Perceptions Of Implementation Of Key Middle School Concepts And Factors That Support Or Hinder Key Programs

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PERCEPTIONS OF IMPLEMENTATION OF KEY MIDDLE SCHOOL CONCEPTS
AND FACTORS THAT SUPPORT OR HINDER KEY REFORMS

BY

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Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
Of the Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Education
Seton Hall University

2000
Acknowledgments

No undertaking of this size is done in isolation. I would like to thank those who were instrumental in assisting the completion of this dissertation and my work at Seton Hall University.

My committee, chaired by Dan Gutmore, was a constant source of inspiration and assistance. Thank you to Dr. Gutmore for all his guidance and support. Dave and Cathy Rock, also committee members, were always there and helpful. A special thank you to Dave Rock for all his editing and advice.

The professors and members of the Seton Hall Executive Ed.D. Cohort I were a constant source of inspiration and motivation. The Cohort lived up to all claims that the goal was to be supportive in having us complete our dissertations. Dr. Caulfield was a true leader in making this program work so well for so many.

I would also like to thank the two school districts and staff members who took part in the survey for this study.

The staff of Roosevelt School in Westfield, NJ also deserves my thanks for all their support and understanding while I was working on my studies at Seton Hall. A special thank you to Susan Furrer for all her help with the final editing of this dissertation and support at Roosevelt School. An additional thank you goes to Cheryl O'Brien for directing me to the Cohort and her support while I was in the program.

Finally, a thank you to my family and friends for all their support and understanding during the past three years.
Dedication

To Roland Black, a retired New Jersey Principal, for his constant efforts and motivation in having me complete my studies for my doctorate.
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CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

During the past three decades the concept of the middle school has been embraced by more and more school districts across the county. The modern middle school movement and the reform that comes with it is more than 30 years old and shows no signs of slowing down (George and Shewey, 1994). George called this movement "the largest and most comprehensive effort at organizational and curricular change in the history of American public schooling" (p. 3).

George, Renzulli and Ries (1997) characterized the middle school movement by stating: "Of all the innovations, movements, ____isms, and ideologies that have paraded through the hallowed halls of education, the one that shows the greatest potential for real and lasting change is the middle school" (p. 43). The movement has not only been restricted to the United States but has reached into Canada, the United Kingdom, international schools in Europe, South America and Asia (George and Shewey, 1994). The movement has grown out of educators' desires better to meet the needs of adolescents (Lewis, 1992). Despite it's growth some aspects of the middle school movement have not been thoroughly studied. One area that needs more study is the relationship of the reform elements and the factors that increase support for those reforms (Lipsitz, Mizell, Jackson, & Austin, 1997; Russell, 1994). The growth of the middle school movement makes it is essential not only to understand the level to which it has actually been implemented, but what factors are present that allow it to grow, and what factors inhibit middle level reform.
The middle school movement in the United States has continued to grow throughout the last part of this century. In the 1992-93 school year Market Data Retrieval, Inc. reported that there were 11,215 middle schools (George and Shewey, 1994). This reform movement has been directed and influenced by teachers, administrators and others who have supported a school that would meet the unique needs of the adolescent. Principally, it calls for a new way to organize instruction, curricula and programs that will meet more effectively the needs of middle school students.

This desire to meet the needs of middle level student is not new. In fact, it is a concept that has its roots at the turn of the century. In 1893 The Committee of Ten on Secondary School Studies was formed to react to the concern of Charles W. Eliot, President of Harvard (George, Stevenson, Thomason, Beane, 1992). His concern was about the average age of students entering as college freshman. As a result of the work of the committee school districts all over the county reacted to issues of the "correct balance between elementary and secondary styles of education" (p. 3, George, et.al. 1992). In 1913 the Committee on Economy of Time in Education made the first call for separating middle level students. Thus, the first calls for what became known as the junior high school was sounded. More important than just a new grade configuration was the concept that this new level of American education should be responsive to the very special needs of students who are entering adolescence. The idea of shortening the preparation time for college soon was out of favor. Replacing it was the notion that the time spent in school by students needed to be different, in fact, better (Capelluti and Stokes, 1991). A configuration of grade 7-9 became the suggested method of making the transition from elementary to high school more age appropriate. George, et.al. (1992)
states "Plans for the new junior high schools contained components that would be very familiar to today's middle school educator. The school was to be based on the characteristics of young adolescents and concerned with all aspects of growth and development" (p. 3). This sounds very much like the calls for the reform of the junior high school that took place over thirty years ago and continues to this day.

The calls for reform of the junior high stem from the fact that many of the original needs expressed were not fulfilled. "The junior high school was originally perceived as a bridge between the elementary and the senior high school, but its broad exploratory function has been replaced by a preparatory function. With an emphasis on content, it prepares students for senior high school...In summary, concern about the purposes, program, and organization of the junior high school has been increasing among educators and community members alike" (Kindred, Wolotkiewicsz, Mickelson, Coplein, Dyson, 1976 p. 3). Other problems soon became evident with the junior high school movement. They literally became less of a junior high school, which was to meet the needs of that age group, and more and more "little high schools" (George, et.al. 1992). The programs of the junior high school were modeled after those of the high school. "Teachers were organized in academic departments (as they were in the high schools and universities and at Harvard), rather than in the interdisciplinary core curriculum groups that the literature of the junior high school recommended. Students were promoted or retained on a subject-by-subject basis. Elective programs focused on specialization that would lead to quasi-majors at the high school rather than the exploration envisioned by other early junior high school educators. Rigid grouping patterns based on perceived ability (measured by IQ) or prior achievement became characteristic of the junior high school in
more districts...The junior high, in practice, was shaped by the high school.” (George, 1992 p.5). Thus by the late 1950’s and the early 1960’s the reform of the junior high school came into focus by middle level educators concerned about achieving a structure based on the rationale it would meet the needs of adolescents aged 10 to 14. Middle level educators believed that, if middle schools meet these needs, students would feel better about themselves and it would increase academic achievement. As a result the modern middle school movement came to be associated with meeting the special needs of the early adolescent. More than just grade configuration, the middle school movement has come to be identified with specific programmatic elements that foster the adolescent development. Modern middle schools and the programs within are designed to meet the needs, emotions and intellectual and physical development of adolescents. (Campbell, 1992). The question then of how well these concepts have been adopted in practice by middle level schools is still an important question to pose. Even more important is what factors hinder these reforms and what factors need to be present for them to flourish. Lipsitz, Jackson and Austin (1997) have stated that despite all the research on middle level education there is “surprisingly little quantitative information to satisfy the demands of thoughtful practitioners and policy makers for assessment of those efforts” (p. 518). Turning Points (Task Force of Education of Young Adolescent, 1989), A Nation at Risk (1984) and other concerns (Finn, 1991) on how American schools educate children have also called attention the need to study what reforms make a real and lasting difference in school improvement. Lipsitz, Mizefl, Jackson, Austin (1997) agrees stating, “national and international studies attest to the intellectual underdevelopment of too many young adolescents. For example, only 28% of eighth-graders scored at or above the “proficient”
level in reading in 1994, and just 2% read at or above the advanced level” (p. 518).

Lipsitz (1997 b) concludes, “these statistics about young adolescents’ poor academic performance suggest that many middle-grade schools are failing to enable the majority of their students to achieve anywhere near adequate levels (p. 515). Felner, Jackson, Kashak, Mulhall, Wolff (1997) calls for more study on middle level reform stating, “There is a clear need...for additional research that directly addresses the process of middle grades restructuring and its impact” (p. 531). The need to know what factors need to be present for middle level reform to take place is critical for middle level educators.

Statement of Problem

As the middle school movement has continued to grow, various aspects of this growth have been studied. Teaming (Walsh & Shay, 1993), student self-esteem and the organization of middle schools have received attention. The question about whether these changes have been implemented continues to be a question posed by middle school educators. Many middle schools have become so in name only. Cawelti (1988) reported that approximately half of all the middle schools throughout the nation still functioned under a departmental structure. Cawelti in this ASCD report brought home the point that many schools, although called “middle schools”, do not have many of the principal elements of effective middle schools. Even though many middle schools have adopted the structural practices and recommendations of middle school reform, consideration still needs to be given as to whether or not these changes are fully implemented. The information educators need to have are what are the factors that have hindered development of a middle school environment that was recommended by the landmark
Felener, et al. (1997) points out, “even relatively “mature” and highly motivated middle schools (i.e., schools that have been teaming and attempting the implementation of practices consistent with Turning Points for several years or more) have not realized the full extent of structural changes that would fulfill the recommendations of Turning Points” (p. 530).

Another key question for administrators, teachers and schools implementing middle level reform is what factors need to be in place to enhance development? “Collaborative planning by teachers, a greater sense of camaraderie among staff and greater professional development among teachers are, themselves, desirable outcomes. Whether these outcomes have an affect on student learning, though, is a very different issue...So, while we can be almost certain that teaming changes how schools work, we cannot assume that those procedural changes alter the school’s “product,” student learning and behavior in the same way” (Arahr, Johnston and Markle, 1989) Russell (1994) did address this pressing concern among educators by studying the implementation of middle level programming concepts in urban middle schools in Omaha, Nebraska. Russell (1994) reported that “Middle level-programming, when implemented with full consideration for the students’ experience, shows promise of contributing in a significant positive way to addressing the needs, and enhancing the academic growth, of early adolescents” (p. 104).

It is important to understand what factors help or inhibit the implementation of key middle school concepts. Lipsitz, et al (1997b) purports that high performing schools are
developmentally responsive, academically excellent and are socially equitable. In order
for middle schools to have these characteristics Lipsitz et al (1997 b) outlines the
following ten elements which need to be present:

- Professional development
- Coordination
- Networks
- Data-driven decision making
- Leadership
- State-Level Leadership
- Improved teacher preparation
- State-level leadership
- Well-informed public constituencies
- Comprehensiveness

Lipsitz, et al (1997 b) offers the following barriers to middle level reform:

- Loss of intensity and focus
- Frequent turnover in leadership
- Superintendents and school boards do not have a philosophical or operational
  understanding of the middle level and why reform is necessary
- Political animosities
- A lack of individual will to persevere despite formidable obstacles

Determining the level to which these positive and negative factors are present will be
useful to those interested and involved in middle level reform. Superintendents, middle
school administrators and middle level teachers need to be reflective about the level of
effective middle school reforms. They need to understand the factors which inhibit
development and which promote middle school reforms. They also need to work to make
sure those factors which promote reform are in place and work to minimize those factors
which are barriers.

