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TOWARD SCHOOLS IN THE MIDDLE: PROGRESS AND PROBLEMS

WILLIAM M. ALEXANDER, *University of Florida*

Throughout the twentieth century, many efforts have been made to find a grade organization for American schools better than the eight-grade elementary and four-grade secondary pattern of education that had become common by the latter part of the twentieth century. Now as we face the twenty-first century, a three-level, elementary-middle-secondary organization has become the prevailing plan, but many problems remain with the school in the middle and how it fits with the ones above and below. Curriculum and supervisory leaders and others have done much, but much more needs to be done before the new schools in the middle can achieve their founders' hopes of promoting better education. The following brief review of the various school organizations in the middle is intended to provide a basis for examining the progress, problems, and prospects of the middle level.

THE ESTABLISHMENT OF SCHOOLS IN THE MIDDLE

The Junior High School

The eight-grade elementary and four grade secondary pattern of education below the college had barely become common (but not universal) when the search began for a school in the middle. The first argument was to modify the 8-4 plan, especially in its upper elementary grades. Harvard President Charles W. Eliot's argument for shortening and enriching the school years undoubtedly influenced the appointment and deliberations of the Committee of Ten appointed in 1892 by the National Council on Education, with Eliot as its chairman. Along with its proposed program of studies that became for many years the almost universal one for American high schools, the committee recommended:

> Several subjects now reserved for high schools . . such as algebra, geometry, natural science, and foreign languages—should be begun earlier than now, and therefore within the schools classified as elementary, or as an alternative, the secondary-school

period should be made to begin two years earlier than at present, leaving six years instead of eight for the elementary-school period.[1]

Other national committees then studied the problem, with the Committee of Fifteen (appointed by the Department of Superintendence) recommending in 1895 that transitional programs in algebra and Latin be introduced in the 7th and 8th grades without reducing the length of elementary education.[2] In 1899, the National Education Association's Committee on College Entrance Requirements recommended a six-year high school to make for better transition and programs for early adolescents.[3] The reports in 1907 and later of the Standing Committee on Six-Year Courses in High School Study supported the proposal for the six-year high school, as did the Committee on Economy of Time in Education. In its 1913 report, this committee also proposed cutting the total general education period, elementary through college, by two years and dividing the secondary unit into two periods.[4]

A report that came after the first junior highs had been established is generally recognized as the most significant and influential: In 1918, the Commission on the Reorganization of Secondary Education specifically recommended "junior and senior periods" of secondary education, with one major distinction:

> In the junior period emphasis should be placed upon the attempt to help the pupil explore his own aptitudes and to make at least provisional choice of the kind of work to which he shall devote himself. In the senior period emphasis should be given to training in the fields thus chosen This distinction lies at the basis of the organization of the junior and senior high schools.[5]

As these national committees, especially the latter ones, were debating and reporting, the first junior high schools were being established. Although a grades 7–8 Intermediate School established in 1895 in Richmond, Indiana, has been cited as the first junior high school, most recognition for this distinction has been given to Columbus, Ohio, where a three-year Junior High School opened in September 1909, and to Berkeley, California, where two three year schools that became widely known as junior high schools opened

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[1]National Educational Association, *Report of the Committee of Ten on Secondary School Studies* (New York: American Book Co., 1984), p. 45.

[2]National Educational Association, *Journal of Proceedings and Addresses* (Denver: NEA, 1905), p. 329f.

[3]National Educational Association, *Journal of Proceedings and Addresses* (Los Angeles: NEA, 1899), p. 659.

[4]*Report of the Committee of the National Council of Education on Economy of Time in Education*, Bulletin 1913, No. 38, Department of the Interior, Bureau of Education.

[5]Commission on the Reorganization of Secondary Education, *Cardinal Principles of Secondary Education*, Bulletin 1918, No 35, Department of the Interior, Bureau of Education, pp 12–13.

Table 1. Movement Since 1970 from the Junior High School to the Middle School Organization

Grade organization	Number of schools		Percent of increase/decrease
	1970–71	1984–85	
Grades 5–8	722	1,005	+ 39
6–8	1,662	3,802	+129
7–8	2,450	2,776	+ 13
7–9	4,711	3,172	− 33
Others*	850	940	+ 11
Totals	10,395	11,695	+ 13

Source. Compiled from U.S. Department of Education and National Association of Secondary School Principals sources

*5th or higher, with the highest grade 7th to 9th

in January 1910. Many other communities adopted the idea, too, and by 1920 there were 833 junior high schools in the United States.[6]

Later in the 1920s and on, the post-World War I enrollment boom made the move of two grades (7–8) from the elementary and one grade (9) from the high school into a new junior high unit feasible. This factor and others popularized the junior high school movement, so that by 1960 about four out of every five high school graduates had gone through the 6-3-3 organization rather than the 8-4 one.

