SREB

MMGW

Making Middle Grades Work

Technical Assistance Guide for Team Members

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Southern
Regional
Education
Board

592 10th St. N.W.
Atlanta, GA 30318
(404) 875-9211
www.sreb.org

Acknowledgement

This guide was prepared by Barbara Moore, associate director of Making Middle Grades Work.

Foreward

States that work with the Southern Regional Education Board (SREB) have committed to reaching every student by adopting and working towards SREB's *Challenge to Lead* Goals for education. These goals are designed to make states leaders in national educational achievement and cluster around three themes: getting all students ready – for first grade, for high school, and for postsecondary education and beyond; closing achievement gaps among groups of students; and providing a unified system of education.

One of the *Challenge to Lead* goals speaks specifically to the importance of student success in the middle grades:

Achievement in the middle grades for all groups of students exceeds national averages, and performance gaps are closed by 2012.

This goal includes the following measures of progress:

- Percentages of all groups of students meeting state academic standards in reading, writing, mathematics, science and social studies increase annually to reach 100 percent.
- Achievement gaps in meeting state standards are closed for all groups of middle grades students.
- Percentages of eighth-grade students meeting the Proficient achievement level on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) are above the national average in reading, mathematics and science. All students meet the Basic level. (See Appendix I for definitions of performance levels.)
- The percentages of all groups of students who successfully complete Algebra I by the end of eighth grade increase. All students complete Algebra I by the end of grade nine.

The *No Child Left Behind* legislation focuses on equity and closing achievement gaps. It requires schools to document the progress of all students — disaggregated by gender, socio-economic status and race — and judges schools' success based on their lowest-performing group. The legislation also focuses on the importance of teacher quality, expecting teachers to be highly-qualified, with deep content knowledge.

The Technical Assistance Visit (TAV) team should pay close attention to these goals and measures in determining what challenges the school faces. Is the school teaching all students to proficient-level standards? What assistance does the school provide to students not meeting grade-level standards? Are school and district resources and professional development focused on improving curriculum and instruction? How do districts and states support teachers to meet and maintain highly-qualified status?

This guide will help the TAV team focus on the challenges and needed actions facing the school, as it prepares for, conducts and provides feedback on the Technical Assistance Visit.

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Background

***Making Middle Grades Work* (*MMGW*) is an effort-based school improvement initiative founded on the conviction that most students can master rigorous academic studies if school leaders and teachers create an environment that motivates students to make the effort to succeed.** *MMGW* builds on the success of *HSTW*, the nation's first large-scale effort to engage state, district and school leaders in partnerships with teachers, students, parents and the community to raise student achievement. It is based on the simple belief that most students can improve their achievement through effort and hard work. School leaders and teachers can motivate students to achieve at high levels when they:

- expand students' opportunities to learn a **rigorous academic core** that is taught in ways that enable students to see the usefulness of what they have been asked to learn.
- create supportive relationships between students and adults. These relationships provide students with the extra help needed to meet challenging course standards and with the support to make successful transitions from the elementary level to middle grades and from middle grades to high school.
- work as advisers with parents and students to set goals and help students take the right courses that prepare them for high school, postsecondary studies and careers.
- focus school leadership on supporting what and how teachers teach by providing common planning time and professional development aligned with school improvement plans.

In this environment, more students will recognize that school matters to their future and more students will become independent learners who are able to set future educational and career goals and choose which courses to take to achieve those goals. In an era of rising workplace requirements, getting a good education is more important now than ever before. **Yet, too many students do not graduate from high school and many more who do graduate lack preparation for further study and the recognized credentials needed to get good jobs.**

To address these issues, the *MMGW* school improvement design provides a framework of Goals, Key Practices and Key Conditions for accelerating learning and setting higher standards. It recommends research-based practices for schools to improve instruction and student achievement. *MMGW* research has shown that sustained school improvement and student achievement occur when state, district, school and teacher leaders work together to adopt the *MMGW* design for the specific needs of individual schools.

Primary *MMGW* Mission and Goals for Continuous Improvement

The mission of *MMGW* is to create a culture of high expectations and continuous improvement that prepares middle grades students for challenging high school studies. To achieve this mission, *MMGW* has several goals:

- Increase to 85 percent the percentages of students who meet the *MMGW* reading, mathematics and science performance goals on the Middle Grades Assessment, a NAEP-referenced exam.
- Increase the percentages of all students who perform at the Proficient level to at least 50 percent in reading, mathematics and science, as measured by the Middle Grades Assessment.
- Increase annually the percentages of middle grades students entering high school prepared to succeed in college-preparatory courses.
- Increase to 90 percent the percentages of middle grades students who transition into grade nine and complete high school four years later.
- Reduce the failure rate in grade nine by ensuring middle grades students receive the preparation they need to succeed in high school courses such as Algebra I and college-preparatory English 9.
- Advance state and local policies and leadership initiatives that sustain a continuous school improvement effort.

A Comprehensive Improvement Framework

SREB believe that, to accomplish the *MMGW* goals, schools must base improvement efforts on a comprehensive improvement framework of key practices and essential conditions:

- **An academic core that is aligned to what students must know, understand and be able to do to succeed in college-preparatory English, mathematics and science —** All students in the middle grades need an academic core curriculum that accelerates their learning, that challenges them and that appeals to their interests. This curriculum must include stringent academic requirements:
  - In mathematics, all students satisfactorily complete Algebra I or pass a pre-algebra test of proficiency and use algebra concepts to reason and solve problems.
  - In science, all students use laboratory and technology experiences to learn scientific concepts in physical, life, and earth and space sciences.
  - Reading instruction is incorporated into all content areas in the academic core curriculum.
  - The language arts curriculum requires students — before they leave eighth grade — to use language correctly and to effectively find, organize and communicate information.
  - The social studies curriculum requires students — before they leave eighth grade — to describe their heritage, their government, their world and economic principles through key issues of the past, present and future.
- **A belief that all students matter —** Each student needs to be connected to an adult who takes an interest in his or her successful learning, goal-setting, educational planning and personal growth.
- **High expectations and a system of extra help and time —** Students learn in different ways and at different rates. Middle grades students need enough time and help to meet more rigorous, consistent standards. The middle grades curriculum should accelerate achievement for all students.
- **Classroom practices that engage students in their learning —** Students need varied learning activities linked to challenging academic content and opportunities to use new skills and concepts in real-world applications.
- **Teachers working together —** All teachers need time to plan together, develop and coordinate learning activities, and share student work that meets proficiency standards.
- **Support from parents —** Parents must understand and support higher performance standards in the middle grades.
- **Qualified teachers —** Middle grades teachers must know specific academic content and how to teach young adolescents.
- **Use of data —** States, districts and schools must use data on student, school and teacher performance to review and revise school and classroom practices as needed.
- **Use of technology for learning —** Middle grades students and teachers must have opportunities to explore and use technology to improve knowledge and skills in English/language arts, reading, mathematics, science and social studies.
- **Strong leadership —** Middle grades schools need strong, effective principals who encourage teachers and participate with them in planning and implementing research-based improvements.

Essential Conditions for Raising Achievement

Five essential conditions must exist in order for a school to increase student achievement:

- **Commitment —** State partners, the local school board, district leaders and the community must commit to fully implementing the comprehensive improvement framework.

- **Planning for continuous improvement —** District and school leaders must create an organizational structure and a process that will provide both time and ways for faculty and administrators to discuss and plan actions needed to raise student achievement. Leaders will work with faculty in deciding what to teach, how to teach, what to expect students to learn, and how to evaluate student learning.

- **Curriculum —** District leaders must support and encourage a curriculum review and alignment that compares all curricula to state, national and international standards. As a result, a set of content and performance standards will define the quantity and quality of work expected at each grade level throughout the system.

- **Support for professional development —** District and school leaders must provide leadership and financial support for professional development that is directly connected to academic standards and student achievement needs. Professional development will include support for teachers in the classroom as they implement teaching practices with evidence of effectiveness.

- **Teacher preparation —** The local school board should encourage teachers who do not have a major or minor in their teaching assignment to upgrade their content knowledge through academic courses and should hire teachers with content backgrounds that match their teaching assignment, (i.e., a subject area major or minor.)

Technical Assistance Visits

The purpose of Technical Assistance Visits (TAVs) is to help school leaders and teachers identify changes needed to improve student achievement in the middle grades and to implement the comprehensive improvement framework. TAV teams help sites by working with teachers, counselors and administrators to develop action steps that:

- focus on a rigorous, challenging academic core curriculum.
- examine how the school and its adults relate to students.
- raise expectations for student achievement and help students meet higher standards.
- improve how teachers relate to each other.
- improve how the school relates to parents.
- improve how schools work with sending elementary and receiving high schools to ensure continuous learning for all students.
- expand guidance and advisement to ensure that all students leave grade eight with a five-year education plan developed jointly with their parents.
- collect and use data for decision making.
- use technology to support comprehensive improvement.

Technical Assistance Visits can be led by a *MMGW* representative, a state coordinator or other state department representative, or a contracted team leader trained and certified by SREB.

The Technical Assistance Visit Team

Perhaps the most important component of the visit is the team member. Team members are responsible for reviewing the data and getting to know the school as well as possible before the visit. They observe classes; interview administrators, teachers, counselors and students; and help develop the site report.

Team members come primarily from within the school district or community. The *MMGW* site coordinator/principal selects representatives for the TAV team. The number of team members depends on the size and number of classrooms to be visited. The site coordinator should endeavor to have each core content area represented, as well as the fine and related arts.

The TAV team consists of individuals from within the state and local district and should include:

- a representative from each elementary school sending students to the middle grades school;
- representatives from the core academic disciplines in the high school(s) that receive students from the middle grades site;
- a member of the local board of education;
- a business/industry representative;
- parent(s);
- the site coordinator and/or other representative(s) from other *MMGW* sites within the state; and
- the state *MMGW* coordinator or school improvement consultant from the state department of education or from a regional service center.

Tips for Being a Great Team Member

1. **Think of yourself as a "helper," a provider of technical assistance to a site that is taking great risks to change school and classroom practices. Celebrate the good!**
2. **Be analytical. Look beneath the surface to be sure you are giving an honest appraisal of where the school is now and where it needs to be. Try to focus on root causes and not just surface issues.**
3. **Take copious notes. Do not rely on your memory, no matter how good it is. You will give the team leader your notes at the end of the visit, so be clear in what you say.**
4. **Ask pointed questions in interviews. Don't skip over a question if there is no answer; ask the question in another way. Talk to teachers and students in the halls as well as in the interviews.**
5. **Read and study the materials provided by the school.**
6. **Listen to the team leader and visit all classes assigned to you.**
7. **Remember that each promising practice and each challenge must have a strong, clear rationale. Find hard data to support your conclusions. Talk in specifics not generalities.**
8. **Let the essential elements and conditions form the basis of your questions and investigations.**
9. **Include evidence that supports your findings. Get copies of assignments, student work and tests.**
10. **Always keep in mind that the purpose of the visit is to provide technical assistance to the site, not to monitor or evaluate.**

The TAV should be a growth experience for school leaders, teachers and the TAV team. The visiting team focuses on four areas: (1) identify the site's promising practices related to the *MMGW* comprehensive framework and key conditions; (2) discuss or examine improvement steps planned by the site; (3) describe the major challenges to improvement faced by the site; and 4) identify action steps the site might take to address challenges. The Technical Assistance Visit will help the team answer important questions:

1 What evidence of high school readiness is required of every student by the end of eighth grade?
2. Do grade-level performance criteria describe the skills and qualities needed to do college-preparatorywork in high school?
3. How has the school changed what is taught, how teachers teach and how student performance is measured to better prepare all students for high school?
4. Is student work evaluated consistently according to known criteria across classrooms and subjects? Do all teachers expect essentially the same quality of work? Do classroom assignments and activities target proficient-level work?
5. How does the school help students who are having difficulty achieving the standards?
6. Does the school publish information on how many students achieve content and performance standards?
7. Does the school report information on how different groups of students perform in different subjects?
8. What major challenges exist in achieving the *MMGW* goals? How should the school address these challenges?