Significance of Study

The purpose of this study was to evaluate the level of implementation of key
middle school programming concepts in two suburban New Jersey School Districts and
to determine factors promoted the implementation and those that acted as barriers to
implementation. A total of five middle schools took part in the study. Four of the middle
schools were in one township. The fifth school was a National Blue Ribbon Middle
School in another New Jersey District that had only one middle school. Implementation
was determined by surveying certified middle school staff members in all five suburban
middle schools. These professional educators reported their perceived implementation of
six core middle level concepts in their own school. They also reported on the degree to
which elements were present that assisted implementation and elements that were
perceived as barriers. The staff members were asked to report the level of
implementation they believed described the middle school in which they worked. The
levels of implementation were described as: not under consideration, at the preliminary
discussion stage, at the active discussion stage, partially implemented, and fully
implemented. These stages were based on the definitions of key middle school
programming provided by Alexander and George (1981). The survey, based on one
developed by Russell (1994), was used with permission.
The middle level program concepts rated were;
• **Interdisciplinary Teaming**

• **Advisor/Advisee Programs**

• **Exploratory Curriculum**

• **Developmentally Appropriate Teaching Strategies**

• **Transition/Articulation**

• **Appropriate Required Curriculum/Learning Skills**

The implementation levels of each of the middle level concepts served as the independent variables in the study. These elements are the ones described by Lipsitz, et al (1997 b) who claim sustainable middle-level school reform is achievable.

The elements that assisted reform measured by the staff members were:

• **Professional development**

• **Coordination**

• **Networks**

• **Data-driven decision making**

• **Leadership**

• **State-Level Leadership**

• **Improved teacher preparation**

• **State-level leadership**

• **Well-informed public constituencies**

• **Comprehensiveness**

The following Likert type rating scale used was:

1--Not helpful
2--Somewhat unhelpful
3--Neutral
4—Somewhat helpful
5—Very Helpful.

The elements that are barriers to middle level reform measured by the staff were:

- Loss of intensity and focus
- Frequent turnover in leadership
- Superintendents and school boards do not have a philosophical or operational understanding of the middle level and why reform is necessary
- Political animosities
- A lack of individual will to persevere despite formidable obstacles

The following Likert-type rating scale was used to measure barriers:

1—Not a barrier
2—Somewhat a barrier
3—Neutral
4—a barrier
5—Very much a barrier

This study provides information to middle school educators and policy makers regarding:

- The degree to which implementation of middle level concepts was present in two suburban New Jersey school districts
- The extent to which middle level concepts are being implemented equally among these schools in two New Jersey suburban school districts
- The factors which assist with implementation of these core elements.
- The factors which act as barriers to implementation of these core elements.

Two suburban school districts in Central New Jersey, was the location for the study.

Each district has long established middle schools. Both school districts are in the same District Factor Grouping. This was done in order to control for some of the
socioeconomic factors of using multiple New Jersey School Districts that are of varying socioeconomic levels. The five schools and enrollment are:

- District A School 1  753
- District A School 2  710
- District A School 3  732
- District A School 4  725
- District B School 1  1,250

(The Inquirer, 1998)

This study will provide more information about the role of key middle school concepts and the factors that promote the concept and barriers that hinder their development. The significance of this study was to enhance our understanding about the implementation of core middle school concepts and how to have them transform middle schools more effectively. With the continued growth of middle schools around the globe understanding middle level program implementation and what is required for growth is essential knowledge for policy developers, school boards, middle school administrators, teachers and staff as well as parents and students. Since this question has received little attention, it is now important to focus on the role of middle school concepts. Since school districts are struggling with converting junior high schools into middle schools information about which factors can aid in this is important to know. As mature middle schools evaluate the degree to which they have actually implemented middle school this study will allow those schools to evaluate factors they need to sustain a true middle school program. It is important to fully understand to what extent schools have actually implemented middle level programming. Many middle schools are middle schools in
name only. Programmatically, they do not resemble effective middle schools as described by the research.

This study is designed to contribute to our knowledge about implementation of key concepts at the middle level and how to implement them more aptly. This study will aid those in the middle school movement to make better decisions about middle leveling programming. This study will also provide two suburban New Jersey school districts with up-to-date information on middle level implementation in their middle schools.

Definition of Terms

As the middle school movement has grown throughout the last three decades, more and more districts have organized schools to house middle level students. Some configurations include grades five through eight, some seven and eight, and many six through eight. The five schools used in this study have the more typical arrangement of housing grades six through eight. Still other districts have other variations such as five and six grade buildings and K-8 buildings with a separate program for the middle school students. However, the key determination of middle school programming is not the grade configuration. The major factor, agreed to by most middle level proponents, is the level to which key middle school concepts are offered to grade six, seven and eighth grade students in that setting. A major determination of whether a middle school is in fact a middle school is the extent to which it has implemented the six essential program concepts presented by Alexander and George (1981). These concepts are agreed to by Cawelti (1988) and supported by the National Middle School Association (1995). They are further supported by Williamson, and Johnston (1996). The concepts are:
Interdisciplinary Teams/Block Scheduling: Scheduling of middle-school students should allow for students to be arranged in interdisciplinary teams with the same teachers responsible for the core subjects of the same group of students. Teachers on the team should be provided with blocks of instructional time and planning time to create interdisciplinary programs for the students on the team.

Guidance: A guidance program should be offered to assure that each student has access to an adult who has responsibility for that student. This person should be consistent over the years the student is enrolled as a student and should provide advice and guidance. This guidance should include advice about the student’s academic program as well as about personal and social matters. Group settings should also be available to students through a middle school guidance program.

Transition/Articulation: A program should be in place to assure the students a smooth transition from the elementary setting to the middle school program. A program should also be in place for students leaving middle school entering high school. Focus on a clearly articulated transition should include providing the student with factual information about the programs as well as about coordination of the curricula.

Appropriate Teaching Strategies: The middle school program should focus on meeting the special and differing needs of the adolescent by using teaching strategies that are effective with middle school students. Teachers should be trained in meeting the individual needs of middle school students and using techniques such as hands-on activities, cooperative learning, pair and share sessions, as well as curriculum compacting and enrichment strands.
Exploratory Programs: Middle schools should offer students the opportunity to explore a range of exploratory or elective classes. These settings should allow students to explore areas of interest. All students should also have the opportunity to take part in extracurricular activities and athletics.

Appropriate Core Curriculum/Learning Skills: Each team should have a core curriculum that is appropriate for middle school students. All students should master this core curriculum. Extension and enrichment opportunities should also be offered.
CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

The middle school concept has received much attention during the past three decades. However, the discussion of what constitutes an effective middle school that meets the needs of the emerging adolescent has been widely debated. Since the beginning of the junior high school concept at the turn of the century through the development redesign of the junior high school into the middle school concept in the 1960's, there has been discussion about what grade configuration is most effective for academic achievement, and what programs should be offered to middle level students. The effective middle school is neither an elementary school nor a reduced version of the high school. Not elementary, not secondary, the middle school is an important part of the American school community. The popularity of middle schools continues today. The important role they play in the lives of adolescence was underscored by the Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development’s Task Force on the Education of Young Adolescents (Carnegie, 1989). The council stated, “For many youth 10 to 15 years old, early adolescence offers opportunities to choose a path toward a productive and fulfilling life. For many others, it represents their last best chance to avoid a diminished future.... Middle grade schools...are potentially society’s most powerful force to recapture millions of youth adrift.” (p. 8). Thus, understanding and researching the concepts that will help us make the middle school setting a place that will help students achieve better academically is important.
The Evolution of the Middle School

It is important to understand how the middle school as preferred by most school administrators today evolved. Valentine, Clark, Nickerson & Keefe (1981) reported that 72% of principals, 59% of assistant principals, and 65% of leadership team members chose the 6-8 grade configuration as ideal. The middle school is a growing way to classify schools. Sailor (1986) reported that the number of schools with a 6-8 grade configuration, the most common form of middle school classification, increased 88% between 1970 and 1980. During the same time period the traditional grade configuration for the junior high school decreased 29% (Sailor 1986). It is based on the desire of middle level educators to create an ideal learning environment that meets the needs of the adolescent. Educators have become ever more aware about the special needs of the adolescent. Awareness of changes in physical, intellectual and social development, as well as more knowledge in the area of child development and growth, has established the base for the formation and continued development of the middle school. The National Middle School Association in This We Believe (1995) stated, “Middle Level Education is the segment of schooling that encompasses early adolescence, the stage of life between the ages of 10 and 15. In order to be developmentally responsive, middle level schools must be grounded in the diverse characteristics and needs of these young people. It is this concept that lies at the heart of middle level education.” (p.4).

The roots of the current middle school can be traced back to the formation of the junior high school at the turn of the century. The junior high school grew out of the concerns over the traditional 8-4 pattern schools then employed. The 8-4 pattern was eight years of elementary school and four of secondary school. The first eight years of
school were elementary and the last four secondary. In 1888 Charles Eliot, president of the Harvard University, was one of the critics of the 8-4 arrangement of schools. (Capelluti and Stokes, 1991). Committees formed as a result of the concern over the status of the students entering as freshman. The recommendations concluded that the 7-9 grades should become a transitional phase of secondary education. The junior high school was born. In his article Why Middle Schools (Capelluti and Stokes, 1991) Eichhorn states, “The junior high was one of the most remarkable innovations in the history of education. In this noble experiment, the ninth grade was placed with the seventh and eighth grades. Ninth grade retained its high school status by necessity, as ninth grade students continued to earn Carnegie Units necessary for graduation.” (p. 1). Junior high schools were on their way to becoming just that, little high schools.

The junior high school was developed from the perceived needs of the students in the late 1800’s and early 1900’s. By the turn of the century students in most urban settings attended the 7-9 model junior high school (Bondi & Wiles, 1986). During the next several decades the junior high school grew in acceptance and became little high schools. The same programs, activities, classes, schedules and teaching styles became the norm. A growing dissatisfaction grew about how the junior high school was preparing and teaching students. The outcry was similar to the concerns that brought about the first changes from the 8-4 pattern commonly used prior to the development of the junior high school. (Eichhorn, 1968).

The 1960’s brought about an interest and focus on public education, on what our students were learning and on how best to meet international challenges through our schools. The launch of Sputnik, the Cold War, and fears American students were falling
behind in the area of science and math led to many changes in funding as well as in the attitudes of the public and government toward the schools. Subjects such as algebra, biology and foreign languages were moved from the high school level to the middle school level and teaching strategies were organized to be more "hands on" (Capelluti & Stokes, 1991). There was mounting concern about the role of the junior high school. Conant (1960) wrote,

"The school board and the professional staff must always keep in mind the danger that the three-year junior high school may become a replica of the senior high school with all its attendant social pressures. Interscholastic athletics and marching bands are to be condemned in junior high schools: there is no sound educational reason for them and too often they serve merely as public entertainment. Community desires to glorify the role of the "senior" in the junior high school must also be watched carefully. Graduation ceremonies with cap and gown have no place at the junior high level" (p. 42).

These changes are the foundation for the nation taking a second look and middle level education and revisiting the concept of the junior high school. Eichhorn (1968) presents four reasons why during the 1960's the middle level movement began.

1. A recognition and reaffirmation of the belief that youngsters aged 10-14 are in a unique stage of development in which they share similar physical, mental, social, and emotional characteristics.

2. New medical evidence that suggests that youngsters attain puberty at an earlier age than before.
3. Forces such as the new technology, racial integration, and the knowledge explosion that were affecting society.

4. The junior high school organization was perceived as a high school and in many instances had become an institution patterned after the senior high school. (p.viii)

Moss (1969) proposed five reasons to support the new movement of middle school theory:

1. The earlier onset of puberty required that the 6th graders be housed with 7th and 8th graders.

2. Middle schools were not tied to college preparatory requirements and could, therefore, engage in greater curriculum experimentation focusing on the needs of 11-14 age group.

