

Transforming a Junior High School into a Middle School
Margaret R. Dalton, Ph.D.
Southeast Missouri State University

This is a long case study similar to Module II on the SLLA exam. The time limit for this case study is one hour. Use the scenario and the school improvement goals presented below and the documents provided on the following pages as the basis for answering the questions.

Scenario

You are the newly assigned principal of Pine Hills Middle School. Due to recent shifts in demographics the fifth and sixth grade school was closed. The fifth grade was placed in the elementary schools and the sixth grade was added to the seventh and eighth grade school. Previously the seventh and eighth grade school was Pine Hills Junior High School. You were hired to transform a departmentalized junior high school into an interdisciplinary middle school. The decision to move from a junior high school to a middle school was made by the superintendent and the school board. In general the parents in the school district are supportive of the schools and interested in their children's education.

School Improvement Goals

- To improve core subjects through direct instruction
- To prepare students for the academic rigors of high school by teaching basic skills in core areas

Documents

- School fact sheet
- Achievement data for the current year and the three previous years combined
- Excerpts from a school improvement plan (completed by the previous principal)
- A letter from a parent to the principal

Questions

Read all of the documents presented in this section and consider the scenario and school improvement goals given above. Address each of the following questions:

1. Based on your understanding of learning and teaching and larger educational issues, what are the issues faced by this school?
2. Briefly describe the specific actions you would take to transform Pine Hills Junior High School into a middle school.
3. Evaluate the given school improvement plan in terms of its strength and weaknesses. If changes are needed, how would you go about making revisions? Cite specific evidence for your judgments.
4. Outline the strategies you would implement to gain the community's support of the school improvement plan.

School Fact Sheet

1. Pine Hills Middle School is now composed of all the sixth, seventh, and eighth graders in the district. The district has seen steady decline in enrollment over

the past ten years. There are approximately seventy-five students in each grade level. Ten years ago there were a hundred students in each grade level.

2. The dropout rate and the pregnancy rate have increased by 50% in the past five years. The attendance has dropped to an all time low and is a major problem.
3. The school has an active parent organization. Among other things, the parent organization has conducted a successful fund-raising campaign and donated the profits to the school's sports program.
4. Because of the declining enrollment, two of the nontenured teachers at Pine Hills were fired to make room for the tenured sixth grade teachers. None of the teachers from the sixth grade center were fired.
5. The school's budget for professional development for the year is \$500.
6. At the fifth and sixth grade center, the faculty was united in their belief that interdisciplinary units were the best way for students to learn. The entire curriculum was taught through interdisciplinary units and team teaching.
7. At Pine Hills Junior High School the teachers did not work together on curriculum. The junior high school was rigidly departmentalized. The seventh and eighth grade teachers feel that the students were babied too much at the fifth and sixth grade center.

Test Data

Grade 6 Reading Test Data

	Last Year	Mean of 3 Previous Years Combined
Number of students	75	85
Percent meeting standard	70%	82%
Percent slightly below standard	15%	25%
Percent far below standard	15%	5%

Grade 7 Reading Test Data

	Last Year	Mean of 3 Previous Years Combined
Number of students	70	80
Percent meeting standard	65%	79%
Percent slightly below standard	20%	25%
Percent far below standard	15%	10%

Grade 8 Reading Test Data

	Last Year	Mean of 3 Previous Years Combined
Number of students	76	87
Percent meeting standard	60%	70%
Percent slightly below standard	20%	20%
Percent far below standard	10%	20%

Grade 6 Math Test Data

	Last Year	Mean of 3 Previous Years Combined
Number of students	75	85
Percent meeting standard	60%	60%
Percent slightly below standard	20%	30%
Percent far below standard	20%	10

Grade 7 Math Test Data

	Last Year	Mean of 3 Previous Years Combined
Number of students	70	80
Percent meeting standard	55%	65%
Percent slightly below standard	25%	35%
Percent far below standard	20%	10%

Grade 8 Math Test Data

	Last Year	Mean of 3 Previous Years Combined
Number of students	76	86
Percent meeting standard	50%	60%
Percent slightly below standard	25%	35%
Percent far below standard	25%	15%

Letter from Parent

Dear Principal:

We have lived in Wood Springs our entire lives. We are proud to live in this community and we have always been proud of our schools unto now. The school board made an unwise decision to change our junior high school to a middle school. My husband and I are both proud to be Pine Woods Junior High School Woodchucks!

A junior high school was good enough for me and it is good enough for my children. The children in this community have been successful for decades without a middle school. We do not need a touchy feely school to make our children feel good about themselves. We need strong academics. We feel that Pine Woods Junior High School was beginning to make a real difference in the life of our son. The junior high school provided the discipline and structure that our oldest son needed. I am afraid with the middle school our other two children will be robbed of the same quality of education our oldest son received.

As I am sure you are aware, two other communities close by tried this middle school fad and realized that an old fashioned back to basics education was what the children needed. I am asking you to reconsider this change to a middle school. Our children need good solid academic subjects taught with discipline not some new age fad.

My husband and I have been active in the parent teacher organization as well as the church for many years and I can assure you that we are not the only ones in the community that feel this way. Please take the necessary steps to prevent our junior high school from becoming a middle school. If you don't we will.

