

## **Middle Grades Improvement Plan 2010-2011**

### **Overview**

Over the past few years Cambridge has committed to studying middle grades education throughout the district. The work has been informed by the Middle School Task Force, the Blue Ribbon Commission on Middle Grades Education, and most recently by staff and community discussion and input on a number of proposals on the middle grades. Although the final decision regarding any structural changes to grades 6-8 has not been reached, the process has generated city-wide conversations regarding the opportunities and challenges that we face in educating 11-14 year-old students in our community.

At this time the School Committee is carefully considering a number of issues as part of a comprehensive review of this decision. Although this work is on-going, there are important steps that will be taken immediately with the goal of improving the quality of education for students in grades 6-8 in our schools. These action steps focus on improving achievement for all students and reducing our persistent achievement gaps.

The specific action steps in this document outline key strategies that the district will undertake over the next few months and over the next school year. We have begun to get feedback from administrators, teachers, CTA leadership and other key stakeholders on the proposed initiatives and will continue to engage them as we shape and prioritize the work for the 2010-2011 school year.

# Middle Grades Improvement Plan 2010-2011

## Action Steps 2010-2011

The following action steps are recommended in response to the feedback and ideas that have been generated throughout the CPS middle grades discussion this year.

The middle grades improvement plan addresses the following areas:

1. Closing the Achievement Gaps
2. Use of Student Data
3. Collaboration for Teachers, Coaches, and Administrators
4. Aligned Coherent Curriculum
5. Evaluation of the Intensive Studies Program (ISP)
6. Out-of-School-Time (OST) Partnerships Coordination

Although they are listed separately, the six areas are inter-connected all in support of the goal of increased student achievement and enhanced opportunities for CPS middle grade students.

### 1. Closing the Achievement Gaps

In order to close the achievement gaps, middle school teachers need to:

- have high expectations for all students
- be held accountable for student achievement
- engage students in an aligned, viable curriculum
- use best research-based practices
- use assessment to determine what students need
- differentiate their instruction
- recognize different modes of learning and support musical and artistic learning as ways to improve student achievement

#### ***Differentiated Instruction Training for Middle Grades Teachers, Coaches and Administrators***

Starting in the summer of 2010, the district proposes to implement an initiative designed to increase our capacity to meet the needs of all of our learners. All middle grades teachers, coaches and administrators will participate in training designed to strengthen their abilities to differentiate instruction. This represents an opportunity to accelerate the learning of our struggling students, to provide appropriate challenge for a wide range of learners and to close the persistent gap in achievement that exists between and among subgroups.

The professional development will build upon the work already in progress within the curriculum areas and expand upon it to support teachers in differentiating instruction to meet the needs of students who need additional challenge and support. Using assessment, student work and best pedagogical practices as guides, teachers / coaches/ administrators will learn how to tailor their instruction to provide each student with the

experiences that s/he needs to achieve at a high level. The training will be coordinated with the current efforts of each department as they work towards strengthening the horizontal articulation of curriculum across the middle grades as well as the vertical alignment with CRLS.

## **2. Use of Student Data**

Administrators, teachers and coaches will be expected to use student data (both standardized and CPS assessments) to improve practice, to diagnose student learning needs, and to set measurable goals for improved student outcomes. As Instructional Leaders principals will be held accountable for the achievement of all students in their schools. The district is engaging teachers and administrators in a working group focused on the evaluation process and will explore how to include the Student Growth Percentile (SGP) data and other local student outcome data in both principal and teacher evaluations.

Student Growth Data will be analyzed along with other assessment information to identify areas for improved teacher practices as well as exemplary teaching. As a district we will work to identify, name, and replicate some of the effective teacher moves utilized by our middle school teachers who have high Student Growth Percentile (SGP) scores. The district's involvement with the Harvard Research Project will support this work with our administrators and teachers. Harvard Graduate School of Education will support the CPSD in identifying best practices by observing, recording and analyzing effective teacher moves in classrooms that have been recognized as having higher than average Student Growth Percentiles.

The new Youth and Resource Development System (YARDS) will house all CPS student data. Administrators and teachers will be trained in the use of the YARDS system beginning in the summer of 2010 with training continuing throughout the school year.