3. The development of middle school teacher certification would create a profession of teachers especially trained for dealing with preadolescents and early adolescents.

4. Eventually, middle schools would offer a nongraded structure, which would facilitate the transition from elementary to high school.

5. Middle schools would emphasize guidance. (pp. 84-85)

Eichhorn’s (1968) phrase “transescence” has become the term widely used to describe middle school students. Eichhorn defines Transcension as “the stage of development which begins prior to the onset of puberty and extends through the early stages of adolescence. Since puberty does not occur precisely at the same chronological age in human development, the transescent designation is based on the many physical,
social, emotional, and intellectual changes in the body chemistry that appear prior to the puberty cycle to the time in which the body gains a practical degree of stabilization over these complex pubescent changes.” (P. 3).

The middle school movement and the concepts it proposes need much study. One of the areas to be studied more fully is the relationship of these practices on student achievement. The initial look needs to be at the body of research on grade configuration and academic achievement.

Grade Configuration and Academic Achievement

Since the development of middle schools grade configuration has been an area of research the question arises. Does the grade configuration a school adopts affect the academic performance of students? Middle schools can encompass several grade levels. There are middle schools with a range of grade configurations. Schools have been arranged with grades 5-8, 6-8, 7 and 8, 6-9 and 7-9. Still other systems have only buildings with one grade level. The junior high school configuration of grades 7-9 has been shifting over the past two decades. The shift has been to a 6-7-8 arrangement. There has been an increase in the percentage of schools from 15% in 1981 (Valentine, Clark, Nickerson & Keefe, 1981) to 40 % (Alexander and McEwin, 1989). In 1993 55 % of school had 6-7-8 configuration (McEwin, et al. 1995). McEwin, et al. (1995) reported that in 1995 a total of 13 % of middle schools had the 7-9 structure. There has been a rise in the number of schools reconfiguring to the new middle school style and a decline in the number of school reporting the traditional junior high school arrangement.
The organization of the school in terms of grade configuration may not be the key factor in meeting the needs of the adolescent. Zdanowicz (1965) found that when meeting the needs of students the grade organization was not an essential concern. Sailor (1986) reported that in placing sixth graders in an elementary or middle school setting made little difference in academic achievement. Sailor stated “There is no consistent evidence that elementary vs. middle school placement makes any difference in the academic achievement of sixth graders.” (Sailor, p. 4). Sailor went beyond grade configuration and indicated that the programs may make the difference for achievement of middle schoolers. Sailor indicated, “…one must distinguish between the effects of grade organization per se, and the effects of various facets of the middle-school approach to education” (Sailor, p. 4)

Johnson (1982) stated, “From what we know it is difficult to argue for or against the middle school or the junior high school based on grade organization alone. Most experts appear to agree that significant results are not likely to discovered by simply comparing 5-8, 6-8, 7-8, or 7-9 grade organizations. If there are important differences to be identified they are most likely to be tied to programmatic differences.” (p.107).

The National Middle School Association (1995) stated, “While grade configuration may be a consideration, the nature of the program provided for young adolescents, wherever they are housed, is the crucial factor. “ (p.5).

Grade configuration may also be the result of districts’ needs in terms of space or costs. Making schools cost-effective may result in grade configurations that have little to do with achieving stated goals (Silberman, 1970).
In a 1996 study for the Louisiana Department of Education (1996) on grade configuration and student achievement Franklin and Glascock concluded that the creation of separate school for middle or high school students needs to be guided by the students needs the schools are designed to serve. Eichhorn (Capelluti & Stokes, 1991) concurs indicating, “Grade organization...is less important than program development. And at this time it appears that program development is moving at a slower pace than grade reorganization.” (p3).

The findings seem to concur that configuration is not the essential element, which determines academic achievement for middle level students, rather, it is the programmatic differences that matter. During the development of middle level theory over the past two decades several organizations have proposed what they believe are the essential elements of an effective middle school program that meet the specific needs of the adolescent.

The Middle School Concept

The programmatic elements of the middle school and how effectively and purposefully they are implemented, are a more of a factor in determining student achievement than grade configuration. A clear understanding of those essential programmatic elements is necessary. What is offered to middle level students in terms of program is at the heart of middle school theory. Below are several key group lists of elements that the modern, effective middle school should possess in order to meet the needs of the transescent.

The Task Force on Intermediate Education of New Jersey (1972) issued a list of features for middle schools. The department listed the following characteristics:
1. Emphasis on a child-oriented program rather than subject-oriented program.

2. Gradual introduction of the student into exploratory programs.

3. Programs must consider the individual and provisions must be made for independent study as well as a small and large group instruction.

4. Common teacher planning times.

5. Subject areas must be closely integrated.

6. The psychological, social, emotional and intellectual as well as the physical needs of the growing adolescent will be emphasized.

7. Students will participate in schedules which are flexible and which meet the need individual needs.

8. Emphasis on identifying the gifted, remedial and limited as well as the average in terms of fulfilling an individual program.

9. Physical education to emphasize corrective programs, intramural emphasis and life sports.

10. A responsible, helpful and professional guidance program brought directly into the classroom.

11. Organization from the grade six through eight will be a gradual transition from self-contained to a larger exposure to more teachers.

12. Major opportunities offered to student will be in the areas of common branches.

13. Programs will be individual providing for an elective process.

14. Transition will be emphasized for student experiences.
Alexander and George (1981) cited some of the same characteristics. They found that an ideal middle school would have the following characteristics:

1. Interdisciplinary team or unit structures;
2. A child centered philosophy;
3. Heterogeneous groupings for most subjects;
4. Activities structured around the team or unit;
5. Opportunities for the team or unit teachers to meet regularly to plan interdisciplinary activities;
6. Appropriate teaching strategies for young adolescents;
7. An appropriate core curriculum that gives students background for future learning, while still giving time for exploration.

The Educational Research Service (1983) summarized characteristics of true middle schools as follows:

1. a grade pattern that begins with either the fifth or sixth grade and ends with the eighth grade;
2. an educational philosophy that emphasizes the needs and interests of students:
3. a willing attitude on the part of the staff toward instructional experimentation, open classrooms, team teaching, utilization of multimedia teaching techniques, and student grouping by talent and interest, rather than age alone;
4. an emphasis on individual instruction and guidance for each pupil;
5. a focus on education the whole child, and not just the intellect;
6. a program to help ease the transition between childhood and adolescence.

Turning Points (Task Force of Education of Young Adolescent. 1989) listed eight essential elements for middle level education:

1. Large middle grade schools are divided into smaller communities for learning.

2. Middle grade schools are organized to ensure success for all students.

3. Teachers and principals have the major responsibility and power to transform middle grade schools.

4. Teachers for the middle school grades are specifically prepared to teach young adolescents.

5. Schools promote good health; the education and health of young adolescents are inextricably linked.

6. Families are allied with school staff through mutual respect, trust and communication.

7. Schools and communities are partners in educating young adolescents. (p.36)

Raebeck (1992) proposed the following list of elements the best middle schools have:

1. Teaming: of staff in small groups...able to teach the four major subjects of language arts, science, math and social studies; of students in groups of 50-125 housed as a unit in the building...

2. Whole-Child Approach: all aspects of the student’s being (intellectual, physical, social, and psychoemotional) are considered in structuring the teaching/learning program along developmentally appropriate lines.
3. Advisory Program: each student in the school is part of a sub-group of ten to fifteen students who are the direct responsibility of one staff member who is a "significant other" to them, and with whom they meet daily in a homeroom setting and at least once a week for a longer period of time.

4. Integrated Curriculum: there is a conscious, continuous attempt by the teaching staff to make the curriculum as whole, interdisciplinary, and relevant to the lives of the students as possible.

5. Block Schedule: the daily schedule provides for larger, flexible blocks of "core" time to be used as the interdisciplinary team sees fit.

6. Exploratory Arts Program: there is provision for all students to experience the practical and fine arts throughout each year through an elective/exploratory program.

7. Cooperative, competitive, and Autonomous Activities: all students have ample opportunities to succeed in a variety of activities, groups, structures, and settings tailored to current ability and known potential.

8. Dynamic, Engaging Teaching/Learning Experiences: the classroom is at least as compelling as any other facet of the strong middle school.

9. Committed, Visionary Leadership and Staff: no program will succeed in transformation without open, upbeat people (p. xvii).

The National Middle School Association in 1992 in its cornerstone document This We Believe cited the following as the core components of a middle school which uses middle school theory in practice:

1. Curriculum that is challenging, integrative, and exploratory.
2. Varied teaching and learning approaches.

3. Assessment and evaluation that promote learning.

4. Flexible organizational structures.

5. Programs and policies that foster, health, wellness, and safety.

6. Comprehensive guidance and support services (p. 11).

Throughout the history of the middle school movement characteristics of effective middle school education have been repeated. However, their implementation is another story. Some middle level educators have focused only on these lists of essential middle school characteristics and not the needs of the students in their own schools (Williamson & Johnston, 1996). William and Johnston (1996) point out that “Too often, the essential elements and desired characteristics were implemented, but nothing changed”. They call on middle level educators to look at the lists, programs, characteristics and essential elements in terms of their responsiveness to client needs. They have added to the traditional definitions of the core elements in middle level education. They look at the six major themes of middle level education and provide an additional perspective.

The six themes and the direction are:

1. From Interdisciplinary Teaming to Learning Communities

2. From Adviser-Advisee Program to Restructured Adult-Student Relationships

3. From Block Schedules to Using Time as a Resource

4. From Interdisciplinary Units to Rigorous and Authentic Curriculum, Instruction and Assessment

5. From Parent Participation to Parents as Active Partners

6. From Testing to Accountability and Program Evaluation
Williamson and Johnston (1996) have called on middle level educators to meet the needs of the adolescent in an authentic way, not by just implementing programs. Below are the characteristics middle level educators need to be concerned about today in middle school reform.

**Characteristics for the Future of Middle Level Education**

**From Interdisciplinary Teaming to Learning Communities:**

Traditional thinking: The creation of interdisciplinary teams would in and of itself meet student needs. Middle level educators tried to find the right characteristics such as size, subjects or planning time. As a result some teams existed in name only.

Reform thinking: Responsive middle schools move from the implementation of standard interdisciplinary teams to creating learning communities that make substantial changes in the relationships of adults to students. (Williamson and Johnston, 1992).

**From Adviser-Advisee Program to Restructured Adult-Student Relationships:**

Traditional thinking: Each teacher should provide guidance to students in small advisory groups and lead conversations about “hot topics”. Community concerns about hot topics result in a sanitized curriculum lead by teachers uncomfortable or untrained in this area.

Reform thinking: Adult guidance needs to be natural and the outgrowth of setting where students and adults are engaged in meaningful activities. Clubs, plays, activities where adults are role models and mentors provided the core of successful advisory programs.

“If we are successful in creating learning communities, we probably do not need a formal advisory program. If we need to ensure that time exists in the school day for children and adults to learn about and from each other, it is best done in the context of an enjoyable, purposeful activity that permits conversation that is unvarnished by an activity sheet, a
party game, or a scripted "discussion" of the hot topic of the day?" (Williamson and
Johnston, 1996).

