



2007 REFERENDUM FACT SHEET

Fact Sheet #4: Middle Level education

3/2/07

- The April 17 \$40 million bond referendum would finance expansions and renovations of our schools.
- Our schools would be restructured into four K-4 elementary schools, and one 5-8 middle-level campus at the Hadley site. Hadley currently houses grades 6-8.
- Hadley would house a 5-6 wing and a 7-8 wing. These wings would focus on delivering age-appropriate education and programs, and for the most part, would operate separately.
- FACT SHEET #4 focuses on the educational impact this change would have on middle-level education.
- FACT SHEETS 1, 2, 3 and 4 are posted on www.d41.org/referendum

Watch for future
REFERENDUM FACT SHEETS. Please
email questions or comments to
referendum@d41.org.

MIDDLE-LEVEL EDUCATION FOCUSES ON AGE 10-15

Middle level refers to young adolescents, defined as children ages 10 through 15. This age range has its own set of needs, features and challenges. Most educational and medical professionals note that children are developing the physical characteristics of adolescence at a younger age than in times past. Middle-level education means a focus on meeting the unique needs of young adolescents and their families within the total school community.

YOUNG ADOLESCENTS HAVE UNIQUE LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENTAL NEEDS

Young adolescents are growing and developing quickly, and in different ways than they were as younger children. Among this group there is a great deal of diversity in interests and a wide range of maturation levels. The adolescents themselves are placing increasing priority on their physical and social development. During this time, children experience many transitions toward their adult personality, with its features of self-concept, philosophy of life and values, and feelings of connectedness to a larger society. Middle-level students are becoming more interested in their peers and in working out democratic relationships. Social and behavioral problems may increase at the middle level for a number of reasons, including curiosity, making this a critical time for educators to work with families to support students in positive decision-making.

CHARACTERISTICS OF MIDDLE-LEVEL EDUCATION

Nationwide, middle-level students are educated in a variety of settings: one-room schools, within elementary buildings, and in grade-level centers such as 7-8 buildings. The most common structure is 6-8. What distinguishes a true middle-level focus is what goes on inside the buildings and how well the staff, curriculum and programs meet student needs. In a recent survey, 84% of K-8 educators urged implementing either a 5-8 or a 6-8 structure staffed by professionals trained and dedicated to educating this age group. Students in these grades have needs that are distinctly different from elementary students. Parents, too, find that their role is changing as is their relationship to the school. Middle-level schools may offer students interdisciplinary teaming, flexible scheduling, advisory programs partnering students with caring adults, and a variety of exploratory programs as well as advising/counseling. Students have enhanced opportunity to interact in a structured environment with their peers. Another characteristic of middle-level schools is a commitment among the educators and professionals to value this age group, understand its developmental features, and work together to provide consistent, unified and appropriate education, programs and services.

A 5-8 MIDDLE-LEVEL CAMPUS AT HADLEY: AGE-APPROPRIATE INSTRUCTION, PROGRAMS

From a facility standpoint, the campus would be two schools in one, connected through the core spaces like the gyms, library, etc. Grades 5 and 6 and grades 7 and 8 would be grouped together, each in its own wing with its own entrance, arrival and dismissal times, schedules and bus routes. The wings would both use the core spaces, but at different times. Students will mix for planned educational purposes or activities, but will be distinctly separated as they move through their day at school. From an educational standpoint, the school would promote a learner-centered, continuous improvement culture that offers supportive, respectful environments for all students and prepares students for success in high school and beyond. This means:

- Attention to the needs of the whole child, including transition to Hadley from the elementary school.
- A learning environment that reflects the developmental and intellectual needs of young adolescents, incorporating movement, problem solving, decision making and self management.



- A curriculum that is aligned to challenging state and federal standards, that is developmentally appropriate and offers interdisciplinary and exploratory experiences.
- An environment for fifth and sixth graders that respects their childhood while providing a rich academic experience.
- An environment for seventh and eighth graders that fosters independence and provides structure for increasing academic challenge and decision making.
- A program that promotes development of the personal qualities necessary for success in school and life.

GROUPING FIFTH AND SIXTH GRADERS PROVIDES OPPORTUNITIES FOR BOTH

Compared to today, fifth graders would have a longer day with enhanced learning opportunities in areas such as fine arts and health and wellness (the instructional day at Hadley is approximately 20 minutes longer than at the elementary schools). Self-management and academic skills will be systematically addressed. Social and extracurricular activities would be planned to address the distinct needs of these students, which are different than the older junior high students. Having all fifth grade teachers together will support collaboration among teachers for alignment in curriculum and instruction. Many educators note that sixth graders have much in common with fifth graders, and there are opportunities to both grades in being grouped together. Sixth grade will have elements in common with the elementary environment, compared to the junior high environment it is in today. The sixth grade curriculum will incorporate some changes to prepare students for the curricular and instructional approach that begins in seventh grade.

TRANSITIONS CAN SUPPORT CONNECTIONS

Transitions are ideal times to systematically encourage engagement, create strong, positive identities for schools, and address the social, organizational and motivational needs of students, parents and staff. District 41 already does transition work with students in fifth grade preparatory to entering Hadley, and those efforts would be adapted to fourth grade. We also work with eighth graders preparatory to entering high school, and those efforts would continue. Preceding and during the first year that the new structure is in operation, there will be some short-term transitional needs. Elementary students and staff will want to know how the changes affect their school. The community at large will need to become familiar with the new grade structure. Numerous internal processes will be different than before. Intermediate students will be entering a larger environment and, for the first year of operation, both grades will be new to their environment at the same time. Both intermediate (5-6) and junior high (7-8) students, staff and parents will have new facilities to become familiar with. Fifth grade teachers will receive support as they begin working together in a larger team.

5-8 SCHOOLS ARE NOT UNCOMMON

There are more than ninety 5-8 schools in Illinois ranging in size from fewer than 100 students to more than one thousand. Some are former 6-8 middle schools that decided to incorporate fifth grade for space reasons, and may have done so without a systematic plan to build an educational program that takes account of the needs of fifth graders or takes advantage of the affinities of grades 5 and 6 and of grades 7 and 8. Others are seeing academic gains, parent, staff and student satisfaction with the approach, and illustrate the strengths that this approach can provide. District 41's vision is for a 5-8 campus with a facility that meets practical needs and supports an instructional approach developed in alignment with the academic, social and emotional needs of young adolescents.

WHERE CAN I LEARN MORE ABOUT MIDDLE-LEVEL EDUCATION?

The National Middle School Association (www.nmsa.org) has many resources about the subject.

HOW CAN I FIND OUT MORE ABOUT THE REFERENDUM? Visit www.d41.org/referendum, attend informational sessions (dates are on the Web site), watch for upcoming **REFERENDUM FACT SHEETS**, AND direct questions or comments to referendum@d41.org.