Step 1 Preparing for a Technical Assistance Visit

Before the Visit

First, the team members should study all information sent from the site, including the most recent Middle Grades Assessment (MGA), state and school data. Team members should each receive the following at least 14 days prior to the visit:

- a letter from SREB or the site and the *Technical Assistance Guide for Team Members*
- the agenda with times and locations of meetings and interviews (for sample agendas, see Appendix II)
- a map to the school (and to and from hotel where out-of-town members are staying)
- a floor plan of the school
- a list of the team members with complete contact information
- school data profile or descriptive brochure
- current demographic information including male/female ratios, minority population, socio-economic status of community served by the school, etc
- absentee rate, suspension rate, and expulsion rate by grade level, gender, and race/ethnicity and district dropout rate
- recent assessment data, including the MGA student achievement scores and student and teacher surveys, state test data, standardized test scores and other school data

During the school visit, the team member will review a master schedule with teachers' names, departments, class assign-ments and room numbers; the School Improvement Plan; and samples of teacher assignments and student work.

Second, team members should read and study the information in this guide. Reviewing the guide will help team members understand what is expected of them and what their roles are during the visit.

Third, team members should make a full-time commitment to serving on the team. While team members should be present for the duration of the visit, each team member **must be on time for the beginning meeting on Day One and must remain at least through the evening of Day Two.** Teachers and business representatives do not have to report on the third day; however, there are benefits for the school and the team if they can do so.

Step 2 The Technical Assistance Visit

During the Visit — Day One

Team Orientation

The first step toward having a successful visit and preparing a helpful report is a briefing by the team leader, which usually lasts about two hours. Team members should pay particular attention to their assignments, protocols for visiting classes, group interview procedures and questions, and gathering data for preparing the report.

During the briefing, the team leader will review *Making Middle Grades Work* and assign team members groups to interview, key questions to ask, and specific information to find in reports and data, including:

- high school dropout and failure rates — especially grade 9;
- detention, suspension and expulsion rates by gender and ethnicity;
- attendance rates for the past three to five years;
- statewide assessment data for at least two of the past three years;
- promotion and retention policies; and
- other information that may emerge from reviewing the background materials.

After the orientation, team members will have time to review materials individually and to plan classroom observations and interview schedules for the next day. This is a good time to ask the team leader any questions about the process and to fill out the personal schedule in Appendix V.

Site Orientation

On Day One, the TAV team will meet for 30 to 60 minutes with site leaders, including the principal, the school improvement team, teacher leaders and others invited by the site. This is a good time to educate the entire faculty about *MMGW* and to stress the importance of the TAV. Site representatives should answer the following questions during their presentation to the team:

- What are the school's promising practices? What has been done to implement the *MMGW* comprehensive framework?
- What are the results of implementation efforts to date in terms of improved student learning, attendance, attitude and behavior?
- What does the site intend to do next? What improvement actions has the school planned next?
- What are the major challenges the school faces in improving the quality of student learning?

Each team member should take extensive notes during the presentation. After this presentation, TAV team members will review materials, complete their observation schedules for the next day, and receive their group interview assignments.

Step 3 Classroom Observations and Interviews

During the Visit — Day One and Two

Morning Briefing

Team members will spend 10 to 15 minutes in each classroom and will need access to all classes. The principal and site coordinator should have encouraged teachers not to test on the day the TAV team visits classes. If there is testing, team members should not visit the class at that time. (See Appendix III for more information on classroom observation.)

Classroom Visits

The basic purpose of the classroom visit is to find out:

- the extent to which students are challenged.
- the extent to which students are engaged in learning.
- the extent of teacher preparation.
- the extent to which the classroom is productively focused and managed.
- the extent of differences between high- and low-achieving classes.

Team members will visit all academic and exploratory classes to get a comprehensive view of what and how students are being taught. Each team member should visit multiple sections of academic classes to assess if there are differences in content, expectations and instruction. If you complete your visits and time remains, go to other classes to see as much as possible. Team members are responsible for getting **detailed** information about teaching practices, student participation and administrative support. **Team members should record specific examples of quality lessons and other details from their visits.** Informal conversations with teachers and students before and after classroom visits also provide excellent information.

Each team member should use the Classroom Observation and Summary Forms (Appendix III) as a guide for recording what is happening in each classroom. These forms are aids to help team members focus on research-based class-room practices. These forms are not teacher evaluation instruments. Document outstanding instructional approaches in which the teacher was well prepared or caused students to think and reflect. Take detailed notes in the space provided on the form.

Interviews — Administrators, Teachers, Students, Counselors and Parents

One of the most valuable aspects of the Technical Assistance Visit is the feedback received through person-to-person contact. (For more information about conducting interviews, see Appendix V.) Each team member will participate in at least one group interview with students, teachers, counselors or parents to determine their views on the promising practices, next steps planned and challenges the school faces in achieving the *MMGW* goals. Interviews allow team members to question and follow-up on important details that might well be overlooked in written materials. Each team member should review the questions for interviews with students, teachers, counselors, parents and administrators in Appendix VI.

The team leader will assign team members to specific group interviews. To keep the interview on course and to be mindful of participants' time commitments, the team leader will ask one team member in each interview to lead the questioning. Other members in the interview should take detailed notes. The team leader will be the lead interviewer during the student interviews. All participants in the interviews should be assured that individuals will not be identified in the team's report. **Team members should respect the confidential nature of interviews and the entire Technical Assistance Visit process.**

Interviews — Department Heads or Lead Teachers

The team leader will assign team members to interview department heads or team leaders selected by the school principal. These interviews produce a wealth of information without making the group teacher interview too long. Interviews with department chairs normally occur during the department chair's planning period. The TAV team leader or site coordinator will indicate a location for the interview. Each team member should review the questions for interviews with department chairs in Appendix IV.

Evidence Worksheets

The Evidence Worksheet (Appendix III) helps team members assess how effective the site has been in implementing the *MMGW* Key Practices. It is important to remember that each site is at a different stage in the implementation of the *MMGW* framework. The Evidence Worksheet should not be considered as evaluative criteria; rather, it helps team members focus on whether or not indicators are in place or planned.

Step 4 Developing the Promising Practices Section

At day two, the team leader will conduct a debriefing session, and team members will discuss the information they have collected and observed. The team leader and team members will select four to six promising practices, identify next steps planned by the school, state four to six challenges and prepare a draft outline of the report that evening. Each promising practice and challenge must be supported by multiple data sources. Team members should be prepared to provide the necessary information to draft a quality site report. The more information provided by team members, the faster the debriefing session will go and the more complete the report will be.

Organizing Questions and Evidence for Promising Practices

The purposes of the promising practices section are to communicate the good things the school is doing to advance student learning and achieve the *MMGW* Goals and to encourage the faculty to build upon these practices. Team members should use the following checklist for each organizing question to ensure that all evidence and supporting data have been gathered and reviewed.

1

Does the school have high expectations for all students and provide extra help? What policies and school and classroom practices are sending a message of higher expectations and providing students with the extra help and time to meet those higher expectations? Team members should get detailed information on those items that are raising expectations.

Indicators of high expectations:

- ☐ Attendance rate has increased.
- ☐ Detention and suspension rates have decreased.
- ☐ Ninth-grade failure and/or dropout rates have decreased.
- ☐ *MMGW* and state assessment scores have increased.
- ☐ Teachers indicate the amount and quality of work necessary to earn an A or B.
- ☐ The same expectations are communicated to all students, and the same level of challenge, support and enrichment exists for all students.
- ☐ Counselors, teachers and administrators encourage students to take higher-level courses, work harder, attend school and prepare for the future.
- ☐ Students and families receive samples of and guidelines for quality work.
- ☐ Student work is revised until quality standards are met.
- ☐ Teachers tell students what they are expected to master before they start an assignment.
- ☐ Teachers post daily objectives or learner outcomes.
- ☐ Student work is posted with identifiers that describe the quality of the work.
- ☐ Teachers communicate grading criteria for assignments.
- ☐ Students with disabilities and limited English proficiency are held to essentially the same standards as other students.
- ☐ The school has decreased or eliminated low-level courses or multiple levels within a subject or grade.

Indicators of extra help for all students:

- ☐ Policies and school and classroom practices guarantee extra help for students.
- ☐ Students report that they are able to receive extra help when they need it, with little or no difficulty.
- ☐ Students report that teachers set high expectations and are willing to help them meet those expectations.
- ☐ Extra help is required for students not meeting standards.
- ☐ There are multiple opportunities for students to receive extra help (e.g., before and after school, during the school day, Saturday School).
- ☐ Extra help is delivered in ways that are different from the original instruction.
- ☐ The school uses an A, B, C, Not Yet grading policy.
- ☐ Students are being taught in ways that help them master the content.

2

To what extent has the school implemented an upgraded academic core equal in content and standards to what is taught in the college-preparatory curriculum in language arts, mathematics, social studies and science?

Indicators:

- ☐ All students take an upgraded academic core that will prepare them to take a college-preparatory curriculum in high school.
- ☐ Content and performance standards are aligned at each grade level in at least grades four through nine and ideally in grades K-12.
- ☐ The school has revised curriculum to reflect higher standards that are aligned to state and national standards such as the English standards developed by the **National Council of Teachers of English,** the mathematics standards developed by the **National Council of Teachers of Mathematics,** and the science standards developed by the **National Science Teachers Association.**
- ☐ Teachers have a content major or minor in the subject(s) they are assigned to teach.
- ☐ Students complete short writing assignments weekly for credit in all subjects.
- ☐ Students demonstrate an overall understanding of grade-level materials, including explicit and implicit information.
- ☐ Students read 25 to 30 books or the equivalent across the curriculum each year.
- ☐ Students design, conduct, analyze and describe a science investigation in writing and orally.
- ☐ Students complete a research paper written to standards that indicate readiness for college-preparatory English in high school.
- ☐ Students complete pre-algebra or algebra and perform satisfactorily on an end-of-course assessment.
- ☐ The school has disaggregated data (by ethnicity, gender, poverty level and special programs) that show evidence that all groups of students are achieving to standard.
- ☐ The school has mechanisms to ensure that core content classes are being taught to high standards.
- ☐ School leaders and teachers analyze data, student scores, and test items over time to develop a clear understanding of what students must know and be able to do to successfully complete college-preparatory level coursework in high school.
- ☐ The school works with receiving high school(s) to analyze ninth-grade failures as related to curriculum offered.

- ☐ The school has examined student achievement scores to determine if more students are reaching the basic level of proficiency and increasing numbers of students are performing at the proficient or advanced levels.
- ☐ The school has documented efforts to eliminate low-level classes, connect academic and exploratory classes, raise the level of content and improve the standards to which the content is taught.
- ☐ School leaders and teachers have critically examined the learning experiences of different student groups to determine if there are differences in what students are taught or the extra help they receive.

3

Does the school engage students in challenging, complex assignments? What are the classroom practices and assignments that engage students and get them to achieve at the proficient level? This promising practice should include specific examples that illustrate active student engagement recorded during classroom observations.

Indicators:

- ☐ Students are required to research, interpret and analyze information.
- ☐ Students work in groups, pairs and individually to brainstorm strategies, come to conclusions and complete assignments.
- ☐ Instruction is balanced between teacher-centered and student-centered activities.
- ☐ Teachers use a variety of instructional methods to teach content and address different learning needs within the class period.
- ☐ Teachers use reading and writing strategies across the curriculum.
- ☐ Teachers use open-ended problems for which there is no immediate solution in all subjects.
- ☐ Teachers require students to participate in class discussions.
- ☐ Teachers require students to use word processing software to complete assignments.
- ☐ Teachers use authentic assessment strategies such as portfolios, open-response questions, performance event and projects.
- ☐ Teachers work with other teachers to examine student work and determine if it meets expected standards.
- ☐ Teachers frequently meet as part of an interdisciplinary or disciplinary team to plan joint instructional activities.
- ☐ Students have multiple opportunities to apply newly acquired skills and understanding to solve similar problems.
- ☐ Students tackle thought-provoking, complex problems; try different strategies to solve them; and present possible solutions or approaches to solving the problem.
- ☐ Students make presentations in English, mathematics, science and social studies classes.
- ☐ Students report that teachers know their subject and can make it interesting and useful.
- ☐ Students use technology, including computers, to complete assignments, integrated projects and demonstrations.
- ☐ Students apply skills and content to real-world problems.
- ☐ Students write in-depth explanations about classroom activities.
- ☐ Student grouping for instruction is short-term, flexible and changed as necessary according to student progress.
- ☐ Students help plan what they learn and make choices about topics or problems for major learning activities.
- ☐ Students develop and use scoring guides or rubrics to improve the quality of their work.
- ☐ Students evaluate their own work.

