

Blue Ribbon Commission on Middle School Education



Membership of the Commission

- Joseph Grassi, Chair
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- Wendell Bourne
- Lucy Chen
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- Richard Harding
- Dr. Janice Ellen Jackson
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Charge of the Commission

In our study of middle school education in Cambridge, our group will:

- Consider the work of the Middle School Task force, review data, discuss the current program to determine strengths and weaknesses, and look at alternative models from other communities

Charge to the Commission

- Provide an analysis of the current state of affairs and explore the ideas and considerations that will enable others to gain a better understanding of the current program and future possibilities

Limitations of the Commission

- The commission is not a decision-making body, nor is it expected to make a final determination of the structure of middle school education in Cambridge

Middle School Task Force

Met from March - May, 2007.

5 Guiding Principles of Effective Middle Schools:

1. Provide curriculum that is rigorous with high expectations for all students; developmentally responsive and relevant to students' lives; integrated and exploratory; based on MA Curriculum Frameworks and CPS Learning Expectations; consistent across the schools; guided by clearly articulated student proficiencies; driven by assessment.

Task Force Guiding Principles, continued

2. Use research-based instructional practices designed to prepare all students to achieve high standards.
3. Staff the middle grades with teachers who are expert in adolescent development, academic content, and best teaching practices, and are committed to knowing the whole child.

Support teachers through the development of professional communities in which they work collaboratively toward student achievement and growth.

Task Force Guiding Principles, continued

4. Provide a safe and respectful school environment, free from bullying, in which healthy relationships and communication are fostered in order to improve academic performance and develop caring and competent citizens.
5. Work in partnership with families and communities to support student learning and development.

What Every Good Middle School Should Look Like (Through the Eyes of a Middle Schooler)

- Comfortable and safe, physically, emotionally, and psychologically.
- Fun, interesting, engaging - a place of wonder, where challenges and new endeavors are explored.
- Connectedness to peers, teachers, and the community - a support network.
- Ownership and respect, choices and responsibility.

Middle School Improvements (ELA)

Grade 8 2007 MCAS ELA Results

2% improvement in percent prof/adv from 2006-2007

Grade 7 2007 MCAS ELA Results

Higher CPI than the state (CPS: 88, State: 86.9)

19% improvement in the percent prof/adv from 2006-2007

Grade 6 2007 MCAS ELA Results

5% improvement in the percent prof/adv from 2006-2007

Grade 5 2007 MCAS ELA Results

4% improvement in the percent prof/adv from 2006-2007

Results can be attributed to:

- Literacy Collaborative work K-5/6: professional development and coaching
- K-5 and Middle School Analysis of student writing using 6-Trait rubric, three times annually
- Strong, consistent professional development for middle school ELA teachers at Middle School Department meetings
- Strong curriculum support of new K-5 and middle school ELA teachers through redesigned NTIP (New Teacher Induction Program) course offered by district ELA coaches
- Extra middle school and grades 3 and 4 support in ELA provided by Lesley University during the 06-07 school year

Middle School Improvements (Math)

Grade 8 2007 MCAS Math Results

3% decrease in percent prof/adv from 2006-2007

Grade 7 2007 MCAS Math Results

11% improvement in the percent prof/adv from 2006-2007

Grade 6 2007 MCAS Math Results

9% improvement in the percent prof/adv from 2006-2007

Grade 5 2007 MCAS Math Results

10% improvement in the percent prof/adv from 2006-2007

Results can be attributed to:

- CMP2 (Connected Math Program) training for grades 6-8 in 2006-2007, including summer institutes
- K-5 Investigations District-wide implementation
- Strong math curriculum support of new middle school and K-5 teachers through redesigned NTIP course offered by district math coaches and veteran teachers
- Strong, consistent professional development for math teachers at Middle School Department meetings by district math coach

Results can be attributed to:

- Math Content Institutes in Geometry (2005) and Algebra (2006) for K-5 teachers in the three CSR (Comprehensive School Reform Schools: King Amigos and Tobin)
- RM Smartboard Math training in 2006-2007
- Math Grade Level Lesson Study conducted at the three CSR schools (King, Amigos and Tobin) from 2004-2007
- Adjustment in Math Pacing Chart, effective 2005-2006
- CLN (Cambridge Leadership Network): consistent focus on excellent math instruction

Additional Middle School Data

Grade 8 2007 MCAS Science Results

- 6% improvement in percent proficient/advanced from 2006/2007

Grades

- 4% decrease in % of 7th & 8th grade students with report card grades of C or below in all 4 core subject areas (ELA, Math, Science, Social Studies)

Summary of Middle School Benchmark Report

Academic Indicators

ELA MCAS

- CPI increase of 3.5 points at grade 6; state increase of 1.5
- CPI increase of 8.2 points at grade 7; state increase of 2.3
- On grade 7 MCAS Exam, the CPI (88.0) was higher than the state
- CPI increase of 0.1 points at grade 8; state increase of 1.2

Subgroups

- All subgroups outperformed the state except Limited English Proficient students on the grade 6 MCAS
- On the grade 7 exam, all subgroups outperformed the state.
- On the grade 8 exam, all subgroups except African American students outperformed their counterparts in the state

Summary of Middle School Benchmark Report

Math MCAS

- CPI increase of 4.4 points at grade 6; state increase of 4.4
- CPI increase of 8.9 points at grade 7; state increase of 3.8
- CPI decrease of 0.4 points at grade 8; state increase of 3.9

Subgroups

- On the grade 6 exam, all subgroups outperformed the state except Asian and Limited English Proficient students.
- On the grade 7 exam, all subgroups outperformed their counterparts in the state.
- On the grade 8 exam, all subgroups outperformed the state with the exception of White and African American students.

School Climate Indicators

Attendance rate

- Remains high at 95%
- Special Education and Non Hispanic multi-racial students attendance rates were 94% and 93% respectively.

Discipline

- Overall suspensions increased from 9.7% to 11.7%
- African American, Special Needs, Hispanic and Low Income students are suspended at a greater rate than other students.

Parent/ Guardian Participation in Student Conferences

- 10% increase in participation from 64% to 74%.

A Sampling of Some Key Strengths of our Current System

- School community that truly knows our students. Former teachers working in same building as middle schoolers
- Small classes.
- Wonderful offerings - music, visual arts, foreign languages, drama, city-wide orchestra/chorus/band.
- English/Language Arts Reading Assessment - aids in specialized instruction.
- 8th grade portfolios.
- ISP program
- Developmental Design - effective, developmentally appropriate, infusive social curriculum.

A Selection of Some of the Weaknesses of our Current System

- Some middle school math teachers teaching 3 grade levels of CMP.
- Scheduling difficulties of specialists - instrumental teachers split amongst schools.
- Transiency of middle school population - transferring from school to school.
- Transition concerns from structure of middle school to more independent nature of high school.
- Need for more common planning time and cross-school, departmental meetings.
- Role of 6th grade in middle schools.

Input and Feedback from Community

- How can we better meet the academic and social needs of our middle school students?
- How can we better prepare our middle school students for high school?
- When you select a middle school, public or private, what criteria are most important to you?
- What factors might influence your decision to leave your school at the middle school level?
- What is it that schools can do to promote more parent participation at the middle school level?