

Maturing Investments

PHILANTHROPY AND MIDDLE GRADES REFORM

Prepared for Grantmakers for Education by:

KRONLEY & ASSOCIATES

* Robert A. Kronley * Claire Handley *



Acknowledgements

As in so much else that has happened when philanthropy intersects with middle grades reform, this paper began with an idea by Hayes Mizell that led to support from the Clark Foundation. Leah Meyer Austin, then at the W. K. Kellogg Foundation, became interested in the analysis and her enthusiasm resulted in a supplemental grant from the W.K. Kellogg Foundation. Hayes and Leah provided more than financial support—they were deeply interested in all aspects of the endeavor and supplied suggestions about approaches, recommendations about individuals to talk with, and ideas about useful sources. They also took time to read drafts of the analysis, to make factual revisions, and to offer alternative interpretations.

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Foreword BY DAVID HORNBECK

All kids are great, but those between ten and fifteen have always been among my favorite. They are still young enough to want a hug and old enough to have an informed conversation about things that matter in the adult world. At the same time, as one observer put it, having been “mugged by their hormones,” they are sufficiently unpredictable that they are both interesting and fun to be around.

Thus, I was delighted when I had the opportunity in the late eighties to chair the Carnegie Corporation’s Task Force on Education of Young Adolescents and the Edna McConnell Clark Foundation’s Advisory Committee for its Program for Disadvantaged Youth. I already loved and respected the kids in the middle, but, like most, I did not know very much about them. Service on behalf of Clark and Carnegie changed that for me. The work that went into producing those reports, along with the results from the Kellogg, Lilly, and other foundation initiatives identified in this report, has permanently altered that widespread ignorance of this important group of kids across the nation’s education community.

We now “know” what teaching learning conditions will more likely result in higher academic achievement by children across the demographic spectrum. Perhaps more accurately, I should say the knowledge exists about those conditions. Regrettably, as with so many other things, what is known and what is practiced or supported by professionals, parents, and other citizens are two very different things. In the context of improving middle schools, it is important to remember, however, that we are not searching for the cure to an incurable disease.

Developing the capacity among the many and the will among many more to do what we know works for all children is difficult and complex. So we have a long road to walk to change practice, but, at least we have largely conquered the

basic knowledge challenge and know what to do. We owe much of that fact to the middle grade reform initiatives that are the subject of this report and the underlying research that fed and grew out of those initiatives.

We now know that the vast majority of the students, whatever personal challenges they may face, will succeed academically, emotionally, and as good citizens in school and in their communities if one combines: (1) an integrated curriculum reflecting rigorous standards, (2) intelligent assessment systems, (3) quality teachers who have high expectations, (4) students in heterogeneously grouped small learning communities, and (5) attention to the affective needs of the students in the way the school is managed and the teaching and learning environment is constructed. We have comprehensive whole school reform models such as Turning Points schools and the Talent Development model that schools can “buy” off the shelf.

Many people can properly claim credit for contributing to this body of knowledge but none more so than Tony Jackson, Joan Lipsitz, Leah Meyer Austin, and Hayes Mizell, who were the key foundation-based staff whose long-term commitment to this special group of youngsters resulted in the extraordinarily rich, detailed, and complex knowledge of kids in the middle. The nation owes them a great debt of gratitude for their work.

In offering this word of appreciation, I want to underscore a point made in this report. Each of these individuals was or became expert in the “technology” of education for young adolescents. But one thing that sets them apart from too many who are “skilled” in pedagogy, curriculum, child development theories, and other elements of the “technology” is their radical belief that every child really can learn to high levels. All of their educational improvement efforts were designed around that value.



The report notes that results from the foundation investment are mixed. This is hardly a novel discovery. The first time I learned of such a conclusion was in reading a powerful report written about thirty years ago called *A Foundation Goes to School*. It was the story of the Ford Foundation's \$10 million investment in education during the sixties. The report's conclusion, in a nutshell, was that the investment had not resulted in sustained, systemic change in the way schools did business. It found that when the money ran out or the principal left or whatever had been the impetus for the local initiative changed, the effort and the gains often ended there. This report also brings to mind Lee Schorr's wonderful book, *Within Our Reach*, published in the early nineties that described in hopeful detail scores of health and social service projects across America in which children facing the hardest challenges were being successfully served. When Schorr revisited the project five years later at least half of them had not only failed in their hopes to be replicated but had shuttered their windows and closed up shop.

* * *

One lesson we have learned in our efforts to provide a top-notch education to all of our kids is that the best programs with the best evidence of effectiveness are destined to fail if they are not implemented with fidelity over a sustained period of time. Replication of successful programs, just because they are successful, is not a sufficiently powerful incentive.

Incentives are crucial. They are part of human nature. Adoption of practice or change in behavior results when something becomes indispensable to what one wants to achieve. For the most part, American public education is still not framed in a system of incentives that is tied to student performance, especially the performance of those with whom we have historically

We have a long road to walk to change practice, but at least we have largely conquered the basic knowledge challenge and know what to do.

failed. These children are most notably poor, African-American, English-language learners, and/or students with disabilities. If a school or district keeps spending within certain boundaries, average test scores (or at least those of students perceived to be more advantaged) within state or national norms, and student disruption at manageable levels, relatively little pressure is placed on educators to do more.

Since implementing what we know works with ten to fifteen year-olds requires venturing outside familiar boxes and is much more difficult and risky with little systemic incentive to take it on, it is hardly surprising that we continue to see so little of it being done.

The next wave of change efforts for middle level education reform (and other levels of education reform as well) needs to wrestle more directly and deeply with new incentive systems, including the following:

1. EDUCATOR ACCOUNTABILITY

We educators resist accepting responsibility for the product of our work, especially if there are real consequences attached to whether we succeed or fail with students. The No Child Left Behind law frames the imperative of educator accountability more sharply. There are elements of the law that represent significant steps forward. The most notable is the requirement of

disaggregated (by race and income and other categories) data as the basis for states' accountability systems. It will not allow the historical masking of failure with certain groups of students behind the averages of all students. The law also results in measurable performance standards that do have consequences for schools (and maybe for educators).

However, there are serious problems in the law. The consequences are framed so they will be imposed on districts and schools, not states, when, in fact, in every state it is the state that has the constitutional responsibility for the education of students. There is, for example, nothing in the law that would require an adequate and equitable playing field for all districts/schools/teachers/students in a state as a precondition to expecting students, teachers, and principals to produce good results. Even in the most inadequate and inequitable situation, it will be the district/school/teacher that will feel the brunt of the system, and not the chief state school officer or the state board of education, much less the governor or legislature. In other words, No Child Left Behind puts accountability on the shoulders of the little guy and leaves out of the accountability system those in a position to do more about the savage inequities visited on millions of children daily.

My point is not a critique of the new federal law. The law is both good and bad. It is to say that the law begins to change the policy landscape in a way that will make the prospect of educator accountability based on student performance a more likely reality. For educators to take the findings of middle level school reform seriously in a sustained way, the incentives laid out in the accountability system must encourage educators to adopt those findings.

2. COMPENSATION SYSTEMS

As long as educators are paid based on accumulated degrees and/or credits and longevity and

not on what they know and can do or whether their students achieve or whether they are teaching students that need their talents the most, they are unlikely to give as much attention to those things as they would if some combination of them were part of the basis for their compensation. The professional pay systems work of Allen Odden from the University of Wisconsin is particularly noteworthy in trying to change the way in which we think about compensation in public education. If pay systems were organized to encourage educator knowledge and practice arising out of findings like the ones reviewed in this report, one can be sure the findings will have greater impact.

3. GRASSROOTS ACTIVIST SUPPORT

Most public engagement has taken the form of relatively benign participation in school activities as defined by the teachers, principals, and superintendents. Traditional PTA activities may be the most widespread. Parent volunteer activities are important manifestations. Sometimes around hot issues parents are mobilized to speak at board meetings or town/city/county council meetings. But it is relatively rare to have a sustained, informed grassroots organization of parents and other citizens who challenge school and elected officials to produce the best that is known for their children and other people's children.

The National Rifle Association can produce thousands of letters, phone calls, and emails within any 72-hour period of time at any level of government policy. Whatever one thinks of their positions, they have impressive and effective capacity to move legislation and impact our laws and policies. We need to build equally powerful capacity by citizens around issues of equitable, quality education for all students.

A model to examine is Good Schools Pennsylvania (www.goodschoolspa.org) that has developed an informed grassroots organization of parents, faith communities, college, and high school students to



Replication of successful programs, just because they are successful, is not a sufficiently powerful incentive.

change radically the education policies of the state to serve each child. Thousands of grassroots activists are meeting on a regular basis around a structured curriculum that both educates them on the issues and provides paths and templates for positively influencing elected officials to act on behalf of all children.

4. YOUNG PEOPLE AS AGENTS OF CHANGE

Most reform efforts treat students as objects of change, not agents of change. Motivated, informed, respected, and organized students can become a powerful incentive in a school for adults and fellow students to create positive teaching and learning environments. When I stepped down as Philadelphia's superintendent, I was often asked what I would do differently if I did it again. My answer consistently was that I would have treated students as agents of change much earlier in my tenure.

Many middle level school reform initiatives include community service or even service learning. Students can be effectively engaged in changing their schools to be places that value and promote learning through service learning that includes student activism around the problem areas that are the focus of the service. Research demonstrates that those same activities will also contribute to the students' academic accomplishments. A good example of service that includes activism is the work of the Philadelphia Student Union led by Eric Braxton (www.phillystudentunion.org).

5. GRADUATION AND PROMOTION REQUIREMENTS

Graduation and promotion requirements constitute the student accountability system. Much more attention must be paid to constructing requirements that actually reflect what we want students to know and be able to do. If we frame those standards well, use intelligent and multiple assessment systems, provide the learning supports that students need, and ensure that educators demonstrate they know how to help students achieve the standards *before* the standards are used for student high stakes purposes, the requirements will become powerful, complementary incentives to the others mentioned here.

Incentives arising from these kinds of initiatives can provide the basis for the adoption of practices or behaviors in a sustained, systemic way that will work with students. The philanthropic, path-breaking efforts described in this report teach us in compelling ways what to do.

* * *

The next challenge is one of motivation and will. We must discover what it is that will move us as educators and citizens and members of families and communities to do those things. And we must insist that a good education—in this instance, at the middle grade level—be provided for our own children and grandchildren and for those children and grandchildren of other people including those who may not share our color, income, or language.

We owe the pioneers of the efforts described in this report our thanks. We owe our children the courage and resolve to make them a reality for all children.

DAVID W. HORNBECK
Philadelphia, PA
March 2003

Summary of Findings: Maturing Investments

FINDING #1:

Collective investments of key funders spurred the creation of a new field of middle grades reform.

FINDING #2:

The middle grades reform field grew out of and was closely tied to a vision of learning and achievement and an insistence on equity that significantly expanded the traditional emphasis on the affective development of early adolescents.

FINDING #3:

Building capacity in responsible adults was at the core of philanthropic investments in middle grades reform.

FINDING #4:

Philanthropic interest in middle grades improvement stimulated extensive innovation that led to significant knowledge about school reform and philanthropic practice and to the development and dissemination of new ideas.

FINDING #5:

Funder emphasis on academic rigor in the middle grades coincided with the emergence of standards-based reform, which significantly influenced the context, design, and implementation of subsequent middle grades investments.

FINDING #6:

The success of middle grades reform investments was appreciably affected by the local context for these investments; where the work occurred became critical to its shape as well as to the outcomes it engendered.

FINDING #7:

In establishing a field of middle grades reform, funders strengthened, created, and maintained a variety of organizations whose effectiveness will be crucial to sustaining philanthropic efforts at middle grades reform.

FINDING #8:

Funders relied extensively on data in making decisions about middle grades reform and made evaluation a central part of their work.

FINDING #9:

Despite significant communication and cooperation among middle grades funders, there has not been widespread philanthropic investment in comprehensive implementation of the middle grades concept nor has there been extensive programmatic collaboration among the funders.



Introduction

For well over a decade, foundations have recognized the middle grades as a critical period in education.

Funders have acted on this awareness by supporting diverse efforts, focused in great part on schools and school districts, to improve the academic, emotional, and social development of early adolescents.¹ Through comprehensive grantmaking programs dedicated to middle grades as well as through programs with broader educational focus, funders have supported a variety of initiatives and have provided prestige and presence to approaches to transform the middle grades. In so doing, many within the philanthropic community have sought to erase the effects that years of neglect have visited on the education of early adolescents and to spur renewed interest in middle grades education as a critical and discrete period in students' intellectual growth.

Through considerable energy, persistence, and innovation, the funders involved in these efforts have made real progress that has led to significant new understanding about middle grades, far greater capacity among educators and other stakeholders to address middle grades and, for many students, improved outcomes.

Their work has also created valuable new insights about the challenges in attempting to change public education—both what is hopeful and exciting as well as what is disappointing and frustrating—and points to new areas within middle grades education where new funders, with insight and commitment, can have significant and meaningful impacts.

THE FUNDERS

Reforming or, at a minimum, substantially improving middle grades education has attracted attention and resources from all manner of funders. Private foundations—including national, regional, and local funders—corporate charitable

interests, and community and family foundations are each represented among the institutions that have invested in and continue to support efforts to change the middle grades. The array of funders is more than matched by the various strategies and activities that they have chosen to underwrite; policy development, district reform, whole school transformation, structural change, curriculum innovation, professional development, standards, and leadership development have been among the means that philanthropy has pursued to remake and substantially better middle grades education.

This report addresses both the range and the results of philanthropic involvement in middle grades education. It comes at a time when some of the funders long associated with the middle grades have turned their attention to other interests and when there are other compelling claims—early childhood education, youth development and high schools, among them—on the resources that philanthropy can devote to education.

Like the cohort of students they are aimed at, systemic investments in middle grades reform are themselves ripening. This year will witness the conclusion of the last of the major funding efforts to support comprehensive transformation of middle grades. While there is a relatively new and deep appreciation of the importance of the middle grades, attributable in great part to philanthropic effort, there are questions about how, by whom, and to what extent the philanthropic commitment to the middle grades can be sustained.

For funders, a key element in sustaining reform involves building on what has been learned from previous and current investments; this report attempts to surface some of these lessons.



THE WORK

In engaging the middle grades, philanthropy sought to fill a vital and longstanding need. Led primarily by four large private foundations—the Carnegie Corporation, the Edna McConnell Clark Foundation, the W.K. Kellogg Foundation, and the Lilly Endowment—funders provided sufficient sustained attention to the education of early adolescents to help spur the creation of a field.

This field has been constructed on a vision of middle grades education that was cemented by an insistence that early adolescents are capable of rigorous learning and that the benefits of this learning are as important to their healthy maturation as is their social and emotional development. It is comprised of individuals and organizations, including the funders themselves, who are interested in and advocates for the well being of early adolescents.

Enabled in large part through foundation support and encouragement, these individuals and organizations deepened their understanding of the needs of middle grades students and their ability to assist educators—from the school, district and state levels—and communities better meet these needs. Philanthropic guidance and funding has also brought these individuals and organizations, who once operated in isolation from one another, together regularly and around meaningful issues, helping to create a coherent and cohesive web of stakeholders who can not only support one another through the exchange of information and ideas but who can now also speak powerfully with one voice, clearly articulating the needs of students long overlooked.

The commitment, support, and leadership dedicated to middle grades education by the philanthropic community was critical to the development of the middle grades field even though the funders, including the four primary funders of middle grades reform, were not for

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the most part focused on field-building. Rather, they pursued and tested innovative and thoughtful strategies to improve outcomes for a too-long ignored group of students. These strategies were diverse and comprehensive. Among other things, these four funders supported the creation and dissemination of meaningful assessment tools as well as vital research that spoke directly to the decisions practitioners make about curriculum and instruction. They engaged policymakers around the needs of early adolescents, and they helped nurture infrastructures that could sustain and further reform at the local and state levels.

While it may not have been their explicit intent, a dynamic field of middle grades reform exists where it once did not in large part because of their work.

Given the state of middle grades education two decades ago—overlooked, under appreciated, and ineffective—it is no accident that the middle grades vision that under-girds the field was fostered by foundation officials who were not themselves primarily educators but whose views were

¹ Early adolescence is a period loosely defined as ages 10 through 15. “Middle grades” can encompass the period in which students are enrolled in grades five through nine; it is not synonymous with middle schools, which are commonly configured as grades six through eight but can include other grades as well.

instead formed by varied experiences in different careers, among them public policy, psychology, civil rights, and adolescent development.

They worked mostly individually but in continuing communication with one another. While pursuing their distinct strategies, each sought to focus attention on the middle grades, to secure and direct resources to transforming them, to inspire the active participation of others, to help put in place the structures and supports that were required to stimulate sustainable change, and to monitor thoroughly and report honestly on these efforts. In helping to forge a new field, funders focused on learning while stressing the importance of racial and gender equity to producing better outcomes for middle grades students.

THE RESULTS: MIDDLE GRADES TODAY

The full effect of funders' efforts will not be known for years. Some of the already discernable results that are associated with philanthropic investments in middle grades reform include new approaches to professional and leadership development in education, the early embrace of learning standards to elevate performance, and innovations in mathematics and science teaching. Many schools and districts changed policy and practice affecting the middle grades and some have experienced improvements in student outcomes as measured by standardized tests.

The work of funders engaged in public policy on the national, state, and local levels has helped to encourage continuing reform in some states and the creation on the federal level of multi-million dollar programs that draw on what has been learned from foundation-supported efforts in the middle grades. By making grants to support or establish organizations that focus on the middle grades, philanthropy has helped create and nurtured a core of institutions with the capacity to sustain and build on previous accomplishments. Middle grades funding has been heavily data driven, providing rich opportunities to surface

and disseminate lessons learned and to engage in extensive evaluations. The persistence of some foundations has drawn other funders into the field to develop and test their own approaches.

Despite these and other outcomes, the systemic efforts at middle school reform are threatened, and uncertainty about their future is to some degree tied to gaps in what has been achieved so far. A paramount reason for the current insecurity is student performance—improvement in middle grade test scores in schools and districts that have been supported by funders has been spotty. Regardless of whether this speaks to a flaw in philanthropic approaches, uneven performance invites frustration and questions about the efficacy of foundation investments. These questions attract attention and, in recent months, some funders have garnered more notice for their decisions to withhold support for education than many received when they determined to undertake major grant programs to pursue change.

While it may not have been their explicit intent, a dynamic field of middle grades reform exists where it once did not in large part because of grantmakers' work.

There are, however, other reasons than a general disappointment in student performance for the tentativeness that characterizes discussions about the future of continued deep philanthropic support for middle grades reform. Despite extensive communication among middle grade



Methodology

In developing this analysis, the authors drew on published reports and internal documents from many funders. These were supplemented by written questionnaires and interviews with current and former funders, their grantees and knowledgeable observers of the middle grades, philanthropy, and education reform.

The report is geared to those who are interested in education reform, the middle grades, and early adolescence. It has special resonance for funders. The analysis begins with a discussion of the context in which funders perceived the need for middle grades reform and an overview of philanthropic response. This is followed by a more detailed discussion of the work of individual funders, which leads to a presentation of detailed findings. A discussion of philanthropic opportunities in middle grades reform concludes the analysis.

funders and some programmatic coordination, few if any institutional synergies have developed between the foundations themselves; collaboration for the most part has been informal and limited to individuals who shared a vision of reform. The absence of institutional bonding around the middle grades has resulted in decisions about future support being driven more by the specific strategic concerns of individual institutions than by a shared interest in sustaining previous accomplishments.

In addition, while several foundations have supported aspects of middle grades change and have signaled their interests in continuing to do so, no funder has yet determined to make the next major commitment to the issue, responding to the unmet needs of these students and capitalizing on the new and deep knowledge about middle grades reform that has grown from the work of the early funders. It remains an open question if, in the next few years, there will be sustained attention at sufficient funding levels to the education of early adolescents.

Finally, despite substantial federal funding that will build on both the lessons and tangible accomplishments from philanthropic investments, no champion of middle grades reform has emerged on a policy or political level. Issues that affect middle grades students—teenage pregnancy, after school programs, drug abuse, school-to-career education—have attracted the attention of policymakers, but the issue of middle grades education, as contrasted with both the elementary and high school experiences, has not yet done so.

Middle grades reform, cultivated and sustained with considerable support and leadership from philanthropy, is consequently at a critical moment in its own development and its future may depend upon a sensitive blend of autonomy and nurturing that is often the foundation of a flourishing adolescence. The detailed findings

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in this report speak to the contributions that philanthropic support has made to the middle grades while addressing some of the challenges it has faced and the significant opportunities that remain for funders to make meaningful and unique impacts on middle grades education and the well-being of early adolescents. The report suggests that continued investment in middle grades reform has much to offer funders with a specific interest in the issue and a more general concern about education reform. It highlights areas in which new funders could have significant effect and assume real leadership for change.

These areas include:

- Maintaining the middle grades vision.
- Creating challenging curricula.
- Strengthening teacher quality.
- Building bridges to other reform efforts such as the small schools movement.
- Fostering change by nurturing capacity among reform support organizations.
- Sustaining leadership.

Achieving Adolescents: The Challenge for the Middle Grades

The education of early adolescents has long been a source of both debate and consternation. By the early 1900s, it was increasingly clear to many educators that the then most common configuration of public schools—kindergarten through eighth grades in elementary schools and ninth through twelfth grades in high schools—was not meeting the needs of an entire cohort of students.

By the time young people reached the seventh and eighth grades, they were growing disaffected from school, often finding it unchallenging or repetitive. Their teachers lacked content specific knowledge, which often limited their ability to create a curriculum of new and engaging material. The process of disengagement that ultimately led many students to drop out of school became pronounced in the “middle years.”

THE EVOLUTION OF THE NEW MIDDLE SCHOOL

In response, many communities created junior high schools, which were typically comprised of grades seven and eight though they frequently included the ninth grade as well. As their name implied, these institutions functioned much like high schools, familiarizing students with the high school routine and structure and preparing them to make a successful transition.

To strengthen curriculum, junior highs were departmentalized around subject areas; students moved from room to room and teacher to teacher by subject, and they were usually grouped by ability. The proponents of junior highs, recognizing that young adolescents were different from older teenagers, that they were in the midst of significant changes and therefore needed greater support, also encouraged schools to include guidance counselors on their staffs and to incorporate a regular class period that was dedicated to “guidance.”

By the late 1950s and early 1960s, the structure of junior highs and high schools had become virtually indistinguishable; in most settings, the sole distinction between them was the grade levels

served. It was not clear, however, that these mini-high schools did indeed meet the needs of young adolescents. Dropout rates had fallen but the various components of junior highs rarely worked as intended—guidance counselors were seldom able to meet one-on-one with students and “guidance” periods were usually short, “homeroom” periods spent on logistical concerns. Some educators questioned whether departmentalization and tracking were appropriate for young adolescents; these questions became more frequent as researchers explored and learned much more about the dramatic developmental changes that young adolescents go through.

Many educators and researchers had also begun to wonder whether the age grouping of junior highs was still appropriate. Given the increasingly early onset of puberty, many believed that schools serving early adolescents should include younger grades—the sixth and possibly even the fifth grade. Drawing on new knowledge of early adolescence, which emphasized developmental changes and needs, experts, by the 1960s, were calling for the replacement of junior highs with “middle schools.” These schools would contain smaller learning communities, offer an integrated curriculum, limit or discard the sorting of students by ability, and nurture more personal relationships between adults and students.

Gradually the notion of middle schools, most often comprised of grades six through eight, began to gather steam and then spread rapidly, replacing junior highs across the country. Between 1970 and 1980, the number of middle schools grew by almost 200 percent while the number of junior highs declined by 24 percent. That trend continued. Between 1980 and 1999, the number of middle schools increased by 92 percent while the number of junior highs fell by 39 percent.²

The transition from junior highs to middle schools—at least in name—took place relatively



quickly. While there was some debate about which type of school best served young adolescents, most communities moved fairly smoothly to middle schools. In the places where there was debate, it was less often about the merits of junior highs versus those of middle schools than about which grade levels should be included in the middle schools.³ The absence of contention around the junior high versus middle school debate may have reflected a lack of understanding among educators as well as across the broader community about what exactly a middle school was supposed to be. How did middle schools and junior highs differ from each other? What were teachers and administrators in middle schools supposed to do differently?

STUNTING THE VISION: BUSINESS AS USUAL

It soon became apparent that in practice, the answer to these questions was “not much.” Advocates, however, believed that middle schools should be very different from junior highs. The initial vision put forth by middle schools’ proponents in the 1960s expanded throughout the 1970s. Middle schools were to be student-centered, which meant that they were to be comprised of small, heterogeneously-grouped learning communities led by teams of teachers with competencies in core subject areas who would develop and teach an integrated curriculum. Proponents also suggested that middle schools explore such things as block or flexible scheduling and more engaging and active instructional strategies.

Embedded in this concept of the middle school was the assumption that young adolescents are intellectually inquisitive and capable of understanding complex subject matter and undertaking critical analysis. The components of the middle school concept were not planned solely to facilitate closer relationships between students and teachers but also to enable those teachers to develop an engaging course of academic study.

Embedded in this concept of the middle school was the assumption that young adolescents are intellectually inquisitive and capable of understanding complex subject matter and undertaking critical analysis.

To some extent, this vision of middle grades and the transition from junior highs to them represented a first attempt at whole-school reform for, to be fully realized, the adults connected to middle schools would have to change in fundamental ways what they believed about, their expectations of, and behavior toward young adolescents.

