**THE STATE EDUCATION DEPARTMENT** / THE UNIVERSITY OF THE STATE OF NEW YORK / ALBANY, NY 12234

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| **TO:** | The Honorable the Members of the Board of Regents |
| **FROM:** | James A. Kadamus |
| **COMMITTEE:** | EMSC-VESID and Full Board |
| **TITLE OF ITEM:** | Strategy to Implement the Regents Policy Statement on Middle-Level Education |
| **DATE OF SUBMISSION:** | January 20, 2005 |
| **PROPOSED HANDLING:** | Approval |
| **RATIONALE FOR ITEM:** | Implementation of Regents Policy |
| **STRATEGIC GOAL:** | Goals 1 and 2 |
| **AUTHORIZATION(S):** | |

**SUMMARY:**

In December, staff presented the revised three-model strategy for the Board's consideration and identified the modifications that had been made based on the public comments received between September and December.  In January, the document reflected suggestions by Committee members to correct some inconsistencies in language and to add a provision for a five-year renewal of approved applications for Models B and C.   Based on comments by the Committee in January, the following changes were made in the three-model strategy:

- The Regents Policy Statement on Middle-Level Education adopted in July 2003 has been included as Attachment A.
- On page 3, we added a sentence concerning an overall goal of the strategy to ensure students are prepared to make the transition to ninth grade, academically and personally.
- On page 4, we added a Design Principle concerning collaboration with teacher education institutions.
- On page 5, we added a chart that indicates what continuum of options will be available to districts and schools as a function of their student performance.
- Under Models B and C, we have clarified that the Regional Superintendents in New York City are responsible for developing applications for existing schools to be submitted to the Chancellor for approval.  Applications for new schools may come from either a Regional Superintendent or the Chancellor.  In all cases, the Chancellor on behalf of the district submits the application to the Department.
- Under Models B and C, we have clarified that a district would submit an application for an individual school.
- Under Model C, we now reference applications for restructuring the full education

program as Model C#1 and applications for specific program enhancements as Model C#2.

- Under Model C, we have indicated that the Board of Regents will set a limit of 75 applications submitted by districts:  30 for structuring full educational programs (Model C#1) and 45 applications for specific program enhancements (Model C#2).  We have consulted with the New York City Department of Education, the Big 4 Cities and other districts about their interest in Model C.  The New York City Department of Education has indicated that it plans to use Model C in a number of new and existing schools.  These schools will all have strong core academic programs and will ensure that all students have opportunities to meet the intermediate State learning standards in exploratory subjects, such as in technology, home and career skills, health, art, music, and second language.  Based on our consultations with districts, we believe that the 75 limit will be adequate.  The Regents will review annually this limit to determine if it needs to be changed.
- The attachment on possible scenarios has now been labeled Attachment B.

With these modifications to the three-model strategy, the attached document is submitted to the Board of Regents for approval.  A report on assessments in the middle grades will be submitted separately to the Regents EMSC-VESID Committee for discussion.

VOTED:        That the Board of Regents approve the attached strategy to implement the Regents Policy Statement on Middle-Level Education and direct staff to proceed with developing the appropriate amendments to the Regulations of the Commissioner and with initiating the activities the Department has identified to support school districts and their schools with middle grades in implementation of the strategy.


Attachment

# Strategy to Implement the
## Regents Policy Statement on Middle-Level Education

**Introduction:**

Since February 2004, the Board of Regents has discussed several possible strategies for implementing the Regents Policy Statement on Middle-Level Education. The Board and Department staff concluded that, while we know a great deal, we do not know everything we need to know to transform our middle-level schools. We know what high performing middle-level schools look like and have captured those attributes in the Regents Policy Statement on Middle-Level Education (see Attachment A) and the Department's Essential Elements of Standards-Focused Middle-Level Schools and Programs. What we don't know is what combination of assistance, incentives, and requirements will enable schools, with sometimes similar and other times unique circumstances, to be more successful in developing young adolescents academically and personally. Thus, rather than presenting a single prescription or model for transforming middle-level schools, the Department is proposing three models that target both positive youth development and the improvement of student performance. By proposing a number of models, rather than a single approach, we are responding to the expressed concerns of the educational community for local flexibility. An overall goal of this strategy is to ensure students are prepared to make the transition to ninth grade, academically and personally.

**Design Principles:**

A core set of Design Principles will apply to each of the proposed models:

· Schools must administer required State assessments in the middle grades (English language arts, mathematics, social studies, science) as well as grade-by-grade tests required under No Child Left Behind that will begin in the 2005-06 school year.
· Schools must employ teaching staff that are properly certified to teach assigned subjects/classes.
· Schools must ensure their middle-level program is aligned with the Regents Policy Statement on Middle-Level Education and the State Education Department's Essential Elements of Standards-Focused Middle-Level Schools and Programs.
· Students who are at risk of not meeting the State's standards where there are State assessments must receive timely and targeted academic intervention services.
· Students must receive instruction in all of the State's 28 learning standards (with instruction in English language arts, mathematics, social studies, science, and physical education occurring each year in each of the middle grades).
· Students must be provided opportunities for taking high school courses (acceleration).

All schools with middle-level grades will also be encouraged to address the following additional Design Principles:

· Align curricula to the State learning standards, and articulate and integrate, where possible, the program across the middle grades (grades 5 through 8).
· Involve and engage key stakeholders and constituencies from the larger community.
· Engage parents and families in the education of young adolescents and ensure opportunity for families to communicate with educators on an on-going basis.
· Develop and maintain a supportive learning environment that promotes both academic

learning and youth development.
· Collaborate with teacher education institutions to ensure new teachers have the appropriate knowledge and skills to address the academic and personal development needs of young adolescents.