From Block Schedules to Using Time as a Resource

Traditional Thinking: There is a perfect design for block scheduling. Teachers put
together traditional classes into clusters and larger blocks of time.

Reform thinking: Time is used as a resource, rather than as a constraint. "Making this
leap in thinking frees the middle level school to examine current practices and embrace
creative alternatives. It removes the pressure from developing the perfect schedule and
creates a climate in which faculty members can focus energies on curriculum and
instructional issues." (Williamson and Johnston, 1996).

From Interdisciplinary Units to Rigorous and Authentic Curriculum, Instruction and
Assessment

Traditional Thinking: The idea that teaming did not alone create teams lead to the
concept of the interdisciplinary unit. Teachers who were subject specialists needed to
find activities, which were not always essential for student learning. These activities
need to be forced these units. Traditional subject matter was put on "hold" while the unit
was covered. The unit also may not have been relevant to the curriculum or to the
school's goals. In addition, in some cases the "curriculum composed of a series of
interdisciplinary units had little relationship to any organizing principles; the
development of thinking skills, the integration of important content-specific inquire
skills, or the investigation of critical issues and concerns. (Williamson and Johnston,
1996).
Reform Thinking: The program in which middle level students are engaged is created out of a real need for knowledge. “Authentic curriculum and instruction ensures that students are engaged in the production and use of knowledge, that production is for a specific purpose, and that project-based learning is accompanied by formal instruction as necessary.” (Williamson and Johnston, 1996).

**Student Achievement**

The questions lingers as to whether a middle school incorporates these middle level concepts into the daily routine and culture of the school so that students will perform better.

A study by Smith (1975) compared two middle level schools in Ohio. One school had the components commonly found in the middle level theory. One school had team teaching with interdisciplinary units and thematic approaches. The second middle school followed the more traditional high school model of teachers teaching separately in a departmentalized arrangement. Smith concluded that students performed better in reading, science and social studies in the school that offered interdisciplinary units and a thematic approach.

Russell (1994) compared the implementation of middle school program elements with student achievement and that “certain of the middle-school level programming concepts, when judged to have been implemented, related slightly with student achievement (p. 185). Russell called for further research in this area, “Implementation of middle level program concepts, and research and evaluation concerning those concepts, should continue.” (p. 185).
Williamson and Johnston (1996) state that “students in middle level schools with less departmentalization, more heterogeneous grouping, more team teaching, and other factors had higher student achievement scores and were more engaged in their schooling than students in schools without these characteristics”. Even more than having these factors they needed to be studied together. When found together and not in isolation they have a positive impact on learning. Williamson and Johnston point out the in isolation the factors did not have the same impact.

The role of the modern middle school and middle school educator is to ensure student success (Williamson and Johnston, 1996). Therefore the continued study of middle school education and the factors and elements that ensure student success is critical.

The National Middle School Association (1999) has pointed to the overlap of its recommendations for the future of middle level education and the Carnegie recommendations. Each group stated the need for middle schools to:

- engage students in a rigorous course of study,
- create a safe, welcoming school,
- hire staff who are trained and ready to work with middle school students and parents,
- respond in developmentally appropriate ways to the needs of middle school students,
- Structure schools for productive assessment, evaluation, and learning for all students. (National Middle School Association, 1999)
One of the largest recent studies which supports the goals of middle level reform was conducted in Michigan. Schools involved with the W.K. Kellogg Foundation’s Middle Start Initiative took part in surveys in 1994-1995 and 1996-1997. This longitudinal study involved 155 schools. The schools involved in the reform made improvements in several important areas of reform. Those areas included:

- Students performing better on standardized tests
- Students feeling more stress to perform better, but overall safer in school
- Teachers working together more effectively to serve the specific needs of middle school students
- Schools implementing more middle school structures centered to meet the needs of adolescents. (Mertens, Flowers & Mulhall, 1998).

This study supports the notion that the key elements of middle level reform, when implemented improve middle level education on several levels.

Felner, Mulhall, Kasask, Sartain, Mungo, and Wolff (1993) reported that some elements are critical and without them, schools may lose many of the benefits of other elements. They point to three of these critical elements. The first is positive administrative/teacher decision-making and support climate: teaming and modified instructional practices before heterogeneous grouping. The second is team planning for integration of curriculum. The third is that key stakeholders (teachers, administrators, staff, and parents) buy into the concepts and practices.
CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

This chapter will present the procedures and methodology of the research study design. It will contain an overview of the research design, a description of the two districts participating in the study and the specific procedures of data collection, including a discussion of the instrumentation, and the data analysis plan.

The purpose of this research is to determine the level of implementation of key middle school concepts in two New Jersey school districts. The areas of implementation measured were: curriculum, advisor/advisee program, developmentally appropriate teaching strategies, transitional/articulation, and appropriate required curriculum/learning styles. The study also will correlate factors that help implement or act as barriers to these reforms being implemented. The study will also determine if there is a difference in the implementation between a middle school that is recognized as a National Blue Ribbon School and ones that are not.

The Research Design

The research design will consist of quantitative survey research. One questionnaire will be used to collect data from two New Jersey suburban school districts. A total of five schools will be surveyed. Four middle schools are from one school district and one is from a district with only one middle school. The single district middle school is a National Blue Ribbon School.

The survey was originally developed by Jill Russell at the University of Nebraska (1994) to measure the implementation of middle school concepts in the Omaha Public
Schools. The survey in this study was used with permission of the author. The survey was adapted to include recent research factors that have purported to inhibit or help the implementation of key middle level reforms. The adaptations included having staff members identify for each reform area barriers and promoters of middle level programs. Several drafts of the survey were submitted to educators in a third school district who took the survey and provided verbal and written feedback. Modifications to the surveys were made based on the results of the field-testing. A major modification to the original survey document constructed and used by Jill Russell was the addition of items the tested for factors that promoted or inhibited the implementation of the middle school reforms. This section was necessary in order to test for one of the problem statements in this study. The final version of the instrument has been named the SHU Middle School Survey.

The data-gathering method proposed for this research is a self-report descriptive survey. Staff members will complete questionnaires that contain both closed and open-ended questions about the various middle level reforms in their school and rate factors that have hindered or promoted those reforms.

Background

The two school districts involved in the study both have mature, long-standing middle school models. One school district has four middle schools, the other just one. Both districts place a high value on the quality public education offered to students. Many families located in theses communities because of their school’s reputation for excellence. One school district is in the “T” District Factor Group (DFG). The other is in the “FG” District Factor Group. The District Factor Group ranks schools in New Jersey. There are special needs districts (ranked “A”) and the wealthiest districts (ranked “J-1”)
and districts on a continuum in-between. The ranking is an indicator of the socio-economic status of the residents in each district. This information is useful for reporting, in a comparative manner, test results from New Jersey's statewide program. Both school districts have had a middle school design in place since the 1970's. The staff members of all five schools were invited to participate in the survey after permission was received from the central office in both school districts. Both districts indicated they wished to remain anonymous in the reporting of the results of the study. A consent letter was sent to each staff member inviting him or her to take part in the survey. The surveys were distributed by the researcher in individual teacher mailboxes. The cover letter provided information about the information regarding the purpose of the study and that the central office gave permission. The letter also provided information that the survey was voluntary in nature and had the approval of the Institutional Review Board of Seton Hall University. If staff members chose to take part, they needed to return the survey to sealed boxes located in the school's main office. Those willing to participate were asked return the completed survey in one week.

Instrumentation

The survey instrument was developed by Jill Russell (1994) and modified for the purposes of this study. It was administered to staff members in five middle schools in New Jersey. The survey was designed to determine the level of implementation of middle school concepts in each school. The instrument, base on the design of Jill Russell (1994) consists of thirty-six items. The respondent on a five point Likert-type scale evaluates the items. Sample items include: "At my school organizing students into
team; typically groups of 100-150 students is:” and “At my school the use of specific
social and developmental goals in all advisee groups is:”

Staff members then assign a score based on level of response from:

(1) not under consideration,
(2) at the initial discussion stage,
(3) at the active stage of discussion,
(4) partially implemented, and
(5) fully implemented.

Data Analysis Plan

Hypothesis One

This hypothesis examines the perceived level of implementation of middle school
initiates and determines if the level of implementation differs from blue
Ribbon schools to other schools. The hypothesis is that the level of middle school
programming implementation score of the Blue Ribbon School exceeds the level of
middle school implementation in the other schools.

Data Needed

The data needed for testing this hypothesis is the level of implementation scores
for the teachers in all of the schools surveyed.

Data Collection

The middle school implementation survey will generate scores for all six areas of
middle school programming for the two school districts. The six areas are: curriculum,
advisor/advisee program, developmentally appropriate teaching strategies,
transitional/articulation, and appropriate required curriculum/learning styles. The mean
scores and standard deviations for each are will be calculated. The data will be analyzed using a t-test between the scores of the Blue Ribbon School and the other schools.

**Hypothesis Two**

The second hypothesis examines the identification of factors that promote and hinder implementation of middle school initiatives. The second hypothesis is that there will be no difference in the scores which promote and hinder middle school programming.

**Data Needed**

The data needed for solving the second hypothesis included: the scores on the survey for factors that promote or hinder middle school implementation and the data collected on the implementation of the areas of middle school programming.

**Data Collection Method**

The level of implementation survey will generate the implementation scores and the scores for the factors that promote or hinder implementation. A stepwise multiple regression analysis will be constructed. The implementation scores for each initiative will be used as the dependent variables and the list of drivers or inhibitors will be used as the independent variables (predictors). The stepwise selection process will be used to build a model that identifies the drivers or inhibitors related to the implementation variable. In stepwise regression, the independent variable most strongly related to the dependent variable is identified first and included in the regression equation. Next, the remaining independent variables are scanned to determine if any, together with independent variables already in the equation, would result in a significant increase in the multiple correlation. This process will be continued until the remaining variables are
unable to contribute significantly to the multiple correlation, at which time the processing is completed. The variables entered into the equation are related to the dependent variable, and the multivariate relationships between the independent variables and the dependent variable are taken into account through the stepwise process.

Stepwise multiple regression analysis is useful when the researcher is seeking to identify and understand the relationship between a dependent variable and multiple independent variables (predictors). Stepwise multiple regression analyses were conducted to identify the factors that drive and inhibit the middle school initiatives. In stepwise multiple regression analysis the predictors, either middle school initiative drivers or inhibitors, are scanned to identify the one that is most strongly correlated with the dependent variable. In this study the dependent variables were the implementation levels of the middle school initiatives. When the first predictor was identified it was selected and entered into the regression equation. Next, the remaining predictors were scanned to determine if any, when combined with the variable already identified, were capable of making a significant increase in the multiple correlation, thus accounting for unique variance between the predictors and the dependent variable. If so, the predictor was selected and added to the regression equation. This process was continued until no remaining predictors were capable of making a significant increase in the multiple correlation. Processing was terminated, and the variables in the equation were those significantly related to the dependent variable. The variables that were not included in the regression equation failed to account for unique variance in the dependent variable. As a result, stepwise multiple regression was useful for model building, essentially clarifying the relationship between a dependent variable and multiple predictors.
CHAPTER IV

ANALYSIS OF THE DATA

Results

The purpose of this chapter is to present the results of the statistical analyses generated on the data collected for this study. Basic descriptive statistics are presented on the subjects and schools that participated as well as the key study variables. This is followed by the results of hypothesis testing.