Since 1960, the number of grades 7–9 junior high schools has declined, and the number of other grade organizations, especially 6–8, has markedly increased. Although the newer *middle school* and the older *junior high school* terms have been used at times indiscriminately for the same organizations, data provided by the U.S. Department of Education clearly show the movement since 1970 from the typical junior high (grades 7–9) to the typical middle (grades 5–8 and 6–8) school organization (see Table 1). The middle school grade organization has definitely outgrown and is replacing the junior high school organization. The hybrid two-year (grades 7–8) schools that may be more like upper elementary, middle, or junior high schools are still increasing. In any event, grade 9 is again most generally found in high schools and grade 6 in middle-level ones today.

The Middle School

The emergence of a middle school, which usually includes grades 6–8 or 5–8 cannot be attributed to the recommendations of national committees Rather, the organization apparently first developed independently as efforts by local districts to overcome deficiencies in their 8-4 or 6-3-3 patterns.

[6]George E. Melton, "The Junior High School Successes and Failures," Chapter II in *Perspective of Middle School Education, 1964–1984,* ed John H. Lounsbury (Columbus, Oh.. National Middle School Association, 1984), p 7

Beginning in the 1960s, certain advocates did help to spread the idea through publications, addresses, and consultancies. Thus, the middle school most frequently developed as an innovation either planned locally or aided by knowledge from other districts and individual proponents. For example, such a model as the Fox Lane School, Mt. Kisco, New York, undoubtedly had much influence in the 1960s through its visitation and a publication reporting its early planning and stressing that the new middle school must differ in "fundamental aspects from the ones below and above."[7]

One of its most vocal advocates, Donald Eichhorn, aptly said the movement "erupted as a protest against the program, not against the concept, of the junior high school."[8] His school district, at the time Upper St. Clair, Pennsylvania, had requested the approval of a grades 6–8 school in 1959, and its Fort Couch Middle School opened in the 1962–63 school year.[9] Even earlier, the Saginaw, Michigan, schools had established a 4-4-4 plan on the basis of studies on the characteristics of the various age and grade groups, to include: "the primary school, which includes kindergarten through grade 4; the middle school, with grades 5 through 8; and the four-year high school, with grades 9 through 12."[10]

Similar organizations also existed in such situations as senior elementary units in California and the grades 6–8 junior high schools operated by some elementary school districts under the Illinois township system. For example, the Skokie Junior High School—a grades 6–8 unit established in the Winnetka Elementary School District, Illinois, in the 1920s—developed many practices that were really exemplars for the middle school ones advocated in the 1960s. Still, my own 1967–68 survey of middle-grades organization found that only 11 of the sample of 110 schools queried of all 1,101 middle schools identified (as having at least three grades and not more than five, and including grades 6 and 7) had been established before 1960, and only 4 before 1955.[11]

The growth of the middle school has been phenomenal in the last 20 years. Whatever the sources of the plan, it caught on rapidly in the 1960s. William Cuff's brief survey of 1965–66 identified 499 middle schools (defined as having grades 6 and 7 and not extending below grade 4 or above grade 8).[12] Just two years later, my more comprehensive survey, as noted above,

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[7]*Middle School: A Report of Two Conferences on the Definition of Its Purpose, Its Spirit, and Its Shape* (Mt. Kisco, N.Y.: Bedford Public Schools, 1962), p. 19.

[8]Donald H. Eichhorn, "The School," Chapter IV in *Toward Adolescence. The Middle School Years*, ed. Mauritz Johnson. Seventy-ninth Yearbook of the National Society for the Study of Education, Part I (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980), p. 57.

[9]Donald H Eichhorn, *The Middle School* (New York: Center for Applied Research in Education, 1966), pp. 2–3

[10]George E. Mills, "The How and Why of Middle Schools," *Nation's Schools* 68 (December 1961): 43, 45.

[11]William M. Alexander, *A Survey of Organizational Patterns of Reorganized Middle Schools*, Final Report, USOE Project 7-D-016 (Gainesville; University of Florida, 1968), p. 14.

