

MIDDLE SCHOOL MATTERS INSTITUTE



Middle School Matters School Leadership Team Description and Checklists

Establishing a Middle School Matters (MSM) School Leadership Team facilitates successful implementation of research-based practices across a campus. The team should include a variety of positions and perspectives, including administrators, teachers, instructional coaches, counselors, data coordinators, parent liaisons, and others whose knowledge and skills are critical to school improvement efforts. Team members collaboratively develop the MSM implementation plans, manage action steps toward goals, track and measure progress, and ultimately, determine whether goals have been met and student outcomes have improved.

Forming a leadership team has several advantages. First, it creates a culture of collective leadership, which establishes the expectation that all staff members (not just the principal or a handful of individuals) play an active role in decision-making. It allows a principal to delegate tasks to those who possess specific expertise aligned with key initiative areas. This delegation, in turn, fosters motivation, encourages buy-in from the staff, and develops future leaders. Finally, sharing responsibilities among a leadership team promotes sustainability of efforts. In contrast, if all responsibilities remain with the principal and administrative changes occur (as they often do), the initiative may become disorganized, delayed, or halted altogether.

MSM School Leadership Team members should possess a few key characteristics:

- A focus on improving student outcomes
- Interpersonal skills
- Readiness for change
- Key knowledge of district efforts, school management, and research-based practices.

An effective MSM School Leadership Team includes individuals who fill a few key roles:



MIDDLE SCHOOL MATTERS MANAGER: Leads and coordinates overall MSM efforts, maintains timelines, and tracks goal progress



STUDENT SUPPORT FACILITATOR: Coordinates the development of a tiered system of supports that promotes increased attendance and positive behavior for all students and monitors early warning indicator data



DATA MANAGER: Supports the development of a streamlined data system and the use of data to drive instructional decisions

Delegating the management and coordination of specific implementation goals to the most qualified team member is an effective strategy. For instance, if a school develops a goal that involves training teachers to use a new vocabulary strategy with all students, the English language arts department head might be the best person to lead that effort. He or she would be responsible for writing action steps to ensure the goal is met and monitoring how well these steps were followed. Progress would be shared with the full MSM School Leadership Team during meetings.

Finally, district support and a district vertical team can be key assets when scaling up research-based practices. District support provides schools with information on flexibility (e.g., curriculum, schedules, staff), alignment with existing district initiatives and goals, guidance in data analysis, identification of needs, and available resources outside of the school. Likewise, convening a district vertical team will encourage the use of research-based principles and practices at the elementary and high school levels that ultimately enhance the success of middle grade students.

Descriptions of each role are presented on the next few pages, followed by **checklists** of recommended qualities or skills. School leaders may use these checklists to determine appropriate individuals for the MSM School Leadership Team.



MIDDLE SCHOOL MATTERS MANAGER

The MSM Manager leads and coordinates the MSM School Leadership Team and is pivotal to the overall success of the team and the school's efforts. He or she is responsible for understanding the range of resources available through the Middle School Matters Institute, leading the school through each phase of the MSM School Implementation Blueprint, and monitoring the progress of the school. Progress monitoring begins with baseline data generated from the MSM School Readiness Assessment and continues through quarterly reviews of data collected to track goals established in the implementation plans. Throughout implementation, the MSM Manager leads team meetings and problem-solving processes and acts as the prime contact with the school's MSM Coach at the Middle School Matters Institute.¹

The MSM Manager should possess good working knowledge of the MSM Field Guide. He or she should also skillfully engage with team members and enjoy the loyalty of team members and the support of supervisors. He or she should be organized and efficient so that implementation efforts occur according to established timelines.



STUDENT SUPPORT FACILITATOR

The Student Support Facilitator builds meaningful and trusting relationships with the most at-risk students, offers and provides support to students and families, and assists students in setting and monitoring specific program goals.

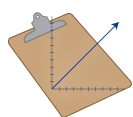
Research documented in the MSM Field Guide has shown that the support and guidance of a student support advocate, combined with the social, emotional, and behavioral learning strategies taught by campus leaders and teachers, greatly benefit middle grade students in their attempt to stay on track, graduate, and become college and career ready. The school counselor or psychologist may fill this role most easily. If a school counselor is not available, teachers can share some of this responsibility by allocating time to work with a consistent group of students each week.

Specific responsibilities of the Student Support Facilitator include the following:

- ✓ Assist the Data Manager with the development of an early warning indicator system
- ✓ Develop a tiered system of interventions that meets the various social, emotional, and behavioral needs of students—these interventions should focus on increasing the attendance and positive behavior of all students
- ✓ Use data to assign appropriate interventions to students
- ✓ Ensure that student support interventions and practices align with research, implementation goals, and available resources—the Student Support Facilitator should monitor implementation to ensure that interventions are provided with fidelity and improve student outcomes

¹ An MSM Coach is available to all schools that participate in the PD on Demand Support Network (www.middleschoolinstitute.org/pd).

