

DRAFT



MIDDLE GRADES DESIGN TEAM
Report to the Superintendent
January, 2006

DRAFT

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I. Charge to the Team

In September 2005, the Assistant Superintendent for Middle and High Schools, Dr. Pamela Nash, was given the charge by the Superintendent to establish a design team to examine the current middle school instructional program. The Middle Grades Design Team was formed, and was comprised of the eleven middle school principals, as well as key practitioners in the District.

A District goal for its middle schools is to ensure that *all middle grade students have an equal opportunity to gain the academic and interpersonal skills necessary to be prepared for the rigor of ninth grade*. In order to more effectively address this goal, the charge to the team was to ***design a consistent 6th-8th grade educational experience across the middle grades of the Madison Metropolitan School District that addresses areas of learning, engagement, and relationships***. Through its study, the team recognized that there is great variability among its middle schools. It quickly became clear that one of the biggest challenges for the team would be how to ensure a consistent, standards-based educational program across all middle schools, while still maintaining the unique character of each school.

As the team developed recommendations to address the areas consistent with the charge, it also became clear that there were additional topics to discuss that could result in more effective middle school programs across the district. The team suggested that these creative and visionary possibilities to better prepare students for the future could result in a second phase of the Design Team's work. The primary focus of this first phase of the Design Team work was to address areas of consistency that would ensure a high quality program in all middle schools.

What follows in this report are the Design Team's work that includes:

- Information: Department of Public Instruction State Statutes and Clarification between Exploratories and Electives
- Identification of Issues
- Recommendations
- Budget Implications
- Overview of the Work of the Design Team
- Summaries of the Data Collected
- Summaries of the Design Team's Sub-committees
- Areas to Address in the Future
- Appendix

II. The Team

Assistant Superintendent: Pamela Nash

Middle School Principals: Gail Anderson, John Burmaster, Pat Delmore, Nancy Evans, Joe Gothard, Mary Kelley, Colleen Lodholz, Anne Nolan, Hank Schmelz, Karen Seno, Ann Yehle

English as a Second Language/Bilingual: Ruthann Lewis

Madison Schools Community Recreation: Julie Koenke

Ninth Grade Counselors: John Evenson, Phil Hubble, Larry Nash

Special Education: Scott Zimmerman

Student Services: Ellen Chybowski

Teaching and Learning: Faye Hilgart, Julie Palkowski, Mary Ramberg

Facilitator: Cathy Caro-Bruce

III. State Statutes

The Middle Grades Design Team recognized that its proposals had to be in compliance with the Wisconsin State Statutes for middle schools. Below is a summary chart of the *minimal* standards for all middle schools. The original document is in the appendix P4-P6 or can be found at <http://dpi.wi.gov/cal/curriculum.html>.

	GIVENS	FLEXIBILITY	COMMENTS
Reading	Regular instruction, each week, entire year	Number of minutes	Separate course in Reading not required; recommended to be integrated into language arts curriculum
Language Arts	Regular instruction, each week, entire year	Number of minutes	
Social Studies	Regular instruction, each week, entire year	Number of minutes	Grades K-8, two grades must teach curriculum in Native American history
Mathematics	Regular instruction, each week, entire year	Number of minutes	
Science	Regular instruction, each week, entire year	Number of minutes	
World Languages	Grades 7/8: Regular instruction	Could be blocks of time	Access must be provided; students not required to take course
Career Exploration	Grades 6-8: One semester course or equivalent; total of 90 hours	Can be a separate course or infused in others	
Health	Each week for the entire school year	May do the equivalent time, i.e. block that totals 36 class periods for 9 weeks	Grade 6: Each week or equivalent; grades 7-8: may be offered as required course, elective, or health units integrated in other disciplines
Physical Education	None		Schedule accordingly in order to meet standards
Art	Grade 6: Each week for entire year or equivalent; grades 7/8: must be available	7 th and 8 th – optional; could have as a block or integrated with another class if provided by licensed teacher	Grade 6: Must be provided by licensed art instructor; may be a block of 36 days or 8 weeks of daily instruction
Music	Grade 6: Each week for the entire year; grades 7/8: general music, vocal, and instrumental must be available	7 th and 8 th optional;	May be a block of 36 days;

IV. Clarification between Exploratories and Electives

Team members believed that it was important to clarify the difference between Exploratories and Electives, as many use the terms interchangeably when discussing middle schools.

Exploratories should be based on exploration, which is the conscious effort of a school to provide opportunities for students to discover in a fairly threat-free setting, their strengths, weaknesses, interests, and aspirations. Exploratory activities should be short in duration, provide opportunities for students to participate actively, hold students accountable for completing activities but not hold mastery as a criterion. Exploration is considered an essential component of the middle school model.

Electives, in contrast to exploratories, focus on building mastery over time. Courses are longer in nature and follow a scope and sequence of skill building versus exposure. Elective offerings are more traditional in nature and build on each other year to year.”

Definitions from Compton, M. F., & Hawn, H. C. (1993). Exploration: the total curriculum. Columbus, OH: National Middle School Association.

V. Identifying the Issues

What follows is a summary of findings from a comprehensive data collection process designed by the Data Committee to identify issues that needed to be addressed. The process included:

- Data Committee generated a data collection plan to better understand practices at all middle schools. *(See appendix P23-P25 for forms.)*
- Data Committee summarized findings from data collection for the Design Team.
- Design Team defined the issues in more depth, discussed why the issues currently existed, and possible actions/strategies to address the issues.

The following summary grids are a synthesis of the work of the team.

Data Committee Charge:

Collect and analyze data from a variety of sources, including achievement, attendance, behavior, GPA, scheduling, and other areas that will assist the Design Team as it identifies areas of strength and areas of concern.

MATHEMATICS

DPI Standards: Instruction each week for the entire school term in sufficient frequency and length to achieve the objectives and allocation of instructional time identified in the curriculum plans.