4

Does the school have a guidance and advisement system that actively involves parents and teachers? Has the school developed a guidance and advisement system that connects each student with an adviser throughout their middle school experience — an adviser who really gets to know the student? Has the school developed a process to involve parents in planning and revising students' high school programs of study?

Indicators:

- ☐ There is an advisory system that includes all staff and provides a guidance curriculum, a continuum of services and training support.
- ☐ All students have at least one adult at the school who connects and communicates with them on a regular basis and who assists students and their parents in planning a program of study for high school.
- ☐ All students leave eighth grade with a five-year educational plan. Regular meetings with advisers, families and students are held at least annually to review the students' educational plans.
- ☐ Students report that they participated in a parent-teacher-student conference to plan a high school program of study.
- ☐ Middle grades leaders and faculty coordinate with the high school to address the critical transition into ninth grade and reduce the number of students unprepared for high school work. Students and parents are aware of high school graduation requirements and the knowledge and skills needed (and courses successfully completed) for entry-level jobs or postsecondary education.
- ☐ The school board and administrators support a guidance and advisement program that focuses on setting educational goals and planning how to meet them.
- ☐ The school has a network of community agencies and youth service organizations that assist the school in addressing student needs.

5

Do teachers have the support of system and school leaders? What are system and school leaders doing to support the faculty in achieving the *MMGW* Goals? (Give specific examples.)

Indicators:

- ☐ School and district leaders communicate a vision of high expectations to students, teachers, parents and the community.
- ☐ Teachers strongly agree that goals and priorities for the school are clearly understood by all faculty and students.
- ☐ The school has a mission statement that is clear in terms of improving student achievement. (Get a copy of the school's mission statement.)
- ☐ The school's mission is concrete and measurable, and all stakeholders can articulate the school's vision and plans for achieving identified goals.
- ☐ School leaders and faculty have analyzed all available data and established a collective commitment to advance the quality of student learning and teach more challenging content.
- ☐ Staff development for teachers has changed teaching practices and resulted in higher student achievement.
- ☐ Teachers are provided time and support to develop content and performance standards and to examine student work.

- ☐ School and district leaders support school-based professional development with regularly scheduled follow-up and feedback.
- ☐ The school and district commit to hiring qualified teachers and support teachers in developing content expertise. All core content teachers have a major or minor in the subject they teach.
- ☐ Professional development is based on teacher and student needs, and teachers have opportunities to observe colleagues and master teachers during instruction.
- ☐ School leaders attend conferences and workshops with the faculty.
- ☐ Teachers work in teams and have flexibility to schedule learning experiences for groups of students.
- ☐ Teacher teams are composed of academic core teachers and representatives from the fine and practical arts, special education and second language programs.
- ☐ Common planning time is used to plan and improve integrated instruction and examine student work.
- ☐ Teachers and administrators understand the curriculum in the sending and receiving schools.
- ☐ All faculty members are actively involved in school-improvement groups, and the school has a clearly defined structure that allows for shared decision-making.
- ☐ The faculty uses multiple data sources to determine changes needed and to evaluate the school's progress.

6

Does the school support a successful transition from eighth to ninth grade for all students? Does the school have an upgraded core curriculum and provide sufficient extra help to enable students to meet high school readiness standards?

Indicators:

- ☐ There a "gearing-up" program in which middle grades and high school leaders identify students who need extra help with mathematics, language arts and reading instruction in grades seven and eight. Students are chosen for this program according to specific criteria, such as scoring below the 40th percentile on a norm-referenced test.
- ☐ High-level exploratory courses in grades seven and eight that require students to read, write and do mathematics.
- ☐ A four- to six-week summer program is offered to entering ninth-graders who need further help to succeed in high school.
- ☐ "Double doses" of English and mathematics are required for students needing extra help.
- ☐ A summer school orientation program is required for students coming from the middle grades to high school.
- ☐ The school conducts a follow-up of ninth-graders to assess whether the middle grades programs prepare students for rigorous high school studies.
- ☐ Steps are being taken to reduce the flow of incoming ninth-graders who are unprepared to do rigorous high school work.
- ☐ Middle grades and high school teachers have vertically aligned the curriculum and developed readiness indicators for grades seven, eight and nine.
- ☐ A support class gives students the extra assistance they will need to successfully complete a rigorous high school curriculum.

Step 5 Developing the Next Steps Section

The Next Steps should be concise, one-sentence statements that capture what the site intends to do and when. These are not suggestions from the TAV team; they are actions the school plans to take to increase student achievement. Next steps can be determined through the school's presentation, interviews or the school improvement plan. Each statement should begin with an action verb.

Step 6 Developing the Challenges Section

Every school faces challenges in raising student achievement. Often these challenges are similar from one site to another; however, the justification for the challenge is usually site specific. The heart of the *MMGW* Technical Assistance Report is a justification for each challenge and a set of actions the school can consider to address the challenge. The background for identifying challenges comes from discussions and evidence gathered from classroom visits, interviews and data. Too often these challenges focus on the "small picture" and do not address the major challenges the school faces in improving the quality of student learning. Determine a gap between what is expected from the *MMGW* framework and what is presently in place and craft a challenge that focuses on the gap. Define the challenges in a straightforward sentence. Interviews with counselors, students and the principal will be key elements in building the justification for each challenge.

The team must justify each challenge by providing a clear, data-based rationale. Build the case for a continuous improvement planning process. If teachers are unaware of the data or have not looked at it, that is evidence of a challenge. If there is no organized improvement structure for teachers, parents and others to meet frequently through the school improvement committee and a variety of subcommittees, then an adequate mechanism is probably missing. A high dropout rate, a high failure rate in ninth grade, several levels of curricula, a high percentage of students who are unprepared for Algebra I in grade nine and a high percentage who are not ready to take college-preparatory language arts courses are all indicators that students are not ready to do high school work. After justifying the challenge, write a set of recommended actions.

The team leader should leave with an outline of approximately 10 pages of promising practices, next steps, challenges, justifications and actions from which to fashion a solid report. **Finally, all team members will submit all of their information on the school to the team leader and attend the exit report on the morning of Day Three. This meeting will last about one hour.**

Overriding Challenge — Closing the Gaps

The overriding challenge for all schools is to close gaps in achievement, opportunity, expectations and possibility. **The overriding challenge will serve as the blueprint for all remaining challenges.**

The Achievement Gap — Achievement Outcomes Related to Standards

Does the school have the same high expectations for all students? Do gaps in achievement exist among the various subgroups? As you look at the MGA results, state assessment results and the school's status in the state, where does the school stand in meeting the goal? (The *MMGW* goal is for 85 percent of all students to meet the basic performance level and for increasing numbers of students perform at the proficient and advanced levels on the Middle Grades Assessment by 2012.)

The Opportunity Gap — Content Taught to Each Group

- Check the master schedule to see the various levels being taught.
- Get enrollment by subgroups in each level of course offered (e.g., general/basic, college-preparatory/honors, gifted/talented).
- How are students placed in classes? What data is used?
- Are course requirements different for different students (e.g., type and amount of reading required, research required, homework required for different classes)?
- How are teachers assigned to low-level/high-level classes? Are experienced, results-oriented teachers assigned to teach students with the greatest challenges?
- Do teachers have content majors in the courses they teach?
- How are students performing on the *MMGW* science, mathematics and reading assessments?

Expectations Gap — School Climate

The achievement and opportunity gaps cannot be closed unless a climate of high expectations exists. Does the school have high and consistent expectations for all students regarding basic school policies and behavior? Does the faculty really believe that poor and minority students can learn? Do teachers work with these students to help them overcome learning deficits so they meet standards or do they make excuses for why some students cannot learn?

What is the school's mission? Is it to prepare all students for college-preparatory coursework in high school? Do teachers strongly agree that students' success or failure in school is largely due to factors beyond teachers' control? On the most recent MGA, what percentage of teachers:

- strongly agree that the goals and priorities of the school are clear?
- strongly agree that the community actively supports the school's instructional goals?
- report that the principal stresses they should teach all students to the same high standards?
- report that the principal uses data to evaluate the school's academic program?

In addition, check trend data by subgroups:

- number of disciplinary actions over the past three to five years, including expulsions
- current attendance rate compared with the state's (or similar districts'/schools')
- promotion rate compared with the state's (or similar districts'/schools')
- ninth-grade failure and dropout rates

Do gaps exist for all students or for different groups of students? Data should be used — along with evidence collected from observations and interviews — to build the justification for the challenge. The team must help the school focus on ways to close the gaps among the various subgroups.

The Possibility Gap — Showing High-Poverty, High-Minority Schools What Similar High-Performing Schools Look Like

High-poverty, high-minority schools need to learn how similar schools are increasing student achievement. Best practices from schools with similar demographics will help these schools close the possibility gap.

Making Middle Grades Work Challenges

1 High expectations and a system of extra help and time

Does the school have high expectations for all students and provide extra help? What policies and practices are sending a message of higher expectations and providing students with the extra help and time to meet those higher standards? Are there different expectations for students in different levels? If so, explain.

Review the indicators and evidence pertaining to high expectations (pages 12).

- **Task:** Define the challenge in a straightforward sentence describing in what ways the school does not have high expectations for all students.
- **Check:** Ensure that evidence from the data sources and information collected from the school is clear and justifies the challenge. Problems with school climate issues — including attendance, high number of tardies, high dropout rates and discipline referrals — are often associated with expectations. Data should clearly show the gaps between what the school is doing and should be doing.
- **Task:** State three to four concise actions the school can take to address this challenge.

2 An UpgradedAcademic Core

Does the school offer all students a curriculum in English/language arts, mathematics and science that provides a sequence of courses taught to college-preparatory standards, or is the school teaching college-preparatory-level courses to only accelerated students?

Review the indicators and evidence pertaining to rigorous academics (pages 13 and 14).

- **Check:** Has the school revised courses so they are aligned not only to state standards, but also to SREB's readiness standards?
- **Check:** Do students know what is expected of them to earn an A or a B? Have course pacing guides and common assessments been developed?
- **Task:** State a clear challenge and justify it by identifying low-level courses, disproportionate numbers of students in accelerated classes, achievement scores and classroom observations.
- **Task:** State three to four concise actions the school can take to address this challenge.

3 Engaging Students in Challenging Assignments

To what degree are students actively engaged in the learning process? How well are students taught in academic and exploratory/elective classes? To what extent are teachers using student-centered instructional strategies that engage students in challenging, complex assignments?

Review the indicators and evidence pertaining to student engagement (page 14).

- **Check:** To what extent are teachers using student-centered instructional strategies that engage students in challenging, meaningful assignments? Examples include:
  - cooperative learning
  - project-based or problem-based learning
  - integration
  - reading and writing strategies
  - technology for learning
  - Socratic seminar
- **Check:** To what extent are students gaining a deep understanding of academic concepts by applying them in new and creative ways?
- **Task:** Develop a clear challenge to engaging students in challenging assignments and justify it, based on classroom observations, student interviews and *MMGW* data.
- **Task:** State three to four concise actions the school can take to address this challenge.

4 Guidance and Advisement

To what extent has the school developed a guidance and advisement system that connects each student with one adviser throughout the middle grades — an adviser who really gets to know the student?

Review the indicators and evidence pertaining to student advisement (page 15).