When it came to practice, however, to what actually happened in these new middle schools, it was “business as usual.” Although they were often large, particularly in urban areas where enrollment could top 1,000 students, few created small learning communities. Most continued to be organized around subject areas so that students rotated among adults throughout the course of the day, limiting the development of strong relationships between teachers and students, and, for the most part, curriculum was not integrated across subject areas. Teachers,

² National Center for Education Statistics. Digest of Education Statistics, 2001. Table 95. Available at <http://nces.ed.gov/pubs2002/digest2001/ch2.asp>

³ According to one study, the debate over grade configuration is the “longest running debate in middle level educational research.” (Douglas J. Mac Iver and Joyce L. Epstein, “Middle Grades Research: Not Yet Mature, but No Longer a Child,” *The Elementary School Journal*. May 1993.) Questions continue to be raised today about best grade configuration for middle level students but for most middle grades advocates, the focus is less on grade configuration than on the practices of middle level educators and whether or not they adhere to the middle grades vision.

still lacking content-specific preparation in the courses they taught, continued to rely on passive instructional strategies. In most communities, middle school or junior high seemed to be virtually interchangeable labels.

Despite the prevailing practice, some teachers and administrators did embrace the middle school concept or at least its underlying recognition of the profound developmental changes young adolescents were undergoing. They saw how poorly the junior high traditions and structures served young adolescents and recognized how disconnected from school these students were becoming. The burgeoning research on early adolescents, which highlighted the social and emotional changes they were undergoing, affirmed what these practitioners were seeing in their own schools.

As a result, educators in some schools began implementing elements of the middle school concept, most frequently an integrated curriculum and teaming—teams of teachers working together collaboratively to share information about students and develop the curriculum. Faculty in these schools worked hard to create a welcoming environment for students and to establish more personal relationships with them. In doing so, they often stressed students' social and emotional growth—students' intellectual or academic needs were subsumed in efforts to meet their affective needs.

Middle school advocates did not suggest that their primary purpose was to meet young adolescents' affective or developmental needs to the exclusion of their intellectual or academic needs. An article in the *NASSP Bulletin* from the mid-1970s, for example, proposed that middle schools had seven goals for young adolescents:

- Acquire the skills of constructive interaction.
- Achieve an appropriate dependence-independence pattern.
- Establish a workable value system.

- Stimulate and cultivate intellectual abilities.
- Adapt to and accept a changing body.
- Accept an appropriate sexual role.
- Provide options or choices in all phases of the middle level program.⁴

Ensuring that young adolescents had deep academic knowledge was, in practice, however, pushed down the priority list in most schools.

By the mid-1980s, then, middle schools were proliferating, but were not flourishing as their proponents had envisioned. In reality, they were, in most places, almost indistinguishable from junior highs. Where there was a broader vision of what middle schools could be, it was defined by students' affective needs and too often scanted their academic development.

For students, neither scenario bode well for academic success. Middle schools functioned as holding tanks—some were much more inviting and supportive than others but almost all served as places where students' intellectual development floundered. Achievement, particularly among low-income and minority students, was poor, and far too many students ended up dropping out of high school or being relegated to remedial or low-level courses that left them ill-prepared for the workforce or for post-secondary education.

There are several reasons for the aridity and stagnation that characterized the middle grades. The research community emphasized social and emotional development, and some educators believed that young adolescents were incapable of being inquisitive, critical, and thoughtful learners. They contended that the development of early adolescents' cognitive skills was virtually suspended and that it was fruitless to expect high levels of academic achievement. This belief was compounded by the lack of preparation that the overwhelming majority of middle school teachers had in content knowledge and in pedagogical strategies appropriate to and most effective with

By the mid-1980s, then, it was clear that the promise of the middle grades concept was unfulfilled and, without intervention, was likely to remain so.

their students. Most middle school teachers were trained for the elementary level and had had little exposure to the middle school concept in their preparation; they did not, as a result, have sufficient understanding of the students who faced them everyday in the classroom.

Stretching across all of this was the lack of visibility that young adolescents had within the education community and among policymakers. This was compounded by as well as the absence of a coordinated core of leaders who could raise awareness of these students and their needs. The advocates for the middle grades concept, dedicated as they were, were few in number and limited in their ability to influence decision-makers. Like the students they were concerned about, they were relatively powerless.

By the mid-1980s, then, it was clear that the promise of the middle grades concept was unfulfilled and, without intervention, was likely to remain so.

PHILANTHROPIC INTERVENTION TO SUPPORT THE MIDDLE GRADES

Philanthropic attention to the middle grades did not develop overnight. Different interests spurred the participation of diverse funders; some of these interests would coalesce over time to help shape a field. This process was neither direct nor simple and was, to a great degree,

driven by the commitment and vision of individuals who were knowledgeable about the circumstances of early adolescents, devoted to reforming education as a means to improve the life chances of all students, and highly sensitive to the inequities that were powerfully present in public education.

For some funders, a central interest was in supporting innovative efforts in education. While funders had always devoted considerable resources to this issue, the quest to improve public schools took on greater urgency following the release in 1983 of *A Nation at Risk*. That report captured the significant challenges faced by the nation's public schools and outlined the profoundly negative consequences, which loomed if we failed to make meaningful change in how children were educated.

While making schools better became a focal concern for policymakers, this heightened awareness of a general need to reform education did not initially lead to a specific focus on the schooling of early adolescents. The philanthropic community, however, was beginning to stir. Funders looked beyond the labels that were attached to middle grades education and recognized both the poor condition of schools serving middle grades students and the high cost of failing to improve them. They began to move toward change.⁵

Initially many funders focused on strengthening mathematics and science education. Both fields had been highlighted in *A Nation at Risk* as areas in which achievement was particularly weak, most noticeably among middle and high school level students. Subsequent reports,



⁴ R. Stephen Tegarden, "Implications of the Middle School for Elementary and Secondary Education," *NASSP Bulletin*, October 1976.

⁵ There were exceptions to the general lack of concern about the middle grades. An important one came from the National Middle School Association, which, in 1982 released an important document, *This We Believe*. *This We Believe* called for the creation of middle grades schools that were developmentally responsive, which incorporated, although it did not make explicit, the expectation of high academic achievement. Later NMSA publications as well as programmatic activities have made this explicit.

including several that underscored the failure of American adolescents to keep pace with their peers internationally, maintained focus on those areas. Funders were also gaining deeper understanding of the extent of what is now referred to as the “achievement gap”—the marked differences in academic success between majority and minority students and between low-income students and their middle- and upper-income peers.

Concerned about the gap and the dismal levels of achievement among adolescents, the Ford Foundation was among those that invested in math and science education. In 1983, it launched a large, multi-year initiative aimed at improving math education at the middle and high school levels, particularly among students who traditionally had been at risk for poor achievement. Other funders made similar investments. Improving math and science education remains a priority for many in the philanthropic community today. Beyond these math and science initiatives, funding was (and in some instances continues to be) directed to middle grades by foundations as part of other education improvement programs—in literacy, parental involvement, and professional development, for example. These and related initiatives are discussed in the following section.

The investments in middle grades that grew out of the more general interest of some funders in improving education was paralleled by a series of events that reflected other interests about the healthy development of young adolescents. In 1975, Joan Lipsitz, then at the Learning Institute of North Carolina, authored *Growing Up Forgotten*, a book that documented the barriers that early adolescents faced in growing up to lead healthy and productive lives and the overwhelming lack of societal concern about removing these barriers.

The Ford Foundation, seeking to better understand the status of early adolescents, had supported the work that went into the book and

thereafter determined to involve other funders in issues related to early adolescence. Ford was joined by the Mary Reynolds Babcock Foundation in funding a series of six regional meetings; a number of regional foundations, provided additional support to the meetings.⁶ These meetings led to the creation, in 1978, of the Center for Early Adolescence at the University of North Carolina.

Lipsitz was the Center’s founding director, a position she held until 1986, when she left to create a new K-12 education program, which would soon focus on the middle grades, at the Indianapolis-based Lilly Endowment. She continued to publish widely on issues connected to early adolescence including a second book that also proved influential—*Successful Schools for Young Adolescents*.

The Center for Early Adolescence generated data and disseminated ideas about issues that affected 10-15 year olds, and ultimately it proved to be a pivotal link between Lipsitz and the other program officers at Kellogg, Clark, and Carnegie who helped to shape and drive their foundations’ middle grades reform efforts. The Center took a comprehensive approach to a narrow and targeted age cohort. Its home at a flagship university provided it with significant intellectual legitimacy, and it received support from major foundations. More important for the development of middle grades reform were its connections to people, its influence on their thinking, and the cross-fertilization of ideas and approaches that grew out long-term relationships that were rooted in shared commitments and mutual respect.

Leah Meyer Austin had been a founder of the Institute for Learning in Retirement at Duke University prior to her appointment to the Center, where she served as deputy director. She would go on to work in middle grades in Indiana, where she helped to establish the Indiana Youth



The idea of transforming the middle grades began to resonate in the philanthropic world as Carnegie, Clark, W. K. Kellogg, and Lilly each separately designed dedicated grantmaking programs for middle grades reform.

Institute, a statewide information, training, and advocacy center for people who work with youth. Before she joined the Kellogg Foundation in 1993, where, as Program Director for Youth and Education, she oversaw the Foundation's Middle Start initiative as well as other youth development and educational programs.

Hayes Mizell was a member of the Center's advisory board. Mizell was a principal in the Southeastern Public Education Program (SEPEP), a project of the American Friends Service Committee. SEPEP was at the vanguard in the struggle for educational equity in the South, and Mizell was widely recognized for the depth and breadth of his vision along with his writing and organizational skills. He had served as a school board member in Columbia, South Carolina, and, in the late 1970s, chaired the presidentially-appointed National Advisory Council on the Education of Disadvantaged Children. In 1987, he became a program officer at the Edna McConnell Clark Foundation where, two years later, he would initiate the Program for Disadvantaged Youth, which would develop the Foundation's middle grades program.

One of the Center's roles was to educate policymakers about early adolescence and one of its major audiences was the Select Committee on Children, Youth, and Families of the United States House of Representatives. The Committee and the Center often collaborated, and the Committee drew on the work of the Center to inform its fact-finding and its reports and recommendations. A key staff member of the Committee was Anthony Jackson. Trained as a psychologist, Jackson would leave the Committee in 1987 to join the Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development to staff its Task Force on Education of Young Adolescents. In 1988, Jackson became the Carnegie Corporation's Director of the Middle Grades Schools State Policy Initiative, which he developed and led. In that role, he helped oversee the release in 1989 of the Council's influential report on young adolescents.

The different approaches that Jackson, Lipsitz, Meyer Austin, and Mizell took to issues that affected early adolescents reflected their different interests and backgrounds. Human development, organizational development, public policy, research, and advocacy were distinct entry points to understanding the unique and overlooked circumstances of early adolescents, attracting attention and resources to the issues and engaging others in focused efforts to resolve them.

Despite these varied perspectives, the individuals who would become the leaders of philanthropic involvement in middle grades reform shared an acute awareness of how vulnerable 10-15 year olds are. Each displayed a devotion to social equity. Three of them lived and worked in the South and every day confronted the

⁶ The Lilly Endowment funded the Midwest meeting; the New Hampshire Charitable Fund and the Boston Safe Deposit and Trust Corporation funded the New England meeting; the National Endowment for the Humanities, the Texas Committee for the Humanities and Public Policy of the Southwest, the Fund for New Jersey, the William T. Grant Foundation, and the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation funded the Mid-Atlantic meeting; and, the Rosenberg Foundation supported the meeting in the west.

legacy of years of discrimination in education, while the fourth dealt with similar concerns on a national level. Finally, there was a striking commonality in their careers—while two had taught in public schools, none was a traditional educator.⁷ Given the state of middle grades education two decades ago, this lack of experience provided distinct benefits—each was underexposed to the failing approaches of the educational establishment and all brought nontraditional perspectives to developing education programs at four major foundations.

The idea of transforming the middle grades began to resonate in the philanthropic world as Carnegie, Clark, W. K. Kellogg, and Lilly each separately designed dedicated grantmaking programs for middle grades reform. Middle grades reform did not mean a renewed emphasis on shifting from a junior high configuration to a middle grade school configuration. While grounded in part in the vision put forth by middle school proponents, these funders were dedicated to transforming the learning experiences of early adolescents regardless of what type of configuration their schools had. This commitment to fundamental reform was rooted in a vision of middle level education that married developmental responsiveness to academic excellence and reflected also a deep and abiding concern for equity.

Each of the four major foundations chose a different path to promoting what middle school advocates now refer to as “academically excellent, developmentally responsive, and socially equitable” education. While these programs reflected the values and cultures of the foundations, it was the beliefs, experiences, and passions of the four individuals that energized the programs they led. Lilly emphasized work in schools and districts’ central offices; Carnegie pursued a policy approach; Clark focused on systemic change at the district level; and Kellogg concentrated on structural changes that would lead to and sustain reform.

Through experience, funders learned that systemic reform is more than an abstraction; it is what must take place if complex public organizations are to change in positive, sustainable ways.

While these were the primary foci of the funders’ work, each incorporated components of the other approaches. The initiatives of Carnegie and Kellogg, for example, grew eventually to incorporate models of whole-school reform. All sought to build the capacity of the individuals and organizations that could advocate for, guide and support reform. Detailed descriptions of each funder’s grantmaking program, in the order they were initiated, are provided in the following section.

* * *

What is perhaps ultimately more meaningful than the separate places where each funder started is how, as they proceeded on their individual journeys, they wound up together. What each foundation learned is that its efforts would of necessity embrace elements that went well beyond its initial focus. Program implicates policy, and there is no working policy without effective programs; what happens in a classroom affects and is affected by what happens in the schoolhouse, at the district office and on the state level; schools will not succeed unless they have the support of the community and no community will thrive unless it is somehow connected to its schools. Through experience,



funders learned that systemic reform is more than an abstraction; it is what must take place if complex public organizations are to change in positive, sustainable ways.

While this understanding did not dawn overnight, it developed into a powerful conviction. In 1997, after Joan Lipsitz had retired from the Lilly Endowment and not long before Anthony Jackson was to leave the Carnegie Corporation, they joined with Leah Meyer Austin and Hayes Mizell to publish a manifesto for middle grades reform that was published and disseminated with support from the Kellogg Foundation. Entitled *Speaking with One Voice*⁸, the document distills aspects of the authors' collective experience and urges that educators and others stay the course toward reform. The manifesto begins with the assertion that sustainable middle-level reform is achievable, it bears witness to important changes that have occurred, and it details the necessary elements of reform.⁹ For the middle grades, these are essential to achieving and maintaining the change that will lead to positive outcomes for students.

In articulating the necessary elements of middle grades reform, the manifesto also provides insight into what is required to create and sustain a coherent field of middle grades reform. Building this field includes efforts to ensure that the necessary elements of middle grades reform identified in *Speaking with One Voice* are present but it also involves surfacing, analyzing, and disseminating findings about the impacts of the efforts.

As the next section details, philanthropy, through the broad range of efforts undertaken by the four major funders and their grantees as well as the important and varied work of more than twenty other funders and their grantees, has made significant contributions to the creation of a field and, while doing so, provided substantive benefits to those connected to the middle grades and to education reform generally.

⁷ Lipsitz and Meyer Austin had both previously taught in public schools.

⁸ Joan Lipsitz, M. Hayes Mizell, Anthony Jackson and Leah Meyer Austin, "Speaking with One Voice," *Pbi Delta Kappan* (1997)

⁹ The manifesto identifies the necessary elements as professional development, technical assistance, coordination, networks, data-driven decision-making, superintendent leadership, state-level leadership, improved teacher preparation, well-informed public constituencies and comprehensiveness.

Forging a Field

This chapter explores the work of funders at a time of significant change in the makeup of philanthropies that are investing in the middle grades.

The middle grades reform programs of the Lilly Endowment, the Carnegie Corporation, and the Kellogg Foundation have ended, and that of the Clark Foundation is drawing to a close. Their efforts, complemented richly by related work of other funders, spurred their grantees to undertake or promote significant middle grades reform. This has resulted in a vital legacy.

Many of the challenges faced by early proponents of middle schools remain—the persistent discounting of academic excellence in favor of developmental responsiveness, the enduring belief that young adolescents are incapable of deep learning, and the ongoing difficulty in capturing and holding the attention of policymakers within and outside of the education community. Despite these challenges, many middle grades schools have become or are in the process of becoming places that fulfill the middle grades vision articulated by the core funders and pursued by their partners: they are academically excellent, developmentally responsive, and socially equitable.

Articulating a compelling vision was in itself a significant step. Today, we have a clear idea of what the middle grades should look like and do. There is, as well, a far deeper understanding of what it takes—from practitioners, policymakers, support organizations and funders—to get there—to implement and successfully sustain this vision.

What it took to develop and articulate a vision and to blaze a trail to reach it has led to something that simply did not exist 15 years ago—a field of middle grades reform, that could not have developed without philanthropic commitment and persistence. The existence of this field provides the means to sustain efforts to reform the middle grades.

Before funders turned their attention and resources to middle grades, there was no widely held and widely agreed-upon definition for what a middle grades school ought to be.¹⁰

The field was not created deliberately or, for some of the funders, consciously. It grew out of separate efforts by foundations to transform the middle grades. Each of these efforts had its own priorities and approaches—in today's lexicon each possessed a distinct theory of change. The field that developed was dependent on more than an evolving vision and the long-term investments of funders. It required the commitment and will of educational leaders, experts in early adolescence, teachers, researchers, advocates and others—the array of organizations and individuals in them that collectively received support for their efforts. No set of philanthropic approaches, no matter how well conceived or effectively implemented can develop into a field without grantees who have or who grow the capacity to engage in the relentless pursuit of change, reflect on their actions and share what they learn.



FUNDER	PRIMARY / SECONDARY APPROACH	PROGRAM PERIOD
Lilly Endowment	School-level reform / District engagement	1987 - 1997
Carnegie Corporation	Policy development / Whole-school reform	1990 - 2000
Clark Foundation	District-level reform / Infrastructure building	1989 - 2003
Kellogg Foundation	Infrastructure building / School-level reform	1994 - 2002

The field that has evolved out of these collective efforts is centered on efforts by multiple and diverse stakeholders to promote effective middle grades education. It is characterized by:

- Developing and promoting a set of beliefs and principles that stresses the importance of academic achievement by early adolescents without regard to race and class distinctions.
- Building policy, organizational and programmatic infrastructures to promote long-term reform.
- Emphasizing the importance of capacity for educators.
- Encouraging and testing new ideas.
- Promoting the involvement of new actors in the middle grades reform enterprise.
- Relying on data to measure progress and make mid-course changes.
- Using standards as benchmarks of success.
- Evaluating outcomes.
- Disseminating information and results.

Most of these characteristics became manifest to different degrees in the individual efforts of four major funders, taken together they now inform the efforts of middle grades reformers.

In the sections that follow, this report first reviews the middle school reform efforts of the Lilly Endowment, Carnegie Corporation, Clark Foundation, and Kellogg Foundation; the chart above highlights their primary and secondary approaches. They are presented in the order in which the initiatives began. Following these descriptions, the work of selected other funders is reviewed.

¹⁰ This statement does not mean to imply that valuable work around the education of young adolescents was not being undertaken prior to concentrated philanthropic efforts. Several groups, in particular the National Middle School Association, were advocates for an approach to middle grades education that was far more responsive to the needs of early adolescents than had been typical. These groups, however, tended to focus on students' affective needs. As funders turned their attention to middle grades, expanding and promoting the critical work of their grantees, their vision of middle grades education, while reflecting attention to students' affective needs, explicitly incorporated the expectation that middle grades education should also be academically rigorous and socially equitable.

Lilly Endowment, Inc.

MIDDLE GRADES IMPROVEMENT PROGRAM

Between 1987 and 1997, the Lilly Endowment launched its Middle Grades Improvement Program (MGIP), a comprehensive effort to support middle grades reform in 16 urban school districts in Indiana. Through MGIP, Lilly sought to spur systemic change at the district level that would encourage meaningful reform at the school level. It also sought to support interventions directly at the school level that would lead to better outcomes for students, especially minority and low-income students.

BACKGROUND

The Lilly Endowment initiated its Middle Grades Improvement Program for several reasons. It had recognized that middle grades, however they are configured, are pivotal years for students. The Endowment saw that few schools serving young adolescents in Indiana were meeting their needs, especially the needs of low-income and minority students. For these students, middle grades schools were the places where they lost their connection to school—as the Endowment noted, “the number of students who fail in school seems to grow uncontrollably from fifth through eighth or ninth grades.” These students stumbled on through remedial courses in high school or simply dropped out.

At the same time, Lilly’s staff noted that in many communities, middle grades received proportionately the fewest financial resources and had, as well, few advocates. Few people were directing time, energy or money to these schools and the students who attended them.

In addition Joan Lipsitz, a leading expert in early adolescence, had joined the Endowment’s staff to develop a K-12 education program. Given its recognition of the growing crisis in middle grades and wanting to use Lipsitz’ expertise to the greatest benefit, Lilly decided to undertake a comprehensive effort to improve middle grades in Indiana.

GOALS

Within its broader commitment to improving educational opportunities for youths in Indiana, the Endowment sought to encourage and support urban districts in creating and implementing well-designed and innovative plans to transform middle grades education through the Middle Grades Improvement Program (MGIP). Specifically it sought the development of schools serving middle grades students that were characterized by:

- Warmer, more adolescent-centered environments.
- Communities of learners marked by high student achievement and creativity.
- Reduced disparities between students of differing racial or class groups.
- Developmentally responsive and academically excellent curriculum and instruction.
- Parents and community organizations engaged in the work of the school.

In creating such schools, these districts would be leaders in Indiana and across the nation.

STRUCTURE

MGIP was originally intended to be a four-year program, which targeted urban school districts in Indiana. All of these systems struggled with the issues of urban education—low test scores, low morale, poorly prepared teachers, and high



rates of absenteeism and disciplinary problems. Lilly wanted to help districts and schools address these issues in middle grades but it did not have a highly prescribed method or process for doing so; districts would have to develop their own approaches.

The Endowment did, however, have two key expectations that shaped its work. First, while it engaged districts, work in schools was the heart of MGIP; instead of being a top-down effort, Lilly expected the innovative work at the schools to bubble up to and inspire the central office. Second, Lilly believed schools needed to focus initially on creating the climate and structures that would support meaningful change and, once having created these, expand their work to examine, and change instruction and curriculum. Without an environment of trust and collaboration among adults, cultivated through such practices as teaming and shared leadership, attempts to change instruction and curriculum would go no further than previous change efforts—programs that lasted only as long as funding did and only rarely spurred deep reflection among practitioners.

During the first phase of MGIP, 19 districts—on a non-competitive basis—were awarded grants of \$15,000 - \$25,000 to develop a comprehensive reform plan. Each district was required to establish a planning team comprised of central office and school personnel as well as community members. Lilly asked that the districts chose two of five areas to concentrate on in their plans:

- School-based self-assessment and institutional reform.
- The development of instructional leadership.
- Reading improvement.
- Dropout prevention and increased access to postsecondary education.
- Building public support for school improvement.

Lilly also encouraged, but did not require, districts and schools to utilize the Middle Grades Assessment Program (MGAP) in creating their plans. The MGAP is a comprehensive assessment tool that helps schools understand their strengths and weaknesses. It enabled schools to look beyond indicators of student achievement, important as those are, to considering practice and policy, and it involved not only teachers and administrators but also parents.

Sixteen districts, which incorporated 65 middle grades schools, received three-year grants of up to \$150,000 from the Endowment to implement their plans to reform middle grades; the remaining three districts did not submit plans. In addition to this financial support, Lilly brought consultants to the districts to assist in the implementation of their reform plans. The consultants often became critical participants in schools' work and stayed with the schools throughout the duration of their reform efforts.

As the districts moved ahead in implementing their plans, the Endowment—recognizing that the changes they sought required intensive effort and sustained commitment—decided to offer a second cycle of funding. Phase II sought to continue the districts' work. Based on feedback from district leaders, however, Lilly asked districts to focus on one of two areas in Phase II—deepening the instructional process or connecting schools more dynamically to parents and the community.

In so doing, the Endowment expected districts not merely to continue the work they had begun in the first phase but to develop innovations that would push it deeper. Lilly also asked districts to examine their policies regarding suspension, expulsion, and tracking, particularly regarding minority and low-income students. It also required participating districts to eliminate corporal punishment. These suggestions and mandates were not well received but Lilly insisted that

continued participation in MGIP was dependent on an end to corporal punishment and a reduction of suspension, expulsion, and tracking.

At the same time it was embarking on Phase II of MGIP, Lilly established MGIP: Strengthening the Instruction Process or MGIP-X (X for extension) grant program as a means to encourage schools to begin connecting changes in structure and climate directly to classroom instruction. MGIP-X grants were grants for teachers; they ranged from \$7,500 to \$15,000. The first phase of MGIP-X funding focused on reading, writing, and language arts, the second on linking social studies and the arts, and the third phase focused on science, math, and technology.

Also at the start of Phase II, Lilly created the MGIP Network, which was comprised of representatives from each of the 16 districts. The Network was a means for schools and districts to share information and to learn from each other's experiences. It was more, however, than a communications vehicle. The Network, which had a director, developed resource materials for schools, sponsored professional development activities, provided a forum for principals, and provided leadership for the middle grades reform movement in the state.