Issues/Questions	Findings
<ul style="list-style-type: none">■ What mathematics options exist at the middle and high school levels?■ How are students identified for acceleration?■ How is the curriculum differentiated for all students?■ Are inclusionary practices the norm for students with disabilities?■ Are students with disabilities provided with a rigorous curriculum?	<ul style="list-style-type: none">✓ Inconsistent process for identifying students for acceleration.✓ Inconsistent involvement of parents in the process for identifying students for acceleration.✓ Inconsistent course offerings for high-achieving students.✓ Inconsistent assignment of grade-level staff to teach high-achieving students.✓ All schools offer CMP and Algebra in grade 8.✓ All schools seek to identify high-achieving and potentially high-achieving students of color for accelerated coursework.✓ The length of study per week ranges from 225 to 450 minutes, with 225 minutes the most common instructional block.

MUSIC

DPI Standards:

Grade 6: Music required; instruction each week for the entire school term or the equivalent in sufficient frequency and length to achieve the objectives and allocation of instructional time identified in the curriculum plans.

Grades 7/8: Music must be provided, but students not required to take the course; instruction in sufficient frequency and length to achieve the objectives and allocation of instructional time identified in the curriculum plans; at least one course in each area (general music, vocal music, instrumental music) must be available to all students in each grade; general or non-performance music courses must be available in both grades.

Issues/Questions	Findings
<ul style="list-style-type: none">■ Courses (choices, frequency, requirements, etc.).■ Teacher certification.■ Resources (instruments, technology, sheet music, etc.).■ Relevance.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">✓ All schools require music in grade 6.✓ All schools provide music in grades 7 and 8.✓ All schools provide music instruction for the entire school term.✓ All schools offer orchestra, band, and vocal music.✓ Six schools offer music courses in addition to orchestra, band, and vocal music.✓ Music is an elective in most schools in grades 7 and 8.✓ The length of study per week varies from 105 to 180 minutes, with 150 minutes the most common instructional block.

ART

DPI Standards: Grade 6: Art required; instruction each week for the entire school term or the equivalent in sufficient frequency and length to achieve the objectives and allocation of instructional time identified in the curriculum plans.

Grades 7/8: Art must be provided, but students not required to take the course; instruction in sufficient frequency and length to achieve the objectives and allocation of instructional time identified in the curriculum plans.

Issues/Questions	Findings
<ul style="list-style-type: none">■ Courses (choices, frequency, requirements, etc.).■ Teacher certification.■ Resources (tools, technology, etc.).■ Relevance.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">✓ All schools require art in grade 6.✓ Ten schools provide art in grade 7 (of this number, 10 require it.)✓ Ten schools provide art in grade 8 (of this number, seven require it.)✓ One school offers two separate art courses at each grade level.✓ The length of study per week varies from 90 to 250 minutes, with 250 minutes the most common instructional block.✓ The length of study per year varies from six weeks to one semester, with one quarter the most common instructional block.

WORLD LANGUAGES

DPI Standards: Grade 6: Not required.

Grades 7/8: Must be provided, but students not required to take the course; instruction in sufficient frequency and length to achieve the objectives and time allocations of a written, sequential curriculum plan in foreign language.

Issues/Questions	Findings
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ What is the current state in middle schools? ■ What does research indicate about the importance of beginning world languages in the early grades and continuing through middle and high school? ■ Is it advisable for all students to take world language? ■ What should the world language curriculum look like (frequency, choice, length of study, grade levels, etc.)? ■ What is the goal and purpose of world language? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Four schools offer instruction in grade 6. ✓ All schools offer Spanish. ✓ Seven schools offer French. ✓ Two schools offer Italian. ✓ All schools allow students to choose the language of study. ✓ Six schools require world language in grade 7. ✓ Four schools require world language in grade 8. ✓ The length of study per week varies from 110 to 250 minutes, with 250 minutes the most common instructional block.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ What is best practice in world language? ■ Do the world languages offered in the middle grades align with high school offerings? ■ Should middle schools with a high concentration of native Spanish speakers offer a Spanish for Spanish speakers course? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ The length of study per year varies from one semester to yearlong in grade 7, with nine schools offering study yearlong (Spanish and French.) ✓ All world language offered in grade 8 is yearlong.

PHYSICAL EDUCATION

DPI Standards: Grade 6 Physical Education: A minimum of three times weekly.
Grades 7/8 Physical Education: All students shall participate in the instructional program.

Issues/Questions	Findings
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Lack of focus on fitness/health/physical education. ■ Lack of consistency and standardization. ■ Discrepancy in equipment and facilities. ■ Safety and behavior management. ■ Large class sizes. ■ Lack of instruction in health, AODA, and human growth and development. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ All schools require physical education in all grades. ✓ The length of participation per week varies from 90 to 132 minutes, with 125 minutes the most common instructional block.

HEALTH/FAMILY AND CONSUMER EDUCATION

DPI Standards: Grade 6 Health: Required each week for the entire school year or its equivalent.
 Grades 7/8 Health: Required course or elective course or instruction units integrated in other disciplines.

Issues/Questions	Findings
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Lack of focus on fitness/health/physical education. ■ Lack of consistency and standardization. ■ Discrepancy in equipment and facilities. ■ Safety and behavior management. ■ Large class sizes. ■ Lack of instruction in health, AODA, and human growth and development. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Nine schools offer health/family and consumer education in grade 6 (of this group, all require it.) ✓ Eight schools offer health/family and consumer education in grade 7 (of this group, seven require it.) ✓ Eight schools offer health/family and consumer education in grade 8 (of this group, six, require it.)
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ The length of study per week varies from 88 to 250 minutes, with 250 minutes the most common instructional block. ✓ The length of study per year varies from six weeks to one semester, with one quarter the most common instructional block. ✓ Teachers certified in health, physical education, and family and consumer education teach the courses.

CAREER EDUCATION

DPI Standards: Grades 5-8: Required; one-semester course or the equivalent in instructional time and course content; instruction must equal a semester or 90 instructional units; content can be a separate course, infused in other courses, or a combination.

Issues/Questions	Findings
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ How can schools effectively schedule 90 hours of career education annually for all students? ■ What are the key objectives and competencies in the discipline? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Two schools offer career education in grade 6. ✓ No schools offer career education in grade 7. ✓ Two schools offer career education in grade 8.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ What are the essential skills of the discipline? ■ How can the District identify, purchase, and implement a single career education portfolio and software package for all middle schools? ■ How much career education should be embedded in existing content areas? ■ How much career education should guidance counselors deliver? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ The course is taught by school counselors and staff certified in other areas.

