

Making Middle Grades Work Initiative (MMGW)

HSTW SW Ohio began its work with middle schools in 2000. The school improvement model utilized is the Southern Regional Education Board's Making Middle Grades Work initiative. Only middle schools that serve as a feeder school to a High Schools That Work high school site are eligible for participation.

The Southern Regional Education Board's middle grades initiative is designed to help states, districts, and schools look at what they expect, what they teach, and how they teach young adolescents to prepare for success in further education. Too many students leave the middle grades unprepared to take advantage of all that high school can offer and unable to be successful in career opportunities after high school.

Making Middle Grades Work: A Comprehensive Improvement Framework

The *MMGW* Key Practices provide direction and meaning to comprehensive improvement for increased student achievement.

- **Aligned academic core:** Provide rigorous content in all middle grades academic core classes, and align core classes with performance standards that clearly state what students must know, understand and be able to do to succeed in college-preparatory English, mathematics and science courses in high school. Enroll middle grades students in core curricula that accelerate their learning, challenge them and appeal to their interests.

- **Engaging classroom practices:** Design classroom practices and instructional strategies to engage students intellectually, emotionally, behaviorally, and socially in learning rigorous academic content. Young adolescents need varied learning activities linked to challenging academic content and opportunities to use newly acquired skills and concepts in hands-on, real-world applications so that they can understand and explain their interests, talents and aspirations.

- **Literacy across the curriculum:** Embed reading and writing standards and strategies for learning into all courses to advance academic and reading achievement and to help

students become independent learners. Provide reading instruction in all academic curricula through grade eight and utilize research-based literacy strategies across content areas.

- **High expectations and a system of extra help and time:** Hold students to grade-level standards aligned to readiness standards for high school, college and careers. Organize time and resources to ensure students receive the extra help needed to meet high standards and expectations. Middle grades students learn in different ways and at different rates, and some will need more time and help to meet more grade-level standards. The complete middle grades curriculum should be focused on accelerating achievement for *all* students.

- **Intervention program for at-risk students:** Identify at-risk students in grades six, seven and eight who need accelerated instruction in mathematics, language arts and reading to be prepared for college-preparatory high school course work, and implement strategies and programs that target their needs.

- **Comprehensive system of guidance and advisement that involves parents:** Engage teachers, students and parents in a comprehensive guidance and advisement system — including academic advisement, career exploration and educational planning — that leads to a successful transition to high school. Involve parents in the school improvement process by informing them of the school's mission and assisting them to understand the higher standards of performance now required of middle grades students and to support students to make greater effort and work hard.

- **Teachers working together:** Provide teams of teachers with time and support to work together — within and across disciplines — to integrate mathematics and literacy concepts across the curriculum, analyze teacher assignments and student work, and help students succeed in challenging academic and exploratory studies.

- **Quality professional development to support teachers:** Provide teachers with extensive, ongoing professional development on research-based instructional practices aligned with the school's mission and school improvement plan. Today's teachers must acknowledge that student failure is no longer acceptable and that they need extensive content knowledge coupled with effective, research-based teaching strategies to incorporate rigorous, engaging assignments and activities, and formative and summative assessments into their instruction..

- **Use of technology for learning:** Middle grades classrooms in all subject areas should view technology as a tool for learning. Schools can support teachers to plan units of instruction that allow students to conduct research, write papers, communicate globally, prepare presentations using electronic tools and resources, and explore the use of technology to address an array of contemporary problems and projects linked to a range of broad career

areas.

Continuous improvement through strong leadership: Develop strong instructional leaders who take an active role in engaging teachers in continuous improvement of school and classroom practices. Middle grades schools need effective principals who encourage, support and actively participate with teachers in planning and implementing research-based school improvement strategies. Schools must continuously gather and use data on student, school and teacher performance to review and revise school and classroom practices as needed.

MMGW Goals & Outcomes

The mission of *Making Middle Grades Work (MMGW)* is to create a culture of high expectations and continuous improvement that prepares middle grades students for challenging high school studies . To

achieve this mission,

MMGW

has set several goals for continuous improvement:

- Increase the percentages of students who meet the *MMGW* performance goals in reading, mathematics and science on the Middle Grades Assessment to 85 percent.
- Increase the percentages of all students who perform at the Proficient level to at least 50 percent in reading, mathematics and science, as measured by the Middle Grades Assessment.
- Increase annually the percentage of students entering high school prepared to succeed in college-preparatory courses.
 - Increase the percentage of students who transition into grade nine and complete high school four years later to 90 percent.
 - Reduce the failure rate in grade nine by ensuring middle grades students receive the preparation they need to succeed in rigorous ninth-grade courses such as Algebra I and college-preparatory English and science.
 - Advance state and local policies and leadership initiatives that sustain a continuous school improvement effort.

***MMGW* Conditions for Accelerating Student Achievement**

MMGW believes that everyone — teachers, school leaders, district leaders, and local and state leaders — must work together to create the conditions in which student achievement, graduation rates and school culture can improve.

- **A clear, functional mission statement:** A clear, functional mission statement defines the purpose of the middle grades school: to prepare students for rigorous, college-preparatory courses in high school.

- **Commitment:** State partners, the school board, district leaders and the community are fully committed to implementing the comprehensive *MMGW* improvement framework.

- **Planning for continuous improvement:** District and school leaders create an organizational structure and process that ensures continuous involvement with the faculty on what to teach; how to teach it; what students are expected to learn; how to assess what they have learned; and how district and school leaders support each other, the students, students' parents and the community.

- **Curriculum:** District leaders support and encourage a curriculum review that aligns all curricula to state, national and international standards. Performance standards define the quantity and quality of work expected at each grade level throughout the system.

- **Support for professional development:** District and school leaders provide leadership and financial support for professional development directly connected to academic standards and student achievement. Professional development includes support for teachers as they develop the capacity to implement teaching practices.

- **Teacher preparation:** The local school board helps teachers without a major in their subject area upgrade their content knowledge through planned and approved learning experiences. The school board strives to hire new teachers with subject-area majors that match their teaching assignments