

**Fayette County Public Schools 20/20 Vision  
Middle School Reform  
Final Report  
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**Number of Recommendations: 9**

***Recommendation Number 1***

**Middle schools should be staffed with smaller student/teacher ratios allowing schools the flexibility to lower class sizes in appropriate courses.**

*Rationale*

Middle school students need a variety of learning activities requiring materials and movement in the classroom, which would be supported by smaller class sizes. Some middle school classes in FCPS have more than 30 students. The committee recommends a 25:1 maximum in core classes.

“Small classes provide quality (higher scores), equality (pupils assigned at random and every child gets a smaller class), and equity (those who usually do less well get greater benefits).” (Achilles, Finn, and Bain 1998)

“There is a greater impact on achievement for low income and minority students.” (Picus, Odden, and Picus for KDE 2003)

“Small classes with low-achieving students have been characterized as functioning like large classes with high achieving students. In classes with high achieving students, teachers manage less, assign more homework, ask more probing questions, and allow more time between questions and answers, which gives students time to think longer before answering questions.” (Reichardt 2001)

“Early data from the Project on High Performance Learning Communities....indicates that teams of 120 or fewer students, with a ratio of no more than 25 student to one teacher, engage in the kind of instructional practices that are linked to positive student outcomes more often than larger teams or teams with higher student-teacher ratios.” (Erb & Stevenson, 1999, pp. 48-49)

## ***Recommendation Number 2***

**Middle schools should be staffed with an additional full-time certified position, to take on the additional duties of coordination and implementation of testing and learning checks and correlation of professional development with test results.**

- When additional duties are added to the workload of school staff, additional staff should be assigned to complete the extra work.
- Schools should also have a more formalized plan for coordinating the workloads of social workers, counselors and the Family Resource Centers.

### ***Rationale***

Counselors in the middle schools have a multitude of duties, such as scheduling, overseeing testing procedures, and record keeping that cut into face-to-face engagement with students. Counselors are needed to work one-on-one with students as they often have expertise in handling sensitive information and situations that teachers and other staff members may not.

“How are guidance and support services currently handled in our school? Who does what, when, and for whom? A middle school should keep what is working, drop what is not, and change whatever needs to be changed in order to provide guidance services for all students.” (National Middle School Association, 2001, p111)

“There is no best way for the local school district to play an instrumental role in the transformation of its middle schools. A key variable is the organizational capacity of the school to improve student performance.” (Jackson and Davis, for the Carnegie Corporation, Turning Points 2000)

### ***Recommendation Number 3***

**The district needs additional methods of assessment (besides standardized testing) to monitor the progress and achievement of schools and students.**

#### *Rationale*

The committee believes that students should be tested and the results should be analyzed each year to track progress, rather than simply comparing students to other students. “Middle level students need to participate in all phases of assessment and evaluation, helping to set individual and group goals, identifying ways to measure progress, and evaluating their own accomplishments.’ This approach would appear to be contrary to the current emphasis on externally-imposed standards and assessment.” (National Middle School Association, 2001)

“The curriculum process should enable an individual teacher, a teaching team, and the school to monitor student achievement at the classroom level. Each department or grade-level team uses the district’s curriculum goals, standards, and benchmarks to identify the general goal for the course or grade level they are teaching. The teams of teachers responsible for teaching a particular course or grade level identify the essential student outcomes for each course or grade level. The teams develop common, comprehensive assessment strategies that will produce data on individual and collective student’s achievement. The teams identify the proficiency levels all students should achieve. (R.DuFour and R. Eaker, 1998.)”

“Quality assessments arise from and accurately reflect clearly specified and appropriate achievement expectations for students. Any assessment process must begin by defining what it means to succeed. To have a quality assessment program, schools must be clear on the knowledge and skills that students are to master. (R. DuFour and R. Eaker, 1998.)”

### ***Recommendation Number 4***

**The middle schools should offer various activity “clusters” that give students opportunities to become immersed in interests/activities in small group settings.**

- These are not magnet programs. They would be offered to the students already attending the school.
- Offerings could include robotics, computers, aeronautics, photography, sign language, etc.
- These “clusters” fit into the Smaller Learning community concept.
- Student interest in the activities could increase attendance.

#### *Rationale*

“...an extensive body of research suggests that small schools and small learning communities have the following significant advantages:

- increased student performance, along with a reduction in the achievement gap and dropout rate
- a more positive school climate, including safer schools, more active student engagement, fewer disciplinary infractions, and less truancy (The National Forum, 2004)

“Organize content around concepts, since the brain searches for meaningful patterns, connecting parts to wholes. Connect what happens in the classroom to the students, either directly or by helping them discover links to the world beyond the classroom.” (Jackson and Davis for the Carnegie Corporation, 2000).