INFORMATION AND TECHNOLOGY LITERACY

DPI Standards: Four categories or content standards specify what a student should know and be able to do; they include media and technology, information and inquiry, independent learning, and the learning community.

Issues/Questions	Findings
<ul style="list-style-type: none">■ Is instructional technology a necessary course of study?■ What are the essential skills within the discipline?■ Teacher certification.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">✓ Ten schools offer instructional technology in grade 6 (of this group, all require it.)✓ Ten schools offer instructional technology in grade 7 (of this group, nine require it.)✓ Ten schools offer instructional technology in grade 8 (of this group, five require it.)✓ The length of study per week varies from 110 to 250 minutes, with 250 minutes the most common instructional block.✓ The length of study per year varies from six weeks to yearlong, with one quarter the most common instructional block.

TECHNOLOGY EDUCATION

DPI Standards: Five categories or content standards specify what a student should know and be able to do; they include application of the basics, ability to think, skill in communication, production of quality work, and connections with community.

Issues/Questions	Findings
<ul style="list-style-type: none">■ Shortage of certified teachers.■ How can applied technology be integrated into the study of mathematics and science?	<ul style="list-style-type: none">✓ Four schools offer applied technology in grade 6 (of this group, all require it.)✓ Four schools offer applied technology in grade 7 (of this group, all require it.)✓ Three schools offer applied technology in grade 8 (of this group, one requires it.)✓ The length of study per week varies from 113 to 250 minutes, with 250 minutes the most common instructional block.✓ The length of study per year varies from 6 weeks to one semester, with 12 weeks the most common instructional block.

STUDENT SERVICES

DPI Standards: Guidance

Issues/Questions	Findings
<ul style="list-style-type: none">■ Inconsistency in delivery of student support services by certified counselors, nurses, psychologists, and social workers.■ Lack of clarity in job functions and descriptions■ How are staff in these positions providing direct support for the delivery of instruction?■ Need to discuss how to make these positions more effective.■ Why are middle school counselors not targeted allocations in the same way that middle school nurses, psychologists, and social workers are or in the same way that high school counselors are?	<ul style="list-style-type: none">✓ Support staff at five schools teach a stand-alone class (teaching staff include four guidance counselors and one social worker.)✓ Support staff teach classes in career education, developmental guidance, self esteem, guided study, and cooperative work.✓ Allocation for learning coordinator ranges from 1.0 to 2.0 per school, with most schools staffed at 1.0.✓ Allocation for guidance counselor ranges from .5 to 2.0, with most schools staffed at 1.0.✓ Allocation for school social worker ranges from .3 to 1.0, with most schools staffed at 1.0.✓ Three schools supplement the targeted allocation for school social worker with formula allocation.✓ Allocation for school psychologist ranges from .3 to 1.0, with most schools staffed at 1.0✓ One school supplements the targeted allocation for school psychologist with formula allocation.✓ Allocation for school nurse varies from .3 to .8, with most schools staffed between .4 and .5.✓ No schools supplement the targeted allocation for school nurse with formula allocation.

VI. Recommendations for all Madison Metropolitan Middle Schools

AREA A: Fine Arts

1. Art will be required in grade 6.
 - May be scheduled every day for nine weeks or every other day for one semester.
2. Art will be offered as an elective in grades 7 and 8.
3. Music will be required in grade 6.
 - Choices: Band, Orchestra, Chorus, or Music Experience
 - Classes meet every other day for the school year.
4. Music will be offered as an elective in grades 7 and 8.
 - Choices: Band, Orchestra, Chorus or Music Experience
 - Classes meet every other day for the school year.

AREA B: Mathematics (Appendix P7-P22)

1. Hold a parent meeting in the spring at all middle schools for seventh grade parents and parents of sixth grade students who have been through the INSTEP process to present them with the different mathematics pathways for eighth grade students. It is recommended that all middle school mathematics teachers should be present at this meeting as well.
 - Present chart, *Acceleration Paths in MMSD High Schools* (see appendix), detailing the middle to high school pathways for students taking Mathematics 8 or Accelerated Algebra.
 - Present the Eighth Grade Mathematics Curriculum documents that detail the curriculum offered in both Mathematics 8 and in Algebra, as well as curriculum supplements offered by teachers.
 - Have a high school mathematics teacher attend the meeting to provide information and answer questions.
 - Provide information to parents by mail or via the Internet describing the options.
2. Use a consistent process and rubric, *Eighth Grade Mathematics Recommendation* (see appendix), across all middle schools for Algebra.
 - Parent input into placement of students in Algebra will take precedence over other criteria.
 - If parents do not respond to request for placement in 8th grade mathematics courses, the teacher's recommendation will be used.
3. Students will stay in the selected eighth grade course (Mathematics 8 or Algebra) for the entire year.
4. All students with special education needs and English Language Learners should be included in the mainstream mathematics classrooms.
 - Students who take the Wisconsin Alternative Assessment may need an alternative to the regular mathematics course offerings.
 - If students with special education needs and English Language Learners have been included in regular education mathematics classes in middle school, they should be included in regular education mathematics classes in high school.
5. Middle and high school staff in each attendance area will meet to articulate the curriculum, including a review of the textbooks used.
6. All students who take Geometry in middle school must have completed the TAG INSTEP process.
7. Students who take Geometry in middle school will have one of the following options available to them: take the course in their own middle school, or at another middle school, or at their area high school.

AREA C: Life Skills (Career Education, Computer Technology, Information Technology)

1. Computer Technology/Career Exploration will be a required exploratory offering in grade 6.
 - May be scheduled every day for nine weeks or every other day for one semester.
 - The equivalent of three weeks will consist of Career Exploration.
2. Computer technology will be offered as an elective in grades 7 and 8.
3. In grades 7 and 8, Career Education will be offered for the equivalent of three weeks (15 class sessions or the equivalent) in consultation with the school counselor and can be stand alone units or embedded in other courses.
4. A district-wide committee will design a 6-8 career education curriculum that includes:
 - Electronic career planning portfolio (using common MMSD program of <Wiscareers.com.>) that will follow the student to high school.