**A Series of Three Models:**

The three models in the series are:

- Model A (Comply with Existing Regulations):  The district would continue to comply with the current regulations, making full use of the existing flexibility provisions in the regulations (e.g., offering exploratory courses in grade 6).

- Model B (Strengthen the Academic Core):  The district would be able to propose a program that strengthens core academic subjects and effective academic intervention services, and provides all students with exploratory subjects that address the learning standards, are of high interest to students and further reinforce core academic learning.

- Model C (Build on Success: Develop Next Generation Schools/Programs):  The district would be able to propose new ideas for structuring the full educational program (Model C#1) **or** specific program refinements (Model C#2) and be granted relief from programmatic regulatory requirements, while ensuring that all students receive opportunities to achieve all of the State learning standards.  Model C is based, in part, on the Next Generation Schools proposal in the May 2004 report to the Regents, and is designed to enable schools to engage in a planned and thoughtful process of innovation and experimentation based upon their need and capacity and to document successful implementation of programs that could be replicated in other schools.

**A Continuum of Options:**

The three models taken collectively constitute a continuum of options based upon a district or school's need and capacity to change.  Each model has both commonalities and differences that make it best suited to the needs and circumstances of individual districts and schools.  Table 1 illustrates the continuum of options, with at least two options available for every district and school in the State.

**Table 1: Availability of Models to Schools as a Function of Student Performance**

|  | Model A (Comply with Existing Regulations) | Model B (Strengthen Academic Core) | Model C (Build on Success: Develop Next Generation Schools/Programs) |
|---|---|---|---|
| Schools that are high performing where students are achieving proficiency on the State Standards. | YES | NO | YES |
| Schools that are making Annual Yearly Progress (AYP) or can demonstrate a pattern of improved student achievement over time. | YES | NO | YES |
| Schools that have significant numbers of students not meeting State Standards (i.e., first year school did not make Adequate Yearly Progress), but are not explicitly designated as SINI or SURR. | YES | YES | NO |
| Schools with the largest numbers of students not meeting State Standards (e.g., those designated as SINI or SURR). | YES | YES | NO |
| Newly-formed schools (including those created as a response to the mandate to Redesign/Restructure). | YES | YES | YES |

Model A (Comply with Existing Regulations): Retain the current regulatory structure, making full use of the existing flexibility provisions in the regulations, i.e., offering exploratory courses in grade 6.

**Eligibility:**  All schools eligible to select this Model.

**Application and Sign-off:**  No application required.

**Regulatory Compliance:**  Districts and schools comply with all existing regulations.

**Plan:**  No plan required.

**Educational Program (Curriculum):**  As prescribed in Sections 100.3 and 100.4 of Commissioner's Regulations.
**Professional Development:**  As prescribed in Section 100.2 of the Commissioner's

Regulations.

**Evaluation of Model Effectiveness:**  Student performance on State assessments.

**Accountability:**  Student performance on State assessments.

**Model Implementation:**  Local responsibility.

**Specifics:**  Under this Model, districts/schools would continue to ensure all students achieve the intermediate-level State learning standards by the end of grade 8, to offer an instructional program in grades 5-8 as specified in Sections 100.3 and 100.4 of Commissioner's Regulations, to provide instruction by qualified teachers, and to benefit from the following flexibility provisions in current regulations:

- Languages other than English (LOTE) instruction may commence at any grade level prior to grade 8, but no later than the beginning of grade 8 so that students are provided the required two units of study by the end of grade 9.
- Unit of study requirements in grades 7 and 8 may be reduced but not eliminated for students determined to need academic intervention services.
- Students may meet the required half unit of study in music by participation in a school's band, chorus, or orchestra, provided that such participation is consistent with the goals and objectives of the school's music programs for grades 7-8.
- The requirements for technology education, home and career skills and library and information skills may be met by the integration of State learning standards into other courses.
- Qualified students in grade 8 must be given the opportunity to take high school courses in mathematics and in at least one of the following areas:  English, social studies, languages other than English, art, music, career and technical education, or science.  Schools may allow students in other grades to take high school courses in these subjects.

     Also, the Board of Regents will reinstitute Section 80-5.12 of the Commissioner's Regulations which provides flexibility in making teaching assignments for schools that propose an experiment in organizational change in the middle grades.  Approval of applications for this flexibility would be contingent upon those teachers that are affected being required to pursue and complete a certification extension to teach at another grade level in a middle school within three years.  Further, a statement of continuing eligibility would be made available for teachers who had provided instruction under a previously approved experimental middle school program.

**Department Guidance and Involvement:**  Minimal support and guidance with minimal involvement.

> Model B (Strengthen the Academic Core):  The district would be able to propose a program that strengthens core academic subjects and effective academic intervention services, and provides all students with exploratory subjects that address the learning standards, are of high interest to students and further reinforce core academic learning.

**Eligibility:** Districts with schools that have a high percentage of students requiring academic intervention (including but not limited to those formally designated as SINI or SURR) **or** newly formed schools, including those created as a response to the mandate to "Redesign" or

"Restructure," are eligible.

**Application and Sign-off:**  Formal application from the district to the State Education Department required. The superintendent(s) and board(s) of education must sign off on the application.  In New York City, an application for an existing school would be developed by the Regional Superintendent, be approved by the Chancellor of the New York City Department of Education, and submitted by the Chancellor to the State Education Department.  Applications for a new school may come from either the Regional Superintendent or the Chancellor.  In all cases, the Chancellor on behalf of the district submits the application to the Department.  A district must submit with its application a report from the district's shared decision-making team, or in New York City the school leadership team, that provides evidence that consultation took place at the district and building levels and identifies any concerns expressed by constituents.  Only applications from districts will be considered; applications submitted by individual schools will not be accepted.