[12]William A. Cuff, "Middle Schools on the March," *NASSP Bulletin* 51 (February 1967) 82–86

identified more than twice as many, and included no schools having grade 4 Ronald Kealy and Mary Compton, both graduate assistants associated with this study, conducted follow-up surveys of their own using the same 1967–68 criteria; Kealy[13] identified 2,298 middle schools in 1969–70, and Compton[14] 3,723 in 1974. The more complete follow-up by Kenneth Brooks and Francine Edwards in 1977 identified 4,060 middle schools, also by the same 1967–68 criteria.[15] This figure can be compared with the 1984–85 ones cited earlier of 3,802 grades 6–8 and 1,005 grades 5–8 schools, for a total of 4,807—an increase of 21 percent from 1977 to 1985. All these figures exclude schools having only two grades, and therefore the grades 7–8 ones, which numbered 2,776 in 1984–85. So today most schools in the middle do not include grades below 5 or above 8 and can be considered true middle schools, neither elementary nor secondary.

Other Organizational Approaches

Besides the three-year junior high and the three- and four-year middle school organizations, the two-year (grades 7–8) school has persisted. In 1952, 19 percent of the junior high schools were grades 7–8 schools (and only one reported as grades 6–8).[16] In 1984–85, almost 24 percent of all schools in the middle were two-year ones—almost the identical fraction found in 1970–71. National committees and leaders in both the junior high school and the middle school movements have generally not recommended the two-year units; the objection "everybody is either coming or going" in these schools seems common.

But despite the problem of rapid student turnover and the difficulties it leads to in developing student leadership, school morale, and other desirable features, the two-grade plan is maintained for diverse reasons: the traditions of the six-year elementary and the four-year high school and the related beliefs that 6th-graders belong in the elementary school and 9th-graders in the high school; the fit of available facilities; and determined interest in having a middle-level program, whether called junior high or middle school, for at least grades 7 and 8. Certainly it is easier for grades 7 and 8 to follow the more flexible program of the middle school than grade 9, with its traditional inclusion in the college-preparatory, Carnegie unit pattern of the high school.

Of course, students of middle-level age, 10 or 11 to 14 or 15, are also found in grade 6-6 plans, and in sundry locally expedient but relatively occa-

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[13]Ronald P. Kealy, "The Middle School Movement, 1960–70," *The National Elementary Principal* 51 (November 1971): 20–25.

[14]Mary Compton, "The Middle School: A Status Report," *Middle School Journal* 7 (June 1976): 3–5.

[15]Kenneth Brooks and Francine Edwards, *The Middle School in Transition: A Research Report on the Status of the Middle School Movement* (Lexington: College of Education, University of Kentucky, 1978).

[16]William T. Gruhn and Ellsworth Tompkins, "What's the Best Combination?" *NEA Journal* 45 (November 1956): 486–498.

sional arrangements such as one-grade centers (used frequently in the early days of desegregation in southern cities), grades 4–7, 4–8, 4–9, and other assorted combinations. As school districts and their high schools have grown larger, the six-year high schools have definitely decreased in number. The other arrangements are generally temporary and in any event defy generalizations on their provision for students at this level.

A Middle Level?

Today the marked trend is toward grouping all schools that serve students between and separated from the elementary and high schools as middle-level ones Past distinctions between middle, intermediate, upper elementary, and junior high schools are becoming blurred. Although a few school districts still operate on a K8-4 and K6-6 two-level basis, most now operate three levels, whether K6-3-3, K5-3-4, K4-4-4, K6-2-4, or some other grade organization.

Conrad Toepfer concluded in his review of research, "Junior High and Middle School Education," that a long-awaited "true three-stage public education system" could not be provided and that "the articulation of the three units . appears to be at hand."[17] However, many problems remain in making the middle-level schools achieve our hopes for them.

WHY A SCHOOL IN THE MIDDLE?

The literature of junior high and middle school education is replete with statements of the schools' rationale—purposes, functions, goals, and so forth. For the junior high school, many early pronouncements were made by national committees. For the middle school, most of the statements originally came from local school groups or individual advocates of the middle school plan. There has been considerable agreement on several reasons for the new schools, and some interesting contrasts exist both between and within those given for the junior high and those for the middle school.

