

## *Perspectives and Imperatives*

### **CARNEGIE'S MIDDLE SCHOOL IDEALS: PHASES OF PROGRAM DEVELOPMENT**

DAVID F. QUATTRONE, *Greenwich (Connecticut) Public Schools*

*Turning Points*, Carnegie's report on young adolescents, is cut from the same cloth as many other documents of reform.<sup>1</sup> By now, the list of problems writes itself. rapidly changing demographics, unfavorable international comparisons of student achievement, an economy that will require a more highly skilled, versatile work force. Because of the urgent nature of these problems, the authors reject small-scale, incremental school reform in favor of sweeping transformation:

Educational reformers and the public have ignored early adolescence as a critical developmental period. The evidence on the period's special risks and opportunities makes it clear that sustained attention is long overdue. . . . Fundamental shifts in the organization, curriculum, and methods of instruction in middle grade schools are necessary.<sup>2</sup>

The report generates eight goals:

- Create small communities for learning.
- Teach a core academic program.
- Ensure success for all students.
- Empower teachers and administrators.
- Staff middle grade schools with specially prepared teachers.
- Improve academic performance through health and fitness.
- Reengage families in education.
- Connect schools with communities.

Specific recommendations accompany each goal (Table 1). Taken together, these recommendations comprise a laundry list of familiar middle school programs. teachers acting as advisers to small groups of children, interdisci-

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<sup>1</sup>Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development, *Turning Points. Preparing American Youth for the 21st Century* (New York: Carnegie Corporation, 1989).

<sup>2</sup>Anthony W. Jackson and David W. Hornbeck, "Educating Young Adolescents," *American Psychologist* 44 (May 1989): 834.

<b>Table 1. Transforming the Education of Young Adolescents: Summary of the Carnegie Recommendations</b>	
<b>Goal</b>	<b>Recommendations</b>
<i>Creating a community for learning</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Creating smaller learning environments</li> <li>• Forming teachers and students into teams</li> <li>• Assigning an adult adviser to each student</li> </ul>
<i>Teaching a common core of knowledge</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Teaching young adolescents to think critically</li> <li>• Teaching young adolescents to develop healthful life-styles</li> <li>• Teaching young adolescents to be active citizens</li> <li>• Integrating subject matter across disciplines</li> <li>• Teaching students to learn as well as to test successfully</li> </ul>
<i>Ensuring success for all students</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Using cooperative learning and flexible grouping</li> <li>• Scheduling class periods flexibly to maximize learning</li> <li>• Expanding the structure of opportunity for learning</li> </ul>
<i>Empowering teachers and administrators</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Giving teachers greater influence in the classroom</li> <li>• Establishing building-governance committees</li> <li>• Designating leaders for the teaching process</li> </ul>
<i>Preparing teachers for the middle grades</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Developing expert teachers of young adolescents</li> </ul>
<i>Improving academic performance through better health and fitness</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ensuring student access to health services</li> <li>• Establishing the school as a health-promoting environment</li> </ul>
<i>Reengaging families in the education of young adolescents</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Offering parents meaningful roles in school governance</li> <li>• Keeping parents informed</li> <li>• Offering families opportunities to support the learning process at home and at school</li> </ul>
<i>Connecting schools with communities</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Placing students in youth service</li> <li>• Ensuring student access to health and social services</li> <li>• Supporting the middle grade education program</li> <li>• Augmenting resources for teachers and students</li> <li>• Expanding career guidance for students</li> </ul>
<p>SOURCE. Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development, <i>Turning Points: Preparing American Youth for the 21st Century</i> (New York: Carnegie Corporation, 1989).</p>	

plinary studies, exploratory activities. School administrators, teachers, and parents will take the obvious step and ask whether these recommended programs are present or absent in their school. But a laundry-list approach assumes that schools can change significantly by adding new components. This article takes a somewhat different approach. How should these various recommended programs fit together? This question explores the relation among components. Are they weighted equally? Can we distinguish between process and outcomes? One clue to these questions lies in the tendency of middle school ideology to downplay the role of intellectual development. The Carnegie report has taken a significant step toward correcting that problem.

