Action Based Research Project:

In order for a middle school to be designated as exemplary, what elements must it possess and in what ways does my school possess those elements?

A Master's Action Research Thesis Proposal

submitted by

Brenda Morrow

to

New England College

April 19, 2009

Debra Nitschke-Shaw, Ph.D.
Dean of the Undergraduate Programs and Faculty
Research Mentor and Instructor

Carlton Fitzgerald
Director of Teacher Education and the
Master of Education Program Instructor

Acknowledgements

Thank you to my mentors, professors, and colleagues who continually provided me with support, guidance, and constructive criticism throughout my action research project.

Special acknowledgments are extended to:

- The Windham Middle School EDies Committee Members for continually giving me “something else” to consider and always keeping me grounded.
- Dr. Debra Nitschke-Shaw, my Research Mentor and Instructor for her wisdom, insight, support, and most importantly, her patience.
- Mr. Carlton Fitzgerald, my Instructor and Intern Supervisor for his support, enthusiasm, and encouragement.
- Ms. Kori Becht, my school principal, for providing me with the opportunity and professional freedom to explore, investigate, and learn from my colleagues.

Dedication

To my colleagues, who strive for educational excellence every day.

To my husband, whose support, encouragement, and devotion allowed me to complete my Masters Degree.

To my children, Alex and Erin, whose patience and love reminds each day why I am an educator.

To my father, may you rest in peace knowing that I completed my project. Thank you for believing in me; I will continue to make you proud of me.

Table of Contents

Acknowledgements 2

Dedications 3

Chapter One: Introduction 6

Introduction 6

Project Summary 6

Definitions of Key Terms 7

Background Information 7

Theoretical Framework and Underpinnings 8

Assumptions 9

Overview of the Methodology 9

Data Collection 10

Contributions 11

Chapter Two: Review of the Literature 12

Curriculum and instruction 12

Learning process 15

Achievement 19

Community involvement 21

Leadership 24

School Climate 27

NH Excellence in Education Award 29

Conclusion 29

Chapter Three: Research Methodology 31

Aim of the Research Project 31

Focus of Inquiry 31

Setting and Participants 32

Phases of Inquiry 33

Data Analysis 35

Debriefing 37

Chapter Four: Results 39

Limitations 56

Action Plan 57

Summary 60

References 62

Appendices 65

A: Committee and Staff Member Consent Form 65

B: Principal Consent Form 67

C: NELMS Spotlight Survey 69

D: Spotlight School Award Application Letter 74

E: EDies Evaluation Rubric 76

F: EDies Nomination Letter 77

G: EDies Evaluation Rubric #2 82

Chapter 1: Introduction

Receiving a NH Excellence in Education Award, also referred to as an "ED" ies award, is a distinct honor. Schools all over the state of New Hampshire compete to be named a school of excellence. In order to be considered for such an award, a school must demonstrate its excellence. A school must be exemplary. As I research the elements of an exemplary middle school, I am drawn to the conclusion that middle schools all over the nation have a difficult task meeting not only the academic needs of their students, but the developmental needs of young adolescence. According to Thomas Armstrong, "educators need to understand the developmental needs of young adolescents and in particular their neurological, social, emotional, and meta cognitive growth" (2006, p.113) Examining test scores as the only measure for a school to be considered exemplary does not provide enough information. As the NH Excellence in Education Awards Board of Directors investigates schools of excellence, they set up a rigorous criterion that focuses on all aspects of the school community and the child. According to the NH "ED" ies evaluation rubric, schools are judged based on the following categories: curriculum and instruction, teaching/ learning process, student achievement, community/parent involvement, leadership/decision-making, and school climate.

Project Summary

Based upon the criterion established by the NH Excellence in Education Awards Board of Directors, I designed an action research project that explores the elements of an exemplary middle school. My exploration led me to investigate whether or not my school possesses the essential elements to be considered exemplary. The National Middle School Association (NMSA) defines the "purpose and functions of the exemplary middles schools" as those which "center on the intellectual, social, emotional, moral, and physical developmental needs of young adolescents…. Exemplary middle level programs foster appropriate programs, policies, and practices that foster the development of these tasks in positive ways (http://www.designshare.com/Awards/2000/10031/10031_POE_4a.htm). My initial thought is that my school fosters the development of our students and practices the elements that make a school exemplary. Through my research and committee work, I intend to examine the qualities of my middle school and evaluate our candidacy for a NH Excellence in Education Award. My project will include self-assessments, research, and meaningful discussions with a committee of

dedicated instructional leaders for school improvement, the final result being the completion of an application for an “ED” ies award for my school and an action plan for the next steps.

Definition of Key Terms

“ED” ies- New Hampshire Excellence in Education Awards Board of Directors

Curriculum- a program of study

Assessment- an evaluation or judgment about something based on an understanding of the situation.

