MIDDLE SCHOOL IS NOT A BUILDING

A Resource for Educating Vermont's Young Adolescents

Revised and Interactive Edition, 2020

Vermont Association for Middle Level Education
VAMLE.org

VERMONT ASSOCIATION FOR MIDDLE LEVEL EDUCATION (VAMLE.org)

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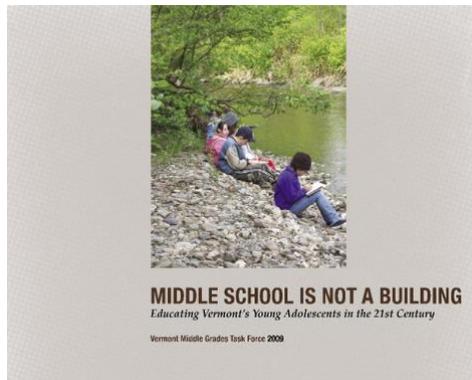Laurie Singer

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New England League of Middle Schools (NELMS.org)
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Vermont Agency of Education (education.vermont.gov)
Vermont Middle Grades Collaborative (middlegradescollaborative.org)
Vermont Principals' Association (vpaonline.org)

MIDDLE SCHOOL IS NOT A BUILDING
Educating Vermont's Young Adolescents in the 21st Century

Vermont Middle Grades Task Force 2009

As of June 2020, *Middle School Is Not A Building* can be found online at:
www.vamle.org
www.middlegradescollaborative.org

June 2020

Dear Caring Teacher, Administrator, Colleague, Family Member, Student, and/or Friend -

Welcome to the new and improved edition of ***Middle School Is Not a Building*** (MSNB). When this anchor text was first compiled in 2009, by members of what was called the Vermont Middle Grades Task Force, it provided middle level educators a source of information with a Vermont focus, ready to use as a helpful resource to guide best practice. As a middle level English teacher at the time, I remember the pride and excitement of browsing that research-based hard copy. It seemed that everyone had MSNB on their bookshelves and in their hearts and minds.

Today, in this interactive, online edition, we share with you a fresh version of MSNB. The Vermont Association for Middle Level Education (VAMLE) has worked with its many partners to bring this version to life. Since 1987, VAMLE's mission has been to support and encourage Vermont's middle level communities. Members of VAMLE believe in the dedicated, inspired, innovative, and forward-thinking momentum of young adolescents across the Green Mountain State and beyond, and we know that personalized, developmentally appropriate, research-based best practice is the way forward. VAMLE remains invested in collaborating with and advocating for positive, inclusive, and equitable environments that advance and enhance the lives of all students.

Every winter, VAMLE hosts the annual Beyond Bullying conference. This event provides professional development to build inclusive and equitable classrooms, and it encourages students to create action plans to implement in their schools. Students lead students in workshops designed to build empathetic and supportive relationships, programs, and mindsets. Each spring, in partnership with the New England League of Middle schools (NELMS), we celebrate young people's academic and civic achievements at a family-oriented Scholar Leader Banquet and ceremony. These meaningful initiatives, in addition to others, allow students and teachers to be supported, recognized, heard, and celebrated.

This collaborative revision of MSNB, through the efforts of VAMLE, honors all those who support students' journeys during the middle years. We hope that this user-friendly tool will educate and inspire, and that teachers and schools will use it as an assessment measure to ensure that the needs of our most important resources – our students – are met with joy and compassion.

We would be remiss if we did not acknowledge the enormous efforts teachers, students, and families have been forced to face in the wake of COVID-19, and we send our warmest gratitude and best wishes for a bright future, enhanced by the exceptional voices of young people and leaders across our communities.

Sincerely,
Dr. Monica McEnerny, Associate Professor of Education, Castleton University
President, VAMLE
http://mmcenerny.wix.com/monica-mcenerny

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   The Vermont Association for Middle Level Education (VAMLE), with over 85 member schools, stands in solidarity against racism and inequity in Vermont, the nation, and around the world. We recognize that the homicides of George Floyd, Ahmaud Arbery, Breonna Taylor, Tony McDade, and many others are evidence of systemic racism that has plagued our nation since even before its inception. We acknowledge the unique role schools play in perpetuating this system, and we strive to help all schools become anti-racist organizations.

   Members of the VAMLE Board are called to action in a multitude of ways that affect our lives and those of young people. Our Annual Conference brings together student-educator teams from across Vermont to listen to shared experiences, and to learn about all forms of social injustice and inequity.

   We here offer the 2020 workshop topics and **resources** compiled for this year's canceled Annual Conference entitled, "Beyond Bullying: Creating a Culture of Respect in Learning Environments." You will see from the **workshop descriptions**, which can also be found on **VAMLE.org**, that the VAMLE community commits to identifying and dismantling racism and other forms of discrimination. Our Annual Conference will continue to exemplify these beliefs.

   We believe change lies in encouraging both educators and youth, in action-oriented teams, to address inequities together and to co-create a culture of respect and inclusion in our middle school communities and beyond. Finally, we commit to cultivating courageous conversations designed to move us closer to disrupting and eradicating systemic racism in our schools and communities, now and into the future.

                    With deep compassion,
                    The VAMLE Board

Dear Reader,

Early adolescence, ages 10-15, is a critical and exciting time of life, one filled with extraordinary potential, reward, and challenge. The rapid and dramatic development that occurs during this stage of life – intellectual, socio-emotional, and physical – prompts students to ask rich questions about themselves and the world around them. Young adolescents care deeply about affiliation and belonging, just as many yearn for opportunities for increased independence, responsibility, and meaningful decision-making. As such, the middle grades are an opportune time for students to engage in authentic, real-world learning that cuts across traditional subject areas and helps students cultivate a sense of purpose and agency. Service learning, place-based education, project-based learning, and youth participatory action research are just a few of the many approaches that can open the door to this kind of positive youth development. Such is the work of the middle grades educator. Those who work with this age group know that this is a special time indeed.

This was true a decade ago when we published the first edition of *Middle School Is Not a Building* and it is no less true today. In fact, we know more than ever about responding to young adolescents' varied needs. We also know more about targeting the inequities that often accompany certain identities, such as living in poverty, being a person of color, being gay or gender non-conforming, experiencing trauma, or being differently abled, for example. And ten years later, while these aims are not new for many educators, we now have powerful legislation backing these efforts, policy mandates that require a Vermont education to be personal and equitable. I am hopeful that this new edition—with its careful attention to varied stakeholders--will provide educators, families, communities and others who influence the education of Vermont's youth an entry point for dialogue, collaboration, and action.

Our state has a long history of innovative educational practice. As another decade stretches out before us, I am eager to see what we can accomplish together on behalf of Vermont's middle grades. Thank you for your sincere interest in promoting positive change for our state's young adolescents.

Best Wishes,
Penny A. Bishop, Ed.D.
Associate Dean, College of Education and Social Services
Professor of Middle Grades Education
University of Vermont

Dear Reader,

Young people today face many challenges, from trying to achieve personal and academic success to feeling emotionally and physically safe. In particular, students with disabilities are 2-3 times more likely to be bullied than their peers without disabilities. To combat this, the Special Olympics Unified Champion Schools program is aimed at promoting social inclusion for students with intellectual disabilities through intentionally planned and implemented activities affecting system-wide change. Unified programs promote healthy, safe, respectful school cultures where the student voice is valued and appreciated, and respectful learning is the norm.

With sports as its foundation, the three-component model offers a unique combination of activities to equip young people with tools and training to create school climates of acceptance, places where all students are welcome, routinely included in, and feel a part of all activities, opportunities, and functions. This is accomplished by implementing inclusive sports, inclusive youth leadership opportunities, and whole school engagement. Unified programs are designed to be woven into the fabric of the school, to enhance current efforts and provide rich opportunities that create a socially inclusive environment that supports all learners.

With the support of the U.S. Department of Education, over 75 Unified Champion School programs are engaging young people both with and without intellectual disabilities in Vermont schools. Through inclusive experiences and school activities promoting respect and inclusion, awareness and acceptance are becoming the standard.

Over 92% of participating Vermont schools report that Unified programs create a more socially inclusive school climate and raise awareness about students with intellectual disabilities. Additionally, 95% of schools see increased opportunities for diverse students to work together and increased social interactions which lead to more positive perceptions of their school's inclusive climate. In turn, students are more empathetic, compassionate, and feel better supported.

Unified programs tackle many of the challenges outlined in this publication, head on. Students participating in inclusive leadership clubs gain critical skills in social and emotional development and leadership skill enhancement, which is a tipping point for change in attitude and behavior, creating less bullying and more inclusive behaviors and positive school climates. We are eager to see these programs grow in pursuit of a more accepting generation. If you are interested in learning more about how your school can join the inclusion revolution, please visit www.specialolympicsvermont.org. We thank you for your efforts to promote inclusion, acceptance and respect in your school communities and look forward to working with your school!