Subjects and Schools

Sixty-seven subjects participated in this study. Eighteen (27.7%) were males, 42 (64.6%) were females, and 5 (7.7%) did not indicate their gender.

A frequency distribution on the subject areas taught by the study participants is presented in Table 1. The subject pool was largely represented by 6th, 7th, and 8th grade teachers (38, 58%). Several teachers (12, 18.5%) taught subjects other than those listed. The remaining subjects were distributed among administration (3, 4.6%), counseling (3, 4.6%), foreign languages (2, 3.1%), physical education (3, 4.6%), music/art (3, 4.6%), and industrial arts/technology (1, 1.5%).
Table 1: Frequency Distribution on Subject Area

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subject</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Administration</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Counseling</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6th Grade</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>13.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7th Grade</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>23.1</td>
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<tr>
<td>8th Grade</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>21.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foreign Language</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physical Education / Health</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Industrial Arts / Tech</td>
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<tr>
<td>Music / Art</td>
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<td>4.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>18.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOTALS</strong></td>
<td>65</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2 presents a frequency distribution on the subjects' ages. The subjects were almost equally distributed across the age categories, with the exception of the over 61 years old category which contained only 2 subjects (3.0%). The 20 to 30 year old category had 17 (25.8%) subjects, the 31 to 40 category had 16 subjects (24.2%), the 41
to 50 year old category had 16 subjects (24.2%), and the 51 to 60 year old category had 15 subjects (22.7%).

Table 2:
**Frequency Distribution on Age**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Cumulative %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>20-30</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>25.9</td>
<td>25.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31-40</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>24.2</td>
<td>50.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>41-50</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>24.2</td>
<td>74.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>51-60</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>22.7</td>
<td>97.0</td>
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<tr>
<td>61+</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTALS</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A frequency distribution on years of experience as a middle school teacher is presented in Table 3. Most subjects (36, 55.4%) had 10 or less years of experience. Only 8 subjects (12.3%) had 11 to 15 years, 6 subjects had 16 to 20 years and 15 subjects (23.1%) had 21 or more years of experience. It is of interest that the majority of respondents to the survey had fewer than ten years in education.
Table 3:
Frequency Distribution on Years of Experience

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Years Experience</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Cumulative %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0 to 5</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>29.2</td>
<td>29.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 to 10</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>26.2</td>
<td>55.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11 to 15</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>12.3</td>
<td>67.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16 to 20</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>9.2</td>
<td>76.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21 +</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>23.1</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTALS</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Analysis of Hypotheses

This study examined the level of implementation of key middle school initiatives and factors that have promoted or hindered their implementation. The key areas examined were curriculum initiatives, advisor/advisee programs, developmentally appropriate teaching strategies, and transition/articulation initiatives.

Hypothesis One

This research question examines the perceived level of implementation of middle school initiatives and determines if the level of implementation differs from blue ribbon schools to other schools.

Tables 4 through 8 present frequency distributions on the levels of implementation for each middle school initiate. Table 9 presents the means and standard
deviations on perceived level of implementation of the key middle school initiatives. These means indicate that the subjects, on average, perceived 4 of the 5 initiatives as partially implemented. These initiatives include transition/articulation ($X=4.44$), curriculum ($X=4.31$), learning skills ($X=4.26$), and developmentally appropriate teaching strategies ($X=4.09$). The initiative that reflected the lowest level of implementation was the advisor/advisee initiative ($X=2.68$) which was viewed as between the “initial stages of discussion” and “active stages of discussion.” These data clearly indicate that the implementation of most initiatives is underway. However, the advisor/advisee initiative had the lowest level of implementation. The literature suggests that this area of middle school reform has been problematic. Thus, this finding is not surprising. In addition, middle schools in New Jersey have had the added pressure of state testing. The Early Warning Test, replaced by the Grade Eight Proficiency Test, put added pressure on middle schools to focus only on the academic areas.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<th>Cumulative %</th>
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<td>Advisor/Advisee Program Implementation</td>
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<td>%</td>
<td>Cumulative %</td>
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**TOTALS**  
67  100.0
Table 6
Frequency Distribution on Teaching Strategies Implementation

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<th>%</th>
<th>Cumulative %</th>
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TOTALS 67 100.0
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<th>Cumulative %</th>
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<td>Curriculum/Learning Skills Implementation</td>
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<td>%</td>
<td>Cumulative %</td>
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Table 9
Means and Standard Deviations on level of Implementation

<table>
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<th>Factor</th>
<th>X</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>Range</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Curriculum</td>
<td>4.31</td>
<td>0.68</td>
<td>1.0 - 5.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advisor/Advisee Program</td>
<td>2.68</td>
<td>0.95</td>
<td>1.2 - 4.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teaching Strategies</td>
<td>4.09</td>
<td>0.71</td>
<td>2.0 - 5.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transition/Articulation</td>
<td>7.44</td>
<td>0.74</td>
<td>1.5 - 5.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning Skills</td>
<td>4.26</td>
<td>0.52</td>
<td>2.75 - 5.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: n=67

Table 10 presents the means, standard deviations, and t-tests between the blue ribbon school and other schools on the level of implementation of the key middle school initiatives. These results show that the blue ribbon school and the other schools did not differ on curriculum (t=1.22, df=65, p=.22), advisor/advisee programs (t=1.74, df=65, p=.09), transition/articulation (t=.76, df=65, p=.44), and learning skills (t=.16, df=65, p=.87). However, significant mean differences were found on developmentally appropriate teaching strategies (t=2.27, df=65, p=.02). These results indicate that the level of implementation mean of 4.37 for the blue ribbon school was significantly higher than the implementation mean of 3.89 for the other schools. The means indicate that the blue ribbon school had advanced the implementation of developmentally appropriate
teaching strategies beyond the level of the other schools. No other significant man
differences were found. This finding is significant. The blue ribbon district’s advanced
implementation of developmentally appropriate teaching strategies is an important
finding. Although other areas were not significant meeting the developmental needs of
middle school students is one area of reform which will impact student achievement.
Thus, a further area of study would be to look at the academic achievement of students in
the blue ribbon district versus non blue ribbon district to see if there was a correlation
between developmentally appropriate teaching strategies and student test scores on state
wide tests.

Table 10
Level of Implementation Comparisons - Blue Ribbon vs. Other
Schools

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factor</th>
<th>X</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>X</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>DF</th>
<th>Significance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Curriculum</td>
<td>4.22</td>
<td>0.83</td>
<td>4.42</td>
<td>0.44</td>
<td>1.22</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>0.22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advisor/Advisee Program</td>
<td>2.86</td>
<td>0.94</td>
<td>2.47</td>
<td>0.93</td>
<td>1.74</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>0.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teaching Strategies</td>
<td>4.27</td>
<td>0.60</td>
<td>3.89</td>
<td>0.78</td>
<td>2.27</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>0.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transition/Articulation</td>
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<td>0.81</td>
<td>4.51</td>
<td>0.66</td>
<td>0.76</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>0.44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning Skills</td>
<td>4.27</td>
<td>0.52</td>
<td>4.25</td>
<td>0.52</td>
<td>0.16</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>0.87</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Blue Ribbon = 36
Other = 31
Hypothesis Two

Identification of factors that promote and inhibit implementation of middle school initiatives.

Stepwise multiple regression analyses were conducted to identify the variables that drive and inhibit the middle school initiatives. In stepwise multiple regression analysis, the implementation scores for each initiative were used as the dependent variables, and the list of drivers or inhibitors were used as the independent variables (predictors). The stepwise selection process was used to build a model that identified the drivers or inhibitors related to the implementation variable. In stepwise regression, the independent variable most strongly related to the dependent variable is identified first and included in the regression equation. Next, the remaining independent variables are scanned to determine if any, together with independent variables already in the equation, would result in a significant increase in the multiple correlation. This process is continued until the remaining variables are unable to contribute significantly to the multiple correlation, at which time the processing is completed. The variables entered into the equation are related to the dependent variable, and the multivariate relationships between the independent variables and the dependent variable are taken into account through the stepwise process.

Curriculum

The stepwise multiple regression analysis results for curriculum drivers are presented in Table 11. These results indicate that only 1 driver entered into the regression equation, which was professional development \([F(1,60)=5.92, p=.01]\). No other variables entered into the equation, which indicates that technical assistance,
networking, data driven decision making; leadership, state level leadership, improved teacher preparation, well informed public constituencies, and comprehensiveness were not perceived as impacting the level of implementation. The correlation between professional development and curriculum implementation was .30 (p=.01), which indicates that 9% of the variance in the level of implementation was explained by professional development.

Table 11
Stepwise Multiple Regression Analysis - Curriculum Drivers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>STEP</th>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Beta</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>DF</th>
<th>SIG</th>
<th>R</th>
<th>R</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
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<td>1.60</td>
<td>0.01</td>
<td>0.3</td>
<td>0.09</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

The multiple regression analysis results for curriculum barriers are presented in Table 12. These results indicate that only 1 barrier demonstrated a significant relation with level of curriculum implementation was political animosities [F(1,60)=4.15, p=.04]. No other barriers entered into the equation, which indicates that loss of integrity and focus, leadership turnover, lack of understanding by upper board or administration, loss of support, and lack of will to persevere were not perceived as barriers of curriculum initiative implementation. The correlation between political animosities and level of curriculum implementation was .25 (p=.04), which indicates that 6% of the variance in the level of implementation was explained by political animosities.
Table 12.
Stepwise Multiple Regression Analysis - Curriculum Barriers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>STEP</th>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Beta</th>
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<th>DF</th>
<th>SIG</th>
<th>R</th>
<th>R</th>
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</thead>
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<td>0.04</td>
<td>0.25</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Animosities</td>
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</table>

Advisor/Advisee Programs

The multiple regression analysis results for advisor/advisee programs drivers are presented in Table 13. These results indicate that 3 drivers were viewed related to the level of advisor/advisee program implementation. These drivers were: improved teacher preparation [F(1,55)=16.44, p=.001], state level leadership [F(2,54)=11.51, p=.001], and leadership [F(3,53)=9.83, p=.001]. Other drivers, including professional development, technical assistance, networking, data driven decision making, well informed public constituencies, and comprehensiveness, were not viewed as related to the implementation of advisor/advisee programs. The multiple correlation between teacher preparation, state level leadership and leadership with level of advisor/advisee program implementation was .59 (p=.001), which indicates that 35% of the variance in the level of implementation was explained by these drivers.
Table 13
Stepwise Multiple Regression Analysis - Drivers for Advisory Programs

<table>
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<tr>
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<th>Variable</th>
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<th>F</th>
<th>DF</th>
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<th>R</th>
<th>R ch</th>
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<td>0.48</td>
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<td>State Level Leadership</td>
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<td>11.51</td>
<td>2.54</td>
<td>0.001</td>
<td>0.54</td>
<td>0.29</td>
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<td>Leadership</td>
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<td>3.53</td>
<td>0.001</td>
<td>0.59</td>
<td>0.34</td>
<td>0.05</td>
<td>4.84</td>
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</table>