### THE UNFULFILLED PROMISE OF MIDDLE SCHOOLS

The *Turning Points* call for sweeping change begins with an irony. The report not only condemns traditional junior high school approaches but also severely criticizes prevailing practices in middle schools that claim to be more "developmentally appropriate," where many of the recommendations already exist, at least in some form. Nevertheless, the Carnegie authors have clearly concluded that the proliferation of middle schools, thus far, has failed to meet the urgent needs of young adolescents. For example, the report declines to recommend a specific age range for middle schools (e.g., grades 6–8 vs. 7–9). According to one author, what goes on inside the building is more important than the particular grade span.

At this point, grade 6–8 middle schools outnumber junior highs by a two-to-one margin and are especially prevalent in suburban areas and the western part of the country.<sup>3</sup> Nevertheless, even where educators have devoted "sustained attention" to middle level education, it is not clear that their efforts have yielded the hoped for results. Braddock's analysis of National Assessment data concludes:

Most schools for students in the middle still look much like the junior high school or high school of recent past, even though a sizable minority of more innovative schools can actually now be found. . . . Team teaching only occurs in a minority (19 percent) of the 6–8 schools. . . . Departmentalization of staffing without teaming remains by far the most frequent form of teacher assignment.<sup>4</sup>

The Carnegie report thus takes aim at twin targets. (1) the junior high schools that have not grappled with the issue of developmental appropriateness and (2) the middle schools that have developmentally appropriate forms but have blurred or weakened their intellectual mission. Such schools are in one-dimensional phases of development.

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<sup>3</sup>Jomills H. Braddock II, Shi-Chang Wu, and James M. McPartland, *School Organization in the Middle Grades. National Variations and Effects*, Center for Research on Elementary and Middle Schools, Report No. 24 (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University, 1988), p. 9

<sup>4</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 13.

## ONE-DIMENSIONAL PHASES

1. *The one-dimensional junior high school.* The stereotypical junior high has subject-centered programs organized by departments. Students travel from classroom to classroom, receiving chunks of knowledge carved out from a vertical (K-12) scope and sequence. Little articulation occurs across subject areas. Content mastery is stressed rather than critical thinking skills. The various learning programs and services are implemented in a fragmentary way, with scant attention paid to the personal and social concerns of young adolescents.

2. *The one-dimensional middle school.* Classic middle school theory simply stands the junior high school on its head. Adolescent development replaces curriculum content as the organizing principle, with special emphasis on the emerging identity of early adolescents. The theoretical underpinnings of this point of view have systematically muted the importance of cognitive development. The conventional wisdom has favored concrete rather than abstract thinking, based on a premise of "slow brain growth." If complex thinking comes later, goes the argument, exploring many subjects is more appropriate for younger adolescents than striving for depth: "Children should not be pushed to rise very much in cognitive level during these years but, instead, might be encouraged to develop and consolidate already initiated skills."<sup>5</sup> Similarly, in one classic middle school text, the authors encourage middle schools to focus on social development and refinement, the promotion of physical and mental health, the development of self-concept and self-acceptance, and—fourth on the list—academic adequacy.<sup>6</sup>

Lipsitz has found that even in exemplary middle schools, classrooms are characterized by

a surprising lack of intellectual rigor. While school administrators stress inquiry into ideas, teachers for the most part stress the transmission of facts. There is relatively little inquiry. The tone of classroom discussion reflects an assumption that young adolescents are developmentally incapable of grappling with concepts.<sup>7</sup>

In contrast, *Turning Points* explicitly rejects this assumption:

The young adolescent is maturing intellectually at a significant rate. Our youth will be able to analyze problems and issues, examine the component parts, and reintegrate them into either a solution or into a new way of stating the problem or issue.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>5</sup>Quoted in Joan Lipsitz, *Successful Schools for Young Adolescents* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Books, 1984), p. 190.

<sup>6</sup>Jon Wiles and Joseph Bondi, *The Essential Middle School* (Columbus, OH: Charles E. Merrill, 1981), p. 12.

<sup>7</sup>Joan Lipsitz, *Successful Schools for Young Adolescents* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Books, 1984), p. 190.

<sup>8</sup>Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development, *Turning Points: Preparing American Youth for the 21st Century* (New York: Carnegie Corporation, 1989), p. 15.

