



# Middle Grades Recommendations

Fall 2021



**HOLYOKE PUBLIC SCHOOLS**  
A PATHWAY FOR EVERY STUDENT

# Agenda

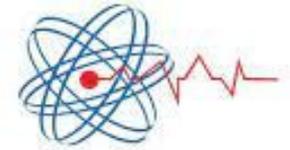
- Background
- Data Highlights
- Recommendations
- Unresolved Issue
- Next Steps
- Discussion

**Background**

IMAGINE







Holyoke STEM Academy



**VERITASPREP  
HOLYOKE**



# PreK-8 Portfolio

	<b>SY15-16</b>	<b>SY21-22</b>	<b>Ideal</b>
# of ES/MS Schools	9	11	8-9
# of ES/MS School Buildings	9	10*	8-9
Avg Size ES/MS School	412	331	450
Range of School Size	212-568	167-440	360-550
# of Grade Configurations	4	9	2

\* Peck/Veritas and Holyoke STEM/Dean Campus are co-located. Metcalf spans two buildings (the original Metcalf building and the old Blessed Sacrament building (rented space)). Prior to receivership and in the ideal state, schools would not be co-located and a single school would fit into one school building.

# Purpose of Middle Grades Collaborative Study Team (MGCST)

- **Understand existing data** on the middle grades experience in HPS
- **Study best practices** in middle level education
- **Propose a vision** for the middle grades experience
- Discuss **implications related to academics, social emotional learning (SEL), equity, and operations** resulting from that vision
- Make recommendations on **the middle school experience and grades configuration**

# Outreach by Middle Grades CST

- 30 “empathy interviews” with individuals
- 1 meeting with a high school student group
- 3 family/community input sessions
- 1 staff input session
- 567 survey responses (282 long, 285 short)

Voices			
Student	Staff	Family	Community
138	229	275	82

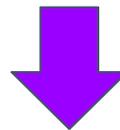
# Data Highlights

# Literature and Research Reviewed



# Holyoke Data Review

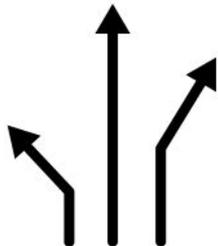
<b>75%</b>	Students say their culture & native language are respected.
<b>61%</b>	Middle school students <b>feel they belong</b> at their school.
<b>&lt;50%</b>	Students <b>on-track</b> in middle school.
<b>&lt;25%</b>	Students at the 50th percentile on STAR Reading or Math
<b>21%</b>	Students feel their <b>school has opportunities and activities that meet their interests and needs.</b>



**Takeaway:** Holyoke middle school students aren't prepared for high school and deserve more from their MS experience.

# Data Highlights: Surveys

<b>86%</b>	Middle school programming should include an <b>advisory period</b> .
<b>83%</b>	Setting students on a path to complete <b>MassCore is important</b> .
<b>81%</b>	Middle school programming should <b>directly connect to the high school programming of academics or career vocational technical ed.</b>
<b>63%</b>	HPS should <b>use previous MS building work as a starting point</b> on a single MS building project. 21% think we should start new. (17% are unsure.)
<b>54%</b>	Prefer <b>different programming across schools to promote a pathway for every student</b> vs. 30% prefer similar programs to ensure equity. (16% are unsure.)



# Data Highlights: Interviews & Focus Groups

Theme	Insight
<b>Clear, Rigorous Expectations</b>	Individual learning goals must be <b>set, rigorous, individualized, measured, and aligned</b> to standards and students' potential.
<b>Programming, Electives &amp; Extracurricular Activities</b>	Students want to learn beyond core, tested subjects. Classes and activities <b>aligned to students' interests are a motivating factor for students and provide opportunities for exploration of extended learning</b> (i.e., STEM, student council)
<b>Social Emotional Learning (SEL)</b>	Despite how some students may present in school, <b>leaders need to ensure that ALL students benefit from Social and Emotional Learning</b> - not just students who are experiencing trauma or present with needs.
<b>Equity &amp; Access</b>	Decisions need to include those impacted and must be made <b>transparently and equitably</b> .

# Panelists' Quotes

**“Students care how much you care, not how much you know.”** - Mary Cieplik, Principal, Westfield

**“Grade span isn’t the make or break decision. What gets picked isn’t that important. It’s about how well you implement.”** - Ron Berger, Senior Advisor, EL Education

**“Every kid must feel safe and welcome. Every kid must feel challenged.”** - Rachel Romano, Executive Director, Veritas

**“We need to take into consideration the big picture to understand the impact on the whole HPS community.”**

- Rebecca Thompson, Principal, HPS

# Recommendations

# Proposed Vision for HPS Middle Schools



HPS middle schools equip students with the skills and experiences to excel academically and socially in high school and beyond.

# Guiding Beliefs

MGCST grounded itself in AMLE's (American Middle Level Educators) 16 Characteristics of Effective Middle Schools.