Achievement- something that somebody has succeeded in doing, usually with effort

NELMS- New England League of Middle Schools

Background Information

My school is located in a community of approximately 15,000 people. Our school district currently serves over 1,600 students in our three community schools. Currently, our district is building a high school that is anticipated to open in the fall of 2009. The middle school has approximately 600 students, 82 teachers, which includes support staff and custodians, two administrators, two guidance counselors, a nurse, a school resource officer, and an active parent teacher organization. Our school is dedicated to our students and community. Our school mission is “to meet the academic, social, and emotional needs of adolescents. We acknowledge that each student is unique with regard to need, purpose, and experience. To this end, we affirm our responsibility to do everything within our power and authority to maximize the potential of each student” (Staff Handbook, 2007, p. 1).

I have been a member of this school for four years and I am proud of my school and district. We have gone through many changes through my experience in the district, including a new superintendent, human resource director, business administrator, assistant principals at several schools, and a new building principal at the middle school. New instructional programs have been implemented, special education services revamped, collaboration through grade levels and academic departments improved, student and teacher mentoring programs used on a regular basis, curriculum planning and mapping implemented, and a new advisory program beginning, as well as teaming through the grades have been just a few of the many improvements my district as instituted for school-wide advancements. Through all of the changes created within my

district, our middle school has always shown growth and has maintained a staff of dedicated individuals who are always willing to do the best for students.

As I examine and explore the characteristics of my school, I will gain valuable information about the amazing things that occur with our school walls and take the opportunity to celebrate with my colleagues the outstanding job we do each day for our students and our school community. The individuals who have volunteered to work on my committee in order to explore our school's candidacy are not just classroom teachers. The members consist of the building administrators, core academic classroom teachers, the school librarian, and the music teacher. It would be unfair to classify them as merely classroom teachers, because the individuals who work at my school are dedicated individuals who are role models for adolescents and adults alike. I look forward to working with these individuals every day.

Theoretical Framework

Schools that possess the elements to be considered exemplary are effective in meeting the needs of all types of learners and are dedicated to improving instructional practices on a routine basis. Through communication and collaboration, teacher leaders and administrators can motivate the entire school community for improvement. It is my belief that my school is a middle school that is dedicated to its students and one that has the characteristics to be considered exemplary. My research will conclude that my school contains the necessary elements to be considered a school of excellence by the New Hampshire Excellence in Education Awards Board of Directors.

A New Hampshire Excellence in Education Award is not given lightly. Careful consideration is given to each applicant. Schools are judged in several areas and must provide evidence of their accomplishments. The categories include curriculum and instruction, teaching

and learning processes, student achievement, community/ parent involvement, leadership, and school climate. In chapter two, these theories will be discussed in detail.

Assumptions

I believe my school is an excellent school. By creating this action project and chairing a committee for the purpose of examining our school practices, I intend to prove the worth of my school as exemplary as well as develop an action plan that will lead to continued growth and excellence. Working collaboratively with my colleagues examining our curriculum, instruction, the learning process, student achievement, community involvement, leadership, and school climate will strengthen our school environment. Through our assessments, the committee will collectively make decisions as to the candidacy of our school as a school of excellence, develop an action plan that will lead to continued growth and excellence, and learn to work together to make our school the best it can be.

Overview of Methodology

As John Collins states in his book, Good to Great, "All good-to-great companies begin the process of finding a path to greatness by confronting the brutal facts of their current reality" (2001, p. 88). In order to conduct my action research project and truly assess whether or not my school possesses the qualities of an exemplary middle school, it is imperative that my committee take an honest look at the elements of our school. Committee members need to assess the school and work together to develop a plan for continued growth and excellence and, if warranted, apply for a NH "ED" ies Award. A New Hampshire Excellence in Education Award is not given lightly and it will take the efforts of the entire committee and school to demonstrate the qualities of our middle school to be exemplary.

The establishment and execution of the committee tasks will be critical to the exploration of our candidacy. In order to effectively assess and evaluate our school, the committee will meet on a regular basis. The committee will begin by listing the strengths and weaknesses of our school. Our discussion will then lead our exploration as to how we can change our weaknesses. By examining the weaknesses we view, we can implement changes for improvement and strengthen our candidacy for an "ED" ies award. As we focus on the categories evaluated by the NH Excellence in Education Board of Directors, (see Appendix E: EDies Evaluation Rubric) our school will improve itself by strengthening its curriculum and instruction, learning process, student achievement, community involvement, leadership, and school climate. Using the guiding questions provided by the "ED"ies Board of Directors for the creation of a nomination letter and the information gained by my research, we, as a committee will be able to evaluate whether our school is meeting the needs of our students and school community to the best of our ability as well as create an improvement plan for areas in which we can strengthen our school.