Following Phase II, the Endowment chose to continue MGIP and launched Phase III. Participation in Phase III was limited, however, to the four districts that had demonstrated the greatest commitment to systemic reform of middle grades education—where school level innovations and reform had, indeed, been absorbed by the central office. In these districts, central office personnel had worked closely with school faculty to nurture change rather than remaining distant observers of schools' isolated efforts. Ultimately Lilly provided three of the four districts with two-year grants of up to \$100,000 to push their reforms.

While continuing the focus on instruction and parent and community engagement, the Endowment did not require the districts to undertake specific courses of action. Rather, it asked them to assess themselves honestly, gauge their progress, identify their strengths and weaknesses, and create a plan that would push reform forward and give it a life beyond that of the grant period.

While it did not offer support to the remaining districts, Lilly did provide funding to selected middle schools in those districts that, often despite a lack of district-level support, had made strides in improving the academic experiences of young adolescents through developmentally responsive means.

Throughout the duration of MGIP, the Endowment sought to shape the policy context in which districts operated through grants to such organizations as Indiana's state standards board. It also sought, particularly in the later phases of MGIP, to build an infrastructure that could better support middle grades reform in the state. The MGIP Network was an important component of this infrastructure, as were grants to universities, professional associations, and technical assistance providers for a variety of initiatives such as improving teacher education programs and creating professional development opportunities for teachers that align with the goals of middle grades reform.

OUTCOMES

Lilly changed how many middle grades schools in Indiana function. In some places, the changes amount to a complete transformation of what adults believe about students and their role with them and the interactions among adults and between adults and students. These transformations have occurred in schools that once seemed noted for their inhospitable climates, and their inattention to the needs of young adolescents, particularly those who are minority or poor.



Sarah Scott Middle School in Terre Haute is one such example. In 1987, the year MGIP was implemented in Terre Haute, 46.5 percent of the school's students qualified for free and reduced-price lunch; by 1992 that figure had climbed to 61.9 percent, reflecting the closings of local manufacturing plants. The school's student body was 15 percent African-American, the highest percentage among middle schools in the district. At the outset of MGIP, Sarah Scott's test scores were low, its attendance rate poor, and its suspension and expulsion rates high.

Undeterred, a visionary principal and dedicated staff recognized the opportunities that MGIP offered and recreated Sarah Scott. The school utilized MGAP to evaluate its strengths and weaknesses, implemented teaming, which was not a smooth process but one staff were committed to, and teachers embraced literacy initiatives sponsored by the Endowment. Their hard work paid off. Despite the growing poverty of its students, test scores improved in reading between 1987 and 1992, and, a decade later, the school continues to use Lilly-sponsored reading initiatives. In 1995, Sarah Scott was one of two schools out of over 100,000 to be recognized by the U.S. Department of Education for its family involvement program. While not all of the 65 Lilly-funded middle grades schools achieved these results, many did or made considerable progress in reaching them.

Before embarking on MGIP, Endowment staff conducted an informal tour of several districts to gauge what people understood about middle grades. Many of those queried had fairly vague notions about reform; those who were familiar with middle grades reform seemed to focus on its structural aspects and did not link these structures to a fundamental transformation of teaching and learning.¹¹ In the majority of districts, most schools for young adolescents were junior highs—few schools had even begun to learn about and experiment with the structural

changes that the middle grades vision proposed. Local boards of education were wholly unaware of the middle grades vision, and there was indifference to it at the state level. The state's association for middle grades educators, the Indiana Middle Level Education Association (IMLEA) was virtually moribund.¹² In 1988, its membership totaled 40.

In this relatively barren environment, Lilly was able to plant the seeds of change. The Endowment helped build IMLEA, providing in 1988 funding to cover membership expenses for 200 teachers and initiate an annual conference. It also supported an annual summer institute—the Indiana Middle Level Institute—a week-long, intensive professional development experience for middle grades educators. By 1991, IMLEA's membership had grown to over 500; today its membership totals more than 1,500. IMLEA has also continued both the annual conference and the Institute and has, as well, expanded its professional development offerings.

In addition, while middle grades advocates agree that teacher licensure for middle grades is not yet what they would like it to be, advances have been made as a result of the middle grades movement in the state, a movement spearheaded by Lilly by creating a “critical mass” of expertise and energy at the school and district levels and through grants to various teacher preparation programs. Indiana now requires middle grades teachers to have an endorsement; the endorsement requires teachers to have nine credit hours in teaching methods for young adolescents as well as 18 credit hours in a subject area.

¹¹ The Endowment did not advocate a particular grade configuration for schools serving young adolescents. Rather, it held that, regardless of the chosen grade structure, middle grades education must be developmentally responsive, academically rigorous, and socially equitable. It argued that grade configuration should not be viewed either as an excuse for poor performance or a guarantee of high performance.

¹² At the time, IMLEA was known as the Indiana Middle School Association or IMSA.

Carnegie Corporation

MIDDLE GRADE SCHOOLS STATE POLICY INITIATIVE

The Carnegie Corporation's Middle Grade Schools State Policy Initiative (MGSSPI) was a ten-year effort (1990 - 2000) by the Corporation, which drew upon its seminal report, Turning Points: Preparing Youth for the 21st Century, to improve middle grades education in 15 states, three cities and Puerto Rico. The initiative had two primary strands: encouraging states to develop policies to promote middle grades reform and supporting middle schools in those states and communities that were committed to and working toward reform.

BACKGROUND

In 1986, the Carnegie Corporation established the Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development to build greater understanding and awareness of the unique but often unmet needs of adolescents. The Council, in turn, established the Task Force on Education of Young Adolescents the following year. The Task Force, comprised of leaders of and experts in education, health, and government as well as the nonprofit and philanthropic communities, spent two years gathering extensive information on the needs of young adolescents and the challenges they face in having those needs fulfilled.

Among other findings, the Task Force noted that the typical middle grades school curriculum was not rigorous and was taught through passive learning techniques, that far too many middle school teachers did not understand and were not helped to learn about the developmental needs of adolescents, and that the seeds of failure in high school were planted in middle grades through such practices as tracking. The Task Force found that students of color and low-income students were particularly vulnerable to poor experiences in middle schools.

The Task Force's research culminated in the publication in 1989 of *Turning Points: Preparing*

Youth for the 21st Century, which laid out eight recommendations to transform middle schools:

- Large middle grade schools are divided into smaller communities for learning.
- Middle grade schools transmit a core of common knowledge to all students.
- Middle grade schools are organized to ensure success for all students.
- Teachers and principals have the major responsibility and power to transform middle schools.
- Teachers for the middle grades are specifically prepared to teach young adolescents.
- Schools promote good health; the education and health of young adolescents are inextricably linked.
- Families are allied with school staff through mutual respect, trust, and communication.
- Schools and communities are partners in educating young adolescents.

The report was broadly distributed; between 1989 and 1999, almost 100,000 copies of the full report and over 200,000 copies of its executive summary were disseminated.¹³ *Turning Points* received extensive media coverage, including positive editorial comment in leading newspapers and journals.



The *Turning Points* recommendations, in many respects, were not new. A dedicated but small group of educators, researchers, and other advocates for young adolescents had been calling for similar changes for much of the proceeding two decades. They sought the creation of middle schools that provided nurturing learning environments for both teachers and students through a variety of strategies including, among others, teaming and common planning time, integrated curriculum, and developmentally appropriate instructional approaches.

Their voices, however, were often unheard or, where they were listened to, they were often not understood. *Turning Points* brought these strategies together into a coherent vision of middle grades education and presented in detail not only the necessity for but also the urgency of realizing this vision.

In 1990, the Corporation launched the Middle Grade Schools State Policy Initiative (MGSSPI) to turn the *Turning Points* recommendations into action.

GOALS

MGSSPI had two goals: 1) to promote widespread implementation of the eight *Turning Points* recommendations through changes in state policies that encouraged local schools and districts to adopt promising practices, and 2) to stimulate the development of schools serving concentrations of low-income youths that would produce intellectually prepared, healthy young adolescents.¹⁴

STRUCTURE

In 1990, the Corporation provided planning grants of \$60,000 to 27 states. Through a competitive process, 15 of the states—Arkansas, California, Colorado, Connecticut, Delaware, Illinois, Maryland, Massachusetts, New Mexico, New York, North Dakota, Rhode Island, South Carolina, Texas, and Vermont—were

chosen to receive two-year MGSSPI implementation grants in the following year. The grants ranged from \$50,000 to \$360,000 and, in most instances, they were made to the states' Departments of Education. States were required to match the grants. The Corporation provided subsequent two-year grants through 1999, when MGSSPI ended, to those states that continued to make progress in pursuing middle grades reform.¹⁵ Carnegie also made a series of grants to three cities—Boston, Los Angeles, and New York—as well as to Puerto Rico to support middle grades reform efforts in each of those communities.

In the early years of MGSSPI, the Corporation directed its focus toward helping the departments develop and implement policies that would spur or support middle grades reform. Many states created task forces, committees, or councils on middle grades. Among other things, these entities sought to better understand and raise awareness about the circumstances of middle grades education in their states by collecting data, holding forums, and sponsoring focus groups and meetings. Many states released reports of their findings and made recommendations for changes. Several states established statewide networks of educators, advocates, experts in early adolescence, health care and social service representatives, and others. A few states developed demonstration or pilot projects in which a select group of schools implemented the *Turning Points* recommendations and served as models for other schools. As a result of their work, some states established new requirements for the certification and licensure of middle grade teachers and created curriculum and assessment frameworks for middle grades.

¹³ Anthony W. Jackson and Gayle A. Davis, *Turning Points 2000: Educating Adolescents in the 21st Century*, (New York: Teachers College Press, 2000)

¹⁴ Anthony W. Jackson, "Middle Grade School State Policy Initiative," *Phi Delta Kappan*. Vol. 78, No. 7, March 1997.

¹⁵ Eleven states received funding through 1999: California, Colorado, Connecticut, Illinois, Maryland, New Mexico, North Dakota, Rhode Island, South Carolina, Texas, and Vermont.

In 1993, based on what it was learning from the states' experiences, Carnegie began encouraging states to work more directly with schools—to link policy more closely to practice. Each of the 15 states created a network of “systemic change” schools, which was comprised of middle grades schools that were seeking to implement the *Turning Point* recommendations and that would serve as models for change. At Carnegie's behest, the networks focused on schools that served large proportions of low-income students. On average, over half of the students in the network schools participated in the federal government's free and reduced lunch program. In total, over 225 schools across the MGSSPI states participated in reform networks; many of the schools received financial assistance from the Corporation.

The networks, coordinated by the University of Maryland, also included other stakeholders including state education agencies, reform organizations, state middle grades educator associations, universities, and more. These organizations supported the schools through various means—technical assistance, professional development, coaching, leadership training, and support for data-based self-assessments. The Massachusetts Department of Education, for example, provided on-site coaching to schools and districts that were part of its middle grade schools network. Initially the coaches were Department staff members. As time passed, however, the need for coaches surpassed the Department's ability to provide them, so it shifted to training district and school personnel to be coaches.

Although this change was driven by exigency, it proved to be fortuitous. It helped build the capacity of district and school staff to lead and facilitate reform. In some settings, local coaches were also more effective than those from the state as school faculty were already familiar with and had confidence in coaches from their

districts. In addition, local coaches were able to provide more sustained assistance than those from the state so that problems could be dealt with promptly and more easily managed.

Carnegie recognized that in many ways it was asking states to do things—such as provide coaching—that they had never done before. As a result, it engaged several organizations to supply technical assistance to the states and, in some instances, the schools to help them develop new knowledge and skills. The Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) offered or brokered on-site assistance and held meetings and conferences at which policymakers and practitioners could learn from experts and from each other. In 1998, CCSSO published *State Policies to Support Middle School Reform: A Guide for Policymakers*, which, drawing upon the experiences of the MGSSPI sites in implementing the *Turning Points* recommendations, offered advice and strategies for how states could spur and support middle grades reform.

States and schools also received help gathering, interpreting, and utilizing data to measure progress in and inform the process of implementing reform from the Center for Prevention Research and Development at the University of Illinois and from the National Center for Public Education and Social Policy at the University of Rhode Island. MGSSPI network schools completed a self-study, which provided them with baseline information, helped them to identify challenges and strengths, assisted them creating short- and long-term plans, and gauged their progress from one year to the next.

OUTCOMES

Carnegie's work in middle grades reform had far-reaching influence. Its 1989 report, *Turning Points* resonated deeply for those concerned about young adolescents, especially with educators in the classroom, bridging the gap between research and practice. Even prior to the estab-



lishment of the *Turning Points* networks in the 15 MGSSPI states, faculties at numerous schools across the country were using the report as a guide to change what they were doing.¹⁶

As noted, many of the MGSSPI states made important changes in policies affecting middle grades schools. These changes were not due solely to Carnegie's efforts—in Illinois, for example, the Association of Illinois Middle Level Schools was an energetic and influential advocate and, in California, the state superintendent had made improving middle grades a priority since the early 1980s. Carnegie was able to affirm what such organizations were doing, provide critical and stable funding, ensure access to the most current research on middle grades, and connect middle grades advocates to one another. These and other activities generated a momentum for reform that would likely have been lacking in their absence.

The network schools also benefited greatly. While progress was uneven—an almost inevitable outcome in education reform—many of the schools in the state networks made important gains. They demonstrated that poverty did not have to be the determining factor in a students' academic success.

The Corporation did not want to lose these gains and, as MGSSPI was drawing to a close, took deliberate steps to ensure that it would not. In 1998, it funded the Center for Collaborative Education (CCE) to begin developing a *Turning Points* whole school reform model. CCE had been working with a network of middle grades schools in Boston to support comprehensive change so was deeply familiar with *Turning Points*. In 2001, Carnegie awarded CCE a grant of \$900,000 to complete the development of the model and to create a national *Turning Points* network of schools to implement the model. Five regional network centers have been established across the country, which provide techni-

Carnegie generated a momentum for reform that would likely have been lacking in its absence.

cal assistance and support to the schools. In addition, *Turning Points* has been selected by New American Schools to be included in its portfolio of research-based, whole school reform models.¹⁷

The lessons of middle grades reform and of MGSSPI live on as well within the foundation itself. Carnegie has joined forces with the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation to launch a comprehensive high school reform initiative which seeks to reconfigure high schools across seven urban school districts as small learning communities to improve academic achievement and nurture more personal relationships between adults and students. It appears that older adolescents too can benefit from the types of educational experiences and supportive environments that middle grades advocates have long called for.

¹⁶ Based on information gathered from interviews with staff at the National Middle School Association and the Association of Illinois Middle Level Schools.

¹⁷ New American Schools (NAS) is a national, nonprofit organization that seeks to improve education by identifying and helping schools implement effective whole school reform models. It was founded in 1991 by a group of business leaders and has garnered considerable support from the business and philanthropic communities. In early 2002, the Kellogg Foundation awarded NAS a grant of \$3 million to help refine its Middle Start model from a state-by-state model to one that can be implemented nationally.

Edna McConnell Clark Foundation

PROGRAM FOR STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT

Since its inception in 1989 through today, the Edna McConnell Clark Foundation's Program for Student Achievement has sought to improve middle grades education, particularly among low-income and minority students, by encouraging school districts to launch and helping them to sustain systemic reform targeted to middle grades. In addition to funding and working cooperatively with selected districts, the Foundation has sought to raise awareness of the needs of middle grades students and the schools they attend among policymakers, funders, practitioners, and other stakeholders.

BACKGROUND

The Clark Foundation's interest in education reform and in the middle grades grew out of a workforce development initiative it operated in the 1980s. As that initiative progressed, it became apparent to the Foundation that workforce development is closely linked to education and that efforts to ensure that students, particularly low-income and minority students, are prepared for the workplace or for higher education must begin before they reach high school. The Foundation had also observed that middle grades were frequently overlooked by people engaged in or supporting education reform; most reform initiatives were targeted to elementary or high school students. There was as well a lack of clarity about the mission of middle grades schools. This included observers of and experts in education and extended to teachers and administrators in those schools. Were they to focus on students' affective needs and support their emotional development or were they to focus on academic needs? Were the two mutually exclusive, as they seemed often in practice to be?

Clark did not believe that academic rigor and success had to be sacrificed to meet the affective needs of young adolescents. Foundation staff had come to believe, moreover, that middle grades schools might present the last opportunity for

effective intervention among students at risk of poor academic outcomes. By high school, too many of these students were already disengaged, shunted aside in programs of little academic rigor or value. Others simply left school and those that stayed were merely marking time. The Foundation responded by establishing the Program for Disadvantaged Youth in 1989.

GOALS

The goals of the Program for Student Achievement have changed over the course of the Foundation's work. At its founding, the Program's goal was to help "schools make changes necessary to provide disadvantaged youth in grades six through nine with educational experiences of high expectations, high content, and high support." Its current goal sets a more specific target for achievement: that students will meet the academic standards, determined by their districts, by the end of eighth grade.

STRUCTURE

The Clark Foundation has pursued a multi-strand approach to reforming middle grades. The core of its program has been its support to districts engaged in systemic reform that target middle grades. This work with districts has been both extended and reinforced by the Foundation's efforts to build an extended



community of middle grades reform that will, among other things, help sustain the achievements in the districts beyond the grant period.

Working in Districts

From its inception, the Program for Disadvantaged Youth was intended to be a systemic reform effort. Clark wanted to move beyond programmatic initiatives that were “add-ons” in schools; it wanted to help schools and districts change the nature of what they do so that instruction was dynamic, meaningful, and engaging—and learning was deep and thoughtful across systems. Its goal was for schools and districts to provide educational experiences that were infused with high expectations, high content, and high support. The Foundation readily acknowledged that it was not sure what systemic reform would look like nor did it expect school districts to know at the outset what it would be. It did know, though, that reform would not be quick or easy.

In 1989, following a competitive selection process, Clark awarded five-year grants to five school districts across the country—Baltimore, Louisville, Milwaukee, Oakland, and San Diego. In each site, districts embarked on reform by focusing on a small group of middle schools. It did so with the expectation that reform would be scaled up across all middle schools, ideally triggering similar changes in elementary and high schools. In keeping with Clark’s concern for students at risk for poor academic outcomes, the schools chosen in each district served many low-income students who were often minority and, in some schools, had limited English-speaking skills.

In its support to districts and schools, Clark was far more than a distant funder. Foundation staff, consultants, and evaluators were often on site, engaging district and school personnel and learning with them as they jointly grappled with identifying and implementing effective strategies to improve teaching and learning. Schools

explored many different strategies in their quest for improvement.

Its hands-on approach enabled the Foundation to understand quickly that schools were approaching their reform work in a piecemeal fashion—initial reform strategies were largely programmatic initiatives that might yield transient gains for individual teachers or selected groups of students but did not in most instances lead to meaningful and sustainable improvements in teaching and learning across schools. Central office personnel in most districts also continued to see reform programmatically rather than systemically; they did not change what they did to help schools reform themselves. Clark brought its concerns to the districts and sought to focus their work by tightening its program goals to emphasize student achievement.

In 1993, drawing on what it had learned so far, the Foundation embarked on the second phase of its initiative. It expanded to include three additional districts—Chattanooga, Jackson (MS), and Long Beach. In each of the new sites, districts did not embark on reform with a small number of schools and then expand; rather their efforts were system-wide and included all middle schools from the beginning.

Despite Clark’s greater emphasis on student achievement and its sustained focus on systemic change, several districts continued to approach reform work programmatically. They had not persisted in creating a comprehensive vision of reform and were either unwilling or did not understand the need to change administrative functions to guide and support schools. Schools in these districts were struggling. As a result, the Foundation made improving student achievement through the development and implementation of curriculum and performance standards the explicit focus and goal of its program. To reflect this shift, Clark renamed its initiative the Program for Student Achievement. In so doing,

however, it did not retreat from its commitment to disadvantaged youth. Indeed, it believed that disadvantaged students stood to gain the most through the development of meaningful standards and the thoughtful implementation of them.

In late 1994, Clark awarded a third round of funding to six districts—four of them were previous grant recipients under the Program for Disadvantaged Students (Chattanooga, Long Beach, Louisville, and San Diego) and two were new (Corpus Christi and Minneapolis). All of them, however, seemed to share the Foundation’s vision of systemic, standards-based reform; Clark provided each with a one-year grant to plan a standards-based reform that would be implemented in all middle schools. The planning grants were followed by two-year implementation grants to in 1996 and 1997.

As part of its concentration on student achievement and on standards, Clark embraced accountability; it required districts to set student achievement goals in math, science, language arts, and social studies. Districts created the goals themselves—the Foundation did not dictate what their goals should be. It believed that reaching the goals would necessitate districts to reflect on and improve, among things, teaching, professional development, administrative functions, and parental and community involvement.

The Foundation was aware that the goals the districts had set for themselves were somewhat ambitious. It was Clark’s hope that the “stretch” goals would provide incentive to districts to change and that, if the districts did not speed along a path of reform, they would, nevertheless, make steady progress in reaching their goals.

In addition to relying on the districts’ own assessments of their progress, the Foundation also relied on external evaluators to deepen its knowledge of what districts were doing and how student achievement was being affected.

The evaluators examined both quantitative and qualitative data annually to build a broad picture of reform in the districts. Clark shared these reports with the districts and used them to identify areas in need of attention. It also used them in part to determine whether or not to continue funding individual districts.

Given issues both within and outside of the systems, the Foundation decided to cease funding Chattanooga and Minneapolis after 1997. It made the same decision two years later in Louisville. Since 1999, then, Clark’s funding of districts has been limited to Corpus Christi, Long Beach, and San Diego.

The Program for Student Achievement is now in its final phase of funding to the three districts; current grants will end in 2003. In anticipation of the program’s completion, the Foundation has sought to ensure that the middle grades reform work undertaken through its auspices will be sustained. As part of that effort, Clark is funding the Public Education Network to encourage each of the three communities to consider developing local education funds (LEFs). LEFs, which are nonprofit, independent organizations that raise funds for and help design and implement reform strategies, can monitor the districts and, having an external perspective, have the potential to ask difficult questions and maintain the districts’ focus on reform.

Funding external organizations such as LEFs to assist the districts is not a new tactic for Clark. It provided funding to independent organizations in four of the six districts it had funded in 1994; in the remaining two districts, it was not able to identify local organizations with the capacity to or interest in promoting middle grades reform.

The four organizations that received funding were different from one another in role and activities, which ranged from monitoring and advocacy to educating parents about reform



so that they could actively participate in it to assisting immigrants and students with limited English. While different, each organization contributed to the districts' reform efforts. So important were these organizations' contributions that, in several instances, the Foundation's support for the external organizations outlasted its support for the districts.

In promoting the development of LEFs and in funding the local external organizations, Clark built the capacity of the communities surrounding the school districts to advocate for and support reform, which would help to sustain reform in its absence. It sought to do something similar when it deliberately began building a cohesive and visible community of organizations and individuals committed to middle grades reform. This work was the second prong of Clark's middle grades reform initiative.

Nurturing a Community

Clark set about to change the isolation in which the middle grades had traditionally functioned—it consciously sought to shine a spotlight on the needs of middle grades students and the schools that served them. It also wanted to create or to enhance the capacities of organizations that could make middle grades better. In short, it sought to define and strengthen the nascent field of middle grades reform.

The Foundation used a variety of strategies to do so, most prominent among them generating and disseminating new knowledge and establishing an infrastructure to support stakeholders in middle grades reform.

Clark supported numerous efforts to increase knowledge about effective middle grades practice and share this knowledge among multiple stakeholders. For example, it provided funding to the National Staff Development Council (NSDC) for an intensive, two-year study of staff development programs that improve student

achievement; the study's results were released in a report, *What Works in the Middle: Results-Based Staff Development for the Middle Grades*.

The Foundation also created MiddleWeb, a comprehensive website that gathers information on or provides links to numerous issues regarding middle grades from teacher practice to school management to policy decisions. MiddleWeb is run by the Education Writers Association with funding from Clark and has proven to be a valuable resource, receiving over 3,000 "hits" a day.

The Foundation used other dissemination tools. For example, in 2000, Clark provided funding to *Education Week*, the leading publication on education, to support a special report on middle grades.

In 1997, Clark provided the initial funding for the National Forum to Accelerate Middle Grades Reform. The Forum is made up of funders, educators, researchers, representatives of state agencies and middle grades associations, and others concerned with middle grades reform. It has fostered consensus and collaboration among national leaders of middle grades reform.

Clark funded the Southern Regional Education Board (SREB), an interstate compact of 16 southern states, to extend its successful High Schools That Work initiative to middle grades through a new initiative, Making Middle Grades Work (MMGW). MMGW is a network of schools, districts, and states working to improve middle grades education through the implementation of a research-based framework, which is grounded in a rigorous core curriculum, effective teaching, reliable and informed use of data, and strong leadership. MMGW is a unique network of practitioners and policymakers, and SREB has committed to continuing the initiative beyond the period of the Clark grants. Currently 15 states and over 140 schools are participating in MMGW.

OUTCOMES

The three districts—Corpus Christi, Long Beach, and San Diego—that Clark has continued to fund throughout the final phase of the Program for Student Achievement (1995 - 2003) have each focused during this period on improving instruction by strengthening teachers' content knowledge and pedagogical skills, nurturing the ability of principals to lead standards-based reform, and providing greater support to schools with large proportions of students at risk for academic failure. As a result, each district has shown evidence of improvements in student achievement.

In San Diego, eighth graders made considerable gains between 1998 and 2000 on the state assessment; their math scores increased by five percentage points and their reading scores by six points during that period. Similar gains were seen on the NAEP-based exam used by the Foundation's quantitative evaluator. On this exam, the percentage of students scoring at the lowest level in reading declined by 10 points during those two years. A qualitative evaluation of the district revealed a sustained focus on literacy instruction including greater coherence in instructional strategies across grades.