## **3. Collaboration for Teachers, Coaches, and Administrators**

### *Teacher Collaboration*

A major finding in the recent CTA Restructuring Survey was a need for more opportunities for teachers to collaborate with colleagues. Therefore, teachers will be supported with time to collaborate in an effort to bring coherence in expectations and outcomes across the middle grades, as well as to create a positive and productive climate in which to teach and learn.

In order to support teachers around this collaboration, the district will explore the possibility of engaging middle grade teachers in the creation of Professional Learning Communities within which teachers will prioritize the most important issues to address. Additionally, middle grade teachers will continue to meet with their coordinators and coaches to:

- develop common grade level expectations and benchmarks
- explore effective teaching practices
- visit each others' classrooms

- share strategies for meeting the needs of all learners including students with special needs and English Language Learners (ELL)
- plan lessons collaboratively with each other and with coaches
- develop teacher leadership within the schools
- use data to improve instruction
- discuss students whom they have in common
- write and refine curriculum and assessments

Special education teachers will work in collaboration with coaches to increase their content based expertise in all subject areas.

In addition, there is a need for the middle school teachers, their coaches, curriculum coordinators and principals to establish agreed upon proficiencies or benchmarks in each subject area for students as they exit eighth grade. The middle school departments will continue to articulate what it is that we expect all eighth graders to know and be able to do in all subject areas. They will also continue to create and refine the assessments and performances that we will use to determine if students have achieved these benchmarks.

### **Administrators' Collaboration**

*Principals, Assistant Principals, Curriculum Coordinators, District Administrators*

Administrators have a need to collaborate with their colleagues about:

- common agreements about effective instruction
- recognizing and supporting best practices around differentiation
- supporting a coaching culture in their buildings
- using the new student growth data to identify needs for improved and exemplary teacher practices
- assuring that every child in their school is meeting district and state standards for proficiency

This is the recommended work of the Cambridge Leadership Network for the 2010-2011 school year. This network includes district administrators, principals and deans of curriculum. In addition to this established network, it is recommended that the district expand its leadership network to include curriculum coordinators, assistant principals, and deans of students whose work it is to explore the nature of excellent instruction in middle grade classrooms and to compare practices across curriculum areas.

In addition, the Office of Special Education's administrative team and interested school administrators will visit other districts that implement different models of delivering special education services (e.g. Resource Room model, co-teaching, etc.) at the middle school level. This group will also review recommendations made by the independent consultant hired to complete a special education program review to determine best practices to service this population of students at the middle grades.

#### **4. Aligned Coherent Curriculum**

##### *Collaboration among Teachers, Coaches, Coordinators and Deans of Curriculum*

The collaborative work of the middle school teachers by department serves to bring greater coherence across the middle grades to all content areas. In addition to this work across the schools there needs to be an alignment of curriculum and expectations between the elementary schools and CRLS.

We currently have four middle and high school teams of 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> grade teachers, coaches, coordinators and deans of curriculum. Their area of focus is the vertical alignment of curriculum and the seamless transition to the high school. We will continue and broaden the scope of this work in 2010-2011. We will add a team of arts teachers from middle school and CRLS to create a smoother transition for students.

In addition to this work, members of the Office of Special Education's administrative team, including the CRLS Teacher-in-Charge, will continue their practice of meeting with special educators for students in 8<sup>th</sup> grade to discuss programming, services and transition of students into the high school. This will also include visits of middle school teachers and school psychologists to CRLS to become more knowledgeable with regards to student expectations, services and programming at the high school level.

Through this collaborative work it is expected that the gaps that presently exist among our schools in middle grade performance will narrow significantly. Our middle school data should converge over time so that the gap in performance in ELA from the lowest performing school to the highest performing school should narrow from an 18.6 CPI point difference in 2009 to a 10 CPI point difference in 2011.

Additionally, the gap in performance in math from the lowest performing school to the highest performing school should narrow from a 36.4 CPI point difference in 2009 to a 20 CPI point difference in 2011.