**Regulatory Compliance:**  Districts and schools comply with all existing regulations, with the exception of the prescribed time requirements for units of study in exploratory courses.

**Plan:**  All schools selecting this model (even those not formally designated as SINI or SURR) must follow the SINI/SURR Redesign or Restructure school improvement plan format and protocol.  The completed SINI/SURR Redesign or Restructure school improvement plan must address the results of a State-developed but locally conducted self-study process and be submitted as part of the application package.

**Educational Program (Curriculum):**  Reinforce the importance of student learning in the middle grades in English language arts, mathematics, social studies, science, art/music, and physical education and exploratory course instruction in the middle grades that addresses the State learning standards in technology education, health, home and career skills, career and occupational studies, library and information skills, and a second language.

**Professional Development:**  As prescribed in Section 100.2 of Commissioner's Regulations, but with a focus specifically on the teaching of literacy and numeracy across the curriculum.

**Evaluation of Model Effectiveness:**  Student performance on State assessments **and** State-developed measurable indicators of structural, organizational, curricular and/or instructional change as well as behavioral, attitudinal, and environmental changes.

**Accountability:** The application must include observable, research-based, objectively measurable indicators/evidence of school change and improvement aligned with the Regents Policy Statement on Middle-Level Education and the State Education Department's Essential Elements of Standards Focused Middle-Level Schools and Programs.

**Model Implementation:**  Approval of regulatory relief is based upon the State Education Department's acceptance of the measurable indicators/evidence of school change and improvement as proposed in the application and will be for a period of five years.  Continuation of regulatory relief during the approved implementation period will be contingent upon monitored and publicly reported progress on:

- the implementation of the school improvement plan proposed in the application;
- the measurable indicators/evidence of school change and improvement as proposed

in the application;
- the school's Performance Index; and
- the State-developed checklists of knowledge and skills or alternative assessments in those areas where there are no State assessments.

Districts seeking continued approval of regulatory relief beyond the approved five-year implementation period must formally reapply.

**Specifics:** Under this Model, the Department will provide guidance to districts as they complete the basic steps of a school improvement process that:

*Educational Program and Structure:*
- ♦ Ensure that all students are given opportunities to receive instruction in exploratory areas such as technology education, health, home and career skills, career and occupational studies, library and information skills, and a second language.
- ♦ Create small schools or small learning communities within schools. The small schools or learning communities could be organized by a theme, but would not be required to do so.
- ♦ Cooperate with a high school in the district on the transition of students from grade 8 to grade 9.
- ♦ Assess and monitor each school's learning environment by using a set of State-developed indicators of a supportive learning environment.
- ♦ Develop and evaluate a strategy for engaging students and parents, including giving them a voice in designing the school program and structure.

*Instruction and Assessment:*
- ♦ Document how students will meet all of the State learning standards through the design proposed.
- ♦ Plan for students who are behind in English and math using high interest materials to stimulate their interest in literacy and math.
- ♦ Make literacy a part of all content area instruction.
- ♦ Address the needs of students with disabilities, with a focus on literacy and math.
- ♦ Address the needs of English language learners, with a focus on improving English reading, writing and speaking.
- ♦ Administer curriculum/performance-based assessments and uses data on student performance to improve instruction.
- ♦ Identify and periodically assess specific measurable goals for improvement of student performance in English and math on State assessments.

*Teaching and Administrative Staff:*
- ♦ Ensure all teachers in the middle grades are qualified.
- ♦ Plan for the ongoing professional development of teachers and administrators with the focus to include, but not be limited to, instructional content, pedagogical techniques, interdisciplinary teaching, student support, supportive learning environments, and numeracy and literacy in content areas.
- ♦ Provide common planning time for teachers so they can ensure coordination of program, integration of content and review of the progress of individual students.
- ♦ Plan for building the leadership skills of teachers and administrators.

**Department Guidance and Involvement:** Strong support and guidance with significant Department involvement.

> Model C (Build on Success: Develop Next Generation Schools/Programs): The district would be able to propose new ideas for restructuring the full educational program (Model C#1) **or** specific program enhancements (Model C#2) and be granted relief from programmatic regulatory requirements, while ensuring that all students receive opportunities to achieve all of the State learning standards.

**Eligibility:**  Newly formed schools and all existing schools, except those that have the highest percentage of students requiring academic intervention services (i.e., those designated as SINI or SURR), are eligible.   The Board of Regents will set a limit of 75 applications:  30 for restructuring the full educational program (Model C#1) and 45 for specific program enhancements (Model C#2).  The Regents will annually review this limit to determine if it needs to be changed.

**Application and Sign-off:**  Formal application from the district to the State Education Department for a full educational program model (Model C#1) required.  The superintendent(s) and board(s) of education must sign off on the application.  In New York City, an application for an existing school would be developed by the Regional Superintendent, be approved by the Chancellor of the New York City Department of Education, and submitted by the Chancellor to the State Education Department.  Applications for new schools may come from either a Regional Superintendent or the Chancellor.  In all cases, the Chancellor on behalf of the district submits the application to the Department.  A district must submit with its application a report from the district's shared decision-making team, or in New York City the school leadership team, that provides evidence that consultation took place at the district and building levels and identifies any concerns expressed by constituents.   In those districts where public school choice is required under No Child Left Behind (NCLB), the district's application for each newly formed school must include an agreement that a minimum of 20 percent of seats will be offered to students seeking transfer, consistent with State and federal law.  Only applications from districts will be considered; applications submitted by individual schools will not be accepted.

