janice L. Alka
Enclosures

Appendix C
Follow-up Letter

Janice L. Alka
Route 4, Box 86
Mt. Carmel, Illinois 62863

May 15, 1995

Principal, 1

2 -

3 -

Dear Colleague,

This letter is to request your assistance in a research study regarding the implementation of middle level concepts. Your response to the enclosed questionnaire will provide data to be analyzed as part of this study.

The code number on the envelope and the questionnaire will only provide information as to who returned the surveys and to provide report summaries. All responses will be treated confidentially, and individual schools will not be identified.

I truly appreciate your time! It would be of great assistance to me if the questionnaire could be completed and returned by May 30, 1995. A stamped envelope is enclosed for your convenience.

Thank you.

Sincerely,

Janice Alka

Enclosures