



Physical facilities for the middle school should reflect the transition from the self-contained classroom to the mobility of multipurpose flexible spaces, as in the Branford (Connecticut) Intermediate School.



Purpose and Function Precede Middle School Planning

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The middle school facility should represent the flexibility of the program, the rapidly changing child, the motivating atmosphere. It must in itself be a dynamic force, a live and living institution.

MEMBERS of local boards of education, building committees, architects, school superintendents, principals, teachers, and others recently have found themselves involved in the planning, development, and construction of middle schools. It is essential that all persons involved in such endeavors recognize that certain necessary examinations and activities must precede the combining of brick and mortar. The thorough and careful consideration of the purposes and functions of the school will help to assure that the resultant product will be able to best provide that for which it was intended.

How should one go about identifying the purposes and functions of the middle school? High on the list of prerequisites would be achieving an awareness and an understanding of the special characteristics and needs of the students who will be served by such a school. Much overlapping and interrelatedness may exist between and

among the characteristics of this age group. Yet some common traits may be identified according to those which are essentially *physical, social, emotional, and intellectual.*

Characteristics and Needs of Middle School Students

Physical—In relation to body development, appearance, and activity, students of middle school age exhibit:

Increased interest in the physical aspects of the body, including its functions and changes

Generally rapid, though irregular, physical development with resultant differences among peers due to uneven growth and development

Generally a more advanced physical maturity on the part of girls than of boys at the same chronological age

† This article is based on the Connecticut State Department of Education bulletin, "A Guide to the Writing of Educational Specifications in the Planning of Middle School Programs," of which Dr. Tobin was the principal author. Co-authors with him were Leonard Garber, G. Wesley Ketcham, and Harriet C. Nash, all consultants with the Connecticut State Department of Education.

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Awkward and clumsy movements due to bone growth preceding muscle growth

Considerable attention to personal appearance and concern with irregularities such as skin blemishes, scars, and obesity

Conformity with "in" styles, such as clothing and hair style

Extreme restlessness with great need to release physical energy

Talkativeness

Responsiveness to a variety of nonstructured and leisure activities.

Social—With their concern for individuality, conformity, and development of values, students of middle school age evidence:

Desire to be "different," yet within the overall limits of peer conformity

Desire for opportunities to exercise selectivity in the choice of food, activities, and friends—with frequent changes in "close" friendships

Considerable peer consciousness: strong need for a feeling of belonging to a group

Adherence to peer group standards along with awareness of "acceptable behavior"

Concern for "right," "wrong," and "social justice"

Concern for less fortunate "others"

Attempts to identify with adults other than parents.

Emotional—In relation to their uncertainties and conflicts, students of middle school age tend to:

Be frequently impulsive with words and actions; impatient to get things done in a hurry

Have ambivalent desires: want freedom, but fear the loss of certain securities

Become more independent, yet still feel the need for direction and regulation

Desire to make their own evaluation of suggestions from others

Exhibit a wide range of overt behaviors and mood instability: quiet-loud, shy-boisterous, fearful-confident, anxious-assured

Need experience with frequent success and desire attention and recognition for personal efforts and achievements

Seek approval of and acceptance by adults



Learning programs for transcents may utilize multi-age grouping . . .

Be sensitive to criticism of personal shortcomings and often easily offended

Be anxious, doubtful, and confused about their physical and intellectual development, social relationships, and adult authority.

Intellectual—In relation to their intellectual experiences, students of middle school age tend to:

Be curious and inquisitive

Prefer active over passive learning activities

Relate intellectual activities with immediate and short-range goals

Prefer interaction with peers during learning activities

Desire opportunities to express originality on an individual basis

Be interested in both concrete and abstract exercises and be more able to deal with abstract concepts than formerly

Desire opportunities to participate in practical problem-solving situations

Show interest in races and cultures other than their own

Challenge "idealistic" teachings

Be interested in making fuller utilization of basic skills used in the elementary school

Evaluate personal capabilities, both attributes and limitations

Show strong, intense interests, not always sustained, in various pursuits.

Many of the pre- and early-adolescents in the middle school age group will vary in



... as well as opportunities for independent work and study.

differing degrees from these generalizations. The major planning direction, however, should be toward providing for both the general and individual needs of the students to be served by the school.

Purposes and Functions

If the general and specific characteristics of the students in the middle school age group are to be the bases for the planning and development of a realistic program, the suggested purposes and functions of the middle school would include the following:

- To provide a program for pre- and early-adolescents that is *relevant to individual needs and societal demands* in a world where there is constant change and a rapidly expanding body of knowledge. Such a program would consciously aim toward the continuing development of self-directing individuals, capable of solving problems through both rational and creative endeavors.

- To provide an educational environment where the *child* is most important and has opportunities for success. Such an environment would facilitate communication and interaction and afford opportunities for meeting interpersonal needs.

- To provide *orientation* to and *exploration* of the broad spectrum of educational experiences in the world of work, living, and leisure.

- To provide for a *transitional period* of continuous adjustment between the elementary school and the senior high school. This would include emphasis upon a continuation and enrichment of basic education in the concepts and skills pertinent to the general education of the pupil.

- To provide more adequately for *guidance and counseling* through the provision of special services and personnel. Aptitudes, interests, and capacities of individual pupils would be discovered by testing, counseling, and exploratory work.