**Regulatory Compliance:** Districts and schools receive relief from specific regulatory requirements as per an approved application and/or school improvement plan.

**Plan:**  Schools proposing new ideas for restructuring the full educational program (Model C#1) would complete a State-developed but locally conducted self-study process. Newly-formed "Redesign" or "Restructure" schools would address the results in the required Redesign/ Restructure school improvement plan that must be submitted as part of the application package.  Schools proposing to make specific program enhancements (Model C#2) would not be required to complete the self-study process.

**Educational Program (Curriculum):**  As prescribed in Sections 100.3 and 100.4 of Commissioner's Regulations (with any changes in program/curriculum based upon the approved application package and school improvement plan, if required).

**Professional Development:**  As per the approved application (and school improvement plan, if required), but must be consistent with the requirements prescribed in Section 100.2 of Commissioner's Regulations.

**Evaluation of Model Effectiveness:**  Student performance on State assessments **and** State-developed measurable indicators/evidence of structural, organizational, curricular and/or instructional change as well as behavioral, attitudinal, and environmental changes.

**Accountability:** The application must include observable, research-based, objectively measurable indicators/evidence of school change and improvement aligned with the Regents Policy Statement on Middle-Level Education and the State Education Department's Essential Elements of Standards Focused Middle-Level Schools and Programs.

**Model Implementation:**  Approval of regulatory relief is based upon the State Education Department's acceptance of the measurable indicators/evidence of school change and improvement as proposed in the application and will be for a period of five years.  Continuation of regulatory relief during the approved implementation period will be contingent upon monitored and publicly reported progress on:

- the implementation of the school improvement plan proposed in the application;
- the measurable indicators/evidence of school change and improvement as proposed in the application;
- the school's Performance Index; and
- the State-developed checklists of knowledge and skills or alternative assessments in those areas where there are no State assessments.

Districts seeking continued approval of regulatory relief beyond the approved five-year implementation period must formally reapply.

**Specifics:**  Under Model C#1, districts interested in proposing systemic changes that either target or impact program areas in which there are either mandated State assessments or specific graduation requirements will be required to submit an application to the State Education Department on behalf of a school.  The Board of Regents will set a limit on applications for 30 schools the State Education Department will approve for restructuring the full educational program (Model C#1).  In addition to the core Design Principles, any proposal for Model C#1 should address the following specific areas:

*Educational Program and Structure:*
- Address the size of the school or size of the learning communities within schools.
- Cooperate with a high school in the district on the transition of students from grade 8 to grade 9.
- Assess and monitor each school's learning environment by using a set of State-developed indicators of a supportive learning environment.
- Develop and evaluate a strategy for engaging students and parents, including giving them a voice in designing the school program and structure.
- Create partnerships with higher education, the business community, and community-based organizations to bring community resources into the school.

*Instruction and Assessment:*
- Document how students will meet all of the State learning standards through the design proposed.
- Plan for students who are behind in English and math using high interest materials to stimulate their interest in literacy and math.

- Make literacy a part of <u>all</u> content area instruction.
- Address the needs of students with disabilities, with a focus on literacy and math.
- Address the needs of English language learners, with a focus on improving English reading, writing and speaking.
- Administer curriculum/performance-based assessments and use data on student performance to improve instruction.
- Identify and periodically assess specific measurable goals for improvement of student performance in English and mathematics on State assessments.

*Teaching and Administrative Staff:*

- Plan for the ongoing professional development of teachers and administrators with the focus to include, but not be limited to, instructional content, pedagogical techniques, interdisciplinary teaching, student support, supportive learning environments, and numeracy and literacy in content areas.
- Provide common planning time for teachers so they can ensure coordination of program, integration of content and review of the progress of individual students.
- Plan for building the leadership skills of teachers and administrators.

Districts only interested in proposing selective program refinements (Model C#2) that target specific standards areas not measured by mandated State assessments would be required to develop an application on behalf of a school.  Districts outside the Big 5 cities would submit the application to the District Superintendent to review and to make a recommendation concerning approval to the State Education Department. In New York City, an application for an existing school would be developed by the Regional Superintendent, be approved by the Chancellor of the New York City Department of Education, and submitted by the Chancellor to the State Education Department.  Applications for new schools may come from either a Regional Superintendent or the Chancellor.  In all cases, the Chancellor on behalf of the district submits the application to the Department.  In the case of the Big 4 school districts, the application would be submitted directly to the State Education Department for review and approval.

The application for Model C#2 would address the core Design Principles and explicitly detail the targeted innovation, its relationship to student achievement, student interests, and/or student development, and the plan for evaluating the effectiveness and impact of the innovation on student learning/development.  The Board of Regents will set a limit of 45 applications the State Education Department would approve for a specific program enhancement (Model C#2).  The Board of Regents will annually review this limit to determine if it needs to be changed.  The types of approved program refinements would be monitored over time to determine if any should be added to the flexibility provisions currently allowed in regulations listed under Model A.

**Department Guidance and Involvement:**  Minimum support and guidance and significant involvement when the district is proposing systemic changes that target/impact program areas in which there are either mandated State assessments or specific graduation requirements (Model C#1); moderate support and guidance with moderate involvement when the district is proposing only selective program refinements that target specific standards areas not measured by mandated State assessments (Model C#2).