Better Articulation, Transition, Continuity

The wording differs in the various reports, articles, goal statements, and other presentations of the rationale for schools in the middle, but virtually all embrace the notion that the school should "bridge the gap" or "ease the transition" between the more student-centered elementary school and the more subject-centered high school. The early committee reports proposing a new junior high unit tended to stress the need for earlier "introduction" to such college-preparatory subjects as foreign languages and algebra and other mathematics areas. The tendency was to extend secondary education downward, many critics believed. Several decades later, middle school goals sought

[17]Conrad F Toepfer, Jr., "Junior High and Middle School Education," in *Encyclopedia of Educational Research,* ed. Harold E. Mitzel, 5th ed. (New York: Free Press, 1982), p 995.

Table 2. Reasons for Change to Middle School Organization

Reasons	Percent of schools		
	NASSP (1980)	Brooks (1977)	Alexander (1967)
Provide program suited to middle-level child.	61	68	45
Provide better transition from elementary to high school	57	63	40
Adjust to enrollment trends	46	48	58
Employ new curricular/instructional innovations	31	23	24
Use new school facility/building	28	18	20
Provide 5th- or 6th-graders with more curricular specialization	26	20	30
Solve concerns about junior high program	24	36	25
Move 9th-graders into high school program	19	29	25
Employ ideas/programs successfully implemented in other schools	17	13	13

Source Adapted from the report of the 1980 NAASP survey. Jerry Valentine, Donald C Clark, Neal C Nickerson, Jr , and James W Keefe, *The Middle Level Principalship,* V 1 *A Survey of Middle Level Principals and Programs* (Reston, Va National Association of Secondary School Principals, 1981), p 59

a more unique status, with emphasis on many areas—academic, vocational, and recreational—that might be continued in high school and thereafter. Recently, too, the great importance of lifelong learning skills and interests has been recognized, and so continuity in curriculum and instruction, and in motivation and guidance, is stressed for all levels As shown in Table 2, my 1967–68 survey, and especially its replications in 1977 by Brooks and in 1980 by the National Association of Secondary School Principals (NASSP),[18] found much concurrence of middle-level principals on the influence of the bridging function.

A Focus on the Unique Needs of the Age Group

The concept of the middle school stated in *The Emergent Middle School* tied together the "bridging" and "unique needs" functions, describing

> a school providing a program planned for a range of older children, preadolescents, and early adolescents that builds upon the elementary school's program for earlier childhood and in turn is built upon by the high school's program for adolescence Specifically, it focuses on the educational needs of what we have termed the "in-between-ager."[19]

For both the junior high and the middle school, especially the latter, many proponents have argued the unique nature of the early adolescent, or the

[18]The Alexander and Brooks surveys are cited in footnotes 11 and 15, respectively, and the NASSP one in Table 2

[19]William M. Alexander, et al , *The Emergent Middle School* (New York. Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1968), p 5.

"transescent," a term used by Eichhorn that caught on to describe the middle school learner's stage of development: "the stage of development which begins prior to the onset of puberty and extends through the early stages of adolescence."[20] The junior high rationale gave much attention to the misfit of traditional elementary education to older children in grades 7 and 8; the middle school's later absorption of grade 6, and frequently grade 5, was justified by the earlier maturation of children and the corresponding misfit of grade 6 and perhaps grade 5 of the elementary school to these children so much more (usually considered 1 to 2 years) mature physically than those of the same age when the junior high was first introduced.

In all these surveys, the major reasons schools cited was to "provide a program suited to the middle-level child" (Table 2); in the two more recent studies, the same reason was given most frequently. The "unique needs" rationale has been reflected in plans and programs for exploring interests; in health and physical education that gives special attention to the needs and interests of boys and girls in puberty and thereafter; in social activities in general and in relation to the considerable variations between and within the sexes in their interest in the opposite sex; and in problems of maintaining and strengthening intellectual activities in a developing flood of competing interests.

A Broader, More Flexible Program

Universally, the case for a new school in the middle has stressed the expectation of a better program for the middle-level learners, not only because of the greater continuity and the focus on the age group, but because of the increased breadth and flexibility possible in a non-elementary program, especially one not restricted by 9th-grade college-preparatory requirements. Besides introducing foreign languages, higher mathematics, and science, the junior high school was to provide vocational guidance and courses. For example, Briggs's classic statement in 1920 of junior high school aims included: "to start each pupil on the career which, as a result of the exploratory courses he, his parents, and the school are convinced is most likely to be of profit to him and to the state."[21] Undoubtedly, introducing exploratory courses has been one of the junior high school's major contributions. Also, the high school's activity program, largely extracurricular and after school hours, was frequently developed in the junior high school through an activity period within the school day, which allowed all students to participate.