Best wishes,
Missy Siner Shea
President & CEO, Special Olympics Vermont

THE CRITICAL MIDDLE

The middle level is exciting and fertile ground for students' academic and social growth. Young adolescents are brimming with possibility and potential. They begin to move from concrete to abstract thinking, take greater responsibility for their learning, and develop lasting attitudes about work and schooling. Students begin planning for college, other post-secondary education opportunities, and careers and make choices that will affect these goals in the future. And they bring enthusiasm, humor, and energy to their learning.

Ten to fifteen year olds are in the midst of tremendous change – physically, intellectually, socially, emotionally, and morally. Young adolescents are on a constant search for identity; experimenting with various personas in an attempt to discover a comfortable and genuine self (Brown, 2016). They grapple with life's quintessential questions, asking, "Who am I, and who do I want to be? What do I believe? How should I act?" Ethnically diverse students often experience challenges in their search for identity (Gay, 1994). A certain percentage of adolescents do not identify as heterosexual or as gender binary (Dolgin, 2018). Their curiosity, decision making, and possibly ultimate choices of gender and sexual identity may occur during the middle level years. Adolescents face numerous choices, many of them risky, and they require powerful and meaningful role models. These are generally caring and supportive adults who accompany them on their journey through the middle level years.

Teachers and administrators in the middle level grades know the unique challenges and rewards of working with an age group that is intensely social, constantly trying on new identities, embracing learning, and valuing a hands-on and minds-on approach. Yet only recently has the public begun to appreciate the crucial role the middle level years play in students' later quality of life. The middle level years are often called 'the last best chance' to reach students, and with good reason. Contrary to popular belief, "the level of academic achievement that students attain by eighth grade has a larger impact on their college and career readiness by the time they graduate from high school than anything that happens academically in high school. It is the social, emotional, identity development, and psychological growth opportunities that occur however during the middle level years that create the greatest opportunities for a healthy and successful future academic career. A singular focus by educators on academic performance and content standard attainment during the middle level years prevents young adolescents from receiving the critical information and guidance needed for comprehensive healthy development (Daniels, 2020). To that end, it is imperative that middle level educators explicitly address the affective components of young adolescent development by purposely designing the school day to affect these areas of development (Boyer-Pennington, 2016; Brinthaupt & Lipka, 2016)

 Similarly, although demographic factors such as socioeconomic status, ethnicity, and parental education place certain students at greater risk than others for dropping out of school, we now know that students demonstrate important school-based factors that can help us identify these learners as early as the 6th grade. In fact, research indicates that if a 6th grader fails mathematics or English, receives a suspension or poor final behavior grade or attends school less than 80% of the time, s/he has less than a 20% chance of graduating from high school on time. And knowledgeable educators identify students at risk of school failure in these critical middle years.

Dropping out of school has grave personal and societal implications. Not finishing high school places youth at significantly greater risk of incarceration, poverty, and substance abuse. Keeping kids in school holds implications for our state's economy as well. A reduction in Vermont's male dropout rate would, for example, reveal significant savings. All of this underscores the critical nature of the middle school years and the important role middle level educators play in preparing tomorrow's citizens for a complex world.

Who are the middle grades learners in our state? What promises and challenges do they present? What unique academic, social, emotional, and identity development needs do they possess? And how can Vermont's educators rise to the challenge of meeting these needs? As educators work to keep young adolescents on track for school success, the challenge in contemporary schools is substantial, as illustrated by the following data on academic, behavioral, and affective outcomes.

THE STATUS OF VERMONT'S YOUNG ADOLESCENTS

Vermont offers a relatively high standard of living in comparison to many other states, sporting high school graduation, health and wellness, college degree attainment, home ownership and median household income rates all above the national norms. Despite Vermont's excellent high school graduation rates, high school graduates attend four-year colleges at much lower rate. Two sources that help identify these rates are the NCHEMS Information Center and Knocking at the College Door.

Vermont schools face significant challenges to ensuring success for all students. For example, approximately 8,000 Vermont families with children live in poverty – children who either do or will soon attend our schools. This information comes from the National Center for Education Statistics.

Additionally, in the past decade, Vermont schools have seen an increase in the population of English Language Learners while the overall student population has decreased. This increase in cultural and linguistic diversity creates new classroom opportunities, and it also presents educators with requirements and expectations many have never before faced.

Further, this generation of young adolescents is more "plugged in" than ever (Poehner & Brown, 2020). Young adolescents in the United States use between five to seven hours of screen media per day--time that does not include screen use for homework or school (Rideout & Robb, 2019). Fifty-three percent of 11 year olds and 69 percent of 12 year olds across the country have smartphones, and they report that they "are more than twice as likely as they were four years ago to use computers for homework every day" (Rideout & Robb, p. 7)). Tapping into the digital worlds these students inhabit requires educators to cross the digital native/digital immigrant divide, a skill that may be new for many teachers.

Educating Vermont's children, like all children, comes with both substantial challenge and great promise. Between February and April 2019, students at 123 middle schools took the 2019 Vermont Youth Risk Behavior Survey. Survey procedures protected the privacy of students by allowing for anonymous and voluntary participation and completion during a single class period.

This report presents the middle school results from schools that include students in grades six through eight. Elementary or intermediate schools ending in sixth grade are not eligible to participate. The results in this report are weighted by gender, grade, and race/ethnicity to compensate for absenteeism and incomplete surveys.

Overall, 13,998 middle school students completed the 72-item 2019 YRBS.

Below are some statistics derived from the Middle School Results-YRBS 2019

Alcohol Use (Current)
Overall, 7% of students consumed at least one drink during the previous 30 days.

Two percent of middle school students binge drank during the past 30 days.
Current alcohol use has significantly decreased since 2011. It did not change between 2017 and 2019.
▪ Female students are significantly more likely than male students to drink alcohol during the past 30 days.
▪ Current alcohol use significantly increases with each grade level.
▪ Students of color are significantly more likely than white, non-Hispanic students to drink alcohol during the past 30 days.
▪ LGBTQ+ students are nearly three times as likely as heterosexual students to drink alcohol

Alcohol Use (Lifetime)
One in five middle school students have ever drunk alcohol.
Lifetime use of alcohol significantly increased between 2017 and 2019 but remains similar compared to 2011.
▪ Ever drinking alcohol does not differ by sex.
▪ Ever drinking alcohol significantly increases with each grade level.
▪ Students of color are significantly more likely than white, non-Hispanic students to have ever drunk alcohol.
▪ LGBT students are significantly more likely than heterosexual / cisgender students to have drunk alcohol during their lifetime.
Lifetime

Bullied at School, Lifetime
Overall, 45% of middle school students have ever been bullied at school.
The percent of students reporting bullying on school property has significantly decreased since 2011 but did not change between 2017 and 2019.
▪ Female students are significantly more likely than male students to have ever been bullied on school property.
▪ Ever being bullied on school property does not differ by grade level.
▪ Students of color are significantly more likely than white, non-Hispanic students to have ever been bullied.
▪ LGBTQ+ students are significantly more likely to have ever been bullied at school compared to heterosexual / cisgender students.

Electronic Bullying, Lifetime
About a quarter of middle school students have been electronically bullied during their lifetime.
Ever being electronically bullied has not significantly changed since 2011 or between 2017 and 2019.

Female students are nearly two times more likely to ever experience electronic bullying compared to male students.
▪ Electronic bullying increases with each grade level.
▪ Students of color are significantly more likely than white, non-Hispanic students to be bullied electronically.
▪ LGBTQ+ students are two times as likely to have ever been electronically bullied compared to heterosexual / cisgender students.

Bullying Others
During the previous 30 days, 9% of students reported bullying others.
The percent of students who said they bullied others has significantly decreased since 2011; it did not change between 2017 and 2019.
▪ Bullying other students does not differ by sex or grade level.
▪ Students of color are significantly more likely to bully others compared to white, non-Hispanic students.
▪ LGBTQ+students are significantly more likely than heterosexual / cisgender students to bully someone else during the past 30 days.

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Electronic Vapor Product Use (Current)
Less than one in ten middle school students used an electronic vapor product during the past 30 days.
Current EVP use has significantly increased since 2015 and doubled between 2017 and 2019.
▪ Female students are significantly more likely than male students to use an EVP during the past 30 days.
▪ Current EVP use significantly increases with each grade level.
▪ Students of color are significantly more likely than white, non-Hispanic students to use an EVP during the past 30 days.
Among students who used EVP, about four in ten used them because their family or friends did or for other reasons. About one in eight used them because they were available in many flavors, while less than one in ten used them because they thought they were less harmful or were trying to quit using other tobacco products.