- **Check:** Has the school developed a process to involve parents, at least annually, in planning and revising students' progress and programs of study?
- **Check:** To what extent are students learning about potential career opportunities, requirements and pathways?

- **Check:** Does every student receive assistance each year in planning a program of study related to post-high school objectives? Are parents active partners in the planning process?
- **Task:** Considering the gaps between the *MMGW* goals and the current guidance and advisement system, craft a clear challenge the school faces.
- **Task:** State three to four concise actions the school can take to address this challenge.

5 Support of School and District Leaders

Do teachers have the support of system and school leaders? What are system and schoolleaders doing to support the faculty in achieving the *MMGW* goals?

Review the indicators and evidence pertaining to administrative support for improvement efforts (pages 15 and 16).

- **Check:** What kind of support have teachers received in professional planning, use of collaborative planning time and other crucial factors?
- **Check:** Has staff development for teachers changed teaching practices and resulted in higher student achievement?
- **Check:** How is the faculty involved in decision making, implementation, and monitoring of school improvement actions? Are *MMGW* focus groups in place? Are all teachers involved?
- **Check:** To what extent have faculty been involved in using data to advance the quality of student learning and to teach content that is more challenging?
- **Task:** Craft a challenge, based on gaps between *MMGW* goals and what is in place. Build a case that there are not adequate mechanisms in place continuous improvement.
- **Task:** State three to four concise actions the school can take to address the challenge.

6 Transition — Middle Grades to High School

Does the school have an effective transition system in place? Students entering middle grades need to learn about their school, the new routines they will follow and the skills they will need to be successful, and they need to complete the work necessary to meet the requirements of a rigorous high school curriculum.

Review the indicators and evidence pertaining to transitions (page 16).

- **Check:** Are preventive strategies in place as early as seventh grade to reduce the number of ninth-graders unprepared for high school-level work? Is there:
  - a gear-up program in which middle grades and high school leaders identify students who need extra help with mathematics, language arts and reading instruction in grades seven and eight?
  - evidence of high-level exploratory courses in grades seven and eight that require students to read, write and do mathematics?
  - a four- to six-week summer program for entering ninth-graders who need further help to succeed in high school?
  - a support class to give students the extra assistance they will need to successfully complete rigorous grade-level coursework?
  - evidence that middle grades and high school teachers have vertically aligned the curriculum and developed readiness indicators for grades seven, eight and nine?
- **Check:** Have eighth-graders shadowed high school students to learn what is required at the high school level?
- **Check:** Have links been developed with feeder elementary schools and have readiness indicators been developed between schools to monitor what students should be learning in grades K-12?
- **Task:** Considering the gaps between *MMGW* goals and what is in place, state a clear challenge to implementing effective transitions. Justification for the transitions challenge includes high dropout rates, high failure rates in eighth and ninth grade, multiple levels of curricula and a high percentage of students unprepared for Algebra I or college-preparatory English in ninth grade.
- **Task:** State three to four concise actions the school can take to address this challenge.

1. *Does the school have high expectations and provide a structured system of extra help and time for all students to meet standards?*

MMGW Key Practice #3: High Expectations and Extra Help

High Expectations:

- What policies and classroom practices have been adopted to raise expectations (student-led/engaged classrooms)?
- Is there a homework policy communicated in writing and enforced? Are students required to do one or more hours of homework daily across all subject areas?
- How has the attendance rate increased?
- If discipline has been a problem, how has it improved?
- How has the failure rate decreased?
- Do teachers indicate the amount and quality of work necessary to earn an A or a B.
- Do teachers require students to revise work until quality standards are met.
- Are students required to read books and articles to complete projects in all classes?
- Have low-level courses been eliminated?
- Are eighth-graders required to take pre-algebra or Algebra 1?
- Are all students taking common end-of-course exams?
- Are all students required to take the *MMGW* curriculum? Extra Help:
- Are students who earn a C or lower required to seek extra help?
- Does the school provide a structured extra help program during the school day, before and after school, or during summer school?
- Does the school have an A, B, C, Not Yet grading policy in place?
- Is mastery learning required of all students?

Evidence/Source	**Promising Practice (+) or Challenge (-)**	**Detailed Notes:** Who, What, When, How, Why and Quotes… *Example: "Teachers here have high expectations. Classes really challenge us."*

2. Has the school upgraded academic courses to state, national and SREB Readiness standards? Does the school require students to complete the MMGW recommended curriculum?

MMGW Key Practices #1: Rigorous Academic Core; #5: Teachers Working Together

Upgraded Academic courses:

- Do students report having to complete daily homework and use math, science, reading, writing, problem solving, research in all classes?

Academic studies aligned/taught to college-preparatory standards:

- Are content and performance standards aligned at each grade level in at least grades four through nine and ideally in grades K-12?
- Does the school have documented efforts to eliminate low-level classes; connect academic, exploratory, and career classes; and raise the level of standards to which the content is taught?
- What policies and classroom practices exist to ensure that rigorous standards are in place, taught, and assessed (common course syllabi, end-of-course exams, reading, writing, numeracy across the curriculum)?
- For what percentage of students is the core content taught to collegepreparatory standards?
- What percentage of students complete pre-algebra or Algebra I and perform satisfactorily on an end-of-course assessment?
- Have school leaders and teachers critically examined the learning experiences of different student groups to determine if there are differences in what students are taught or the extra help provided them?

Evidence/Source	**Promising Practice (+) or Challenge (-)**	**Detailed Notes:** Who, What, When, How, Why and Quotes… *Example: "Teachers here have high expectations. Classes really challenge us."*

3. Does the school engage all students in challenging, student centered instruction?

MMGW Key Practice #4: Classroom practices that actively engaged students

Engaging Strategies for All Teachers

- Do classroom practices engage students in challenging assignments and make them work harder to produce proficient- and advanced-level work? (See rubric)
- Have teachers received at least 40 hours of instruction in methods that engage students in challenging assignments (e.g., cooperative learning, project-based learning, Socratic questioning, debates, real-world application)?
- Are student assessments aligned with standards and do they challenge students to reflect at the proficient and advanced levels (e.g., portfolios, open-ended responses, performance events, projects)?
- Are students required to complete research using technology and prepare oral and written presentations?
- Do students report having an assignment for which a grade is given in both an academic and elective course?

English/Language arts

- Do students have to read 11 or more books each year?
- Do students complete short writing assignments weekly?
- Do students draft, edit and rewrite assignments before receiving a grade?
- Are students required to complete a research project on a topic of their choice at least once a year?

Mathematics (weekly/monthly)

- Do students use scientific equipment and graphing calculators to complete assignments?
- Do students report completing a major report?
- Do students report working in groups to solve real-world problems?

Science (weekly/monthly)

- Do students use sinks, tables and lab equipment to complete assignments?
- Do students read an assigned article/book other than the text?

Evidence/Source	**Promising Practice (+) or Challenge (-)**	**Detailed Notes:** Who, What, When, How, Why and Quotes… *Example: (+) In a social studies class, students were assigned a "start your own business" project. In groups, students searched the Internet to determine a product, customers, goals and risks, and presented a PowerPoint presentation on their proposed business.*

4. *Does the school have an effective guidance and advisement system that actively involves parents and teachers?*

MMGW Key Practices #2: All Students Matter; #5: Teachers Working Together

Guidance programs

- Do students have a four- or five-year career plan by eighth grade?
- Do students report that they received help in planning a high school program of study by eighth grade?
- What percentage of students is encouraged to take higher level courses (e.g., Algebra I, Foreign Language, Pre-AP)?

Advisement programs that involve teachers

- Does the school have an advisement program? Does it meet regularly? Have teachers received professional development?
- Do all students have at least one adult at the school who connects and communicates with them on a regular basis?

Parent involvement activities/programs

- How are parents involved in guidance and advisement?
- Are students' four-year career plans reviewed annually with parents?

Evidence/Source	**Promising Practice (+) or Challenge (-)**	**Detailed Notes:** Who, What, When, How, Why and Quotes… *Example: One student said, "Only my parents helped me to develop a plan for high school and are also helping me develop a plan for college".*

5. *Do teachers have the support of the school and district?*

MMGW Key Practices/Conditions #5: Teachers working together; #8: Use of Data; #10: Strong Leadership
Key Condition: An organizational structure and leadership to achieve the key practices

Does the principal:

- keep everyone informed and use data to drive the changes in school improvement?
- organize faculty focus groups to address individual components of the school improvement plan?
- recognize and encourage good instruction?
- make parents partners in their student's education?

Does the superintendent and school board:

- support the changes needed to fully implement the *MMGW* design with accommodations, policies and resources?

Do teachers report:

- having more than 40 hours of professional development on key strategies during the last three years?
- having opportunities for response on decisions that affect them?
- having scheduled planning time to work in teams on school improvement efforts?
- receiving feedback from the principal on content taught to standards and within the scope and sequence of the curriculum?
- sharing professional development strategies learned with other staff members?
- studying samples of student's work to improve academic and technical skills and to accelerate achievement?
- revising the school improvement plan annually?

Evidence/Source	**Promising Practice (+) or Challenge (-)**	**Detailed Notes:** Who, What, When, How, Why and Quotes… *Example: (+) One teacher said, "The district has a history of random acts of improvement. MMGW is the first initiative that has kept the course."*

6. *Does the school have a structured transition program?*

MMGW Key Practices #3: High Expectations and Extra Help; #5: Teachers Working Together; #2: All Students Matter

For middle grades to high school transition, do teachers:

- meet with feeder middle grades schools at least annually to discuss expectations, content knowledge and performance standards for entering high school?
- vertically align the curriculum and develop readiness indicators for grades seven, eight and nine with high school teachers?
- have parent-teacher-student conferences to plan or review the high school program of study for every eighth-grader?
- inform parents of student's readiness for college-preparatory work at least once a year?

For middle grades to high school transition, has the school/district:

- established high-level exploratory courses in grades seven and eight that require students to read, write and do mathematics?
- required a summer school program for students coming from the middle grades to high school?
- implemented a summer bridge program for eighth graders identified as needing supplemental instruction?

Evidence/Source	**Promising Practice (+) or Challenge (-)**	**Detailed Notes:** Who, What, When, How, Why and Quotes… *Example: (-) Teachers report that eighth-grade students are not ready for Algebra I. However, they have never met with seventh-grade teachers.*

Step 7 The Exit Report

During the Visit — Day Three

The team leader and team members will present an exit report on the morning of Day Three in a meeting with the superintendent, the principal and others identified by the school. The meeting should last approximately one hour, but it may be longer, depending on questions and comments from the site.

The presentation will include the following:

- The team leader thanks the team for its hard work and the school for its hospitality.
- The team leader presents a brief history of SREB and of *MMGW*.
- The team leader highlights the promising practices that the team observed and asks site leaders if the team missed any important practices.
- A team member or the team leader summarizes the next steps the school intends to take. Again, the school should have an opportunity for input.
- The team leader introduces and discusses each challenge. The justification for the challenge should be clear, and the leader should suggest several actions the site might take to address the challenge.
- The team leader asks school leaders for additional ideas and comments. The team leader reminds the site that it will receive a draft copy of the written report from SREB for review before the official report is sent to the superintendent for distribution.

Appendix I: SREB Performance Description

Reading

Basic

Eighth-grade students performing at the basic level demonstrate understanding of explicitly stated information by retrieving information from parts of the text.

At the basic level, students use text details to make simple inferences and predictions. They use explicitly stated information and supporting details to identify a character's emotions and recognize their cause. They use context clues to define and interpret a phrase. In addition, these students can use surface details to draw a logical conclusion or interpret meaning from text. They can identify a reason why information is included in an article and recognize the purpose of a title and illustration. They can form an opinion in response to text, but may not be able to use the text to provide support for their opinion.

Proficient

Eighth-grade students performing at the proficient level demonstrate understanding by using both explicitly and implicitly stated information to identify and summarize the main idea of a text.