The crunch of increased academic scheduling demands on the junior high school, especially through the 9th grade, actually became one of the "weaknesses" (Table 2) many wanted a new grades 6–8 school to eliminate.

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[20]Donald H Eichhorn, *The Middle School* (New York. Center for Applied Research in Education, 1966), p. 3

[21]Thomas H Briggs, *The Junior High School* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1920), p. 26.

The concept of the "better program" of the middle school has continued to stress not only exploratory subjects such as industrial arts, homemaking, art, and music but independent studies and mini-courses within academic areas that were first introduced in junior and senior high schools and later expanded at the middle level.

Administrative and Other Problems and Policies

Administrative factors have been prominent in the establishment of both junior high and middle schools. John Lounsbury found in 1954 that 59 percent of his random sample of 158 junior high principals stressed the influence of enrollment or facilities problems; 30 percent cited a desire to have transitional programs and to provide better for the needs of the age group.[22] Table 2 shows clearly the existence of several factors not necessarily related to program improvement for the age level. Thus, the 1967 study found the most frequently cited reason was "to eliminate crowded conditions in other schools." The post-World War II bulge of school enrollments in the 1950s and thereafter brought support to moving one or two grades out of the elementary school (or even three or four from the K–8 one) and into a new middle school or, perhaps more frequently, into the old junior high school. Grade 9 moved into (often back into) the high school—much the same as the enrollment/facility situation of the late 1920s and 1930s, which accelerated the establishment of the junior high school. Another more recent influence has been the expansion of kindergartens into space created by moving grade 6 to the new middle school or the old junior high schools. This factor of enrollments and facilities was still an important one, according to their principals, in the establishment of nearly half of the schools included in the 1980 survey.

More than one reason has generally been instrumental in the reorganization of school grades into a middle-level plan. Although the following reasons less related to program and student needs were checked fewer times by the principals responding to each survey, the reasons were still checked by more than 1 out of 10 principals in each survey: "use new school facility/building"; "move 9th-graders into the high school program"; "employ ideas/programs successfully implemented in other schools." Also, "to aid desegregation" was not included in the 1980 NASSP survey, but this reason was checked by 7 percent in 1967 and 14 percent in 1977.

Other more general but significant reasons have also been given for the new organization. In my first extended proposal for a new school in the middle, at the 1963 Cornell University Junior High School Conference, I gave the following reason in addition to those related to the ones considered above (including "an emphasis on values" and the greater "individualization of instruction"):

[22]John Lounsbury, *The Role and Status of the Junior High School* (doctoral diss., George Peabody College for Teachers, Nashville, 1954).

It would also facilitate the reorganization of teacher education sorely needed to provide teachers competent for the middle school; since existing patterns of neither elementary nor secondary teacher training would suffice, a new pattern would have to be developed.[23]

In 1965, the *Saturday Review*'s education editor, Paul Woodring, wrote on the same point:

> The emerging intermediate school creates a demand for a new kind of teacher education that will differ substantially from the preparation of either primary or high school teachers. If this challenge is met in time, and if those who plan the schools show imagination and courage, the new school organization can contribute greatly to the improvement of educational quality.[24]

Unfortunately, teacher education has not yet met the challenge, although there is still hope that time has not run out.

Experimentation and innovation have also been cited as an aim and an accomplishment of the junior high school,[25] and "to try out various innovations" was listed as a purpose of the middle school organization by a significant number of schools in the surveys cited. Despite some recent and current pressures to resist change, the middle-level program is retaining many of its innovative features.

CRITICAL ELEMENTS OF THE MIDDLE-LEVEL SCHOOL

Many groups and individuals have stated and described the elements considered critical for the school in the middle, especially those uniquely important at this level.[26] The statements stem from the middle school rationale, from experimentation and observation, and from research efforts. There is considerable unanimity as to certain elements. Paul George and Lynn Oldaker found also that, among 130 middle schools considered exemplary, "there was striking similarity in the components of the exemplary middle schools included." For example, an interdisciplinary team organization was a "central feature"

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[23]William M Alexander, "The Junior High School Changing View," *NASSP Bulletin* 48 (March 1964): 22.

[24]Paul Woodring, "The New Intermediate School," *Saturday Review* 48 (October 16, 1965). 78.

[25]George E Melton, "The Junior High School: Successes and Failures," Chapter II in *Perspective of Middle School Education, 1964–1984*, ed. John H. Lounsbury (Columbus, Oh.: National Middle School Association, 1984), pp. 11–12.

