Measuring the Middle School Concept: The Status and Effectiveness of Middle School Concept in Illinois

Scott Woods

What is Middle School Concept?

• On your index cards, write three things that are distinctive of MSC that do not typically happen in other types of schools?
  – Cards will be collected and shared.
Goals for this session…

- Rationale for measuring MSC
- Discussion about measuring MSC
- Feedback on study in progress

About me…

- Principal, Urbana MS, IL
- 10 years MS principal
- 2 years MS AP
- 6 years teacher
- Doctoral student UIUC
- Find me
  - swoods@usd116.org
  - @sctwds
Context

• Urbana Middle School
  – Grades 6-8
  – 950 students
  – 69% low income
  – 63% non-white
  – 5.6% ELL
• Find us
  – usd116.org/ums
  – @UMStigers

Context cont.

• Interdisciplinary Teaming w/ Common Planning Time
• Teams of about 90-105 w/ 4 reged and 1-2 sped or ESL
• Individual planning time for all teachers
• 25 minute daily advisory
• Heterogeneous grouping
• Full exploratory program
• Comprehensive athletics and extra-curriculars
Are we a model middle school?

• Discuss with the person next to you whether or not UMS is a model middle school.
  – Is UMS an effective MS?
  – What more do we need to know?
  – How do we measure MSC?

Index Cards

• What do we think MSC is?
What is Middle School Concept?

1. Serve young adolescents
2. Utilize teaming structure
3. Utilize common planning time
4. Utilize advisory structures that focus on affective needs

How Are Schools Measured?

• Reliance on standardized testing
• Lack of consideration of unique challenges of working in diverse schools
• Narrative of school failure
From: iirc.niu.edu

What defines these higher performing schools?

What defines these lower performing schools?

Are these Middle Schools?

From: iirc.niu.edu
Rationale for Measuring MSC

- What is not known in Illinois…
  - Levels of implementation of MSC
  - Whether or not there is a relationship between implementation and student demographics—race and/or poverty
  - Whether or not there is a relationship between implementation and academic outcomes

What defines MS?

- Focus on young adolescents
- Foster smallness, community, and attention to affective
- Strong academic program

- Interdisciplinary teaming with common planning time
- Advisory programming

(This We Believe in action, 2012; George & Alexander, 2003; McEwin & Greene, 2010; Research & Resources, 2010).
NFAMGR

• Academic Excellence
• Developmental Responsiveness
• Organizational Structure
• Social Equity

http://middlegradesforum.org/our-criteria/

NFAMGR and MSC

• “Adults and students are grouped into smaller communities (e.g., teams, houses, academies) for enhanced teaching and learning.”
• “Every student has a mentor, advisor, advocate, or other adult he/she trusts and stays in relationship with throughout the middle school experience.”
  – “the school community knows every student well” and “every student has an adult advocate and supporter in the school”

"Organizational structures foster purposeful learning and meaningful relationships"

"Every student’s academic and personal development is guided by an adult advocate."
What is Middle School Concept?

1. Serve young adolescents
2. Utilize teaming structure
3. Utilize common planning time
4. Utilize advisory structures that focus on affective needs

Teaming and CPT

• In many school districts across the country, common planning time is perceived as a privilege or luxury, and not as a necessary component of middle level education. (Mertens, Flowers, Anfara, & Caskey, 2010, p. 56)
Teaming and CPT

• Valentine et al. (2004) and McEwin and Greene (2013) found that highly successful middle schools were much more likely to be implementing interdisciplinary team structure than middle grades schools in general.

• Effective teaming involves all team teachers having CPT (Flower, Mertens, & Mulhall, 1999)
• CPT along with individual plan time is recommended (Hackmann, Petzko, Valentine, Clark, & Lucas, 2002)
**Interdisciplinary Teaming**

Levels of interdisciplinary teaming related to common planning time

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>High</strong></td>
<td>Interdisciplinary teaming in all middle grade levels with high levels of CPT (minimum of four meetings per week with each meeting lasting 30 minutes or more)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Low</strong></td>
<td>Interdisciplinary teaming in all middle grade levels with low levels of CPT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>None</strong></td>
<td>Not teaming in all middle grade levels...or schools that were not engaged in interdisciplinary teaming</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note. From Mertens et al., 2010, p. 52.*

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**Measuring MSC includes...**

- **Interdisciplinary Teaming Structure**
  - Are students and teachers grouped into teams?
  - Are students taught only by the teachers on the team?