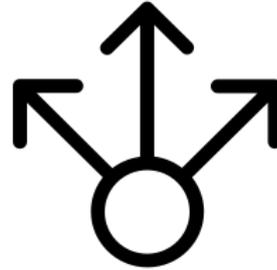
Surfacing from the data and discussion, there were five recommended as anchors for our middle grades work. Four directly from AMLE and one resulting as an overwhelming theme in the engagement process.

- 1 Students and teachers are engaged in **active, purposeful learning** to drive academic growth.
- 2 Educators use **multiple learning and teaching approaches**.
- 3 Students engage in applied learning and **activities inside and outside the classroom**.
- 4 The school environment is **inviting, safe, inclusive, and supportive of all**.
- 5 Adults **value young adolescents** and are prepared to teach them.

# Leading 21st Century Skills for students to develop by the end of 8th grade



**Problem Solving**



**Decision Making**



**Critical Thinking**



**Communication**



**Growth Mindset**

# Academic Recommendations

- Most important: Ensure **readiness for MassCore through high quality curriculum and instruction**
  - Schedule needs to allow for accelerated learning in Math and ELA especially, without compromising a well-rounded curriculum
- Also important: Provide **exposure to enrichment opportunities and career pathways** within core curriculum and advisory
  - CVTE, World/heritage languages, arts, music, STEM, theatre, consumer sciences, financial literacy, etc.

# Social Emotional Recommendations

- Implement an **Advisory period** to support social emotional learning, promote strong relationships and offer opportunities for exploration
- **Embed social emotional learning** across the curriculum - not separate
- Prioritize and protect time and space dedicated to **mental health** in schools
- **Partner with community agencies** to augment services provided in schools

# Equity Recommendations

- Equity ensures **all students have a rigorous academic experience** so they can take advantage of opportunities in high school and beyond
- Support for **specialty programming and exposure to a variety of enrichment**, while recognizing that students need to make choices
- **Balance** the number and needs of special populations (e.g. SPED, EL) across schools
- Ensure **all stakeholder voices are heard** and represented

# Operational Recommendations

- Develop and implement a **plan** for middle schools now **that works with/without a new building**
- Ensure enough students per grade/school to allow **for class and programming variety**
- Ensure time for **educator collaboration**
- Identify smart, efficient, sufficient, sustainable **staffing levels** that work for mid-sized middle schools
- Offer **continuity of programming** from ES to MS
- **Utilize previous MS building work as a starting point** in order to save time and money on the new project

**Unresolved Issue**

# Possible Grade Spans and # of Schools

	OPTION 1	OPTION 2
Grade Span	5-8	6-8
# of Middle Schools	3	2
Where is Dual Language?	small standalone	1 strand w/in a MS
# of Students/MS	1 of 400 / 2 of 550	550
# of Students/Grade	1 of 100 / 2 of 140	183
# of Feeder Elem schools per MS	1 into DL MS 2 into each other MS	3 into each MS

# 3 Grades 5-8 Schools: Select Pros/Cons

## Pros

## Cons

### Academics/SEL

- More time w/ S&F for academic growth & relationships
- Flexible/innovative staffing Ops
- A little smaller # of students/gr. while still enough for variety of programming/electives
- Allows for 1 DL-only school

### Ops/Equity

- 5 ES will all have ~4 classes/gr, resulting in similar sized ES
- No more co-located schools
- Have internal capacity while new building is built

- Some people view Gr. 5 as “too young” for MS
- Jump btwn Gr. 5 and Gr. 6-8 standards/curriculum
- Would likely require non-traditional staffing models
- Holyoke & MSBA may expect a gr. 6-8 model
- 3 MS makes collaboration and cohesion less straightforward
- Only 40% of students may experience a new MS bldg

# 2 Grades 6-8 Schools: Select Pros/Cons

## Pros

## Cons

### Academics/SEL

- CCSS content is 1 grade band
- Tighter developmental span
- Sufficient # of students & teachers for teaming, collaboration & more electives
- Integrates DL students

- Short time span in 1 school for relationship building & academic acceleration during a time of a lot of personal change for students

### Ops/Equity

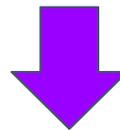
- No more co-located schools
- Have internal capacity while new building is built
- 2 MS makes collaboration and cohesion more straightforward

- Veritas Prep Holyoke - [a proven model in Springfield](#)- relies on the gr. 5-8 structure
- Only 50% of students may experience a new MS bldg
- ES varies more in size, with 3 or 4 classes per grade

# MGCST Preferences for Schools

3 - gr. 5-8 schools			2 - gr. 6-8 schools	
Strongly Prefer	Prefer	Indifferent / Unsure	Prefer	Strongly Prefer
3 votes	2 votes	4 votes	4 votes	3 votes
31%		25%	43%	

Results are inconclusive, with a slight preference for two gr. 6-8 middle schools. Sample size is small.