Feeling Unsafe * New in 2019
During the previous 30 days, nearly one in ten students skipped school because they felt unsafe at school or on their way to or from school. Four percent of students skipped school more than one time.
Skipping school due to safety concerns was significantly higher in 2019 compared to 2011. It did not change between 2017 and 2019.
▪ Female students are significantly more likely than male students to skip school because they felt unsafe during the past month.
▪ There are no differences by grade.
▪ Students of color are significantly more likely than white, non-Hispanic students to skip school because they felt unsafe.
▪ LGBTQ+ students are nearly three times as likely to report skipping school during the past 30 days because they felt unsafe, compared to heterosexual/cis gender students

Unwanted Sexual Contact *New in 2019
One in ten middle school students have ever had someone do sexual things to them that they did not want such as being kissed, touched or having sexual intercourse.
Female students are nearly three times more likely than male students to have ever experienced unwanted sexual contact.
▪ Experiencing unwanted sexual contact increases with each grade level.
▪ Students of color are significantly more likely to experience unwanted sexual contact compared to white, non-Hispanic students.
▪ LGBTQ+ students are more than three times as likely as heterosexual / cisgender students to experience unwanted sexual contact.

Peer Disapproval of Using Electronic Vaping Products (EVP)
Overall, 84% of middle school students think it is wrong or very wrong for someone their age to use EVP.
▪ Believing it is wrong or very wrong for someone their age to use EVP does not differ by sex.
▪ Perceptions of peer EVP use as wrong or very wrong decrease with each grade level.
▪ Students of color are significantly less likely than white, non-Hispanic students to believe it is wrong for someone their age to use EVP.
▪ LGBTQ+ students are significantly less likely than heterosexual / cisgender students to believe it is wrong for someone their age to use EVP.

Physical Activity and Inactivity
Computer and Video Game Use - Physical Inactivity
Overall, four in ten students spend less than three hours per day using a computer or going online to do something other than schoolwork.

Spending three or more hours per day playing video games or on a computer significantly increased since 2015 and between 2017 and 2019.

Television Watching - Physical Inactivity
▪ About six out of ten students (58%) spend one hour or less watching TV.
One in five watch three or more hours of TV per day.

Physical Activity Breaks During the School Day
Eight in ten middle school students have at least one physical activity break at school during a typical week. Nearly four in ten have opportunities for physical activity every day (36%).
Since 2015 (72%) and between 2017 and 2019, significantly more students have at least one physical activity break during the week (75% vs 80%).

Sport Team Participation
Seven in ten middle school students participated on at least one sport team during the past year (72%). Nearly a third participated on three or more teams (31%).
▪ Participating on at least one school or community-based sport team does not differ by sex or grade level.
▪ White, non-Hispanic students are significantly more likely than students of color to participate on at least one sports team during the past year.
▪ Heterosexual / cisgender students are significantly more likely than LGBTQ+ students to participate on at least one sports team.

Feeling Sad or Hopeless
During the past 12 months, nearly a quarter of students felt so sad or hopeless almost every day for at least two weeks that they stopped doing some usual activities.
Feeling sad or hopeless for two or more weeks in a row during the previous year has significantly increased since 2013 and between 2017 and 2019.
▪ Female students are more than twice as likely as male students to feel sad or hopeless.
▪ Feeling sad or hopeless significantly increases with each grade level.
▪ Students of color are significantly more likely than white, non-Hispanic students to feel sad or hopeless.
▪ LGBTQ+ students are three times as likely to report feeling so sad or hopeless that they stopped doing regular activities compared to heterosexual / cisgender students.

Hurt Themselves on Purpose *New in 2019
Nearly two in ten students have ever done something to purposely hurt themselves without wanting to die such as cutting or burning themselves on purpose.
▪ Female students are more than twice as likely as male students to have ever hurt themselves on purpose.
▪ Hurting oneself on purpose increases with each grade level.
▪ Students of color are significantly more likely than white, non-Hispanic students to have ever hurt themselves on purpose.
▪ LGBTQ+ students are nearly four times as likely to report hurt themselves on purpose compared to heterosexual students.

Suicide Ideation: Thoughts
Overall, 18% of students have ever seriously thought about killing themselves.
Having serious thoughts about suicide significantly increased between 2011 and 2017. It did not change between 2017 and 2019.

- Females are nearly twice as likely as male students to have ever seriously thought about killing themselves.
- Suicidal thoughts significantly increases with each grade level.
- Students of color are significantly more likely than white, non-Hispanic students to have had serious thoughts about suicide.
- LGBTQ+ students are more than three times as likely as heterosexual / cisgender students to have ever thought seriously about killing themselves.

Suicide Ideation: Plans
More than one in ten middle school students have ever made a plan about how they would kill themselves.
The percent of students who have made a suicide plan has significantly increased since 2011. It did not change between 2017 and 2019.

Suicide Attempts
Overall, 6% of middle school students have ever tried to kill themselves.
The percent of students who have tried to kill themselves significantly increased between 2011 and 2019. It did not change between 2017 and 2019.
- Female students are two times more likely to have attempted suicide compared to male students.
- Attempting to kill oneself significantly increases with each grade level.
- Students of color are significantly more likely than white, non-Hispanic students to have ever attempted suicide.
- A quarter of LGBQ+ students have ever attempted to kill themselves, six times the rate among heterosexual/ cisgender students.

Lifetime Cigarette Use
Overall, 7% of students have ever tried a cigarette.
Since 2011, the percent of students who have ever tried even one or two puffs of a cigarette has significantly decreased from 11% to 7%. It did not change between 2017 and 2019

Marijuana Use (Current)
During the past 30 days, 5% of middle school students used marijuana.
Current marijuana use among middle school students did not significantly change between 2017 and 2019.
- Current marijuana use does not differ significantly by sex.
- Marijuana use during the past 30 days significantly increases with each grade level.
- Students of color are two times more likely than white, non-Hispanic students to have used marijuana during the past 30 days.
- LGBTQ+ students are nearly three times more likely than heterosexual/ cisgender students to have used marijuana during the past 30 days.

Marijuana Use (Lifetime)
Overall, 7% of students have ever used marijuana.
There has been no change in lifetime marijuana use since 2011.
1% have tried it before age 11.

Physical Fights
Overall, four in ten students reported that they have ever been in a physical fight.
Since 2011, the percent of students who have ever been in a physical fight has significantly decreased. There was no significant change between 2017 and 2019.

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- Male students are twice as likely to report physical fighting compared to female students.
- Eighth grade students are significantly more likely than younger students to have ever been in a physical fight.
- Students of color are significantly more likely than white, non-Hispanic students to report every being in a physical fight.
- LGBTQ+ students are significantly more likely than heterosexual students to have ever been in a physical fight.

Prescription Drug Misuse *New in 2019
Six percent of students have ever taken a prescription pain reliever that was not prescribed to them or took one differently than how a doctor told them to use it.
- Misuse of a prescription drug does not differ by sex.
- Students of color are significantly more likely than white, non-Hispanic students to have ever misused a prescription medicine.
- LGBTq+ students are twice as likely as heterosexual students to have ever misused a prescription medicine.

Peer Disapproval of Using Electronic Vaping Products (EVP)
Overall, 84% of middle school students think it is wrong or very wrong for someone their age to use EVP.
- Believing it is wrong or very wrong for someone their age to use EVP does not differ by sex.
- Perceptions of peer EVP use as wrong or very wrong decrease with each grade level.
- Students of color are significantly less likely than white, non-Hispanic students to believe it is wrong for someone their age to use EVP.
- LGBTQ+ students are significantly less likely than heterosexual / cisgender students to believe it is wrong for someone their age to use EVP.
Overall, 5% of students have ever used inhalants such as sniffing glue, breathing in the contents of spray cans, or inhaling any paints or sprays to get high.

Lifetime Use of Inhalants
Since 2011, the percent of students ever using inhalants has significantly decreased. Between 2017 and 2019, use of inhalants significantly increased.
- Inhalant use among middle school students does not differ by sex.
- Ever using an inhalant significantly increases with each grade level.
- Students of color are significantly more likely than white, non-Hispanic students to ever use inhalants.
- LGBTQ+ students are three times as likely as heterosexual / cisgender students to have ever used inhalants

Prescription Drug Misuse: Stimulants
2% of students have ever misused a prescription stimulant, either taking it without a prescription or taking it differently than prescribed.
- 8th grade students are significantly more likely than 6th grade students to have ever misused a prescription stimulant.
- LGBTQ+ students are more than five times as likely as heterosexual students to have ever misused a prescription stimulant.(6% to 1%)

Parental Disapproval Regarding Substance Use
About nine out of ten middle school students believed their parents would think it is wrong or very wrong for them to use alcohol (87%), marijuana (92%) or EVP (92%).
A few were not sure how their parents would feel about them drinking alcohol (4%), using marijuana (3%), or EVP (5%).

Since 2011, the percent of students who think their parents believe it is wrong for them to use alcohol and marijuana significantly decreased. Between 2017 and 2019, significantly more students believed their parents would think it was wrong or very wrong for them to use alcohol; perceived parental perceptions of marijuana use did not change.