Planning for Learning

The middle school program should be tailored to the needs, interests, and abilities of the child. The primary objective is the motivation to learn and the awareness of the various methods of learning, rather than the mere acquisition of knowledge. The essential skills, understandings, and attitudes to be acquired within each discipline, as well as between and among disciplines, must be carefully defined within the framework of this objective.

The Program. The program for learning in the middle school must give each child opportunities for increasing self-identity, for comprehension of his environment, and attaining his or her full potential in understandings and skills. Development goals include improvements in rational thinking procedures and increased competency in identifying, analyzing, classifying, manipulating, measuring, listening, viewing, communicating, and expressing. Sensory experiences should permeate the entire program to activate student involvement in experimentation and exploration. The nature of all of these experiences, their quality and adequacy, will strongly influence a child's image of himself, his establishment of values about learning and living, and consequently his development as an individual and a member of society.

Resources. A wide range of learning resources should be available to all students and staff. The variety, adequacy, accessibility, and appropriateness of such materials,

Is Your Middle School Relevant?

The accuracy of your answers to the following sample questions can help assure that the planning for your middle school will be as relevant as possible:

1. How do you plan organizationally to accommodate your instructional program to the learning needs and progress of your students?
 2. In what specific ways will an individual student's schedule differ from that in the conventional junior high school?
 3. What alternative approaches to instruction are to be provided?
 4. What provision has been made for growth in independent study skills?
 5. In what ways does the total school program coordinate the various subject fields? In what ways are the instructional endeavors in any one subject field linked to other areas of activity?
 6. What is your plan for evaluating program effectiveness on a year-by-year basis? What base line data will you employ? How many aspects of growth will these survey? To what provisions for program modification for individuals and for groups will these studies and assessments lead?
 7. What provision for building adaptations will be made for changes in program from year to year?
 8. What factors in the *total* middle school program indicate that the emphasis is upon the child and his opportunities for success?
 9. What provisions are being made to assure that the background, experience, training, and attitudes of the staff members are commensurate with child-centered rather than subject-centered approaches to working with middle school students?
 10. What components of the middle school program will facilitate student and staff communication and enhance the scope and quality of interpersonal relationships?
- How can factors that might inhibit communication and interpersonal relationships be eliminated?
11. What opportunities are afforded in the school program for orientation and exploration beyond the "academic" areas? What opportunities are afforded for familiarization with the worlds of work, living, and leisure? What provisions have been made for using the immediate and larger community as a learning laboratory?
 12. How will the middle school program be articulated with the elementary and secondary programs? What provisions are included in the program for those students who have not yet mastered the basic skills at the elementary school level? What provisions are included for those students who are "ready" for facets of the curriculum that have traditionally been "reserved" for the high school?
 13. How adequate are the facilities, staff, and program for the expansion of guidance and counseling during the middle school years?
 14. How do you plan to identify and maintain an ongoing assessment of the aptitudes, interests, and capabilities of your students? How can you adapt this diagnosis and assessment to the teaching program?
 15. What evidence have you that the purposes and functions of the middle school are understood and supported by the pupils, staff, parents, and community? What roles do students and parents play in the design, implementation, and evaluation of the middle school program?
 16. What provision has been made for the selection and use of learning resources? Will the number, variety, and range of resources give students opportunities for appropriate experiences that will support the learning program and their special needs? What plans do you have to facilitate student and teacher access to these resources when they are needed?

equipment, and personnel should be commensurate with the program they are designed to support. A well developed and equipped educational center is the base for providing essential and effective student and staff resource services.

Organization. The pattern of organization of a middle school is not the only determinant factor in establishing a quality educational program designed to serve the needs of pre- and early-adolescents. A key lies in the program itself. However, once a program is developed, careful consideration should be given to selecting a flexible organizational pattern that will best accommodate it. Factors related to the organizational pattern of a school include time scheduling, grouping patterns, and personal assignments. An individualized and flexible program demands a flexible time schedule.

Grouping patterns appropriate to a flexible program might include heterogeneous, homogeneous, and multiage groupings, or varying combinations of these, as well as opportunities for independent work and study.

In determining personnel assignments, consideration should be given to the requirements of such approaches as team teaching, differentiated staffing, tutorial programs, independent study, or a combination of these, and how they may contribute to the needs of students.

Services. Essential to an effective school



An in-school television studio allows for the preparation of a variety of teaching materials.



Photos courtesy of the author

Faculty work space for individual and group planning is essential.

program is a carefully developed plan which will ensure the necessary administrative and supportive services. These services include administration, guidance, health, special education, and maintenance.

Spaces. The basic consideration in designing the school plant is the accommodation of the facility to the program of the school. The middle school plant must reflect the transition from the concept of the self-contained classroom to the mobility of smaller groups and even individuals in later years. Variety, flexibility, and accessibility of spaces are prime considerations.

Provision must be made for a variety of spaces, ranging from large to small group areas, individual work spaces, staff resource centers for individual and group planning and for the preparation of a variety of teaching media, laboratories, and conference rooms. Flexibility of space can be achieved by means of mobile partitions, a variety of area dividers, and multipurpose facilities.

The facility to house a middle school program should be most carefully planned. It should represent the flexibility of the program, the rapidly changing child, the motivating atmosphere. Above all, it must in itself be a dynamic force, a live and living institution. □

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