The multiple regression analysis results for advisor/advisee program barriers in Table 14 indicate that only 1 barrier, the lack of individual will to persevere despite formidable obstacles \( F(1,54)=10.99, P=0.002 \), was viewed a barrier to advisor/advisee program implementation. No other barriers entered into the equation, which indicates that loss of integrity and focus, leadership turnover, and lack of understanding by upper board or administration were not perceived as barriers of advisor/advisee program implementation. Clearly, the lack of will to implement and keep and advisor/advisee program in place is seen as a major barrier by the staff in both districts. As this reform has been problematic further study of schools who have been successful in implementing this reform could be given the survey to test if the drivers and barriers identified in this study are upheld.
### Table 14.
Stepwise Multiple Regression Analysis - Advisor/Advisee Program Barriers

<table>
<thead>
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<th>STEP</th>
<th>Variable</th>
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<th>DF</th>
<th>Sig</th>
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<td>Lack of Will to Persevere</td>
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<td>0.002</td>
<td>0.41</td>
<td>0.17</td>
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</table>

Developmentally Appropriate Teaching Strategies

The multiple regression analysis results for developmentally appropriate teaching strategies drivers is presented in Table 15. These results indicate that only 1 driver, improved teacher preparation \(F(1,60)=7.19, p=.009\), was viewed as driving the implementation of developmentally appropriate teaching strategies. The other drivers, including professional development, technical assistance, networking, data driven decision making, leadership, state level leadership, well informed public constituencies, and comprehensiveness were not viewed as drivers to the implementation of developmentally appropriate teaching strategies. The correlation between improved teacher preparation and implementation of this initiative was \(r=.32(p=.009)\). While not surprising that improved teacher preparation was a driver. It was interesting to see that professional development was not significant as a driver.
Table 15
Stepwise Multiple Regression Analysis - Developmentally Appropriate Teaching Strategies Drivers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>STEP</th>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Beta</th>
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<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The multiple regression analysis results for barriers to implementation of developmentally appropriate teaching strategies are presented in Table 16. These results indicate that only 1 barrier, “the initiative lost support” [F(1,62)=15.79, p=.001] was viewed as a significant barrier in the implementation of this initiative. No other barriers entered into the equation, which indicates that loss of integrity and focus, leadership turnover, and lack of understanding by upper board or administration, political animosities, loss of support, and lack of will to persevere were not perceived as barriers of developmentally appropriate teaching strategies implementation. The correlation between loss of support and implementation of this initiative was .45(p=.001), which indicates that 20% of the variance in the level of implementation of this initiative was viewed as related to loss of support.
Table 16
Stepwise Multiple Regression Analysis - Developmentally Appropriate Teaching Strategies - Barriers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>STEP</th>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Beta</th>
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<th>DF</th>
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<td>0.001</td>
<td>0.45</td>
<td>0.20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Lost Support</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Transition/Articulation

Stepwise Multiple regression analysis was conducted to analyze the relationship between transition/articulation implementation and implementation drivers. None of the driver variables entered into the equation, which indicates that no significant relationship exists between the implementation of transition/articulation initiatives and the implementation drivers including professional development, technical assistance, networking, data driven decision making, leadership, state level leadership, improved teacher preparation, well informed public constituencies, and comprehensiveness.

The stepwise multiple regression analysis results for transition/articulation barriers are presented in Table 17. These results indicate that only 1 barrier, "lack of individual will to persevere despite formidable obstacles" [F(1,58)=12.20, p=.001] was viewed as a significant barrier in the implementation of transition/articulation initiatives. No other barriers entered into the equation, which indicates that loss of integrity and focus, leadership turnover, and lack of understanding by upper board or administration, political animosities, and loss of support were not perceived as barriers of transition/articulation implementation. The correlation between lack of will to persevere and the implementation of this initiative was .41(p=.001), which indicates that 17% of the
variance in the level of implementation of this initiative was viewed as related to lack of will to persevere. This result is not surprising. Articulation programs for incoming and outgoing students must be constantly maintained. Thus, the perception on the part of the staff may be that not maintaining and updating transition programs would be a barrier to their implementation. The finding that no items on the list were seen as drivers is of real interest. This may relate to the fact that few teachers have much to do with transition programs and may be handled primarily by administrators.

Table 17  
**Stepwise Multiple Regression Analysis - Transition/Articulation Barriers**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>STEP</th>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Beta</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>DF</th>
<th>SIG</th>
<th>R</th>
<th>R</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Lack of Will to Persevere</td>
<td>-0.41</td>
<td>12.20</td>
<td>1,58</td>
<td>0.001</td>
<td>0.41</td>
<td>0.17</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Appropriate Required Curriculum/Learning Skills

The stepwise multiple regression analysis results for appropriate required curriculum/learning skills drivers is presented in Table 18. These results show that 1 driver entered into the regression equation, leadership \[F(1,59)=12.80, p=.001\]. Leadership was the only driver viewed as significantly related to the implementation of appropriate required curriculum/learning skills. These results indicate that no significant relationship exists between the implementation of appropriate required curriculum/learning skills initiatives and the implementation drivers including professional development, technical assistance, networking, data driven decision making, state level leadership, improved teacher preparation, well informed public constituencies,
and comprehensiveness. Thus, the importance of the role of a strong educational leader is upheld in this study when it comes to the implementation of curriculum and learning skills. The role of effective leadership was seen a significant driver in this study. The finding is important for middle school leaders and those working to effectively implement middle level curriculum.

Table 18
Stepwise Multiple Regression Analysis - Curriculum/Learning Skills Drivers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>STEP</th>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Beta</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>DF</th>
<th>SIG</th>
<th>R</th>
<th>R</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Leadership</td>
<td>0.42</td>
<td>12.80</td>
<td>1,59</td>
<td>0.001</td>
<td>0.42</td>
<td>0.17</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The stepwise multiple regression analysis results of barriers to the implementation of appropriate required curriculum/learning skills are presented in Table 19. These results indicate that loss of integrity and focus, as well as lack of will to persevere was viewed as significant barriers to the implementation of appropriate required curriculum/learning skills initiatives.

Table 19
Stepwise Multiple Regression Analysis - Curriculum/Learning Skills Barriers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>STEP</th>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Beta</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>DF</th>
<th>SIG</th>
<th>R</th>
<th>R</th>
<th>R ch</th>
<th>Fch</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Loss of Integrity and Focus</td>
<td>-0.80</td>
<td>16.38</td>
<td>1,61</td>
<td>0.001</td>
<td>0.46</td>
<td>0.21</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Lack of Will to Persevere</td>
<td>0.42</td>
<td>10.90</td>
<td>2,60</td>
<td>0.001</td>
<td>0.51</td>
<td>0.26</td>
<td>0.05</td>
<td>4.49</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Loss of integrity and focus entered on the first step \( F(1,61)=16.38, p=.001 \),
correlating .46 with implementation of this initiative. Lack of will entered next
\( F(2,60)=10.90, p=.001 \), which increased the R to .51. Together, loss of integrity and
focus and lack of will to persevere accounted for 26% of the variance in the
implementation of appropriate required curriculum/learning skills.

Table 20: Summary of Multiple Regression Analysis – Significant Drivers and
Barriers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Implementation Variable</th>
<th>Drivers</th>
<th>Barriers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Curriculum</td>
<td>Professional Development</td>
<td>Political Animosities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advisor/Advisee Programs</td>
<td>1. Improved Teacher Preparation</td>
<td>Lack of will to persevere</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. State Level Leadership 3. Leadership</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teaching Strategies</td>
<td>Improved Teacher Preparation</td>
<td>Initiatives lost support</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transition/Articulation</td>
<td>Leadership</td>
<td>Lack of will to persevere</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Curriculum/Learning Skills</td>
<td>Leadership</td>
<td>1. Loss of integrity and focus 2. Lack of will to persevere</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CHAPTER V

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The Conclusions Chapter will present a review of the problem studied, the purpose of the study, the methods and the results. A discussion of the practical implications and suggestions for future study will be stated.

Introduction

Middle level education is a growing force in the world of education. It has become a way of organizing schools to meet the specific needs of adolescents. It is a way of setting up middle schools in teams of teachers who see the same group of students. It has also been established to allow ways for educators to address the unique educational, emotional, and development needs of middle school students. Many middle schools are middle schools in name only and have not embraced all the reforms offered by middle school advocates or Turning Points (Task Force of Education of Young Adolescent, 1989). Many middle schools have changed their names from "junior high schools" but retain the same departmental organization and format of the high school model. Thus, implementation of key middle schools reforms is a valid question for middle school to evaluate. In fact, assuring that schools are indeed meeting the developmental needs of young adolescence is critical to students' success.

The question of grade configuration has also played a role in the development of the middle school movement. Some schools have grade configurations that are:

- 6th through 8th grade
- 7th through 9th grade (the traditional junior high school model)
- 5th through 8th grade
7th and 8th grade

Regardless of the grade configuration, the key elements that define a middle school are related to the programmatic design. The key program elements as defined by Alexander and George (1981) are: 1) interdisciplinary teaming, 2) advisor/advisee programs, 3) exploratory programs, 4) developmentally appropriate teaching strategies, 5) transition/articulation programs, and 6) appropriate required curriculum/learning skills. Middle school theory purports that the implementation of these six reforms will have the desired outcome of improved student academic performance, enhanced personal development and group citizenship.

The middle school movement is almost a century old. First a junior high school movement, it transformed into the middle school movement in the early 1960's. This transformation occurred in large part out the original goals of the junior high school reform. That goal was to meet the unique needs of the adolescent. Since the junior high reforms in most cases created “little high schools,” the middle school reform movement began to revisit the issue. It has taken hold as a grass roots movement in the United States and in several other nations around the world.

Some of the same concerns that plagued the rise of the junior high school movement have been seen in the middle school reform efforts. Many middle schools are middle schools in name only. These middle schools in name only have not incorporated these elements into their programming. Thus the need for middle schools, regardless of the grade configuration, to evaluate the degree to which they have embraced and implemented the key middle level concepts proposed by George (1981), The National Middle School Association (1995) and Tuning Points (Task Force of Education of Young
Adolescent, 1989) is an important part of any attempt to evaluate or research middle school programming.

Furthermore, the climate in which these reforms emerge is important to research. An understanding of which factors need to be in place to have middle school reforms grow and flourish is an important research component. Also, an understanding of which factors result in hindering their development is equally important. Lipsitz et al. (1997 b) proposed the following ten elements which need to be present for middle school programming to flourish:

- Professional development
- Coordination
- Networks
- Data-driven decision making
- Leadership
- State-Level Leadership
- Improved teacher preparation
- State-level leadership
- Well-informed public constituencies
- Comprehensiveness

Lipsitz, et al. (1997 b) proposed the following barriers to middle level reform:

- Loss of intensity and focus
- Frequent turnover in leadership
- Too few superintendents and school boards have a philosophical or operational understanding of the middle level and why reform is necessary
• Political animosities

• A lack of individual will to persevere despite formidable obstacles

This study correlated these promoters and barriers to middle school programming in the two school districts studied. It provides information to middle school teachers, administrators and policy makers about these proposed promoters and barriers.

