

Our Middle Years Learners - Engaged, Resilient, Successful

An Education Strategy for Years 5-9 in NSW 2006-2009



Introduction

We are committed to engaging and supporting our Middle Years' students in ways that inspire them to be successful and to achieve their best possible learning outcomes.

Middle Years' students are in Years 5-9 and are generally aged between 9 and 14 years. In our public schools we want to help them to be successful learners and to develop confidence, resilience, a love of learning and a respect for others.

The Middle Years represent an important stage in their development. These are the years when experiencing positive relationships, being genuinely engaged in learning and developing high self-esteem have a major and lasting impact on each young person.

In our public schools, therefore, we will provide innovative and expanded opportunities for students in Years 5-9 to learn and grow in ways that acknowledge and respect them as individuals.

The Middle Years span primary and secondary schooling, where there are often significant differences in learning environments and relationships. In the past, primary and secondary schooling have usually been seen as separate educational stages. Research and experience have shown, however, how important continuity in educational programs and practice are between primary and secondary schools.

We must continue to review our thinking, practices, processes and organisation to promote effective continuity in student learning and development.

We aim to connect with Middle Years' students in ways that direct their energy, shape their self-concept and raise their expectations. How well we achieve our goals will depend on our capacity to understand how adolescents view the world and how the world impacts on them.

We have designed this Middle Years' Strategy to better position students to achieve a secure and successful future, one characterised by personal achievement, physical and emotional well-being and a balanced way of life.

A profile of Middle Years' students

Students in the Middle Years are experiencing a profound transition from childhood to adolescence. They are undergoing significant intellectual, social, physical, emotional, ethical and moral development.

During the Middle Years, students are moving from concrete to abstract thinking. They have an intense curiosity and a growing capacity for higher order analysis and reflection. They are also moving towards more rational decision making and a better understanding of the consequences of behaviour.

Middle Years' students have a growing interest in ethical and moral questions and like exploring real world social issues. Many want to make the world a better place as active, emerging young citizens within our Australian society and global community.

For many students the transition from primary to secondary school can be exciting and smooth sailing. For others it can be a time of apprehension and anxiety.

Many young adolescents feel an intense need to belong and be accepted by their peers. They strive to be independent, but while outwardly confident they are often insecure and sensitive to personal criticism. They increasingly turn to their peers to define their language, attitudes, self image and values.

As students in the classroom they seek challenge and engagement. A hands-on approach is often preferred with the opportunity to have a say in what they learn, how they learn and how they will be assessed. They enjoy working cooperatively with their peers yet also like working independently on individual research and projects. Middle Years' students are progressively developing the ability to manage their own learning.

We must also acknowledge the particular impact that technology is having on the lives and learning of Middle Years' students. For many students the use of mobile phones, MP3 players, video games and the Internet are not just tools, but a way of life. Through technology, many have developed their own language and social networks. The role and importance of technology in learning will be a major factor in the way Middle Years' students learn and define themselves.

At the same time, the ICT revolution and continuing evolution have resulted in a higher demand for Middle Years' students to be highly skilled in reading and writing and in doing so with speed, agility and in different genres.

NSW Government investments in the Middle Years

The NSW Government continues to invest in highly successful programs and proven initiatives relevant to students in the Middle Years, in order to prepare these young people to face future challenges and opportunities from a position of strength.

Key achievements to date have included:

