



Glossary of Middle Grades Terms

Ability Grouping—grouping students for learning based on achievement levels within a class or sometimes across classes.

Accountability—refers to federal, state, and district policies developed to hold districts, school staff, and/or students responsible for academic performance. Standardized test scores typically are used to determine the measure of success or failure.

Achievement Gap—is the difference in academic performance between students of different racial-ethnic groups and income levels.

Advisory Program—a teacher-based guidance effort that provides every student with one adult advisor who serves as an advocate and a small group leader. The group meets on a regular basis and typically focuses on personal/social development, educational advisement, school-wide communication, and home-school-community relations.

Alignment—this process makes standards, assessment, and instruction consistent so they are most effective in helping students reach state goals. Related words: see also **standards, assessment, instruction**.

Assessments—are ways to determine what middle school students know and show teachers/schools the areas where improvement is needed. There are many forms and methods for assessing students. **Alternative Assessments** are ways, other than standardized tests, to gather information about what students know and where they may need help. Oral reports, discussions, written reports, projects, and portfolios are considered examples of alternative assessments.

Association of Illinois Middle-Level Schools, AIMS—founded in 1976 as a not-for-profit umbrella association committed to the education of early adolescents and to the professionals who teach them. Affiliated with the **National Middle School Association** in 1977. Phone (217) 333-7104; Website www.cprd.uiuc.edu/aims

Basic Skills—the elements of learning considered essential to an understanding of a specific subject.

Block Schedule—a flexible time arrangement, characteristic of middle grades schools that allows teams of teachers to schedule instructional time in flexible time periods to better meet the academic and social needs of the students.

Co-curricular Activities—activities in the school program based on student interests that are not usually graded. Related word: see also **intramural**.

Common Plan Time—a period in the daily schedule when the teams of teachers who work with the same groups of students are given time to plan together.

Comprehensive Health—a very broad approach to integrating health education in the school program including not only content such as drug education, but also skills development for healthy living.

Comprehensive School Reform (CSR)—a federal program designed to increase student achievement by assisting public schools with implementing comprehensive reforms grounded in scientifically based research and effective educational practices. Most CSR programs seek to improve schools by assisting them in the process of increasing the quality and pace of reform efforts, as well as by encouraging schools to build upon state and local school initiatives into a comprehensive plan for school improvement. **AIMS** is the Regional **Turning Points** center, serving twenty-four CSR schools in Illinois.

Cooperative Learning—an instructional strategy that has students working together within the classroom. Students share responsibilities as well as rewards; both individual and group accountability are provided.

Curriculum—is the subject matter that teachers and students cover in class.

Early Adolescence—a distinct developmental stage of life usually defined as ages 10 to 14, grades 5 through 8.

Encore Team—a term often used to refer to a team of teachers who instruct subjects such as home economics, art, music, and industrial arts, which are not usually represented by teachers on an interdisciplinary team of core subjects.

English as a Second Language (ESL) and English Language Development programs take children whose first language is not English out of regular classrooms to study English.

Exploratories—refers to subjects such as home economics, art, music, and industrial arts. A term often used to refer to subjects not usually represented by teachers on an interdisciplinary team of core subjects. Various these subjects may be called **unified arts, practical arts, related arts, encore**. A different application on the term exploratories refers to **mini-courses** or other short-term learning activities based on the philosophy that students should explore subjects outside of the core academic classes.

Flexible Scheduling—see block scheduling.

Homogeneous-grouped Classrooms—classes composed of students with similar levels of achievement.

Heterogeneous-grouped Classrooms—classes composed of students with a variety of achievement levels.

House—a small cluster of teachers and students within the larger school; also called a school-within-a-school; also called a pod.

Illinois Horizon Schools-- Illinois Horizon Schools are schools that have conscientiously dedicated themselves to fully implementing the nationally endorsed criteria for high performing middle schools; they seek social equity, academic excellence, and developmental responsiveness. Such schools should serve as models and mentors for other schools seeking to improve, even as they continue their own efforts to provide exemplary educational program for young adolescents.

Illinois Middle Grade Education State Policy Planning Initiative—a 15-month planning grant awarded to the Illinois State Board of Education by the Carnegie Corporation for the purpose of formulating policy for middle grades education as follow up to the release of the **Turning Points** report. Grants were awarded to 27 states in 1990, and 15 continuation grants were awarded in 1991. Illinois was one of the recipients of the continuation grants.

Inclusion—is the practice of placing students with disabilities in regular classrooms. This is also known as mainstreaming.

Instruction—the methods teachers use such as lecture, discussion, experiments, role play, small, group, and writing assignments. The most effective teachers utilize a variety of methods because not all methods are effective with all students.

Integrated Curriculum—a model of curriculum theory that integrates skills, themes, concepts, and topics on small or large scales to decrease fragmentation and increase interdisciplinary instruction.

Interdisciplinary Team Organization—a group of two or more teachers from different subject areas who have a common group of students, a similar schedule with common planning, and who share the same part of the building. During the team’s common team planning time, they address both the academic and affective needs of students and collaborate in developing their programs.

Interdisciplinary Unit (IDU)—a curricular unit of study developed to reflect multiple subject areas and skills in an integrated manner. Sometimes called a thematic unit.