Purpose

This study was undertaken in an effort to measure the implementation level of two suburban New Jersey schools districts with mature middle schools and test for factors which promoted or hindered key programming elements outline in the literature. This study was an evaluation of middle level school in two districts. One district was recognized as a National Blue Ribbon school. The study included an assessment about the degree to which the six areas of middle school programming were implemented in the two school districts. Part of the study was to see if there was a difference in the level of implementation of a school that was recognized for excellence by the Federal Government. The study also included an assessment about the role barriers and promoters played in the development of these elements as perceived by the staff.

Methods

This study was conducted in the context of two suburban New Jersey school districts. One district had four middle schools, the other school district one large middle school. The one large middle school was recognized as a National Blue Ribbon School. All the middle schools were mature middle schools (they were opened in the late 1960's or 1970's with a middle school design in mind). Educators in those schools were surveyed to obtain information to the extent they felt the middle school programming
reforms had been implemented. Educators were also asked to rate the factors, which they perceived, promoted or hindered the implementation of these programming elements in their schools. This study asked if there was a higher degree of implementation of these elements in a middle school, which was a Blue Ribbon School, verses those mature middle schools, which were not. The study also asked which promoters or barriers were correlated with implementation.

The data collection method used for this study was surveying of certified middle school staff members. The survey was specifically designed to study the implementation of middle school programming. The part of the survey that tests for implementation was designed by Russell (1994) and used with permission. The factors that were offered by Lipsitz, et al. (1997 b) as promoters and barriers were incorporated into the survey.

The analysis of the data began with calculation of the descriptive data obtained by the survey. A frequency distribution was then constructed. Mean scores were taken for each of the key middle level programming elements. The mean scores standard deviations and t-tests between the blue ribbon school and other schools were constructed. A stepwise multiple regression analysis was constructed to identify the variables that drive and inhibit the implementation of middle school programming. In the stepwise multiple regression analysis, the implementation scores for each element were used as the dependent variables (predictors). The stepwise selection process was used to build a model that identified promoters or inhibitors related to the implementation variable. In stepwise regression, the independent variable most strongly related to the dependent variable is identified first and included in the regression equation. Next, the remaining
independent variables were scanned to determine which, if any, together with
independent variables already in the equation, would result in a significant increase in the
multiple correlation. This process was continued until the remaining variables were
unable to contribute significantly to the multiple correlation, at which time the processing
was completed. The variables entered into the equation were related to the dependent
variable, and the multivariate relationships between the independent variables and the
dependent variable were taken into account through the stepwise process.

Results

The results showed that 4 of the 5-middle level programming initiatives have been
implemented in each of the districts. The initiative that has the lowest level of
implementation is the advisor/advisee program. Although all of the initiatives were
underway, this one was the most problematic.

In both school districts implementation was underway and only in one area was
there a significant difference in implementation and that was in the area of
developmentally appropriate teaching strategies. The blue ribbon school district had
advanced the implementation of appropriate developmentally appropriate teaching
strategies beyond that of the other schools in the study. In no other areas were significant
mean differences found.

The promoter for the implementation variable of curriculum was professional
development and the barrier was political animosities. The promoters for
advisor/advisee programs were; 1) improved teacher preparation, 2) state level
leadership, and 3) leadership. The barrier for advisor/advisee was lack of will to
persevere. The promoter for the implementation of developmentally appropriate
teaching strategies was improved teacher preparation and the barrier was initiative lost support. There were no promoters correlated with the implementation of transition/articulation programs, and one barrier, lack of will to persevere. Finally, for the implementation of curriculum/learning skills only one promoter emerges, leadership. However, two barriers are identified; 1) loss of integrity and focus, and 2) lack of will to persevere.

Discussion

These findings are of interest for several reasons and are provide some practical advice for those in middle level education. This study shows that a barrier to the development and fulfillment of middle level programming that there needs to be a steady driver. The lack of will to persevere, the loss of integrity and loss of focus are all areas for administrators to fully understand in assuring that middle level reforms continue to flourish in their schools. Thus, effective middle school reform requires administrators, boards of education, and teachers to persevere and not lose focus.

The findings also point out the statistically there is no significant difference between the district that is a national blue ribbon school and the second district, expect for one area, developmentally appropriate teaching strategies. It should be noted that the in this study only on Blue Ribbon District was used. To determine if the pattern of significant differences in implementation of developmentally teaching strategies held for other Blue Ribbon, Non Blue Ribbon districts was a pattern would require a larger study. A larger study would also determine if the areas were no significant differences were found could be replicated. In addition, further research is needed why there is no statistical difference between the districts except for this one reform, developmentally
appropriate teaching strategies. Further studies of middle schools that are blue ribbon, and those that are not and the level they have implemented middle level reform are needed to test this finding.

The finding that both districts have implemented four of the five areas of middle level reform is evident. The results showed that the only area that both districts have not implemented is the area of advisor/advisee programs. This is problematic for both school districts. It has been difficult for districts to implement advisor/advisee programs for several reasons. Johnson and Williamson (1996), report that in “practice, advisory programs remain one of the most problematic areas of the middle school.” They report that while attempted by many middle schools they tend to be poorly executed and poorly received by staff, students and parents. Having unskilled teachers, who lack the guidance training in group process, or are uncomfortable in leading discussions on controversial topics, has added to problems of effective instituting an advisor/advisee program. A further question arises in the advisor/advisee discussion over the amount of time this program entails. The mandate of high stakes state testing and academic time has become a real and pressing issue for many districts throughout the state of New Jersey and across the county. Time for advisor/advisee programs during the school day, when pressure to increase test scores in math, reading and writing continues to mount, makes this part of middle level reform seem expendable. Further research into the connection between effective advisor/advisee programs would be helpful for middle level policy makers and practitioners.
Theoretical Implications

Middle level theory promotes the several key middle level reforms are necessary to effectively meet the needs of the adolescent. That the implementation of these programs will enhance student personal development and student achievement. It further states that there are specific drivers and barriers to the implementation of these reforms. This study examined the implementation of two districts and measured the barriers and drivers. The conclusion offered is that all but one area of the reform, advisor/advisee, were implemented and only area was significantly higher in the blue ribbon school district. The conclusion also pointed that a major barrier to keeping middle level reform implemented are barriers such as lack of will to persevere and loss of integrity and focus. Political animosities played a role in the implementation of curriculum and professional development was a driver.

Understanding what keeps reforms in place and moving forward is useful information to new middle schools as they begin new programming. It is also extremely useful to mature middle schools, such as the ones in this study, to assure that programs and reforms receive the support and leadership necessary to keep them in place and effective.

Practical Implications

Middle level programmers, administrators, teachers, and policy makers in the districts studied can use the information in this study to make decisions on how to continue to promote middle level reforms in their districts.

Recommendations based on the finding of this study:
• A decision on advisor/advisee, which is not implemented in either district, could be a point of discussion for administrators and teachers. Moving to the Williamson & Johnson (1996) model of having positive adult-student relationships that help students grow into productive adults. Williamson & Johnson (1996) points out, "Those relationships are characterized by large amounts of time in the company of adults, without an intervening curriculum."

• In the area of curriculum professional development is necessary. It is one of the drivers that allow staff effectively to implement curriculum at the middle level. Leaders in the school district must find effective methods to keep political animosities from being infused into curriculum discussions. Political animosities are barriers to effective implementation of middle level curriculum.

• Efforts must be made by middle level leaders to keep the support for appropriate developmentally teaching strategies, transition and articulation programs and learning skills. Loss of integrity and lack of will to persevere were seen by staff as significant barriers to keeping these reforms from moving forward.

• Districts should continue to monitor the level of implementation of key middle school reforms. The results will be helpful to see if progress is being made in maintaining the level of implementation and could be used as points of discussion for staff. It will also be helpful for improving programs already in place.

Suggestions for Further Research

There are several issues that need further study based on this study. Examination and analysis of the level of middle school reforms in blue ribbon middle schools and those that are not labeled as such is one area. This study found only one area of
significant difference. It would be of interest to see if that is the case for other blue
ribbon and non-blue ribbon middle schools.

Another area for further study is to identify the level of implementation of
advisor/advisee programs in middle schools and their relationship to academic
achievement. The problematic nature of this reform has been pointed out in the literature
and by the results of this study. Thus, finding out how, and whether it has a positive
correlation to student achievement, would be very helpful to middle level policy makers.
Furthermore, the entire concept of advisor/advisee is an area for further research. The
results of this study showed little or no implementation of this area of middle school
reform. It would be of interest to middle level educators why this area is difficult to
implement and is this a larger trend than found in this study. The area of advisor/advisee
has been problematic for middle school educators having further research on it’s
effectiveness, level of implementation and qualitative research form those in middle
schools would benefit middle level educators.

This study should also be replicated to determine if the findings hold for other
mature middle schools. Do other schools find that the lack of will to persevere and the
lack of focus act as barriers to middle level reform? Are professional development and
leadership drivers that help advance the middle level movement in the areas of
curriculum and learning skills for middle level students?

The design of this study allows school districts easy replication to determine the
levels of middle level reform and assess which factors are drivers and barriers. It would
also be of interest to measure the differences between districts, not only in regards to their
level of implementation, but also to the factors identified as drivers and barriers.
Summary of Conclusions

It is evident from the results of this study that the implementation of middle level reforms requires continued drivers such as perseverance and leadership. The reforms where this was significant as reported by this study were in the areas of curriculum and learning skills and advisor/advisee programs. Once in place, attention and leadership is needed to keep them moving forward. Effective leadership and support and of these programs is necessary. Reforms that lack drivers are not likely to remain in place or prosper. Barriers were found to be significant for the areas of curriculum, advisor/advisee programs, teaching strategies, transition/articulation and curriculum learning skills.

It is also evident from this study that advisor/advisee programs are not in place in either of the two districts studied. This finding is consistent with findings in the literature about the problematic nature of this middle level reform. Further study on the nature of the advisor/advisee program is called for to determine its level of implementation in other districts and its relationship to academic achievement. With growing pressure for high stakes testing, determining if this middle level reform has a positive correlation with academic achievement, would be most useful for middle level educators.

Middle level programming, when given support by middle level leaders by promoting the areas in this study that act as drivers and by doing what they can to minimize the barriers, will help implement and more importantly maintain these reforms.


National Middle School Association, (1995), *This we believe.* Columbus, OH.

National Middle School Association, (1999), *The middle school concept: Why it works.* Columbus, OH.


The Task Force on Intermediate Education in the State of New Jersey. (1972), *The middle school An Idea Whose Time has come.* New Jersey State Department of Education, Trenton, NJ.


APPENDIX
Middle Level Survey

DEMOGRAPHICS

In what subject area do you presently spend at least fifty percent of your professional time?