- **A comprehensive response to the recommendations of the report *Time to Teach, Time to Learn***, resulting in a range of programs to improve teaching and learning in primary schools:
 - *Getting the Balance Right* – a guide for primary teachers to help them manage the implementation of the primary curriculum and improve reporting to parents
 - *Connected Outcome Groups (COGs)* – a comprehensive set of materials to support primary teachers to plan, program and assess across all key learning areas of the curriculum
 - *Foundation Statements* – developed by the Board of Studies, in collaboration with the Department of Education and Training, to help teachers to prioritise what needs to be taught in primary schools. They also assist with curriculum transition to secondary schools.
 - **Implementation of the McGaw recommendations about the School Certificate**
Through Securing Their Future a number of reforms of the School Certificate were implemented including the development of the K-10 Curriculum Framework, the evaluation and redevelopment of the 7-10 curriculum and the introduction of standards referenced assessment to strengthen the School Certificate and give it meaning and significance for students, parents and the community.
 - **Middle Years Action Research (MYAR) Projects**
\$750,000 was invested in the ten education regions in the state to establish projects that would provide innovative solutions at the school level to the challenges faced by students across the Middle Years.
 - **Multi-campus colleges**
The multi-campus college model has provided an opportunity for secondary schools in this model to specifically focus on the needs of early adolescent learners and prepare them for their transition to post compulsory education and training.
- In addition, our investments which have focused on major change to benefit all students are also benefiting Middle Years' students. These include:**
- **Schools in Partnership**
The Schools in Partnership (SIP) program is part of the \$65 million in targeted funding to improve educational outcomes for Aboriginal students in public schools. The SIP initiative is supporting targeted schools with high numbers of Aboriginal students to develop innovative ways to improve the educational achievements of Aboriginal students in partnership with Aboriginal communities and other government agencies.
 - **More than \$12.5 million over the next four years for the Schools to Work program** has been allocated to provide vocational and enterprise learning programs and to assist students in planning their career and transition pathways.

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- **\$36 million is provided directly to schools annually** to support the ongoing provision of a quality teaching profession by providing professional development for teachers.
 - **More than \$36 million is provided in targeted programs for Priority Schools** to support students in the State's most disadvantaged communities.
 - **\$75 million has been allocated to increase access to education and training options through the use of technology.** The use of satellite technology for distance education and the availability of online courses and resources are key achievements. Recurrent funding has been allocated over the next four years for the provision of email and a range of other e-services for students and teachers in government schools and TAFE Institutes.
 - **The State's Literacy and Numeracy Plans are being supported with \$616 million** over the next four years.
 - **The NSW Institute of Teachers has been established** to accredit teachers against professional standards, including literacy instruction and classroom and behaviour management.
 - **\$18 million to establish ten trade schools** over the next four years. These trade schools will be established in schools and TAFE Institutes. They will specialise in providing training for school-based apprentices in shortage areas such as health care, construction, automotive, engineering and hospitality. These schools provide an important new pathway for Year 9 students as they move beyond the Middle Years.

These Government initiatives have been informed by an unprecedented level of consultation with the community of NSW about the kind of education and training system that educators, parents and the community believe will best serve young people now and in the future.

The results of the three most recent consultations are contained in:

- *The Report of the Consultation on Future Directions for Public Education and Training: One Size Doesn't Fit All*
- *The Review Yanigurra Muya: Ganggurrinyma Yaarri Guurulaw Yirringin.gurray Freeing the Spirit: Dreaming an Equal Future* conducted in partnership with the Aboriginal Education Consultative Group
- *The Strategic Evaluation of Vocational Education and Training in Schools in New South Wales.*

As a result of these important consultations and ongoing discussions with parents and stakeholders, significant improvements have already been made. This Strategy will build on those improvements.

The Next Phase – 2006 -2009

This Middle Years Strategy has three goals:

- 1. Reaching higher**
- 2. Growing towards independence**
- 3. Strengthening connections**

These goals build on the fine achievements of our teachers in establishing strong academic and social foundations in the early years of schooling. They focus on extending the talents, capacities and aspirations of the young people who are our Middle Years' students.

To reach higher, young people need to feel connected to teachers who know them well, who enhance their confidence through successful learning experiences and who provide regular, encouraging feedback. Strong literacy, numeracy and technology skills are essential because they provide the foundations for future success.

In considering Middle Years' students we must look to each individual young person and balance their need for support with their desire for responsibility and independence. We must equip them with the habits of mind that foster sound decision making, a healthy independence and personal success.

Research shows that continuity across primary and secondary schooling makes a significant difference to student outcomes. Our teachers will work together collaboratively to promote effective transition in curriculum approaches and welfare practices from primary to secondary schools.