Attachment B provides possible scenarios for implementation of each of the Models.

**Department Support:**

To support school districts and their schools with middle grades, regardless of which Model they elect to implement, the Department will:

- Inform schools and districts about the educational conditions that must be in place for the Essential Elements of Standards-Focused Middle-Level Schools and Programs to work and to ensure the goals for implementing the Regents Policy Statement on Middle-Level Education are attained.
- Develop content standards in English language arts and math by grade level and identify several model curricula in other subject areas.
- Identify the indicators for a supportive learning environment that are critical to ensuring academic and personal success for all students, including, but not limited to, attendance, discipline, safety, school climate, academic intervention, after-school programs and parent involvement.
- Design a strategy to update the course content in the exploratory subjects (e.g., Technology Education, Home and Career Skills, Library and Information Skills, and Health Education).
- Develop checklists of knowledge and skills to assess student learning in the exploratory subjects consistent with the State learning standards.
- Provide guidance for completing the application package including:
    - a suggested self-study process for informing the development of a school improvement plan required as part of the application
    - research-based, survey instruments that:
        - provide objective, measurable indicators of structural, organizational, curricular and/or instructional change as well as behavioral, attitudinal, and environmental changes and
        - are aligned with the Regents Policy Statement on Middle-Level Education and the Department's Essential Elements of Standards-Focused Middle-Level Schools and Programs; and
    - a timeline for the submission and review of the completed application.
  - Identify resources to assist districts and schools that submit applications to strengthen the academic core under Model B.

**Attachment A**

**Supporting Young Adolescents:**
**Regents Policy Statement on Middle-Level Education**
**July 2003**


**Introduction**

Young adolescents from ages 10 to 14 are undergoing personal transformations – physical, intellectual, emotional, social and psychological.  The Board of Regents believes that the time these students spend in the middle grades, 5 through 8, is critical to both their personal growth and development and their success in high school.

Based on a series of statewide discussions with many groups and a thorough review of the research on effective middle level education practices, the Regents and the State Education Department have identified seven essential elements of standards-focused middle-level schools and programs.  This policy statement reflects these seven key factors.

The challenge to middle-level education is to make the change from childhood to adolescence and from the elementary grades to the high school a positive period of intellectual and personal development.  For many students, this is a hopeful time of life.  However, for some youngsters emerging adolescence is a stressful time.  These personal difficulties may be exacerbated in cases where either the home or the community (including the school) in which the young person lives and learns offers limited opportunities for positive role models, employment, and a satisfying lifestyle.

Educators, parents, families, and communities must recognize that they need to work together to assist students in a changing society.  Educators need to recognize and assume a shared responsibility not only for their students' intellectual and educational development, but also for their students' personal, social, emotional, and physical development.  The entire school community must share responsibility for the success of all students, assuring high-quality instruction, course content, and support and other services in the middle-level grades, and promoting high expectations for all students, regardless of disability, limited English proficiency, religion, sex, color, race, or national origin.

The following seven essential elements must be in place in standards-focused schools with middle-level grades if young adolescents are to succeed academically and develop as individuals:

1.      A philosophy and mission that reflect the intellectual and developmental needs and characteristics of young adolescents.
2.      An educational program that is comprehensive, challenging, purposeful, integrated, relevant, and standards-based.
3.      An organization and structure that support both academic excellence and personal development.
4.      Classroom instruction appropriate to the needs and characteristics of young adolescents provided by skilled and knowledgeable teachers.
5.      Strong educational leadership and a building administration that encourage, facilitate, and sustain involvement, participation, and partnerships.
6.      A network of academic and personal support available for all students.

7.       Professional learning for all staff that is ongoing, planned, purposeful, and collaboratively developed.

In a standards-focused middle-level school or program, the goals of academic achievement and personal development for each student are not in conflict or in competition. Rather, they are compatible, complementary, and mutually supportive.  From a young adolescent's perspective, the essential elements of a successful standards-focused middle-level school or program must contain the following components.

**Philosophy, Mission, and Vision**

**Every young adolescent deserves a school that values academic achievement and personal development and provides a supportive environment free from violence, bullying, harassment, and other negative behaviors.**  Students in the middle grades are in a unique period of development, a period of rapid intellectual, physical, social, and emotional change.  The philosophy, mission, and vision of a school with middle-level grades must reflect the dual purposes of middle-level education (academic achievement and personal development).  They must also stress the positive development of the individual and affirm the school's responsibility to assist all students in making a successful transition from the elementary grades to high school and from childhood to adolescence.

**Educational Program**

**Every young adolescent needs a challenging, standards-based course of study that is comprehensive, integrated, and relevant**.  They need an educational program that is enhanced by genuine involvement of students, their parents, their families, and the greater school community.  Further, they need an educational program that emphasizes and promotes the requisite academic knowledge and skills needed to succeed in school — both middle-level and high school — and in later life.  The educational program should be fully aligned with the State's 28 learning standards and emphasize the natural connections and linkages among the standards.  Middle grades instruction must build upon the foundational knowledge and skills of the elementary grades and, in doing so, prepare students for success in high school.

Literacy and numeracy are key to the educational program.  English language arts — reading, writing, listening and speaking — and mathematics are emphasized across the subject areas with expectations for performance that are consistent across and within the disciplines and commonly understood by both teachers and students.  Strategies for reading are applied in all the content areas and writing experiences are provided in a variety of forms. Mathematics instruction builds on basic skills and emphasizes conceptual understanding and problem-solving skills.  The educational program also promotes both an understanding and the use of the concepts of technology; fosters an understanding and an appreciation of the arts; teaches how to access, organize, and apply information using various media and data bases; helps students understand and apply positive health concepts and practices and participate in healthful physical activities; and develops skills to explore new subject areas.

