



National Organizations Recognize Importance of New Middle Grades Research *Gaining Ground in the Middle Grades: Why Some Schools Do Better*

Each day, nearly 20 million young adolescents enter schools with the hopes and dreams of succeeding in the middle grades and becoming college-ready high school graduates. EdSource’s recent study, *Gaining Ground in the Middle Grades: Why Some Schools Do Better*, is an important piece of research that draws attention to the critical role that middle grades schools play in the preK-12 continuum and provides schools with key strategies that will help prepare students for academic success in high school and beyond.

The National Middle School Association (NMSA), the National Association of Secondary School Principals (NASSP) and the National Forum to Accelerate Middle-Grades Reform have long recognized the important role middle grades education plays in preparing students for their future. *This We Believe* (NMSA) and *Breaking Ranks in the Middle* (NASSP) both call for middle grades schools to hold high expectations for all students and provide them with a challenging curriculum, engaging instruction and balanced assessment—all within the context of an environment personalized to meet the needs of young adolescents. The National Forum’s *Schools to Watch* Program uses a stringent set of criteria to guide school improvement and recognizes middle grades schools which provide their students with an education that is academically excellent, developmentally responsive and socially equitable.

Gaining Ground in the Middle Grades: Why Some Schools Do Better found middle grades schools that outperformed their peer schools with similar students did so by focusing on strategies that resulted in a significant school culture shift that emphasized preparing students for the future. Strategies included the effective use of assessment data to improve instruction and learning; the importance of early identification and intervention to proactively keep students on track; the critical role played by district and building leadership; the need for the district and school to set measurable goals for improvement; and effective communication with students and their families about the importance of middle grades achievement to their future. Furthermore, the study did not find a consistent or strong association between a school’s grade configuration and its student outcomes on standards-based tests. All of these findings closely mirror recommendations of our organizations.

We also applaud the report’s recommendations on how this research can serve as a valuable guideline for developing local, state and federal policies that support the education of young adolescents. It encourages local districts to discuss the priority they give to the middle grades, states to sustain their investments in public education and include a focus on middle grades and federal policy makers to recognize that “college ready” does not apply only to high schools. Our three organizations encourage both educators and policy makers to pay close attention to this work and consider its findings and recommendations as they focus on ensuring an academically excellent and equitable education that is responsive to the developmental needs of young adolescents and is focused on preparing them for success, now and in the future.