- ✓ Lead schoolwide professional development related to student support interventions (e.g., schoolwide discipline model)
- ✓ Work with community agencies to determine low-cost resources available for use during the school day (e.g., tutors, mentors, specialized services for highly at-risk students) and for referral of parents and students for additional support outside of school (e.g., healthcare, nutrition, counseling)
- ✓ Support teachers and school leaders—the Student Support Facilitator should observe classes, share observations about possible antecedents to specific student behavior, provide alternative management strategies and other nonacademic suggestions to improve student outcomes, and develop or reinforce a systematic process for collecting and analyzing student misconduct referrals



DATA MANAGER

A Data Manager possesses a strong understanding of available school data and their potential use in monitoring progress toward implementation goals. The Data Manager provides a systematic way for teachers to use data to inform instructional decisions and a streamlined process for all educators to access the data they need to monitor progress and make decisions.

The Data Manager increases teacher capacity to use data to identify student needs and develop appropriate action plans. This capacity building can occur through monthly meetings with teachers to discuss student performance data, identify trends, and consider appropriate responses. By modeling how to use data to gauge progress toward learning goals and make instructional decisions, data facilitators can help teachers feel more confident in their own abilities as they develop a better appreciation of the value of using data to manage student performance.

A school's data should include more than just annual achievement data. Data should also include benchmark or interim assessments, demographic data, attendance and behavior data, course performance data, and perception data from surveys. The Data Manager may need to work with district administration and instructional technology staff members to ensure that teachers and the MSM School Leadership Team can access data.

The Performance Management content dimension, detailed in the MSM Field Guide, provides research-based practices the Data Manager can use to facilitate effective data collection, management, and use.

DISTRICT SUPPORT AND DISTRICT VERTICAL TEAM

A district vertical team that meets quarterly can also be helpful when middle schools use the MSM Field Guide to improve student outcomes. The team can include leaders from feeder elementary schools and the high schools that the middle grade students typically go on to attend. It can also include representatives from the district administration, such as curriculum coordinators, and other leaders, such as the associate superintendent or superintendent. The quarterly meeting provides the opportunity for the MSM Manager and other members of the MSM School Leadership Team to share their school improvement efforts and progress in using the MSM Field Guide.

The highlights shared at team meetings provide concrete descriptions of the types of activities elementary students and their parents can look forward to when they move up into the middle grades. The achievement gains and other improved student outcomes (attendance, behavior) are important information for high schools to ensure that students have a rigorous program available when they graduate from the middle grades.

Sharing research-based principles and practices that work in the middle grades also encourages the use of research-based principles and practices at the elementary and high school levels. The superintendent and other district administrators have the opportunity to use the school improvement efforts in the middle grades to inform other reform efforts in the district.

The district vertical team structure provides an opportunity to problem-solve any barriers that using the MSM Field Guide at the district level presents. The school may be able to use an existing vertical team structure for this purpose, or it might make more sense to have special quarterly meetings with this vertical team focused on the use of the MSM Field Guide. Therefore, we do not provide a checklist of qualifications for this team but recommend that the school be strategic in selecting district involvement to maximize the success of the school improvement efforts.



Checklist: Middle School Matters School Leadership Team Member

Directions: For each person considered for a position on the MSM School Leadership Team, indicate the qualities he or she possesses to determine whether he or she is an appropriate fit for the team.

A FOCUS ON IMPROVING STUDENT OUTCOMES

- ☐ Experience implementing change
- ☐ A belief that all middle grade students can learn and achieve high standards
- ☐ Organizational and planning skills to keep the school transformation on track

A FOCUS ON IMPROVING STUDENT OUTCOMES

- ☐ Proven experience developing positive relationships with stakeholders (school staff, district staff, students, parents, and community members)
- ☐ Willingness and ability to disagree with others politely—a “thick skin”
- ☐ Teamwork skills to complete tasks responsibly and support team members
- ☐ Strong persuasive skills

READINESS FOR CHANGE

- ☐ An open mind about ways to improve student learning
- ☐ Willingness to learn about what kinds of big changes work under differing circumstances
- ☐ Willingness to try new structuring strategies
- ☐ No political agenda that may interfere with student-learning-centered decisions

KNOWLEDGE

- ☐ Knowledge of the formal and informal district decision-making processes
- ☐ Knowledge of past district efforts to change and improve schools
- ☐ Knowledge of education management and effective schools research, with a focus on what has been proven to produce learning results with disadvantaged students

Adapted from *School Restructuring: What Works When—A Guide for Educational Leaders* (2010) from American Institutes for Research*.