Sexual Activity
Overall, 5% of students have ever had sexual intercourse.
Lifetime sexual intercourse has not significantly changed since first asked in 2015.
▪ Male students are significantly more likely to have had sexual intercourse compared to female students.
▪ Having sexual intercourse significantly increases with each grade level.
▪ Students of color are significantly more likely than white, non-Hispanic students to have had sexual intercourse.
▪ LGBTQ+ students are nearly three times more likely than heterosexual / cisgender students to have had sexual intercourse

Sexual Behavior
Overall, 5% of students have ever had sexual intercourse; 6% have had oral sex.
- 2% of 6th graders
- 4% of 7th graders
- 8% of 8th graders
- Students of color are significantly more likely than white, non-Hispanic students to ever have sexual intercourse of oral sex (10% to 5%).
- LGBTQ+ students are significantly more likely than heterosexual students to have ever had sexual intercourse or oral sex. (17% to 5%)

Social Determinants of Health - * New in 2019
Language Spoken at Home
Four in ten students have someone at home who speaks another language (39%). Less than 10% live with people who primarily speak a language other than English (6%).
▪ Living with people who mostly speak a language other than English does not differ by sex or sexual orientation / gender identity.
▪ 6th grade students are significantly more likely than older students to live with people who mostly speak a language other than English.
▪ Students of color are nearly seven times more likely than white, non-Hispanic students to live with people who mostly speak a language other than English.

Food Insecurity
During the past 30 days, three-quarters of students never went hungry because there was not enough food at home. One in ten were hungry at least sometimes; 16% rarely went hungry.
Going hungry at least most of the time has not changed since 2015.
▪ Going hungry at least most of the time because there was not enough food at home does not differ by sex or grade level.
▪ Students of color are significantly more likely than white, non-Hispanic students to feel hungry at least most of the time because there was not enough food at home.
▪ LGBTQ+ students are three times more likely than heterosexual / cisgender students to feel hungry at least most of the time because there was not enough food at home.

Youth Assets and Other Protective Factors

Family Connectedness
Six in ten middle school students ate dinner with their parents every day during the past week. More than eight in ten students ate dinner with a parent at least four times during the previous week. Eating dinner with a parent at least four times during the previous week significantly decreased between 2017 and 2019.
▪ Eating dinner with a parent at least four times during the previous week does not differ by sex.
▪ Eating dinner with a parent four or more times during the previous week decreases with each grade level.
▪ Students of color are significantly less likely than white, non-Hispanic students to eat dinner with a parent four or more times during the previous week.
▪ LGBTQ+ students are significantly less likely than heterosexual / cisgender students to eat dinner with a parent four or more time during the previous week.

School Connectedness
Seven in ten middle school students have at least one teacher or other adult in their school that they can talk to if they have a problem; 15% were not sure if there was someone they could talk to.
Having a teacher or other trusted adult significantly decreased between 2017 and 2019.
Two-thirds of middle school students agree or strongly agree that their school has clear rules and consequences for behavior (64%). Nearly two in ten are not sure if their school has clear rules and consequences for behaviors (18%).

Community Connectedness
Six in ten students agree or strongly agree that they matter to people in their community; a quarter were not sure. Since 2011, the percent of students who agree or strongly agree that they matter to people in their community significantly increased. Community connectedness significantly decreased between 2017 and 2019.
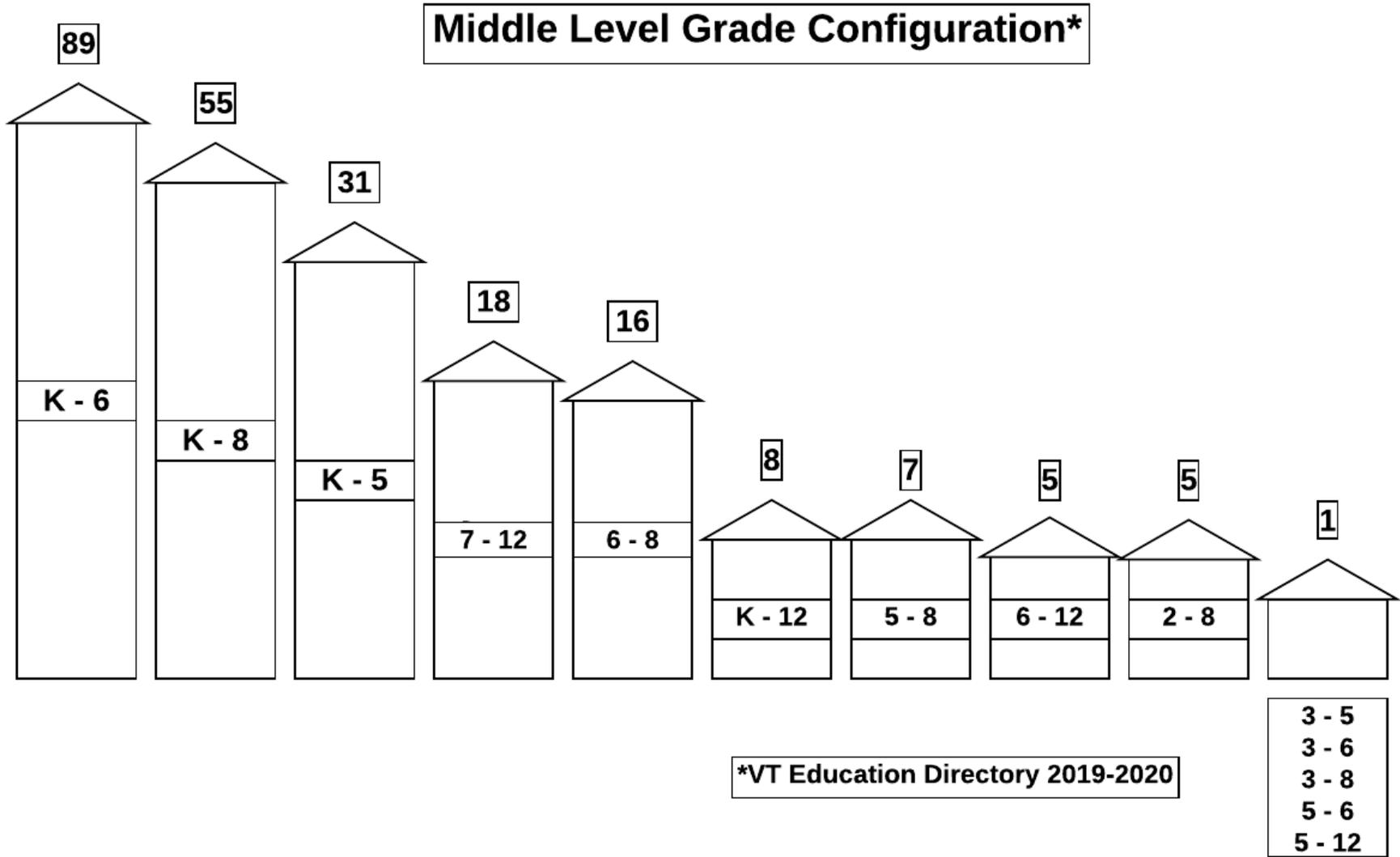▪ Male students are significantly more likely to believe they matter to people in their community compared to female students. ▪ 6th grade students are significantly more likely than older students to believe they matter to people in their community.
▪ White non-Hispanic students are significantly more likely than students of color to think they matter to people in their community.
▪ Heterosexual / cisgender students are more than two times as likely to feel like they matter to people in their community compared to LGBTQ+ students.

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So where does this leave Vermont middle grades educators? We must be ever diligent in our commitment to create learning opportunities that are academically challenging, developmentally responsive, and socially equitable for our students in the middle years.

VERMONT SCHOOL STRUCTURES

Where are our 10-15 yr. olds learning?

Middle Level Grade Configuration*

Count	Configuration
89	K - 6
55	K - 8
31	K - 5
18	7 - 12
16	6 - 8
8	K - 12
7	5 - 8
5	6 - 12
5	2 - 8
1	3 - 5 / 3 - 6 / 3 - 8 / 5 - 6 / 5 - 12

*VT Education Directory 2019-2020

MIDDLE SCHOOL IS *STILL* NOT A BUILDING

In many areas of the United States, as well as other countries, middle level schools are easily defined by their grade level configuration. Grades six through eight are often grouped together within a building for the purposes of teaching and learning. This is not so in many states and areas of Vermont. Instead, middle level educators face the particular challenge of teaching young adolescents wherever they may be. And this means teaching them in a wide variety of settings, including K-6, K-8, 5-8, 6-8, 7-8, and 7-12 school structures, among others.

Because middle level schooling in Vermont transcends structure, we must ask ourselves, "How can we ensure high quality learning experiences that meet the unique nature and needs of young adolescents regardless of the sign on the building?"

