



**POSITIONS**

# **GRADE CONFIGURATIONS**

## Middle Level Grade Configurations in New York State

As advocates for the highest quality Middle Level programs in New York State, we are often asked about the best grade level configurations for a Middle School building, and it is our firm position that while a small list of variables are important to consider, ANY grade configuration can work to create a quality Middle Level program.

It is much more important to ensure that a strong, developmentally appropriate educational program, with high collaboration among stakeholders and a firm commitment that the Essential Elements of Standards-Focused Middle Level Programs and Practices is in place, than to invest enormous time and energy to a change in grade level configuration.

Even so, let's examine some of the grade configuration factors that might influence a Middle Level student's experience:

1. **Transitions**—Moving from one school to another will introduce stress for a student and a family, and while stress is not necessarily a bad thing, we do well to minimize the number of school transitions for a PK-12 student when possible. It is well accepted to expect a transition from an Elementary to a Middle Level setting, and another from Middle Level to High School—so two building transitions are not too much to navigate. In general, the younger the student, the more stressful the transition. This may argue against a configuration like some one-grade buildings (a 9<sup>th</sup> grade academy, for example), or even a two-grade configuration like a 7-8 Middle School, where consecutive school years are either the “transition in” or “transition out” time.
2. **Organization and Structure**—Far more important than what's going on around a grade level in the building is how that grade level operates. It's the reason Organization and Structure is emphasized as one of the seven Essential Elements. Does the master schedule serve the Middle Level student, as opposed to the other way around? Can teams of professional teachers collaborate during the school day to oversee the educational and social-emotional experience of their students? Is the building safe for students while they explore the world around them and discover who they are in this vital time of their lives?

3. Implementation of the Essential Elements Across Grades 5-8 (or 9)—Wherever our Middle School students are, districts must ensure that the program is designed to meet their developmental needs, and to deliver on academic rigor paired with a “surround and support” approach to Social Emotional Learning. No grade configuration will stand in the way of success if the schools that serve their Middle Level students are committed to continual improvement in implementing the Essential Elements.