Making Middle Grades Work Initiative (MMGW)

In order to support the increased academic requirements at the high school level, priority schools are invited to participate in the Making Middle Grades Work Initiative (MMGW). The primary mission of MMGW is to create a culture of high expectations and continuous improvement that prepares middle grade students for challenging high school studies. MMGW is a comprehensive, whole-school improvement effort that will assist all middle grade students to receive a high-quality, challenging, and appropriate education that prepares them for success in college- and career-level courses in high school. To help middle schools meet this challenge, MMGW provides a framework of goals, key practices, and key conditions for accelerating learning and setting higher standards. The MMGW design recommends research-based practices for schools to increase student achievement.

Making Middle Grades Work is a Southern Regional Education Board (SREB) framework utilized by the Alabama Department of Education for incorporation into Alabama’s priority middle schools.

The following objectives are obtained through this initiative:
- Improve students’ academic knowledge and skills.
- Show students the connection between the middle grades, high school, technology centers, and their futures.
- Prepare students for a rigorous, college preparatory curriculum in high school.
- Assist teachers in gaining confidence in their abilities to help all students complete a challenging middle and high school curriculum.
- Promote collaboration among teachers to implement a more rigorous curricula.
- Strengthen administrators’ understanding of curriculum and instruction as they lead the staff in continuous school improvement.

Conditions for Eligibility

The MMGW key practices provide direction and meaning to comprehensive improvement for increased student achievement. Participating schools must agree to the implementation of the following MMGW key practices:
- A rigorous academic core.
- A belief that all students matter.
- High expectations and a system of extra help and time.
- Classroom practices that engage students in their learning.
- Teachers working together.
- Support from parents.
- Qualified teachers.
- Use of data.
- Use of technology for learning.
- Strong leadership.
Recommended Curriculum and Instruction

The centerpiece of MMGW is a challenging curriculum in the core academics — English language arts, mathematics, science, and social studies. School leaders need to align core academic courses to essential grade-level and state standards that prepare middle grades students for challenging high school course work. To reach eighth-grade proficiency and readiness for college-preparatory courses, students need to gain the essential skills for each of the core subject areas.

In English language arts, each student should:
- Summarize, paraphrase, and categorize information from a variety of nonfiction pieces.
- Make inferences and predictions from what he or she reads.
- Use context clues and word parts to determine what words and phrases mean.
- Write pieces that address a variety of audiences for different purposes.
- Revise and edit compositions to improve clarity and correctness.
- Combine reading and writing skills to produce a research paper at least once a year.
- Make oral presentations that fulfill specific purposes, some of which include technology.
- Take notes effectively from what is read and heard.
- Write a major research paper on a subject he or she chooses once a semester or once a year.
- Complete a short writing assignment of one to three pages for a grade weekly.
- Make an oral presentation each month or each semester.
- Read, both in and out of school, books of various types.

In mathematics, each student should:
- Develop and analyze tables, charts, and graphs in course work often.
- Use a scientific calculator weekly.
- Solve mathematics problems other than those in the textbook at least weekly.
- Work with one or more students on a challenging mathematics assignment monthly or weekly.
- Explain to the class — both orally and in writing — how he or she solved a mathematics problem monthly or weekly.
- Explain different ways to solve mathematics problems monthly or weekly.
- Use mathematics skills to solve problems in other classes monthly or weekly.

In science, each student should:
- Complete science projects that last one week or longer.
- Complete written lab reports once a semester or monthly.
- Use equipment to complete activities in science labs with tables and sinks once a semester or monthly.
- Use word processing software to complete an assignment or project often.
- Complete short writing assignments of one to three pages for a grade once a semester.
- Use a laptop computer, hand-held electronic device, and lab book or notebook to keep records, logs, and comments.
- Write long answers to questions on science assessments monthly.
In **social studies**, each student should:

- Understand the essential concepts of geography, economics, history, and government.
- Analyze conflicts and evaluate, debate, and defend a position.
- Participate in hands-on activities such as problem-solving and decision-making in real-world situations and service learning.
- Describe his or her heritage, government, and world and economic principles through the study of key issues of the past, present, and future.

In **exploratory courses**, each student should:

- Experience a curriculum that is aligned to core academic standards.
- Explore and use technology in the context of addressing contemporary problems and issues.
- Read and write to learn.
- Use language correctly and effectively to find, organize, and report information through reading, writing, speaking, and listening.
- Work on projects that require the application of mathematics and science knowledge and skills.
- Use labs and technology to learn scientific concepts in physical, life, and earth and space sciences.
- Explore different career and educational pathways.

In **literacy across the curriculum**, each student should:

- Read the equivalent of 25 books per year across the curriculum and demonstrate understanding of the content of materials read.
- Write weekly in all classes as a way to deepen understanding and retention of subject-matter content.
- Use reading and writing strategies to enhance learning in all classes.
- Write research papers in all classes.
- Complete a rigorous language arts curriculum.

In addition, the following components are suggested for implementation in Alabama’s priority middle schools:

1. An **Advisement Program** through which **ALL** students will have an adult mentor/advisor.

2. A prescriptive reading program for middle-grade students reading below grade level.

**Please Note:** The Southern Regional Education Board (SREB) also has a High Schools that Work (HSTW) initiative and a Technology Centers That Work (TCTW) initiative. Middle schools, high schools, and technology centers are encouraged to communicate with feeder pattern schools in the system and collaboratively plan for implementation of all three initiatives. This combined feeder pattern effort of implementation will promote
collaboration among teachers at all levels to implement a more rigorous curriculum and ensure that all students receive a high-quality, challenging, and appropriate education that prepares them for success in college and/or careers.

For additional information concerning High Schools That Work (HSTW) and Technology Centers That Work (TCTW), please visit the SREB website www.sreb.org and follow the links from HSTW and CTCTW or contact Craig Collins via email at ccollins@alsde.edu or by phone at 334-353-8387.