Everyone concerned with the education of ten to fifteen year old students should understand that effective middle level practices are predicated on comprehensive, research-based methods. These important ideas are outlined in several seminal documents, including *This We Believe*, *Breaking Ranks in the Middle*, *Middle Still Matters*, *What Every Middle School Teacher Should Know* (2014, 3rd ed.), *The Encyclopedia of Middle Grades Education* (2016, 2nd ed.), *Research to Guide Practice in Middle Grades Education* (2013), *International Handbook of Middle Level Education Theory, Research, and Policy* (2020). These and other instrumental texts are linked at the end of this document.

Racial, cultural, and social justice reforms are alive and well in Vermont, with organizations such as The Vermont Coalition for Ethnic and Social Equity in Schools (VSESES) leading the way. With Act 1 on ethnic studies and social justice enacted, there is a growing emphasis on this crucial work.

The Vermont Middle Grades Task Force (2009) offered ten recommendations that focus on three areas of improvement, and these still ring true today: curriculum, instruction, and assessment; school organization and community; and teacher education and development. These important components work together to ensure that every young adolescent attains a high degree of academic excellence and personal efficacy. The Vermont Middle Level Teacher Competencies, reflected here in the VT-AOE Transcript Review Worksheet, also reflect these goals.

GOALS

Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment

1. All middle level learners engage in coordinated curricula that are standards-based, challenging, authentic, and focused on the acquisition of content and conceptual knowledge so that students can demonstrate proficiency and transferable skills and can develop a commitment to using knowledge and skills towards advancing the common good in their communities and in the world.

2. Instruction is effective, engaging, and personalized to meet individual student learning goals along their path to graduation.

3. Student learning growth is measured by a balance of assessment types that inform curricular and instructional decisions to support students' educational pathways.

School Organization and Community

4. Organizational structures and a school culture of reasonable and personalized academic expectations enable all middle level students and educators to grow and learn.

5. Relationships for learning create a climate of intellectual development and a caring community that includes having an adult advocate for each student.

6. Ongoing family and community partnerships provide a supportive and enriched learning environment for each middle level student.

7. A supportive, safe, and healthy learning environment advances learning and promotes overall student and educator wellbeing.

8. A democratic system of continual collaboration by all stakeholders allows for authentic student voice and a shared vision to guide decisions.

Teacher Education and Development

9. The recruitment, hiring, and preparation of teachers and administrators is based on knowledge of the developmental characteristics of young adolescents, strong content knowledge, and the ability to use research-based instructional strategies and assessment practices appropriate for middle level students.

10. Research is generated, disseminated, and applied to identify and implement practices leading to continual student learning and progressing academic achievement at the middle level.

THE WAY FORWARD

Vermont educators have long promoted developmentally responsive practice for young adolescents. The Vermont Association for Middle Level Education, chartered in 1987, continually recognizes outstanding middle level school practice through its annual Beyond Bullying Conference, its Scholar Leader Banquet, and its Middle Matters Recognition Awards. The Vermont Agency of Education has issued a middle level teaching endorsement since 1989 and staffs a consultant specific to that level. And the Vermont Middle Grades Collaborative, a formal union of Vermont colleges and universities, has hosted an annual summer institute since 1990, offering teacher professional development and graduate coursework.

On the local school level, there is also a tradition of promoting progressive and developmentally appropriate middle level practices. More and more building leaders require the middle grades endorsement for teacher hiring purposes, viewing it as a sign of quality preparation and a commitment to the age group. Many middle level schools are organized into interdisciplinary or partner teams and conduct advisory, service learning, and mentoring programs. Several Vermont schools have been recognized as New England League of Middle Schools Spotlight Schools. Several Vermont middle grades teams have received national recognition from the Association for Middle Level Education for their outstanding work with young adolescents. The Middle Grades Review also provides an excellent source of support for middle level educators.

While these practices are promising, our state has a long way to go toward ensuring that all young adolescents have access to the type of education that promotes meaningful social and emotional growth, cultural understanding, and personal efficacy. Research is clear, for example, that teachers who hold middle grades licensure are more likely to engage in research-based practices, such as interdisciplinary teaming and common planning time practices that have been linked to increased student achievement (McEwin & Greene, 2013). Vermont's middle grades teaching endorsement continues to be offered to support a greater understanding of young adolescents' unique nature and needs.

Educators must work in an integrated, coherent, and comprehensive manner to improve middle level education in Vermont. Within this document are ten recommendations for improving the education of Vermont's 10 to 15 year olds. These goals, drawn from seminal research-based documents, point to curriculum, instruction, and assessment; school organization and community; and teacher education and development as the means to foster the healthy intellectual and socioemotional development of Vermont's young adolescents. Such development is essential to these learners' efficacy, self-identity, and success and is also essential to a healthy and vibrant state economy and citizenry.

Research on schooling for young adolescents is clear. We know what is necessary to improve their schooling lives and chances for later life success. Curriculum must be challenging, relevant, integrative, and suited to living and working in today's world. Schools need to be organized to meet the social, emotional, cultural, identity development, and academic needs of ten to fifteen year olds. Teachers must be specially trained to work with young adolescents. Middle level education school leaders should be prepared to provide momentum and guidance to each of these initiatives. When these are in place, there are clear gains in middle grades student outcomes (McEwin & Greene, 2013).

Moreover, we know that such recommendations work in concert with one another. In order to fully realize the increased student achievement and well-being that accompanies such a learning environment, school leaders must work toward the implementation of all recommendations as a cohesive whole.

The pages that follow provide the task force's ten recommended goals with proposed actions for state, professional organization, post-secondary, district, school, classroom, and learner level considerations. These are not meant to be limiting in nature, but to offer steps that lead to research-based

practices supported by recent, valid available data. While actions implemented in schools and districts may vary depending on size and grade or building configuration, many middle level experts believe that all goals are attainable in schools and districts throughout the state.

Young adolescents are filled with hope and promise of things to come. Their capacity for meaningful, authentic work is immense, and we only do them justice when we engage them in genuine learning about topics and questions that matter to them. Teachers who understand the unique characteristics of young adolescents appreciate the challenges of identity development and build opportunities for such exploration within the curriculum. Traditional curricular designs often fail to engage young adolescents because they provide students with actions they do not ask (Bishop, Downes, & Farber, 2019).

Inviting our students into the conversation about their schooling is an essential first-step toward ensuring their attainment of meaningful growth and personal efficacy. As professional educators, we owe them nothing less.

THE BRIDGE
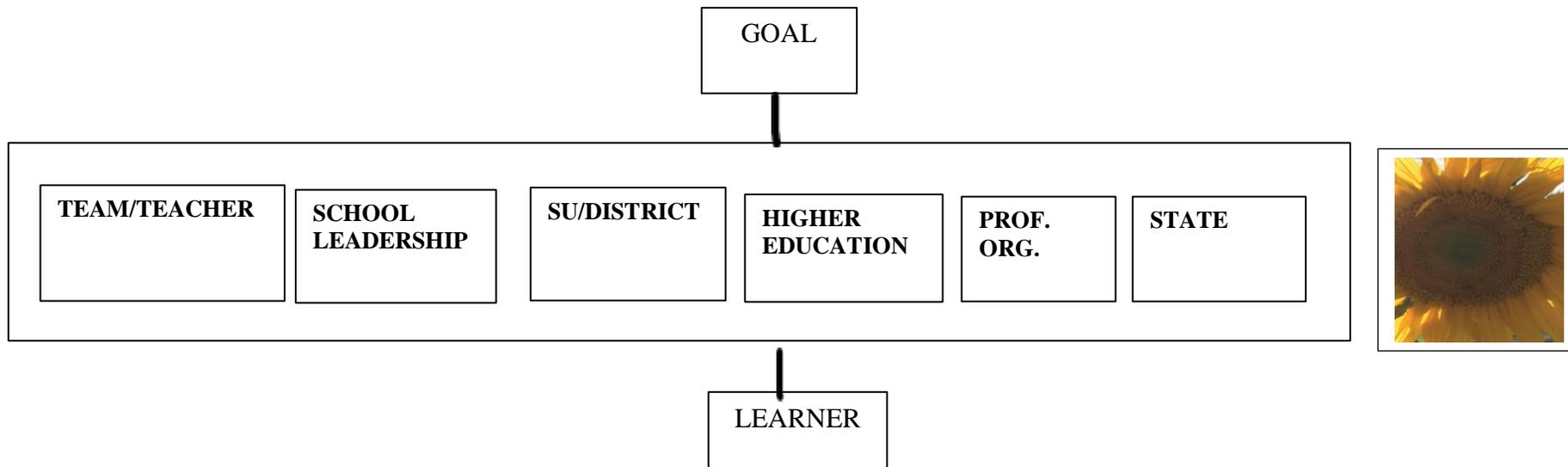
The above graphic illustrates how the following Matrix "bridges" the middle school goals to the roles and responsibilities of the various stakeholders. The Matrix outlines specific steps necessary to implement a coordinated and strategic plan to continually improve both academic and social success for all 10 to 15 year olds as they gain the skills needed to be lifelong learners in the 21st century. The best way to use the Matrix is to look at which of the ten goals you wish to assess or work on. Find your stakeholder group and begin to examine the recommendations. You also may want to review the other groups that you work with directly. Teachers should study the learner and school columns, while Administrators might examine the teacher and district columns. The authors of this unique resource would like for you to utilize it as a living document from which to build. We know that full implementation of research-based middle level practices can be challenging and committed processes. We also know that many schools are at different places in terms of best practices. Finally, we recognize that in order to create the middle level school environments that best serve Vermont students, it will take all the stakeholders working together to bring their unique voices and expertise to the table.