AREA D: Wellness

1. A districtwide standards-based curriculum will be developed with clear articulation between middle school Wellness classes and high school Health classes.
2. Wellness/Healthy Living education will be required as follows:
 - In 6th grade, a nine week course or a course offered every other day for a semester will be required.
 - In 7th and 8th grades, a class or health units integrated in other disciplines i.e. Family and Consumer Education, or Physical Education, or Science classes will be required.
3. Offer more opportunities to experience physical and lifetime fitness activities in Physical Education.
4. Establish health promoting school environments.

AREA E: World Languages

1. Based on readings and discussion, the Design Team recommends that the District refer to the study of languages as *World Languages* instead of *Foreign Languages*.
2. World Language will be required every day, all year long during 7th and 8th grade for one class period per day.

3. Students may only be excused from this requirement due to individual circumstances (e.g., IEP, READ 180, English Language Learners.)
4. All schools will offer Spanish. Schools may also offer another language that articulates with their attendance area high school.
5. Schools offering World Language experiences with resources made available through grants approved by the Board of Education may offer enrichment opportunities that are structured differently.

AREA F: Learning Coordinator and Library Media Specialist

1. Each middle school may 1.0 allocation at a minimum for a Learning Coordinator.
2. Each middle school will follow state guidelines by having .5-1.0 Library Media Specialist for up to 299 students; 1.0-2.0 for 300 to 799 students.

AREA G: Student Services (school counselors, nurses, psychologists, and social workers)

1. Provide schoolwide supplemental student services allocation to be distributed according to a formula taking into account Mobility, Socioeconomic Status (SES), English as a Second Language (ESL), Transitional Education Program (TEP), and Special Education factors of each middle school.
2. Have the Chief of Staff continue to make recommendations regarding the minimum allocation for each middle school for nurses, psychologists, and social workers.
3. Have the Assistant Superintendent for Secondary Schools make the recommendations regarding the minimum allocation for each middle school for school counselors. It is recommended that 2005-06 levels be maintained.

AREA H: Madison Schools Community Recreation (MSCR)

In an effort to provide consistent MSCR program experiences for Middle School Students, the MSCR Youth Resource Center Team recommends the following programs and operational structures to be implemented at all 11 middle schools.

1. The following after school sports are offered at all eleven middle schools for competition between schools for 7th and 8th grade students: Coed Flag Football, Coed Volleyball, Cross Country, Girls and Boys Basketball, Swimming, Coed Tennis, Coed Softball and Coed Soccer. (currently funded)
2. The following city-wide after school clubs will be offered at all eleven middle schools: Horseback Riding, Canoe/Kayak Club, Homework Club, Skateboard Club, Juggling Club, Drill/Dance, Chess Club, etc. (currently funded)

3. All middle schools will have the ability to create school specific after school clubs to address student needs. (currently funded)
4. All interested middle schools will offer an extended after school program until 5:00 p.m. that will have a 5:00 p.m. late bus option. (currently funded at Black Hawk, Cherokee, Jefferson, Sennett, Sherman, Toki, Whitehorse, and Wright. O'Keeffe and Sherman have extended programming until 6:00 p.m.)
5. All middle school students will have access to an afternoon recreation program in partnership with MMSD summer school.
6. MSCR will offer a 5th to 6th grade transition program during summer prior to the start of the school year (currently funded at Sherman and Cherokee).
7. MSCR will offer evening tutoring options at interested schools (currently funded at Sherman.)
8. MSCR will offer a Saturday enrichment and recreation program at interested schools (had past funds for Cherokee.)

Area I: Additional Middle School Recommendation

Principals will have the discretion to offer or not offer a class when enrollment drops below 15 students.

VII. Work of the Design Team

Key activities of the Design Team included:

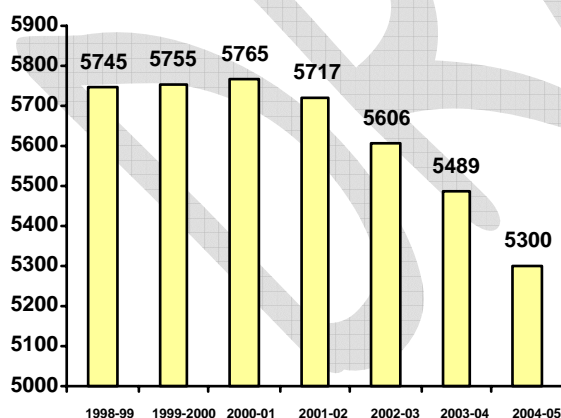
- Reflected on the current Madison Middle School from the perspectives of parents, students, staff, principals, district administration, and the community.
- Collected data from all middle schools on current programs and practices in the areas of Mathematics, World Languages, Exploratories, and staffing.
- Divided into three committees (Data, Communications, and Literature Review) and Six Teams (Fine Arts, Life Skills, Mathematics, Staffing, Wellness, and World Languages.) Each group member served on both a committee and a team.
 - The *Communication Committee* determined that input from parents, middle school staff, students, and community organizations was critical to the process. Structured focus groups were held for all of these groups, and the complete results can be found in the appendix. The questions for each group were also put on the MMSD website, and parents and staff were invited to respond to the questions on-line. The parent focus groups were asked to give feedback on the final recommendations of the Middle Grades Design Team, and they agreed to do so.
 - The *Data Committee* designed a data collection plan that included looking at all middle schools in the areas of Exploratories, Health, Mathematics, Physical Education, Reading/Read 180, Staffing, Study

Skills, Technology, Unified Arts, and World Languages. They analyzed all of the data and presented it to the Design Team.

