

Core Principles for Maine's Middle Level Schools

Maine's *Learning Results*, a system of articulated high standards, provide a framework for schools containing the middle grades to use as they reshape their curriculum to be both developmentally appropriate and challenging in ways that will prepare their students for their 21st century future. Recognizing that many Maine middle level schools have made critical improvements in organization and climate, now middle level schools must be places where all students learn at high levels. To achieve this goal, it must be recognized that:

- Middle level schools expect strong academic performance by each and every student.
- Academic success in middle level schools is more likely to occur when students' other developmental needs are met as well (Van Hoose, 2001).
- There is a strong body of evidence about the functions, purposes, and goals of successful schools. Every school containing young adolescents in any combination of grades 5-8 must use that evidence to plan the middle level program. Middle school leaders today recognize that the middle school concept is an interconnected system of programs, organization, and attitudes based on a set of beliefs about teaching and learning, supported by research. It is a system where every element depends on every other element.
- Change is systemic, not linear (Felner, et al., 1997).
- The program is more important than grade configuration. Maine will always have a variety of buildings that house the middle grades. While grade configurations that are typically found in the majority of this country's middle level schools (6-8, 5-8, and 7-8) are more apt to provide the programs that young adolescents need, all schools containing students ages 10-to-15 must consciously plan their middle grades program around the middle school concept (McEwin, et al., 2004).
- Special care must be taken to provide opportunities for high levels of learning in all schools educating 10-15 year olds.