Long Beach has had a similar experience. It has seen steady improvements in reading among eighth graders on the NAEP-based assessment and the proportion of students scoring in the lowest level of the exam declined by 15 percentage points between 1998 and 2000. According to the district's writing exam, the percentage of "proficient" writers among eighth graders rose from 21.6 percent in 2000 to 44.5 percent in 2001. In addition, many more students are taking algebra, and the district's dropout rate fell from 11.2 percent in 1994-95 to 2.7 percent in 2000-01. Qualitative evaluations of Long Beach found strong leadership and a coherent strategic plan—which includes district-created performance assessments and portfolios to measure students' attainment of standards, student

profiles to track their progress, and coaches and content training for teachers—that has been implemented thoughtfully and consistently.

Since 1995, Corpus Christi has shown significant increases in student scores on the state exam, the Texas Assessment of Academic Skills (TAAS) exam. Between 1995 and 2001, the percentage of eighth graders reaching the minimum performance standards on the TAAS exam grew from 70 percent to 93 percent in reading, from 47 percent to 91 percent in math, and from 67 percent to 87 percent in writing. In part because of these gains, Corpus Christi has been designated as a "recognized" district by the state, up from "acceptable." The NAEP-based exams, however, do not show the same levels of gains. This discrepancy may reflect the findings of a qualitative review of the district's middle grades, which indicated that while teachers and principals were willing and committed to improving their knowledge and skills, the district central office had been slow to provide them with the support and learning opportunities necessary to do so. This, in turn, likely contributed to the low expectations teachers had of students and the low levels of instruction they utilized that the qualitative evaluators observed.

W. K. Kellogg Foundation

MIDDLE START INITIATIVE

The W. K. Kellogg Foundation's Middle Start Initiative seeks to improve middle grades students' educational outcomes by linking local school improvement to the broader contexts that affect school reform efforts' scale-up and sustainability. Begun in 1994 in Michigan, Middle Start has also given rise to the Mid South Middle Start initiative in Arkansas, Louisiana, and Mississippi, which is directed by the Foundation for the Mid South. Because of its emphasis on building regional infrastructure to support school improvement, the Kellogg Foundation has funded local schools as well as research, educational policy, and professional development organizations; higher education institutions; and others who can provide ongoing, locally or regionally available support to schools. The Academy for Educational Development, the Center for Prevention Research and Development, New American Schools, and the National Forum to Accelerate Middle Grades Reform have been important national partners in this initiative.

BACKGROUND

In the late 1980s, troubled by declining achievement among Michigan's fourth graders, particularly those of who were low-income, as well as by other indicators of poor outcomes for students such as escalating drop-out rates at the high school level, the W. K. Kellogg Foundation's Board identified early adolescence as a target area for its work with youth in the 1990s. As a result, in 1994, the Foundation, working collaboratively with the Academy for Educational Development (AED), the Center for Prevention Research and Development (CPRD) at the University of Illinois, and several universities and colleges in Michigan, created Middle Start.

From the beginning, Middle Start was conceived to be a multi-layered effort. It would support the development of a comprehensive infrastructure to advance middle grades reform and would also build the capacities of schools and communities to implement and sustain such reform.

The Foundation and its collaborators saw dynamic partnerships among and across engaged individuals and organizations at every level as the key to Middle Start and to sustained middle grades reform.

The Kellogg Foundation believed that it needed to be respectful of and responsive to the communities in which it worked; this perspective infused all of Middle Start. This meant that while the Foundation created a framework it believed could seed and nurture reform, the framework had to be flexible—enabling adaptation and growth based on experience, reflection, and learning. In short, it had to work where opportunity presented itself; the work was grounded in the particular needs and contexts of the schools and communities. The Kellogg Foundation's initiative was, therefore, an organic process for all involved, and Middle Start developed and changed as participants' knowledge grew, contexts shifted, and new opportunities arose.

GOALS

Middle Start has three goals:

- Encourage changes in policies, practices and public awareness at the school, district, and state levels, in order to improve teaching and learning for middle grades students.
- Foster schools' collaboration with other community agencies that provide services to vulnerable young people and their families.
- Increase and sustain schools' attention to curricular areas that are critical to low-achieving students' academic success in the middle grades and beyond.

STRUCTURE

There are three primary and interconnected components of Middle Start; the first is building an infrastructure to support reform. The Kellogg Foundation questioned whether reform at the school level could be sustained if the infrastructure—the educational infrastructure that surrounds the school from state-level policies and programs to community-based engagement and initiatives—did not also change.

As a result, the Foundation chose to build the capacity of stakeholder organizations so that they could better offer assistance to schools, provide leadership for middle grades reform, and influence and work with policymakers to help them make sound decisions to more effectively address the needs of young adolescents. The second component of Middle Start is direct assistance to middle grades schools engaged in comprehensive reform, enabling them to become schools that are academically excellent, developmentally responsive, and socially equitable—schools in which students, particularly low-income students, can thrive.

While separate, these first two components are far from disconnected. The work undertaken in one area informs the work undertaken in the other. The third critical component of Middle Start and the binding link between the first two,

which drives the work of each, is data—data that is relevant and can be used effectively by educators and policymakers to improve outcomes for students. Throughout its work in middle-grades reform, the Foundation has seen data as the entry point for spurring meaningful reform at the school level and among the broader education community. As its program director explained several years ago, “Over time, access to accurate and useful data about what is happening in Michigan’s middle grades schools, coupled with data that describe effective middle grades policies and practices, will stimulate the accomplishment of the initiative’s goals and objectives.”¹⁸

Using Data to Improve Outcomes

Meaningful data can help schools make more effective instructional and curriculum choices, help capacity-building organizations develop effective technical assistance and professional development strategies, and help policymakers and the public better understand the unique needs of middle grades students and the particular challenges of the schools that serve them. With the encouragement of an informed public, data can also help policymakers and practitioners, both within and outside of schools, establish policies and practices that better support middle grades schools.

The centerpiece of Middle Start’s data collection and analysis component is a self-assessment survey for schools called the Self-Study.¹⁹ The Self-Study is a comprehensive questionnaire for teaching and administrative staff designed to help them assess their practices, school climate, and staff attitudes as well as to gauge how successfully they are meeting students’ academic and developmental needs. CPRD developed the survey and, throughout the Middle Start initiative, has analyzed survey results. In 1994, the Foundation used the Self-Study to launch Middle Start—it offered the survey to all schools in Michigan that serve middle grades students.



The Kellogg Foundation's first step to improve middle grades was to help build a support system—an infrastructure—that could enhance reform through greater knowledge, sustain it beyond the tenure of individual leaders, and move it beyond work in isolated schools.

Two hundred twenty-four schools in Michigan completed the Self-Study that year.

The survey results were returned to the schools to use as they determined. Some schools used their results to examine their practice and identify strengths and weaknesses, an essential first step in developing effective strategies for reform. Other schools, however, chose to set their survey results aside and to continue with “business as usual.” Participation in the Middle Start Self-Study was voluntary and doing so did not obligate schools to engage in reform. The Foundation’s only request was that participating schools commit to repeating the study every two years, from 1994 through 2002. (As described in greater detail below, schools that wished to apply for funding from the Foundation were required to participate in the Self-Study.) Although there was some attrition among participating schools, there were enough long-term participants to create a valid, statistically significant sample

that gave an accurate picture of middle grades issues and challenges in Michigan.

The Self Study has had additional uses beyond individual schools. The data gathered through the Self-Study, in the aggregate, has provided critical information on the needs of middle grades students and how schools address those needs. This data has, in turn, been used to generate public awareness about and shape public policies toward the middle grades. One example of using Self Study data for this purpose comes from the early years of the Middle Start initiative. With funding from the Foundation, the Michigan League for Human Services (MLHS) worked with CPRD to analyze the survey data and prepared a report on the state of middle grades education in Michigan. The report, *Starting Again in the Middle*, was widely disseminated to policymakers and the media.

The Self-Study is a springboard to the other primary Middle Start components—infrastructure building and school reform. The Foundation established the Middle Start Partnership, which is the cornerstone of an emerging infrastructure in Michigan that can help implement and sustain middle grades reform. The Foundation also provided financial support and technical assistance to a limited number of schools to undertake reform.

Infrastructure Building

Prior to the launch of Middle Start, the middle grades were not receiving much attention in Michigan.²⁰ The particular needs of young adolescents were not, in general, on the radar

¹⁸ Leah Meyer Austin, “The Middle Start Initiative,” *Phi Delta Kappan*. Vol. 78, No. 7, March 1997

¹⁹ While the Self-Study is the centerpiece of Middle Start’s data component, it is only one of several types of assessment and information-gathering tools that have been used throughout Middle Start. These include stakeholder studies, qualitative documentation of school improvement, infrastructure development studies, and other forms of school self assessments. For schools involved in Middle Start, data collection and analysis extends far beyond traditional standardized exams to data that informs practice at the school level and policy at the state level.

²⁰ Michigan had not participated in either the Carnegie Corporation or the Clark Foundation’s middle grades initiatives at either the state or district level.

screens of decision-makers at the state or district level and, while there were organizations, such as universities, that provided technical assistance to schools and districts, they were not focused on middle grades either. This meant that even when middle grades schools had dynamic leaders who could lead comprehensive reform, the reforms would likely depend on the longevity of leaders; there was little support in place at the state or district level to sustain the changes in the absence of these leaders nor were there any real mechanisms for spreading them to other schools. The low priority assigned to the middle grades also meant that there was little shared or comprehensive knowledge them.

The Kellogg Foundation's first step to improve middle grades was to help build a support system—an infrastructure—that could enhance reform through greater knowledge, sustain it beyond the tenure of individual leaders, and move it beyond work in isolated schools. The Foundation engaged policymakers and organizations collectively around middle grades, enhancing their knowledge about middle grades and helping to build their capacity to lead, support, and sustain middle grades reform. This collective engagement—and the relationships that grew out of it not only between the Foundation and these organizations but also among these organizations—was at the core of creating an infrastructure for reform.

The Foundation established a statewide advisory group to help craft the reform work. This group included representatives of the Michigan Department of Education, who proved to be very interested in middle grades reform and, in time, their participation was critical in Middle Start's evolution as a Comprehensive School Reform Demonstration (CSR/D) model. (See below.) The Foundation then created the Michigan Middle Start Partnership. In addition to the Foundation, partnership members included four universities—Central Michigan, Eastern Michigan, Northern Michigan Universities and

the University of Michigan; it also included the state's largest school system, Detroit Public Schools, the Kalamazoo Regional Service Agency, the Michigan Coalition of Essential Schools, the Connected Math Program (a National Science Foundation-funded mathematics program operated by Michigan State University), the Michigan League for Human Services, and Young Citizens, Inc., a nonprofit organization focused on service learning for adolescents.

These organizations, working together, have provided leadership for middle grades reform at the state and regional level and have as well provided technical assistance to schools implementing reform. Among their many activities, the partners have provided or coordinated extensive professional development opportunities, made policy recommendations, undertaken public education campaigns, and conducted research and evaluation. As the Middle Start initiative progressed, the Partnership's work has been supplemented by ongoing collaborations, funded by the Foundation, with such organizations as CPRD, the Academy for Educational Development, New American Schools, and the National Forum to Accelerate Middle Grades Reform.

To enhance the provision of technical assistance, the Partnership created regional networks of middle schools and locally-based organizations and institutions that support the reform work of those schools. Again drawing on the Foundation's belief that its work needs to be responsive to communities' needs and contexts and respectful of those communities, the Partnership did not proscribe a template for the networks' formation or for the specific tasks undertaken by each. Rather, it encouraged each network to capitalize on its particular strengths and to organize its work in the manner most attuned to the participating communities and schools.



An example of a regional network is the Southwest Michigan Network, which is based at the Kalamazoo Regional Educational Service Agency and is open to all middle schools in Kalamazoo and an additional 20 surrounding counties. The network, like the others in the state, helps cultivate learning communities of teachers and administrators focused on developing effective practice and local policies. Some of the ways in which the network nurtures this collaborative approach to adult reflection and learning is through monthly principal meetings, professional development experiences and school visits. These are types of activities that encourage a dynamic exchange of information and ideas, break down isolation that is pervasive throughout education, and help build the capacity of individuals and schools to create, implement, and sustain thoughtful reform efforts.

The Partnership, the infrastructure it has generated and the relationships it continues to create and nurture have given middle grades reform in Michigan a life beyond the Kellogg Foundation's involvement and funding—as the Foundation intended the Partnership to do. From the beginning, it was the Foundation's intent that the partnership would be long-term and ultimately not dependent on Kellogg funding; its hope was that the Partnership would come to be seen not as a special initiative dependent on philanthropic support but part of what member organizations do. This is, in large part, what has happened. As it has turned its attention to other urgent issues confronting youth, the Foundation's involvement in and funding for Middle Start has diminished considerably yet the Partnership continues to flourish.

SCHOOL REFORM

The remaining key component of Middle Start is direct assistance to middle grades schools. Building an infrastructure has helped to create

the context for reform—awareness of the needs of young adolescents and the schools that serve them, new knowledge among educators, policy-makers, and community members on how to best meet these needs, leadership focused on middle grades reform, and enhanced capacity of individuals and organizations to undertake and sustain reform. All middle grades students can potentially benefit from such an infrastructure.

The Foundation, however, was particularly concerned about high poverty students, who are especially vulnerable to low achievement and poor outcomes. As a result, it established a grant program to provide support to schools serving these students, schools in which at least 40 percent of students qualify for the federal free and reduced lunch program. Schools that wished to apply for support were required to participate in the Self Study; for these schools, the Self Study was a “ticket, not a test.” It was not meant to penalize them but to provide them with tools to improve their practice.

The Foundation made grants in three categories: Planning and Enhancement (PE) grants, Comprehensive School Improvement (CSI) grants, and Focused grants. The first grants distributed were PE grants; these grants, which went to 28 schools, were for \$9,000 and gave schools time to use the Self-Study data to develop a reform plan. The Foundation then made CSI or Focused grants based on the schools' plans. Twelve schools received CSI grants and an additional 19 received Focused grants. (Several schools that had not received PE grants were awarded Focused grants.)

The CSI grants were the largest—up to \$150,000 per school. These schools pursued comprehensive reform. The Focused grants were for amounts of up to \$10,000 and supported enhancements in math and literacy. All grantees also received technical assistance although CSI grantees received the most

concentrated support. Much of this assistance was provided through the regional networks, which connected grantees with other middle grades schools and educators who were grappling with the challenges of reform.

In 1998, when considering the whole school reform models offered through the U.S. Department of Education's CSRSD program, the Michigan Department of Education, which has had staff members actively involved in Middle Start and has become sensitized to the issues of middle grades, was concerned that there were very few CSRSD models focused on middle grades. In consequence, the Department requested that the Foundation and its partners supply evidence of Middle Start's effectiveness, which it did. Based on this evidence, the Department designated Middle Start as a "homegrown" school reform model.

Drawing on what it had learned from working with the Foundation's Middle Start school grantees, the Partnership's members created a whole school reform model—the Middle Start model—which is described in greater detail below.

Middle Start Reform Model

The model rests on four principles, which should infuse a reformed middle school:

- Reflective review and self-study.
- Effective small learning communities.
- Rigorous curriculum, instruction and student assessment.
- Distributed leadership and sustainable partnerships.

Nine components characterize the Middle Start model:

- Goals and benchmarks for student performance.
- Supportive staff members.
- Research-based methods.
- External assistance.
- Parental and community involvement.

- Staff development.
- Coordination of resources.
- Evaluation.
- Comprehensive approach.

Each component is realized through a series of practices, including:

- Making inquiry and reflection central to a school's culture by devoting time and resources to it.
- Collecting and analyzing data to set goals, inform practice, and gauge student progress, particularly among low-income and minority students.
- Forming interdisciplinary teams—which have common planning time to coordinate curriculum, instruction, and assessment and to lead the small learning communities.
- Providing regular and meaningful communication with parents and the broader community.
- Adopting a rigorous curriculum—one which cultivates deep understanding and higher order thinking and is grounded in best instructional practices—that is aligned with assessment and with district, state, and national standards.
- Using various types of assessments so that students have multiple opportunities to demonstrate their knowledge and skills.
- Electing an inclusive and collaborative leadership team to guide reform efforts.

Middle Start's designation as a CSRSD model brought about a significant new phase for the Middle Start Partnership and for middle grades reform in Michigan. Middle schools in the state can now receive public funds—minimally \$70,000 a year for up to three years—to implement Middle Start. The first round of CSRSD grants for Middle Start was awarded in 1999 to 20 middle schools for a three-year period. A second group of CSRSD grants was awarded to 16 middle schools in 2002. According to the Southwest Educational Development Laboratory, which also lists it as an approved model, Middle Start



is among the top 25 of 357 models implemented by schools receiving CSRSD funds.

Like the Foundation grantees, however, CSRSD schools participate in the regional networks. The Middle Start model continues to be grounded in belief that schools, working in isolation, are greatly limited in their ability to effectively implement and sustain reform if the context in which they operate does not also change to support this reform. The regional and statewide infrastructure that the Foundation and its partners endeavored to create are central to the success of schools implementing the model.

OUTCOMES

Middle Start is making a difference. According to a 1999 evaluation conducted by CPRD, the 155 schools that participated in the first two Self-Study assessments saw improvements in student achievement between the 1994-95 and 1996-97 school years, as measured by the Michigan Educational Assessment of Progress (MEAP). The schools that received grants from the Foundation, which served significant proportions of high poverty students, saw gains that surpassed those of schools serving fewer poor students. The MEAP scores of grantee schools increased by 10 and by six percentage points in reading and math respectively. More striking, grantee schools at which 60 to 100 percent of students participated in free and reduced lunch saw the greatest gains of all. Students' MEAP math scores increased by 15 percentage points in these schools.

The CPRD study also found that those schools in which faculty and administrators were most effective in implementing the Middle Start model made the greatest strides in student achievement. For example, schools in which interdisciplinary teams of teachers had high levels of common planning time showed significant gains in achievement among at-risk students.

AED has also followed the progress of middle grades reform in Michigan. In a qualitative review of the 12 CSI schools, it found that while reform efforts were initially slow and somewhat fragmented, over time the schools began making strides in reform. Most had developed a comprehensive reform plan and were integrating once piecemeal efforts into a cohesive strategy. AED also found that there was greater awareness across the state of the unique concerns of early adolescents and, as a result, of the need to fundamentally change what happens in the schools that serve them.

As the Foundation planned since the beginning of the initiative, Middle Start has also moved beyond the boundaries of Michigan. The Foundation has provided funding to the Foundation for the Mid South, an operating foundation that serves Arkansas, Louisiana, and Mississippi. In many ways, the Foundation for the Mid South was a natural fit for becoming a Middle Start partner; it has had a long-standing interest in early adolescence and several of its staff members had worked on issues connected to early adolescence.

In addition, the Kellogg Foundation had a commitment to working in the mid-south region and was doing so already in such areas as health, rural development, food systems, and volunteerism. While Middle Start has been altered somewhat to best meet the needs of these states—in keeping with the Foundation's philosophy of responding to and not dictating to grantees—it too is grounded in the collection, analysis, and thoughtful use of meaningful data and in the development of an infrastructure in each of the three states of organizations and individuals that can promote and sustain middle grades reform.

Other Philanthropic Investments

Carnegie, Clark, Kellogg, and Lilly developed long-term middle grades grant-making programs that either began or evolved into conscious efforts at systemic reform and involved widespread implementation of a comprehensive vision of the middle grades.²¹ Other funders followed a different pathway and supported discrete components of middle grades reform or improvement.

Some of these individual efforts were connected to a deliberate strategy that focused on early adolescents or the middle grades; other funders' investments reflected a belief that an investment in a middle grades activity would best further a broader foundation interest in education reform. In a few cases, foundation dollars have come to the middle grades not because of a funder's specific interest in an educational issue but because of a belief in the leaders of an effort that happens to target the middle grades.

Listed below is a brief summary of philanthropic investments in middle grades. It is followed by a discussion that describes the range of these investments by issues that attracted funders. Selected grants are highlighted. The discussion does not purport to be exhaustive but seeks instead to provide some insight into the array of opportunities for funders and how these can promote a larger vision of comprehensive reform.

* * *

TEACHER QUALITY

Years of research have shown that teacher quality is the key factor in determining students' academic success. A good teacher has thorough command of her subject, has mastered a variety of dynamic, inquiry-based instructional strategies and, aided by meaningful data, engages in continuous reflection on her practice and her students' progress.

Few teachers currently, despite dedication and great effort, possess this knowledge and these skills. Neither the professional development offered through schools and districts nor the preparation received in schools of education provide teachers with them. As a result, the philanthropic community has devoted considerable resources to improving teacher quality, some of it in for the middle grades.

Professional Development: Nesholm Family Foundation

The Nesholm Family Foundation's education program is not easily categorized. It is an intensive effort to build the capacity of the teachers and administrators in three Seattle middle schools to lead and sustain reform. While its focus is on leadership and strengthening literacy, it is nurturing beliefs, structures and practices that may yield an even richer transformation of the schools.

BACKGROUND

The Foundation's middle grades reform effort, Kids in the Middle, has grown organically. Its origins lie not in a specific interest of the Foundation in middle grades but rather in its belief that meaningful and sustainable change depends on effective and inspiring leadership. In the late 1990's when the Foundation began considering whether it should create an education program that moved beyond responsive grantmaking to one in which it shaped goals and strategies, its program officer met with over 30 people throughout the Seattle school district.

²¹ While the core funders focused on their systemic reform strategies, they did, at times, support discrete components of middle grades reform. Kellogg, for example, funded Reading in the Middle, a middle grades literacy program, and Collaborating for Student Success, a school team building effort.

She queried them on what they believed were the district's most pressing needs. She got a myriad of answers and was left still wondering what the greatest needs were and how the Foundation could best respond. Believing that the success of any effort was ultimately dependent on the leadership of those guiding it, she then began asking where the strongest leadership in the district was—the repeated answer was the district's director of middle schools.

At the time, the director was already using the *Turning Points* recommendations as a tool to organize middle schools and was also bringing middle school principals together regularly to discuss their work. The Foundation believed it could build on the director's leadership and energy to push reform even farther into Seattle's middle schools and in 2000 launched Kids in the Middle.

GOALS

The Foundation has established two goals for Kids in the Middle:

- Establish literacy strategies in curriculum, classroom instruction, and assessment.
- Strengthen school-wide, collaborative leadership.

STRUCTURE

Three schools were selected to participate in the initiative. The student population of each school is high-minority and high-poverty and each has a strong principal who practices collaborative leadership. The schools' inclusion in the program was dependent on each of the principals agreeing to participate in a network of the three schools, to lead an effort to improve instruction in their schools, and to remain at their schools for the duration of the initiative.

The Foundation believed it could meet its two goals for Kids in the Middle by surrounding schools with the resources adequate to support change and allow them to decide how to use these resources and by meeting them where they

Philanthropic Investments in Middle Grades

TEACHER QUALITY

Chicago Community Trust
Nesholm Family Foundation
Stuart Foundation
Wallace Funds
William Penn Foundation

CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT, IMPLEMENTATION & EVALUATION

Math & Science Curriculum

Abell Foundation
Agilent Technologies Foundation
Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation
Coca-Cola Foundation
Dow Corning Foundation
Dow Foundation
Ford Foundation
Heinz Endowments
Lucent Technologies Foundation
Noyce Foundation
Pew Charitable Trusts
Steelcase Foundation

Other Curriculum Areas

Ewing Marion Kauffman Foundation
GE Fund
J.P. Morgan Chase Foundation
Kellogg Foundation

WHOLE-SCHOOL REFORM

Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation
Cargill Foundation
Carnegie Corporation
Champion International Foundation
Ford Foundation
Foundation for the Mid South
J.P. Morgan Chase Foundation
Kellogg Foundation
Parent & Community Engagement
Pew Charitable Trusts
Stuart Foundation

LEADERSHIP

Doris & Donald Fisher

K-12 CONTINUUM

Donnell-Kay Foundation
Ford Foundation
Lucent Technologies

were at—helping schools understand their strengths and weaknesses and building their capacity to undertake and sustain change.

The district's director of middle grades, who retired from that position and has assumed the role of co-director for the initiative, worked collaboratively with the three principals to develop specific reform strategies. Nesholm has committed \$100,000 a year to each school for the initial three-year period of the program and hired a consultant, a former principal, to provide on-site technical assistance.

The thrust of the first year, 2000-01, was developing trust within and among the schools, planning how to use resources, and identifying literacy as the focus for improving achievement. The aim of the second year was to establish literacy across the curriculum and improve literacy instructional skills (i.e., establishing curriculum mapping and block scheduling, looking at student work, creating literacy indicators, and providing on-site assistance with literacy instruction).

While Nesholm has concerns regarding the sustainability of the changes underway in these three schools, it will consider extending the program should the schools continue to make progress.

OTHER PHILANTHROPIC EFFORTS TO SUPPORT TEACHER PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT:

Stuart Foundation

The Foundation has invested over \$1 million in WestEd's Strategic Literacy Initiative (SLI), an ongoing program to improve literacy among high poverty middle and high school students. SLI has two primary components—research and professional development. Stuart funding has supported the design of professional development strategies, the program's work with teachers and evaluations. The Foundation, which values collaboration as means to build understanding of complex issues and exchange new

ideas and information, also supports partnerships between SLI and two nonprofit organizations interested in incorporating SLI into their work with teachers.