The educational program also encourages students to pursue personal interests, engage in school and community activities (e.g., sports, clubs, etc.), explore potential futures and careers, and develop useful social, interpersonal, and life skills needed to live a full and productive life.  It also offers opportunities for the development of personal responsibility and self-direction.

Up-to-date learning aids (e.g., textbooks, current adolescent literature, laboratory equipment, etc.), instructional materials, and instructional technology are used to support the educational program.  Targeted and timely academic intervention services must be provided so that students do not fall behind in meeting the learning standards.  These additional academic instruction and/or student support services that address barriers to learning are critical in the middle grades to ensure that all students achieve the State's learning standards and graduate from high school.  Such services are particularly important to students with disabilities and those who are English language learners to ensure they are successful in the general academic program.

**Organization and Structure**

**Young adolescents learn and develop best in a school that is organized and structured to promote both academic achievement and personal development.** Organizational effectiveness and school success are not contingent upon a particular grade or school configuration.  What is critical is that a school is organized and structured to help young adolescents make the transition from the elementary to the high school grades, from childhood to adolescence.

The organization and structure should help make all students, staff, parents, and families feel secure, valued, and respected as significant contributors to the school community.  Teachers must be provided with regular opportunities to interact and collaborate to ensure that instruction is consistent and inter-related across and within the subject areas. Scheduling flexibility is necessary to provide a comprehensive educational program, interdisciplinary curricula, targeted and timely academic intervention services, co-curricular and extra-curricular activities, and opportunities for students to engage in leadership and community service projects.

The organization and structure connect youngsters to adults and to other students in the school and community and provide opportunities for increasingly independent learning experiences and responsibilities within a safe and structured environment.  Each student needs a caring adult advocate in the school who knows that student personally and well.  The organization and structure provide time during the school day that is necessary to ensure opportunities for additional instruction and personal support are available for students who need extra help to meet the State's standards.

**Classroom Instruction**

**Every young adolescent requires skilled and caring teachers who have a thorough understanding of their subject(s) and of the students whom they teach.** Young adolescents learn and develop best when they are treated with respect, involved in their learning, engaged with challenging content that has meaning and connections for them, and receive assurances that they are capable, worthy people.  Teachers need to recognize and understand the changes that are occurring within their students, design and deliver a challenging curriculum based on the State's learning standards, and accept responsibility for each student's learning and development.  They need to have an extensive understanding of their subject matter and of different approaches to student learning.  A variety of successful instructional techniques and processes that reflect best practices (e.g., differentiated instruction, cooperative learning, etc.) must be used and capitalize on the unique

characteristics and individual needs of young adolescents.

Teachers must provide instruction that is purposeful, challenging, relevant, integrated, and standards-based and use classroom assessments that are useful indicators of individual student growth and performance to monitor each student's progress and to plan instruction. They ensure that performance expectations are consistent and interrelated across and within subject areas. Student data, both personal and achievement, are used to make curricular and instructional decisions and technology and other instructional resources support and enhance learning. Teachers use flexible grouping based upon pupil needs, ways of learning, and interests, and employ interdisciplinary approaches to help students integrate their studies and to fulfill their potential. Opportunities are created for students to develop social, interpersonal, and leadership skills in addition to academic proficiency.

Teachers consult with each other and with other school personnel about instructional, curricular, and other student-related issues. They also inform and involve parents in their children's education by helping them understand the instructional program, their children's progress, and how to help their children at home with schoolwork, school decisions, and successful development through early adolescence.

## Educational Leadership

**Every young adolescent should be educated in schools that have knowledgeable, effective, and caring leaders.** Students learn and develop best when the adults in the school community have high expectations for students and staff, share and support a common vision, and work together to achieve common purposes. The personnel in effective schools with middle-level grades share leadership responsibilities. For the school to prosper, those in positions of leadership must know and understand the needs and developmental characteristics of young adolescents and the essential elements of a standards-focused, high-performing school with middle-level grades. They must articulate and maintain high standards for classroom instruction and student performance and support and encourage teachers to take risks, explore, question, and try new instructional approaches. They must also ensure and facilitate inter-school cooperation, collaboration, and communication with feeder elementary schools and receiving high schools.

Educational leaders promote school/community partnerships and involve parents and other members of the community in school activities and initiatives that benefit students. They create, promote, and sustain a school culture and climate of mutual support and collective responsibility for the educational and personal development of every young adolescent. They also ensure students are provided with opportunities to assume significant and meaningful leadership roles in the school.

## Student Academic and Personal Support

**Every young adolescent needs access to a system that supports both academic achievement and personal development.** Caring adults are a significant positive influence for young adolescents. To ensure a comprehensive network of academic and personal support is available for students and their families, schools with middle-level grades must maintain two-way communication with parents and families and ensure that all students and their families have access to counseling and guidance services to make educational, career, and life choices. Trained professionals (including school counselors who know and understand the needs, characteristics, and behaviors of young adolescents), special

prevention and intervention programs, and community resources must be available to support those who require additional services to cope with the changes of early adolescence and/or the academic demands of middle-level education, especially students with disabilities and those who are English language learners.  Students also need to be provided with opportunities to have access to adult mentors and positive role models. Parents, families, and community groups must be informed of the essential role they play in ensuring students attend school and access available services, expanding and enhancing venues for significant learning, promoting youth development, and supporting positive school change.