#### **5. Evaluate the Intensive Studies Program (ISP)**

During the 2010-2011 school year, the district will evaluate the curriculum, assessment and overall effectiveness of the ISP Program and its capacity to meet the needs of advanced learners

#### **6. Out-of-School-Time (OST) Partnerships Coordination**

As a result of the Mayor's Blue Ribbon Commission on Middle School Youth, Cambridge is developing a comprehensive cross-system service delivery, coordination and placement plan that will afford middle grade students increased opportunities in academic enhancement, life skills, career exploration, college readiness, culture and the arts, recreation, health and fitness, and leadership opportunities. Through these Out-of-School-Time opportunities students will get a chance to mix with a more diverse group of peers as well as to experience other resources and structures that could better prepare them for a smoother, more successful transition to high school.

Activities for the 2010-2011 school year:

1. Development of a formal OST service delivery, coordination and placement system to support middle grade students across city
2. The three Middle School Partnership (MSP) afterschool programs (MSP @ Peabody/Gately, MSP @ Kennedy-Longfellow/East End House and MSP @ King Open/Frisoli) will continue to serve as pilots for how schools and OST programs can be better linked. These MSPs will focus on providing more opportunities for academic support and enrichment including opportunities in environmental sciences, performing arts, media arts and community service learning. Program staff will expand their communication with school day staff including the sharing of student data and professional development opportunities with CPS Instructional Coaches.
3. Continued growth of summer transition programs targeting rising 9th graders
4. Establish a *Middle School Success Network* that will include OST staff, CPS teachers and counselors, and city service providers who will work to design, enhance and coordinate service delivery that meets the needs of middle grade students across the city
5. Development of resources, such as *guides*, *maps* and *calendars*, to help adults and students better understand the OST offerings throughout the year
6. Inclusion of OST providers in CPS anti-bullying training

#### **YARDS Middle School Pilot Proposal**

Cambridge Public Schools, in collaboration with the Cambridge Department of Human Service Programs, is proposing a pilot project using the newly developed Cambridge YARDS system to facilitate enhanced communication and data sharing between these two departments focusing on the needs and success of city youth.

The proposed pilot will involve a select group of middle school students dually enrolled at a middle school and a DHS Youth Center. The purpose of the pilot is to explore the potential of the YARDS system to enable secure data sharing and collaboration between school personnel and non-school service providers. This pilot is planned for spring 2010 into the summer of 2010. Lessons learned from this pilot will be used to develop processes and guidelines to enable expansion of this functionality throughout Cambridge Public Schools and other non-school service providers.

## Middle Grades Action Plan

when	what	who
April-May 2010	Initial planning for Middle School professional development opportunities including differentiated instruction, the use of data, and Professional Learning Communities	sub-committee district, principals, coordinators, CTA
July- August 2010	Summer Institute focusing on closing the achievement gap through differentiating instruction, using data and Professional Learning Communities	district administrators, principals, asst. principals, deans, coordinators, coaches
August Professional Development (day- long session)	Overview of the Middle School Initiative during the opening of school Professional Development Day with teachers and administrators  Middle school departments begin work plan for the year	administrators, coordinators, coaches, teachers grades 6-8
CLN visits (6) (Nov, Dec, Jan, Feb, Mar, Apr)	Cambridge Leadership Network for Principals with a focus on the use of student data, differentiated instruction and supporting Professional Learning Communities at the middle school	principals, district admin
Development of program and dates to be determined	Expansion of Cambridge Leadership Network for Curriculum Coordinators , Assistant Principals/ Deans of Students and with a focus on middle school instruction	assistant principals, deans of students, curriculum coordinators, district admin
Dates to be determined	Middle Grade Dept meetings Each department will set priorities from the following: -develop common grade level expectations and benchmarks -explore effective teaching practices -visit each others' classrooms -share strategies for meeting the needs of all learners including students with special needs and English Language Learners (ELL) -plan lessons collaboratively with each other and with coaches -develop teacher leadership within the schools -use data to improve instruction -write and refine curriculum and assessments	coordinators, coaches, asst. principals, teachers, special educators, ELL teachers
Dates to be determined	Vertical Teaming  Continuation and broadening of work started in 2009-2010 with 8 <sup>th</sup> and 9 <sup>th</sup> grade teachers in the ELA, Math, Science and Social Studies depts.	curriculum coordinators , deans of curriculum, principals, coaches, teachers grades 8 and 9
Dates to be determined	Middle School Success Network will meet to design, enhance and coordinate service delivery for middle grade students across the city	OST program manager, CPS school personnel, OST program staff, city service providers, families