Checklist: Middle School Matters Manager

Directions: For each person considered for MSM Manager, indicate the qualities he or she possesses to determine whether he or she is an appropriate fit for the team.

A FOCUS ON IMPROVING STUDENT OUTCOMES

- ☐ Possesses deep understanding of the research base on which the MSM Field Guide was developed
- ☐ Understands how the MSM Field Guide is organized (content dimensions, principles, practices) and the intended use of each strategy described in the Field Guide
- ☐ Can help design a plan for implementing practices with fidelity, monitoring and measuring fidelity, and providing increased support for educators as needed
- ☐ Knows how to solicit additional resources, information, and support from the Middle School Matters Institute

ORGANIZATIONAL AGILITY

- ☐ Understands how organizations work
- ☐ Knows how to get things done through formal channels and the informal network
- ☐ Understands the origin and reasoning behind key policies, practices, and procedures
- ☐ Understands the cultures of organizations

DECISION-MAKING SKILLS

- ☐ Makes good decisions based on a mixture of analysis, wisdom, experience, and judgment
- ☐ Is sought after by others for advice and solutions
- ☐ Has an orderly process of decision-making
- ☐ Thoroughly questions and considers of the nature of the problem

PROBLEM-SOLVING ABILITY

- ☐ Learns quickly when facing new problems
- ☐ Is open to change
- ☐ Analyzes successes and failures for clues to improvement

- ☐ Enjoys the challenge of unfamiliar tasks
- ☐ Quickly grasps the essence and underlying structure of things

ABILITY TO SET PRIORITIES

- ☐ Spends his or her time and the time of others on what is important
- ☐ Can quickly assess what will help or hinder accomplishing a goal
- ☐ Eliminates roadblocks
- ☐ Creates focus



Checklist: Student Support Facilitator

Directions: For each person considered for Student Support Facilitator, indicate the qualities he or she possesses to determine whether he or she is an appropriate fit for the team.

KNOWLEDGE OF RESEARCH-BASED STUDENT SUPPORT PRACTICES

- ☐ Strong knowledge of and experience providing research-based interventions to at-risk students
- ☐ Knowledge of adolescent social and emotional development
- ☐ Persistent focus on data and data analysis
- ☐ Ability to interpret schoolwide “ABC” data (attendance, behavior, coursework) and to plan and implement research-based interventions to respond to data trends
- ☐ Ability to develop a tiered system of research-based interventions
- ☐ Ability to design intensive interventions for the most severely at-risk students
- ☐ Ability to provide in-depth analysis of individual student data so that intensive interventions target the root cause of difficulty

INTERPERSONAL SKILLS

- ☐ Excellent communication and interpersonal skills
- ☐ Ability to lead and collaborate with a diverse group of professionals around clear goals and expectations
- ☐ Ability to successfully manage and lead educators toward completion of shared goals
- ☐ Willingness to make decisions that are in the best interest of students
- ☐ Proven ability to foster collaboration among school personnel and departments that traditionally work in isolation
- ☐ Ability to develop strong relationships with students and their families and to connect with the entire school community, including home visits to at-risk students and their families and outreach to community-based organizations



Checklist: Data Manager

Directions: For each person considered for Data Manager, indicate the qualities he or she possesses to determine whether he or she is an appropriate fit for the position.

ABILITY TO SUPPORT TEACHERS IN DATA-BASED DECISION-MAKING

- ☐ Experience using data to drive decision-making in the classroom (e.g., developing intervention groups, monitoring student progress, using various grouping strategies to differentiate instruction)
- ☐ Ability to create professional development sessions and provide ongoing support and coaching to teachers as they learn to use data to drive decision-making
- ☐ Ability to motivate staff at all levels to use data to improve instructional practices and student achievement
- ☐ Knowledge of various valid and reliable curriculum-based measures, progress-monitoring tools, standardized tests, and diagnostic tools across a variety of content areas
- ☐ Ability to interpret results from various types of assessments and use those results to facilitate decision-making at the classroom, grade, and school levels

ABILITY TO ACCURATELY COLLECT, MANAGE, AND RETRIEVE DATA

- ☐ Working knowledge of data warehouses, student information systems, and early warning indicator systems
- ☐ Ability to effectively collaborate with instructional technology specialists and district officials to develop a streamlined data system
- ☐ Experience with data collection, reporting, and analysis of program outcomes
- ☐ Well-developed written and verbal communication skills