



Supporting Material

MYSA Position Paper Middle Schooling: People, Practices and Places

How to use this supporting material

This document has been prepared to support the *MYSA Position Paper - Middle Schooling: People, Practices and Places*. It addresses the following:

1. Terminology
2. Why are the middle years important?
3. What is the *MYSA Position Paper: People, Practices and Places*?
 - What are the Practices associated with middle schooling?
 - What is important about the People associated with middle schooling?
 - What is important about the Places associated with middle schooling?
4. What is the middle schooling reform process?
5. About MYSA

1. Terminology

Middle years is an umbrella term for young adolescents from around age ten to fifteen, spanning the years from childhood to adolescence. Young adolescents in the middle years experience a range of significant physical, cognitive, emotional, social and moral changes.

Middle schooling is an intentional approach to teaching and learning that is responsive and appropriate to the full range of needs, interests and achievements of middle years students in formal and informal schooling contexts. Middle schooling has the following elements.

1. Clear philosophy relevant to the context
2. Comprehensive range of signature practices to engage young adolescents in relevant, meaningful and challenging learning, along with organisational initiatives to facilitate their implementation
3. Evidence-based approach with clearly articulated outcomes.

Middle schooling practices are those teaching and learning signature practices, typically incorporating curriculum, pedagogy, pastoral care and assessment approaches that address the specific needs of the young adolescent population.

Middle years of schooling are the year levels, grades and/or student age recognised in schooling contexts where middle years students are engaged in formal and informal learning.

Middle phase (of learning) is a broad band of schooling used by some education systems typically within a three tier schooling structure comprising early, middle and senior phase.

Middle schools are structures allocated for specialist use by students in the middle years – middle schooling practices may or may not be pursued in these middle schools.

2. Why are the middle years important?

The middle years, with their spotlight on early adolescence, have become a specialist site for educational work, including teacher preservice and in-service provision and research. Middle schooling as an intentional approach to the education of young people is a particular initiative. There are generally accepted reasons for this focus on the middle years, including:

- statistics revealing a decline in students enjoyment of learning with an associated decline in levels of engagement in learning
- signs of alienation from schooling, evident in ways such as dislike of teachers, anger, failure to complete work, peer conflict, bullying, disruptive behaviour
- decline in achievement levels, evident through state-wide and national benchmark testing and individual performance
- early school leaving, leading to a greater chance of reduced employment and post-school leaving outcomes.

These trends coincide with the developmental peak of early adolescence, which is recognised as presenting unique challenges and opportunities for educators. From an educational perspective, this has resulted in two emerging developments:

- acceptance of early adolescence as a unique stage between childhood and later adolescence and the onset of adulthood
- increased awareness of the characteristics of early adolescence and recognition of the need to develop forms of schooling that are embedded in, and responsive to, these needs.

Middle schooling advocates support the view that developmental events alone do not account for the patterns presented. Proponents argue that improvements in the educational experiences and outcomes of middle years students can be achieved through adopting middle schooling approaches.

3. What is the *MYSA Position Paper: People, Practices and Places*?

The Position Paper is a platform for advocacy and innovation. MYSA frames middle schooling through the interconnected concepts of *People*, *Practices* and *Places*. This is a unique concept developed by MYSA that is intended to bring together many of the existing definitions, explanations and ideas about middle schooling. Attention to all three of the interconnected concepts is regarded as critical for middle schooling success. Middle schooling optimizes the learning opportunities of young **People** in the middle years so that their potential to live and work successfully in contemporary society, today and in the future, is enhanced. Middle schooling features the adoption of interdependent and aligned **Practices** across the domains of pedagogy, pastoral care, assessment and curriculum; and through organisational initiatives in their learning **Places**.

What are the practices associated with middle schooling?

Practices associated with middle schooling are aimed at enhancing the quality of teaching and learning in the middle years through a range of pedagogical, pastoral, assessment and curriculum strategies, including:

- higher order thinking strategies
- integrated and disciplinary curricula that are negotiated, relevant and challenging
- heterogeneous and flexible student groupings
- cooperative learning and collaborative teaching
- small learning communities that provide students with sustained individual attention in a safe and healthy school environment
- emphasis on strong teacher–student relationships through extended contact with a small number of teachers and a consistent student cohort
- authentic and reflective assessment with high expectations
- democratic governance and shared leadership
- parental and community involvement in student learning.

What is important about the people associated with middle schooling?

The qualities and capabilities of the **people** associated with middle schooling are identified as a way of enhancing the quality of teaching and learning in the middle years. The key features of People associated with education in the middle years are capacities for:

- recognition of, & response to, the unique developmental changes typically experienced by students in the middle years
- facilitation of current & future learning, lifelong learning, resilience, & the creation of a love of learning
- engagement of middle years educators with an interest & commitment to middle schooling.

What is important about the places associated with middle schooling?

The desirable characteristics of **places** associated with middle schooling are identified as a way of enhancing the quality of teaching and learning in the middle years. The key feature of Places associated with education in the middle years is positioning schooling as an important part of life, creating a sense of belonging, self-belief & community.