Stuart also supported a professional development initiative for faculty from three high-poverty middle schools, the TEAMS program, which was run by San Francisco School Volunteers. TEAMS' focus was cooperative learning, an instructional strategy well-suited to young adolescents as it not only engaged them in active learning experiences but it also helped them develop social skills.

Wallace Funds

As part of an effort to improve instruction by helping teachers to learn to undertake continuous and reflective review of student work, the Wallace Funds awarded the Academy for Educational Development (AED) \$750,000 over three years (1998 - 2001) to work with teachers in five middle schools in two districts, Philadelphia, PA, and Plainfield, NJ. Activities included extensive professional development, creating collaborative interdisciplinary teams, networking with colleagues from other sites and monitoring progress.

Chicago Community Trust

In 2000 and 2001, the Trust supported a network of middle grades schools in Chicago, an initiative of the Association of Illinois Middle Schools (AIMS). AIMS operates similar networks in other areas of the state. The networks are more than a mechanism for connecting faculty from schools to one another; they provide professional development opportunities for teachers around a variety of issues including curriculum development, creating and facilitating teams, and establishing mentoring programs.

With the exception of a handful of schools led by dynamic principals, AIMS had little success cultivating a network in Chicago. Teachers and



administrators had little incentive or support from the system to engage in professional development of this nature, particularly if it was outside the boundaries of the system. The Trust's funds were used to hire a middle school teacher to coordinate a Chicago network. The network coordinator not only recruited schools into the network, she provided technical assistance to schools and organized professional development opportunities. She also worked with the district's central office to help raise awareness of the needs of middle grades students.

Strengthening Teacher Preparation: William Penn Foundation

While much of the work around improving teacher quality has focused on incumbent teachers, some foundations are helping to reform teacher education programs. The William Penn Foundation supported a multi-year, collaborative effort—which included the Philadelphia Education Fund, the School District of Philadelphia, and Temple University—to improve the pre-service training that middle grades teachers in Philadelphia received.

BACKGROUND

Penn's support for the Excellence in Teaching Partnership is part of its larger goal of helping young people successfully make the transition to higher education and/or the work force and its commitment in reaching that goal to improving academic outcomes for students in the Philadelphia area.

The Foundation's interest in middle grades began to grow in the mid-1990s as increasing attention at the national level was being paid to the unique needs of middle grades students and as it gained access to new information about the challenges Philadelphia's middle school students faced. The then-superintendent in Philadelphia believed strongly in collecting, analyzing, using, and disseminating data in ways that his predecessors had not. As a result, the district was

taking new steps to share data, some of which highlighted middle schools, with concerned stakeholders including Penn.

In addition, Penn was gathering information from another funder, the Pew Charitable Trusts, which shared the Foundation's concern about the poor outcomes of Philadelphia's students. In 1996, Pew launched a longitudinal study of eighth graders to track them through high school as part of an effort to learn more about the high dropout rate in the city. It shared what it was learning—which included new knowledge about the critical role of middle schools—with Penn and others in the community.

With this enhanced understanding of the poor conditions in middle schools, Penn agreed to fund a proposal from the Philadelphia Education Fund, the community's local education fund, to address the high teacher turnover rate in the district's middle schools in 1998. While teacher turnover was a problem throughout the district, it was particularly high across middle schools.

The high turnover rate reflected in part Pennsylvania's teacher certification requirements; the state does not require middle grades certification. As a result, most middle grade teachers in Philadelphia are certified for elementary education²² and many move to K-5 positions as soon as they become available. The reliance on elementary-certified teachers also means that few middle grades teachers have in-depth knowledge of subject areas, particularly math and science.

The Education Fund proposed a collaborative effort among the Fund, the School District of Philadelphia—which was struggling to address these issues—and Temple University's College of Education, the district's largest supplier of new teachers. This collaboration, the Excellence in

²² According to the Philadelphia Education Fund's 1999 report, *The Preparation of Middle Grades Teachers in an Era of High Stakes and High Standards: Philadelphia's Predicament*, 93 percent of Philadelphia's middle school teachers are elementary certified.

Teaching Partnership, was the first time these organizations worked together cooperatively.

GOALS

- Increase the number of qualified middle grade teachers in the district.
- Improve the pre-service education of middle grade teachers.
- Strengthen the ability of the district's Office of Human Resources to recruit and retain qualified middle grades teachers.
- Build stronger connections between Temple and its surrounding community schools.
- Create a practice of collaboration between Temple and the district's offices of Human Resources and Professional Development.

STRUCTURE

Three middle schools, those geographically closest to Temple, were asked to participate in the Partnership. At Temple, faculty from the Colleges of Education and of Arts and Science collaborated to create a new middle grades curriculum, the Middle School Endorsement Program. As part of the Program, a middle grades practicum was created as a means to introduce pre-service students to middle grades and to encourage them to pursue endorsement in it. Temple also created a resource center specifically for middle grades.

In addition, the student teaching experience for program participants was enhanced. All student teachers were placed in the three participating middle schools, allowing Temple faculty to better supervise them as well as to work more closely with school faculties. Temple provided professional development to the teachers, enhancing their abilities and enabling them to become better models of effective teaching. The principals met monthly with the other Partnership members for networking and decision-making meetings.

A distinct feature of the Partnership was the release the district gained from the teacher's

union so that the principals could hire the Temple students who had done their student teaching at the schools. Obtaining this dispensation meant that the new teachers were able to work in schools where they already knew the principals, their colleagues and, in some instances, their students, thereby easing the often difficult induction that novice teachers face. In addition, the district's human resource office reviewed its policies and practices, leading it to alter its screening exam for prospective teachers to better identify those who were best suited to teaching in an urban setting and it streamlined its hiring process. In addition, the district created new human resources marketing materials.

The Education Fund, which administered the grant, was responsible for monitoring the work of the Partnership members and for evaluating it. It also acted as facilitator of meetings and communication, which was a critical function in a project that required two large bureaucracies to collaborate.

The Partnership was originally conceived to be a two-year initiative, running from 1998 to 2000. Interim outcomes—such as the successful development of the Middle School Endorsement Program and the resource center for middle grades—were positive and, as a result, Penn continued funding the Partnership for two additional years, through 2002.

* * *

CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT, IMPLEMENTATION & EVALUATION

As the standards-based reform movement progressed, it became clear to funders that few schools and districts had developed curricula that would enable students to reach the newly developed and rigorous standards most states were requiring. This was particularly true in middle grades where few teachers have deep



content knowledge, most especially in mathematics and science. As a result, many funders have invested in strengthening curriculum—developing innovative and rich curriculum, helping teachers to implement it, and evaluating its effectiveness. The particular activities funded varied—at times foundations provided support to practitioners to help them develop curriculum themselves; in other settings, funders made grants to research organizations, usually universities, to develop and test curricular models.

Math & Science Curriculum

Considerable funding has supported reform in middle grades math and science education. Since the early 1980s, there has been a growing awareness that few students, particularly minority and low-income students, are developing deep knowledge of and mastering complex skills in math and science. Much of this awareness has been generated by series of reports which were unanimous in delivering this message. In many instances, these reports also brought attention to math and science curriculum offered in most schools; students were not gaining and demonstrating complex knowledge and skills in math and science because they were not being taught them. *A Nation at Risk*, for example, highlighted poor achievement in math and science. A 1986 math report card, released by the Educational Testing Service, which drew on data from the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), had the same finding.

The philanthropic community responded to these reports. From 1980 through 1998, the **Ford Foundation** operated a far-reaching initiative to reform mathematics education in middle and high schools, particularly in urban schools that served predominantly low-income and/or minority students. Ford sought not only to improve test scores in math but also to expand the number of poor, minority, and female students participating in rigorous math courses and, perhaps most important-

ly, to fundamentally change math curriculum and instructional methods. The Foundation wanted to encourage teachers and schools to move away from basic arithmetic and pedagogical strategies that relied too much on rote memorization and recitation to the exploration of complex math theories through more active learning experiences. In total, Ford invested over \$35 million into its mathematics reform initiative.

Through the initiative, Ford made a variety of grants, totaling \$10 million, to support different approaches to improving middle grades math education. These grants included support for out-of-school programs, the development of tools to assess the effectiveness of math programs, and the development and dissemination of mechanisms to improve instructional practice.

The cornerstone of the Foundation's middle grades math program was its \$13.5 million investment between 1989 and 1995 in the Quantitative Understanding: Amplifying Student Achievement and Reasoning program or QUASAR. QUASAR was an effort undertaken by the Learning Research and Development Center (LRDC) at the University of Pittsburgh to support the development of a new approach to mathematics instruction. Through this effort, researchers from LRDC helped teachers from six low-income middle schools in six districts across the country craft curricula and instructional strategies to strengthen students' ability to understand advanced mathematical concepts, including algebra and statistics, and solve complex problems. QUASAR demonstrated that urban students, who at many of the project sites were not only minority and poor but also English-language learners, could master and apply complex math concepts.

Another early initiative in middle grades math reform was the Algebra Project, a community-based effort founded in a Boston middle school by Robert Moses in 1982. It led to real gains in

math achievement in many participating schools and has, over time, garnered considerable funding from the philanthropic community. With this support, the Algebra Project has spread to 22 schools or school districts across 13 states and continues to focus on middle grades.

Public agencies also began to seed efforts to improve math and science education in the middle grades. The **National Science Foundation** (NSF) supported the Connected Mathematics Project (CMP) between 1991 and 1997, an initiative to create a math curriculum from middle grades students. CMP grew out of an earlier NSF project, the Middle Grades Mathematics Project, and is just one of many NSF-funded efforts.

The push to reform math and science education, especially in middle and high schools, gained even greater momentum following the release in 1995 of the Third International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS). TIMSS found that while fourth graders from the United States did well in math and science, placing above the international average, by eighth grade, they had slipped below the international average in math although they remained above the average in science. The slide that began in eighth grade continued through high school. In science and particularly in math, twelfth graders from the United States scored well below the international average. TIMSS focused even greater attention from policymakers, practitioners and funders on what was happening—and what was not happening—in math and science classrooms from middle schools through high schools.

TIMSS was revisited in 1999—the Third International Mathematics and Science Study—Repeat (TIMSS-R). U.S. eighth graders had made important gains, but they continued to have a long way to go to reach the desired levels of achievement in math and science as well as to reduce the achievement gap.²³ The

heightened visibility of the National Assessment of Educational Progress exam (NAEP), a result of the national push for standards-based reform and increased accountability, also highlighted the continuing struggle of students to make sustained progress in math and science.²⁴

The NAEP results and TIMSS-R helped ensure that the philanthropic community maintained its focus on strengthening math and science education particularly among middle and secondary students.

TIMSS found that while fourth graders from the United States did well in math and science, placing above the international average, by eighth grade, they had slipped below the international average in math although they remained above the average in science.

Local, regional, and national foundations have and continue to commit significant funds to efforts that seek to bolster math and science education. Philanthropic efforts have included:

- The **Heinz Endowments** awarded the Carnegie Institute a \$2 million grant in 2000 for an initiative to build the math skills of middle and high school students.
- The **Coca-Cola Foundation** made a grant of \$420,000 to Saint Louis University in 1999 to support a collaborative initiative to improve outcomes in math and science for and prevent dropouts among middle schools students.
- Between 1998 and 2001, the **Abell Foundation** awarded over \$2.3 million to the Ingenuity Project for the development and implementation of an intensive math and science curriculum in three Baltimore middle schools and one high school.
- The **Noyce Foundation**, which has a grant-making program dedicated to improving math and science education, is supporting the Massachusetts Mathematics Coaching Project. A three-year initiative, the Coaching Project seeks to raise achievement among middle school students throughout Massachusetts by building a cadre of math coaches who can work with districts to craft and implement a rigorous math curriculum and to build the knowledge and skills of middle grades teachers.
- With a grant of \$1 million in 2000, the **Dow Foundation** is supporting a multi-year, statewide effort to improve middle school math education in Michigan—the Middle School Math Reform Project. Coordinated by Western Michigan University and including partnerships with 90 school districts across the state, Dow was joined by the **Dow Corning** and **Steelcase Foundations** in supporting the Project. Unsurprisingly, corporate foundations, particularly those from the manufacturing and technology sectors such as Dow Corning and Steelcase, have been

particularly interested in improving math and science education.

The Mathematics Achievement Partnership is a recent national initiative to strengthen middle grades math curriculum and instruction. The Partnership is a collaboration between the College Board, which developed and operates the SAT exam and the Advanced Placement program, and Achieve, an organization founded in 1996 by governors and CEOs to help states develop high academic standards and accountability systems. The **Pew Charitable Trusts** has awarded this initiative \$1.5 million. The **Agilent Technologies Foundation** is also contributing to MAP. Fourteen states have joined the Partnership and are funding it as well.

Achieve cites the troubling findings of TIMSS and the persistently low scores on the NAEP math exams as the impetus for creating MAP. Through MAP, Achieve and the College Board are creating three tools to help states improve middle grades mathematics: rigorous standards that incorporate algebra and geometry; high-quality support materials for teachers, and technical assistance to states to develop effective professional development opportunities for teachers; and an eighth-grade mathematics exam that measures the standards.

MAP is not the College Board's only foray into middle grades curriculum. In 1999, the **Clark Foundation** awarded \$530,000 to the Board,



²³ In 1989, as the standards movement gathered momentum, the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics released *Curriculum and Evaluation Standards for School Mathematics*. Similarly, the American Association for the Advancement of Science released *Science for All Americans*, which laid out recommendations for what students should know and be able to do. The Association established specific learning goals in 1993 with the publication of *Benchmarks for Science Literacy*.

²⁴ In 1990, 48 percent of eighth graders and 42 of twelfth grades scored below basic on the NAEP math exam, which means they had not reached even the “partial mastery of prerequisite knowledge and skills that are fundamental for proficient work at each grade level.” (<http://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard/mathematics/achieve.asp>) By 2000, fewer students in both eighth and twelfth grades were below basic on the NAEP math exam (34 percent and 35 percent respectively) and more students had attained the basic level. The percentage of students in both grades, however, who reached the “proficient” level, while improving, remained small. (Proficient is described as “solid academic performance for each grade assessed. Students reaching this level have demonstrated competency over challenging subject matter.” See previous cite.) In 1990, 15 percent of eighth graders and 12 percent of twelfth graders scored at the proficient or advanced level; in 2000, those numbers were 27 percent and 17 percent respectively.

in conjunction with the Charles A. Dana Center at the University of Texas, to align middle and high school math curriculum in four districts to increase the enrollment of students in advanced math courses.²⁵ With funding from the **Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation**, the College Board has also created CollegeEd, a curriculum consisting of 12 lessons to introduce middle school students to college and help them better prepare for it.

Since 1999, through its support of the LASER program, the **Lucent Technologies Foundation** has been funding the efforts of four urban districts to improve science education in middle and elementary schools through the implementation of an inquiry-based curriculum that is engaging and academically rigorous. The LASER program (Leadership and Assistance for Science Education Reform) is an initiative of the National Science Resources Center (NSRC), a unit within the Smithsonian Institution. Lucent decided to focus on middle and elementary schools because teachers in these grades rarely have in-depth knowledge of science. Furthermore, few have any meaningful understanding of or experience in an inquiry-based approach to the instruction of science. Teams of experts in science and in instruction at NSRC created developmentally appropriate curriculum units for each level of middle and elementary schools. The Foundation supports the planning and implementation of the units in the districts over a three-year period.

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OTHER CURRICULUM AREAS:

Kellogg Foundation and the GE Fund

The Kellogg Foundation and the GE Fund, the grantmaking arm of the GE Corporation, have provided \$3 million to the College Board to support the development of curriculum and professional development materials for

grades six through 11. The Foundation's funds are supporting the Board's work in English Language Arts while the Fund's money is dedicated to the Board's work in mathematics.

Ewing Marion Kauffman Foundation

The Kauffman Foundation has supported a literacy initiative in the elementary schools of Kansas City, MO, that is built on a curriculum of high quality children's literature and improved practice among teachers. As these students move into middle grades, they are requesting the same types of materials and learning experiences, which is leading the Foundation to consider how it may expand the program to the middle level. As part of this effort, Kauffman has funded a literacy effort in one middle school, which serves as a demonstration site.

The J.P. Morgan Chase Foundation

In 1991, the J.P. Morgan Chase Foundation, a private foundation funded by the J.P. Morgan Chase company, partnered with New Visions for Public Schools, a nonprofit education reform organization in New York, to launch the Champions of Learning (CAL) program. With two-year grants of \$15,000, the Foundation supports middle grades teachers in constructing dynamic, standards-based curricula that integrate subject areas and are connected to students' real life experiences. In 1997, with assistance from the Public Education Network in Washington, D.C., the Foundation expanded CAL beyond New York; it is now in thirteen additional cities. The program also includes ongoing professional development and an annual national conference offering all participating teachers an opportunity to share successes and challenges, and to learn from experts in the field of early adolescent development and education.

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WHOLE-SCHOOL REFORM

While some funders chose to delve into specific strands of school reform, others pursued a broader approach. They wanted to help schools transform themselves, to undertake comprehensive reform that draws on the best research and knowledge about literacy and math curricula, professional development, leadership, and the spectrum of other issues that shape what happens every day in classrooms and in schools.

Middle Start School Design: The Foundation for the Mid South and the Kellogg Foundation

The Foundation for the Mid South has partnered with the Kellogg Foundation to bring the Middle Start model to the three states it serves—Arkansas, Louisiana, and Mississippi.

BACKGROUND

The Foundation for the Mid South's interest in young adolescents is longstanding. In the early 1990s, the Foundation created a national task force on education; its members were familiar with Carnegie's work in early adolescence and with its report, *Turning Points*. Informed by the report's findings, the task force concluded that the Foundation should focus attention on the needs of students in this group, which it did through its Program on Families and Children.

This interest in young adolescents had a new opportunity to flourish when the Foundation entered into a partnership with the Kellogg Foundation to implement its middle grades reform initiative, Mid South Middle Start (MS²), in Arkansas, Louisiana, and Mississippi. Kellogg had long had an interest in the mid South region and worked with the Foundation for the Mid South several times on various projects. When Kellogg sought to expand Middle Start beyond Michigan, a partnership with the Foundation for the Mid South seemed to be a natural evolution of their relationship.

While some funders chose to delve into specific strands of school reform, others pursued a broader approach. They wanted to help schools transform themselves, to undertake comprehensive reform that draws on the best research and knowledge about literacy and math curricula, professional development, leadership, and the spectrum of other issues that shape what happens every day in classrooms and in schools.

Middle Start was appealing to the Foundation for the Mid South because of demonstrated effectiveness as a reform model and because of its collaborative approach. In this approach, the Foundation saw opportunities to build connections across its other program areas and encourage a comprehensive strategy to strengthening communities. As a result of these synergies, Kellogg funded the Foundation to launch MS² in 1997.

²⁵ More recently, the College Board has begun to move beyond math. In early 2002, with a \$2 million grant from the Kellogg Foundation and an additional \$1 million award from the GE Fund, it began developing and testing curriculum and professional development materials for middle grades in English Language Arts.

GOALS

Six goals guided MS²:

- Improve the academic outcomes of middle grade students, particularly those who are at high risk of academic failure because of race and/or class.
- Encourage changes in policies and practices at the school, district, state, and regional levels that will improve teaching and learning for middle grades students.
- Build capacity within the region for providing middle-level schools with expert assistance.
- Improve curriculum and instruction in areas that are critical to expanding the academic and work options of low-achieving students.
- Increase public awareness at the school, district, state, and regional levels about the academic and developmental needs of young adolescents and their schools.
- Foster schools' collaboration with the private sector and community agencies that provide support to young adolescents and their families.

STRUCTURE

The goals the Foundation established are based on a vision of a network of schools for young adolescents across the mid South region that are academically excellent, socially equitable and developmentally responsive. These schools are to be comprised of small learning communities and to strive to engage in reflective review and self-study, to develop rigorous curriculum, instruction, and assessment, and to cultivate distributed leadership and sustainable partnerships.

Like the Middle Start model the Kellogg Foundation implemented in Michigan, MS² operates concurrently on several levels—changing practices in schools and changing the context in which the schools operate.

The Foundation for the Mid South offered the Self Study to middle grades schools in the three states and 288 of them chose to participate in it.

The Foundation for the Mid South has found that there is sometimes a lack of awareness about the particular needs of young adolescents or about the best approaches to addressing these needs in schools. As a result, part of its work is providing information on and building a knowledge base to support middle grades reform.

As described earlier in this report (in the section describing Kellogg's middle school initiatives) the Self Study is a comprehensive assessment mechanism that enables schools to understand more fully where they are and to create a vision and plan for reform that is based on their strengths and responds to their weaknesses.

These 288 schools form a network of Middle Start schools. Beyond the Self Study, which the Foundation offers biannually, these schools are also able to attend an annual meeting hosted by the Foundation. The annual meeting is an opportunity for practitioners to hear from experts and to learn from one another's experiences. To further support the schools, the Foundation has created a resource directory of organizations and individuals who can provide assistance to middle schools and distributes



a newsletter to keep schools up to date on pertinent developments.

Within MS², the Foundation is devoting more resources to middle grades schools in the Delta, the region where the three states come together along the Mississippi River. Wrenching poverty is deeply engrained in this area, and schools here often face the greatest challenges while having the fewest resources to meet them. The Foundation is providing more extensive support to some middle schools in the Delta. Following an initial round of \$10,000 planning grants, the Foundation awarded 26 Delta schools multi-year grants in 2001 to support reform activities.

Nine of the schools received Comprehensive School Improvement (CSI) grants of \$60,000 over three years to implement their reform plans. The Foundation also supplies these schools with an on-site coach as well as a Comprehensive Professional Development Partner (CPP), which provides professional development in one academic focus area. CSI schools are to become model schools that can support visitations and serve as leaders of middle grades reform in the three states.

The remaining 16 schools received Focused Professional Development (FPD) grants, two-year grants of \$16,000 to support professional development in math or literacy. FPD schools also receive some on-site coaching and are paired with a CPP too.

The network of MS² schools is growing with the designation of Middle Start as an approved reform model for the U.S. Department of Education's Comprehensive School Reform Demonstration (CSR D) program. Through the CSR D program, states are able to award schools grants of \$50,000 or more annually for a period of up to three years to implement whole school reform models.

The Foundation is seeking to build the capacity within the region to undertake and/or support middle grades reform. A key strategy here is establishing relationships with other stakeholder groups and linking these groups not only to the Foundation but also to each other. Even within these groups, the Foundation has found that there is sometimes a lack of awareness about the particular needs of young adolescents or about the best approaches to addressing these needs in schools. As a result, part of its work is providing information on and building a knowledge base to support middle grades reform.

As did the Kellogg Foundation, the Foundation for the Mid South is working with the Academy for Educational Development (AED) to implement Middle Start. AED is helping to design and implement training and technical assistance for middle grades schools as well as monitoring developments and assessing progress.

* * *

OTHER PHILANTHROPIC EFFORTS TO SUPPORT WHOLE-SCHOOL REFORM:

Ford Foundation

Ford funded the Success for All Foundation (\$500,000 over three years) to undertake an evaluation of its middle school reform model.

Pew Charitable Trusts and the Carnegie Corporation

The two foundations awarded almost \$2 million (\$500,000 from Carnegie and \$1.3 million from Pew) to the Philadelphia Education Fund to support the implementation of the Talent Development Middle School model in ten middle schools and in the ninth grade of six high schools in Philadelphia. The Talent Development model is a whole school reform model designed for urban middle schools that serve high poverty students.

Cargill Foundation

In June 2002, the Cargill Foundation awarded Olson Middle School, a middle school in Minneapolis, a five-year, \$1.5 million grant to implement a whole school reform plan developed by the school's faculty. The plan draws on research but does not follow a prescribed model. The school, which serves primarily low-income students, many of whom are also recent immigrants, is required to raise matching funds.

Hallmarks of the school's reform plan include extending the school day to incorporate remedial activities for students who have fallen behind and enrichment activities for those who have not. Teachers will work together in teams of four—three focus on “regular” curricula and the fourth on remedial and enrichment activities. The school calendar will be broken into seven-week increments. During the first six weeks, the focus is on the regular curriculum. During the seventh week, the three teachers responsible for the regular curriculum participate in professional development activities and, in collaboration, plan upcoming activities; the students participate in remedial and/or enrichment activities that are led by the fourth teacher. By providing additional support through the extended day schedule as well as the seventh week, teachers hope to catch students struggling early and prevent them from slipping too far behind.

Another key component of Olson's reform plan is summer school, which combines remedial and enrichment activities. Summer school is voluntary for students not in need of remediation but the school encourages parents to bring all students to summer school so that they benefit from the enrichment activities.

Cargill and Olson staff worked with the district's central office, including the superintendent, in developing the plan. If successful, Olson will serve as a reform model for the district's other middle grades schools.

Stuart Foundation

In the late 1980s and early 1990s, Stuart funded planning, startup costs, and evaluation for O'Farrell Community School in San Diego School District, a reconstituted school serving primarily high poverty students. Through reconstitution, the school transformed its structure to better meet students' needs. It was divided into small learning communities so that students would receive personalized attention, be offered an integrated curriculum based on rigorous content, and be provided links to health and social services.

