

110 Chapter 4 • Large Scale Curriculum Development

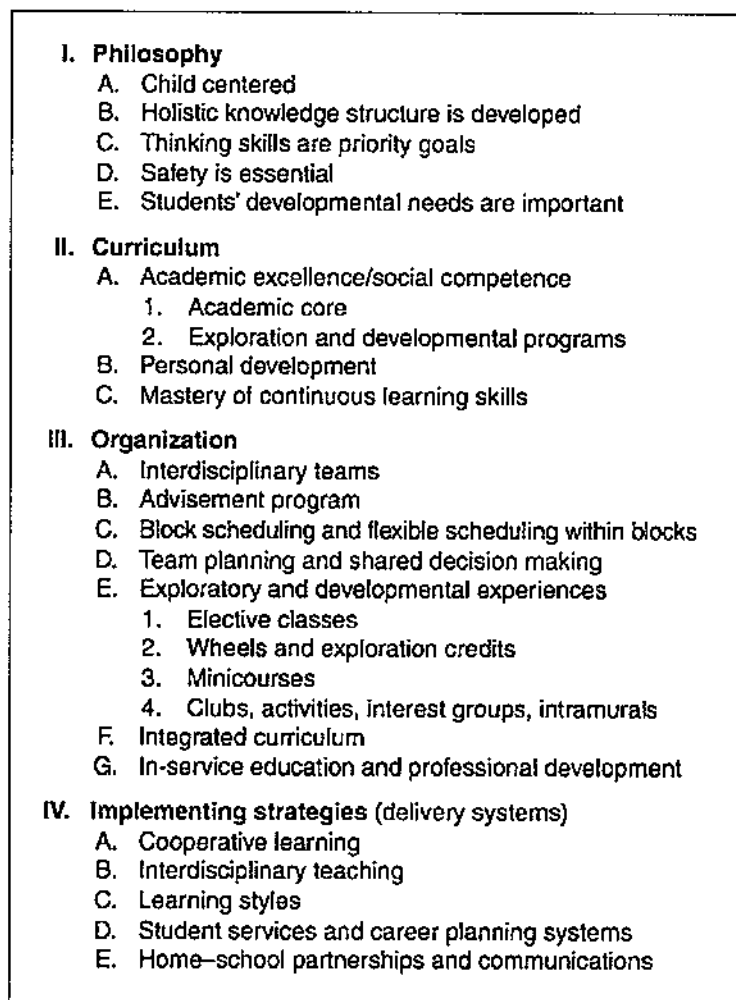
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- I. Philosophy**
 - A. Child centered
 - B. Holistic knowledge structure is developed
 - C. Thinking skills are priority goals
 - D. Safety is essential
 - E. Students' developmental needs are important
 - II. Curriculum**
 - A. Academic excellence/social competence
 - 1. Academic core
 - 2. Exploration and developmental programs
 - B. Personal development
 - C. Mastery of continuous learning skills
 - III. Organization**
 - A. Interdisciplinary teams
 - B. Advisement program
 - C. Block scheduling and flexible scheduling within blocks
 - D. Team planning and shared decision making
 - E. Exploratory and developmental experiences
 - 1. Elective classes
 - 2. Wheels and exploration credits
 - 3. Minicourses
 - 4. Clubs, activities, interest groups, intramurals
 - F. Integrated curriculum
 - G. In-service education and professional development
 - IV. Implementing strategies (delivery systems)**
 - A. Cooperative learning
 - B. Interdisciplinary teaching
 - C. Learning styles
 - D. Student services and career planning systems
 - E. Home-school partnerships and communications

FIGURE 4.12 Overview of Middle School Parameters.

General administrative standards would also be established to encompass the program areas and service them. Areas of concern would include grouping and use of time and staff development (Figure 4.17). When these concerns are wedded to the program standards and identified needs of specific areas, an overall calendar of activity and budget can be developed.

Assessment Stage

The CMP emphasizes assessment from the beginning to support the curriculum development cycle. This assessment is used in at least five ways:

1. To make explicit the rationale of the instructional program as a basis for deciding which aspects of the program should be evaluated for effectiveness and what types of data should be gathered

The Critical Elements Summarized

The middle grades education program has important functions different from the elementary and high school programs. Middle school students (transescents) have special needs that identify them as a unique group in the K–12 learning continuum. There are specific philosophical approaches, educational strategies, and school organizations that are effective during this period. Twelve critical elements are needed in the DCPS middle school.