- The *Literature Review Committee* read current articles related to middle schools, including some that challenge the current middle school model, as well as those that highlighted practices and schools that are making a positive difference for students.
- Engaged in a Literature Review of middle schools, with an emphasis on understanding different points of view about the model.
- Collected data from parents (focus groups and surveys), staff (focus groups and surveys), students (focus groups), and community organization (focus group.)
- Focused on key areas that emerged through the data collection, including: Fine Arts, Life Skills, Mathematics, Staffing, Wellness, and World Languages.
- Identified questions and issues that needed to be addressed, and reached consensus among team members on a set of recommendations for all middle schools.
- Looked at various scheduling options to ensure that scheduling did not become a barrier to the implementation of the recommendations.
- Identified some areas for consideration for future discussion and consideration.

VIII. Data Summaries

• DEMOGRAPHIC DATA



How has the overall enrollment changed over time?

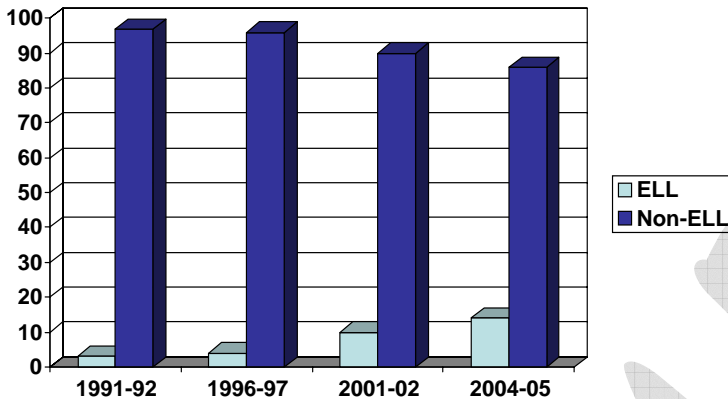
MMSD Middle Schools	% Low Income
Whitehorse	28.3
Black Hawk	28.1
Wright	26.3
Cherokee	20.3
Hamilton	17.7
Jefferson	25.7
O'Keeffe	37.3
Sennett	43.9
Sherman	52.8
Spring Harbor	20.1

Current enrollment by low income
11/05

Year	ESL	Non-ESL
1991-92	3%	97%
1996-97	4%	96%

2001-02	10%	90%
2004-05	14%	86%

What is the growth trend for ESL students at the middle school level?



Focus Groups (36 participants) and On-Line Surveys (32)

1. When you think of a rigorous academic curriculum in the middle school, what would it look like?

Expectations

- A rigorous curriculum that prepares students for high curriculum expectations in high school.
- Curriculum and instruction that allows students to work at their maximum ability and encourages each student to excel beyond that ability.
- There needs to be increasing expectations for academic challenges with a strong emphasis on mathematics and science.

Experience

- Students would have the opportunity for intense study of one or two themes of interest to them, which would be incorporated into academic subjects so they would get a balanced education.

Instruction

- Rigor for high achieving students should be created by challenging texts, materials, and teachers who teach these students to be critical thinkers.
- Students would have exposure to more creative instruction in science and to the world and biological studies.
- Math that includes not only theory, but lots of application and practice; language arts that includes grammar, writing practice, spelling and is integrated into science and social studies themes.

- *Effective differentiation, well-trained staff and high expectations for all students are necessary ingredients when considering rigor for all levels of learners.*

Other

- *Utilize parent volunteers to mentor in subjects and to inspire kids.*
- *The arts (visual, music, performing) and foreign language must be included as required core academics in order to be relevant to the enhancement of learning in all areas.*

2. What experiences do you want your child to have in middle school to enhance his or her social and emotional growth?

Relationships with adults

- *Every middle school student could feel appreciated and cared by the adults in their school. The adults would advocate for them and ensure their safety.*

Relationships with peers

- *Diversity of students gives them opportunities to develop understanding about different cultural groups and acceptance of other people. Having students reach beyond their “normal” racial/ethnic and class line group is important. Have opportunities to learn greater acceptance of differences in others and develop skills for getting along with others.*
- *Staff actively work to support interactions among diverse groups of students.*
- *Positive and healthy experiences with a peer group. No students feel isolated.*
- *Better integration so that students in all grades have more opportunities to be connected.*

Physical and emotional safety

- *Be part of an environment that is free from bullying.*
- *Learn to accept responsibility to create safe environments.*

Programs

- *Athletic programs and unified arts programs that help build students’ self-esteem and promote their connections to school.*
- *Continued opportunities like after school clubs where all students can mix together in a more relaxed environment.*
- *Students continue to have opportunities to experience unified arts and more foreign languages. There are opportunities to experience unique courses. Great math and science opportunities are offered.*

Skill-building

- *Learn how to work effectively in groups.*
- *Have opportunities to learn about how to contribute to being good citizens. Learn about injustice. Develop empathy.*
- *Learn self-advocacy and self-accountability.*

3. What are your hopes and dreams for your child in middle school?

Learning Experiences

- *Students are excited about learning and going to school every day. They are engaged in the learning process and value learning. They graduate wanting to continue to learn.*
- *Students have opportunities to stretch beyond their comfort level and accept the challenges and struggles put in front of them. They get what they need at the level they need. They experience success.*
- *Students engage in a curriculum with opportunities for hands-on learning. There are opportunities for students to become more globally aware and engage in thinking on ethics and justice issues and participate in service learning.*
- *Have strong skills to be able to compete in high school. They need strong basic skills, including study skills. They also need good writing and presentation skills.*

Student Strengths

- *Students and staff know what the students' strengths are. Students take on more responsibility for their learning.*
- *Students are happy, self-confident, and motivated to achieve.*

4. What are your greatest concerns for your child in middle school?

Behavior

- *Opportunity to learn can be hindered by the disruptive behaviors of some students.*
- *Some students do not feel safe at school, in the hallways, and on the buses. Lunchtime also needs to be more orderly and better supervised.*
- *Classroom management/discipline and other non-academic tasks take away from learning time.*

Curriculum and instruction

- *The lack of a consistently high level academic experience for students; lack of challenges resulting in unmotivated students and students' ability to opt out of challenges; lack of challenging assignments; and rigor not consistent in all academic areas.*
- *Concern that the district has discouraged some teachers who have tried to add rigor.*
- *Curriculum: needs to be differentiated to meet the needs of students; concern about content relevance and integration with other curriculum areas, coherence, and promotion of higher level thinking skills; need for greater breadth and depth; too many non-essentials that hinder real growth and understanding of important concepts; doesn't meet all learning styles and needs; lack of opportunity to explore non-academic interests.*