At the proficient level, students are able to extend text ideas to formulate an appropriate question or make a relevant connection to real-life experience. They can use surface details to make a comparison. In addition, these students demonstrate some knowledge of literary elements and devices by recognizing poetic imagery and using details to explain the meaning of a symbolic phrase. When discussing a title's appropriateness or expressing a text-based opinion, these students can provide general support from the text.

Advanced

Eighth-grade students performing at the advanced level demonstrate a thorough understanding of theme, point of view and characterization by using specific ideas from across a text and by connecting ideas between two texts.

At the advanced level, students can explain the relevance of a question by extending text ideas and using a connection between the text and real life experience. In addition, these advanced students can derive meaning from whole texts to make overarching evaluations. When analyzing content or expressing text-based opinions, advanced students can provide specific support.

Mathematics

Basic

Students performing at the basic level are able to work with the four arithmetic operations in one- or two-step word problems. They can identify and apply some mathematical definitions on an elementary level. While these students are likely to possess a satisfactory level of competency with computation, they routinely lack a conceptual understanding of many fundamental mathematical concepts and are usually not able to regularly implement simple reasoning and problem-solving strategies.

At the basic level, students are able to recognize pictorial representations of fractions, read rulers and scales and recognize which units of measurement are most appropriate for a given situation. They can identify geometric shapes and properties of those shapes and visualize transformations of figures. Students at this level are able to construct graphs, such as bar graphs and pictographs, if a scale is given in the problem and can read and interpret information from graphs. They also are able to work with simple probabilities and can find the mean of a set of numbers. In algebra, students at the basic level can extend simple number patterns, work with positive and negative numbers and can evaluate simple expressions and solve equations with one variable. They are beginning to develop an understanding of representation, by locating ordered pairs on a coordinate grid and by constructing number sentences.

Proficient

Students performing at the proficient level possess a working knowledge of many fundamental mathematical ideas and are beginning to interpret and apply concepts and abstract ideas. They are able to work with problems containing more than one or two pieces of mathematical information. These students generally exhibit an emerging knowledge and understanding of more formalized algebra topics.

At the proficient level, students are able to use reasoning in their numerical computations and in working with data in order to interpret their results in the context of the problem. For example, in a problem requiring students to find the number of buses needed for a field trip, if the result is 12 1/4 buses, students will know that 13 buses will be needed for the trip. They can also extract information from graphs and combine that information with their knowledge of other topics in mathematics to solve a problem. At this level, students are able to work with measurement topics that incorporate several ideas. For instance, they are able to recall that the sum of the three angles of a triangle is 180 degrees and can apply that information correctly in a problem. In the area of algebra, students can work with representations to perform operations such as combining like algebraic terms, solving linear equations in two variables and may be beginning to develop an understanding of algebraic identities.

Advanced

Students performing at the advanced level are able to work confidently with abstract representations of fundamental mathematical concepts. They can work effectively with whole numbers, integers, rational numbers and their equivalents. These students are developing mathematical reasoning processes and analysis techniques in order to solve more complex problems and may be able to use a more efficient solution strategy if one is available.

At the advanced level, students are able to utilize properties in geometry to analyze geometric situations and can begin to recognize the formal structure of geometry. For example, they are able to identify counterexamples for certain properties of geometric shapes. In algebra, advanced students possess a thorough understanding of patterns, such as the ability to generalize patterns, construct algebraic representations of patterns and work with complex patterns involving multiple operations that may include powers. These students may also be successful in solving some types of non-routine problems.

Science

Basic

Students performing at the basic level are able to recall fundamental scientific facts, recognize fundamental concepts when presented in a multiple-choice format. However, these students do not link concepts together, such as in a cause-effect relationship. These students have begun to develop basic laboratory skills and demonstrate some knowledge of the scientific method. They can plot data from a data chart; read measurement scales on basic laboratory equipment; read and interpret a table or graph and draw an appropriate conclusion or apply it to a practical situation. They can apply scientific reasoning to solve a two-step problem. Students at this level are familiar with scientific investigations and the scientific method. They know correct terminology for scientific investigations and can recognize an appropriate experimental design.

At the basic level, students are familiar with elementary concepts in different fields of science. For example, in life science, they know the difference between inherited and acquired traits; recognize characteristics that classify living things; recognize hierarchy within a food chain; and recognize characteristics and requirements of living things. They have a fundamental knowledge of photosynthesis; and have basic knowledge of human systems. In physical science, students on this level know physical properties of matter such as solubility and states of matter, can complete a simple electrical circuit diagram, recognize how sound travels; and identify how forces act on a body. In earth science, students have basic knowledge about properties of the Earth's surface and the characteristics of minerals. They are aware that Earth's top layer is made up of continental plates that move; know that the fossil record is evidence of the history of life on Earth and know how the fossil record can be interpreted. Students at this level demonstrate some basic knowledge of

Earth's relationship to other objects in space and have some understanding of the interaction of humans with the Earth, such as their impact on the environment and its resources. Skills related to earth science at this level include using a scale in reading a geographic map.

Proficient

In addition to basic level knowledge and skills, students performing at the proficient level have a clearer understanding of natural processes and can recognize some cause and effect relationships. Students' knowledge of the scientific method and scientific investigations is more fully developed. For example, students can design a simple experimental procedure, such as separating mixtures based on physical characteristics.

At the proficient level, students can demonstrate understanding of processes, such as modes of energy transfer through conversion of light energy to heat energy. Students recognize cause and effect relationships, such as how predator-prey relationships affect populations; causes of extinction; human impact on environment through specific knowledge on causes of pollution, such as acid rain; and forces that cause continual changes to the surface of the Earth.

Advanced

In addition to knowledge and skills present at the basic and proficient levels, students performing at the advanced level are able to conceptualize more advanced processes and have well-developed skills related to scientific investigations. Given a purpose of an experiment, students can design part of an experimental procedure, especially involving the measurement of rates and including a control when appropriate. Using a complex data table, students can derive general relationships between variables. They can synthesize data from multiple sources (i.e., recognizing patterns and making appropriate predictions). Students can design a multi-step experimental procedure such as separating mixtures based on physical characteristics, are aware of sources of experimental error and can give suggestions in experimental design to reduce error in the result.

In content areas, students at the advanced level can sequence levels of organization in living systems, recognize the force of gravity depends on mass and distance, and recognize effects of differences in heating and cooling rates between Earth's land and water surfaces.

Appendix II: Sample Agendas

Sample Agenda: One Full Day, Two Half Days

School:_____ **Date:**_____

Day One (*Day of Week*)

4 – 6 p.m. TAV team orientation for two hours with the team leader [Location]

6 – 7 p.m. The school's *MMGW* School Improvement Team informs the TAV team about the site's accomplishments, next action steps and major challenges. [Location]

Day Two (*Day of Week*)

7:30 a.m. Team organizational meeting [Location]

7:45 a.m. Classroom observations start when students begin classes and continue until lunchtime.

Lunch [Location]

1 – 3 p.m. Other classroom visits as necessary

1 – 3 p.m. Selected members of the technical assistance team interview the following:

- a group of 10 to 12 eighth-grade students, chosen at random [Location]
- the school principal [Location]
- a group of 10 to 12 teachers representing all grade levels, all core academic subjects and the related arts [Location]
- the superintendent or assistant superintendent for instruction [Location]
- guidance counselor(s) [Location]
- a group of parents [Location]

3 – 8 p.m. The visiting team meets to discuss findings and prepare draft report. (or later)

Day Three (*Day of Week*)

7:30 a.m. The visiting team meets to discuss the final report. [Location]

9 a.m. An exit conference is held with the superintendent and site leaders. Allow at least one hour.

Sample Agenda: Two Full Days, One Half Day

School:_____ **Date:**_____

Day One (*Day of Week*)

8 -10:45 a.m.	TAV team orientation and working lunch: TAV team orientation for two hours with the team leader. [Location]
11 -12 a.m.	Interview with school principal: Team leader/*MMGW* state coordinator [Location] Classroom observations begin for team members.
12:45 - 3 p.m.	Classroom observations continue for team members not participating in group interviews.
12:45 -1:45 p.m.	Group interview: Teachers [Location]
12:45 - 1:45 p.m.	Group interview: Students [Location]
1:45 - 2:45 p.m.	Group interview: Parents [Location]
1:45 - 2:45 p.m.	Group interview: Counselors [Location]
3 - 4 p.m.	School presentation: The school's *MMGW* School Improvement Team informs the TAV team about the site's accomplishments, next action steps and major challenges. [Location]
4 - 6 p.m.	TAV team debriefing/data collection [Location]

Day Two (*Day of Week*)

7:30 a.m.	Team organizational meeting [Location]
8 a.m.-2 p.m.	Classroom observations start when students begin classes. Additional group interviews as needed.
2 - 6 p.m.	Team compiles data and prepares exit report. (or later)

Day Three (*Day of Week*)

7:30 a.m.	The visiting team meets to discuss the final report. [Location]
9 a.m.	An exit conference is held with the superintendent and site leaders. Allow at least one hour. [Location]

Appendix III: SREB Classroom Observation and Summary Forms

The purpose of the classroom observation is to determine, within a 10- to 15-minute snapshot in a classroom, the degree to which students are actively engaged in learning challenging content. Given the short window of observation, this form must be brief, while encouraging the observer to note key characteristics of the instruction that support student achievement. Space is provided for notes and reflection on the quality of the learning environment following the observation.

There are many factors that contribute to a well-managed and well-planned lesson. To address them all would result in a form of many pages and an observation that lacks focus. This form encourages the observer to look specifically at the quality of work through items that support student achievement. In addition, the observer is asked to describe several aspects of the classroom environment.

There are several things this form emphasizes:

- **The focus of the form is on the students' experiences in the classroom.** It is a "moment in time" assessment of what is actually happening. *This is not an evaluation of individual teachers*. For example, there are no items related to teacher planning. Though it is important for teachers to plan lessons in advance, planning alone does not guarantee student learning. The teacher's ability to engage the students in learning is a more significant factor and actually can be observed in the classroom.
- **This form describes the quality of the learning experience rather than the specific method used.** This is not an assessment of particular teaching methods, although some methods such as cooperative learning or project-based learning may indeed lead to improved student learning. For example, the form asks if students are engaged in substantive interaction about the content of the lesson. Students could be interacting in groups or in a well-designed discussion involving the whole class.
- **The physical environment and the resources available in the classroom are viewed only as they impact student learning.** Technological tools may be readily available in the classroom, but it is important to note how they are being used to enhance student learning.
- **This form attempts to describe the quality of work in which students are engaged.** It is more than an assessment of whether students are "on task." Observers should be concerned with the nature of the task and whether or not students are encouraged to think deeply about the content of the lesson. For instance, student reading should include evidence that the students understand what they are reading.
- **This form does not address all relevant data from the classroom.** Some data may be difficult to obtain during an observation; some issues may be better explored through questions during student or teacher interviews. For example, students should be asked whether or not they are aware of the standards for quality work and opportunities for extra help. Teachers should be asked about professional development opportunities and ways these opportunities have supported fundamental changes in classroom practice.

Further evidence of student experiences can be collected if it does not interfere with teaching and learning. Beyond the actual observation of classroom events, the observer can ask the teacher, if the opportunity arises, for samples of student work, a copy of the course syllabus, copies of recent assessments or copies of end-ofcourse exams. These offer further evidence as to how the teacher engages students in learning.

The following "look fors" will help you identify engaging activities, based on the content area that you have been assigned to observe.

- **In English Classes:**
  - Do students read or does the teacher read aloud to them?
  - Do students have folders of work in progress?
  - Are students using technology to draft and revise their writing?
  - Are students discussing what they have read?
  - Are students working in peer groups to revise writing?
  - Are rubrics and exemplary writing pieces clearly displayed?

- **In Mathematics Classes:**
  - Are students engaged in solving real-world problems? Look for examples of such problems in text-books and find out if these problems are assigned.
  - Who is working the problems — the teacher or the students? Does the teacher work the problem first, then give students similar problems to work, or does the teacher ask the students to "figure out" the answers first? What is the approach to teaching students to solve unfamiliar problems?
  - Describe group/team work. Is everyone working on the same problem?
  - If students are in a block period (60-90 minutes), how many topics or activities are covered during a particular period? Are topics connected?
  - Are students reading and writing in mathematics class? If so, give specific examples, such as keeping a journal or a lab notebook.
  - Do students make oral presentations?