Champion International (later merged into International Paper)

Inspired by the Carnegie Corporation's *Turning Points*, Champion International created its Middle School Partnership program in 1989. Over the duration of the program, which ended in 2002, Champion (which merged with International Paper in 1999) created partnerships with 60 schools in 10 states. The purpose of the Partnership was to assist schools in realizing the *Turning Points* recommendations—specifically it sought the formation of middle schools characterized by:

- Small learning environments.
- Teacher collaboration around the creation of challenging curriculum and interdisciplinary projects.
- Teams of teacher and of students working together to analyze and solve problems.
- Daily, one-on-one meetings between teachers and students.

Champion focused on building the capacity of school faculties to develop and implement plans to create such schools. It provided funding for a wide variety of adult learning opportunities, including onsite assistance from national experts, networking, site visits to effective middle schools, and workshops. Champion also created a website to provide resources to educators, parents, and others interested in middle grades



as well as to spread the word about what an effective middle school is—a school molded to fit the student instead of one that expects the student to fit the school. Typically, Champion worked with its partner schools for up to six years at which point its expectation was that the school would have implemented the structures necessary to sustain its reform work.

Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation

In early 2000, the Gates Foundation launched the Washington State School Grants program, a three-year, \$30 million initiative to help over 100 schools in the state become high achieving schools. While all levels of schools—elementary, middle, and high—are eligible to participate in the program, some of the attributes of high achieving schools that the Foundation is seeking to cultivate are similar to those long called for by advocates for middle grades reform. These attributes include small schools (or small units within schools) so that students are able to have personalized relationships with adults and time for adults to collaborate to develop the skills and plans to meet students' needs.

The J. P. Morgan Chase Foundation

While not explicitly a whole school reform effort, The J.P. Morgan Chase Foundation has, for almost two decades, provided extensive support to one of New York City's middle schools, the Ronald Edmonds Learning Center. In the process, it assisted the school in transitioning from a junior high to a middle school. Since 1983, J.P. Morgan Chase has provided over \$500,000 in financial assistance as well as extensive in-kind support including mentors, tutors, and equipment.

While this effort focused on only one school, it led to the Foundation's support for a district-wide, middle school reform initiative based on *Turning Points*. When *Turning Points* was released, the school's principal embraced it and created a committee, which included the Chase

program officer, to help the Center become a *Turning Points* school. During this process, the principal moved into a district-level leadership position, from which she launched a district-wide middle grades reform effort. She later moved to a city-level leadership position and took the district initiative across the city. The J.P. Morgan Chase Foundation contributed \$500,000 over five years to the city-wide initiative, and the firm's education grants officer participated as a member of the city-wide middle school task force.

* * *

PARENT AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

While educators are the most critical factor in student success, support from parents and community members can significantly enrich students' academic experiences, particularly for low-income students. Building links between schools, parents, and communities is a key element of the middle grades vision, and each of the core middle grades reform funders encouraged educators to do so. Their investments were supplemented by other funders, which made significant contributions to efforts to bridge the gap between school, home, and the community.

Increasing parent involvement: Cargill Foundation

In 2000, the Cargill Foundation established Schools First, a reform initiative involving twelve schools in Minneapolis; it is unique in spanning multiple grade levels, district boundaries, and even the public/private divide.

Schools First targets schools serving students from pre-kindergarten through eighth grade and is not limited to schools in Minneapolis or even to public schools. Six of the schools serve middle grades students, though are of varying configuration (K-8, 6-8, 4-8). The remaining schools serve younger students. (A significant portion of

middle grades students in Minneapolis attend K-8 schools as opposed to middle schools or junior highs) Participating schools range from traditional public schools to public charter schools to private schools. The Foundation worked with the Center for School Change (CSC) at the University of Minnesota to implement the program.

GOALS

Schools First seeks to improve student achievement by increasing parental involvement and focusing on core curricula areas. Participating schools establish individual goals, which at Cargill's insistence, must be measurable. Continued funding from the Foundation is dependent on schools making progress in reaching these goals.

STRUCTURE

Following a competitive proposal process, Cargill and CSC selected twelve schools in 2000 and 2001 that serve large proportions of low-income students to receive planning grants of \$5,000 to develop strategies emphasizing family involvement and strengthening math and literacy programs. Cargill then awarded the schools \$35,000 implementation grants over a three to four year period. At the conclusion of the grant period, schools that have met their goals will receive \$10,000 reward grants.

In addition to financial support, schools receive technical assistance from local and national experts and faculty have regular opportunities to meet with one another to network and share findings. Regular evaluation of progress is also a key component; CSC and Cargill staff members meet with each school twice a year to assess their progress and accomplishments. A final component of Schools First support is the participation of Cargill employees in various volunteer efforts in the schools.

LEADERSHIP

Some funders have supported middle grades initiatives not because of their focus on middle grades but because they believe that the individuals spearheading change are effective leaders who can successfully implement and sustain reform.

One such example is the story of the KIPP (Knowledge is Power Program) Academies. The first KIPP Academy was founded in 1994 by two alumni of the Teach for America program, Michael Feinberg and David Levin, to serve low-income middle grades students in Houston. The second KIPP Academy was founded in the Bronx two years later.

The KIPP Academies—and the improvements in student achievement their approach has yielded—have gathered significant recognition within the education community and from the broader public.²⁶ Impressed by the leadership of KIPP's two creators, the founders of The Gap, Inc., **Doris and Donald Fisher**, awarded KIPP a \$15 million grant in 2000. These funds are being used to support a leadership academy for future KIPP principals.

Private funders are not alone in being swayed by dynamic leadership. Georgia's former governor, Roy Barnes, was similarly impressed by KIPP's founders after first becoming aware of them via a broadcast news show and then meeting with them. As a result of his interest, Georgia provided state financing to establish a KIPP Academy. Barnes had hoped to add at least 10 more across the state; whether this plan will survive the change in administration brought about by the November 2002 election remains to be seen.²⁷

The KIPP Academy in Houston has been successful in winning considerable support from local foundations. KIPP is now preparing to seek funding from national or regional funders to open KIPP Academies in other areas. It also expects to continue to focus exclusively on middle grades. If KIPP is successful in raising

philanthropic funds, it may be due more to its leadership than to its focus on middle grades.

* * *

K-12 CONTINUUM

Some funders are investing in reform initiatives that seek to improve education by more closely linking elementary, middle, and high schools. This has led to increased interest in improving the middle grades.

The Ford Foundation has invested over \$41 million since 1997 in Project GRAD, an initiative that seeks to promote better outcomes for students in eight urban districts by establishing close links between high schools and the middle and elementary schools that feed into them, implementing rigorous curriculum standards, improving instruction, and providing college scholarships. The effort's pipeline approach to ensuring that students will graduate from high school with the knowledge and skills needed to be successful in higher education or the workplace was a key element in Ford's decision to support the initiative. The **Lucent Technologies Foundation** has also provided substantial support to several Project GRAD sites. The success of Project GRAD led to the creation in 1998 by the U.S. Department of Education of GEAR UP—Gaining Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Programs.²⁸ GEAR UP specifically targets middle grades and has led to the investment of millions of dollars of federal funding in middle grades reform.

Project GRAD bears other links to the middle grades reform movement. One of its key curricular elements is Success for All (SFA); the **Ford, Carnegie, and Kellogg** foundations funded elements of the development and evaluation of the middle grades component of SFA. The middle grades vision was central to the development of the SFA Middle School model of school reform.

According to its designer, SFA Middle School is an extensive elaboration of the middle school philosophy.²⁹

While the **Gates Foundation** has taken a different approach to education reform—focusing on reforming high schools instead of schools across the K-12 continuum—its investment in high school reform in one community has led local funders and stakeholders to consider how middle and elementary schools need also to be reformed. In 2001, Gates provided funding to reform Manual High School in Denver, one of the city's lowest performing schools, which serves predominantly African-American and Hispanic students. The core of the reform was to split Manual into small learning communities. Gates required local funders to match its investment.

It became evident to local observers, particularly the **Donnell-Kay Foundation**, which had contributed to the matching funds, that successfully reforming Manual required reforming the schools that fed into it. In fall 2001, Donnell-Kay convened a meeting of local stakeholders who established the Northeast Schools Collaborative, an initiative that links Manual with its feeder middle and elementary schools as part of a process to reform them. Specific reform strategies are being developed but its goal is clear—improving student achievement at every level.



²⁶ In addition to considerable print coverage in local media outlets such as *The Houston Chronicle*, KIPP has received extensive attention from such national outlets as *The Washington Post*, *The New York Times*, *Business Week*, and *Education Week* as well as from broadcast outlets including CBS' news program *60 Minutes*.

²⁷ KIPP was awarded a \$3.5 million grant from the U.S. Department of Education in 2001 to support after-school, mentoring, and college preparation programs. The current U.S. Secretary of Education is the former superintendent of the Houston Independent School District, where KIPP was founded.

²⁸ U.S. Department of Education. "Why GEAR UP is Important for America's Young People." May 19, 2000. www.ed.gov/offices/OPE/gearup/whyGU.html.

²⁹ Memorandum from Robert Slavin to Claire Handley: August 26, 2002

A Field in Focus: Findings on Philanthropy and the Middle Grades

The nine findings on the following pages arise out of an analysis of the work of multiple funders in supporting the middle grades. As the previous section details, funders developed and implemented multiple strategies for the middle grades. Their work is richly textured and a series of findings could easily be devoted to the programmatic outcomes of every funder's effort. This section concentrates, however, on some of the larger findings that point the way to understanding the field that is emerging in part from the collective investments of these funders.

FINDING #1: Collective investments of key funders helped spurred the creation of a new field of middle grades reform.

While the middle grades vision was first conceptualized and articulated over four decades ago, it was not until the 1970s that it began to spread widely across the country, triggering the reconfiguration of junior highs, serving seventh and eighth grade students, as middle schools, typically enrolling sixth through eighth graders. Notwithstanding these changes in grade configuration, the middle grades continued to be overlooked, particularly as places that could promote serious learning.

There are many reasons for this. Not many educators were well positioned to be advocates for and leaders of middle grades reform. Within schools, few middle grades educators were well prepared to teach in middle grades much less to assume leadership in reforming middle grades schools. Even today, parents are often not effective advocates for middle grades because their children, embroiled in early adolescence, are not easy or necessarily pleasant to be around. Anecdotal observation suggests that parents, who are engaged in elementary school, disengage in middle grades and re-engage in high school.³⁰ Policymakers were also disconnected from the middle grades, focusing more on resources and results than the needs of a specific cohort of students.

The philanthropic community worked to fill these gaps. Many funders, especially Carnegie,

Clark, Lilly, and Kellogg, contributed greatly to the creation of a vibrant middle grades field. Without their contributions, commitment, and leadership, it is unlikely that the field would have come together or, if it had, that it would be as dynamic and as far-reaching as it has become. As described extensively in this report, funders used widely varying strategies and theories of change. At times they did so consciously and at times they acted spontaneously, responding to unforeseen opportunities and emerging needs.

In either circumstance, these four funders thoughtfully nurtured elements of a field—the clear and shared articulation of the middle grades vision; the widespread dissemination of this vision; the process of building capacity by strengthening existing and creating new organizations; the testing of new ideas and sharing new learnings broadly; the use of data to reflect on and inform practice; and the sustained commitment of time and resources. In doing so, they communicated with each other and the broader public and were eager to welcome other funders into their discussion and encourage their involvement in middle grades work. They reached out to other stakeholders and provided opportunities for researchers and advocates to explore how the education of early adolescents might be improved.



FINDING #2: The middle grades reform field grew out of and was closely tied to a vision of learning and achievement and an insistence on equity that significantly expanded the traditional emphasis on the affective development of early adolescents.

Middle grades funders, especially those that had dedicated middle grades grant programs, were keenly aware that, despite changes in structure, the middle grades remained academically parched environments. They learned, through the course of their programs, that an insistence on academic excellence for all middle grades students had to be both explicit and unrelenting.

Carnegie's *Turning Points* described young adolescents as "maturing intellectually at a significant rate," and as "able to analyze problems and issues, examine the component parts, and reintegrate them into either a solution or into a new way of stating the problem or issue."³¹ Its recommendations began with the understanding that middle grades students are capable learners able to master complex knowledge and skills. Embedded in the recommendations was the expectation that as all students were better served academically by middle grades schools, they would learn more, particularly in core academic areas.

Turning Points stated that small learning communities are critical for students' intellectual development, not only their personal growth. The recommendations called specifically for the introduction of academic programs that would "result in students who are literate, including in the sciences," and for the "elimination of tracking by achievement level and promotion of cooperative learning" as well as other strategies to "ensure success for all students."³² The recommendations, released in 1989, when the idea of standards and accountability was beginning to take shape did not, however, contain explicit goals for student achievement.

Eleven years later, Carnegie released a follow-up report, *Turning Points 2000: Educating Adolescents in the 21st Century*. The report traced the evolu-

tion of middle grades reform since 1989 and laid out a second series of recommendations. It found that, while there were schools that embraced the full breadth of the middle grades vision and were striving to implement its structures and practices as a means to improve student achievement, most schools had not done so. Middle schools were happier places but they remained places where students did not learn much.

Turning Points 2000 also found that those schools that most faithfully implemented the middle grades vision and where gains had been made at improving teaching and learning were most often in suburban and affluent communities. High-poverty rural and urban schools, where student needs are greatest, were the least likely to have implemented any of the components of the middle grades vision. As the report's authors noted, the consequences of this include the failure of up to half the students in the nation's largest cities to successfully make the transition to high school.

Given these findings, the recommendations of *Turning Points 2000* are much more explicitly focused on student achievement and equity. The first recommendation calls for middle grades schools to "teach a curriculum grounded in rigorous, public academic standards for what students should know and be able to do, relevant to the concerns of adolescents and based on how students learn best."³³

³⁰ One observer noted that parental re-engagement at the high school level seems to be a result of the many extracurricular activities that high schools offer, such as athletics and performing arts, which provide parents with clear avenues for becoming involved in schools and in their children's school lives.

³¹ Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development. *Turning Points: Preparing American Youth for the 21st Century*. New York: Carnegie Corporation 1989 p. 15.

³² Ibid.

³³ Jackson, Anthony W. and Gayle A. Davis. *Turning Points 2000: Educating Adolescents in the 21st Century*. New York: Teachers College Press 2000. p. 23.

Without suggesting that schools abandon their pursuit of developmentally appropriate policies and practices, the remaining recommendations are permeated with a similar focus on student achievement. For example, in addressing teaching in middle grades, the recommendations are clear that schools should not only provide ongoing professional development but that professional development should be “driven by results, based on standards, embedded in daily work” and lead to improvements in student learning.³⁴ Regarding teacher teams, the recommendations propose that, among other things, teams should “continually concentrate their efforts on achieving high standards for both teaching and learning.”³⁵ A decade of funding, advocacy, advice, and observation underscored the truth of the perception that anything less than explicit demands for academic excellence would be lost in the schools’ emphasis on students’ affective needs.

The Clark Foundation shared that conclusion and its work had presaged it. From the beginning of its middle grades program in 1988, Clark incorporated a clear and direct focus on academic excellence. Its emphasis on equity was reflected in the initiative’s original title, the Program for Disadvantaged Youth, and in its statement of purpose, to help “schools make changes necessary to provide disadvantaged youth in grades six through nine with educational experiences of high expectations, high content, and high support.”³⁶ The Foundation did not initially have a well-defined description of educational experiences that are based on high expectations, content, and support; it,

Funders learned, through the course of their programs, that an insistence on academic excellence for all middle grades students had to be both explicit and unrelenting.

no less than the five districts it first funded, was a novice in systemic reform. Because the desired outcomes were vague, schools and districts did what they had always done—add programs. As a result, in 1992, Clark refined the Program’s goal to “significantly enhance the performance of students in grades six through nine by reforming middle schools.”³⁷ Clark staff were clear by this point that increased student achievement was the purpose of the Program and the measure by which it should be judged.

While the Foundation became clear about its goals, not all of the participating schools and districts did so. The nature and implications of systemic reform, particularly in middle grades, was not always understood and, in some places, students’ affective needs continued to take precedence over their academic needs. In consequence, Clark revisited its goal for the Program in 1994 and crafted a new one that explicitly articulated a focus on academic excellence: “Students in urban middle schools will demonstrate high levels of academic performance by the end of eighth grade.” For the first time, the Foundation also outlined strategies districts should undertake to reach this goal. They were to: “Develop and implement standards, delineate the proportion of students they wanted to meet the standards by 2001, and reform all middle

³⁴ Ibid. p. 24

³⁵ Ibid. p. 24

³⁶ Mizell, M. Hayes, Akiyu Hatano, and Kevin Kirkwood. “Program for Disadvantaged Youth: Review and Strategy.” Edna McConnell Clark Foundation. March 1994. It should also be noted that all of the “core” middle grades reform funders—Carnegie, Lilly and Kellogg—were deeply concerned as well about equity and dedicated to ensuring that all students, particularly those historically at-risk for failure, would achieve at higher levels.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Mizell, M. Hayes. “Program Update: Program for Student Achievement.” Edna McConnell Clark Foundation. December 1995.

schools to enable students to meet the standards.”³⁸ To further demonstrate its belief that middle grades reform was ultimately about improving student achievement, the Foundation changed the name of the initiative to the Program for Student Achievement.

With much effort, Clark’s insistence that schools and districts focus on student achievement beyond affective development began to see results. Through Clark assistance, grantee districts developed content and performance standards and set achievement goals for middle grades students. In many sites, they did so before their home states did.

Student achievement and equity motivated other funders also. The QUASAR initiative, funded by the Ford Foundation, not only helped teachers develop engaging and effective curriculum and instructional strategies, it also demonstrated that all children, not merely those from well-educated, affluent families, could master complex mathematics.

In its new partnership with Olson Middle School in Minneapolis, the Cargill Foundation has required that the school set specific outcomes, interim as well as long-term, as part of its reform plan. In keeping with the Foundation’s mission to serve socio-economically disadvantaged youth, Olson serves predominantly low-income students, many of whom are recent immigrants and struggle with limited English skills.

In their beliefs about and unflinching persistence in demanding that academic excellence is not only possible for all middle grades students to achieve but that they all must achieve it, the philanthropic community was ahead of most in the education community.

The National Forum to Accelerate Middle Grades Reform

A critical element in building and sustaining the field of middle grades reform is the National Forum to Accelerate Middle Grades Reform. The Forum was founded by a group of funders in 1997, but it is far more than a collective of funders. It is the leading edge of the middle grades movement, a means to put forth and galvanize action around a shared vision of middle grades education and a unique entity in the philanthropic world.

While there are groups of funders that gather regularly around various issues, they rarely include practitioners, researchers, advocates, and other key stakeholders.

The Forum does include all of these elements and each has equal standing. The Forum convenes these stakeholders, encourages extensive sharing of ideas and information, and promotes cooperate to meet the goals of middle school reform. Its membership is comprised of approximately 50 organizations, including foundations, universities, state departments of education, research and reform support organizations, school districts, national associations of educators, and others.

The Forum is staffed by the Education Development Center, a nonprofit organization that, among other things, undertakes research, develops tools for practitioners, and partners with other organizations to develop policies and programs that will improve learning and outcomes in a variety of settings. It brings together individuals who are committed to reforming the middle grades, and it is positioned to provide ongoing leadership in further efforts to do so. The Forum institutionalizes and extends the personal relationships that have been central to the

development of the middle grades vision and the emergence of the field.

The Forum has articulated and widely disseminated the belief that effective middle grades schools are academically excellent, developmentally responsive, and socially equitable. It has developed policy statements on issues critical to middle grades reform, including teacher preparation, ability grouping, and high stakes testing. These statements—the product of research, frank give-and-take among the members and genuine consensus building—have also been shared with multiple constituencies.

An important part of the Forum’s work is demonstrating that the middle grades vision, implemented fully, is effective in meeting students’ academic as well as their affective needs and does not require schools to choose between the two. Through its Schools to Watch initiative, the Forum, using demanding criteria, identifies middle grades schools that embody excellence. Thus far four schools have gained the Schools to Watch title. In addition to earning grants from the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation, the schools have garnered considerable attention. Two of the schools were highlighted in the Clark-sponsored special report on middle grades education in Education Week in 2000, which also drew attention to the work of numerous Forum members. The Schools to Watch initiative and the Forum have been cited in other publications including USA Today and Middle Ground, the monthly magazine of the National Middle School Association (NMSA).

The four schools have been inundated with requests for information

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The National Forum to Accelerate Middle Grades Reform

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from educators across the country. The Forum created a Schools to Watch website to tell the schools' stories so that their hard work might inspire and guide others along a similar path. The recognition the schools have received helps reach a second goal of the Schools to Watch Initiative—encouraging districts, states, and professional groups to embrace the high performance criteria embodied in these schools and infuse them into their work and their cultures.

The Forum is extending and deepening its reach; it has established the Southern Forum to Accelerate Middle Grades Reform. The members of the Southern Forum are drawn from a variety of organizations in ten states including schools and school districts, state departments of education, advocacy and reform support organizations, and universities. The Southern Forum functions much as the National Forum does but it enables members to explore issues that have special resonance in the region.

These and other activities have led the Forum to be increasingly recognized as both a resource for and a leader of middle grades reform. It was involved in the organization of Secretary of Education Richard Riley's satellite town meeting, "Powerful Middle Schools" in February 2000, and its assistance was requested by the Office of Educational Research and Improvement at the U.S. Department of Education in planning a conference on curriculum, instruction, and assessment in the middle grades that same year.

Both the Forum's work and its membership continue to expand. In spring 2002, the Forum joined with the NMSA, the National Association of Secondary School Principals,

the National Association for Elementary School Principals, and the National Staff Development Council to pilot a state level Schools to Watch program. Three states, California, Georgia, and North Carolina, have been selected to participate. The Forum will provide training and technical assistance to state teams, which are comprised of representatives of various organizations including middle school associations, universities, state departments of education, reform groups, and others.

The expansion of the Forum's work suggests a greater role for it in sustaining the middle grades reform movement. It is positioned as the intellectual leader for the field. In addition to ideas and relationships with key actors, its members have the collective knowledge and capacity to design and implement, with outside funding, initiatives that can have impacts on policy and practice on national, state, district, and school levels.

The Clark, the Bill & Melinda Gates, the W.K. Kellogg, and the Ewing Marion Kauffman foundations currently fund the Forum.

FINDING #3: Building capacity in responsible adults was at the core of philanthropic investments in middle grades reform.

The heart of middle grades reform is improving and expanding the interactions between adults and students. Yet any innovation is meaningless unless teachers know how to use it to be more effective instructors and to establish more personalized relationships with students. Without diminishing the extraordinary complexity of the reform process or underestimating the external challenges to reform middle grades, funders knew that their success rested on improving the knowledge and skills of adults across systems and schools. Funders devoted considerable resources to building this capacity.

In doing so, they employed a variety of strategies. Most often, they funded professional development, which included an extensive array of activities—on-site coaches to build pedagogical knowledge, training in the use of rubrics, introduction to strategies for strengthening literacy skills, instruction on curriculum design, guidance in facilitating teams, and a plethora of additional activities. Virtually all funders of middle grades, whether they funded the implementation of the full middle grades vision or they funded pieces of it, made investments in building the capacity of adults.

One strategy used by several funders, often those that worked with multiple sites, was the creation of networks, which proved to be powerful opportunities for improving adults' knowledge and skill and for sustaining their commitment to middle grades reform. These networks were a means for educators involved in reform to come together to learn from one another and from experts. They exposed members to the most up-to-date research, information on best practices, and lessons from the field. Perhaps most important, they helped break down the isolation that characterizes education.

All of the major funders supported networks. The Kellogg Foundation's Middle Start initiative is grounded in the development of a reliable reform infrastructure that utilizes, among other things, regional networks. The Foundation for the Mid South has embraced the same approach in its MS² initiative. Lilly's Middle Grades Improvement Program network, established to help schools connect to one another, grew rapidly. Among other things, it provided resource materials to educators, facilitated site visits, and sponsored conferences—all of which facilitated the improvement of educators' knowledge and skills. Clark has helped support the Urban Middle Grades Reform Network, consisting of representatives from over 20 urban districts that is coordinated by the Academy for Educational Development. The Network focused on three areas: systemic reform and managing change, assessment and accountability, and marketing and communications.

Networks became the lynchpin of Carnegie's whole school reform component. The 15 states involved in the foundation's Middle Grade Schools State Policy Initiative (MGSSPI) established networks to help high-poverty schools implement the *Turning Points* recommendations. In addition to connecting these schools with one another, the networks provided ongoing assistance and professional development to their members. The network concept became the cornerstone of Carnegie's final investment in middle grades—the National *Turning Points* Network, which the Corporation established at the Center for Collaborative Education in Boston, oversees and supports the implementation of the *Turning Points* model in schools across the country. While the network assumes various support tasks, enhancing adults' knowledge and skills is one of its core activities.

Virtually all funders of middle grades, whether they funded the implementation of the full middle grades vision or they funded pieces of it, made investments in building the capacity of adults.

FINDING #4: Philanthropic interest in middle grades improvement stimulated extensive innovation that led to significant knowledge about school reform and philanthropic practice and to the development and dissemination of new ideas.

BUILDING KNOWLEDGE

When the funders of middle grades reform—in particular Carnegie, Clark, Lilly, and Kellogg—began their work around middle grades, they were forging new pathways. Their pioneering work and that of their grantees has resulted in new information and knowledge about philanthropic practice and about substantive components of education reform.

