



## A VISION FOR MIDDLE-GRADES SCHOOLS

We, the members of the National Forum to Accelerate Middle-Grades Reform, believe that youth in the middle grades are capable of learning and achieving at high levels. We share a sense of urgency that high-performing schools with middle-grades become the norm, not the exception.

High-performing schools with middle grades are **academically excellent**. They challenge all students to use their minds well, providing them with the curriculum, instruction, assessment, support and time they need to meet rigorous academic standards. They recognize that early adolescence is characterized by dramatic cognitive growth, which enables students to think in more abstract and complex ways. The curriculum and extra-curricular programs in such schools are challenging and engaging, tapping young adolescents' boundless energy, interests, and curiosity. Students learn to understand important concepts, develop essential skills, and apply what they learn to real-world problems. Adults in these schools maintain a rich academic environment by working with colleagues in their schools and communities to deepen their own knowledge and improve their practice.

High-performing schools with middle grades are **developmentally responsive**. Such schools create small learning communities of adults and students in which stable, close, and mutually respectful relationships support all students' intellectual, ethical, and social growth. They provide comprehensive services to foster healthy physical and emotional development. Students have opportunities for both independent inquiry and learning in cooperation with others. They have time to be reflective and numerous opportunities to make decisions about their learning. Developmentally responsive schools involve families as partners in the education of their children. They welcome families, keep them well informed, help them develop their expectations and skills to support learning, and assure their participation in decision making. These schools are deeply rooted in their communities. Students have opportunities for active citizenship. They use the community as a classroom, and community members provide resources, connections, and active support.

High-performing schools with middle grades are **socially equitable**. They seek to keep their students' future options open. They have high expectations for all their students and are committed to helping each child produce work of high quality. These schools make sure that all students are in academically rigorous classes staffed by experienced and expertly prepared teachers. These teachers acknowledge and honor their students' histories and cultures. They work to educate every child well and to overcome systematic variation in resources and outcomes related to race, class, gender and ability. They engage their communities in supporting all students' learning and growth.

The National Forum to Accelerate Middle-Grades Reform represents educators, researchers, professional organizations, and foundations. We work with middle-level educators, policymakers, leaders in higher education, family and community members, and other stakeholders to identify and replicate successful practices, share resources, and create a coordinated movement for reform of middle-grades education.