- **In Science Classes:**
  - How do teachers relate science to the world outside the classroom?
  - Are science classes lab- and inquiry-based or teacher-centered and lecture-based?
  - Are students using mathematics in science classes? If so, how?
  - Are students reading and writing in science class? If so, give specific examples, such as keeping a journal or a lab notebook.
  - Do students make oral presentations?

- **In Social Studies Classes:**
  - Are students provided opportunities to gather, evaluate, organize and synthesize information; analyze conflicts, primary sources and current events; make predictions and inferences; view events from different perspectives; and draw conclusions?
  - What evidence is there of group/team work?
  - Do students make oral presentations?
  - Are students reading and writing in social studies class? If so, give specific examples, such as keeping a journal or a lab notebook.

- **In Elective Classes:**
  - To what extent do exploratory teachers create assignments that require students to read and use skills and concepts from core classes? Look at the level of reading and mathematics being used. Are they above the basic skill level?
  - Determine the extent to which exploratory classes focus on making students independent learners rather than teacher-dependent learners. Are students working on open-ended solutions to real-world problems?
  - Determine the percentage of teachers who have clear and demanding standards.
  - Does the exploratory program develop skills such as problem-solving, creativity, interpersonal skills, leadership and higher-order thinking skills?

- **In All Classes:**
  - Record specific examples of high-quality instructional activities that motivate students and engage them in challenging college-preparatory-level assignments. This provides evidence for the promising practices section of the technical assistance report.
  - What evidence indicates students are being held to high standards?
  - Determine the percentage of classes in which not many students were engaged or in which most or all students were engaged. Record specific examples.
  - Are there examples of student-centered learning, such as authentic projects, cooperative learning, Socratic Seminar and integrated learning activities?

Record specific examples of students engaged in challenging assignments:

- Are students guided toward more independent learning by making choices and understanding the outcomes of their learning?
- Note any particular efforts by teachers to link content to what students are learning in other classes.
- Can students explain what they are doing and why it is important?
- How are grading criteria for assignments communicated to students?
- Does the teacher require revision of work to meet high standards?
- Is there evidence of cooperative learning, integration of technology, integration of academic and exploratory studies, interdisciplinary activities, student presentations, project-based learning, portfolio assessment, and authentic problem solving?
- Is there evidence that students are engaged in higher-order thinking, or is class discussion strictly based upon recalling information?
- Are examples of exemplary student work displayed in classrooms?
- Are there at least three activities during the course of the instructional block?

Each subject should be taught in such a way that students are required to pose and solve problems, formulate assumptions and hypotheses, justify their arguments, construct explanations, and test their own understanding.

Classroom Observation Form

Time of Observation: Opening ____ Middle ____ Closing ____

Course/Level: _____ Class Size ____ Male ____ Female ____

Ethnicity: White ____ Black ____ Hispanic/Latino ____ Asian American ____ Native American ____ Other ____

Classroom Observation	Description/Comments
Evidence of emphasis on literacy ___ Use of reading-to-learn strategies ___ Use of writing-to-learn strategies ___ Student presentations using set criteria ___ Evidence of required reading both in and out of school	Describe the classroom activities or assignments requiring students to read, write and/or present
Evidence of emphasis on numeracy ___ Use of real-world problems ___ Use of problems with many possible answers ___ Use of graphs, charts and tables	Describe classroom activities or assignments that highlight the mathematical skills that are associated with the lesson.
Evidence of emphasis on integration ___ Cross-curricular connections ___ Interdisciplinary unit ___ Application of skills and/or content learned in other classes	Describe any other integrated content observed in the lesson, including integration of content from elective courses.
Evidence of emphasis on state or national content standards ___ State standard or essential questions posted ___ Learning objective posted ___ Learning outcomes described by teacher	What content standard or objective was addressed with this lesson? In your professional opinion, was the content at or above grade level?
Classroom Environment ___ Student work displayed ___ Evidence of rubrics ___ Print-rich environment ___ Availability of technology	Briefly describe the classroom environment. Describe the classroom set-up (rows of desks, clusters or tables).
Teacher Actions ___ Lecture ___ Teacher-led instruction/discussion ___ Teacher modeling with student practice ___ Teacher working with individual students ___ High-level questioning	Briefly describe what the teacher was doing during your time in the classroom and the teacher's location.
Student Actions/Activities ___ Bell ringer/warm-up activity ___ Project/problem-based learning ___ Lab/hands-on student work ___ Using technology ___ Cooperative group work ___ Students working with partners ___ Students making presentations ___ Drill/worksheet/text seat work	Briefly describe what students were doing during your time in the classroom.

Summary of Observation:

Rigor/Challenge of Work	___ Basic	___ Proficient	___ Advanced	
Engagement of Students	___ Low (Compliant)	___ Medium	___ High	

Technical Assistance Observation Summary Form

Directions: Use your completed individual observation forms to complete the following table. This information provides quantifiable information about the current state of classroom practices and engagement. To save time, complete the sections of this form as you exit each class. You will be asked to provide your specific numbers and examples at the beginning of the debriefing session on Day Two of the visit. This form will also be collected by your team leader.

1. Content: Do classes reflect content that is consistent with state grade-level curricula? According to proficiency descriptors, would you classify the content of the lesson as Basic (B), Proficient (P) or Advanced (A)?

B	**P**	**A**
(approaching grade level)	**(grade level)**	**(above grade level)**

2. Engagement: Were class activities student-centered? Consider if learning activities require students to make presentations, work in cooperative groups and perform real-world tasks. Is instruction teacher-led, (lecture, questions and answers or textbook-based) or student-centered or directed (interactive, every student is actively involved)?

L	**M**	**H**
(compliant/passive)	**(moderately engaged)**	**(very engaged)**

3. Classroom Environment: Were students sitting in rows or in groups? Did students have access to technology? Did the classroom have resource materials (books, magazines, maps, globes, artifacts, etc.)? Was student work posted? Did the teacher post a daily objective?

Seating	**Use of Technology**	**Reading resources**	**Student work posted**	**Daily objective posted**
Rows	Teachers			
Groups	Students			

Best Lesson: In two or three sentences, please describe the best lesson that you saw at this school.

Concerns: List your key concerns for the school below.

Appendix IV: Evidence of the *Making Middle Grades Work* 10 Key Practices

Framework Components	Evidence	
Challenging Academic Core Aligned with Rigorous Content and Performance Standards	■ Courses offered as indicated by master schedule — List of Honors/IBP courses ■ Revision of work until it meets standards ■ Assignment rubrics	■ Student opportunity for critical thinking ■ Teacher's questioning techniques and emphasis on higher order thinking ■ Reading and writing in all classes ■ MGA Assessment scores
All Students Matter	■ Student groups are short-term, flexible, and changed as needed ■ Structured adviser/advisee program ■ Inclusive practices and strategies ■ Educational plan for high school	■ Opportunities for mentoring by the larger community ■ Conflict resolution strategies ■ A structured career awareness and development system
High Expectations and Extra Help/Extra Time	■ Assessment trends ■ Attendance rate ■ Promotion/retention policies ■ Required reading outside of class ■ Revision of work until it meets standards ■ Homework policy	■ Various assessment strategies ■ Remediation/enrichment opportunities and requirements ■ Summer programs ■ Tutoring (peer/in school/out of school) ■ Examples of high quality-work with rubrics
Classroom Practices That Actively Engage Students	■ Hands-on projects that emphasize depth of knowledge and quality of content ■ Varied instructional strategies that engage students in challenging, complex assignments ■ Performance-based assessments and real-world applications ■ Emphasis on higher-order thinking	■ Cooperative learning ■ Real-world applications ■ Student/student and teacher/student interactions on substantive content. ■ Use of technology ■ Interdisciplinary units
Teachers Working Together	■ Documentation of student performance criteria ■ Consistent use of students' strengths/challenges to plan instruction and curricular experiences ■ Documentation of curricular and instructional planning that is continuous across and between grades	■ Documentation of common planning time activities ■ Documentation of teacher involvement on committees, teams, study groups ■ Examples of integrated projects/instruction
Parent Support	■ Parent involvement data ■ Documentation that parents received academic standards and examples of quality work at each grade ■ Conference participation rates	■ Evidence of open and frequent communication with parents ■ Parent awareness of school policies (e.g., homework) ■ Student-parent-teacher conferences to monitor academic progress and plan educational goals
Qualified Teachers	■ Documentation of professional development to support teachers' content knowledge and instructional skills ■ Hiring policies	■ Documentation of teachers' academic preparation for content teaching
Use of Data	■ Analysis of data to adjust instruction (Middle Grades Assessment, State Writing Assessment, norm-referenced tests, President's Physical Fitness Test, Career Interest Inventories)	■ System for sharing data with faculty and community in a timely manner ■ *MMGM* School Improvement Plan revised/ updated annually
Technology	■ Classroom use/integration of technology (calculators, computers, media) ■ Computer simulations (e.g., Classroom Inc., CX Bridges)	■ Communication links within school, district, and community ■ Distance learning
Strong Leadership	■ Attend state/SREB workshops and conferences ■ Monitor teachers' lesson plans and classrooms for use of strategies presented at staff development sessions and conferences ■ Participate as a team members in planning and implementing the *MMGW* framework	■ Spend time in classrooms to observe and support teaching and learning ■ Documentation that school leadership team meets regularly ■ Examples of shared decision-making with faculty

Appendix V: Conducting Interviews

Each team member will interview at least one group at the site. There are specific questions in the following pages for interviews with students, teachers, guidance counselors, the principal, the superintendent and parents. Be sure to take thorough notes during the interviews. Your team leader will use these notes to gather supporting evidence and quotes for the final TAV report.

Tips for Effective Interviews

1. Introduce yourself and provide a brief statement about the nature of the visit. Be clear about the purpose of the visit—to help the school identify best practices and future actions needed to improve all program areas. The goal is to get views on what the school has done, to define next steps and challenges, and to enable the people from the school to talk to each other.
2. Be prepared. Study the available data and information. Develop an idea of what you want to learn about the school. Take 15 minutes to review the specific interview questions in the Team Member Guide. Decide if there are other questions you should ask that will help fill in any gaps.
3. Have one person ask the questions. Before the interview, designate someone to take clear copious notes. This can be determined during the team orientation the first afternoon. The team leader should always interview the students, the principal and district leaders.
4. Avoid the trap of allowing one person to dominate the responses. Ask everyone in the room to respond to each question.
5. Restate the question when answers miss the point. For instance, you may not get an adequate answer to a probing question such as, "Why aren't your students performing well?" Do not move on to the next question. Instead, repeat what they have said to you in a different way: "Are you saying that all students' problems originate in themselves and their experiences outside school?"
6. Generate follow-up questions based on responses. For example, if an interviewee says, "I don't have time to give students extra help," you may wish to ask, "How can the school adjust your schedule to help you make time for extra help?"
7. Be prepared to confront challenges constructively. You may say to leaders, "As we look at the data, we might conclude that staff development follow-up is a problem. Other sites may have addressed it better. What can we do to help address the problem?"
8. Summarize the main ideas interviewees have shared with you and ask if there is anything that was omitted or that needs clarification.
9. Thank interviewees for their time and their commitment to raising student achievement.
10. Remember the contextual differences in interviews with students, teachers and site leaders. Relate this to the purpose of the interview and the questions that you ask.

Appendix VI: TAV Interview Questions

Superintendent/Board Member Interview Questions

Use these questions form to interview the superintendent and system leaders at the *HSTW* site.
Note: If this is a first-year site, rephrase the question to include future plans related to *HSTW*.