The Kellogg Foundation's efforts to build a statewide infrastructure that could support and sustain middle grades reform in schools across Michigan seeks to build knowledge on two levels—providing valuable insight into how funders can approach whole school reform effectively and fostering expertise among practitioners. The Michigan Middle Start Partnership—comprised of several universities, social service agencies, and local organizations, some of which had not focused on the middle grades prior to Middle Start, as well as national educational groups—is a means to link these organizations together around a common vision and to reinforce the work that each now does to support middle grades reform. These organizations are becoming experts in middle grades. They provide technical assistance to schools and are advocates for the middle grades.

The Partnership has proven to be an effective approach in the short-term for supporting whole school reform in a manner that enables foundations to work with multiple schools in multiple districts across a state. It has already withstood an unanticipated decrease in funding from the Kellogg Foundation due to a decline in the Foundation's stock in the late 1990s. Partnership members were not deterred and continued what they had begun.

Clark's support for an initiative of the National Staff Development Council (NSDC) resulted in the generation of influential findings for funders, practitioners, and experts. In the mid-1990s, NSDC was interested in identifying content-specific professional development programs that affected student achievement. A study of this nature had never been completed because most evaluation experts believed it was not possible to link professional development to student achievement. In 1997, Clark funded NSDC to undertake such a study for middle grades.

NSDC created an advisory panel for the initiative, which included representatives of the National Middle School Association (NMSA) and the National Association of Secondary School Principals (NASSP) and the content associations such as the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics and the National Council of Teachers of English. Many panel members were strongly resistant to the proposed evaluation but yielded to the Foundation's determination to pursue it. The depth and scope of the resistance NSDC and Clark encountered was, itself, a critical lesson for NSDC and for Clark.

Of the 497 professional development programs³⁹ submitted for review, more than 90 percent were disqualified because they provided no evidence of effect on student achievement. Few programs even mentioned students in their goals or incorporated an explicit expectation that teachers would apply the new knowledge or skills that they gained through the professional development experience. This was further demonstration of how widely-held the belief that professional development could not be assessed for its affect on student achievement was. In the end, NSDC was able to identify 26 programs that

Through their initiatives, funders were dedicated to sharing their ideas, experiences, and findings. Doing so strengthened the work of individual funders, built connections among them and with other stakeholders, and fostered a more strategic use of resources.

met its assessment criteria and described them in a 1999 report, *What Works in the Middle: Results-Based Staff Development*.

The NSDC report was only one example of funders' efforts to capture and disseminate meaningful knowledge particularly in ways that were accessible to practitioners. Clark and Kellogg funded a series of guides, *Guiding Middle Grades Curriculum Decisions*, to help teachers identify and create high-quality curriculum materials as well as make sound instructional decisions. There are three guides—one for language arts, mathematics, and science—and each is available free of charge at the MiddleWeb website.

The lessons learned from funders' investment in middle grades reform resonated beyond the middle grades; in many instances they have enhanced or contributed to reform efforts across the K-12 continuum. One such instance of this indirect influence is the Comprehensive School Reform Demonstration (CSRSD) program.

In 1998, the U.S. Department of Education established CSRSD to help high-poverty, low-performing schools identify and implement research-based, whole school reform models. Unlike previous federal initiatives, CSRSD explicitly avoids funding programmatic initiatives which, too often, are simply “add-ons” in schools—a new project or program that, even well-designed and carefully implemented, has limited effect and is unsustainable.

Following a competitive application procedure in which they must provide an integrated plan to undertake and sustain comprehensive reform, CSRSD schools receive a minimum of \$50,000 for three years. According to a recent report, between FY 1998 and FY 2002, \$935 million has been distributed through the program and over 5,300 schools across the nation, of which two-thirds are elementary, are participating. These funds have gone not only to schools but also to support the development and evaluation of whole school reform models.⁴⁰

In 1999, the U.S. Department of Education awarded over \$76 million over five years to seven organizations to fund the development of reform models specifically targeted to middle and high schools. Three of these focus exclusively on middle grades reform:

- Different Ways of Knowing Middle Grades Model⁴¹ (Galef Institute - \$6.7 million)
- AIM at Middle Grades Reform (Education Development Center - \$13 million)
- Success for All Middle School Model (Success for All Foundation - \$12.2 million).



³⁹ The majority of these programs were in math and science and had received significant funding from the National Science Foundation. The average NSF grant to these programs ranged from \$1.5 - 3 million.

⁴⁰ United States Department of Education, Office of Educational Research and Improvement. “Comprehensive School Reform.” Available at www.ed.gov/offices/OERI/csrrdp.html

⁴¹ The Galef Institute's model explicitly embraces the middle grades edict of schools that are academically excellent, developmentally responsible. In addition, Anthony Jackson, the Carnegie program officer who designed and led MGSSPI is now working at Galef on middle grades reform.

The remaining four models all incorporate middle grades, but do not limit their focus to middle schools alone:

- America's Choice Design Model (National Center on Education and the Economy - \$10.1 million)
- First Things First Model (Institute for Research and Reform in Education - \$11.1 million)
- Making Schools Work Model (Southern Regional Education Board - \$11.6 million)
- Talent Development Model (Johns Hopkins University - \$11.6 million).

The CSRD program presents a critical and perhaps heretofore unparalleled opportunity for multi-year funding distributed to a large number of schools across the country specifically for comprehensive or whole school reform. In some instances, it has served to extend the scope and reach of foundation investments. The Clark Foundation, for example, worked with the Southern Regional Education Board (SREB) to create Making Middle Schools Work (formerly Making Middle Schools Matter), a standards-based, comprehensive initiative to improve middle schools throughout the SREB region that engages individual schools as well as helps build networks within districts, states, and across the region to support middle grades reform.⁴²

Making Middle Grades Work draws on SREB's well-regarded high school reform initiative, High Schools that Work.

The Carnegie Corporation and the Pew Charitable Trusts supported the construction of the Talent Development Model, which was first implemented in Philadelphia's public middle schools.⁴³ While not focused solely on middle grades, the Ewing Marion Kauffman Foundation provided essential support to the Institute for Research and Reform in Education as it developed its First Things First model. CSRD capitalizes on the investments that these funders made — the success of their investments and work, at

least in part, enabled the establishment of the CSRD program.

The Kellogg Foundation is most directly linked to the CSRD program. The Michigan Middle Start Partnership was asked by the Michigan Department of Education to create a whole school reform model based on Middle Start. The Partnership did so and its model has become one of the most frequently adopted models of the CSRD program. This unanticipated development has significantly extended the work of the Partnership.

DISSEMINATING IDEAS AND LEARNINGS

Through their initiatives, funders were dedicated to sharing their ideas, experiences, and findings. Doing so strengthened the work of individual funders, built connections among them and with other stakeholders, and fostered a more strategic use of resources. In some instance this commitment to sharing and dissemination helped to leverage change.

It is widely recognized that the Carnegie Corporation's report, *Turning Points*, was a watershed for middle grades reform. It resonated as previous reports about the middle grades, some of which contained similar findings and recommendations, had not. It was prepared and released under prestigious auspices and disseminated extensively. The report was deliberately geared to multiple stakeholders, and the Corporation worked hard to bring it to the attention of opinion makers in many fields.

Turning Points also resonated deeply because it coincided with the efforts of Lilly and Clark. Three major foundations were calling attention to middle grades and were making the same points — despite differences in grantmaking approaches, each insisted that middle grades students were capable of understanding and mastering complex concepts through critical analysis and reasoning and that academic achievement



must be central to the middle grades concept. This unanimity in vision was the focal point for creating a cohesive field.

Dissemination was a critical element Clark's work. In addition to creating a website on the middle grades, *Middleweb*⁴⁴, the Foundation produced a series of reports and documents chronicling what its efforts and sharing the lessons it was learning. In so doing, it was forthright about where its expectations had not been met. Clark also sought to expand the conversation beyond its own work and funded *Education Week*, a widely read journal, to support a series of articles in each that focused on middle grades reform.⁴⁵

⁴² The SREB region is comprised of Alabama, Arkansas, Delaware, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maryland, Mississippi, North Carolina, Oklahoma, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, Virginia, and West Virginia.

⁴³ The developers of the Talent Development Middle School model drew on work in middle school reform undertaken in the 1980s—including the work of the Carnegie Corporation and of Joan Lipsitz, the developer of the Lilly Endowment's middle grades initiative—to create the model. (Robert Balfanz and Douglas MacIver, "Transforming High Poverty Urban Middle Schools into Strong Learning Institutions: Lessons from the First Five Years of the Talent Development Middle School," *Journal of Education for Students Placed At Risk*, Winter 2000. Available at www.middleweb.com/maciver.html.)

⁴⁴ *Middleweb* is located at www.middleweb.com.

⁴⁵ Other funders also undertook efforts to disseminate information and ideas. Kellogg, for example, provided support to *Phi Delta Kappan*, also a widely read journal, for a series of articles on middle grades.

FINDING #5: Funder emphasis on academic rigor in the middle grades coincided with the emergence of standards-based reform, which significantly influenced the context, design, and implementation of subsequent middle grades investments.

Funders came to view curriculum and performance standards as a powerful and strategic means to improve student achievement.⁴⁶ They made significant investments in the development and, in particular, the implementation of standards, most often across all grade levels.

Through the early to mid 1990s, federal funds were awarded to many subject area associations such as the National Council for the Social Studies, the Consortium of National Arts Education, and the National Council of Teachers of English to create content standards. The Pew Charitable Trusts joined the U.S. Department of Education in providing funds to the Center for Civic Education to support standards development in civics and government. Pew also provided extensive support to the New Standards Project, a joint initiative of the National Center on Education and the Economy and the Learning Research and Development Center of the University of Pittsburgh, to create standards in core academic areas across grade levels.⁴⁷

Carnegie was also involved in standards development; it provided funding to the American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS) for the production and dissemination of the 1989 report, *Science for All Americans*, which laid out a series of recommendations for what students should know and be able to do in science, mathematics, and technology by the time they graduate from high school.⁴⁸

Carnegie provided additional funding to AAAS to support its 1993 follow-up report, *Benchmarks for Science Literacy*, which contained specific goals for science literacy for every grade from kindergarten through twelfth grade. A number of private and public entities joined Carnegie in funding *Benchmarks* or the profes-

sional development activities that AAAS developed for practitioners around them. Philanthropic supporters of *Benchmarks* include Pew as well as the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur, Andrew W. Mellon, and Robert N. Noyce foundations.⁴⁹ The philanthropic community's embrace of standards has been both broad and deep.

Whether or not states and districts used these various reports to guide their own efforts to establish curriculum and performance standards, standards-based reform swept the nation. By 1999, every state except Iowa had created or was in the process of creating standards. The standards were accompanied by new accountability mechanisms, primarily standardized tests, and by new consequences for reaching or not reaching the standards.

STANDARDS AND MIDDLE GRADES REFORM

Philanthropic funders of middle grades improvement embraced standards in their programs. By the late 1990s, standards were an articulated part of Carnegie's approach to middle grades reform. In 1998, Carnegie began working with the Center for Collaborative Education in Boston to develop a *Turning Points* whole school reform model; a standards-based curriculum was one of seven principles upon which the model was based. The belief in standards as a lever to raise achievement for all was further demonstrated with the first of *Turning Points 2000*'s recommendations, which called for all middle grades schools to teach a "curriculum grounded in rigorous, public academic standards."

As discussed above (see *Finding 4*), the development of standards became a primary focus of Clark's work with districts. As part of its com-



prehensive approach, Clark also provided extensive support for the implementation of standards through various professional development and community engagement efforts. Kellogg’s Middle Start Initiative called for “rigorous curriculum, instruction, and student assessment” among its four underlying principles and realizing that principle required Middle Start schools to “align curriculum, instruction, and assessment with each other and with district, state, and national standards.”

There is a natural alignment between the middle grades vision, which places the institution of a rigorous academic curriculum for all middle grades students at the core of middle grades reform, and standards-based reform. The expectation engrained in standards-based reform that *all* students in *all* public schools will meet the same high standards responds to funders’ abiding concern for equity.

While the standards movement is intertwined with middle grades reform, it has also, however, presented some challenges to it. Some educators believe demanding curriculum and performance standards and the supportive middle grades structures and activities that reformers seek are mutually exclusive. These educators persist in the belief that the middle grades primary focus is on meeting students’ affective needs. This lack of clarity around the vision and purpose of middle grades reform has given rise to the notion that standards-based reform and middle grades reform are conflicting rather than complementary—one is solely academic and the other is solely affective.

Even where practitioners fully understand and attempt to implement middle grades reform that emphasizes academic excellence in concert with affective development, the accountability measures accompanying standards may distract faculty from their reform efforts. These measures rely heavily or exclusively on students’ scores on

standardized exams and often demand significant improvements in test scores in relatively short periods of time. Consequences for failing to attain these improvements in the specified time can result in schools losing accreditation or funding and staff losing their jobs. These measures, despite being intended to encourage better teaching and deeper learning, may result in “teaching to the test” or in instructional strategies designed more for short-term performance than long-term understanding. They can put undue pressures on students and teachers and may ultimately serve to divert schools and districts from learning.

Given this, many middle grades reform advocates believe that one of the most critical challenges facing the middle grades continues to be demonstrating that middle grades reform incorporates high academic and performance standards and that its structures, implemented fully, will lead to sustained improvement in student learning—something teaching to the test rarely does.⁵⁰

⁴⁶ Standards here refer to rigorous curriculum and performance standards.

⁴⁷ The MacArthur and the W.T. Grant foundations also provided funding to the New Standards Project.

⁴⁸ AAAS sought private funding for the production of *Science for All Americans* as it felt that it was not appropriate for the government or for the business community to support decisions about what all students should learn.

⁴⁹ Other funders of Benchmarks include the IBM Corporation, the National Science Foundation, the U.S. Department of Education, and four state education agencies—California, Georgia, Texas and Wisconsin. AAAS has received significant philanthropic funding for other components of its work; Carnegie, for example, provided additional funding to AAAS to support the evaluation of math and science curriculum materials for middle and high schools.

⁵⁰ Interviews with staff of the National Middle School Association and the National Forum to Accelerate Middle Grades Reform.

FINDING #6: The success of middle grades reform investments was appreciably affected by the local context for these investments; where the work occurred became critical to its shape and direction as well as to the outcomes it engendered.

Reformers have learned, not always easily, that context rules. A reform approach that works effectively in one school or district may fail in another. For example, Clark invested in several districts yet the specific circumstances in each determined if efforts at reform would take. The experience of middle grades reform in two neighboring states—both of which received considerable philanthropic funding—casts light on the centrality of context.

In 1989, when *Turning Points* was released, Illinois' association of middle grades educators—the Association of Illinois Middle Schools (AIMS)—was a small organization that seemed to be facing an inauspicious future. Founded in 1976, AIMS had had a shaky start. It had a dedicated and enthusiastic membership but not much money, visibility, or influence. It did not hold its first professional development institute until 1986, when it also began publishing a journal. The state's superintendent refused to meet with AIMS and, in early 1989, its bank account stood at about \$4,000. AIMS' staff was undeterred and worked hard to develop programs that would interest its members and attract support.

Their hard work paid off in early 1989, when AIMS was awarded a \$500,000 grant from the U.S. Department of Education to support the establishment of a network of middle grades schools. Through the network, effective middle grades schools would partner with struggling schools and mentor them, sharing information and providing onsite assistance. In addition, AIMS would offer various professional development opportunities to network members.

The award from the U.S. Department of Education preceded by only a few months the release of the Carnegie Corporation's report,

Turning Points. AIMS capitalized on *Turning Points*, seeing in it a powerful and clearly drawn vision for what middle grades education could and should be. The organization sent hundreds of copies to its members and, when published copies were not available, distributed photocopies of it. AIMS staff report that many educators seized upon the report and began, on their own, trying to develop strategies to become the schools that *Turning Points* promoted. With federal funds bolstering the organizational capacity of its middle grades association and cohorts of middle grades educators eager for change, Illinois now required leadership to push the reform agenda.

In the spring of 1989, a new state superintendent was appointed in Illinois. Within weeks of his appointment, he participated in an annual institute for state superintendents run by the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO). At the time, CCSSO was working with Carnegie to help provide oversight and technical assistance to what would become the Corporation's Middle Grades Schools State Policy Initiative (MGSSPI). As a result, CCSSO staff were familiar with *Turning Points* and decided that the focus of the institute would be middle grades reform. Energized by the institute, the new superintendent sought AIMS' assistance. He wanted Illinois to participate in MGSSPI, and AIMS had the knowledge and infrastructure to help make that possible. AIMS worked closely with the superintendent's staff to develop a proposal for MGSSPI, and Illinois was one of the 22 states selected to receive an initial MGSSPI planning grant as well as being one of 15 states later selected to receive MGSSPI funds to implement its reform plan.



Although not required to by Carnegie, the state superintendent established the Division of Middle Grades Education and named a director who was to be an internal advocate for middle grades. The work at the state level progressed somewhat slowly until 1995, when a new director for middle grades was appointed. He embraced the role of middle grades advocate and believed it was his responsibility to determine how any proposed policy or practice—regardless of whether or not it was explicitly directed toward them—would affect middle grades. He promoted middle grades certification for teachers (which is currently under review by the Illinois State Board of Education), and made it a practice to reach outside the department for help. He viewed AIMS as a valuable resource and key partner and helped win state funding for AIMS to support a variety of professional development initiatives. Today, two of the National Forum’s Schools to Watch, schools that exemplify the middle grades vision, are located in Illinois.

While AIMS staff and other supporters of education reform readily acknowledge that considerable work remains to be done to reform middle grades in Illinois, significant progress has been made, and Carnegie has been instrumental in that progress. The Corporation’s work blossomed in large part because of the context in which it was undertaken—one shaped by the commitment of AIMS and the presence of an interested and supportive state superintendent.

Illinois’ neighbor to the east, Indiana, has had a different experience in middle grades reform. It too has seen progress, in large part because of Lilly’s investment, supplemented briefly by Carnegie, but its accomplishments appear to be less even and more tenuous than what has been achieved in Illinois. The environment in Indiana, dramatically different from that of Illinois, hampered momentum for change.

Reformers have learned, not always easily, that context rules. A reform approach that works effectively in one school or district may fail in another.

Lilly’s initial efforts charted new territory in rugged terrain. Its work predated *Turning Points* as well as many of the seminal moments in the standards movement that helped to push middle grades reform in later years.⁵¹ The transition from junior highs to middle schools, proceeding with great vigor in many parts of the country, moved at glacial pace in Indiana; even now, there are many districts that refuse to make the transition.⁵²

There was, as well, virtually no infrastructure in the state to support middle grades reform. The Indiana Middle Level Educators Association (IMLEA), then bearing a different name, had virtually no presence in the state; its membership at the time totaled 40. There was little knowledge about or interest in middle grades reform, and most district leaders had none or only cursory knowledge of the middle grades concept. Indiana also has a tradition of insularity and resistance to change. IMLEA staff notes that educators in Indiana rarely look outside the boundaries of their own districts, much less the state, for new ideas and new practices.

⁵¹ These developments include the adoption in 1989 of the National Education Goals by then-President Bush and the nation’s 50 governors and the release of the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics report, *Curriculum and Evaluation Standards for School Mathematics*, which triggered the development of content standards in other content areas.

⁵² The current director of IMLEA reports that many districts are resistant to middle schools. She is careful to not use the term “middle school” but speaks instead about middle level education and how it can be improved. District and community leaders appear more amenable to change when it is presented in this manner.

While the heart of its work was cultivating meaningful reform in middle grades at the school and district level, Lilly—as its Middle Grades Improvement Program progressed and its staff learned from the experiences of school and district grantees—also sought to seed and nurture an infrastructure that could promote and sustain reform. One strategy for doing so was investments in building the capacity of IMLEA—underwriting memberships, helping launch its annual conference and establishing a summer institute that provided intensive professional development. It also established the Middle Grades Improvement Project (MGIP) Network, a consortium of its grantee schools and districts, which became a vital resource for educators. Encouraged by the work begun by Lilly, Carnegie included Indiana among the 22 states that received initial MGSSPI funding.

Gains were made as a result of the work of these funders. The state established the Indiana Middle Level Task Force, which surveyed the status of middle grades education in the state and prepared a report, *Betwixt and Between*, on its findings; the report also contained recommendations, drawn from *Turning Points*, on restructuring middle grades in Indiana. Carnegie also supported the creation of the Indiana Higher Education Network for Middle Level Educators, a network of faculty from schools of education around the state who came together to learn about middle grades reform and examine teacher preparation in light of it. Lilly, finding many dynamic and committed educators eager to learn, observed that there were promising gains in many of the MGIP schools. IMLEA was growing and taking on a more active role as an advocate and resource for middle grades educators.

These gains, however, proved to be difficult to sustain and the exciting progress Lilly saw in schools and districts were not matched in its attempts to build a stable infrastructure. The state never made middle grades reform a priority

despite the resources and attention both foundations devoted to it; any attention the middle grades received at the state level was dependent on the interest and perseverance of individuals in the department. As progress stalled, Carnegie stopped funding the Task Force or the Network for Middle Level Educators, which did not survive. The MGIP Network did not outlast the MGIP initiative. IMLEA, so vital for a time, has not found funding to replace that of Lilly. It continues to be a critical resource to middle grades educators but its growth has hit a plateau and its influence among policymakers is unclear. Despite IMLEA's vigorous advocacy, the Indiana Board of Education recently chose not to establish a middle grades certification requirement.

The efforts of both Carnegie and Lilly to create an infrastructure could not overcome a context that proved to be stubbornly resistant to change. Creating an infrastructure to support meaningful middle grades reform, however, may not have been a fair expectation, particularly in Lilly's case. It should be noted that the Endowment's efforts to build an infrastructure come late in the MGIP initiative and that the priority of MGIP was, throughout its duration, school- and district-level change.



FINDING #7: In establishing a field of middle grades reform, funders strengthened, created, and maintained a variety of organizations whose effectiveness will be crucial to sustaining philanthropic efforts at middle grades reform.

When the core funders began their work in middle grades, expertise in both early adolescence and in systemic reform was limited. Yet each funder understood from the outset that schools and districts did not have the capacity to undertake transformative change without outside assistance.

To bridge this gap, funders strengthened existing organizations and, where needed, created new ones. Many of the organizations funders worked with were general reform organizations, working across the K-12 continuum.

Lilly initially had virtually no external organizations in Indiana on which it could rely to support schools. As discussed above, it set about reviving the rapidly fading middle grades educators association, which gave the middle grades movement in Indiana a needed boost. Lilly also turned to assistance from individuals and organizations outside of Indiana. It relied on a coterie of highly regarded consultants, most of whom were from the East Coast, to provide sustained support to individual schools.

The Endowment also worked closely with the Education Development Center (EDC), a national nonprofit research organization based in Massachusetts with extensive experience in professional development, curriculum development, and school reform. It engaged EDC to help focus reform efforts on improving instruction, frequently the most difficult aspect of reform. EDC worked intensively with teams of teachers from across Indiana to help them create inquiry-based curriculum units that integrated at least two subject areas.

Lilly's expectations of EDC, however, surpassed its goal of meeting an urgent and specific need of schools. The Endowment also hoped that EDC

would evolve into an organization that possessed deep knowledge of middle grades education and that could provide comprehensive support to schools and districts pursuing middle grades reform.⁵³ Helping EDC grow in this manner took on greater significance because the Center for Early Adolescence was no longer functioning. Its end thus meant that there were no national organizations dedicated to middle grades education that funders could turn to for support for schools and districts pursuing reform. The Endowment hoped that EDC would fill this void. To a great extent, EDC has done so, playing a critical role in the development and support of the National Forum to Accelerate Middle Grades Reform and securing a federal Comprehensive School Reform Demonstration award for work in the middle grades.

The Kellogg Foundation was deliberate and thoughtful from the outset in building organizations that could support reform. Central Michigan University (CMU), for example, has been one of the key partners in the Middle Start Partnership. Through its participation in the Partnership and with funding from Kellogg, CMU established a pre-service middle grades endorsement program as well as a masters degree program in middle grades education; few other universities in the state offer programs in middle education as the state does not require specific middle grades certification.⁵⁴ In addition, CMU, as a technical assistance

⁵³ Nancy L. Ames and Edward Miller, *Changing Middle Schools: How to Make Schools Work for Young Adolescents*. Jossey-Bass: San Francisco. 1994.

⁵⁴ Rarely will schools of education develop programs without being required to do so by the state. When the Association of Illinois Middle Level Schools (AIMS) held a meeting several years ago on teacher preparation for middle grades, two universities sent representatives. This past year, following the recommendation of the Division of Professional Preparation to the Illinois State Board of Education that the Board establish a middle grades certification requirement, AIMS held a similar meeting, which was attended by all but two of the colleges and universities in the state. The William Penn Foundation observed the same behavior in Pennsylvania.

provider to Middle Start schools, has developed expertise in multiple issues of middle grades reform. As required by Kellogg as a condition of its support, these programs are now part of CMU's core activities and will continue beyond the Foundation's funding of Middle Start.

Kellogg also enhanced the ability of other organizations to undertake or assist middle grades reform in other, less direct ways. This is exemplified by its relationship with the Academy for Educational Development (AED). AED is a well-regarded, independent, nonprofit organization that provides critical analysis of and crafts strategies to address complex social problems including improving public education. It worked closely with Foundation staff to develop Middle Start, and, funded by Kellogg, AED has monitored, coordinated, and provided assistance to Middle Start. Its work with Middle Start has enhanced AED's knowledge of middle grades and provided it with tools it has been able to use in other settings.