Our research and school explorations will lead us to the creation of a nomination letter for the "ED" ies award, the completion of an application for the NELMS Spotlight School Award, if nominated, the completion of the final application for the "ED"ies award, and the creation of an action plan to further our growth and enhance our excellence.

Data Collection

Data will be collected and evaluated through the completion of self-assessment surveys, observations, and collaborative discussions. Each committee member will complete a self-assessment survey based upon the New England League of Middle School's Spotlight School criteria to begin our exploration of the validity of our school's candidacy for an "ED" ies award. The survey will serve as a baseline for our committee work. Our committee will compile

information for a completed Spotlight School application as well as gain evidence for the "ED"ies award.

Using the recommended focus questions for the "ED" ies nomination letter, members of the committee will partner up and work on developing a sufficient answer for a particular question. The questions will be complied and revised to create a final nomination letter for the "ED" ies Board of Directors. If our school is nominated, the committee will then work on the application for an award. If our school is not nominated for the application process, the committee will use the categories created by the "ED"ies Board to develop an action plan for school improvement based upon the weaknesses identified. We will continually re-evaluate our school in order to create an environment that will be considered an exemplary school. All committee members will also submit a final reflection summary of their participation in the action research study.

Contributions

Through our investigations, our committee will be focusing on: individual, collegial, and organizational improvements; strategies that will improve the instructional practices used in our school in order to increase student learning; studying methods of improved teaching and learning processes in order to enhance the quality of best practices; mutual trust, honesty, and collaboration in order to meet the needs of our school community; discussions of the elements of exemplary schools and teaching practices; and examining the validity of our school's candidacy for a NH Excellence in Education Award.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Overview of Key Literature

Exemplary middle schools are schools that demonstrate excellence and deserve recognition. My research will focus on the criteria of excellent schools for the state of New Hampshire. In the state of New Hampshire, schools can be nominated for several awards to recognize their merit. The NH Excellence in Education Award, also known as an "ED" ies Award, is a prestigious honor given to selected NH schools who meet high standards of excellence. A school that is nominated for this award is expected to demonstrate its excellence in six categories. Through my research I find that schools viewed as exemplary throughout our nation exhibit excellence in the same categories. These categories include: curriculum and instruction, the learning process, achievement, community involvement, leadership, and school climate.

Curriculum and Instruction

According to the National Forum on Education quoted in a research summary conducted by Susan Wilkinson from the National Middle School Association (NMSA), "in order for schools to support student success, they have to be academically excellent" (2008, p. 1). "Academically excellent means that schools are challenging all students to use their minds well by providing them with curriculum, instruction, assessment, and supports they need to meet the rigorous achievement standards" (Wilkinson, 2008, p. 1). Student achievement is the result of a solid curriculum and effective instruction. Yet, it is important to recognize that "the last thing we need is a one-size-fits-all curriculum with one single set of goals for everyone" (Eisner, 2004, p. 8). Schools must be able to meet the unique needs of their students by continually investigating new concepts and methods of instruction. Recent reports and frameworks reflect curriculum that

is relevant, challenging, integrative, and exploratory; instruction that connects directly to curriculum, assessment, and the students themselves; assessment that allows students to demonstrate their knowledge and skills and allow educators to make improvements in curriculum and instruction to promote learning are the most effective (NMSA, *This We Believe*, 1995).

In order for students to become engaged in learning, they must be exposed to various teaching techniques that meet their learning style. Charlotte Danielson suggests that successful instruction requires students to actively participate in learning opportunities (2007, p. 14). Middle school students learn by doing hands-on learning activities not be being saturated with information (Parker, 2002; Southern Regional Educational Board, 2001c.). Teachers who vary instruction, curriculum, and assessment to meet the diverse developmental needs of the students are more effective (King, 2003). According to research conducted by the National Middle School Association, "Farkas (2003) found that student achievement, attitude, empathy, retention, and transfer are more obtainable in multisensory approaches that traditional approaches. Moreover, he suggested that students are more successful when teachers use learning styles methods to teach" (http://www.nmsa.org/Publications/RMLEOnline/Articles/Vol31No5/tabid/1572/Default.aspx).

Regardless of the method of delivery, communicating clearly and accurately are essential elements and are cited in Danielson's Framework for Teaching as being critical for highly effective teachers (Danielson, 1996, p. 90). Various teaching methods should be explored within a classroom to ensure the potential for success of all learners. One method that stands out in exemplary schools is that of discussion. According to Danielson (2006), "teachers' skills in questioning and in leading discussions are valuable for many instructional purposes, eliciting student reflection, and challenging deeper student engagement" (p. 92). Discussion formats and

strategies can help teachers and students create more engaging lively discussions across subject areas (http://www.nmsa.org/Publications/RMLEOnline/Articles/Vol31No5/tabid/1572/Default.aspx).