[26]See, especially among those published in the past decade or so, William M. Alexander and Paul S. George, *The Exemplary Middle School* (New York: Holt, Rinehart & Wilson, 1981), pp. 16–19; Thomas E. Gatewood and Charles A. Dilg, *The Middle School We Need*. A Report from the ASCD Working Group on the Emerging Adolescent (Washington, D.C.: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, 1975), p. 10; Joan Lipsitz, *Successful Schools for Young Adolescents* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Transaction Books, 1984), pp. 199–202; National Middle School Association, *This We Believe* (Columbus, Oh.: NMSA, 1982), pp. 10–16; NASSP's Council on Middle Level Education, *An Agenda for Excellence at the Middle Level* (Reston, Va.: National Association for Secondary School Principals, n d.).

in 90 percent of the schools, a flexibly scheduled school day in 94 percent, and a home-base-adviser-advisee plan in 93 percent.[27]

Recognizing this unanimity, I have concluded that six elements are critical:

1. *An interdisciplinary organization, with a flexibly scheduled day* The typical team is composed of four teachers representing specialization in language arts, mathematics, science, and social studies, although many other combinations are used. Emphasis is generally on planning for their common group of students rather than on actually teaching together, although team teaching can and does sometimes take place.

2. *An adequate guidance program, including a teacher advisory plan* A generally recommended plan is a home base or advisory group for a half-hour or so daily (or less frequently) for various group activities and guidance

3. *A full-scale exploratory program.* The program would include (a) the traditional exploratory courses of the junior high in fine and practical arts, foreign languages, and perhaps other fields, each offered on a short-term basis to determine interests, with a longer term offering later; (b) a special interest activities program including occasional academic, recreational, and personal development activities, and mini-courses not available in regular classes; and (c) opportunities for independent studies and other methods of exploring individual interests in the regular subjects of the curriculum

4. *Curriculum provision for such broad goals and curriculum domains as personal development, continued learning skills, and basic knowledge areas.* There is considerable agreement on the goals for learners stated by exemplary middle schools and various professional groups and leaders; the 1977 statement of these goals by the National Middle School Association helped to define them for curriculum designing:

> (a) every student should be well known as a person by at least one adult in the school who accepts responsibility for his or her guidance; (b) every student should be helped to achieve optimum mastery of the skills of continued learning together with a commitment to their use and improvement; (c) every student should have ample experiences designed to develop decision-making and problem-solving skills, (d) every student should acquire a functional body of organized knowledge; (e) every student should have opportunities to explore and develop interests in aesthetic, leisure, career, and other aspects of life.[28]

For curriculum designing, *personal development* embraces health and physical education, exploratory offerings, decision making, and guidance opportunities; *continued learning skills* include reading, questioning, observing, problem solving, and using media, computer, and other sources of informa-

[27] Paul S George and Lynn L. Oldaker, *Evidence for the Middle School* (Columbus, Oh National Middle School Association, 1985), p 19

[28] "Report of the NMSA Committee on Future Goals and Directions," *Middle School Journal* 8 (November 1977): 16.

tion; and *basic knowledge areas* include the usual disciplines of English, mathematics, science, and social studies as a minimum.

5. *Varied and effective instructional methodology for the age group.* Methods include continuation of large-group instruction with small-group and individual instruction as needed and possible; many adaptations for varied size and purposes of groups permitted by the flexible schedule and team organization, introduction of independent learning opportunities for students with needed skills, much use of instructional technology, peer teaching, tutorial instruction, and other more innovative practices appropriate to the age group.

6. *Continued orientation and articulation for students, parents, and teachers.* The need for orientation to the new school organization is great, and orientation should be continued for each new group. Good middle schools have continuing provisions for full orientation as needed, with at least annual programs suited to the needs of the respective groups of newcomers.

HOW FARES THE MIDDLE-LEVEL SCHOOL?

At least three generalizations can be made about the status of middle-level schools:

1 A school in the middle has become common—school organization has gradually but surely changed from a two-level (elementary/secondary) to a three-level (elementary/middle/secondary) one.

2 The grades 6–8 middle school has become the most popular plan and is becoming the focal point for improvement efforts.

3 There is considerable agreement among most interested professional groups and individuals on the rationale, goals, and critical elements of middle schools.