1. a. Administration  
b. Counseling  
c. 6th grade team teacher  
d. 7th grade team teacher  
e. 8th grade team teacher  
f. Foreign Language  
g. Physical Education/Health  
h. Industrial Arts/Technology  
i. Music/Art  
j. Other  

2. My Age  
a. 20 to 30 years  
b. 31 to 40 years  
c. 41 to 50 years  
d. 51 to 60 years  
e. 61+ Years  

3. My years of experience at the junior/middle level are:  
a. 0 to 5 years  
b. 6 to 10 years  
c. 11 to 15 years  
d. 16 to 20 years  
e. 21+ years  

4. I am:  
   Male  
   Female  

CURRICULUM

5. At my school the present curriculum:  
a. promotes the attainment of educational goals of middle level education  
b. works, but is not fully compatible with the aims of middle level education  
c. is compatible with the aims of middle school about 50% of the time  
d. does not work well with the aims of middle level education  
e. works against attaining the educational goals of middle level education
6. The development of interdisciplinary teaching teams encourages the coordination of the different elements of the curriculum. At my school the curriculum is:
   a. completely coordinated with the content of the other content areas
   b. mostly coordinated with the content of the other content areas
   c. about 50% coordinated with the content of the other content areas
   d. slightly coordinated with the content of the other content areas
   e. not coordinated at all with the content in the other content areas

7. At my school the curriculum currently being taught:
   a. greatly encourages interdisciplinary teaming
   b. somewhat encourages interdisciplinary teaming
   c. has little or no effect on interdisciplinary teaming
   d. somewhat inhibits interdisciplinary teaming
   e. greatly inhibits interdisciplinary teaming

Please use the following scale to answer the following questions:

1—not under consideration
2—at the initial discussion stage
3—at the active discussion stage
4—partially implemented
5—fully implemented

8. At my school organizing students into teams, typically groups of 100-150 students is:

   1  2  3  4  5

9. At my school organizing the teachers in areas such as math, science, social studies and language arts into interdisciplinary teams, which deliver the curriculum and address the needs of the group of students for whom they are responsible is:

   1  2  3  4  5

10. At my school the provision of a common planning time for team members is:

    1  2  3  4  5

11. At my school the practice of scheduling students within teams so that times for various subjects can be switched and students can be regrouped is:

    1  2  3  4  5

12. Which of the following elements of reform have been helpful implementing middle school curriculum in your school? Please use the following scale for each answer:

1—Not helpful
2—Somewhat unhelpful
3—Neutral
4—Somewhat helpful
5—Very Helpful
13. Which of the following factors have been barriers to the implementation of middle level curriculum concepts in your school. Please use the following scale for each response:

1—Not a barrier  
2—Somewhat a barrier  
3—Neutral  
4—a barrier  
5—Very much a barrier

- Loss of integrity and focus to sustained middle school reforms
  
- Frequent turnover in leadership.
  
- No philosophical or operational understanding of middle school reform by upper administration or the board of education.
  
- Political animosities (Example, divisions between board and administration)
  
- Middle school initiatives have lost support because they have not become integrated with other large-scale school reforms (Example, some middle schools have not used standards to promote a vision of high academic standards.)
  
- Lack of individual will to persevere despite formidable obstacles.
  
- Other:
ADVISOR/ADVISEE PROGRAM

Please use the following scale to answer the following questions:

1—Not under consideration
2—at the initial discussion stage
3—at the active discussion stage
4—Partially implemented
5—Fully implemented

14. At my school the practice of one teacher working with a small group of students, typically 18 or fewer, to establish a stable adult relationship with each of the students is:

1 2 3 4 5

15. At my school the use of specific social and developmental goals in all advisee groups is:

1 2 3 4 5

16. At my school the practice of providing a set time for advisor/advisee activities each school day is:

1 2 3 4 5

17. At my school an exploratory program which provides instruction (often interest based, short term, and non-graded) in non-traditional areas that go beyond music, art, consumer & home economics, foreign language, and industrial technology and permits students to sample a variety of personal interest areas, including topics which may have been previously unknown or not experienced by the students (e.g., photography, anthropology, current events, psychology, etc.), is:

1 2 3 4 5

18. At my school a variety of extracurricular opportunities sponsored by staff members is:

1 2 3 4 5

19. Which of the following elements of reform have been helpful implementing an advisor/advisee program in your school? Please use the following scale for each answer:

1—Not helpful
2—Somewhat unhelpful
3—Neutral
4—Somewhat helpful
5—Very helpful

-Professional development

1 2 3 4 5

-Technical Assistance
(i.e. consultants, district-wide support)

1 2 3 4 5

-Networking
(Within and outside the district)

1 2 3 4 5

-Data-driven decision making

1 2 3 4 5

-Leadership

1 2 3 4 5

-State Level Leadership

1 2 3 4 5
20. Which of the following factors have been barriers to the implementation of an advisor/advisee program in your school. Please use the following scale for each response:

1—Not a barrier
2—Somewhat a barrier
3—Neutral
4—a barrier
5—Very much a barrier

- Loss of integrity and focus to sustained middle school reforms
- Frequent turnover in leadership.
- No philosophical or operational understanding of middle school reform by upper administration or the board of education.
- Political animosities (Example, divisions between board and administration)
- Middle school initiatives have lost support because they have not become integrated with other large-scale school reforms (Example, some middle schools have not used standards to promote a vision of high academic standards.)
- Lack of individual will to persevere despite formidable obstacles.
- Other:

DEVELOPMENTALLY APPROPRIATE TEACHING STRATEGIES

Please use the following scale to answer the following questions:

1—not under consideration
2—at the initial discussion stage
3—at the active discussion stage
4—partially implemented
5—fully implemented

21. At my school the use of teaching strategies that focus primarily on the characteristics of the learner and that are sensitive to the individual's level of intellectual maturity is:

22. At my school the use of teaching strategies that demonstrate the relationship of content to real life situations is:

23. At my school the use of teaching strategies that meet students' varying developmental needs and
24. Which of the following elements of reform have been helpful implementing developmentally appropriate teaching strategies in your school? Please use the following scale for each answer:

1—Not helpful
2—Somewhat unhelpful
3—Neutral
4—Somewhat helpful
5—Very helpful

- Professional development
  1  2  3  4  5
- Technical Assistance
  (i.e. consultants, district-wide support)
  1  2  3  4  5
- Networking
  (Within and outside the district)
  1  2  3  4  5
- Data-driven decision making
  1  2  3  4  5
- Leadership
  1  2  3  4  5
- State Level Leadership
  1  2  3  4  5
- Improved Teacher Preparation
  1  2  3  4  5
- Well-informed public constituencies
  1  2  3  4  5
- Comprehensiveness
  (reform is both "top-down" and "bottom up")
  1  2  3  4  5
- Other:

25. Which of the following factors have been barriers to the implementation of developmentally appropriate teaching strategies in your school? Please use the following scale for each response:

1—Not a barrier
2—Somewhat a barrier
3—Neutral
4—A barrier
5—Very much a barrier

- Loss of integrity and focus to sustained middle school reforms
  1  2  3  4  5
- Frequent turnover in leadership
  1  2  3  4  5
- No philosophical or operational understanding of middle school reform by upper administration or the board of education
  1  2  3  4  5
- Political animosities (Example, divisions between board and administration)
  1  2  3  4  5
- Middle school initiatives have lost support because they have not become integrated with other large-scale school reforms (Examples, some middle schools have not used standards to promote a vision of high academic standards.)

- Lack of individual will to persevere despite formidable obstacles.

- Other:

**TRANSITION/ARTICULATION**

Please use the following scale to answer the following questions:

1—not under consideration
2—at the initial discussion stage
3—at the active discussion stage
4—partially implemented
5—fully implemented

26. At my school an orientation session or process (that goes beyond scheduling issues) for students who will be entering from the elementary level and their parents, prior to arrival at the school, is:

   1 2 3 4 5

27. At my school a mechanism/program for easing the transition to the high school for exiting students (that goes beyond scheduling issues) is:

   1 2 3 4 5

28. Which of the following elements of reform have been helpful implementing transition/articulation programs in your school? Please use the following scale for each answer:

1—Not helpful
2—Somewhat unhelpful
3—Neutral
4—Somewhat helpful
5—Very helpful

**-Professional development**

**-Technical Assistance**
(i.e. consultants, district-wide support)

**-Networking**
(Within and outside the district)

**-Data-driven decision making**

**-Leadership**

**-State Level Leadership**

**-Improved Teacher Preparation**

**-Well-informed public constituencies**

**-Comprehensiveness**
(reform is both "top-down" and "bottom up")

-Other:
29. Which of the following factors have been barriers to the implementation of middle level transition/articulation programs in your school. Please use the following scale for each response:

1—Not a barrier
2—Somewhat a barrier
3—Neutral
4—a barrier
5—Very much a barrier

- Loss of integrity and focus to sustained middle school reforms
  1  2  3  4  5

- Frequent turnover in leadership.
  1  2  3  4  5

- No philosophical or operational understanding of middle school reform by upper administration or the board of education.
  1  2  3  4  5

- Political animosities (Example, divisions between board and administration)
  1  2  3  4  5

- Middle school initiatives have lost support because they have not become integrated with other large-scale school reforms (Example, some middle schools have not used standards to promote a vision of high academic standards.)
  1  2  3  4  5

- Lack of individual will to persevere despite formidable obstacles.
  1  2  3  4  5

- Other:

APPROPRIATE REQUIRED CURRICULUM/LEARNING SKILLS

Please use the following scale to answer the following questions:

1—not under consideration
2—at the initial discussion stage
3—at the active discussion stage
4—partially implemented
5—fully implemented

30. At my school the practice of emphasizing cultural literacy, scientific literacy, knowledge of the humanities, and appreciation for the basic values which sustain our nation is:
  1  2  3  4  5

31. At my school the practice of emphasizing proficiency in the skills of reading, writing, speaking, and listening is:
  1  2  3  4  5

32. At my school having a "core" set of expectations defined for all students is:
  1  2  3  4  5
33. At my school the practice of using heterogeneous grouping (not ability grouping) is:

1 2 3 4 5

34. Which of the following elements of reform have been helpful implementing required learning skills in your school? Please use the following scale for each answer:

1—Not helpful
2—Somewhat unhelpful
3—Neutral
4—Somewhat helpful
5—Very Helpful

- Professional development
  1 2 3 4 5

- Technical Assistance
  (i.e. consultants, district-wide support)
  1 2 3 4 5

- Networking
  (Within and outside the district)
  1 2 3 4 5

- Data-driven decision making
  1 2 3 4 5

- Leadership
  1 2 3 4 5

- State Level Leadership
  1 2 3 4 5

- Improved Teacher Preparation
  1 2 3 4 5

- Well-informed public constituencies
  1 2 3 4 5

- Comprehensiveness
  (reform is both "top-down" and "bottom up")
  1 2 3 4 5

- Other:

35. Which of the following factors have been barriers to the implementation of required learning skills in your school? Please use the following scale for each response:

1—Not a barrier
2—Somewhat a barrier
3—Neutral
4—a barrier
5—Very much a barrier

- Loss of integrity and focus to sustained middle school reforms
  1 2 3 4 5

- Frequent turnover in leadership.
  1 2 3 4 5

- No philosophical or operational understanding of middle school reform by upper administration or the board of education.
  1 2 3 4 5

- Political animosities (Example, divisions between board and administration)
  1 2 3 4 5
- Middle school initiatives have lost support because they have not become integrated with other large-scale school reforms. (Example: some middle schools have not used standards to promote a vision of high academic standards.)

- Lack of individual will to persevere despite formidable obstacles.

- Other: