Characteristics of

This We Believe:
Successful Schools
for Young Adolescents

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Characteristics of This We Believe

NATIONAL MIDDLE SCHOOL ASSOCIATION BELIEVES... Successful schools for young adolescents are characterized by a culture that Includes

Educators Who Value Working With This Age Group and are Prepared To Do So

• Enjoy working with young adolescents.
• Respond to young adolescents’ differences/diversity.
• Know how to involve families.
• Set good example for students.
• Participate in specific training on adolescent development (professional development).
• Understand youth culture.

Therefore,

• Educators need to understand the current fads, fashions, trends, and slang.
• Parents must recognize the change in their role with young adolescents, who seek more independence, yet still need structure.
• Parents need to ask more specific questions.
• Educators need to understand drama issues versus real-life issues.
• Educators and parents need to be patient with young adolescents.

Courageous/Collaborative Leadership

• Know best practices for young adolescents.
• Educate faculty, parents, community leaders about middle school philosophy.
• Understand concepts of teaming, student advocacy, and exploratory learning.
• Seek to ensure the well-being of every child.
• Support professional development throughout the school year that is long-term and job-embedded.
• Recognize teachers as leaders.

Therefore,

• Parents need training on raising an adolescent using resources such as H. E. L. P., More H. E. L. P.
• Staff needs training on This We Believe.
• Educators need to vary instruction strategies such as real-life learning; hands-on activities; lecture; and technology.
• Schools need to implement a varied exploratory program that includes quality advisory time and time for teams to meet (daily if possible).
• Team leaders need to be trained and hold regular meetings.
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A Shared Vision

- Research and practice working together.
- Written mission statement.
- Group discussions on best practices and ways to deal with young adolescents.
- Human growth and development knowledge.
- Challenging academics.

Therefore,
- Schools need to conduct group discussions around articles from journals or books.
- Schools need to use NMSA position papers as a resource.
- Administrators need to seek tools to evaluate middle level programs.
- Educators need to develop a school leadership team.
- We should visit other schools and meet with other teachers and principals.

Inviting, Supported, and Safe Environment

- Foster human relationships.
- Consider how visitors are treated.
- Have prepared methods to deal with conflict.
- Deal with harassment, name-calling, or bullying, on a timely basis.
- Encourage one adult advocate for each student.
- Help ease transitions into and out of middle school.

Therefore,
- Staff should know students by name.
- Staff should readily give statements of encouragement.
- Counselors need to develop a peer mediation group to handle conflict issues.
- Teams need to assign kids to teacher advocates.
- Schools and districts need to embrace the team concept and implement true teaming.
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**High Expectations**

- Convey high expectations.
- Empower students to learn.

*Therefore,*

- Teachers need to be consistent in their rules and policies.
- Teachers need to engage students in active learning.

**Students/Teachers Engaged in Active Learning**

- Use developmentally responsive learning practices.
- Encourage young adolescents to play an active role in their learning.
- Promote student ownership of their learning.
- Focus less on teacher-made assignments.

*Therefore,*

- Have students design rubrics.
- Use notebooks or agendas.
- Give students choices for projects and assignments.

**An Adult Advocate for Every Student**

- Allows affective needs to be met.
- Advocates, advisors, and mentors.
- Displays an attitude of caring.
- Deals with issues outside of academics.
- Recognizes behavioral changes in students quickly.
- Addresses family issues.

*Therefore,*

- Teachers need to make sure every child has one adult that is aware and recognizes his issues.
- Teachers become more in tune with adolescent issues.
- Sometimes we just need to listen to young adolescents.
- Schools need to obtain outside school support.
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### School Initiated Family and Community Partnership

- Schools do not educate children alone.
- Parent involvement is related to higher achievement.
- Hold meetings away from school.
- Develop partnerships with community businesses.

**Therefore,**

- Schools need to communicate more with parents about how to deal with adolescents.
- Schools need to encourage parent involvement, not just in their child’s class.
- Warn of helicopter syndrome.
- Administrators can schedule afternoon teas at parents’ and community leaders’ homes.
- Teachers can provide a wish tree for businesses to contribute to school.

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**NATIONAL MIDDLE SCHOOL ASSOCIATION BELIEVES. . .**

**Successful schools for young adolescents provide**

### Curriculum that is Relevant, Challenging, Integrative, and Exploratory

- Curriculum should be planned in units that extend beyond academics and benchmarks.
- Adolescents need to see the real-life connections to the curriculum to view it as important.
- Tasks and assignments should be attainable.
- Student exploration results in expanded interests, views, and skills.

**Therefore,**

- Educators can integrate units of study.
- Educators can use parallel teaching to provide relevance.
- School leaders can consult NMSA position statements for guidance.
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**Multiple Learning and Teaching Approaches**

- Teaching approaches should enhance and accommodate the diverse skills and abilities of students.
- Students learn best when varied approaches of instruction are used.
- Instructional resources and materials are most worthwhile when they provide multiple viewpoints and encourage students to explore new ideas.

**Therefore,**

- Varied teaching techniques such as cooperative learning, hands-on activities, manipulatives, real-life situations, and technology should be used by classroom teachers.
- Teachers should understand brain growth and development to define expectations of learning.
- Quality middle level training should be implemented for all teachers.

**Assessment and Evaluation Programs that Promote Quality Learning**

- Students should set personal goals and have opportunities to reflect on their progress.
- Teachers should include the process of learning in their teaching plans and take into account student differences.
- Various levels of criteria for evaluation can be incorporated in rubrics.
- Student growth and development must also be addressed in areas of assessment.

**Therefore,**

- Multiple forms of assessment should be used—written, expressive, standardized test, and/or task oriented.
- Training in rubrics and assessment should be part of a professional development plan.
- The evaluation of student work should take the starting point and ending point of each student into consideration.

**Organizational Structures that Support Meaningful Relationships and Learning**

- Team planning and quality team time are a key component.
- Teams need to have an understanding of the concerns of other classes.
- Use block scheduling for extra time and comprehension.

**Therefore,**

- Implementing quality advisory classes are key to connecting with young adolescents.
- Teachers need to effectively use team time and encourage parent and student involvement.
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School-wide Efforts and Policies that Foster, Health, Wellness, and Safety

• Coordinated health programs encourage student involvement.
• Wellness programs provide much needed information for the young adolescent.
• Team building activities develop the support of peers.

Therefore,
• Staff can develop and constantly review reward systems.
• Schools should be discussing the use of vending machines.
• Schools and teachers need to provide healthy choices.
• Educators should be encouraging morning exercise programs.

Multifaceted Guidance and Support Services

• Open communication between school counselors, specialists, and teachers.
• Encourage small-group meetings based on need and topic.
• Develop a plan for the transition in and out of middle school.

Therefore,
• Implementing peer mediation can be an effective bridge between school and student.
• Discussion groups should be utilized.
• Advisory classes should build upon connecting students to peers, adults, and school.
H.E.L.P. & MORE H.E.L.P. — How to Enjoy Living with a Preadolescent
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