The position paper provides specific strategies to advocate for middle schooling innovation and reform at three levels:

- middle years educators, including teachers, parents and related professionals
- middle years teacher education institutions
- systems and organisations providing middle years education

Advocacy for, and implementation of, middle schooling is at varying stages but universally there is recognition of the need to address the middle years of learning.

4. What is the middle schooling reform process?

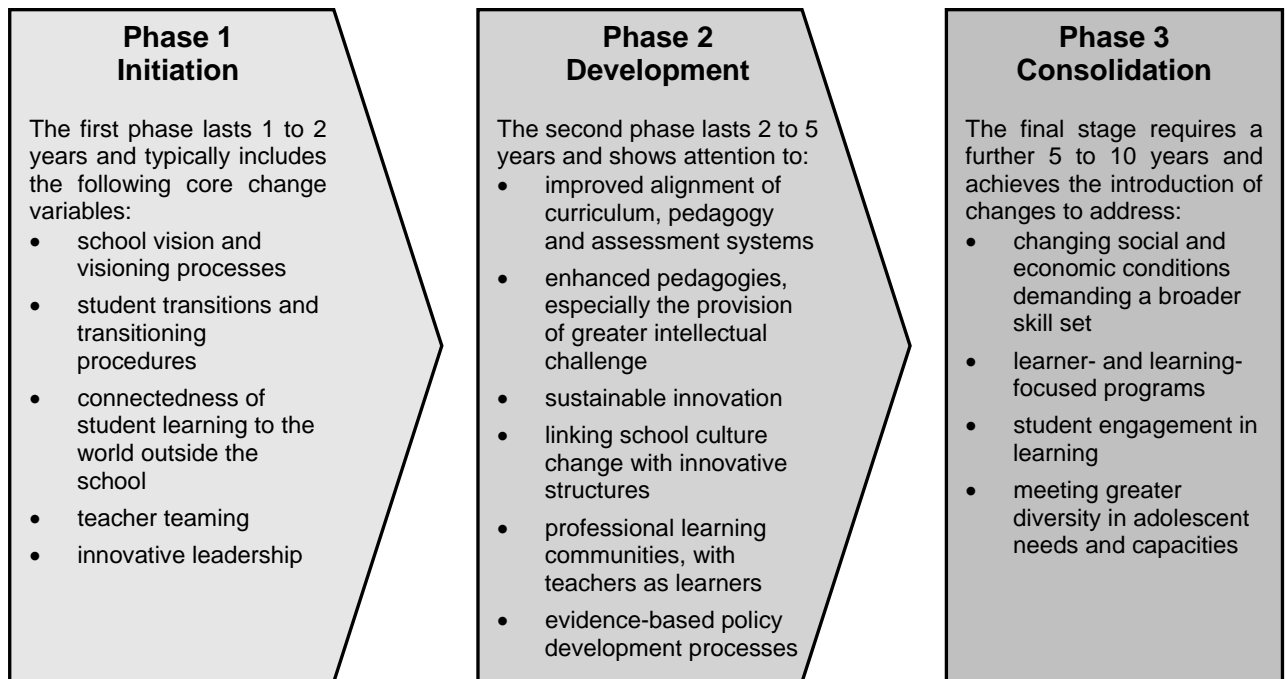
The implementation of middle schooling requires attention to the **people, practices and places** associated with the middle years. Middle schooling implementation typically involves three phases: **initiation, development** and **consolidation**. The elements of middle schooling should be increasingly evident as the reforms are implemented over time. Research indicates that certain aspects of innovation should precede others. This recommended pathway is indicated in the model on the next page.

The model serves as a useful guide for schools at any stage of middle schooling reform. It is typical for schools to experience a dip in the reform process, often the result of predictable events such as the loss of middle schooling champions, changes to leadership, teacher team breakdown, failure to establish protocols for determining the efficacy of the reform process. Importantly, the innovation process can be less traumatic, and achieved in the most expedient time, typically when several key factors are aligned and sustained:

- teacher team membership across several years
- congenial, philosophically-aligned dynamics among team members
- sensitive and sustained leadership
- early adoption and shared risk-taking among members who challenge each other to extend themselves
- a strong emphasis on team problem-posing and problem-solving
- effective use of research in evidence based planning

It is worth highlighting that these factors are from across the spectrum of **People, Practices and Places** of middle schooling.

Three-Phase Model for Middle Schooling Reform



Source:

Pendergast, D. (2006). Fast-tracking middle schooling reform: A model for sustainability. *Australian Journal of Middle Schooling*, 6(2),13-18.

5. About MYSA

MYSA is an Australia-wide peak body organisation dedicated exclusively to the education, development and growth of young adolescents.

MYSA aims to:

- inform individuals, professional educators, parents and the wider community about the nature of education in the middle years of schooling;
- promote the achievements and efforts of individuals, professional educators, parents and the wider community in meeting the developmental needs and interests of young adolescents;
- provide a voice for those interested in and committed to the education, development and growth of young adolescents;
- identify and encourage relevant research in the areas of the middle years of schooling.

<http://www.mysa.org.au/>

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