

# Making Middle Grades Work

## Combining Middle Grades and High School Improvement Efforts — Why It Makes Sense

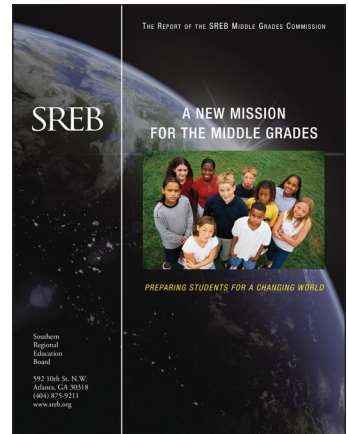
For many youth, the middle grades are a make-or-break time in their education and social and emotional development. At present, however, less than 35 percent of students leave eighth grade with the literacy and math skills they need to complete a college-ready core.

In a groundbreaking report on middle grades education, *A New Mission for the Middle Grades*, SREB makes the case that preteens and young teens flourish when their studies are challenging, meaningful and personally relevant.

SREB's **Making Middle Grades Work** school improvement framework supports middle grades schools in their efforts to advance student achievement by:

- Providing students with accelerated learning experiences that prepare them to leave eighth grade on track to meet state readiness benchmarks.
- Identifying students who need extra help as early as the sixth grade and finding time for teachers to provide special supports to these students.
- Offering exploratory experiences that empower students to make the connection between their studies, their interests and potential careers.

MMGW tools and strategies help schools keep students engaged by tapping into their passions and interests. As a result, more students leave eighth grade prepared for what's next — challenging high school studies, college and careers.



### Meet Bold Goals for Student Achievement With MMGW

SREB encourages middle grades schools to use the MMGW framework to set and meet bold goals for student achievement. MMGW can empower more students to:

- Enter ninth grade ready for college-preparatory academic courses and challenging career pathway courses.
- Enter ninth grade with the literacy skills needed to read, analyze and comprehend texts in all subject areas.
- Enter ninth grade having successfully completed Algebra I or ready for college-prep math.
- Earn enough credit as first-time ninth-graders to enter 10th grade.

### MMGW's Eight Key Practices

Middle grades schools that redesign their curricula around MMGW's eight Key Practices offer accelerated learning opportunities that help students master foundational literacy, math and science skills.

- 1. Schools teach all students using engaging assignments connected to grade-level standards.** MMGW teachers receive professional development and instructional coaching that support their ability to align readiness standards with assignments that motivate students to eagerly invest the effort required to produce quality work.
- 2. Schools use literacy strategies to advance students' literacy and subject-area achievement.** MMGW professional development and onsite and electronic coaching strengthen teachers' capacity to develop literacy-based assignments that engage students in reading grade-level texts in all content areas and expressing their understanding of those texts orally and in writing. Teachers learn how to teach close reading strategies and writing strategies that help students read challenging source materials, organize information, support their ideas with evidence and master content knowledge and writing skills at the same time.
- 3. Schools take a balanced approach to teaching math concepts, procedures and reasoning skills that helps students view math as an essential tool for understanding and solving real-world problems.** MMGW professional development and coaching services deepen teachers' math knowledge and ability to adopt ready-to-use math strategies. MMGW's balanced approach to math instruction advances students' procedural fluency while building their understanding, reasoning and ability to apply math knowledge and skills to solve multi-step problems.



Literacy and math strategies



**4. Laboratory-based learning experiences introduce students to the complexity of scientific research.**

MMGW professional development supports teachers and school leaders in offering lab-based science instruction that engages students in conducting scientific studies, using equipment, recording data, analyzing results and discussing their findings. Students also learn how to collaborate effectively with others, take personal responsibility for their work, assume different roles and accept feedback.



Middle grades STEM courses

**5. Rich STEM (science, technology, engineering and mathematics) learning experiences awaken students' natural curiosity about the world and introduce them to exciting STEM careers.**

Each of SREB's middle grades STEM courses, available in the fall of 2018, are designed around projects that introduce students to the principles of scientific inquiry and the engineering design process. Students work collaboratively with peers to solve real-world problems from fields like computer science and biotechnology. All projects involve conducting research, preparing written designs and reports, developing prototypes, using data to test prototypes and presenting their work.



Readiness courses

**6. Schools take early steps to identify students who are not on a graduation path and provide them with accelerated learning supports connected to grade-level readiness standards.**

MMGW's accelerated learning program provides struggling students with the additional time they need to complete challenging assignments and meet readiness benchmarks while also addressing any attendance or behavioral problems they may have. SREB's **Ready for High School Literacy and Math courses**, offered in the eighth grade, increase the percentage of students who enroll and succeed in college-preparatory Algebra I, science, English and social studies courses in the ninth grade.



Counseling for careers and college

**7. Schools help students explore their interests, aptitudes and career and educational goals through in-school and out-of-school learning activities.**

MMGW works with district and school leaders to implement a comprehensive, curriculum-based counseling system in which students in every grade engage in developmentally appropriate career exploratory lessons. Students and parents are paired with teacher-advisers who meet with them regularly to create, review and revise their personalized programs of study for high school and beyond.

**8. School leaders receive the support and resources they need to advance school improvement initiatives, strengthen teachers' understanding of effective curriculum and instructional strategies, and help good teachers become great teachers.**

MMGW helps school leaders establish a shared vision, mission and goals for school improvement by creating consensus among faculty and staff. Leaders focus their time and energy on empowering teachers to improve teaching and learning and advance student achievement. School leaders also share leadership responsibilities in ways that enhance teachers' capacity to plan instruction and assignments within and across disciplines.



Learn more.

Email: [mmgw@sreb.org](mailto:mmgw@sreb.org)

[sreb.org/mmgw](http://sreb.org/mmgw)