

## Schools to Watch® Criteria

The criteria presented below are the foundation for the Schools to Watch program and were developed by the National Forum to Accelerate Middle-Grades Reform as a means of further defining their vision of high-performing middle-grades schools. The criteria were originally focused on three areas: academic excellence, developmental responsiveness, and social equity. A fourth area, organizational structures and processes, was added as it was found that a school had to have certain structures and processes in place in order to fully implement the other three areas.

### *Academic Excellence*

***High-performing schools with middle grades are academically excellent. They challenge all students to use their minds well.***

AE1-All students are expected to meet high academic standards.

AE2-Curriculum, instruction, and appropriate academic interventions are aligned with high standards.

AE3-The curriculum emphasizes deep understanding of important concepts and the development of essential skills.

AE4-Instructional strategies include a variety of challenging and engaging activities that are clearly related to the grade-level standards, concepts, and skills being taught.

AE5-Teachers use a variety of methods to assess and monitor the progress of student learning (e.g., tests, quizzes, assignments, exhibitions, projects, performance tasks, portfolios).

AE6-The faculty and master schedule provide students time to meet rigorous academic standards.

AE7-Teachers know what each student has learned and still needs to learn.

AE8-The adults in the school are provided time and frequent opportunities to enhance student achievement by working with colleagues to deepen their knowledge and to improve their standards-based practice.

### *Developmental Responsiveness*

***High-performing schools with middle grades are sensitive to the unique developmental challenges of early adolescence.***

DR1-The staff creates a personalized environment that supports each student's intellectual, ethical, social, and physical development.

DR2-The school provides access to comprehensive services to foster healthy physical, social, emotional, and intellectual development.

DR3-Teachers foster curiosity, creativity and the development of social skills in a structured and supportive environment.

DR4-The curriculum is both socially significant and relevant to the personal and career interests of young adolescents.

DR5-Teachers use an interdisciplinary approach to reinforce important concepts, skills, and address real-world problems.

DR6-Students are provided multiple opportunities to explore a rich variety of topics and interests in order to develop their identity, learn about their strengths, discover and demonstrate their own competence, and plan for their future.

DR7-All students have opportunities for voice – posing questions, reflecting on experiences, and participating in decisions and leadership activities.

DR8-The school staff members develop alliances with families to enhance and support the well-being of the children.

DR9-Staff members provide all students with opportunities to develop citizenship skills, to use the community as a classroom, and to engage the community in providing resources and support.

DR10-The school provides age-appropriate, co-curricular activities to foster social skills and character, and to develop interests beyond the classroom environment.

### *Social Equity*

***High-performing schools with middle grades are socially equitable, democratic, and fair. They provide every student with high-quality teachers, resources, learning opportunities, and supports. They keep positive options open for all students.***

SE1-To the fullest extent possible, all students, including English learners, students with disabilities, gifted and honors students, participate in heterogeneous classes with high academic and behavioral expectations.

SE2-Students are provided the opportunity to use many and varied approaches to achieve and demonstrate competence and mastery of standards.

SE3-Teachers continually adapt curriculum, instruction, assessment, and scheduling to meet their students' diverse and changing needs.

SE4-All students have equal access to valued knowledge in all school classes and activities.

SE5-Students have ongoing opportunities to learn about and appreciate their own and others' cultures.

SE6-The school community knows every student well.

SE7-The faculty welcomes and encourages the active participation of all its families and makes sure that all its families are an integral part of the school.

SE8-The school's reward system is designed to value diversity, civility, service, and democratic citizenship.

SE9-Staff members understand and support the family backgrounds and values of its students.

SE10-The school rules are clear, fair, and consistently applied.

### *Organizational Structures and Processes*

***High-performing schools with middle grades are learning organizations that establish norms, structures, and organizational arrangements to support and sustain their trajectory toward excellence.***

OS1-A shared vision of what a high-performing school is and does drives every facet of school change.

OS2-The principal has the responsibility and authority to hold the school-improvement enterprise together, including day-to-day know-how, coordination, strategic planning, and communication.

OS3-The school is a community of practice in which learning, experimentation, and time and opportunity for reflection are the norm.

OS4-The school and district devote resources to content-rich professional development, which is connected to reaching and sustaining the school vision and increasing student achievement.

OS5-The school is not an island unto itself; it is a part of a larger educational system, i.e., districts, networks, and community partnerships.

OS6-The school staff holds itself accountable for the students' success.

OS7-District and school staff possess and cultivate the collective will to persevere, believing it is their business to produce increased achievement and enhanced development of all students.

OS8-The school and district staffs work with colleges and universities to recruit, prepare, and mentor novice and experienced teachers.

OS9-The school includes families and community members in setting and supporting the school's trajectory toward high performance.