Buttressing their argument with National Assessment data, the Carnegie authors conclude:

Many middle schools in this country fail to support and challenge youth. Nowhere is this failure more evident than in the development of American young adolescents' critical reasoning and higher order thinking.<sup>9</sup>

#### COMPETING PRIORITIES IN THE CARNEGIE REPORT

The Carnegie report calls us to go beyond this either-or formulation with a more comprehensive vision, combining both the intellectual development agenda and the personal development and health agenda. These priorities are intertwined throughout the Carnegie report like a double helix, but how they fit together is not clear. Indeed, the two perspectives clash in several respects. Potential conflicts arise between students' present and future needs, the individual and the group, the cognitive and the affective. What reads smoothly in a task force report does not necessarily translate easily to practice, and some persuasive data indicates that middle schools experience difficulty meeting students' academic and social needs. For example, McPartland offers this analysis of data from the 1986 Pennsylvania Educational Quality Assessment.

Teacher responsibilities for large numbers of students reduce their ability to attend to the special needs of individual students, and specialized teachers are more likely to adopt a "subject matter orientation" that emphasizes knowledge expertise than a "student orientation" that emphasizes concern for individual students. . . . Departmentalized staffing may weaken teacher-student relationships while strengthening instructional quality in more specialized subjects such as science and social studies.

Our finding that departmentalized staffing may weaken teacher-student relationships while strengthening instructional quality does not mean that a school should decide which educational goal is most important and then establish the staffing patterns to be used in the sixth grade. Middle schools must address both goals successfully.<sup>10</sup>

McPartland's concept of trade-offs brings us to the comprehensive phases of development.

#### COMPREHENSIVE PHASES OF DEVELOPMENT

In one sense, comprehensiveness is easy. We can include everything. But as schools struggle with the trade-offs McPartland mentions, we must ask how various components fit together. Classic middle school ideology argues for an equal weighting; intellectual development is but one among equals.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid, p. 42.

<sup>10</sup>James M. McPartland, *Balancing High-Quality Subject-Matter Instruction with Positive Teacher-Student Relationships in the Middle Grades*, Center for Research on Elementary and Middle Schools, Report No. 15 (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University, 1987), p. 13.

The recognition that intellectual development is part of broad functions is a hallmark of middle level education that evolved from the junior high school through the middle school to the middle level education movement. It is grounded in the reality that the nurture and education of young adolescents must be an integrated venture; physical, social, emotional, and intellectual development are each inexorably woven together in the fabric of early adolescent life. This is a foundational concept of the middle level education movement. Today the protective custody of this holistic phenomenon is threatened by efforts to rank mental and intellectual development above those other dimensions.<sup>11</sup>

This statement nicely captures the need for integrating various perspectives that is the theme of this article as well. But it fails to address the striking failure of middle schools to deal with the higher level thinking skills. Moreover, no clear distinction between means and ends, process and outcomes, comes through. Some Carnegie recommendations focus on the quality of life inside the school—a personal, supportive environment and access to health services. Other recommendations focus more on learning outcomes—solving problems and synthesizing skills.

The nature of the school's responsibility and its capacity to effect change varies with the specific need under consideration. Despite the inevitable pressures to expand the responsibilities of our public schools to encompass health concerns, the schools share these responsibilities with other institutions—family, church, and community agencies. In contrast, although other parties, especially the family, contribute to the intellectual mission of schools, the schools retain a primary responsibility for intellectual development.

Comprehensiveness will mean different things to different schools, depending on the school's current phase of development. Some schools will need to emphasize the mental health dimension; others will need to upgrade the intellectual caliber of the course of study.

3. *Juxtaposed components.* The most common step for a practitioner attempting to carry out the Carnegie recommendations is to add new components designed to address the unmet needs. A one-dimensional middle school might develop a new critical thinking curriculum; a one-dimensional junior high might add counseling, health, or guidance programs. The resulting picture is an institution with diverse components, with different programs serving different functions. A departmentalized curriculum might exist next to a group guidance program. The educators involved may be diligently attempting to meet academic needs in the first program and mental health needs in the second.