Illinois Middle Grades Network (formerly Project Initiative Middle Level, PIML)—a U.S. Department of Education grant awarded to AIMS from October 1989 to September 30, 1992. This model program of beginner and demonstration schools assists middle level schools and educators with the implementation of exemplary middle grades philosophy and practices. A resource center disseminates information on middle grades practices. Phone (217) 333-7104; Website www.cprd.uiuc.edu/aims

ISBE—Illinois State Board of Education.

Leadership Team—a visionary group comprised of a representation of a school’s teachers, administrators, parents, and/or students that seek to implement school improvement plan.

Limited English Proficient (LEP) or English Language Learners (ELL)—refers to students who are not at grade-level in reading and writing English and for whom English is a second language.

Middle School—a term for a school, which serves early adolescents. In Illinois, there are 27 types of school configurations where seventh grade students attend. The term **middle grades school** is often used to generically refer to any school that serves early adolescents, regardless of the school name. Various terms include junior high, upper elementary, and attendance center.

Mini-courses—short term, usually student-elected courses designed to help students explore a variety of interests. See also **exploratories**.

National Middle School Association, NMSA—national professional association dedicated to the education of early adolescents of which **AIMS** is an official affiliate. Phone (614) 628-NMSA; Website www.nmsa.org

“No Child Left Behind”—a sweeping federal reform of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) signed by President Bush in 2002. It redefines the federal role in K-12 education and issues a plan for closing the achievement gap between the disadvantaged and minority students and their peers. It is based on four basic principles implemented over a twelve-year timeline: increased flexibility and local control, expanded options for parents, and an emphasis on effective teaching.

Peer Tutoring—a teaching/learning technique where older or more capable students provide academic assistance to their peers or younger classmates.

Pod—see **house**.

Practical Arts—refers to subjects such as home economics, art, music, and industrial arts. A term often used to refer to subjects not usually represented by teachers on an interdisciplinary team of core subjects.

Related Arts—refers to subjects such as home economics, art, music, and industrial arts. A term often used to refer to subjects not usually represented by teachers on an interdisciplinary team of core subjects.

Response to Intervention or RTI – Response-To-Intervention is a process which includes the provision of systematic, research-based instruction and interventions to struggling learners. It assumes that the instruction/interventions are matched to student needs and that the monitoring of progress is continuous. Furthermore, RTI is designed as an early intervention to prevent long-term academic failure. As such, RTI can replace and/or augment the I.Q. discrepancy model in the identification of learning disabilities. RTI is considered a general education service, but can also be implemented in special education settings.

“Right in the Middle”—a report of the Illinois Middle Grades Planning Initiative on Early Adolescent Public Education in Illinois. See also **Illinois Middle Grade Education State Policy Planning Initiative**.

Rubrics—are guides for grading tests or student work, typically describing what the work must include to be considered excellent or satisfactory. Educators should give students rubrics before the work is assigned so that students are made aware of expectations.

School-Within-a-School—see **house**.

Shared Decision-making—the practice of including not only the principal, but also the teachers and other school personnel, in school management.

Standards—define what students are expected to know and be able to do. Standards should be clear, measurable, and rigorous. Most school districts rely upon standards developed at the state level. Many national professional organizations of teachers in particular fields have authored standards as well. They usually represent a community’s needs and values if parents, teachers, civic and business leaders are involved in their development. **Content standards**—are the information, ideas, and facts students are supposed to learn in a particular grade. **Performance standards**—are what a student is supposed to be able to do by the end of a particular grade.

Standardized Tests—are given to large numbers of students under similar situations. Most questions on these tests are multiple choice with only one answer deemed as “correct.” Some ask

for written responses. There are several types of standardized tests: **Criterion-referenced tests**—measure how well a student has learned a specific skill or subject. **Performance exams**—are a type of criterion-referenced test that measures students’ ability to perform a certain skill. **Standards-based assessments or tests**—are criterion-referenced tests based upon state standards and what state goals determine as necessary for students to know and be able to do. Norm-referenced tests—compare each student’s score to the scores of students who took the same exam. Questions are usually based on the content of nationally-recognized textbooks as opposed to local curriculum.

Teacher-based Guidance—see advisory program.

Team Leader—a teacher within the interdisciplinary team organization that assumes a facilitative and advocacy role for team goals and activities.

Tracking—the practice of grouping students for learning based upon similar achievement levels for long periods, such as a semester or a school year.

Transescence—a coined word used in older literature, usually supplanted by the term “**early adolescence**” in current literature.

Turning Points—Based upon *Turning Points: American Youth for the 21st Century*, a 1989 national report by the Carnegie Council Task Force on Young Adolescents, this **CSR (Complete School Reform)** model is based upon seven principles and six practices to implement significant change in school programs and services for young adolescents. See also **Illinois Middle Grade Education State Policy Planning Initiative**. AIMS is the regional Turning Points center, serving the twenty-four CSR schools in Illinois.

Unified Arts—refers to subjects such as home economics, art, music, and industrial arts. A term often used to refer to subjects not usually represented by teachers on an interdisciplinary team of core subjects.

Credit:

Adapted from Middle Grades Task Force Report: Last Best Chance, North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, 1991.

EdSpeak: Resources for Better Schools. National Coalition of Education Activists 2002

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