

The Middle Level in the K-16 Continuum

Middle level schools serve a unique function in the K-16 educational continuum. These schools are often referred to as a bridge or transition between the elementary and high school grades. While this is technically true, middle level schools, whatever their configuration, are much more; the years young adolescents spend in middle level schools are critical to their development and learning. The newly released study, *The Forgotten Middle* (ACT 2008), underscores this concept by reporting that the best predictor of whether or not high school graduates are ready for college and the work force is their eighth grade academic record. Also, young adolescents are being prepared for what follows in their lives. Historically, the relationships and connections between elementary and middle level schools have been relatively smooth. Many of the middle level traditions originated or were adapted from progressive elementary school practices with its focus on student-centered environments. At the same time, transitions from the middle level to high school have presented problems for some students and parents in the areas of academic expectations, time management, and level of support.

The work of the Commission on Secondary Education that led to the report, *Promising Futures -A Call to Improve Learning for Maine's Secondary Students* (1998) and the subsequent work of the Center for Inquiry in Secondary Education, presents an opportunity to make stronger connections and have greater cooperation with our high schools. Furthermore, we are hopeful that the traditional emphasis on subjects at the high school and on students at the middle level can be balanced in both schools. Many refer to the primary focus on middle level schools as preparing students for high school. We agree, when the high school being prepared for and readied to accept well-prepared middle level students is a *Promising Futures* high school, committed to the Core Principles and Practices set forth in that report.