**Professional Learning**

**Every young adolescent deserves an educational setting that values continuous improvement and ongoing professional learning.**  Young adolescents need highly qualified, well-trained, knowledgeable, caring teachers, administrators, and other school staff if they are to succeed.  Schools with middle-level grades need to be professional learning communities where adults in the school engage in programs of growth and development that are ongoing, planned, purposeful, and collaboratively developed.  At the core of professional growth should be specific subject area expertise, a knowledge and understanding of the linkages among the 28 learning standards, research-based instructional practices that have proven successful in raising student achievement and, at the practical level, the developmental characteristics of young adolescents.  School staff must understand, not only theoretically but also operationally, how to implement the essential elements of a standards-focused, high-performing school with middle-level grades.

Summary

The University of the State of New York and all of its resources are unified in the mission to raise the knowledge, skill, and opportunity of all people in the State. The Board of Regents believes that the middle-level grades, grades 5 through 8, are a vital link in the education of youth, a critical period of individual growth and development, and a key to success in high school.  A high performing, standards-focused school with middle-level grades addresses both academic performance and personal development.  It ensures that young adolescents are prepared and ready to make a successful transition to high school, academically and personally.  Creating effective schools with middle-level grades will necessitate systemic change and require a philosophy and mission committed to developing the whole child, a challenging and rigorous educational program, a supportive organization and structure, skilled and knowledgeable teachers who use effective instructional practices, strong leadership, a network of support appropriate to the needs and characteristics of young adolescents, ongoing professional learning, and a strong will to succeed.

**Attachment B**

**Possible Scenarios**

## Model A: "Comply with Existing Regulations"

*Scenario A.1: Schools that are making Annual Yearly Progress (AYP) or can demonstrate a pattern of improved student achievement over time.*

A middle school (grades 6, 7, and 8) recently implemented, after several years of study and professional development, an educational program that takes full advantage of the flexibility available in the regulations, addresses all of the 28 learning standards, meets the units of study requirements, and successfully engages students in their learning. Achievement is on the rise and staff have been energized by their students' success. The school does not wish to alter its program at this time and has elected to continue to comply with existing regulations.

## Model B: "Strengthen the Academic Core"

*Scenario B.1: Schools with the largest numbers of students not meeting State Standards.*

A middle school (grades 7-8) with large numbers of students with disabilities and English Language Learners has been designated as a SURR school because of its continued poor performance on both the ELA and math intermediate assessments. Staff feel that students need extensive and sustained instruction (at least double periods) in both numeracy and literacy in each of the grades. The school is proposing a core academic program that includes the equivalent of double periods of instruction in math and English language arts and single periods of instruction in both science and social studies.

This proposed core academic schedule (coupled with the need to provide additional services to special populations – students with disabilities, English language learners, students requiring academic intervention services) leaves insufficient time to meet the unit of study requirements for the standards areas not assessed by State examinations. However, the school believes instruction in these standards areas is important for students and proposes to provide all students – by the time they leave grade 8 – with an integrated exploratory experience that addresses the standards in these areas. The scheduled time for this interdisciplinary experience is, in the aggregate, less than what Commissioner's Regulations require. Student success would be assessed using the State-developed checklists of knowledge and skills that are consistent with the State learning standards.

*Scenario B.2: Schools that have significant numbers of students not meeting State Standards.*

An upstate city has a group of three schools with middle-level grades (one grades K-8 and two grades 6-8) that feed into a large high school. Two of the three schools have low performance and are identified as schools in need of improvement (SINI). The third school is doing well enough to avoid identification, but is concerned that it will not meet performance targets in the future. The level of student interest varies and groups of students have recently asked for more input into school policies and program.

The district proposes to institute a small learning community model in each of the three

feeder schools in grades 6-8 and continue this concept in the high school (thus creating a 6-12 educational continuum for students). The schools are located close to a major research university that has offered resources to the small learning communities. Each small learning community within the schools will have a theme. The curriculum would be interdisciplinary, addressing all of the 28 State learning standards. The State learning standards (especially those associated with the learning community's theme) and the purposeful integration of the standards across the curriculum, rather than mandated units of study, would guide the development of program.

Three themes are proposed for the small learning communities in each building. One small learning community will emphasize community service and government in partnership with the university's schools of public policy and social work as well as the city government and community agencies. A second small learning community will emphasize youth leadership and business in partnership with the university's school of business and local businesses. The third small learning community will emphasize urban environmental issues in partnership with the university's environmental science school and the city/county planning agency. Each small learning community will provide the opportunity for students who would benefit to study subjects in depth and accelerate to taking courses for high school credit.

Groups of students will choose learning communities and be involved with a group of teachers who represent various subject areas. Each learning community will have strong counseling and student support services. Research projects will be required in each of the small learning communities based on their theme.

*Scenario B.3:* *Schools that have significant numbers of students not meeting State Standards.*

A large urban middle school has had continued poor performance on both the ELA and math intermediate assessments. Staff feel that students need extensive and sustained instruction in both numeracy and literacy. The core academic schedule leaves insufficient time to meet the unit of study requirements for the standards areas not assessed by State examinations. However, the school believes instruction in these standards areas is important for students. The school proposes to redesign its exploratory courses into a series of mini-course electives. These mini-courses would be tied to the State learning standards. They would reflect high student interest and relevant topics. The school would bring in partners, such as local businesses, agencies, and institutions of higher education, to collaborate on the design of the mini-course offerings. Student success would be assessed using the State-developed checklists of knowledge and skills that are consistent with the State learning standards.