### ***Recommendation Number 5***

#### **Schools should design annual Professional Development (PD) activities that support the middle school concept.**

- PD offerings for middle school teachers should include yearly training on the characteristics of the young adolescent and reinforcement of the middle school concept.
- PD offering should include information on learning styles and differentiated instruction.
- PD should be designed so that teachers leave the trainings ready to apply the information in the classroom with students.
- PD offerings should not just be one-time activities. PD should include a follow-up component for teachers to share with staff how they applied the information in their classrooms.
- The district should work to make a more flexible calendar (for example, some half days for training and activities) so teachers have time to collaborate and follow through on plans/ideas/lessons.

#### ***Rationale***

“Staff middle grades schools with teachers who are expert at teaching young adolescents, and engage teachers in ongoing, targeted professional development opportunities.”  
(Turning Points 2000).

Teachers have limited opportunities for learning activities. Additionally, many of these are single, isolated sessions offered at the end of an already long teaching day. (Education Week, 2002).

Teachers need opportunities and time to develop a variety of instructional techniques. (Wenglinsky, 2002).

“...teachers need to have adequate time to prepare to use teaching and learning strategies with which they might not be familiar. A one-hour in-service is not enough for most teachers to implement a new teaching practice. Teachers need opportunities to come together...to discuss what results or effects are seen as changes are implemented.”  
(National Middle School Association, 2001).

### ***Recommendation Number 6***

#### **Middle schools should emphasize inquiry learning on the part of students.**

- Teachers should be facilitators of learning.
- Students should have opportunities for making choices and decisions about their own learning.
- Students should have more responsibility for monitoring and presenting evidence of their own progress (student-led conferencing).

#### *Rationale*

“When students ask questions and find the answers for themselves, they get involved in their own learning.” (Educational Dividends, 2000)

“Student accountability is mentioned again and again by educators as a plus for student-led conferences.” (Education World, 2005)

The student benefits of student-led conference include benefits for students, parents and teachers. (Bonnett and Marcellus, 2001)

“The teacher and students must collaborate in learning. Differentiated classrooms must be student-centered, with teachers serving as organizers of instruction, materials, time and space. Together, teachers and students plan, set goals, and try to learn both from what went well and from what did not. As students get better at self-assessment and self-adjustment...the teacher becomes more effective.” (Tomlinson, 1999, p.13, Wiggins & McTighe, 1998, p. 124)

***Recommendation Number 7***

**Middle schools must have a plan for improving school climate.**

- Middle schools should emphasize building relationships.
- Middle schools should include Character Education in the curriculum.
- Middle schools should work to improve communication between constituent groups in the school.
- Middle school students are more successful when they feel a sense of belonging.
- Middle school students have a right to physical and emotional safety while in school.

*Rationale*

“Studies conducted over the last 30 years have identified a relationship between parent involvement and increased student achievement, enhanced self-esteem, improved behavior, and better student attendance.” (Mapp, 1997, p.1)

“To maintain a positive school climate with accompanying high staff morale requires attention in four areas: recognition, communication, shared leadership, and opportunities for growth.” (National Middle School Association, 2001)

***Recommendation Number 8***

**Every middle school student must have the opportunity for daily exercise/movement with an emphasis on fitness.**

- Middle schools must be more creative about giving all students opportunities for daily exercise, rather than relying solely on Physical Education classes.
- The district must look for programs across the country and abroad implementing fitness programs into the school day.
- Physical activity time can also be social skills time for students.
- Schools must have flexibility in time management to allow for exercise/movement time for students.

*Rationale*

“A healthy lifestyle can promote academic success and high engagement and productivity in school can appear to prevent or lessen risky health and other problem behaviors.” (Jessor, Turbin & Costa, 1998, Dryfoos, 1993)

“Regular exercise is also critical to adolescents’ immediate and future physical and mental health, yet nearly half of 12-21 year olds are not actively vigorous on a regular basis.” (CDC, 1997a)

***Recommendation Number 9***

**Students should have equal access to all courses in the middle schools.**

- Middle schools should have heterogeneous ability groupings whenever possible.
- Schools must look for ways to schedule all students into rigorous academic courses.

*Rationale*

“High-performing schools with middle grades are socially equitable. They seek to keep their students’ future options open....and they work to overcome systematic variation in resources and outcomes related to race, class, gender, and ability.” (The National Forum to Accelerate Middle-Grades Reform, 2002)

“Tracking is easily the most formidable structural barrier to equitable learning opportunities and positive intergroup relations; given that minority-group students are disproportionately represented in the lower tracks.” (Braddock, Dawkins & Wilson, 1995, p. 244)

## References

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\*Erb, T.O., ed. (2001). *This we believe..and now we must act*. Westerville, OH: National Middle School Association.

\*Jackson, A.W. & Davis, G.A. (2000). *Turning points 2000: educating adolescents in the 21<sup>st</sup> century*. New York: Teachers College Press.

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Wenglinsky, H. (2002, February 13). How schools matter: The link between teacher classroom practices and student academic performance. *Education Policy Analysis Archives*, 10(12). Retrieved October 12, 2002, from <http://epaa.asu.edu/epaa/v10n12/>

\*Many references are secondary references listed completely in the *Turning Points 2000* book and the National Middle School Association book.