1. The core of the middle school education program is based on the following beliefs:
 - Every child can learn.
 - Middle school is a key time during which students learn that the various disciplines and subjects are all related to humanity's search for understanding.
 - Learners must feel physically and psychologically safe.
 - Thinking-skills instruction is a middle school responsibility.
 - Every child's individual differences must be respected.
2. To accomplish its mission, the middle school curriculum has three interwoven and connected threads, namely, the pursuit of
 - academic excellence as a way to achieve social competence in a complex, technological society;
 - self-understanding and personal development; and
 - continuous-learning skills.
3. The traditional academic core must be taught in a way that ensures that our students recognize
 - the relationships between such disciplines as math, language arts, science, and social studies and can transfer learning from one discipline to another; and
 - that their exploratory and developmental experiences are related to the academic core and are a way to broaden each individual's insights and potential for personal growth.
4. The middle school curriculum contains a variety of exploratory experiences (into disciplines beyond the academic core), which will enable students to
 - recognize, through exploratory experiences, that there are a multitude of routes to take to understanding and successful independence;
 - sample fields they may wish to pursue in greater depth in high school or beyond;
 - develop a realistic overview of talents, aptitudes, and interests; and
 - begin to develop talents and special interests in a manner that provides balance and perspective.
5. Thinking skills expand in scope and nature during the middle grade years. While problem-solving strategies need to be part of the K–12 learning continuum, formal instruction in critical and creative thinking skills is essential in the middle grades program.
6. Middle school students need someone to whom they can relate as an advisor and guide during the transescent period. Middle schools provide such advisors and ensure that advisors and advisees have time to work on the developmental issues of early adolescence.
7. Middle schools integrate academic knowledge and skills by using interdisciplinary teaching teams. The structure of such teams may vary widely, but the essential elements are common planning time and teaching the same group of students.
8. The teachers of the academic core and the exploratory/developmental programs work together to foster transfer of learning from one discipline to another, to enhance application of basic skills, and to help students develop a "big picture" on the scope and nature of our efforts to understand ourselves and the environment.

FIGURE 4.13 Definitional Statement About Critical Elements of the Middle School Program.

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9. The exploratory program is provided in a variety of ways in addition to formal classes. These may include minicourses, clubs, special activities, and interest group meetings built into the school day at regular intervals.
10. In-service education and methods for teachers to share insights and information are an important part of the middle school conversion.
11. Instructional delivery strategies used at the middle grades allow for the developmental traits of the students. Cooperative learning strategies, accommodation of different learning styles, recognition of attention span limitations, and understanding the transescent's preoccupation with personal development issues are all needed in the middle grade program.
12. The middle school must develop a closer relationship with the parents and community and serve as a guide to the student's departure from childhood and embarkation on the route to adulthood and citizenship.

FIGURE 4.13 (Continued)

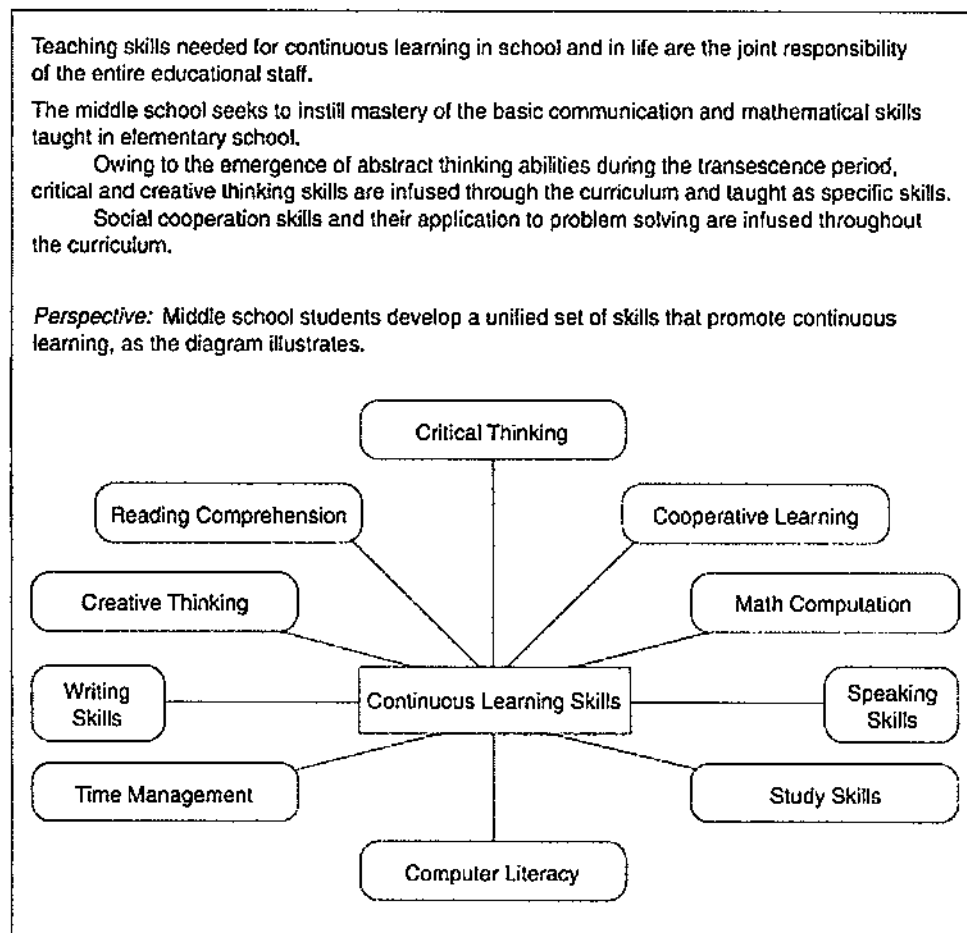


FIGURE 4.14 Thinking Skills Emphasized in the Middle School Program.