

The Origin and Evolution of the State Education Department’s Essential Elements of Standards-Focused Middle-Level Schools and Programs

In 1989, the New York State Board of Regents adopted the *Regents Policy Statement on Middle-Level Education*. For almost a decade, this *Policy Statement* served as the primary reference, along with the Carnegie Corporation’s TURNING POINTS document, for New York’s middle-level educators.

Then, in 1998, James Kadamus, Deputy Commissioner for Elementary, Middle, Secondary, and Continuing Education, encouraged Department staff to identify the “Essential Elements” for their areas of responsibility. Among those who accepted this challenge was the Supervisor of the Department’s Middle-Level Education Program. By 2000, with the assistance of the Statewide Network of Middle-Level Education Liaisons and the New York State Middle School Association, the Department had developed and published the Essential Elements of Standards Focused Middle-Level Schools and Programs. This research-based document became the principal reference and resource for middle-level schools interested in implementing best practice and the *Regents Policy Statement on Middle-Level Education*.

In July 2003, after several years of study and discussion, the Board of Regents unanimously adopted a revised *Regents Policy Statement on Middle-Level Education*. The State Education Department then proceeded, with the help of middle-level practitioners affiliated with the New York State Middle School Association, the Statewide Network of Middle-Level Education Liaisons, and the New York City Forum to Accelerate Middle Grades Reform, to:

- Revise the “Essential Elements of Standards-Focused Middle-Level Schools and Programs” so they reflected the most current research and were fully aligned with the new *Regents Policy Statement*;
- Create rubrics for each of the Essential Elements as an aid to schools interested in determining their level of implementation of the Essential Elements.
- Develop a series of protocols to assist middle-level practitioners interested in:
 - Conducting an Awareness session to acquaint staff with the *Regents Policy Statement* and the Essential Elements and their rubrics;
 - Using the Needs Assessment information on the Essential Elements and their rubrics to complete a building-level Needs Assessment Plan; and, finally
 - Developing a School Improvement Plan based upon the *Regents Policy Statement* and the Essential Elements.