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It is imperative that Learners:
- Know how to advocate for personal learning;
- Engage in self-reflection for personal achievement, and improved understanding of self as person and learner;
- Explore cultural, social, linguistic, gender, and ethnic identity;
- Understand the various types of learning styles profiles and how those styles characteristics impact learning; and
- Take responsibility for learning by demonstrating what is learned, why it is learned, and what constitutes success throughout all learning opportunities.
- Understand the significance of school learning as it applies to solving the genuine challenges of living.

To support this outcome, this page and the following pages provide guidelines for Teams/Teachers, School Leadership, SU/Districts, Higher Education, Professional Organizations, and the State:

MIDDLE LEVEL GOAL I

All middle level learners engage in coordinated curricula that are standards-based, challenging, authentic, and focused on the acquisition of content and conceptual knowledge so that students can demonstrate proficiency and transferable skills and can develop a commitment to using knowledge and skills towards advancing the common good in their communities and in the world.

Teams/Teachers	School Leadership	SU/District	Higher Education	Professional Organizations	State
1. Plan, implement, and assess curricula for a wide range of diverse learners. 2. Collaborate with peers in teams and professional learning communities to develop curriculum. 3. Actively involve students in curriculum development, implementation, and assessment. 4. Use backwards design and varied instruction to ensure alignment of objectives and activities. 5. Promote constructivist learning investigations in which students learn through inquiry, research, and experience. 6. Use a variety of student data to make teacher/team decisions. 7. Participate in professional development throughout the year.	1. Hire teachers knowledgeable about proficiencies and trained specifically in middle level curriculum development. 2. Apply supervision and evaluation tools that reflect teachers' use of proficiencies with an understanding of how young adolescents learn. 3. Promote and support teachers' professional development throughout the year. 4. Build a school-wide commitment to collaborative teaching by providing time for collaboration on integrated curriculum.	1. Design integrated curricula opportunities that are conceptual, challenging, and flexible. 2. Align conceptual proficiencies and curricula to the comprehensive local assessment plan. 3. Engage district personnel, local boards of education, and superintendents in learning experiences that increase their knowledge of young adolescents' developmental and academic needs. 4. Require vertical alignment of curricula among elementary, middle, and secondary schools.	1. Design preparation programs to address integrated, interdisciplinary, proficiency–based curricula that incorporate skills and knowledge. 2. Model appropriate curricula in teacher education classrooms to include current learning contexts. 3. Provide professional development to schools on appropriate middle level curricula. 4. Conduct research on the effectiveness of middle level approaches to curriculum. 5. Disseminate research-based practices through publication and presentation. 6. Collaborate with middle level partners.	1. Provide professional development and resources that are responsive to middle level curriculum and practices. 2. Develop partnerships with schools to promote awareness of available programs and resources. 3. Collaborate with middle level partners. 4. Promote schools identified as "best practice sites" for experiencing effective middle level learning environments in action.	1. Provide support and embedded professional development models on instruction and assessment. 2. Coordinate school support/improvement efforts of the Agency of Education to support schools that teach young adolescents.

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MIDDLE LEVEL GOAL II

Instruction is effective, engaging, and personalized to meet individual student learning goals along their path to graduation.

Teams/Teachers	School Leadership	SU/District	Higher Education	Professional Organizations	State
1. Implement varied instructional strategies that challenge the wide range of diverse students and engage each student while using formative assessment to adjust instruction. 2. Use common planning time to share proven instructional strategies and to develop individualized strategies to support all students. 3. Incorporate students' concerns, opinions, and perspectives, and align with learning goals and outcomes. 4. Participate and help facilitate professional learning communities that incorporate varied instruction, integrated, and student-centered learning.	1. Create professional learning communities that incorporate varied instruction and student-centered learning. 2. Implement a system of personalizing education for all students. 3. Hire teachers who know, understand, and engage young adolescents in the learning process.	1. Provide and promote professional learning communities that incorporate varied instruction and student-centered learning. 2. Develop a system for implementation of personalized learning for all students. 3. Provide professional development opportunities that address varied instruction and personalized learning environments.	1. Design programs to address middle level appropriate instruction. 2. Model appropriate instructional strategies that are student-centered – prepare preservice teachers to meet the needs of all learners by strengthening their instruction in special education, equity literacy, and trauma support. 3. Provide professional development to schools in engaging, personalized, and varied instruction. 4. Conduct research on the effectiveness of varied and engaging instruction. 5. Disseminate research-based practices through publication and presentation.	1. Provide professional development that will help middle level administrators and teachers use data to inform instruction and refine practice. 2. Provide professional development to schools in engaging and differentiating instruction. 3. Help identify "best practice sites" and promote these sites so educators can see quality instruction in action.	1. Provide embedded professional development that will help middle level administrators and teachers use data to inform instruction and refine practice to address student learning needs. 2. Coordinate school support/improvement efforts of the Agency of Education to support schools that teach young adolescents regardless of the school grade configurations. 3. Ensure that school reform initiatives have a specific focus on young adolescents' needs.

MIDDLE LEVEL GOAL III

Student learning growth is measured by a balance of assessment types that inform curricular and instructional decisions to support students' educational pathways.

Team/Teachers	School Leadership	SU/District	Higher Education	Professional Organizations	State
1. Understand how formative assessment can be used to improve student learning. 2. Actively involve students in their own assessment. 3. Implement assessment strategies that challenge and engage each student while using formative assessment to adjust instruction to meet student learning needs. 4. Use classroom assessments and other data to measure and improve students' progress. 5. Design student-led conferences that assess the goals of personalized learning.	1. Support a collaboration model that develops common assessments and school-wide rubrics. 2. Support the training and implementation of formative assessment techniques and strategies. 3. Collect and create a school-wide process that uses data to improve instruction. 4. Create a system of local competency-based assessments and data collection to assist in developing and monitoring instructional strategies. 5. Provide time and support for the development and implementation of student-led conferences.	1. Develop a comprehensive local assessment plan. 2. Create a system that teachers and leadership can access to record and analyze student data. 3. Support a balanced range of assessments that emphasize formative as well as summative feedback embedded into everyday learning. 4. Provide opportunities for all stakeholders based on assessment data. 5. Participate in professional development opportunities which model and offer strategies for actively involving students in their educational improvement.	1. Design programs to address middle-level appropriate assessment. 2. Model appropriate assessment that is student centered and reflective of skills and knowledge. 3. Provide professional development to schools that is relevant and authentic. 4. Conduct research on the effectiveness of various assessment techniques. 5. Disseminate research-based practices through publication and presentation.	1. Provide professional development for the use of assessment that aligns with middle level curriculum and is responsive to student learning. 2. Provide professional development to schools that is relevant and authentic. 3. Align professional development opportunities with middle level practice. 4. Provide professional development opportunities that model and offer strategies for actively involving students in educational improvement. 5. Promote schools identified as 'best practice sites' for experiencing effective middle level learning environments in action.	1. Support embedded professional development for the use of assessment aligned with current knowledge and responsive to student learning. 2. Coordinate school support/improvement efforts of the AOE to support schools that teach young adolescents regardless of the school grade configurations. 3. Ensure that school reform initiatives include understanding young adolescents' needs. 4. Identify "best practice sites" so educators can experience effective middle level learning environments in action.

MIDDLE LEVEL GOAL IV

Organizational structures and a school culture of reasonable and personalized academic expectations enable all middle level students and educators to grow and learn.

