

Study Reveals Common Routes To Successful Middle Schools In Georgia

In 2009, the Georgia Partnership for Excellence in Education presented research on successful high schools to compare and analyze the characteristics, practices, conditions, and programs of the identified schools. The schools in this study are referred to as “85/10 High Schools” because they:

1. Had a graduation rate of at least 85 percent in 2008
2. Increased the graduation rate by at least 10 percentage points over five years, 2004 – 2008
3. Sustained the 85 percent graduation rate and the 10 percent improvement through 2009

The Report raised questions. Specifically, what are the characteristics of successful middle schools that ultimately contribute to the success of our high schools?

In this new research, the GEORGIA PARTNERSHIP FOR EXCELLENCE IN EDUCATION asked these questions:

- Since the dropout process begins much earlier than students’ high school careers, what role do middle schools have in this progression?
- Do the successful middle schools with varying demographics have commonalities?
- How did they improve?
- To what do they attribute their success?
- Do elementary schools contribute to their accomplishments?
- Could other Georgia middle schools benefit from their strategies?
- Can state and local educational leaders learn from the analyses of these schools?

WHAT WE LEARNED... SELECTED FINDINGS

To determine the answers to these questions, the Partnership identified successful middle schools using predetermined criteria; compared and contrasted data; and analyzed the results. This research serves to increase our understanding of the qualities of successful middle schools to determine what characteristics, practices, programs and conditions are common among successful middle schools.

To select a representative sample of middle schools, the Partnership developed criteria for three categories:

- Consistently High Performing Middle Schools
- Rapidly Improved Middle Schools
- Feeder Middle Schools into 85/10 High Schools

SUCCESSFUL MIDDLE SCHOOLS IN THIS STUDY

- ★ Alton C. Crews Middle School (Gwinnett County)
- ★ Forest Park Middle School (Clayton County)
- ★ Fulton Science Academy (Fulton County)
- ★ Lindley Middle School (Cobb County)
- ★ Loganville Middle School (Walton County)
- ★ Lumpkin County Middle School (Lumpkin County)
- ★ Morrow Middle School (Clayton County)
- ★ Rising Starr Middle School (Fayette County)
- ★ Risley Early College Academy (Glynn County)
- ★ Riverwatch Middle School (Forsyth County)
- ★ Union County Middle School (Union County)
- ★ Washington-Wilkes Middle School (Wilkes County)

Once again, as with the 85/10 High Schools, the strategies for success varied. Nevertheless, the commonalities immediately rose to the surface:

- All of the schools have a caring culture of high expectations that focus on student learning and on the application of that learning to the world outside of school, career preparedness, and postsecondary readiness.
- The leaders insist upon a single-minded focus on a rigorous curriculum and mastery of curriculum standards by each student. Teachers and leaders are knowledgeable about the curriculum and employ a variety of effective instructional strategies.
- Students are assessed to determine the level of the mastery of standards, and the schools provide remediation to students who do not master the standards.
- Teachers and administrators work collaboratively to create and use tools, including professional learning, to ensure rigor and effective instruction in each classroom.
- These schools use data and continuous improvement processes in their shared decision-making structure to tackle and resolve barriers to student learning.

WHAT WE RECOMMEND FOR FUTURE STUDY

The successful middle schools in this research share uncompromising focus on educating all students at high levels. Nevertheless, the schools acknowledge they have additional work to do to prepare students. The recommendations include:

1. Identify potential dropouts more effectively.
2. Evaluate the fidelity of programs and interventions.
3. Analyze the ninth grade bulge of students.
4. Create research-based strategies for transitions of students from one level to the next.

TO READ THE FULL REPORT

The *Commonalities of Georgia's Successful Middle Schools* report aligns with the Georgia Partnership for Excellence in Education's purpose of providing systemic, replicable recommendations for change so that all students achieve academic excellence. To read the full report:

- Visit www.gpee.org for the *Commonalities of Georgia's Successful Middle Schools*.
- Visit www.gpee.org for the *Commonalities of Georgia's 85/10 High Schools*.
- Please contact the Georgia Partnership for Excellence in Education if you would like a presentation of the study findings to your school or organization.



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