The strong family-school partnerships that have been established in the Early Years of schooling will be further enhanced as teachers and parents work together to provide a supportive environment which meets the needs of students in the adolescent years.

It is important that curriculum and teaching reflect and incorporate an understanding of youth culture and a connectedness to the students' world.

The main actions flowing from these goals are designed to:

- continue to strengthen the effectiveness of transition from primary to secondary school for all students
- provide a challenging, cohesive curriculum across Years 5-9 including using the current primary school Connected Outcomes Groups (COGs) model to develop integrated, cross-faculty units of work in the early secondary years
- improve student well-being through implementing whole-school approaches to pastoral care that build positive relationships, foster respect and responsibility and provide targeted early intervention and support
- explore more flexible use of resources, including school staffing in the Middle Years, to enable schools to develop local solutions to local needs
- investigate innovative and flexible ways of using learning environments to meet the particular needs of Middle Years' students
- establish 'communities of schools' in each school education area to work collaboratively on continuous improvement in Middle Years' education
- increase teacher professional learning opportunities within and across schools that focus on the Middle Years
- increase the innovative use of technology to support learning, increase learning choices and develop students' skill and confidence as technology users
- continue to improve communication with parents about student progress and commitment.



1.0 Reaching higher

The learning experiences that schools provide for Middle Years' students and the environment in which these occur have a significant impact on adolescent development and achievement. These experiences need to be both academically rigorous and developmentally appropriate.

During the Middle Years it is essential that students experience teaching of the highest quality. They need to develop both independence and the ability to work cooperatively with others. A program of study that provides flexibility, relevance and direct links to real world issues will offer the best framework within which learning can occur.

Key Actions

Raising expectations and achievement

Student achievement is greatly influenced not only by the expectations of parents and teachers but also by students' own perceptions, experiences and expectations of success and achievement.

We will work closely with students and parents to set clear, high expectations about student achievement, provide regular feedback on student progress and provide ongoing support and encouragement that is tailored to each individual student.

We must strive to find new ways to engage Middle Years' students so that they enjoy their learning and want to achieve their very best.

We will:

- strengthen the implementation of quality teaching and raise the level of student expectations, engagement and achievement. This will include a particular focus on achieving greater participation and improved results in science and mathematics
- provide a challenging, cohesive curriculum across Years 5-9 that builds on prior learning and strengthens the relationship between quality teaching, learning and assessment
- ensure targeted support is provided for Aboriginal students so that they stay engaged and achieve success, with the overall retention of indigenous students into the later years of schooling improving as a result of this
 - use the model of Curriculum Outcomes Groups (COGs) across Key Learning Areas to develop integrated, Middle Years' units of work in primary and early secondary years to foster both student engagement and teacher collaboration
 - foster creative and enterprising thinking and a culture of innovation in the Middle Years and expand opportunities for students to apply their learning in a real world context
 - disseminate information system-wide about Middle Years' initiatives and examples of best practice that improve:
 - continuity of learning
 - integrated curriculum approaches
 - quality teaching and assessment practices
 - development of student and parent understanding about improving learning
 - build on students' skills in literacy and numeracy through implementation of the State Literacy Plan and State Numeracy Plan, with particular recognition of the needs of Aboriginal students and students in rural and remote areas
 - develop strategies to enable timely intervention and ongoing tracking of individual progress, particularly for students requiring learning support or enrichment and extension
 - focus on developing students' technological literacy and technological skills to enhance learning
 - report to parents regularly and twice a year provide formal reporting, giving clear information about their child's progress and commitment

Supporting enhanced learning

The establishment of a quality learning environment is a critical factor in the provision of learning experiences that best meet the individual and collective needs of students in the Middle Years.

Innovation within schools, particularly in enhancing the practices and structures that we use to deliver quality learning and student support, will allow us to better respond to the specific context of each school and to the needs of students.