The weakness of this approach is that it addresses the competing priorities separately. The school is more comprehensive but lacks a sense of an integrated common mission. Teachers may fail to acknowledge the valid purposes

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<sup>11</sup>William M. Alexander and C. Kenneth McEwin, *Schools in the Middle: Progress, 1968-1988* (Reston, VA: National Association of Secondary School Principals, 1989), p. 1.

of the counselor or health coordinator. In such a school, an intellectual orientation and a mental health approach may coexist effectively, the risk is that the programs may compete rather than complement each other, clashing in competition for time, energy, and resources. The school's mission may be comprehensive in scope, but the message is mixed. This intermediate phase of development juxtaposes various components but fails to articulate how they are connected.

4. *Integrated components.* How, then, can a school move beyond the juxtaposition phase? The ideal integration of all these needs suggests a kind of interactive network that clearly links each program component to the others, the dynamics would be smooth and continuous, marked by the absence of friction. Spelling out what that network looks like—not to mention the challenge of moving an organization in that direction—perhaps requires not a panel of experts but a conceptual genius. (A panel of experts, by definition, involves juxtaposing different perspectives. Integrating those perspectives is a qualitatively different, more difficult task, and that absence of an integrated network is a significant limitation of the Carnegie report.) Ideally, although staff members have different roles in the school, all staff members recognize the legitimacy of both intellectual and personal and social development and understand the links between them. Of course, no easy answers are possible; dilemmas will persist, but they will be construed as a school community's responsibility, not just that of a subject-matter specialist or a health coordinator. The teachers bring to instruction and student services a comprehensive set of assumptions about what should govern the decisions they make.

If we have far to go before we fully develop the integrated network, we can still gain some important insights by examining the relations of one program component to another. Thinking about these relations can help us move toward a more powerful conception of how middle schools should work.

Consider, for example, the nature of the adviser system. *Turning Points* discusses the need for teacher advisers in mental health terms. Advisers help make a personal connection between student and institution, a typical adviser system takes as its primary aim developing positive relationships among students and between students and the school. At the lowest common denominator, the adviser group is little more than a glorified homeroom. Attendance is taken, messages distributed, or academic progress noted. More ambitious adviser groups might engage in community-service projects, cross-cultural awareness sessions, or recreational field trips. A shift occurs, however, if we view the students not primarily in terms of their social developmental needs but as learners. Viewed from that perspective, the adviser group has a functional relation to the classroom.

One illustration comes from the Touchstones Project, a three-year curriculum sequence designed to help middle school students of varying abilities

improve their discussion skills.<sup>12</sup> This program, developed by three professors from St. John's College in Annapolis, has been carried out in various forms across the country. In the program, short paragraphs from classical texts are discussed once a week. Interdisciplinary in nature, the discussions can be led by teachers from any subject with a minimum of training. In fact, the program presumably gains power if it is not confined to one single department but instead stems from a schoolwide commitment to establishing a community of learners. As a potential curriculum for adviser groups, this kind of curriculum bridges the affective-cognitive gap; it distinguishes between process and outcomes and means and ends; it personalizes the school for young people in the context of academic purpose. This program is being used as an adviser-group curriculum in Baltimore, Maryland.

A second illustration comes from the Illinois' Mathematics and Science Academy. Although this selective school is aimed at gifted students in grades 10 through 12, it has some lessons for the middle school. Besides undertaking a lot of intensive course work and individual projects, each academy student meets in an adviser group twice a month. Although these sessions are indeed opportunities to step back from the ongoing curriculum, they are not divorced from that work. An explicit effort focuses on the student as learner. Part of the adviser approach involves teaching students about different learning styles, both their own preferred modes of learning and those of their fellow classmates. Students are encouraged to share their works-in-progress, and they keep journals about that work. The point is that making sense of students' own development as young adolescents should not be construed as separate from their intellectual journey; the two are inevitably entwined, and an artificial separation between them does students and teachers a disservice.