1. What is the district's vision for the school? Describe what the school will look like in five years?
2. What current plan does the district have for implementing improvements at this school? How does the district drive school improvement efforts at the school?
3. How are stakeholders, including teachers and school leaders, involved in identifying improvement goals for the district and developing plans to meet the goals?
4. How do you and the board support the principal and teachers in making these changes? Does the school have the authority to set its own organizational structure and schedule to improve instruction? Would the board/district support the elimination of low-level courses? the implementation of teacher-based advisory program?
5. How is data used to develop strategies to maintain strengths and address challenges? How is data collected that shows who is or is not learning and why?
6. What steps has the district taken to support the improvement of instruction and student achievement at the school? (Example: Has the district conducted system-wide curricula alignment to standards? state? high school readiness? national content standards?) What opportunities do the school and district provide for teachers to work together to improve teaching and learning? Does the district support vertical team meetings so that teachers can develop criteria and benchmarks by grade levels in all subjects? What additional collaborative opportunities exist for teachers?
7. Describe professional development opportunities provided by the district over the past three years. How does professional learning at the schools- and district-level emphasize both content and pedagogy of teaching for learning? How is teachers' effective implementation of new practices documented?
8. How does the school create opportunities for parents/families to learn about, and become involved in, curricular and instructional activities in school?
9. What further changes would you like to see implemented? How can *HSTW*/*MMGW* assist you in meeting these goals?

School Administrator Interview Questions

Use these questions to interview the school principal and *MMGW* site coordinator.

1. How do you develop teacher ownership and commitment to the *MMGW* program? How does the school use data to build support for decisions? How do school leaders and faculty challenge themselves to meet higher expectations every year?
2. Does the school send a consistent message to students, families and the community about what is expected of students, teachers, and administrators? Does the school's mission address creating a culture of high expectations and continuous improvement that prepares middle grades students for challenging high school studies?
3. How do staff engage in dialogue and reflection about teaching for learning? How do staff use data continuously, collaboratively, and effectively to improve teaching for learning?
4. Do teachers meet to frequently review assignments, student work and assessments to determine if they hold students to proficient-level learning?

5. Has the school created concrete goals that enable quantifiable measurement of progress over time? How do parents, teachers, students and community members provide suggestions on ways to improve the school?
6. How do you involve parents and students in the school improvement process?
7. How have you worked with teachers to align instruction to state standards (e.g., development of a curriculum framework, course syllabi, common end-of-course exams and units of study)? Are curricula benchmarked to national and international standards?
8. What actions have you taken to create a culture of high expectations in the school?
9. How does professional learning within the district and the school emphasize both content and pedagogy of teaching for learning? How does professional learning model effective constructive strategies to improve student achievement?
10. How does the school formally and directly assess whether teachers and principals use skills and knowledge gained from professional development opportunities? Describe how you follow up on staff development to see if strategies have been translated into changes in instruction?
11. How have you worked with teachers to integrate literacy across the curriculum?
12. What process do elective teachers use to highlight academic content in daily lessons and assessments?
13. Is there a program that ensures all students with a grade below B have access to and receive help? If so, describe this program. If not, describe extra help opportunities or the pyramid of interventions at this school.
14. How do students who have not mastered the core academic standards receive extra time and help to achieve mastery? What grade level or group of students have you identified to be a priority at this school?
15. What major challenges do you and the school face in fully achieving the *MMGW* goals and key practices?

Student Interview Questions

Use these questions to interview students.

1. How would you describe your school to a friend?
2. In which class do you learn the most and why?
3. Describe the last assignment that you were assigned that you feel pushed you to learn and challenged you.
4. How do teachers communicate the amount and quality of work you will need to do to earn an A or B (e.g., syllabi, scoring guides, rubrics, student work samples)?
5. Are you expected to redo your work until it meets standards? If yes, describe the process.
6. If you are struggling with the concepts in a class, describe any form of extra help that is available to you. Is it required? What opportunities do you have to make up (earn) credits if you have fallen behind (credit recovery options)?
7. How many books have you read this year in English class?
   - What type of reading assignments do you have in other classes?
   - Describe any writing assignments that you are given outside of English class.
   - How often are you required to make oral presentations? In which classes?
8. Describe a typical day in your mathematics and science classes.

9. What major research paper or project have you completed that took a great deal of time outside of class? What did you learn from the experience? How often do you have this kind of assignment?
10. Have you been assigned an adviser or mentor? If yes, describe how that adviser or mentor works with you.
11. Describe any activities that you participated in to assist you in preparing for high school (Probe: orientation, parent/student night, ninth grade study skills class, etc.). How do you think high school will be different from this school?
12. Have you talked with anyone about what courses you should take in high school? If so, whom? How are your parents involved in planning your high school program of study? What courses do you plan to take in ninth grade?
13. What are the most important school rules? Are they enforced evenly and fairly for all students?
14. How much time do you spend on homework each night? How much time do you spend watching TV?
15. What changes would you make in this school to get more students to achieve high-quality learning?

Teacher Interview Questions

Use these questions to guide teacher interviews at the *MMGW* site you are visiting.

1. Describe how you are using *MMGW* to make improvements in teaching and learning. How has the school gone about getting all faculty members involved in *MMGW*?
2. What is the school's mission and how do teachers support the mission of the school?
3. How often do you work with other teachers to review student work? What types of activities do you use to analyze student assignments, lessons, projects, rubrics and other instructional materials and define what grade-level work looks like for your campus?
4. How do you demonstrate expectations for student assignments? Do you provide these examples to students? To parents?
5. How is information provided to parents/guardians about how they can foster learning at home by giving appropriate assistance, monitoring homework and giving feedback to teachers?
6. How do you get students to analyze, revise and clarify work regularly to make it more effective in communicating the intended message or thought?
7. How often are students required to complete writing assignments and oral presentations according to specific performance criteria in all subject areas?
8. How do you group students for instruction? Are students assessed and regrouped frequently?
9. How do students have choices in the classroom and schoolwide? Give examples.
10. How are you involved in the guidance and advisement of students? How often do you schedule conferences with all families?
11. How do teachers use available technology to support student learning?
12. Describe staff development at your school. How has staff development changed your instruction? What types of follow-up activities exist to support you as you work to implement strategies learned in staff development sessions?
13. How does the principal engage the faculty in using data to evaluate the school's academic and career/technical programs? How are data used to identify gaps in achievement, curriculum and instruction?

14. Describe examples of students working hard in your class to demonstrate quality learning.
15. Describe how students get extra help if they are not meeting standards.
16. How have school and district leadership supported improvement efforts at the school?
17. What major challenges do you and your school face in implementing the *MMGW* goals and key practices?

Department Interview Questions (Optional)

Use these questions to guide interviews with department chairs or team leaders identified by the principal during their planning period.

English/language arts:

1. Is the English/language arts curriculum benchmarked to the National Council of Teachers of English standards?
2. What was the process used to align the curriculum to standards?
3. Are curriculum maps, pacing guides, common sense outlines, syllabi, exams, and scoring guides available for teachers' use?
4. How many books are students required to read each year in English/language arts classes? Do students in different levels (Honors, regular) have different reading requirements?
5. Do English/language arts teachers use a book list representing selections from across the curriculum?
6. Are all students required to read during the summer? How is summer reading assessed?
7. Do teachers use a variety of comprehension strategies to help students construct meaning in reading assignments?
8. Are all students required to write a research paper each year? Does the criteria for research change between sixth- and eighth-grade? *Ask for guidelines and rubrics*.
9. How often are students required to analyze and revise work to clarify it or make it more effective in communicating the intended message or thought?
10. How much writing are students required to do in each English/language arts class? Weekly? Monthly?
11. Have common writing rubrics been developed?
12. How often are students expected to make oral presentations to clearly defined performance standards?
13. Does the English/language arts department use common end-of-course exams?
14. Do teachers meet together to review assignments, assessments, and student work? How often do these meetings occur?

Media Center:

1. Do students have direct access to the media center or library before, during, or after school hours?
2. What is the media center's monthly/annual book circulation?
3. Complete a survey of the center's collection by randomly selecting ten books. Note the publication date and most recent date the item was checked out of the library. (To be current, the center's collection should not have books more than ten years old or selections that have not been checked out within the past year.)
4. How does the media specialist work with core content and fine/related arts teachers to plan assignments, monitor reading and engage students in conducting research?

Mathematics:

1. Is the mathematics curriculum benchmarked to state and National Council of Teachers of

Mathematics (NCTM) standards?

2. What was the process used to align the curriculum to standards?
3. Are curriculum maps, pacing guides, common sense outlines, syllabi, exams, and scoring guides available for teachers' use?
4. How many students take Algebra I in grade eight? Does Algebra I count for high school credit?
5. How much writing are students required to do in each mathematics class? Weekly? Monthly?
6. How often do students work in cooperative groups on assigned mathematics projects and presentations?
7. Do mathematics classes use common end-of-course exams?
8. How often does regular math instruction include the use of manipulatives, mathematical models, simulations, investigations, and graphing calculators? Give examples.
9. Describe ways and opportunities that students have to demonstrate and apply their understanding of mathematical concepts.
10. Do teachers meet together to review assignments, assessments, and student work? How often do these meetings occur?

Science:

1. Is the science curriculum benchmarked to state and National Science Teachers Association standards?
2. What was the process used to align the curriculum to standards?
3. Are curriculum maps, pacing guides, common sense outlines, syllabi, exams, and scoring guides available for teachers' use?
4. Are laboratory and technology experiences an integral part of science instruction? How much time do students spend completing investigations in the science lab each week?
5. Are students encouraged to demonstrate understanding of a concept in multiple ways? Describe examples.
6. How often are science projects required? Do teachers use common criteria and a jointly developed scoring guide to assess projects? Ask for guidelines and rubrics.
7. How often are students required to read, write and make oral presentations in science classes? Request examples of assignment requirements, scoring guides, etc.
8. How many books/articles do students read in science classes per semester/year?
9. Do science teachers use common end-of-course exams?
10. Do science teachers meet together to review assignments and assessments, practice laboratories, and examine student work? How often do these meetings occur?

Social studies:

1. Is the social studies curriculum benchmarked to state and national standards (government, geography, and history)?
2. What was the process used to align the curriculum to standards?
3. Are curriculum maps, pacing guides, common sense outlines, syllabi, exams, and scoring guides available for teachers' use?

4. Are students required to read from a variety of materials? Do teachers use a list of recommended books/articles from which students are expected to read? How many books/articles do students read per semester/year?
5. How often are students required to read, write and make oral presentations in social studies classes? *Request examples of assignment requirements, scoring guides, etc*.
6. How often are student projects required? Do teachers use common criteria and a jointly developed scoring guide to assess projects? *Ask for guidelines and rubrics*.
7. Do social studies teachers use common end-of-course exams?
8. Do social studies teachers meet together to review assignments, assessments, and examine student work? How often do these meetings occur?

Fine and related arts electives:

1. Are students required to do projects in fine and related arts classes? Describe specific projects, especially those that are interdisciplinary/integrated or require considerable work outside of class and involve research.
2. Do teachers use common criteria and jointly developed scoring guides to assess projects? *Ask for guidelines and rubrics.*
3. How often are students required to read, write and make oral presentations in fine and related arts classes? *Request examples of assignment requirements, scoring guides, etc*.
4. How often do students work on open-ended solutions to real-world problems?
5. To what extent do classes focus on making students independent learners versus teacher-dependent learners? Give examples.
6. Do students have opportunities to explore interests and learn about potential careers in fine and related arts classes? Give examples.

Counselor Interview Questions

Use these questions to interview counselors at the *MMGW* site you are visiting.

1. Describe how you are using *MMGW* to improve the guidance and advisement process. What specific changes have occurred in guidance and advisement as a result?
2. What is the school's mission and how does the guidance and advisement program support the mission of the school?
3. How and when do you involve parents in planning a student's program of study? What data do you use to help students plan their high school program of study? What are you doing to create 'reality checks' so students begin to see that they have much to do to prepare for their next step beyond high school? Does the school have a formal advisory program? Does the advisory program use an established curriculum? How are students grouped with their advisor?
4. How does the school plan and coordinate transitions for students entering and exiting the middle school?
5. In what ways does the school partner with community agencies to coordinate social services for students and families?
6. How do you use data to help plan a student's program of study? How are students encouraged to complete a concentration?