According to the National Middle School Association, Marzano, Pickering, and Pollack (2001) identified nine categories of instructional strategies associated with student achievement:

1. Identifying similarities and differences of items, events, processes, or concepts.
2. Summarizing information and taking notes.
3. Emphasizing effort and providing recognition.
4. Assigning valuable homework and practice.
5. Using nonlinguistic representations to increase student knowledge.
6. Fostering cooperative learning.
7. Setting learning goals and giving specific, timely feedback.
8. Generating and testing hypotheses and questions.
9. Using cues and advance organizers.

(http://www.nmsa.org/Publications/RMLEOnline/Articles/Vol31No5/tabid/1572/Default.aspx)

These categories are used as the basis for meaningful curriculum, inspiring student motivation, and providing peer support for learning. Student achievement is a top priority for exemplary middle schools. In order to guarantee that students are making adequate progress, schools must investigate the learning process for each student and continually evaluate and re-evaluate curriculum goals and instructional practices.

Curriculum and instruction must contain effective instructional strategies that are based on best practices and are aligned with state and local standards for education. The “ED” ies

Board of Directors evaluate exemplary curriculums as ones that are research based and well planned (http://www.edies.org/2007-08_Rubric.pdf). The “ED’ ies Board insists that there is considerable evidence of effective instruction through increased student performance and ways in which the needs of the student are meet (http://www.edies.org/2007-08_Rubric.pdf). This includes the use of formative and summative assessments such as the NECAP and the NWEA testing required by the state, to guarantee that students are achieving. Arts integration within the instructional programs is important to the “ED”ies Board of Directors (http://www.edies.org/2007-08_Rubric.pdf). This can be seen through the fact that curriculua must be challenging and appropriate for all students, concentrating on high developmental expectations for all students (http://www.edies.org/2007-08_Rubric.pdf).

Learning Process

The learning process is defined by the on line Encarta Dictionary as learning; the acquisition of knowledge or skill gained through education. In Mark Smith’s article on learning theory, he discussed four different orientations taken from Merriam and Caffarella (1991) they include the behaviorist, cognitive, humanistic and the social / situational orientation to learning. These theories overlap and draw upon each other. Through his research, Smith concluded learning as “something that you do in order to understand the real world” (1999, p. 2). According to the National Association of Elementary School Principals, successful schools are organized around student learning (NAESP, 2001, p. 4). Students do not learn at the same pace or in the same way. Schools that support student success, give students the time they need to meet high academic standards. In addition, these schools provide rigorous curricula and the instructional strategies that support all students (NAESP, 2001, p. 4).

Middle school is a difficult time for adolescents. They are going through social, emotional, and developmental changes. It is important for educators to realize that adolescents need support and guidance in order to enjoy their school experience and to make it valuable to them. Gardner and Goleman point out, that good middle schools help students develop their emotional intelligence and their intrapersonal and interpersonal intelligence. They use cooperative learning as a key to fostering positive social relationships. They engage students in curriculum-related activities that serve to develop their social and emotional intelligences (Armstrong, 2006, p.121). An *Educational Leadership* article written by Nel Noddings, makes it clear that schools should encourage the development of all aspects of whole persons: their intellectual, moral, social, aesthetic, emotional, physical, and spiritual capacities (2008, p. 1). The question remains as to how to get students to think and then in turn, learn while recognizing their unique developmental needs. Exemplary schools appear to be those schools that are filled with educators, who focus on the whole child, are willing to use various teaching strategies, serve as role models and re-evaluate their instructional practices on a frequent basis in order to provide students with more opportunities for learning.

As we look at the learning process it is important to recognize that students come to classes with various levels of motivation to learn. There are an infinite number of actions an instructor can take that will increase student motivation. It has been said, “teaching tweens (middle school students) requires special skills and the willingness to do whatever it takes to ensure student success” (Wormeli, 2006, p. 15). The likelihood of students retaining information and knowledge will increase if teachers make attempts to motivate all of the students in their classrooms. A group of individuals worked with John Malouf creating methods of motivational teaching into 12 categories:

1. Making content relevant to student values and goals.

2. Helping and persuading students achieve their goals through learning.
3. Providing potent models for learning.
4. Promoting students to learn.
5. Establishing positive relationship with students.
6. Rewarding student achievement and learning efforts.
7. Not de-motivating students.
8. Enhancing student learning self efficacy.
9. Using engaging teaching methods.
10. Using appealing teaching style.
11. Giving motivational feedback.
12. Monitoring student motivation levels and adjusting motivation methods as needed.