We will:

- use data collected through student, teacher and parent satisfaction surveys to contribute to evaluation, planning, target setting, programming and policy development
- support schools through the development of a Middle Years' school self evaluation tool which will assist them to respond to the needs of Middle Years' students within the local context
- introduce a Taste of TAFE which will provide Years 9 and 10 students with the opportunity to experience an introduction to hands-on skills training in TAFE to assist them in determining their career options
- investigate innovative and more flexible ways of using learning environments to provide engaging learning experiences for students in the Middle Years
- work with teacher education institutions to investigate and develop professional learning linked to teaching, learning and school leadership in the Middle Years
- implement increased teacher professional learning programs within and across schools that focus on:
 - the nature of Middle Years' students
 - Middle Years' learning and teaching
 - effective school leadership for the Middle Years
- explore options for increasing flexibility in school staffing in the Middle Years within and between primary and secondary schools to enable schools to develop local solutions to local needs.

2.0 Growing towards independence

During the Middle Years young adolescents grow rapidly. Apart from the physical changes that occur, there are also significant changes in the ways that they think and feel, and the way in which they respond and relate to others. Young adolescents are searching for greater independence while still needing support and security from parents and teachers.

It is essential that teachers know students well. They must provide guidance and support to students to assist them in their academic and social development. The establishment of trusting relationships can make a significant difference to the way in which students feel secure and supported, and will directly influence the level of confidence and independence with which they approach their learning.

Key Actions

Meeting individual needs

Every student must be acknowledged by teachers as a young person with their own qualities and strengths. Learning programs and experiences need to be tailored to optimise the ability and success of all students. This requires a sound knowledge of the nature of adolescence and of each student, coupled with highly effective learning and teaching strategies that produce the very best efforts from students.

We will:

- foster inclusive school cultures that celebrate harmony within diversity
- develop a discussion paper for schools and their communities that will focus attention on the nature and needs of Middle Years' learners
- strengthen the systematic monitoring of student progress and, where appropriate, develop individual student learning profiles and learning plans

- expand the range of opportunities available for all students to access and engage in learning experiences that are challenging, relevant and meaningful
- strengthen support for specific students and student groups, including gifted and talented students, students with disabilities, students requiring learning assistance and students from language backgrounds other than English
- improve student well-being through implementing whole-school approaches to pastoral care that build positive relationships, foster respect and responsibility and provide targeted early intervention and support
- provide increased access to careers advice support for Middle Years' students to assist with informed decisions about future options.

Building character and resilience

Middle Years' students are increasingly aware of their individual capabilities and the expectations that are placed upon them by their peers, parents and teachers. Meaningful, positive relationships between teachers and students based on mutual respect and a safe, supportive learning environment are fundamental to supporting students' well-being.

We must strive to support each student to develop a strong set of values and a range of skills that can help them become more responsible, resilient and successful.

We will:

- support students in the development, clarification and practise of the core values of public education
- introduce opportunities for service learning by students within their community that particularly link to Middle Years' curriculum outcomes
- provide increased opportunities for students to put forward ideas and have a say on a wide range of issues linked to their schooling
- provide a variety of leadership opportunities for Middle Years' students that build on their leadership skills and experience established in the Early Years
- maintain safe and secure school environments through social skills development, special programs in conflict management, anti-racism and anti-bullying, and other welfare and social justice programs and approaches
- provide opportunities for students to engage in programs that will allow them to explore and express their creative interests and talents
- strengthen participation in regular sport and physical activity programs which promote fitness and a healthy lifestyle.



3.0 Strengthening connections

Strengthening connections for Middle Years' students will lead to increased options, improved opportunities for success and a strong sense of optimism for their future.

The process of transition from primary to secondary school can be a time of great uncertainty for some young adolescents. All students benefit from effective primary-secondary transition programs that enhance learning continuity and support.

It is important that we create meaningful connections with parents, other schools, local businesses and industry, government agencies, community organisations, tertiary providers and others within the community in order to provide relevant, real world learning opportunities, effective student support and expand students' career horizons.

Connections through technology will provide more flexible structures and delivery options for enjoyable and successful student learning. Technology provides opportunities for students to engage in e-learning environments independent of the physical structures of the school.