Another illustration comes from the health arena. *Turning Points* makes a forceful statement on behalf of promoting healthy behavior. Students who are hungry, drug-involved, or diseased cannot direct their full attention to learning. They need access to medical services and effective intervention. But these health concerns have a curricular component, even in—perhaps especially in—communities where hunger, drugs, and sexually transmitted diseases are not dominant problems. The conventional form of health education consists of what might be called the *Dragnet* approach: "Just the facts, ma'am." More recent incarnations also call for decision-making skills but do not clearly indicate how facts and decision-making skills will yield more responsible, appropriate decisions. Even more unclear is to what degree instruction will affect actual norms of behavior. Besides addressing these questions about effectiveness, a health curriculum must also respond to the charges of low-level content and lack of higher level thinking that are levied against the other curricular areas. Why call for rigorous problem solving and critical thinking in

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<sup>12</sup>Geoffrey Comber, Howard Zeiderman, and Nicholas Maistrellis, "The Touchstones Project: Discussion Classes for Students of All Abilities," *Educational Leadership* 46 (March 1989): 39-42.

**Table 2. Middle Schools: Four Phases of Program Development**

Goal area	One-dimensional		Comprehensive	
	Junior high (low integration)	Middle school (low integration)	Juxtaposed components (intermediate integration)	Integrated components (high integration)
School environment	School components are fragmented, no sense of the complexity of mission. No subunits or teams.	Middle school features exist in form rather than substance. Teams exist, but without planning time or support.	Many middle school features coexist without clear relationship to each other. Advisers and teams are not necessarily connected.	Mental health and higher order thinking skills are viewed as twin responsibilities of all staff members.
Core of knowledge	Organized by separate disciplines, emphasizing content coverage and low-level skills	Interest-based, concrete curriculum, lacking critical thinking attributes.	Interdisciplinary units are not well-integrated with curriculum and higher order thinking skills	Interdisciplinary teams assume responsibility for advising and promoting a healthy environment. Systematic application of appropriate instructional strategies. Scheduling varies with instructional purpose.
Instruction	Inflexible schedule	Flexibility may or may not be used	Intermittent use of effective teaching techniques that harness peer support.	
Health services	Absent or minimal.	May or may not be present	Health programs are unconnected with team activities	
Family involvement	Absent or minimal.	Family receives school and student information but is not enlisted as an ongoing instructional support.	Family receives school and student information but is not enlisted as an ongoing instructional support	
Community connections	Absent or minimal.	May or may not be present.	Sporadic, unconnected enrichment	

mathematics, science, and history but deny the importance of these skills in health, where the stakes are higher and more personal? In fact, instead of viewing health issues as questions for each individual to grapple with alone, schools might do well to put them in a broader context. For example, individual decisions on drug and alcohol use have a bearing on the rest of us (medical and insurance costs, hazards of driving, responsibility to family). These decisions are social policy concerns, not just individual dilemmas. Thus, the health agenda of middle schools is also connected to the broader intellectual mission of schooling. It is not only possible but desirable to teach about health in the broader framework of ethics, science, and history. Inquiry skills need not be turned off as the student crosses the threshold of health class; individual moral dilemmas on Friday night after the football game are not totally removed from the study of the plague in the Middle Ages.

Table 2 elaborates on these four phases of program development, which are arrayed along a continuum ranging from low to high integration of the various goals. For each goal area listed, a description applies to each phase of program development. (The table omits teacher training as a function primarily external to the school, but there are implications for staff development.) Practitioners can assess the degree of program integration in their own schools and identify some points of departure. As schools move toward the next phase, the changes will be more difficult and will require more staff training and involvement. For example, a middle school can add new components—an adviser program, a health course, or a research seminar—simply by working with interested staff members. This practical solution applies to many problems. To move from a middle school with juxtaposed components to a more integrated approach, however, is more complex. Conceptualizing the relations among the various goals and programs and translating them into the currency of time, space, and resources requires broad-scale staff discussion, training, and supervision. For example, curriculum design should be an interdisciplinary undertaking. Staff development for classroom teachers might focus on the guidance and health aspects of the school; staff development for guidance counselors, conversely, might address curriculum questions. Teacher evaluation might address not just questions of classroom delivery but also the teacher's role beyond the classroom and communication with students' parents. Even after much dialogue, dilemmas will persist, and solutions may be messy. But that outcome is inevitable if schools are going to move beyond an institution of discrete bureaucratic functions toward Carnegie's ideal of a community of learners.

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