

Is Your School Ready to Apply for Recognition as an Essential Elements: Schools-to-Watch School?

13 Things to Consider

Your school may be a high performing, high impact middle-level school, but is it ready to be recognized and designated as a model for others? Completing the application process is not an easy or quick undertaking. So before you begin, here are a Baker's Dozen items to consider. If you have some "**Not Yet's**," you may want to rethink or postpone making application at this time. If your choice is to postpone, it is suggested you work with the Self Study and Rating Rubric to guide your work until you feel you are ready to apply.

■	13 Things to Consider BEFORE Beginning the EE: STW Application Process	We're There	We're Not Yet There
1	The school staff and leadership are familiar with the <i>Regents Policy Statement on Middle-Level Education</i> and the Education Department's <i>Essential Elements of a Standards Focused Middle Level Program</i> . They support, in their common vision and in their actions, the full implementation of the Policy Statement and the Essential Elements and understand their connections to the school's improvement plan.		
2	The school possesses a 2008-09 Performance Index of 165 or higher Or, with a 2008--09 Performance Index of less than 165, the school has met all Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) growth targets for both the 2007-08 and 08-09 school years.		
3	The school is not in SINI, SRAP or SURR status and has no unanswered or ongoing civil rights violations against it.		
4	The school's programs and best practices are replicable by other schools with diverse and challenging populations.		
5	The school has a progressive and responsive discipline plan. All students are treated fairly and equitably. The suspension rate is low.		
6	The school actively supports the mental, physical, emotional, and social health, welfare and safety of the students with counseling, health services, adult advocacy, developmentally responsive activities, and positive incentives. The school has a variety of programs specifically designed and implemented to encourage, motivate, resolve conflict, and build character, resiliency, attendance, and achievement for all students.		
7	The district (superintendent and school board) provides strong support for the middle-level school(s) to meet the needs of young adolescents (e.g., financial resources, highly qualified teachers, administrators, and counselors, curriculum and instructional materials, and professional development for its teachers). <i>Explicitly: The middle school is not an island unto itself successfully operating without district support.</i>		

	13 Things to Consider BEFORE Beginning the EE: STW Application Process, continued	We're There	We're Not Yet There
8	<p>The school has an operational and formalized structure of distributed leadership that embraces a clear and current vision and mission for the school. Groups meet independently and regularly. They have a clearly articulated system of norms, a collaborative purpose, accountability measures, communication protocols, and the ability and the motivation to make meaningful decisions.</p> <p><i>Explicitly, the school leadership is not just the administration or a small group of teachers, nor is it "all the teachers buying in to top-down decisions." It is an organized system of learners and leaders.</i></p>		
9	<p>The school is an integral part of the community. It seeks support from the community (universities, colleges, businesses, etc.) and provides support to the community in terms of student volunteer services, facilities, and joint projects.</p>		
10	<p>The master schedule of the school is a reflection of students' needs and school mission. It is flexible and innovative in providing time and opportunity for coherent, rigorous, standards-based instruction for all students within the school day. It provides students with curricular opportunities in core subjects, targeted intervention opportunities, exploratory courses, and physical education. It provides common planning time for teacher teams in the school to work collaboratively on the behalf of their students. It creates smaller, closer learning communities for students.</p> <p><i>Explicitly the master schedule gives priority to students' needs over adults' needs.</i></p>		
11	<p>Curriculum, instruction, school-wide strategies, assignments, homework, assessment, grading and reporting, enrichment projects and activities (i.e. History Day, Science Fair, field trips) in each subject area are inclusive, consistent, and coherent across the school.</p> <p><i>Explicitly, each and every student has equal access, opportunity, and challenge in any classroom to which they are assigned.</i></p>		
12	<p>Most (if not all) teachers regularly practice a variety of research-based instructional and assessment strategies (e.g., differentiated instruction, flexible grouping, hands-on learning, etc.), guided by up-to-date, standards-based curricula and systematic data collection and analysis, that engage and challenge every student in their classroom.</p>		
13	<p>The school is a community of learners, constantly working together to refine curriculum, improve classroom instruction, create a positive climate/culture, and meet the academic and personal needs of all students and all staff.</p> <p><i>Explicitly, the school is a vibrant learning community committed to, and engaged in, continuous improvement and personal growth.</i></p>		