(2008, p. 3)

Motivational methods are important to learning process because they can affect a student's willingness to engage in learning. According to Balfanz & Mac Iver (2000), "in high performing middle schools, students receive an extensive assortment of learning supports to increase their motivation to learn and enable them to succeed academically" (http://www.hup.sjsu.edu/faculty/susanwilkinson/Content/179/5%20NMSA%20Research%20Summary%204.pdf). Schools that are considered exemplary focus on developing self awareness skills and "habit of mind" such as listening with empathy, communicating with precision, persisting and innovating, that are needed for citizenship, work, and careers (http://www.edies.org/2007-08_Rubric.pdf).

Educators recognize that people are not all alike. Each individual has his or her own unique learning strengths and weaknesses. It is vital for teachers to deliberately use a variety of methods to reach all students (Mills, 2002, p. 1). There are many instructional approaches an

educator can use in order to reach the individual learning styles of their students. Many teachers are drawn to using the techniques that incorporate multiple intelligences. Leslie Owen Wilson investigated the reasons why educators use the MI theory and came to the conclusions that MI helps diversify instruction, aids students in becoming empowered and in finding bridging techniques and study skills; a tool for understanding self and others; taps into natural talents, validates natural talents; and broadens categories of giftedness (1998, pp. 1-9). The MI theory helps educators meet the needs of many different types of learners easily, and because it reflects teachers' and parents' deeply rooted philosophical beliefs that all children possess gifts and that part of the most important mission of schools is to foster positive personal development (Wilson, 1998, p. 9).

Another effective model of instruction that promotes student learning is differentiation. Teachers who differentiate instruction simply do what is fair and developmentally appropriate for students when the "regular" instruction doesn't meet their needs (Wormeli, 2006, p. 14). A variety of teaching strategies, instructional formats and expectations that are used appropriately across all grade levels to meet the needs of all students, including students with disabilities, English language learners, talented and gifted learners and students at risk and to enhance learning makes a school exemplary (NH Edies). Differentiation gives teachers the ability to use and suggest more than one strategy to learn something. Differentiation requires us to invite individual students to acquire, process, and demonstrate knowledge in ways different from the majority of the class if that is what they need to become proficient (Wormeli, 2006, p. 16).

The learning process for each student will vary based on each individual's learning style and educational need. The "ED"ies Board of Directors judges schools nominated for an award in terms of their ability to provide evidence of the effective use of multiple teaching strategies and

differentiated instruction that results in learning for all students, the use and integration of technology to advance teaching and learning, professional development priorities and staff evaluations clearly linked to student progress, of procedures for recognizing and reinforcing effective teaching and learning practices, and providing evidence of a teacher induction, mentoring and support program that enhances student learning (http://www.edies.org/2007-08_Rubric.pdf). The "ED" ies organization's criterion sets a high standard for all schools to follow. It is important to remember that the definition of learning; the acquisition of knowledge or skill gained through education (http://encarta.msn.com/) reminds educators that all students are unique and we must be aware of a variety of instructional strategies and techniques in order to meet the needs of all learners.

Achievement

Student achievement is critical to the definition of an exemplary school. Schools are required to meet the requirements of the federal government policy of *No Child Left Behind*. According to the U.S. Department of Education, "the purpose of this title is to ensure that all children have a fair, equal, and significant opportunity to obtain a high-quality education and reach, at a minimum, proficiency on challenging State academic achievement standards and state academic assessments" (http://www.ed.gov/index.jhtml). Measuring the achievement levels of students varies per state. State testing of students' performance also varies per state. Yet, the expectation of achievement itself does not differ from state to state. All schools want to raise the level of achievement for their students. In order to focus on raising the achievement level of students, schools must examine their programs and practice.

Schools that are successful use a variety of assessment tools and strategies to collect data, inform instruction and improve student performance. According the NH Excellence in Education

Committee, exemplary schools demonstrate ongoing assessment and instruction that is well integrated. Teachers regularly use a variety of performance measures and normed tests as the basis for sound instructional planning and to provide varied opportunities for students to demonstrate learning (http://www.edies.org/2007-08_Rubric.pdf). As educators, teachers are expected to advance students' academic, social, and emotional well-being, and are presumed to promote the values and beliefs that students must embrace to contribute to, and advance a democratic society (Lieberman & Walker, 2008, p. 274). In order to meet the demands of education in today's society, teachers must be well trained and collaborate with one another. "If teachers want to teach students to think, they must think about what they themselves are doing," Nel Noddings, *All Our Students Thinking* (2007, p. 4).

