Los Angeles Unified School District
Middle School Programs
Secondary Instructional Support Services

ESSENTIAL ELEMENTS OF AN EFFECTIVE MIDDLE SCHOOL
2/12/07

PRIORITY RECOMMENDATIONS

"Middle Grades can either be a time when students become discouraged and give up or become a springboard to life-long learning." Jack O'Connell, State Superintendent of Public Instruction, (October 4, 2006).

The Middle School Accountability Task Force was convened for the purpose of addressing middle school reform that results in middle school students achieving academic proficiency and social and emotional growth. With that in mind we have addressed the areas of curriculum and instruction, assessment and accountability, student intervention, professional development, parent and community partnerships, health and safety, and structure. These essential elements have been derived from current research on middle school reform. Our recommendations offer a definition of the elements and the priority steps we believe the Board should take to implement this reform.

ESSENTIAL ELEMENT #1: CURRICULUM AND INSTRUCTION

To determine what students should know and be able to do based on state content standards and provide the necessary supports to schools, staff, and parents to enable students to reach the expected outcomes.

01. Uniformly norm class size in ELA/ESL, Math, Science, and Social Science courses to facilitate coring and teaming at all grade levels, six through eight, normed at 25:1 for PHBAO schools, and 28:1 for Regular and Desegregated Receiving schools.
    - The uniform norming process can be phased-in over a three-year period beginning with the eighth grade.*
    - Norms should be consistent at the individual school site inclusive of any magnet or academy programs
02. Provide a comprehensive exploratory/elective program including Career and Technology Education for all students during the school day*
03. Support a college going culture by providing a rigorous curriculum that is engaging and holds students and staff to high performance expectations

The following bullet items, though very important, may already be in place or currently are scheduled for implementation:

- Implement the District's standards-based curriculum utilizing appropriate instructional strategies for all students that ensure access to the core curriculum
- Make policy and program decisions based on the understanding of the characteristics and developmental stages of the young adolescent.

ESSENTIAL ELEMENT #2: ASSESSMENT AND ACCOUNTABILITY

"System-wide accountability holds all stakeholders (students, parents, teachers and principals, district administrators, policy makers and state officials) accountable for expected standards-based outcomes of student learning." (*Taking Center Stage*, page 82)

01. Implement a uniform culmination activity and certificate policy that delineates students successfully completing all classes at every grade level with appropriate support and intervention

The following bullet items, though very important, may already be in place or currently are scheduled for implementation:

- Provide training to all stakeholders on the Instructional Guides and the use of periodic assessment data as formative and summative assessments that inform instructional practice
- Support all students in the core instructional program to meet state standards, succeed academically, pass CAHSEE, and meet A-G requirements

ESSENTIAL ELEMENT #3: STUDENT INTERVENTIONS

To support all students in the core instructional program to enable them to meet state standards, succeed academically, pass CAHSEE, and meet A-G requirements. Intervention programs must meet the academic and developmental needs of students through a variety of opportunities both during and beyond the school day.

01. Provide a formal transition program for all entering 6th grade students at all middle schools*
02. Provide a system-wide intervention curriculum that is explicitly linked to the core curriculum*
03. Provide or expand alternative placement models for at-risk students that provide differentiated instructional strategies to enable students to achieve at levels of proficiency and continue in school*

The following bullet items, though very important, may already be in place or currently are scheduled for implementation:

- Provide EL, SEL, and Special Education students with support in order to access the core curriculum and bridge the achievement gap
- Provide full-time social service personnel such as nurses, school psychologists, PSA Counselors, and Diploma Project Advisors to support students at-risk*

ESSENTIAL ELEMENT #4: PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

To improve student learning through the continuous development of knowledge and skills that promote professional learning through collaboration.

01. Provide professional development on the vision, expectations, instructional strategies, and rationale for effective middle school programs according to state and national reform documents
02. Re-establish a Middle School Practitioner Center located within each local district for the purpose of providing training for teacher teams to implement the middle school philosophy*
03. Extend the school year to include eight pupil free days for professional development, teacher collaboration, and parent engagement throughout the school year*

The following bullet items, though very important, may already be in place or currently are scheduled for implementation:

- Provide on going professional development for administrators that focuses on developing distributive leadership of the school team to support the implementation of the District's initiatives

ESSENTIAL ELEMENT # 5: PARENT AND COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS

To actively engage parents, families, and communities as partners in school programs and activities, to include their voice in the decision-making process, and gain their support and assistance in educating middle school students.

01. Provide a parent center and support service personnel to meet the identified needs of the school community*
02. Provide translation services, both oral and written, that are adequate to meet district wide requirements*
03. Actively promote community partnerships to meet the needs of students and their families

The following bullet items, though very important, may already be in place or currently are scheduled for implementation:

- Provide a telecommunications system that enables school administrators and teachers to provide specific information to parents in a timely manner*
- Continue to promote authentic parent involvement in the school site decision-making process

ESSENTIAL ELEMENT #6: HEALTH AND SAFETY

To create a welcoming environment that fosters personal relationships among adults and students to meet the social, emotional, and developmental needs of all students in a safe and caring atmosphere on all middle school campuses.

01. Ensure that every middle school campus has at least one or more police or safety officers*
02. Provide every school-site resources for a full-time nurse and school psychologist*
03. Provide school-site resources based on transiency, drop-out and attendance rates for a PSA Counselor

04. Provide and sustain a strong asset/character development program*

The following bullet items, though very important, may already be in place or currently are scheduled for implementation:

- Provide continuous support for counselor ratio based on national norms with special attention to the needs of EL, SEL, Special Education students, and at-risk students*
- and Diploma Project Advisor at individual school-sites*
- Provide a Special Education "Bridge Coordinator" based on the number of IEPs*
- Expand the school based health clinics*
- Provide high quality intramural and after school programs and activities at every middle school*

ESSENTIAL ELEMENT #7: STRUCTURE

To organize time, staff, students and facilities to promote personalization that ensures academic excellence.

01. Utilize effective middle school structures to meet the needs of the school community that facilitate exploratory opportunities and intervention programs for students during the school day*
02. Support Common Planning Time for teacher collaboration through the revision of transportation schedules
03. Change the formula for determining school-site capacity from one hundred twenty-five percent (125%) to ninety percent (90%) to improve student achievement and maintain student health and safety*
04. Design and implement protocols that ensure seamless, articulated transitions for students from elementary school to middle school and middle school to high school

The following bullet items, though very important, may already be in place or currently are scheduled for implementation:

- Utilize school structures to support professional learning communities and increase personalization among staff, students, and parents
- Ensure smooth transitions for students from one program to another within the school
- Align class size uniformly in core subjects to support personalization through teaming and coring*
- Allow schools the flexibility to design, provide, and implement alternative schedules and settings for at-risk students*
- Extend the school year to increase time for conducting comprehensive professional development.*

* Consider cost factor: PD, staff, facilities, extended day, etc.