Demands on schools and staff

- *Concern that No Child Left Behind has middle school principals charged with such high demands and limited resources to accomplish them. Concern that the efforts to address the achievement gap will compromise other students' progress.*
- *Concern that some students have too many teachers in one day. Teachers don't really know students.*
- *Lack of staff available to support students: special education students with high emotional needs, students who need support with school engagement, and students who need additional support in heterogeneous classrooms.*

5. If you could design Madison middle schools in any way you wanted, what would they be like?

Structure

- *Different structures: put 6th grade back to elementary and have 7th and 8th as middle school; have a K-8 structure; magnet school with choices.*
- *Students spend more in depth time with teachers, with fewer transitions.*
- *Smaller classes.*
- *Balance of being in both homogeneous and heterogeneous groups.*

Curriculum/Program

- *Make middle schools similar across core academics and add more elective choices that fit the individual schools. Value unified arts as much as core academics.*
- *Curriculum: offer Geometry in the middle school; develop virtual classes so can use resources more effectively and make more opportunities available; develop on-line courses; more integrated curriculum; more service learning and collaboration with the community; rigor and innovation with consistency.*
- *Language clubs that provide credit.*

Parents/Community

- *After school programs: more community partnerships; offer during evening hours; more money/well-funded schools.*
- *Promote greater communication with home to foster true partnership. Would like to see the curriculum for each subject area communicated to parents.*

Staff

- *Staff reflect the diversity of its student population.*
- *Staff are experts in content teaching.*
- *Professional development for staff in differentiation; time of teachers to share what they are teaching.*

Summary from Staff Focus Groups and Surveys

MIDDLE SCHOOL STAFF RESPONSES:

Focus Groups (22 randomly selected participants) and On-Line Surveys (20)

1. What are your hopes and dreams for middle school students?

Learning

- *Students have hands-on educational experiences that will develop multiple intelligences and that individual student learning needs are met in a safe and caring environment.*
- *Students have the opportunity to explore areas of interest that could lead to developing passions in life – offer opportunities to help them meet their dreams as well as opportunities to share their talents with others.*

- *Development of strong academic skills for optimal high school preparedness; want students to learn how to learn as well as nurture a love of learning.*
- *Students would have exposure to challenging curriculum that develops the whole child – not just the academic student; alternative sites for students who are challenged in traditional settings.*
- *A learning environment where teachers are able to make personal connections with students and differentiated curriculum to meet the learning styles of all students.*
- *The arts (visual, music, performing) and foreign language must be included as required core academics as well as FACE for all students.*

Safety

- *That middle school can provide students with a safe environment, free of bullying and that students can go to an adult(s) in their school building when they do not feel safe.*
- *Students are in a setting where they feel safe, respected and a sense of belonging. Develop emotionally, intellectually, socially, morally and physically.*

Skills

- *Students develop healthy relationships with other students and learn to communicate with people in a multicultural, multi-income setting.*
- *Develop necessary skills such as social and study skills to empower students to succeed in life as well as in academia. Social skills development along with resistance skills to help build positive self-image and self-esteem and to prevent participation in high risk behaviors.*
- *Opportunity for students to practice critical thinking skills and freedom to develop into self-directed, goal setting learners who have the ability to advocate for themselves and are responsible for their actions.*

Structure

- *Smaller class sizes and case loads with highly trained and motivated teachers.*

2. What are your greatest concerns for middle school students?

Beyond the school

- *Home and community issues that students have to deal with that affect their ability to engage themselves in school and learning.*

Health/Wellness

- *Students will not develop skills that will help them become happy, well-adjusted, productive members of their community; concerned that FACE is being cut at a time when students need it most and there is a need for comprehensive health and sex education.*
- *Concerned about the level of physical and verbal aggression exhibited by all groups of students. Students with mental health issues are not connecting to school due to their mental health needs.*

Learning

- *Diminishing opportunities and resources for music, arts, and language learning; consistency of distribution of resources hence equity versus fairness.*
- *Behavioral disruptions negatively impact on the learning of others and an inordinate amount of instructional time is spent dealing with discipline issues.*
- *Concerned that ineffective, undifferentiated instruction in classrooms along with inadequate social support can lead to school failure.*
- *Equity issues and meeting the needs of populations of students; meeting the needs of all students from gifted to the most challenged. No vocational opportunities that are productive because too much focus on academics; more service learning opportunities and/or work-to-learn programs that applied technology would be more beneficial to some students.*
- *Raising expectations for all students in light of their academic and social skill level; staff training needed to meet the differentiated needs of all students.*

Structure

- *Larger class sizes resulting in less time to make personal connections with students and teachers being unprepared to meet needs of students will low skill levels. Want students to have opportunity to make strong connections with teachers and peers.*
- *More students referred to special education than necessary and referrals are the only way to get extra help; need alternative programs/options to meet the needs of students.*
- *Lacking adequate resources for ELL/ESL students; more BRS staff needed.*

3. As you think about students with whom you work who are or have been successful in middle school, what school factors and non-school factors have contributed to their success?

School Factors	Non-School Factors
Knowing an adult at school with whom they feel safe and can communicate; strong, healthy relationships with caring adults and peers.	Supportive parents/guardians helping the student learn to advocate for self and to feel valued. Parents/guardians who are committed to education and who ensure students not only attend school consistently but also support and encourage their child's learning.
High attendance rate and respectfully engaged in classroom work.	Basic emotional and physical needs being met at home; homes where a desire to learn is nurtured.
Safe classrooms with no behavioral disruptions.	Family history of educational success.
Small class sizes with engaging curriculum, proactive support teams who effectively communicate with each other.	Positive relationships with an adult, such as a mentor, who can help negotiate issues at school or reinforce positive behavior.
Differentiated, interdisciplinary curriculum that is taught by highly skilled teachers; knowing the learning style of each student.	Adequate amount of sleep each night and healthy meals before and during school.
Participation in after school activities and	Family expectations regarding school

programs of interest that offer opportunities to enhance talents and strengths.	success are high.
Highly skilled, caring teachers who have high expectations for all students and are available during non-class time.	Positive, healthy relationships with peers who value education and support the student socially.
	Hobbies and interests pursued outside of school.