**Model C: "Build on Success: Develop Next Generation Schools/Programs"**

*Scenario C.1 (Selective Program Refinements): A school that is high performing where students are achieving proficiency on the State standards.*

This middle school (grades 6, 7 and 8) is in a middle class suburban area. It has high performance with over 80 percent of its students consistently scoring at Levels 3 and 4 on the grade 8 assessments and only 1 percent of its students scoring at Level 1. It has been highly effective in integrating students with disabilities into the general education program.

The school proposes to redesign its exploratory middle school courses into a series of

mini-course electives.  These mini-courses would be tied to the State learning standards.  There would be no changes in the core curriculum.  Students will be involved in the design of the mini-courses and will select mini-courses from a menu of offerings over grades 6-8.  Mini-courses will reflect high interest, relevant topics such as fad diets, youth fitness, student leadership, engineering design, science and technology research, and the arts as political expression.

The school will bring in partners such as the community hospital, a Fortune 500 corporate research and development center, a local college and the local YMCA in the design of the mini-course offerings.

*Scenario C.2 (Selective Program Refinements)*: *A school that has significant numbers of students not meeting State Standards but is not explicitly designated as SINI or SURR.*

This small middle school (grades 7 and 8) is in a rural area of the State and is housed in a building that also includes grades 9-12.  Its performance in ELA and math is at the State average.  It is seeking ways to increase student interest and motivation and at the same time reinforce literacy and math skills.  It has a relatively strong core academic program that will remain as is, but would like to reinforce those academics further in more hands-on, relevant ways for students.

The school proposes to redesign its exploratory courses to take advantage of the agriculture and recreation industry in the area.  A partnership with the BOCES, local Agricultural and Technical College and local businesses is planned.  The Farm Bureau and other community groups will also be engaged as partners.  Students will be involved in project-based learning and have career exploration in the local industry.  Literacy and math skills will be reinforced through the project-based work.  All of the State's 28 learning standards will be addressed in the redesigned exploratory program.

*Scenario C.3 (Systemic Changes in Educational Program:  Newly-formed schools (including those created as a response to the mandate to Redesign/Restructure).*

A struggling middle school (grades 5, 6, 7 and 8) has 2,000 students and is located in a large urban district.  Student performance on the grade 8 assessments is poor with less than 20 percent of students scoring at Levels 3 or 4.  Over 35 percent of students score at Level 1.  Student behavior is a problem, student interest is low, and staff and student absenteeism is high.  The school has been targeted by the State for "Redesign." The school proposes to break up into four small, discrete schools-within-the-school or "academies," each with a unifying theme that has high student interest.  Students would choose an academy in grade 5 and remain in it for four years.  They would be able to request a change in academy at the end of a grade.

The four academies would each have 500 students (approximately 125 students on a grade-level).  Each academy would have a theme and a community partner.  All schools would have a core academic program and demonstrate how students are achieving all 28 State learning standards. The curriculum of each academy would be interdisciplinary with "real-world" connections, and may or may not conform to the mandated units of study requirements specified in Commissioner's Regulations. All students would participate in the State testing program in grades 5-8, including the new grade-by-grade testing in English language arts (ELA) and math.  Literacy and math instruction would be emphasized in all four academies.

The Science and Technology Academy would emphasize how science and technology principles work and are applied.  A local science museum would be a partner in designing the Academy program and would make its facilities and scientists/researchers available as consultants.  All students would undertake major research in science and technology using resources made available by the museum.

The Arts Academy would emphasize the arts (art, music, theatre and dance).  Middle school A already has a very strong performing arts program and its students regularly perform throughout the city in choral, band and dance.  The Arts Academy would build on this resource and reputation.  The Arts Academy will also partner with a well-known local art museum to build a program in painting, drawing and sculpture.  All students would produce a set of work in the arts annually and exhibit or perform that work.

The International Studies Academy would emphasize world history and culture, languages and international understanding.  The International Studies Academy would draw on the diverse, multicultural population and varied community groups in this area of the city.  The International Studies Academy would partner with a local college that has a strong International Studies program and college faculty would commit time to work with the International Studies Academy in program design.   All students would undertake major research projects and study multiple languages.

The Sports Academy would emphasize all aspect of the sports industry from playing sports to managing and marketing sports to broadcasting.  Two major league sports franchises will be partners with the Sports Academy, along with an all-sports radio station.  Students would conduct research on the sports industry and its economic impact on the community.  In addition, students would either participate on sports teams or be involved in managing, promoting or broadcasting team events.

*Scenario C.4 (Systemic Changes in Educational Program):  A school that is making Annual Yearly Progress (AYP) or can demonstrate a pattern of improved student achievement over time.*

A middle school (grades 5-8) has turned around its academic program in the last three years.  It has increased its ELA and math performance dramatically by all of its students including those with disabilities, but believes it needs additional time on task for students in those subjects to sustain performance.  It has a high concentration of English language learners and students with disabilities and has created a strong program of general education inclusion.  The school has teams of teachers who work with groups of students in smaller learning communities and has been successful in looping teachers for two grades in ELA and math.  This enables continuity of instruction.

The school is ready to do more integration of exploratory and core academic subjects.  The team approach has already proven that teachers can plan for changes in the academic program and ensure that all students get learning experiences based on the State learning standards.  The school proposes to integrate math, science and technology education instruction.  It also proposes to integrate career education and the arts with ELA and social studies.  Health education and physical education would also be integrated.  Instruction would be provided using a team teaching approach.

The school seeks relief on the State's unit of study requirements, but will still provide

instruction in all of the State's 28 learning standards.  The difference will be that instruction will occur in a more applied, integrated model.