

## Support Structures to Help All Middle School Students Succeed

### What do support structures to help all middle school learners succeed look like?

These support structures offer students the options, access, resources, and assistance they need to thrive in school. Students know what teachers expect from them. Teachers present challenging content using methods that engage and make sense to students. They give all learners a chance to shine—adapting curriculum to meet each student’s unique learning needs. Students can take multiple paths to master skills and express their knowledge. They have ample opportunities to obtain extra help, both during and after school. When students receive the support they need, their confidence grows and schools become places where all students can succeed.

### How do support structures that help all students succeed impact teaching?

- Teachers weave high expectations and standards into all planning and instruction. They also make sure that all students benefit from a rigorous curriculum that asks them to stretch and do their best.
- Teachers draw upon a wide range of instructional methods. All approaches seek to actively engage all students.
- Teachers use ongoing, formative assessments. To meet the learning needs of all students, teachers regularly take the time to understand what each student knows.
- Teachers work with each other and with support staff to assess students’ needs and provide resources.

### What would these strategies look like in your middle school classroom?

Teachers can incorporate support structures into any lesson. Consider the examples below, where teachers use various strategies to foster achievement for all students.

#### Example: English Language Arts

Your class is about to start reading “The Call of the Wild” by Jack London. When you taught this novel last year, you asked students to answer chapter questions as they read. These questions proved to be ineffectual. The questions did not challenge your strongest students. Many students got bored and stopped paying attention as they used the same process in chapter after chapter. This year, you decide to try a new approach. You create choice boards for three segments of the book (Chapters 1–3, Chapters 4–5, and Chapters 6–7). Each choice board has four rigorous activities linked to the chapters. Each student must complete one of the activities after the class finishes reading the chapters. By the end of the book, all students will complete three activities. Choices include: writing a letter to the author, creating a dialogue between two characters, penning a book review, and making a scrapbook that captures what happens in the chapters. You work with students one-on-one to help them select assignments that are appropriate to their level and learning needs.

#### Example: Mathematics

Your students work in cooperative learning groups to review their homework and complete in-class assignments. For homework review, students choose their own groups. Most often, they pick peers who share similar interests or are involved in the same out-of-school activities. As a result, each group includes students with a range of math skills. Using an established small group protocol, you ask students to go over the previous night’s homework. When students work on in-class assignments, you group them by ability. You form groups using standardized test scores, as well as formative and summative assessments. Students work through problems with peers at their same level. This means that during small groups you provide focused help to lower-level groups and enrichment work to groups who excel. This flexible grouping method removes the stigmas that may arise if student groups are formed solely based on ability.

**Example: Science**

Your students just finished a lesson on buoyancy. Each lab group designed and carried out a Cartesian Diver investigation. Then, each student wrote up the lab notes in his or her science notebook. In their notes, all students recorded their process and results. They also included a conclusion paragraph where they presented their findings. As you review the lab notes, you notice that eight of your students do not understand how to write conclusion paragraphs. You discuss this situation with your school's science coach. She offers to teach your next class. She, and those students who successfully completed their lab notes, will work on an extension of the buoyancy lab. As they do so, you will spend the class period working on lab notes—and conclusion paragraphs in particular—with the eight students who need your help.

**Can support structures that help all students succeed work in a standards-based environment?**

National Standards in English language arts, math, and science advocate support structures to help all students succeed. Here's what these standards have to say:

**English Language Arts**

The National Board for Professional Teaching Standards' *Early Adolescence English Language Arts Standards* (2001) state that accomplished English language arts teachers:

- Create a caring and challenging environment in which all students actively learn.
- Systematically acquire specific knowledge of their students as individuals and use that knowledge to help develop students' literacy.
- Are committed to the celebration of diversity, practice equity and fairness, and use a variety of texts to promote opportunities to learn acceptance and appreciation of others.
- Set attainable and worthwhile learning goals for students and provide meaningful learning opportunities, while extending to students an increasing measure of control over setting goals and choosing how those goals are pursued.

**Math**

The National Board for Professional Teaching Standards' *Middle Childhood through Early Adolescence/Mathematics Standards* (1998) state that accomplished mathematics teachers:

- Value and acknowledge the individuality and worth of each student; they believe that all students can learn and should have access to the full mathematics curriculum; and they demonstrate these beliefs in their practice by systematically providing all students equitable and complete access to mathematics.
- Recognize that students are shaped by a variety of educational, social, and cultural backgrounds and experiences that influence learning. They draw on knowledge of how students learn and develop in order to understand students and to guide curricular and instructional decisions.
- Create stimulating, caring, and inclusive environments. They develop communities of involved learners in which students accept responsibility for learning, take intellectual risks, develop confidence and self-esteem, work independently and collaboratively, and value mathematics.
- Develop a positive disposition for mathematics and foster the development of all students' abilities to use mathematics as a way to understand the world around them.

**Science**

The National Board for Professional Teaching Standards' *Early Adolescence Science Standards* (2003) state that accomplished mathematics teachers:

- Know the unique characteristics of their students and use this knowledge to determine students' understanding of science and to design and implement appropriate instruction to enhance student learning.
- Take steps to understand and value the diversity of all students, promote equity in the classroom and beyond, and uphold fairness in their daily interactions with all students.
- Create stimulating and safe learning environments that foster high expectations for the success of all students and in which students experience the values inherent in the practice of science.
- Collaborate with colleagues and take leadership roles in their own educational community, as well as the larger community, to advance student learning.

**Questions about support structures to help all students succeed**

- How do you communicate your expectations for high-quality work to all students?
- What data do you use about your students and their learning to tailor your instruction to meet their needs?
- What strategies do you use to engage different students in a lesson?
- How can you structure the class and your time with students to provide additional support to students that need it?

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