Good strategies to increase student achievement are to hire high quality educators, provide professional development opportunities for staff members, and promote teacher collaboration. The National Board of Professional Teaching Standards (2006) has five core propositions for teacher programs:

1. Teachers are committed to students and their learning.
2. Teachers know the subjects they teach and how to teach those subjects to students.
3. Teachers are responsible for managing and monitoring student learning.
4. Teachers think systematically about their practice and learn from experience.
5. Teachers are members of learning communities. (Lieberman & Walker, 2008, p. 275)

"Teacher collaboration is hailed as one of the most effective ways to improve student learning," states Vaishali Honawar (2008, p. 2). In a professional learning community, each

teacher has access to the ideas, materials, strategies, and talents of their colleagues (2008, p. 2). Schools that contain teachers who regularly share student work with one another in order to determine what students know and to plan their next teaching steps are considered by the NH EDies committee to be excellent. Collaborating to reach professional consensus on determining the levels of academic performance based upon assessment results are an effective way to increase student learning (http://www.edies.org/2007-08_Rubric.pdf). Teachers must be willing to analyze performance data based on classroom, state and national assessment tests in order enhance student performance.

Academic achievement is an important component of an exemplary school. The "ED" ies Board of Directors critique schools on whether they can provide the committee with evidence to support the use of varied assessment strategies to collect data, inform instruction and improve student performance, student progress that is supported by school data, the ability of students to apply critical thinking and problem solving skills, and the ability of students who can demonstrate positive character development and self-discipline (http://www.edies.org/2007-08_Rubric.pdf). All students have the right to be taught by competent teachers, and teachers have the right to high-quality preparation, induction, and professional development (Leiberman & Walker, 2008, p. 276). With high quality teachers, analysis of a variety of assessment data, collaboration among colleagues, schools should be able to increase student learning. These tools will assist schools in moving from a good school to an exemplary school. Using performance data results, schools should focus on creating lifelong learners of their students and staff.

Community Involvement

Today's schools are not just for those students who attend classes each day. They are important to the entire school community including, the faculty, students, parents, and

community members. School districts define a community and often times depend on the community to support them. One of the key components of an exemplary school is community involvement. The national standards for Parent/Family Involvement Programs established by the Parent Teacher Association in 1997 explicitly noted the need for school involvement by both parents and the community (Marzano, 2003, p. 47).

"Based on more than two decades of research on parent involvement, family engagement, and community partnerships… tools, guidelines, and action team approaches may be used by all school levels to increase involvement and improve student learning and development," explains Dr. Joyce L. Epstein, Founder and Director of National Network of Partnership Schools (NNPS 1996). According to Robert Marzano, "three features define effective parental and community involvement: Communication, participation, and governance" (2003, p. 47). Parents want to be informed about what is taking place in their children's schools as well as given information about their individual child's academic growth.

It is the school districts responsibility to maintain communication and involvement from the community. The National Education Association (1982) pointed out that parents have no obligation to communicate with the school. Therefore, it is the responsibility of the school to initiate communication with the school (Marzano, 2003, p. 48). Schools that may be considered exemplary use a variety of strategies to encourage effective and responsive communications between the school, parents, and the community. This may include the development of a Parent Teacher Association, newsletters, phone calls, web sites, flyers, social gatherings, informational meetings, cable television and radio announcements, etc…

The parents and the community are an integral part of the school's work. With proper communication, the community can greatly enhance the learning experience and opportunities

for students. Participation from the community can add to the school's resource base. According to Tangri and Moles (1987), benefits include: expanded expertise on specific topics and subject areas, expanded contacts for teachers and administrators with resources in the community, direct financial contributions resulting from business support, and donation of equipment from businesses (Marzano, 2003, p. 48).

Connecting schools with communities, which together share responsibility for each middle grade students' success, through identifying service opportunities in the community, establishing partnerships and collaboration to ensure students' access to health and social services and using community resources to enrich instructional program and opportunities for constructive after-school activities are all recommendations from the Carnegie Corporation's Report *Turning Points* in June of 1989 (Williamson, 2007, p. 14). Researchers have found that schools with higher quality partnership programs report greater parent volunteerism and attendance at school events, more parents involved in the decision-making process, and more widespread use of homework that requires student-parent interaction than do schools with lower quality programs (Sheldon, 2005; Sheldon & Van Voorhis, 2004). Creating a partnership between the school and its community will lead to more benefits for our students.

The NH excellence in Education committee recognizes exemplary schools for their effective and responsive communication between the school, parent, and community. It must be evident that the school regards the local community and its engagement as essential to its success (http://www.edies.org/2007-08_Rubric.pdf). Schools are judged by their ability to be effective and responsive in their communications between the school, parents, and the community, as well as their procedures for developing partnerships with local businesses and community organizations resulting in effective partnerships that impact student achievement and their

volunteer program that should include a training component (http://www.edies.org/2007-08_Rubric.pdf). Creating a partnership between the school and the community will increase the public's awareness of the importance of education and most importantly it may increase the support of their children's learning. Communication with the community is essential for exemplary schools.