**Takeaway:** The implementation of a strong middle school model is more important than the precise grade span.

# Next Steps

# Recommended Near-Term Next Steps

- **Share this middle grades recommendation** with HPS Leadership, Principals, School Committee, School Building Committee, and City Council
- **Host more input sessions** for staff, student, family and community to solicit feedback on recommendations
- Then, make **important decisions on:**
  - Grades 5-8 vs. Grades 6-8 model
  - Dual language model in middle school
  - Middle school building project - school location, funding commitment to enter feasibility phase, etc.

# Recommended Mid-Term Next Steps

- **Develop programs and models for key aspects of middle grades experience**, including world/heritage language and Advisory
- **Engage in a community process** to develop a timeline and transition plan for fully moving to the middle school model, with or without a new middle school building
- **Once the ES/MS plan is set, allow for significant time for planning and implementation at the school level:** staffing, scheduling, teaming, program/academic design, operational (transportation, furniture, etc.)

# Discussion

# Discussion

- **Break-out Questions**
  - What resonated with you?
  - What did you disagree with?
  - What do you still have questions about?
- **Break-out Groups or Whole Group Discussion**
  1. Academics/SEL/Equity
  2. Operations/Grades Configuration
  3. Next Steps
- **MGCST Feedback Survey**



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# APPENDIX

# MGCST Members

- Dean Santiago+#, Family and Community Engagement Coordinator, Peck
- Erin Brunelle+\*@, School Committee Member
- Erin Linville, Chief of Strategy and Turnaround, HPS
- Jackie Glasheen+\*@, Executive Director of School Leadership, HPS
- Jessica Olivares-McBride#, Counselor/SPED Program Coordinator, Peck
- Lorie Banks#, Middle School Math Teacher, Sullivan
- Lulu Ekiert, Gr. 6-8 ESL Teacher, Holyoke STEM
- Melisa Grandison@#, Associate Principal, Veritas
- Nakaia Smith+\*@, Dean of Students, Peck
- Olivia Rivera\*#@, 6th gr. ELA/History Teacher, Veritas
- Rachel Romano, Executive Director, Veritas
- Rebecca Thompson, Principal, McMahan
- Tara Brandt, Director of Mathematics, HPS
- Stephen Mahoney, Chief of Schools, HPS
- Valerie Annear, Chief Instructional Officer, HPS
- Whitney Anderson\*@, Facilities Administration, HPS

Key  
+ HPS Graduate  
\*HPS parent  
@ Holyoke resident  
# Person of Color

\*Supported by Cambiar Education (Thank you Ami Magunia & Beau Gallegos!)

# Existing Elementary and Middle School Configurations

- 9 grade configurations across 11 schools
  - PK-4: Morgan, Kelly
  - PK-5: E.N. White
  - PK-5, 8: Donahue
  - PK-7: Metcalf
  - PK-8: McMahan, Sullivan
  - K-3: Lawrence
  - 4-8: Peck
  - 5-8: Veritas
  - 6-8: Holyoke STEM
- SY21-22: 7 grade configurations across 11 schools b/c Donhaue will be PK-5 and Metcalf will be PK-8.

# Research and Resources

- Pre-reading Packet #1: [Learning from Others](#)
- Pre-reading Packet #2: [What We Know About the Middle Grades](#)
- Panelists: ([bios](#))
  - Ron Berger, Senior Advisor for Teaching & Learning at EL Education
  - Mary Cieplik, Principal of Southampton Road Elementary School in Westfield, MA
  - Rachel Romano, Founding Principal of Veritas Prep
  - Rebecca Thompson, Principal of Lt Elmer J. McMahan Elementary School in Holyoke, MA

# Select Middle School moves since 2016

- **2016-17:** Listening tour and analysis confirmed the community's preference for distinct elementary and middle schools
- **Fall 2018: Began conversion of K-8s to elem. and middle schools**
  - Opened 2 new middle schools: Holyoke STEM and Veritas Prep
  - Allowed Morgan and E.N. White to fully and Kelly to partially convert to elementary schools
- **Fall 2020:** Begin to partially convert Donahue to an elem. school, yet Metcalf now has middle school
- **Fall 2021:** Kelly is fully converted to an elem. school, and Veritas has all grades 5-8
- **Fall 2022:** Donahue will be fully converted to an elem. school, yet ENW DL 6th graders need a middle school location

# Challenges we're seeking to Address

1. The HPS portfolio of school buildings is not aligned with enrollment and educational programming. Too many facilities are under-enrolled, resulting in inefficient and less effective staffing models and student/staff supports.
2. There is too much variation in the grade configuration across HPS schools, leading to an inconsistent educational path from PreK-8th grade.
3. Holyoke lacks a middle school experience that prepares students for success in high school and beyond.