Teams/Teachers	School Leadership	SU/District	Higher Education	Professional Organizations	State
1. Participate in professional development that supports organizational structures, such as integrated curriculum, flexible grouping, flexible scheduling, personalized learning, and interdisciplinary teaming. 2. Operate in an interdisciplinary teaming structure that meets regularly to discuss curriculum, instruction, and assessment in order to ensure student success. 3. Implement structures and systems that support a culture of high expectations for all. 4. Allow and encourage students to participate in the design and implementation of the organizational structure and culture of the team.	1. Create a safe, respectful, equitable, and healthy school culture that promotes personalized achievement for all. 2. Craft a vision and strategic plan that promotes effective teaching practices and personalized student achievement aligned with district policy. 3. Provide professional development and support and implementation of effective middle level structures, including flexible grouping and scheduling and interdisciplinary teaming. 4. Provide team teachers with consistent common planning time multiple times per week. 5. Provide teachers with multiple decision-making opportunities ??? maximum control over team practices efforts.	1. Design and coordinate transition practices that support students as they enter and exit the structures and cultures of a middle school. 2. Develop a vision and mission statement that is aligned to district policy, sets a clear course for school growth and supports effective teaching practices and personalized achievement. 3. Support professional development initiatives and opportunities that reflect effective teaching practices around organizational structures and culture.	1. Work in partnership with schools to model organizational structures and healthy, equitable, culturally-responsive school climates and provide professional development in these areas. 2. Educate pre-service and in-service teachers in the creation and support of appropriate organizational structures. 3. Disseminate research-based practices through publication and presentation.	1. Provide professional development that will help leadership teams and teachers to successfully develop effective organizational structures. 2. Provide professional development to schools to effectively utilize recommended organizational structures. 3. Identify "best practice sites" so educators can see effective organizational structures in action. 4. Advocate for effective middle level practices. 5. Promote schools identified as "best practice sites" for experiencing effective middle level learning environments in action.	1. Educate schools and districts on the implementation of middle level best practices within the various sizes and grade configurations in Vermont schools. 2. Coordinate school support/improvement efforts of the AOE to support schools that teach young adolescents regardless of school grade configurations. 3. Ensure that school reform initiatives include understanding of the needs of young adolescents. 4. Identify "best practice sites" so educators can experience effective middle level learning environments in action.

MIDDLE LEVEL GOAL V

Relationships for learning create a climate of intellectual development and a caring community that includes having an adult advocate for each student.

Teams/Teachers	School Leadership	SU/District	Higher Education	Professional Organizations	State
1. Implement strategies that support student intellectual, social, and emotional development through teacher-based guidance, advisory, and/or learning communities. 2. Model collaboration by sharing resources and ideas with colleagues and students. 3. Maintain positive relationships with colleagues and students by employing effective communication skills and problem-solving strategies. 4. Practice caring and ethical advising and teaching.	1. Develop a school-wide advocacy model with an appropriately low student/teacher ratio and adequate professional development to ensure supportive relationships. 2. Build interdisciplinary teams that maintain the same students and teachers for two or more years. 3. Provide on-going professional development and training on advisories. 4. Provide life skills and counseling/support programs for students.	1. Advise schools to develop a schedule that provides common planning time and professional development for student advocacy. 2. Promote a collaborative decision-making process throughout the district by including teachers and students. 3. Allow multi-year teams to be formed that remain consistent year to year.	1. Instruct and model caring and ethical teaching strategies that support student intellectual, socioemotional, moral, and physical development, including teaming, advisory, and learning communities. 2. Create opportunities for teacher candidates to mentor middle grade learners. 3. Provide instruction on how to develop appropriate caring environments for student learning.	1. Provide professional development that will help leadership teams and teachers successfully develop appropriate climates for student learning. 2. Identify "best practice sites" so educators can see examples of effective middle level learning climates in action. 3. Advocate for effective middle level practices that promote the development of caring student-teacher relationships. 4. Promote schools identified as "best practice sites" for experiencing effective and equitable middle level learning environments in action.	1. Coordinate school support/improvement efforts of the AOE to support schools that teach young adolescents regardless of the school grade configurations. 2. Ensure that school reform initiatives have a specific focus on young adolescents' needs. 3. Identify "best practice sites" so that educators can experience effective middle level learning environments in action.

MIDDLE LEVEL GOAL VI

Ongoing family and community partnerships provide a supportive and enriched learning environment for each middle level student.

Teams/Teachers	School Leadership	SU/District	Higher Education	Professional Organizations	State
1. Include students as active participants in parent/teacher conferences. 2. Utilize secondary-school students as mentors to middle grades students. 3. Develop a process and opportunities that involve parents/guardians and community members supporting students and the school on a regular basis. 4. Include in the classroom curriculum career topics, service learning, and community service opportunities. 5. Institute a daily/weekly means of communication between the classroom and the home. 6. Utilize technology to increase opportunities for parent/teacher communication. 7. Develop and promote career awareness and entrepreneurship activities through partnerships.	1. Engage students and families as partners in education and encourage ongoing family participation in school events. 2. Utilize communication mechanisms to inform families of the availability of school services and promote the use of these services. 3. Ensure consistent and well developed initiatives to assist young adolescents and their families as they transition in and out of middle school. 4. Build partnerships within the larger community that celebrate achievement and effort for all students. 5. Develop and promote career awareness and entrepreneurship activities through partnerships. 6. Establish connections with the business community to promote apprenticeships, community-based learning, and service learning.	1. Involve families and the community in the development of effective middle level practices. 2. Develop initiatives to assist young adolescents and their families as they transition in and out of middle school regardless of grade configuration. 3. Provide middle level educators with professional development that specifically helps them build family and community partnerships. 4. Mobilize communities to ensure that all students and their families have access to technology critical for up-to-date communications and commerce. 5. Foster community support for career exploration and creating meaningful service-learning opportunities.	1. Model and provide instruction that engages and facilitates community partnerships beyond the classroom. 2. Design programs that address the importance of families as partners in student learning. 3. Conduct research on the benefits and effectiveness of service learning. 4. Develop and promote career awareness and entrepreneurship activities.	1. Align programs that address the importance of families and communities as partners in student learning. 2. Provide professional development on the effective implementation of family/community partnerships and the relationship to student learning. 3. Advocate for effective middle level practices. 4. Promote career awareness and entrepreneurship activities. 5. Identify and promote "best practice sites" so educators can see effective community relationships and service-learning opportunities in action.	1. Support initiatives that bring parents and community members together to improve educational opportunities for middle level students. 2. Support community-based learning (e.g. service learning; place-based education, and career exploration) for middle level students. 3. Coordinate school improvement efforts of the AOE to incorporate effective middle level best practices. 4. Identify "best practice sites" so educators can experience effective middle level learning environments in action.

MIDDLE LEVEL GOAL VII

A supportive, safe, and healthy learning environment advances learning and promotes overall student and educator wellbeing.

Teams/Teachers	School Leadership	SU/District	Higher Education	Professional Organizations	State
1. Collaborate with students to develop norms for safe and respectful learning for all. 2. Implement best practices that promote clear and consistent expectations around positive student behavior. 3. Keep classrooms clean and inviting. 4. Participate in professional development that promotes best practices around safe and healthy learning environments. 5. Model appropriate social/emotional behaviors for all students in all situations, particularly when conflict occurs. 6. Develop and implement restorative practices to promote and encourage student ownership of their behavior.	1. Develop and implement policies and procedures around building a safe and healthy learning environment. 2. Engage all members of the learning community, especially students, in decisions to promote a climate of inclusion and professionalism. 3. Create a system that encourages faculty and staff feedback and positive voice,and use feedback to guide decision making. 4. Provide professional development opportunities for teachers on restorative practices and policies. 5. Collect data on student behaviors and attendance to assess the success of teachers' abilities to create safe havens for learning.	1. Develop and implement policies that discourage injustices. 2. Budget funds and seek grants to keep buildings safe, healthy, and clean. 3. include all members of the learning community in major decisions to promote a climate of inclusion and professionalism. 4. Adopt supervision and evaluation models that outline best practices and are clearly and consistently implemented. 5. Foster connections between community health agencies and schools. 6. Provide resources for social/emotional learning, equity literacy, restorative practices, and trauma-informed instruction.	1. Maintain high standards within the program for teacher candidates' character and professional attributes. 2. Provide in-service and preservice teachers with research and data on incidents of unfair treatment of Black Indigenous Students of Color in schools. 3. Include clear and multiple gates for progressing toward degree completion. 4. Where necessary, counsel teacher candidates out of the field.	1. Provide professional development that will help leadership teams and teachers develop inviting, supportive, safe, and healthy environments for improved student learning. 2. Identify and promote "best practice sites" so educators can experience safe, supportive, and healthy learning environments in action. 3. Advocate for effective middle level practices.	1. Coordinate initiatives with stakeholders that support and promote healthy and safe learning environments. 2. Create policy/procedures that reflect expectations that schools will promote student advocacy and voice. 3. Coordinate school support/improvement efforts of the AOE to support schools that teach young adolescents regardless of school grade configuration. 4. Ensure that school reform initiatives have a specific focus on young adolescents' needs. 5. Collect and provide data on incidents of unfair treatment of Black Indigenous Students of Color in Vermont schools. 6. Identify "best practice sites" so educators can experience effective middle level learning.

MIDDLE LEVEL GOAL VIII

A democratic system of continual collaboration by all stakeholders allows for authentic student voice and a shared vision to guide decisions.