Leadership

"While effective teachers remain the number one ingredient in the recipe for high student performance, effective leadership is not far behind," states Tom Erb, the editor for the Middle School Journal May 2006. Effective leadership according to the National Association of Elementary School Principals, are leaders that:

- Lead schools in a way that places student and adult learning at the center.
- Set high expectations and standards for the academic and social development of all students and the performance of adults.
- Demand content and instruction that ensure student achievement of agreed-upon academic standards.
- Create a culture of continuous learning for adults tied to student learning and other school goals.
- Use multiple sources of data as diagnostic tools to assess, identify and apply instructional improvement.
- Actively engage the community to create shared responsibility for student and school success. (NAESP, 2006, p. 2)

Sharing the responsibility of a school is the key to effective leadership. According to Charlotte Danielson, "principals today are expected to be visionaries (instilling a sense of

purpose in their staff) and competent managers (maintain the physical plant, submitting budgets on time), as well as instructional leaders (coaching teachers in the nuances of classroom practice). In addition, the principal has become the point person for accountability requirements imposed by states and federal government, and must respond to multiple stake holders…" (Danielson 2007, p. 16). Given these factors, school improvement depends on the involvement of teacher leaders. A principal's role in high leadership capacity schools is to: learn continually, think strategically, be value- and vision- driven and continually expand the behaviors initiated in earlier phrases (Lambert, 2005, p. 64).

As John Collins states in his book, *Good to Great*, (2001, p. 88) "all good-to –great companies begin the process of finding the path to greatness by confronting the brutal facts of their current reality" (Cassellius, 2006, p. 6). A reality is that today's principals are required to play many different roles in education and many administrators cannot devote enough time and energy to school improvement (Danielson 2007, p. 16). Schools that routinely collaborate and share the decision making process are viewed as more successful. Administrators play an important role in setting the tone and culture of the school building and the importance of maintaining the vision of the school. Cynthia Reeves of the Center for Teaching Quality reminds principals to "maximize opportunities for leadership to interact with staff in meaningful ways" (2007, p. 8). Leaders successful in building relationships are described as authentic, responsive, approachable, humble honest, accountable and consistent (Reeves, 2007, p. 8). Given the amount of responsibilities place on administrators, school improvement for student learning depends on leaders that will establish high levels of trust and mutual respect and are willing to rely on quality teacher leaders.

Teacher leaders are those teachers whose vision extends beyond their own classrooms. They work as teachers but exercise leadership with their colleagues in improving student learning in their schools (Danielson 2006, p. 28). According to Danielson, teacher leaders call others to action and energize them with the aim of improving teaching and learning (Danielson 2007, p. 16). Based upon the Evaluation rubric for the "ED ies" consideration, schools that exhibit school wide leadership that achieves continuous improvement towards their identified goals become exemplary schools. Linda Lambert's article, *Leadership for Lasting Reform* points out that when principals took a lower profile and focused on the facilitation and co-participations, teachers began to initiate actions, take responsibility, discover time for joint efforts, and identify crucial questions about student learning (2005, p. 65).

Danielson points out, "in the most successful schools, teachers supported by administrators take initiative to improve school wide policies and programs, teaching and learning, and communication" (Danielson 2007, 19). Effective leadership is essential for an exemplary school. School leadership should provide encouragement, collaboration, and communication among all members of the school community. It is important for leaders to empower teachers in ways to make a difference (Reeves, 2007, p. 7). The "ED"ies Board of Directors look for schools that provide evidence of a collaborative governance structure that identifies shared decision-making protocols, educational improvement plans with specific goals and action plans, as well as school-wide leadership that achieves continuous improvement towards their identified goals (http://www.edies.org/2007-08_Rubric.pdf). More opportunities for teachers in the decision making process will improve the culture of the school and ultimately impact student learning and achievement for the betterment. Ongoing conversations among

faculty and staff regarding the school practice that most and least effectively reflect their mission and vision will facilitate successful implementation of the school vision (Reeves, 2007, p. 7).

School Climate

School climate is a critical component of effective middle school. School climate is defined by Deal and Kennedy, in the book, *School Leadership That Works: from Research to Results (1983),* as "the collective personality of a school based upon an atmosphere distinguished by the social and professional interactions of the individuals in the school" (Deal & Kennedy; Marzano, 2003, p. 89). Educators in effective schools understand that a trusting school environment contributes to the success of teachers and students (Reeves, 2007, p. 1). In operation, collegiality and professionalism are a function of implicit or explicit norms of behavior among staff members (Marzano, 2003, p. 89).