Key Actions

Enhanced primary-secondary transition

Well-designed primary-secondary transition programs recognise the importance of continuity in student learning and student development during the move from primary to secondary school. These programs should focus on both the individual student and the group.

We are committed to designing and implementing processes and practices that provide the best possible start for all students to secondary schooling. Enhanced primary-secondary transition will also help parents proudly choose to have their children progress from a public primary to a public secondary school.

We will:

- ensure that effective primary-secondary transition programs are included in every school plan and, where required, in school targets
- identify a key person in every school to coordinate transition activities for students
- establish in secondary schools, where possible, home room environments for Year 7 students
- establish 'communities of schools' in each school education area that will work together collaboratively to provide learning continuity and a Middle Years' focus on students, more effective primary-secondary transition, enhanced image and increased enrolments in NSW public schools
- provide additional professional learning and Intranet resources to support the development of effective primary-secondary transition programs
- implement state-wide systems to support the timely exchange of student data and other information between primary and secondary schools
- document innovative primary-secondary transition programs and strategies addressing continuity of learning, teaching approaches, integrated curriculum approaches and students' social and personal development. Disseminate these online through the Teaching and Learning Exchange (TaLe: <http://www.tale.edu.au>).

Highly connected relationships

To engage and support Middle Years' students, it is important that we maintain and further develop ongoing communication and positive partnerships between students, teachers and parents. At a time when some Middle Years' students, as they get older, may not actively encourage their parents to be involved in school, we are committed to finding ways to promote genuine parental participation in their learning.

The other connections that must be in place are the links that we make across our schools, together with the links that can be forged between schools and their local communities. The creation by Regions of appropriate structures at the local level will encourage schools to work in collaborative partnerships for the benefit of their students.

We will:

- strengthen communication and participation by parents and support the important work of parents
- provide increased opportunities for relevant, real world learning by extending and enriching relationships between schools and the community, including exploring local business and industry opportunities
- investigate new ways of strengthening connections and partnerships with government and non-government organisations to further enhance student learning and support
- extend academic and professional partnerships with tertiary institutions and professional associations for the benefit of Middle Years' learning and teaching.

Connecting through technology

Our state-wide technology network provides students, teachers and parents with access to an unprecedented range of learning opportunities, resources and support. We will harness and embrace this technology in a variety of ways to reach beyond the walls of the individual classroom or school community to deliver dynamic and transformational communication and learning opportunities.

We will:

- increase the use of technology to stimulate and support learning, deliver curriculum flexibility, broaden access to networks of learners, improve subject options for individuals and groups of students and foster innovation and creativity
- expand our strong online professional learning networks and learning communities to encourage the sharing of information, expertise, professional learning opportunities and good practice in the Middle Years
- implement secure online access to individual email accounts, information, resources and collaborative online learning tools relevant to Middle Years' students
- continue to expand the material about young adolescent learners and the Middle Years that is available online on the Teaching and Learning Exchange (TaLe: <http://www.tale.edu.au>) and support teachers, parents and students in accessing and using these materials
- provide online and other access to a broad range of curriculum opportunities and specialised support for Middle Years' students in rural and remote areas
- strengthen our ICT industry partnerships to identify emerging technologies that have the potential to transform learning opportunities and outcomes for students in the Middle Years.



Conclusion

Students moving through the Middle Years today are very different from any generation of students we have taught in our schools.

It is our collective responsibility to assist our young adolescent learners to manage the complex changes and challenges they are experiencing. Middle Years' students need to develop a positive sense of self and a deep respect for others.

This Strategy acknowledges the diverse backgrounds of our Middle Years' students. We need to understand and adapt the ways in which we teach, guide, encourage and relate to these students within the context of our growing knowledge about how they think, develop and learn.

We must recognise and respond to the fact technologies are increasingly shaping their lives and defining 21st century learning environments. These students engage with information and communication technologies as powerful learning tools within and outside their classrooms. They have access to immediate connections with the global community.

This Strategy focuses attention in our public schools on the specific needs of young adolescent learners and provides a coherent and coordinated response to those needs.

Implementation of this Middle Years Strategy will continue to strengthen the quality of public education in NSW.

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