7. How does the school engage parents/families in understanding lifelong needs and consequences of a student's academic plan and how best to help students make academic plans and decisions?
8. How often are conferences scheduled with families? In what ways do students participate in these conferences?
9. What major challenges do you and your school face in fully achieving the *MMGW* goals and key practices?

Parent Interview Questions

Use this form to interview parents at the *MMGW* site.

1. How do adults communicate high expectations for all students in this school?
2. What evidence do you have that your student completed high-quality work while in middle school?
3. How have you helped your child in selecting courses to take for high school? What information was provided to assist you and your child to plan for high school and postsecondary education?
4. Has your student received information about high school graduation requirements and further study or work?
5. How did the school help your child to adjust to their new learning environment and expectations (elementary school transition)?
6. What opportunities do you have to meet/talk with your child's teachers or come to school to see what your child is doing? How often are parents required to meet with teachers or guidance counselors?
7. How do teachers and school leaders communicate with parents? How is information provided about how parents/families can foster learning at home by giving appropriate assistance, monitoring homework, and giving feedback to teachers?
8. Do you know what knowledge, skills and qualities your child will need to do challenging work in high school? What is this school doing to prepare your child for success in high school?
9. Does the school emphasize a few important school rules and enforce them consistently and fairly for all students?
10. What evidence do you have that your child has completed high quality work while in middle school? Do you receive examples of student work that meets these standards?
11. How would your child get extra help if he/she were struggling in a class?
12. How much is your child required to read outside of class? In all subjects?
13. How are opportunities provided for direct contact between the school and parents/families that take into consideration a variety of parent needs (e.g., parents' schedules, transportation, translations, interpretation, and child care?
14. Give an example of a high-quality project or assignment that your child was required to complete.
15. How can teachers and school/district leaders work to improve the relationship and communication with parents?

Appendix VII: Team Member Observation Schedule

Name of Team Member: _____

Class	Teacher	Location	Time
1.			
2.			
3.			
4.			
5.			
6.			
7.			
8.			
9.			
10.			
11.			
12.			

INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

Group	Location	Time

Appendix VIII: Interview Schedule

Group	Location	Time	TAV Team Member(s)
Teachers			
Parents			
Students			
Counselor(s)			
Principal, Asst. Principal, Site Coordinator			
Superintendent/ District Coordinator			

* denotes interview leader

Appendix IX: Instructional Review Rubric

***MMGW*'s NAEP-Based proficiency levels provide information about what an eighth-grade student should know and be able to do within a given subject area. (See Appendix I for more information about the proficiency levels.) The purpose of this exercise is to focus on the fact that students cannot reach proficiency unless the instruction and assignments they receive are set to the Proficiency level. For the purposes of this exercise, assign items into one of the three proficiency levels (Basic, Proficient or Advanced) using approximate projections and an understanding of the proficiency level descriptions.**

Basic-level assignments and questions focus on the two lowest levels of Bloom's Taxonomy. Students recall facts, make simple inferences or interpretations, demonstrate a rudimentary understanding of terminology, principles, and concepts that underlie the field, and make only direct connections between content and personal experience. Basic-level work requires students to:

- identify some parts of physical and biological systems.
- recognize relationships presented in verbal, algebraic, tabular, and graphical forms.
- answer who, what, where and when types of questions.

Assignments that require students to remember information or make simple explanations are at the basic level.

Proficient-level assignments and questions focus on the two middle levels of Bloom's Taxonomy. Students are required to use analytical skills, draw reasonable conclusions and make appropriate conjectures or inferences by applying logical reasoning on the basis of partial or incomplete information. Proficient-level work requires students to:

- defend ideas and give supporting examples.
- understand algebraic, statistical, and geometric and spatial reasoning that is relevant to the field.
- apply scientific and technical principles to everyday situations.
- judge and defend the reasonableness of answers or solutions to problems that routinely occur in the chosen technical field.

Proficient-level questions and assignments require students to apply and analyze information learned.

Advanced-level assignments and questions focus on the two highest levels of Bloom's Taxonomy. Students formulate generalizations, synthesize ideas, and create models through probing examples and counterexamples. Advanced-level work requires students to:

- communicate their ideas and reasoning through the correct use of concepts, symbolism and logical thinking.
- design and apply procedures to test or solve complex, real-world situations.
- create thorough, thoughtful, extensive written responses.

Advanced-level questions and assignments require students to evaluate and create work.

The attached rubric provides leaders with each of the following:

- the three NAEP levels
- the old and new Bloom's Taxonomy levels
- sample verbs used for that level of questions
- sample question stems
- potential assignments

Leaders should not consider this an all-inclusive group and will have to make judgments as to the appropriate level based upon the examples provided.

Instructional Review Summary Sheet

Content Area: _____ Team Member: _____

Brief Description	Level of Assignment: Basic, Proficient, Advanced	Types of Questions *(M/C, open-ended, T/F)*	Rubric Provided *(Yes or No)* ✓	Teacher Made ✓	Mass Produced ✓

Brief Description	**Level of Assignment: Basic, Proficient, Advanced**	**Types of Questions** *(M/C, open-ended, T/F)*	**Rubric Provided** *(Yes or No)* ✓	**Teacher Made** ✓	**Mass Produced** ✓

BASIC

Know	Comprehend
Remember	**Explain**
Useful Verbs	**Useful Verbs**
tell, write, list, find, describe, state, relate, name, locate	explain, predict, interpret, restate, outline, translate, discuss, compare, distinguish, describe
Sample Question Stems For Assesments	**Sample Question Stems For Assesments**
What happened after…? How many…? Who was it that…? Name the… Describe what happened at… Who spoke to…? Tell me why…? Find the meaning of… What is it…? Which is true or false…?	Write in your own words… Write a brief outline… What do you think could have happened next…? Who do you think…? What was the main idea? Who was the main character? Distinguish between… What differences exist between…? Provide an example of what you mean by… Provide a definition for…
Potential Assignments And Products	**Potential Assignments And Products**
■ List the story's main events ■ Make timeline of events ■ Make a facts chart ■ List any pieces of information you can remember ■ Recite a poem ■ List all the animals in the story ■ Make a chart showing… ■ Remember an idea or fact ■ Question and answer sessions ■ Workbooks and worksheets ■ Remember things read, heard, seen ■ Information searches ■ Reading assignments ■ Drill and practice3 ■ Finding definitions ■ Memory games quizzes	■ Forming relationships (analogies, similes) ■ Predicting effects of changes ■ Dramatization ■ Peer teaching ■ Show and tell ■ Estimating ■ Story problems ■ Cut out or draw pictures to show a particular event ■ Illustrate the main idea ■ Make a cartoon strip showing the sequence of events ■ Write and perform a play based on the story ■ Retell the story in your own words ■ Paint a picture of some aspect of the story you like ■ Write a summary of the event ■ Prepare a flow chart to illustrate the sequence of events

PROFICIENT

Apply	Analyze
Useful Verbs	**Useful Verbs**
solve, show, use, illustrate, calculate, construct, complete, examine, classify	analyze, distinguish, examine, compare, contrast, investigate, categorize, identify, explain, separate, advertise
Sample Question Stems For Assesments	**Sample Question Stems For Assesments**
Do you know another instance where…? Could this have happened in…? Group by characteristics such as… What factors would change if…? Apply the method used to some experience of your own… What questions would you ask of…? From the information given, develop a set of instructions about… Would this information be useful if you had a…?	Which event could not have happened if…? If…happened, what might the ending have been? How was this similar to…? What was the underlying theme of…? What do you see as other possible outcomes? Why did…changes occur? Compare your…with that presented in… What must have happened when…? How is…similar to…? What are some of the problems of…? What was the turning point in the story? What was the problem with…?
Potential Assignments And Products	**Potential Assignments And Products**
■ Construct a model to demonstrate how it will work ■ Make a diorama to illustrate an important event ■ Compose a book about… ■ Make a scrapbook about the areas of study ■ Make a map showing information ■ Make a puzzle game using ideas from the study area ■ Make a chart showing… ■ Make a clay model of… ■ Paint a mural ■ Design a market strategy for your product ■ Design an ethnic costume ■ Use knowledge from various areas to find solutions ■ Role playing/role reversal ■ Produce a newspaper, stories, etc. ■ Interviews ■ Experiments ■ Solve problems by using known information	■ Practical applications of learned knowledge ■ Suggest actual uses of ideas ■ Design a questionnaire to gather information ■ Make a flow chart to show critical stages ■ Write a commercial for a news/familiar product ■ Review a work of art in terms of form, color and texture ■ Construct a graph to illustrate selected information ■ Uncover unique characteristics ■ Distinguish between facts and inferences ■ Evaluate the relevancy of data ■ Recognize logical fallacies in reasoning ■ Recognize unstated assumptions ■ Analyze the structure of a work of art, music or writing ■ Compare and contrast ■ Construct a jigsaw puzzle. ■ Analyze a family tree showing relationships.

ADVANCED

Synthesize	Evaluate
Create	
Useful Verbs	**Useful Verbs**
create, invent, compose, predict, plan, construct, design, imagine, improve, propose, devise, formulate	judge, select, choose, decide, justify, debate, verify, argue, discuss, determine, prioritize
Sample Question Stems For Assesments	**Sample Question Stems For Assesments**
Design a…to… What is a possible solution to…? What would happen if…? If you had access to all resources, how would you deal with…? How would you design your own way to…? How many ways can you…? Create new and unusual uses for… Develop a proposal which would… How would you compose a song about…?	Write a new recipe for a tasty dish Is there a better solution to…? Judge the value of… Defend your position about… Do you think…is a good or bad thing? Explain How would you have handled…? What changes to…would you recommend? Are you a…person? Why? How would you feel if…? How effective are…?
Potential Assignments And Products	**Potential Assignments And Products**
■ Invent a machine to do a specific task ■ Design a building ■ Create a new product, give it a name and plan a marketing campaign ■ Write your feelings in relation to… ■ Write a TV show, play, puppet show, song, or pantomime about… ■ Design a record, book, or magazine cover for… ■ Create a language code ■ Sell an idea to a billionaire ■ Compose a rhythm or put new words to a known melody ■ Hypothesize ■ Write a creative story, poem or song ■ Propose a plan for an experiment ■ Integrate the learning from different areas into a plan for solving a problem ■ Formulate the new scheme for classifying objects	■ Identify goals and objectives ■ Show how an idea or product might be changed ■ Prepare a list of criteria to judge a…show ■ Conduct a debate about an area of special interest ■ Make a booklet about five rules you value ■ Make judgments about data or ideas based on either internal or external conditions or criteria ■ Accept or reject ideas based on standards ■ Judge the logical consistency of written material ■ Judge the adequacy with which conclusions are supported with data ■ Judge the value of a work or art, music, writing, by using internal criteria or external standards of excellence ■ Generate criteria for evaluation ■ Evaluating one's own products and ideas ■ Form a panel to discuss a topic and state criteria ■ Write a letter to…advising changes needed

Southern Regional Education Board Goals for Education

1. All children are ready for the first grade.
2. Achievement in the early grades for all groups of students exceeds national averages and performance gaps are closed.
3. Achievement in the middle grades for all groups of students exceeds national averages and performance gaps are closed.
4. All young adults have a high school diploma — or, if not, pass the GED tests.
5. All recent high school graduates have solid academic preparation and are ready for postsecondary education and a career.
6. Adults who are not high school graduates participate in literacy and job-skills training and further education.
7. The percentage of adults who earn postsecondary degrees or technical certificates exceeds national averages.
8. Every school has higher student performance and meets state academic standards for all students each year.
9. Every school has leadership that results in improved student performance — and leadership begins with an effective school principal.
10. Every student is taught by qualified teachers.
11. The quality of colleges and universities is regularly assessed and funding is targeted to quality, efficiency and state needs.
12. The state places a high priority on an education system of schools, colleges and universities that is accountable.

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