Sincerely,

Jane Q. Public

cc: Superintendent of Schools

School Improvement Plan (completed by previous principal)

School: Pine Woods Junior High School Goal#1 To improve core subjects through direct instruction

Activity	Responsibility	Date to be Completed	Cost	Evaluation
1.1 Buy teachers guides for text books	Principal	November	\$100	Purchase orders
1.2 Arrange for subject specific workshops n inservice day	Principal	October	\$200	Workshop evaluations
1.3 Core subject teachers meet to enhance subject content	Grade level team leader	January	None	Meeting minutes
1.4 Develop grading policy	Principal	April	None	Teacher comments

School: Pine Woods Junior High School Goal#2 To prepare students for the academic rigors of high school by teaching basic skills in core areas

Activity	Responsibility	Date to be Completed	Cost	Evaluation
2.1 Purchase materials for student test preparation	Principal	September	\$150	Purchase orders
2.2 Demonstrate test preparation materials at faculty meeting	Principal	October	None	Faculty meeting minutes
2.3 Identify weak skills	Team leaders	December	None	Notes from analysis
2.4 Provide inservice for teachers on students' weak skills	Principal	March	None	Agenda from staff development day

Notes to the Instructor
For
Transforming a Junior High School into a Middle School
Margaret R. Dalton, Ph.D.
Southeast Missouri State University

Introduction and Primary Standard

The primary standard this case study was written to address was standard 2:

A school administrator is an educational leader who promotes the success of all students by advocating, nurturing, and sustaining a school culture and instructional program conducive to student learning and staff professional growth.

The primary issue that needs to be addressed in this case study is how to bring together staff and faculty from two different schools with differing philosophies of education and create a school culture that leads to an effective instructional program for students. The case study was purposefully written to include a lot of noise or distracting issues.

The temptation here will be for students to try and justify why the middle school concept is better than the junior high concept. Often students will make the mistake of trying to force one concept on the faculty. The real issue is how you as principal get a group of people to work together for the benefit of students. In other words, how do you create a positive school culture?

Extended Learnings

Students could be asked to create documents such as:

- o A new school improvement plan
- o Parent and community communication plan
- o Analysis of the test score data and plan for improvement
- o Strategies for faculty team building
- o Scheduling documents

Other Standards:

Obviously with such an involved case study any of the standards could be applied.

The case study could also be focused around standard 1:

A school administrator is an educational leader who promotes the success of all students by facilitating the development, articulation, implementation, and stewardship of a vision of learning that is shared and supported by the school community.

Any time two schools are combined there will be a need to develop a new shared vision.

Also the case study could be focused around standard 4:

A school administrator is an educational leader who promotes the success of all students by collaborating with families and community members, responding to diverse community interests and needs, and mobilizing community resources.

The demographics of the community in the case study are changing and a plan to deal with that aspect could certainly become the focus of this case.

Alternate Scenarios

Various changes could be made in the case study in order to shift the focus such as:

- o Providing more data about the changing demographics: a plant could have closed, racial data could be included, etc.

- More information about faculty conflicts could be included.
- More documents that would provide information about the parents' points of view could be included.

Scoring Rubric

This case study is scored on a four-point scale, with 3 the highest possible score and 0 the lowest. The responses to the four questions within the case study are treated as a single response for scoring purposes, so only one score is assigned for the case.

Score 3

Answers to at least three of the four questions are detailed, specific, and convincing. The responses address strategies for dealing with creating a school culture that reflects the changing demographics, test data, school goals, and parent involvement. There should be an interpretation and synthesis of data rather than a mere restating of facts. The response should show an understanding of change and how it takes place. Evaluation of the school improvement plan should include the implications of change such as how to develop instructional and team building strategies. The response should show an understanding of how decisions will affect student learning and all stakeholders. A focus should also remain on the changing demographics and the involvement of all stakeholders. The answers as a whole are coherent with a focus on students and student learning.

Score 2

Answers to at least two of the four questions are clear and convincing. Responses indicate some knowledge for the need to develop strategies to deal with creating a new culture that reflects the needs of all stakeholders. The responses represent less of an understanding and synthesis of the materials presented than a score of three. The response may show some understanding of change and how it takes place. The depth of understanding and ability to implement change may be shallow. Limited understanding of how decisions affect all stakeholders may be displayed. Some attention may be given to changing demographics and involvement of stakeholders. Responses may be unbalanced with some sections being stronger than others in identifying with student learning.

Score 1

Responses are general and lack detail. The responses may fail to address the materials or scenario presented in the case study. One question may have specific answers. Responses may show a vague understanding of the need to develop a school culture. The response may indicate some misreading or misinterpretation of the materials. Information from the case study may be repeated without interpretation. The response may show a minimal understanding of the need for change and how to implement change. Strategies for change presented may be unrealistic or unrelated to stakeholders and student learning. Overall, the response indicates little understanding of the need to develop a positive school culture in terms of student learning.

Score 0

Responses fail to address the basic components of the case study. Responses offer no sound or convincing evidence of any understanding or knowledge of the case study. The response completely misses the point of the case study. No specific actions will be cited to transform the school. Evaluation of the school improvement plan may not address the strengths and weaknesses of the plan. No understanding

of involving stakeholders will be evident. Overall, the response will be so unconvincing that the main problem of the case study will be missed altogether.