To these generalizations, however, we must add a major question: How widely do the thousands of schools in the middle reflect the rationale, goals, and elements reviewed here? On rationale and related goals, the surveys cited indicate marked persistence of reasons for establishing the new middle schools, and their goals for students and education in general have remained constant. Data are lacking on the recent spread of critical features outside the exemplary schools. The surveys of 1967, 1977, and 1980 previously cited gave less encouragement on this spread than middle school leaders had hoped for. On instructional organization, the report of the 1980 NASSP survey stated:

> When comparisons are made with the Brooks and the Alexander studies, it was evidence that very little change had taken place. Middle level education is still predominantly a traditional classroom operation. (p. 63)

For other features, comparable data available in the 1967 and 1977 surveys (not included in the 1980 one) did show some increase in interdisciplinary team organization. But, after reviewing Brooks's report of his 1977 replication

of many 1967 items, I concluded, in general, "There has been very limited progress toward the objectives of the middle school movement, but it has been too little, much too slow. We must do better!"[29]

A similar survey is needed for 1987 to determine progress during this decade. My own guess is that a survey would show some increase, although less than we might hope for, in the number of schools that now have the critical features or "earmarks" involved. This expectation is based on several facts and assumptions. First, the number of exemplary middle schools has certainly increased, and their influence can be considerable George and Oldaker's conclusion that "good middle schools are very similar programmatically, and they work extremely well" is relevant. Also, many significant, even if limited, research studies[30] have examined the effectiveness of particular features of schools in the middle, the influence of these and other hoped-for serious research efforts should identify, publicize, and promote better and more promising practices.

Especially important to the middle-level movement is the growth of interest in middle school education in the past decade. The great increase in the number and the quality of publications and conferences on the middle level—especially those of the National Middle School Association and the Middle Level Council of the NASSP—is perhaps both helping to cause and resulting from this growing interest. Finally, the increased efforts made to ensure the improved quality of middle-level education through local evaluations, state and regional accreditations of individual schools and school districts, and special middle-level teacher certification should increase the spread of desirable features. Obviously, these expectations may be wishful thinking unless progress is made on some substantial problems that still tend to block middle-level education from attaining its full potential.

SOME PROBLEMS TO OVERCOME

The Range of Quality

A great range in the level of quality exists for all types of schools, but the circumstances of their development is believed responsible for an unusual range of quality in middle-level schools. Many of them were established almost overnight to solve an enrollment, facilities, or other administrative problem. Because of the lack of specially trained personnel as well as the obvious need for continued personnel employment from the schools that were reorganized

[29]William M. Alexander, "How Fares the Middle School Movement," *Middle School Journal* 9 (August 1978): 19.

[30]For reviews of many studies, see *Organization of the Middle Grades A Summary of Research* (Arlington, Va.: Educational Research Service, 1983); J. Howard Johnston and Glenn C. Markle, *What Research Says to the Middle School Practitioner* (Columbus, Oh.: National Middle School Association, 1986).

into new middle schools, most professional personnel employed in today's middle schools were trained for, committed to, and experienced in elementary and secondary schools. Few official specifications from either government or professional organizations provided guidance for the new schools, and even today, after some 25 years of development, most middle schools probably do not fully reflect the unanimity on desirable elements that exists in the literature Many so-called middle schools have all the traditional characteristics—departmentalization, uniform daily schedule, after-school activity programs, stringent pressures on academic achievement, and relatively sparse guidance—of the high schools, including many 1960-model junior highs.

Curriculum and supervisory leaders can help solve this problem by determining its existence in the districts that employ them. They can organize study programs, evaluation and planning activities, visits to exemplary schools, and other plans to bring about greater understanding of the goals and desirable features of the middle-level schools and then work with school personnel to bring about continuing improvement.

The Lack of Identity

Despite the great progress made in recent years, *middle school* and *middle level* have little meaning for most adults, who were schooled in the two-level or elementary/junior high/senior high school pattern. The concepts are poorly understood, if at all, by many educational practitioners not directly involved in middle-level education, including professors of education and professional association officers and editors whose publications still refer to elementary and secondary education as comprising all education below college. The problem of identity is even revealed in government statistical reports of education, in school district organization that frequently groups middle schools under secondary schools, and in teacher education institutions that give middle-level education, if included at all, subordinate status in elementary or secondary education departments. Of course, these identity problems were inevitable as a new school level was developed in the middle of the two long-established ones.

But the idea has caught on, and curriculum and supervision workers must help the new level to attract and hold personnel as well as to develop the unique curriculum plans and instructional arrangements it requires. Perhaps identity will come more easily and fully as we bring these plans and arrangements into wider and more effective use.