4. What do middle school staff need to meet the academic, social, emotional, and physical needs of students?

Professional Development

- *More time to collaborate with staff for planning and sharing best practices as well as to share strategies with staff across district. More time to devote to meeting the academic, emotional, and physical needs of students outside of the classroom.*
- *High quality professional development within the school day that is designed by each building and by district staff as needed; in particular, training in differentiation, adolescent development, social and emotional development and specialized training in respective academic areas.*

Staff

- *Staff not only willing to mentor students socially and academically, but also staff that truly has the desire to work with middle school students.*

Structure

- *Smaller class sizes and smaller population of students in buildings to create more space to service needs of all students.*
- *Additional educational support for teachers with students of varying academic abilities and diverse emotional needs. Having a mental health professional or on-site clinic would be a great resource.*
- *School-centered support from central office administration and improved communication between the central office administration and the schools. Financial and emotional support from administrators, colleagues and parents.*

Technology

- *Technological updates to equipment and facilities that support not only student learning but also support staff needs. For example, computers for all staff and high quality computer labs for student projects and research.*

5. MMSD defines academic rigor as 1) commitment to a core of subject matter knowledge; 2) high demand for thinking, 3) active use of knowledge. What does academic rigor look like in your content area?

- *Differentiated curriculum that encourages students to not only work at their own level of academic ability but also optimally challenges their ability; working with all students for mastery while advancing students who are ready for more challenge. Integrated curriculum that is relevant and engaging for all students and allows students to apply and generalize information.*
- *Acquiring problem-solving skills for real-life issues and experiences.*

- *Discussions would be led by using the Socratic method; challenge and debate would be encouraged and students would be trained to become critical thinkers.*
- *Students would have solid training in 6 trait writing skills.*
- *All students would learn Spanish or have language as a core academic.*

• **Summary from Student Focus Groups**

STUDENT FOCUS GROUP RESPONSE SUMMARY **(35 Student Senate; 20 Focus Group)**

1. What were your greatest challenges in middle school?

Learning

- *Would have liked more opportunities for hands-on and self-directed learning; had little access to outside.*
- *School felt institutionalized and some staff did not seem flexible or adaptive to student needs.*

Peers

- *Peer pressure and the intense need and social demand of fitting-in were severe. Lunchtime politics and cliques were also prevalent during middle school. Teachers often did not take the peer pressure and bullying seriously.*

Safety

- *Harassment and bullying by students. Did not always feel valued as an individual.*

2. What were your greatest successes in middle school?

Learning

- *Learned organizational skills.*
- *Unified arts classes helped create a sense of belonging and allowed students to learn to make mistakes yet learn in a very safe atmosphere.*

Structure

- *Small class sizes and changing classes allowed opportunity to get to know more teachers.*
- *Orientation to middle school helped ease the transition from elementary to middle school. Also having the gradual shift from 6th to 8th grade was helpful.*

3. What would Madison's middle schools be like if you could make them any way you wanted?

Learning

- *Develop skills to manage peer pressure and bullying.*
- *Would learn "newer" things each year and more opportunity to learn in teams via exploration. Working on teams with diverse grouping of students and the subjects are integrated would allow students to learn more and to build relationships with the teachers.*

- *Less individual homework would be assigned and there would be more group work; students would choose groups that are well monitored by teachers.*

Staff

- *Teachers would be fun, interesting and captivating.*

Structure

- *Design classrooms in a way that feels less institutional by painting walls brighter colors, using comfortable chairs, and rearranging desks (not in rows).*
 - *Self-expression with regards to clothing styles would be allowed.*
 - *Longer passing times and more time outdoors.*
 - *Smaller class sizes.*
 - *Allow students to carry backpacks to classes.*
 - *Starting time would be later in the morning.*
 - *Longer lunch period with more food choices that are more nutritious and appetizing; more vegetables and “brain” food for breakfast snacks.*
 - *More student input into how school operates. Would like for student voices to be heard and valued by staff and administration.*
 -
4. **What do you do to get help with school work?**
 - *Stay after school with teachers for additional support. After school homework clubs, community centers, or church groups are available to support students academically and socially.*
 - *Some students ask peers, siblings, and/or parents for help with school work.*
 5. **What do you do to get help with peer issues?**
 - *Either seek guidance from a teacher or guidance counselor or talk about the issues with friends; friends are typically the first option.*
 6. **What advice would you give to a new student?**
 - *Be on time to class and stay away from negative peer influences.*
 - *Try to make new friends and be yourself.*
 7. **When you get up in the morning, do you want to come to school?**
 - *Most students responded “no” to this question, further stating that they do not like to do work and wish that school would start later.*
 - *Like to attend school to see friends and to enjoy after school activities.*
 - *Dislike classes with teachers who mostly lecture and repeat themselves.*
 8. **How safe do you feel at school?**
 - *Most students felt safe at school. In order to feel safer, the following conditions are needed: teachers who listen, staff monitoring of recess, and higher student behavior accountability.*
 - *Gossip is a problem that eventually leads to fighting.*

Summary from Community Organization Focus Group

COMMUNITY BASED ORGANIZATION FOCUS GROUP SUMMARY

The following organizations/programs were represented at the focus group: Atwood Community Center/Girl Neighborhood Power, Urban League, Wexford Ridge Neighborhood Center, Centro Hispano, United Way of Dane County, City of Madison Office of Community Services, MSCR, Dane County Human Services, Dane County Youth Commission, Vera Court Neighborhood Center, Streets of Gold Productions, Gay Lesbian Straight Education Network

1. What would you like Madison middle schools to do to support the school involvement of the parents with whom you work?

Communication

- *Communicate consistently with parents/guardians regarding homework assignments and student progress. Communicate positive behavior and achievement as well as negative behavior in a timely manner so that parents can*

