

THE SCHOOLS TO WATCH™ CRITERIA



DEVELOPMENTAL RESPONSIVENESS. The school is sensitive to the unique developmental challenges of early adolescence.

1. The staff creates a personalized environment that supports each student's intellectual, ethical, social, and physical development.
2. The school provides access to comprehensive services to foster healthy physical, social, emotional, and intellectual development.
3. Teachers foster curiosity, creativity and the development of social skills in a structured and supportive environment.
4. The curriculum is both socially significant and relevant to the personal and career interests of young adolescents.
5. Teachers use an interdisciplinary approach to reinforce important concepts, skills, and address real-world problems.
6. Students are provided multiple opportunities to explore a rich variety of topics and interests in order to develop their identity, learn about their strengths, discover and demonstrate their own competence, and plan for their future.
7. All students have opportunities for voice—posing questions, reflecting on experiences, and participating in decisions and leadership activities.
8. The school staff members develop alliances with families to enhance and support the well-being of the children.
9. Staff members provide all students with opportunities to develop citizenship skills, to use the community as a classroom, and to engage the community in providing resources and support.
10. The school provides age-appropriate, co-curricular activities to foster social skills and character, and to develop interests beyond the classroom environment.

EVIDENCE OF A HIGH PERFORMING SCHOOL



DEVELOPMENTAL RESPONSIVENESS. The school is sensitive to the unique developmental challenges of early adolescence.

1. The staff creates a personalized environment that supports each student's intellectual, ethical, social, and physical development.
 - Adults and students are grouped into smaller communities (i.e. teams, houses, academies) for enhanced teaching and learning.
 - These small learning communities are characterized by stable, close, and mutually respectful relationships.
 - Every student has a mentor, advisor, advocate, or other adult he/she trusts and stays in relationship with throughout the middle school experience.
2. The school provides access to comprehensive services to foster healthy physical, social, emotional, and intellectual development.
 - Teachers are trained to recognize and handle student problems.
 - Students with difficulties, and their families, can get help.
 - The school houses a wide range of support—nurses, counselors, resource teachers—to help students and families who need special assistance.
 - The school staff members offer parent education activities involving families.
3. Teachers foster curiosity, creativity and the development of social skills in a structured and supportive environment. All Teachers:
 - Enhance standards-based learning by using a wide variety of instructional strategies
 - Incorporate well-developed procedures and routines for effective classroom management
 - Facilitate learning by deliberately teaching study and organizational skills
 - Integrate creative activities in the lessons, e.g., current technologies, visual and performing arts, etc.
4. The curriculum is both socially significant and relevant to the personal and career interests of young adolescents.
 - Students talk about daily issues in their own lives, their community and their world.
 - Students take action, make informed choices, work collaboratively, and learn to resolve conflicts.
5. Teachers use an interdisciplinary approach to reinforce important concepts, skills, and address real-world problems.
 - For example, students may read a historical novel for language arts and history and then study music from the same time period in music class.
 - Students can work on the same project in several different classes.

6. Students are provided multiple opportunities to explore a rich variety of topics and interests in order to develop their identity, learn about their strengths, discover and demonstrate their own competence, and plan for their future.
 - Teachers and counselors push students to challenge themselves and set high academic and career goals for their future.
7. All students have opportunities for voice—posing questions, reflecting on experiences, and participating in decisions and leadership activities.
 - All students have a real say, or have legitimate representation, in what happens at school.
 - School staff members have an “open-door” policy to encourage student involvement and connection.
 - Students take an active role in school-family conferences.
8. The school staff members develop alliances with families to enhance and support the well-being of the children.
 - Parents are more than just volunteers or fund-raisers; they are meaningfully involved in all aspects of the school.
 - Parents are informed, included, and involved as partners and decision-makers in their children’s education.
9. Staff members provide all students with opportunities to develop citizenship skills, to use the community as a classroom, and to engage the community in providing resources and support.
 - Students take on projects to improve their school, community, state, nation, and world.
10. The school provides age-appropriate, co-curricular activities to foster social skills and character, and to develop interests beyond the classroom environment.
 - Student co-curricular activities cover a wide range of interests—team sports, clubs, exploratory opportunities, service opportunities, and a rich program in the visual and performing arts.
 - Activities include both boys and girls and students of all skill levels.