Teams/Teachers	School Leadership	SU/District	Higher Education	Professional Organizations	State
1. Take an active role in the governance and change process within the school. 2. Offer students individual choices whenever possible for research, activities, and demonstration of student learning. 3. Involve students in developing classroom and team tools, such as rubrics, class norms, and curricula. 4. Serve as facilitators and coaches to learners. 5. Participate in professional development to support authentic student voice.	1. Facilitate professional learning communities for collaborative decision-making. 2. Include student voice in all aspects of decision-making related to student learning.	1. Understand and promote professional learning communities to improve all aspects of student learning. 2. Allow schools to use a professional learning community model to ensure teacher voice in decision making. 3. Include educators, families, community members, and students on committees dealing with SU issues.	1. Design programs that address the role of democratic schooling and authentic student and teacher voice in engagement. 2. Model democratic learning environments and the engagement of student voice. 3. Provide professional development on democratic schooling. 4. Conduct research on effectiveness of democratic schooling. 5. Disseminate research-based practices through publication and presentation.	1. Provide professional development to schools on democratic schooling. 2. Bring multiple stakeholder groups (e.g. students, educators, state board members) together to semi-annually review actions relative to the implementation of these middle level goals and make recommendations for change. 3. Advocate for effective middle level practices. 4. Promote schools identified as "best practice sites" for experiencing effective middle level learning environments in action.	1. Create policy/procedures that reflect expectations that schools will promote student advocacy and voice. 2. Coordinate school support/improvement efforts of the AOE to support schools that teach young adolescents regardless of the school grade configuration. 3. Ensure that school reform initiatives have a specific focus on young adolescents' needs. 4. Identify "best practice sites" so educators can experience effective middle level learning environments in action.

MIDDLE LEVEL GOAL IX

The recruitment, hiring, and preparation of teachers and administrators is based on knowledge of the developmental characteristics of young adolescents, strong content knowledge, and the ability to use research-based instructional strategies and assessment practices appropriate for middle level students.

Teams/Teachers	School Leadership	SU/District	Higher Education	Professional Organizations	State
1. Complete requirements for a middle level endorsement. 2. Seek opportunities and take part in ongoing professional development related to young adolescents' developmental growth processes and effective middle level practices.	1. Support current teachers to complete requirements for middle level endorsement. 2. Hire educators who hold middle level endorsements or demonstrate an understanding of middle level instructional best practices, assessment, and development of skills and knowledge. 3. Work with state and regional agencies to increase training and expertise of staff, provide a schedule that is conducive to a developmentally appropriate middle level program, and create a system of local assessment and data collection to assist in developing and monitoring instructional tactics supported by research. 4. Institute on-site professional learning communities to provide relevant ongoing professional development in best middle level practices. 4. Develop a transactional school leadership philosophy and actions that provide and include teachers with significant decision-making opportunities on school practices, policies, and structures.	1. Hire middle level teachers and administrators who understand young adolescent development and who can implement middle level best practices. 2. Provide and fund professional development and graduate courses for educators to work toward middle grades teaching endorsement, on both content knowledge and developmentally appropriate teaching practices to address the needs of diverse learners. 3. Provide and fund professional development and graduate courses for middle level administrators on effective middle grades leadership. 4. Work with state and regional agencies to assess current middle level programs at the district level.	1. Hire middle level professionals who understand young adolescent development and who can implement middle level best practices. 2. Provide and fund professional development and graduate courses for educators to work toward middle level endorsement, on both content knowledge and developmentally appropriate teaching practices to address the needs of diverse learners. 3. Provide and fund professional development and graduate courses for middle level administrators on effective middle grades leadership. 4. Work with state and regional agencies to assess current middle level programs at the district level.	1. Provide ongoing relevant professional development so that educators can maintain and improve their skills. 2. Work with partners to build a middle level leadership training program that focuses on research-based best practices and models effective leadership practices for middle level education. 3. Advocate for effective middle level practices. 4. Promote schools identified as "best practice sites" for experiencing effective middle level learning environments.	1. Support teachers of young adolescents to be specifically prepared for that age group through the provision of middle grades endorsements in the content areas of ELA, Math, Science, and Social Studies for grades 5-9. 2. Provide standards for teacher preparation programs to ensure that candidates have the necessary pedagogical knowledge in their endorsement area to design and implement learning experiences that are research-based and promote each learner's achievement of content. 3. Provide standards for teacher preparation programs to ensure that candidates understand how learners grow and develop; recognize learner differences in cognitive, linguistic, social, emotional, and physical areas; and design and implement developmentally appropriate and relevant learning experiences

MIDDLE LEVEL GOAL X

Research is generated, disseminated, and applied to identify and implement practices leading to continual student learning and progressing academic achievement at the middle level.

Teams/Teachers	School Leadership	SU/District	Higher Education	Professional Organizations	State
1. In professional learning communities – identify, read, and use current research in middle level education to improve practice. 2. Serve as sites for gathering of research data on effective middle level practices. 3. Collect, maintain, and utilize classroom and team data to improve student, classroom, and school practices. 4. Engage in learning communities to review current research and articles related to middle level best practices.	1. Use multiple measures (such as common local assessments) to monitor student progress. 2. Provide and support time for teams to research, administer, collect, and analyze student data and a cohesive system for teachers to make informed decisions around their middle level instructional practices. 3. Provide and support the practice of collaboratively reading and discussing current articles and research related to best middle level practices.	1. Develop professional partnerships with post-secondary institutions to assist administrators in implementing research-based best practices in middle level education. 2. Know and understand the needs of the students and community in order to align and implement research-based best practices with effective, middle level instruction and learning opportunities. 3. Collect data around middle level education as it relates to best practices and student achievement.	1. Lead the planning and implementation of research geared at Vermont schooling practices and student outcomes. 2. Seek grant funding to support above endeavors. 3. Disseminate research-based practices through publication and presentation on state and national levels. 4. Collaborate with stakeholders to develop a Vermont-based body of evidence around best practices for middle level effectiveness (intellectual, affective, and physical).	1. Disseminate research-based practices through publication, presentation, and via technology on a state and regional level. 2. Create and sustain networks to disseminate and discuss current research that relates to middle level education. 3. Advocate for effective middle level practices. 4. Seek grant funding to support above endeavors. 5. Collaborate with stakeholders to develop a Vermont-based body of evidence around best practices for middle level effectiveness (intellectual, affective, and physical). 6. Promote schools identified as "best practice sites" for experiencing effective middle level learning environments.	1. Encourage districts to support middle level practices that have a sufficient research base demonstrating improved student achievement. 2. Support multi-stakeholder, state level professional learning communities to examine best practices and research. 3. Identify "best practice sites" so educators can experience effective middle level learning environments in action. 4. Seek frequent data on effective middle level practices and policies to disseminate to schools and use as guidance for developing AOE guidelines for middle level education.

RESOURCES SPECIFIC TO MIDDLE LEVEL PRACTICE IN VERMONT

Association for Middle Level Education

Middle Grades Collaborative

New England League of Middle Schools

Vermont Agency of Education

- VT-AOE School Reports
- ACT 46 – School Consolidation
- ACT 77 – Personalization
- Every Student Succeeds Act
- The Transferable Skills

Vermont Association for Middle Level Education

OTHER KEY RESOURCES

Equity Literacy Framework

Glossary of Bias Terms

PLP Pathways

Tarrant Institute for Innovative Education

The Common Sense Census: Media Use By Tweens and Teens

The Global Goals

UP for Learning

Vermont Principals Association

Vita-Learn

VT-ASCD

VTLFF Rubrics for Youth/Adult Partnerships

2017 Vermont Youth Risk Behavior Survey Data

RECOMMENDED/ENCOURAGED TEXTS

A Teacher's Journey to Adolescence (McEnerny, 2018);

Coming of Age Ethnically: Teaching Young Adolescents of Color. Theory Into Practice, 33(3), 149-155. **ERIC Number:** EJ497050;

Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment: Intersecting New Needs and New Approaches (2020, edited by S. L. Stacki, M. M. Caskey, & S. B. Mertens)

Equity & Cultural Responsiveness in the Middle Grades (Brinegar, Harrison, & Hurd Eds., 2019)

International Handbook of Middle Level Education Theory, Research, and Policy

Middle School Journal - AMLE

National Geographic Magazine (Theme issue on "Gender Revolution, January 2017

Personalized Learning in the Middle Grades (Bishop, Downes, & Farber, 2019);

Research to Guide Practice in Middle Grades Education (Ed. by Andrews, 2013);

The Adolescent: Development, Relationships, and Culture (Dolgin, 2018, 14th ed.)

The Common Sense Census: Media Use By Tweens and Teens (Rideout & Robb, 2019)

The Encyclopedia of Middle Grades Education (2nd ed., edited by Mertens, Caskey, and Flowers, 2016);

The Teenage Brain: A Neuroscientist's Survival Guide to Raising Adolescents and Young Adults (Jensen, 2015);

This I Believe - An Educator's Affirmation Statement

This We Believe: Keys to Educating Young Adolescents

This We Believe Study Guide

 (2020, edited by D. C. Virtue)

We Got This. Equity, Access, and the Quest to Be Who Our Students Need Us to Be (Minor, 2019)

What Every Middle School Teacher Should Know (Brown & Knowles, 2014, 3rd ed.)

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