Inadequate Teacher Education

Teacher education institutions have been slow to develop special programs for middle-level personnel. Junior high teacher preparation thrived poorly at most institutions offering it, since students in training usually preferred to aim for the senior high, and as late as 1981 only 31 percent of the member institutions of the American Association of Colleges of Teacher Education responding to a survey on preparation for the middle level (including

both junior high and middle school) had any type of special program.[31] A replication of that study is under way, and it may be that the increased state certification requirements (26 states required special middle-level preparation in 1984, compared with 8 in 1975[32]) will be reflected in special programs Still, most personnel (including principals, counselors, and other support staff as well as teachers) were trained to work in a different organization and program from those of the middle level. Of course, this is the major reason usually given for the tendency of the middle school to greatly resemble the prior organizations, especially the traditional junior high

Curriculum and supervisory leaders can help by impressing the teacher education institutions that they draw from (and the certification agencies concerned) with the need to develop special training programs and by helping to mold these programs. Those employed in the institutions are generally, as they should be, in the forefront of the new movement, although territorial problems with their own elementary and secondary or subject areas may conflict. All of those who understand middle-level education may be able to help in the remedial orientation and retooling education needed for personnel transferring from elementary or high schools to middle schools. School districts, professional associations, and education entrepeneurs have made widespread efforts to carry on this inservice preparation, and there must be a correspondingly wide range in the quality of service available. Can curriculum and supervisory leaders give the aid urgently needed for recruiting, organizing, and evaluating high-quality professional inservice help needed for establishing middle schools that really serve the purposes sought? Can we also remember that such orientation and staff development activities must be continued as long as new faculty members, parents, and children, without previous experience with middle-level education, come into the district or school?

Recently, I participated in an opinion survey about middle schools in a district that had established these schools some 15 years ago, the survey revealed much disagreement, even ignorance, among middle school faculty members on what features middle schools should have and whether theirs had the desirable ones. This finding simply confirmed observations in many situations and related conclusions on the inadequacies of communication and education about the middle school, and especially on faculty orientation that is discontinued after the new schools are first established. The task can be accomplished, but it requires persistence.

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[31]C. Kenneth McEwin and William M. Alexander, *The Status of Middle/Junior High School Teacher Education Programs: A Research Report* (Boone, N.C., Appalachian State University, 1982).

[32]C. Kenneth McEwin and Michael G. Allen, "Moving Toward Middle Level Certification," *Middle School Journal* 16 (August 1985): 19.

Middle School/High School Relations

Recent national committee reports, especially those affecting high school programs and graduation requirements, have generally ignored middle schools. But the pressure on academic requirements, time allotments, and related matters have created problems in many middle-level schools, especially those having 9th grades. The central transitional function of middle schools is not served well by copying the high school or by reducing time and support for exploratory and special interest offerings in the bridging school. Even a change of name does not guarantee that the high school's dominance over the middle school will be eliminated.

Curriculum and supervisory leaders can help solve these problems as they develop and maintain curriculum and instructional programs in the middle that serve the unique needs and problems of the transescent.[33] Among these needs is to prepare for the next unit, but this preparation does not have to be the earlier introduction once again of high school courses, grading standards, and instructional methods such as lectures. Can the preparation concentrate on developing interests and skills for further learning and schooling, with major attention to developing well-rounded, well-disciplined adolescents?

WILLIAM M ALEXANDER is Professor Emeritus, College of Education, University of Florida, Gainesville, FL 32611.

Franklin, Barry M. *Building the American Community: The School Curriculum and the Search for Social Control.* Philadelphia. Falmer Press, 1986. 176 pp. $26.00/$12.00.

This book is a fascinating and controversial interpretation of how major figures in the American curriculum past exercised social control to build their ideals of the American community Based on painstaking research using primary sources and archival materials, Franklin argues that curriculum history is a continuous saga of attempts to reconcile liberal-democratic values with the emergent character of urban industrial life during the first half of the twentieth century. The influence of E A. Ross, C. J. Ross, C. H. Cooley, G. H. Mean, and E. L. Thorndike from sociology and psychology are particularly enlightening. The book also focuses on the contributions of curricularists Franklin Bobbitt, W. W. Charters, William C. Bagley, Ross L. Finney, and Hollis L. Caswell and concludes with a case study of how curriculum thought manifested itself in the Minneapolis schools.

—*William H. Schubert*

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[33]For further suggestions on defining and dealing with the articulation problem, see Conrad F Toepfer, Jr, "Middle Level Transition and Articulation Issues," *Middle School Journal* 18 (November 1986): 9–11.

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