

**Middle School Model vs. K-8 Model**

**AFT/TFT Teacher Leader Program**

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**2022 -2023**

## **Research Question**

Does the Middle School Model prepare young adolescents for high school better than the traditional K-8 (Elementary) Model?

## **Rationale**

The middle school model refers to an educational approach that is designed specifically for students in grades 6 through 8 (typically ages 11-14). The middle school model often includes a team of teachers who work with the same group of students, providing instruction in multiple subject areas. This team approach is meant to provide students with a more personalized and supportive learning environment. Other common features of the middle school model include a focus on interdisciplinary learning, hands-on and project-based learning, and opportunities for student leadership and decision making. The goal of the middle school model is to help students develop the academic, social, and emotional skills they need to succeed in high school and beyond.

On the other hand, K-8 schools are designed to serve students from kindergarten through 8th grade. These schools provide a continuity of education for students from the earliest years of elementary school through middle grades. In K-8 schools, students often have the opportunity to develop close relationships with teachers and classmates over a longer period of time. K-8 schools may also provide a more stable and familiar environment for students, as they do not have to transition to a new school for middle school.

## **Review of Literature**

While both models have their benefits, there is a growing amount of literature that suggests that the middle school model is superior to the traditional elementary school model. From my research, there are four main benefits of the middle school model:

1. Students receive a developmentally appropriate curriculum. Middle school curriculum is designed to cater to the developmental needs of adolescents. It is tailored to meet the needs of this age group with an emphasis on problem-solving, critical thinking, and independent learning. Elementary curriculum has a greater focus on foundational skills.
2. There is increased student engagement. Middle schools often use team based approaches to learning which have been shown to increase motivation and engagement. The elementary model tends to be more compartmentalized.
3. More support for social and emotional development. Middle schools typically have specialized staff members, such as counselors and psychologists who are trained to support the needs of adolescents. Middle schools also provide more extracurricular opportunities which can help develop important social and emotional skills. On the contrary, elementary schools tend to have a limited number of extracurricular activities they offer and often do not have specialized staff members on hand to support students' development.
4. Students are better prepared for high school. Middle schools are often designed to mimic high schools and provide students with the skills and knowledge they need to succeed in high school.

The literature suggests that middle schools offer several benefits over the traditional elementary model.

## **Study Design**

Shortly after the start of the 2022-2023 school year, the McTigue School Core Team was presented with the potential of re-introducing the middle school model back into Toledo Public Schools. District leadership asked core teams to compile questions and "paint pictures" as to what ours would look like. My interest peaked and tied this into my American Federation of Teachers - Teacher Leadership Program research.

In the meantime, the junior high teachers at McTigue wanted to implement some typical middle school procedure to help prepare our students for high school. Some of the procedures included transitioning

from class to class on their own, using the restroom during class switches, and traveling to specials on their own.

Over the course of the year, I would often hear students discussing their concerns for high school and their overall feeling of unpreparedness. I overheard one conversation in particular that was eye-opening. J.H said, "Since we only have four classes, we won't be prepared to go to all of the high school classes. A lot of people will be overwhelmed and stressed...we won't be babied anymore. We are going to be discombobulated." M.B. replied, "I wish we had more classes."

I developed and distributed a survey that consisted of nine questions pertaining to their confidence level in their academic abilities, their level of preparedness for high school, and if they feel that the middle school model would help them be prepared better. Sixty-eight 7th & 8th graders in general education classes participated in the survey.

### **Data Analysis**

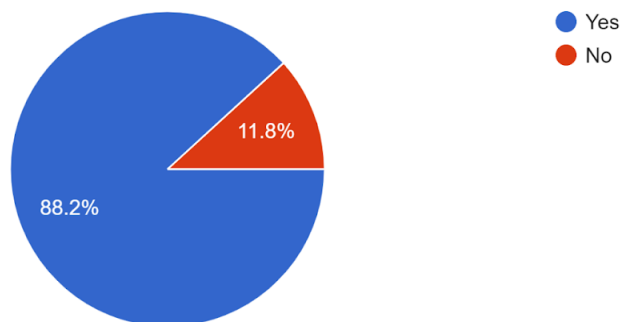
68 of 85 7th and 8th grade students participated in the survey I created using Google Forms. 15 students were absent and 2 chose not to participate. Of the nine questions asked, a few of the results stand out to me.

When asked how confident the student is with their academic abilities as they prepare for high school, 83% are confident or somewhat confident with only 8.8% not confident at all. This tells me that the majority of the junior high feels academically prepared for high school. More surprising to me that when asked if they feel socially prepared, 70% are confident or somewhat confident with 15% not prepared at all.

With what I have heard my students talk about in regards to high school, I can't say that I was overly surprised with the results of the following two questions (see graphs below). I strongly feel this is not the "grass is greener" effect. Overall, the survey results tell me that even though the majority feel prepared for high school, they would possibly feel more prepared if they were apart of the middle school model.

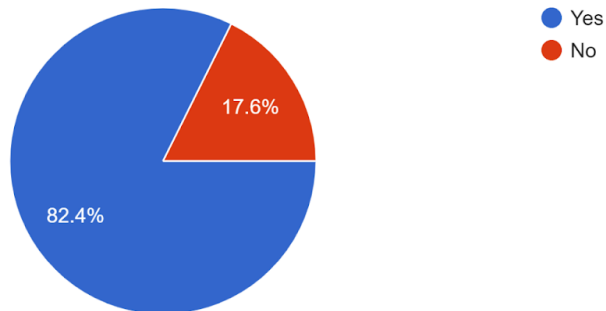
Do you feel that the middle school model would provide you with a better educational experience than elementary school?

68 responses



Do you think that middle school would help you to be better prepared for high school?

68 responses



### **Recommendations**

Overall, both the middle school model and the K-8 model can provide effective educational experiences for students in the middle grades, and the choice between them may depend on a variety of factors, including the needs and preferences of individual students and families.

My recommendation for Toledo Public Schools is to continue servicing our community of students using the K-8 model while providing early adolescents with a middle school experience.

### **Bibliography**

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