Early in its work with Middle Start schools, AED staff quickly realized that the schools needed to assess their efforts to improve teaching and learning in ways other than test scores or the bi-annual Self Study. Drawing on research done in Great Britain and in New York, AED developed the School Self Assessment (SSA) initiative. SSA is more than an evaluation procedure that schools submit to; it is a process by which schools learn how to undertake a comprehensive and meaningful assessment of their work in the context of their goals for student learning. AED helped several middle schools in Michigan to implement SSA. Some of these schools were Middle Start grantees of Kellogg but most were not although they had participated in the Middle Start Self Study.

The SSA initiative, which grew out of a need identified in the Middle Start schools, has become part of AED's broader education reform work.

Many of the organizations funders worked with were general reform organizations, working across the K-12 continuum.

AED was funded, for example, by the Wallace-Reader's Digest Funds to assist five middle schools in Philadelphia, PA, and Plain Field, NJ, in learning how to engage in a continuous and comprehensive review of student work in ways that inform instruction. AED's knowledge about and its capacity to support meaningful reform have been enhanced because of its work with Middle Start.

The use of local intermediaries is not limited to the four core funders; the William Penn Foundation is collaborating with the Philadelphia Education Fund on a model of teacher preparation for three middle schools.

Supporting research was a central component of funders' efforts to build knowledge about young adolescents and middle grades reform; this research, in turn, provided new opportunities for the organizations undertaking it to support education reform. The Center for Research on the Education of Students At Risk (CRESPAR) at Johns Hopkins University, which created the Talent Development Middle School model to help reform middle grades education in Philadelphia, has drawn on its findings to construct a Talent Development High School model. Beyond this, CRESPAR is one of seven organizations awarded funding by the U.S. Department of Education for the Comprehensive School Reform Demonstration project to take its middle grades beyond Philadelphia.



It is difficult to trace all of the ways in which the array of intermediary organizations may have affected middle grades reform as well as K-12 reform. These organizations move within multiple circles of education reformers, their work is iterative, and the knowledge that results from it may not lead to sequential “next steps” but may ripple out in multiple and unanticipated directions.

What is clear is that the middle grades vision is permeating other facets of education reform. The National Commission on Teaching and America’s Future, for example, calls for schools in which time and staffing have been restructured “so that teachers have regular time to work with one another and share responsibility for groups of students,” schedules have been reorganized “so that students and teachers have more extended time together,” and barriers to parental involvement reduced.⁵⁵ The Institute for Research and Reform in Education (IRRE), a Kauffman Foundation grantee as well as a recipient of a CSRD award, has created a comprehensive reform model that calls for schools to be reconfigured as small learning communities in which teachers work collaboratively and build stronger relationships with students. IRRE is working with the Kansas City, KS, school district and, with CSRD funds, is working with additional schools and districts in several other states. The lessons of middle grades reform enhance the knowledge and abilities of the external or reform support organizations funders have engaged and, in so doing, appear to inform broader conversations about improving public education.

These “pre-existing” organizations are not, however, the only ones carrying the middle grades message. While foundations dedicated considerable funding to existing organizations, they also created new ones. Carnegie, for example, helped establish the Rhode Island Middle Level Educators Network, a professional association for middle grades educators and schools.

Clark supported the creation of the Community Accountability Team (CAT) in Louisville, a community-based organization that sought to monitor the reform effort in the district and report on its progress. Support for CAT was an effort to develop capacity outside the school system that would equip citizens to demand effective reform.⁵⁶

Perhaps most important for the continuation of the middle grades field was the establishment of the National Forum, which would not exist without the foresight and support of funders. When creating it in 1997, its founders were deliberate in convening a diverse group of funders, practitioners, researchers, advocates, and others committed to middle grades reform. This diversity in membership has helped to ensure that the various perspectives and needs of those who work in and support middle grades are addressed. As discussed above, the Forum has provided leadership to the middle grades field and proven to be a vital resource for reliable information.

⁵⁵ National Commission on Teaching and America’s Future. *What Matters Most: Teaching for America’s Future*. NCTAF: September 1996. In its restructuring of schools, the Commission envisions teams of teachers working collaboratively.

⁵⁶ For further information about Clark’s experience with the CAT, see Lewis, Anne C. *The Community Accountability Team in Louisville: Waking a Sleeping Giant*. Edna McConnell Clark Foundation. August 2002.

FINDING #8: Funders relied extensively on data in making decisions about middle grades reform and made evaluation a central part of their work.

Middle grades funders recognized that collecting and analyzing meaningful data would assist their grantees in making strategic decisions about almost every facet of reform, including instruction, resources, professional development, and parental engagement. It would also help funders understand grantees' progress and hold them accountable for it.

The Kellogg Foundation's emphasis on Self Study demonstrates funders' embrace of assessment and its expectation that schools and districts would use data to drive their reform work. The Self Study was developed by the Association of Illinois Middle Schools (AIMS), a grantee of Carnegie, and the Center for Prevention Research and Development (CPRD) at the University of Illinois. Like the Middle Grades Assessment Program (MGAP), which came before it and which Lilly encouraged its grantees to utilize, the Self-Study is a comprehensive tool schools can use to assess their practices, policies and environment.

Self Study stretches beyond a narrow focus on test scores to consider qualitative issues that affect the interactions between teachers and students—the heart of the learning process and of middle grades reform. The Self Study is comprised of three surveys—one for administrators, one for teachers and one for students—which pose questions across multiple areas, including classroom and curriculum practices, instructional integration, teacher preparation and staff development needs assessment, and decision-making practices.⁵⁷

The impetus for this tool came from AIMS. AIMS had quickly adopted the *Turning Points* recommendations after their release and promoted their implementation in Illinois through its network of middle grades schools. Staff members soon realized that schools

needed an assessment mechanism that would enable schools to understand where they were at the outset of reform and to then develop reform strategies that built on their particular strengths and responded to their weaknesses. Ongoing assessment would also help them gauge their progress, identify problems, and refine strategies.

A second purpose for a comprehensive assessment mechanism was AIMS' need for evidence that the *Turning Points* recommendations worked—that made a difference in schools, with teachers, and for students. The *Turning Points* findings and recommendations infused the work of its network schools and influenced the professional development experiences AIMS designed and offered. While some principals and superintendents needed little urging to join the network or participate in professional development, most needed significant encouragement; accustomed to managing professional development internally, they needed proof that implementing the policies, practices, and structures that *Turning Points* called for would lead to real gains. Assessment provided that proof. AIMS staff also understood that funders would require evidence of success if they were to continue to provide funds to implement the middle school model.

Long-term results from the assessment demonstrated that implementation of the *Turning Points* recommendations had a positive effect on schools. While the Carnegie Corporation had not initially funded the Self Study, it later did so, as did the Lilly Endowment. So greatly did the Corporation come to value the Self Study that it is now an integral component of the *Turning Points* model for whole school reform. Beyond its utility for individual schools, Carnegie funded research at CPRD that drew

on aggregated results from the Self Study to gain a better understanding of the progress and the pitfalls of middle grades reform.

Carnegie was not alone in its reliance on data and the use of the Self Study. Kellogg made it a key component of its middle grades program. In Middle Start, the Self Study is a critical tool to drive reform in the individual schools. It has also been a lever for wide-scale reform. No foundation could support reform in every middle grades school in a state but, in offering the Self Study to all schools that served middle grades in Michigan, Kellogg provided those that wished it a powerful tool to pursue reform. The Foundation also saw the Self Study as a means to influence policy. Self Study results, viewed in aggregate, presented a far more detailed picture of the state of middle grades education in Michigan than had ever been offered before and were disseminated to policy-makers, educators, and other stakeholders.

The Self Study remains the connective core of the Foundation for the Mid South's Middle Start initiative and, as a result, is being used by middle grades schools across Arkansas, Louisiana, and Mississippi. In addition, the Kauffman Foundation, in considering a middle grades reform effort, used the Self Study in the metropolitan Kansas City area to help the schools as well as the Foundation gain a better understanding of needs, strengths, and priorities for middle grades.

Funders also used data collection and analysis as a means to gauge grantees' progress and to hold grantees them accountable for it. Not only did they make regular site visits and require grantees to submit reports, they engaged external organizations to undertake comprehensive reviews of work in schools and districts. Clark worked with several external organizations to conduct various types of evaluations.

Some evaluations focused on quantitative outcomes while others delved into qualitative

issues. Clark funded Education Matters, a nonprofit, education research firm, to conduct annual, in-depth reviews of its grantees. Education Matters staff made numerous site visits, meeting with teachers and administrators and spending extensive time observing classrooms, professional development opportunities, and other reform-related activities. The results of these endeavors were detailed reports on what was happening in districts, from the central office to the classroom. Taken with quantitative reports, they presented a comprehensive view of progress. The reports, which Clark shared with its grantees, enabled the Foundation to not only understand the reform process in each district but also to ask critical questions to trigger reflection or prod educators to take essential steps to continue reform.



⁵⁷ There is as well an optional survey for parents.

FINDING #9: Despite significant communication and cooperation among middle grades funders, there has not been widespread philanthropic investment in comprehensive implementation of the middle grades concept nor has there been extensive programmatic collaboration among the funders.

Middle grades funders, to a degree that may be unprecedented within the philanthropic community, have devoted considerable time and energy to sharing their experiences and knowledge with one another. This communication has flourished informally since the core funders began their work 15 years ago; it continues today and it includes the spectrum of funders that have invested in all facets of middle grades reform. Staff members from the Foundation for the Mid South and the Kauffman Foundation speak of learning from Kellogg, where Leah Meyer Austin, in turn, drew on the insights of Joan Lipsitz' work at Lilly. Jill Ryan, the director of the Nesholm Family Foundation's middle grades initiative, notes the willingness of Anthony Jackson and Hayes Mizell to offer advice and act as a sounding board.

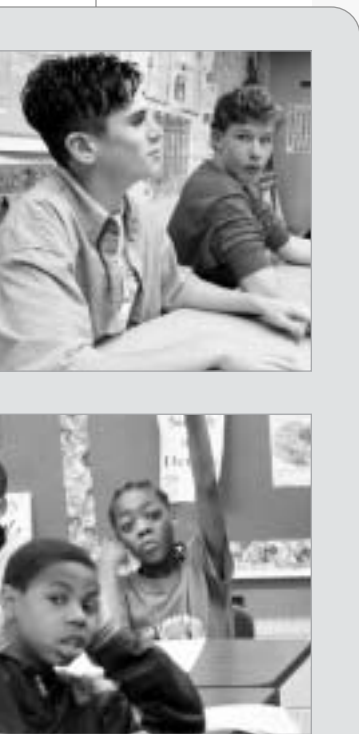
These types of exchanges led to and are sustained by the National Forum to Accelerate Middle Grades Reform, which is, itself, evidence of cooperation and ongoing informal collaboration among funders. Under the Forum's auspices, the program officers of the four core funders prepared and disseminated a manifesto on middle grades reform, *Speaking with One Voice*. The manifesto was the result of a unique joint effort in which the four program officers frankly discussed the challenges of middle grades reform at each level—school, district and state—and laid out a shared vision for what middle grades education can and should be for every student. These kinds of interactions and collaborative work have been a sustaining force among funders and others interested in middle grades reform.⁵⁸

There have, in addition, been a few examples of formal collaboration among funders. For instance, Kellogg and Carnegie have worked together to support Success for All, many funders

at one time supported the National Forum, and Lilly and Carnegie worked in Indiana, Carnegie having seen an opportunity to promote change brought about in large part due to Lilly's work. These instances are the exceptions to a course of conduct that has not embraced formal and regular institutional collaboration. Funders have not chosen to align their resources around a shared strategy for or theory of change about middle grades reform. Foundations for a variety of reasons—including differences in culture, tradition, beliefs, and goals, which are set by boards and driven at least in part by a desire to be unique—have not yet collaborated in such a manner.

Nor has another major funder yet joined the core four funders and established a grantmaking program dedicated to implementation of the middle grades concept. Many funders have supported elements of it, and several have embraced it in work with one or a handful of schools. Since 1994, however, when the Kellogg Foundation created Middle Start, no funder of national scope has joined the effort to implement middle grades reform.

The reasons for why other national grantmakers have not adopted a focus of middle school reform vary. Funders looking for an issue might prefer to plow new fields, and there are many pressing education reform issues that could benefit greatly from philanthropic attention. Furthermore, by the mid-1990s funders, like other stakeholders were focused on standards-based reform. There was also a push for broader reform spanning a K-12 or even a P-16 continuum. Against this backdrop, some funders may have viewed an emphasis on middle grades reform as too narrow. Finally, there is the continuing reality that, even as the middle grades



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have attracted more recognition, they remain overshadowed by the attention paid to early childhood and elementary education and the increased focus on high schools.

⁵⁸As has been pointed out throughout this report, however, representatives of the four major funders came together frequently to consider and share strategies, lessons learned, and challenges.

Achieving Adolescence: Philanthropy and the Future of Middle Grades Reform

Philanthropic investment in the systemic reform of middle grades education is now in its fifteenth year, a moment that traditionally signals the end of early adolescence. Like the parents of similarly aged students, funders who have nurtured the middle grades may rightfully breathe a small sigh of relief while wondering about the uncertainty of what's to come.

Middle grades reform is still maturing and, while its development has in some ways met or surpassed expectations, it has also suffered disappointments and will continue to face significant challenges before it is fully formed. These challenges, as we discuss below, provide continuing opportunities for philanthropy.

By the end of 2003, the last of the four major funders of the middle grades will have made its final grant as a leader of the reform effort. Yet even then it will be premature to think of these investments in the past tense. Philanthropic support of the middle grades—not only from Carnegie, Clark, Kellogg, and Lilly but also from the score or more of funders considered in this report—was about more than funding discrete activities. Funders invested in a process of exploring new approaches to persistent issues, developing and implementing innovative ideas, and reflecting on results and sharing what they did and learned. The results of their investments cannot now be finally tallied and their effects will not be fully known for years to come.

At this juncture, we know that significant gains have been made:

- Many more educators in states, districts, and schools now understand, and act on the understanding, that early adolescents are capable of rigorous learning.
- There is ample and growing evidence of curricula that have been created to foster this learning.
- Educators and observers in many places have embraced the middle grades as a time when academic success can go hand in hand

with appropriate consideration of developmental needs.

- Racial minorities, newcomers, and non-English speakers are no longer ignored.
- There is significantly more emphasis on the qualifications and the capacities of those who teach 10-15 year olds.
- There is stronger appreciation for the role of families and communities in promoting student success.
- Some, but by no means all, places where funders have promoted reform are showing gains in student performance.

Investments in the middle grades have also taught much about how philanthropy can foster education reform—insisting on evaluation and relying on data, building networks, creating and supporting intermediary organizations, and developing targeted strategies for dissemination. We know how important the passion, commitment, and expertise of foundation staff is to the success of an initiative, but we have also learned that, without a powerful and abiding institutional commitment, the dedication and leadership of one person can only go so far.

Philanthropic involvement in middle grades reform has reinforced the often painful truths that reform comes incrementally and that its pace is neither steady nor sure. Governing boards of many of the funders treated in this report recognized this and, for the most part, responded with significant gifts of time to their staffs and to their grantees. Their understanding that long-term reform means years and that years can soon grow into a decade or more provided opportunity for funders to help fashion a coherent field of middle grades reform that has the capacity, if appropriately cultivated, to sustain and build on what has been accomplished.

Despite these and other successes as well as the potential for more, funders of middle grades reform initiatives are frustrated by the absence



of widespread improvements in student performance on standardized tests. Philanthropic frustration about student achievement is not limited to those who support the middle grades; it is an issue that confronts all those who invest in systemic improvement in education. For funders, it raises a question of how long is long enough. In middle grades reform, one answer may be that previous investments have led to real gains that have set the stage for further development; long-term systemic support of schools and districts may now give way to more targeted investments that seek strategically to build on what has been accomplished. These strategies are important for the continuation of middle grades reform; they are also critical to adding to what is known about education reform generally.

The gains that have been made as a result of long-term investments in the middle grades require additional nurturing to be sustained. It is an open question if this will occur—building on the work of others, even if it involves new approaches, has not traditionally attracted funders, who prefer to seize on emerging issues, help define them, and devote resources to promoting and testing innovations to address them. Some funders, however, may see new major investments in the middle grades as a chance to pioneer in a deeper exploration of territory that has not been fully charted; others may view these investments as an opportunity to further education reform by focusing on areas where there has been progress.

NEXT STEPS

Should funders choose to do so, significant opportunities exist to expand the development of the field of middle grades reform and, in the process, make discrete and substantive contributions to education reform.

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Maintaining the Middle Grades Vision

One such opportunity is to ensure that the balanced approach to early adolescence, which is central to the middle grades vision, is maintained. For almost two decades, a core group of funders and their allies fought to instill an understanding that the healthy development of 10-15 year-old students required a commitment to rigorous learning, a responsiveness to social and emotional growth, and a dedication to equity. This balance must be maintained, an increasingly difficult task for those concerned about middle grades in an era of standards and high-stakes testing.

Through their work, some middle grades funders and their philanthropic colleagues came to see standards and their attendant accountability measures as a powerful mechanism to improving learning. Today, however, national and state focus on standards and accountability as measured by standardized tests threatens to skew what happens in the classroom away from efforts to foster appropriate social and emotional development in a context that is sensitive to the growing diversity among students and the very different circumstances of their families. Additional research, particularly longitudinal surveys, on the education of early adolescents is needed that will yield useful data. Strategies to disseminate data are required, along with demonstrations that test the research findings.

Creating Challenging Curricula

Promoting learning in the middle grades requires developing and presenting challenging course work. There have been significant investments in mathematics and science education in the middle grades, which are yielding positive results for students. There is, as well, growing attention being paid to literacy and to the humanities, including history and the social sciences. These hard-won gains in an area long bereft of challenging curricula should not be allowed to slip away.

Investments in enrichment areas are also important. These areas—arts and culture prominent among them—are threatened by budget cuts and by an increasing emphasis on teaching for tests, which often means replacing art and music classes with additional test preparation to meet accountability goals.

Strengthening Teacher Quality

Teacher quality remains a compelling issue throughout education, but it has special urgency for the middle grades, which in many places is still characterized by large numbers of teachers trained for and eager to transfer to elementary school positions. The result, as a recent study demonstrated, is large numbers of unprepared middle grades teachers. For example, 68 percent of middle grades math teachers have neither a major or certification in mathematics and 22 percent do not even have a minor in mathematics.⁵⁹

Funders have made preliminary forays into teacher preparation programs, both in schools of education and among nontraditional providers, around issues that are specific to the middle grades; they have also begun to explore appropriate incentives to encourage interested and qualified students to pursue careers as middle grades teachers. Much more remains to be done on both fronts. There remains as well a great need to import successful professional development models for incumbent middle grades teachers into schools and districts.

In many schools and districts and across many universities, these changes in teacher preparation and development will not occur without changes in states' expectations. Encouraging states to do so—to raise their expectations of teachers—is critical. The movement to require certification for middle grades' teachers has led to changes in some states; replication in the remaining states will do much to increase the cohort of capable and caring teachers for early adolescents.



Building Bridges

Potential funders of middle grades reform should operate with an awareness of developments that may have direct bearing on the middle grades. Many middle schools are relatively large institutions, and the problems these remote and impersonal schools raise for early adolescents are well documented. Connecting the small schools movement, which spans K-12, to middle grades reform would provide new opportunities for student development and powerful evidence of the impact that the nurturing environment of small learning communities has on student learning.

Similar efforts might be made to promote synergies between current efforts to reform high schools with what has been learned from the middle grades experience. As efforts at high school reform continue, there will be opportunities to align curricula, to coordinate aspects of professional and leadership development, and to assess more deeply how the transition from one level to the other is proceeding and how it might be improved. Efforts to promote improved achievement in high schools, no matter how well designed and conscientiously implemented, are doomed if the middle grades provide ineffective preparation.

Beyond the programmatic, funders may wish to consider similarities in experience and how they might affect strategies for both high schools and the middle grades. For example, *Speaking with One Voice* was a manifesto that grew out of what funders were learning from systemic investments in middle grades reform. Aspects of the document have direct bearing on other levels of schooling. Drawing on it and on the reflections of middle school funders in assessing the first wave of high school reform activities and in designing the next can potentially add new dimensions to the reform enterprise.

Fostering Change

Developing capacity to undertake reform involves more than direct investments in classrooms, schools, and districts. Middle grades funders were sensitive early on to the need to create and nurture intermediaries or reform support organizations. Some of these groups were national organizations, which brought technical assistance, monitoring, and other capabilities to sites. Others were local organizations that had, or developed, relationships with reforming schools or districts. Each type of organization supported reform by both pushing (providing assistance and support to) and pulling (making demands on) educators to pursue necessary change. Investing in the capacity of national and local reform support organizations to undertake specific efforts connected to middle school reform, including technical assistance, professional development, and monitoring will help keep educators on the path to reform and build community capacity to support it.

Sustaining Leadership

Among the plethora of organizations created and supported by the array of funders that invested in middle grades reform, the National Forum to Accelerate Middle Grades Reform has a special place. Composed of educators, funders, policymakers, representatives of associations and reform support organizations, and experts on early adolescence and middle grades education, the Forum is more than a place for discussion about the middle grades. Its diverse and committed membership has the will and capacity to develop and undertake efforts, in collaboration with other organizations and individuals, which can continue the process of transformation that its members endorse. The middle grades have traditionally suffered from a lack of

⁵⁹ U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics. *Qualifications of the Public School Teacher Workforce: Prevalence of Out-of-Field Teaching 1987-88 to 1999-2000*, NCES 2002-603, by Marilyn McMillen Seastrom, Kerry J. Gruber, Robin Henke, Daniel J. McGrath, and Benjamin A. Cohen. Washington, DC: 2002



informed advocates. The creation and maintenance of the Forum has, in part, filled this void. Funders interested in sustaining the middle school reform movement should look to the Forum for advice and capacity to conceive and implement specific projects.

All these areas offer funders strategic opportunities to sustain efforts at middle grades reform. If they wish to continue on this path, there are some lessons learned from the experience of middle grades funders that might help guide them. The first is that immersion in reform requires a well-thought out plan about what an initiative wishes to accomplish and how it will go about it. A central element of the plan is how it will respond to the messy business of school change—reforming education requires a theory of change that will enable the work to evolve in response to new learnings and supervening events. Superintendents leave, school boards change, state and federal education policies shift with often unanticipated consequences—these and other developments are sure to demand adjustments in funders’ approaches.

Capacity is critical for reform efforts to succeed. Capacity is not limited to members of the education community; funders must assess their own capacity. This includes human and financial resources but it also requires the ability to tolerate ambiguity, to invest for the long haul, to accommodate frustration, and to communicate effectively and strategically with different constituencies using diverse means. These constituencies include those within the foundation, where familiarity with the vicissitudes facing the reform enterprise may vary.

Funders have long ago learned the importance of assessment and use it assiduously with grantees. It is equally important for the funder to design and implement periodic assessments of its progress in meeting its own goals. Each of the four major supporters of middle grades

reform made major adjustments in its approach based on detailed scrutiny of what it was learning as the effort evolved.

Finally, ongoing collaboration should be explored in detail. While middle grade funders communicated honestly and extensively, formal institutional collaboration was limited. Philanthropies investing in high school reform seem to have learned from this, and there is greater evidence of institutionalized collaboration. In middle grades reform, collaboration can go beyond major national funders. There are substantial opportunities for work among national, regional, and local foundations, and collaboration with public funders who have adopted the middle grades vision and are investing in it should not be overlooked.

The middle grades reform movement has reached a crossroads in its continuing journey. A field has been built and structures created to sustain it. The intensive efforts and leadership of the philanthropic community have resulted in a coherent vision of reform, a body of knowledge about how to foster change, greater understanding of what works, demonstrable successes in the classroom, in schools, and in districts, and a critical mass of educators, researchers, practitioners, and policymakers who have embraced the challenge of drawing on the pioneering work of a group of funders so that the benefits of over almost two decades of effort continue to ripen.

Sustaining these accomplishments and promoting achievement for early adolescents requires a new generation of targeted investments.

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SUSIE DEHART
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MARTHA GRAHAM
J.P. Morgan Chase Foundation

TONI GREEN
Cargill Foundation

BARBARA HUNTER COX
Foundation for the Mid South

ANTHONY JACKSON
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SHARRON JARVIS
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National Staff Development Council

TONY LEWIS
Donnell-Kaye Foundation

JOAN LIPSITZ
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LEAH MEYER AUSTIN
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She has written on various aspects of education reform and philanthropy, is author of *Teaching Matters: Promoting Quality Instruction in East Baton Rouge Parish* for the Academic Distinction Fund; and is co-author of several publications including *Reforming Relationships: School Districts, External Organizations and Systemic Change* for the Annenberg Institute; *Framing the Field: Professional Development in Context* for the Finance Project; *Inspiring Leadership: A Philanthropic Partnership for Professional Development of Superintendents* for the BellSouth Foundation; and "Notes from the Field: Higher Education Desegregation in Mississippi," in *Chilling Admissions* for the Harvard University Civil Rights Project.

Ms. Handley earned her bachelor's degree from the University of Michigan and a master's degree in public policy from the University of Wisconsin-Madison.

The photos in this report are of students and educators from three Michigan middle schools: East in Ypsilanti, Holmes in Flint, and Parkside in Jackson. Grantmakers for Education is grateful to the W.K. Kellogg Foundation for sharing these photos. Grantmakers for Education also acknowledges and thanks the Edna McConnell Clark and Ewing Marion Kauffman foundations for their financial support of this research report.

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