- **Common Planning Time**
  - What do teachers do during CPT?
  - Frequency of Team and Individual Planning?
Advisory

- a designated staff member responsible for a small group of students
- regularly scheduled meetings of the advisory group
- ongoing individual conferences between advisor and advisees during the school year
- administrative support for advisory activities
- parent contact with the school through the child’s advisor, and,
- an adult advocate for every young adolescent

(This We Believe in Action, 2012, p. 147)

Advisory

- 93% of “exemplary” middle schools studied included an advisory program (George & Oldaker, 1985)
- Implementation of advisory programs was higher in HSMS, 65%, when compared to middle level schools from a random sample, 53% (McEwin & Greene, 2010)
### A typology of advisory components. From Galassi et al. (1997)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Need</th>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Goals &amp; Focus</th>
<th>Advisor Skills</th>
<th>Sample Activities</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Caring</td>
<td>Affective</td>
<td>Substantial implementation time</td>
<td>Adult–student relationship</td>
<td>Personal qualities—interest and concern for students</td>
<td>Individual student conferences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community</td>
<td>Affective</td>
<td>Substantial implementation time</td>
<td>Group identity</td>
<td>Personal qualities, group management</td>
<td>Group discussions, intramurals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Invigoration</td>
<td>Affective</td>
<td>Minimal “prep” time</td>
<td>Relaxing, recharging</td>
<td>Personal qualities, enthusiasm</td>
<td>Intramurals and clubs, parties, informal “fun” activities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic Enhancement</td>
<td>Cognitive</td>
<td>Substantial implementation time</td>
<td>Academic performance</td>
<td>Personal qualities, teaching</td>
<td>Study skills, silent reading, writing, tutoring</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Administrative homeroom</td>
<td>Administrative</td>
<td>Minimal “prep” time</td>
<td>General school business, “housekeeping”</td>
<td>Clerical, organizational</td>
<td>Announcements, distributing materials, collecting money</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Effective Advisory…**

- Advisor to student ratio of between 1:10 and 1:15 (Burns, Jenkins, and Kane, 2012; AMLE, 2012; Gallassi et al., 1998)
- Meet 4-5 school days per week for at 15-24 minutes (Burns et al., 2012)
Effective Advisory…

- Schools in which advisory met 4-5 times per week for 30-45 minutes had higher levels of student achievement and lower levels of student stress (Felnter et al., 1997)
- Flexibility of time to perform varied tasks and activities is important (Burns et al., 2012)

Measuring MSC includes…

- Advisory structures
  - Is an Advisory program present?
  - Frequency of meeting
  - Length of meeting
  - Type of activities
  - Importance of types of activities
Precedent of Measuring MSC…

- Two major study strands
  - Alexander and McEwin
  - NASSP (Valentine and Clark)

### Alexander and McEwin Series

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Author</th>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Interdisciplinary Teaming</th>
<th>Common Planning Time</th>
<th>Advisory</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Alexander</td>
<td>1968</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
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<td>Alexander and McEwin</td>
<td>1989</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
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<tr>
<td>McEwin, Dickinson, and Jenkins</td>
<td>1996</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
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<tr>
<td>McEwin, Dickinson, and Jenkins</td>
<td>2003</td>
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<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
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<tr>
<td>McEwin and Greene</td>
<td>2011</td>
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## NASSP Series

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Author</th>
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<th>Common Planning Time</th>
<th>Advisory</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Valentine, Clark, Nickerson, &amp; Keefe</td>
<td>1981</td>
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<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
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<tr>
<td>Valentine, Clark, Irvin, Keefe, &amp; Melton</td>
<td>1993</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Valentine, Clark, Hackmann, &amp; Petzko</td>
<td>2002</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

## Two major study strands

- Inconsistent or lack of consideration to issues of race and poverty
- Identification of “effective” and “successful” schools is problematic
An issue with HSMS?

Data from McEwin and Green (2011)

Illinois StW Compared to State Average

Percent Low-Income  Percent White  State Low Income  State percent white
Race and Poverty

• How do we reconcile issues of race and poverty with advocacy for MSC implementation?
What’s the point?

In order to advocate for MSC organizational structures that we believe are the right things to do for young adolescents, we must provide clear evidence that MSC implementation results in success for all students and not that its success rests in the luck of the privileges of whiteness and affluence.

“Middle Schools” in Illinois

• 3,934 Regular Education, Public schools
  – ISBE defines 607 schools with 18 different grade configurations as MS
  – 3,301 schools with 71 grade configurations serve grades 5-9

• How to define the sample???
“Middle Schools” in Illinois

• Schools that serve students of any grade levels ranging only from 5-9 that include at least two consecutive grade levels and must include grade 7 (Valentine et al., 2002)
Questions?

What is the current level of MSC implementation in Illinois?

- Survey 614 middle grades school principals in Illinois in order to identify and report the levels of MSC implementation.
- Identify and categorize schools according to MSC implementation levels.

Questions?

Is there a statistically significant relationship between schools’ rates of student qualification for federal free and reduced lunch and levels of MSC implementation in Illinois’s schools?
Questions?

Is there a statistically significant relationship between schools student racial/ethnic composition, as an aggregate and according to specific racial/ethnic groups, and levels of MSC implementation?

Questions?

Is there a statistically significant relationship between school’s academic achievement levels, based on state mandated standardized tests, and levels of MSC implementation in Illinois’s schools, and does that relationship correlate with rates of free and reduced lunch and/or racial composition of schools?
Proposed Study

• Survey of 614 MS Principals
  – Provide snapshot of MSC implementation in Illinois
  – Categorize schools on a spectrum from high to low MSC implementation (MSC Scale)

Proposed Study

• Simple Regression Analysis
  – MSCS to Race
  – MSCS to FRL Rate
  – MSCS to Academic Achievement
Thank You!

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