- *be aware of their student's progress and can have time to respond appropriately. Clarify union restrictions as they apply to teacher/parent communication. Identify a specific staff contact for personalized communication with parents/families. The contact person would be a staff member who is responsible for building relationships with families and would serve as a direct contact for families to express concerns or issues. The staff contact would also serve to make families feel welcome to the school.*
- *Use community centers, home visits, and other alternative sites in the community to confer with parents/guardians.*
- *Define academic terms for parents such as extended academic periods, CMP, etc.*

Involvement

- *Clarify the most appropriate levels of parental involvement for middle school students. Inform parents of the expectations schools have for involvement.*
- *Increase parental involvement by having representatives from school and District administration develop a specific outreach plan for parents of students not yet attending school.*
- *Use neighborhood and community staff to serve more effectively as liaisons between home and school; use parents as true partners to address academic and social issues such as curriculum and harassment.*

Professional development

- *Offer training for PTO officers as a way to outreach to other parents in an effort to foster relationships.*

2. **As you think about students with whom you work who are or have been successful in middle school, what school factors and non-school factors have contributed to their success?**

School Factors	Non-School Factors
A trusting relationship with a staff member who is both able to communicate in a caring and gentle manner and hold the student accountable in a respectful manner.	Trusting relationships with adults outside of the school environment such as a church group leader, after-school club leader, and/or coach.
High academic and behavioral expectations that are consistently enforced and reflected in the classroom and school environment.	Participation in community and after-school activities/programs such as sports, clubs, and community youth groups.
Effective communication between school staff, parents/guardians, and community-based organizations.	Parents/guardians who engage students in broader learning experiences, expose students to new ideas and provide meaningful rewards for positive accomplishments.
Participation in small group activities such as GLBT or minority student groups where students develop a sense of belonging and feel connected and supported.	Significant community collaboration for broad support.
As a result of a strong sense of school pride, students feel invested and a sense of ownership in their school.	
Schools that recognize strengths of each family structure of students and consistently encourage all families and students to participate in school activities regardless of	

income, sexual orientation, race/ethnicity, and/or religious preference.	
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3. What would Madison middle schools be like if you could make them any way you wanted?

Environment

- *Caring classrooms and school community that would be led by school administration and would engage school staff, parents and students.*
- *School offices should feel more welcoming to parents and other community visitors.*

Extracurricular activities

- *Every school would have a Youth Resource Center where an array of academic enrichment clubs, sports and other programs could be hosted. Students would have the opportunity to participate in service learning and/or peer teaching in order to address alternative modes of learning.*
- *Every middle school would provide gender specific and racial/ethnic specific clubs and activities.*

Parents/Community

- *Increased parental and community involvement where the school would be an integral part of the community.*
- *Parents would have a resource room in each school and there would be increased opportunities for parents to confer with teachers while students are present. Resource room would also serve as a location for parent education opportunities as well as a community involvement site.*

Program

- *Increased staff and student diversity. Increase special education staff to reduce caseloads of special education teachers.*
- *Courses for students in study skills, organization, test taking and utilization of resources.*
- *Increase ESL programming and create an ESL Resource Center for students and families.*

Structure

- *Smaller school populations.*
- *Teachers would follow cohort of students from 6th through 8th grade.*
- *Consider creating smaller learning environments at the middle school level similar to some of the high school models.*

Other

- *Safe and adequate transportation to and from and adequate and safe transportation for after school program participants.*

4. What are your hopes and dreams for the middle school students with whom you work?

Attitude

- *To feel good about school and to have fun and enjoy being in middle school.*
- *To realize that life success is more than test scores and good grades; have a sense of a “big” life for themselves.*

Experience

- *To have opportunities to experience employment, leadership and community service; to experience being responsible in order to prepare for successful adulthood.*
- *Students learn that they have something to contribute and have an opportunity to do so.*
- *Basic needs are being met.*
- *Appreciate individual differences and value diversity.*

Future

- *Having adults not only teach them how to develop and execute a plan for getting into higher education but also having adults encourage and support them in their pursuit of goals.*

Skills

- *Have a good understanding of adolescent sexual, emotional, and mental development and how to best care for themselves in a positive and healthy manner.*
- *Develop cultural competence, acceptance, awareness and global thinking.*

5. What are your greatest concerns for the middle school students with whom you work?

Future

- *Students lack exposure to vocational areas of interest and opportunities to develop relationships with professional role models, specifically in fields of interests to students such as graphic designers, music production, technology, and other non-traditional fields.*

Meeting student needs

- *Student mental health issues are neither identified nor managed adequately.*
- *Families are unaware of school and community resources that support students academically, emotionally, and socially. Therefore, students have limited or no access to those resources.*
- *Students experiencing high mobility rates develop a lack of connection to school.*
- *Some basic needs of young people not being met, such as adequate sustenance and health care.*

6. What have you learned from the middle school students and families with whom you work that will help MMSD as it looks to middle schools?

Partnerships

- *Community based organizations want to partner with schools in an effort to better support the academic achievement and academic plans of the youth attending their respective programs.*

Success in school

- *Surveys indicate that most middle school students want to succeed in school.*
- *The majority of parents regardless of race/ethnicity, socioeconomic status, or family structure want their student to be successful in school.*

IX. Future Areas for Discussion

The Design Team had a very specific charge. As the team met, it quickly became apparent that additional areas that pertain to middle level education are ripe for discussion. The final recommendation from the team includes a wish to continue this discussion over time. The areas that are of interest include:

- K-8 model
- Scheduling around part-time staff. Sharing staff.
- Distance Learning, i.e. district on-line course offerings
- Mental health and severe behavioral issues
- Alternative educational settings
- Bus safety
- Regular articulation meetings between middle and high school staff in all content areas
- Regular articulation meetings between middle and high schools among student services staff to increase communication and develop a set of agreed upon expectations and practices regarding 8th to 9th transition.
- Advisories
- Safety issues, i.e. bullying, climate
- City-wide projects and competitions
- Revisit the juxtaposition of the MMSD Educational Framework, the Equity Framework, the MMSD Middle School Common Expectations, and the current middle school models used in MMSD.