The climate of a developmentally responsive middle level school is safe, inviting, and caring; it promotes a sense of community and encourages learning (http://www.designshare.com/Awards/2000/10031/10031_POE_4a.htm). Creating a healthy school environment for students begins by supporting healthy relationships among staff. According to analysis of the 2006 North Carolina Teacher Working Conditions Survey data, establishing an atmosphere of trust and mutual respect was strongly correlated with overall student performance at the elementary, middle and high school levels (Reeves, 2007, p. 1). Educators want to be valued and appreciated for what they do. Supporting the staff in a school with ultimately improve the environment of respect for all members of the school community. In a true learning community, cooperative learning and mutual respect are expected of faculty as well as students (NMSA, 2008). Schools with high levels of trust often describe a culture that consistently celebrates success of educators and students (Reeves, 2007, p. 6).

Teacher collaboration is hailed as one of the most effective ways to improve student learning according to Vaishall Honawar in the article, "*Working Smarter by Working Harder*" (2008). Establishing a supportive school environment increases self-esteem and achievement (Cantwell, 2003; NMSA 2008). "Most teachers don't want to work in isolation," Mr. Mattos said. "They want to be part of something bigger. They realize that collaboration is good not just for the children, but for the teachers as well" (Honawar, 2008, p. 5). Principals and teachers from exemplary schools that have achieved high levels of trust indicate that successful schools find ways to 1) create a shared vision; 2) provide an effective group decision-making and problem-solving process; and 3) ensure school leadership consistently supports teachers (Reeves, 2007, p. 6).

Exemplary schools have established environments that are a source of pride for the entire school community. They clearly contribute to the well being and learning of the students and staff members (http://www.edies.org/2007-08_Rubric.pdf). Close, trusting relationships with adults and peers create a climate that supports personal and academic growth (NMSA, 2008). Practices at the best schools honor the developmental uniqueness of young adolescents, including the provision of a safe school environment, student initiated learning, student roles in decision making, and strong adult roles models (Armstrong, 2006, p. 113). The "ED" ies organization gives value to those schools that are able to establish a school climate that is age-appropriate and effectively supports student practices and procedures, exhibits multicultural awareness, gender sensitivity, and racial and ethnic appreciation and equity (http://www.edies.org/2007-08_Rubric.pdf). Schools must also provide a safe, clean, and orderly environment for students and staff, as well as, illustrate that students are excited by learning,

proud of their achievements and are happy to attend school (http://www.edies.org/2007-08_Rubric.pdf).

NH Excellence in Education Award

The New Hampshire Excellence in Education Award is given to schools and individuals who meet high standards of excellence. Based in the information available on the "ED" ies web site, only one school at each level, elementary, middle, and secondary, is recognized and honored a year. If the selection committee determines that there are no applicants of sufficient merit then, no school will be recognized. The criteria for the award is developed by the New Hampshire Excellence in Education Awards Board of Directors and applied by selection committee composed of experienced New Hampshire educators and community leaders. Schools are judged in terms of six categories: curriculum and instruction, the learning process and achievement of students, community involvement, leadership and school climate (http://www.edies.org/ApplicationInfo.htm).

Conclusion

Exemplary schools are challenging to define. Schools have a difficult task in providing the full implementation of effective curriculums, instructional practices, student achievement, community involvement, effective leadership and positive school climates. Recognizing and evaluating school programs as well as creating improvement plans school will assist good schools to become exemplary schools.

As John Collins explains, "a primary task in taking a company from good to great is to create a culture wherein people have a tremendous opportunity to be heard and, ultimately, for the truth to be heard" (Collins, 2001, p. 88 retrieved from Cassellius, 2006, p. 9). Conducting research for my school's candidacy for a NH Excellence in Education Award will allow my

school to examine our best practices and strategize ways to increase our school in terms of curriculum and instruction, understanding the learning process, improve practices and student achievement, increase community involvement, provide effective leadership and the create a positive school climate**.** Effective leaders display optimism and enthusiasm, confidence and decisiveness (Danielson, 2007, p. 17). My investigations and collaboration with committee members will assist my school not only in its candidacy for an award of excellence, but promote a healthy school environment in which staff members trust and respect each other enough to learn about ourselves and work for a common goal of creating a school that is exemplary. As Confucius states, “Learning without thinking is labor lost; thinking without learning is dangerous.” The committee at my school will think and collaborate in order to learn the best methods to improve our school.

Chapter 3: Research Methodology

Aim of the Research Project

The aim of this research project is to examine the practices of exemplary middle schools and investigate my school for its candidacy for an NH Excellence in Education Award. Collaboratively, a committee will lead our school in discussion and data collection to determine whether our middle school has met the criteria in order to be nominated, and ultimately recognized, as a New Hampshire school of excellence.

Focus of Inquiry

The focus of my inquiry will answer the question, *what elements must a middle school possess to be considered exemplary and in what ways does my school possess those elements?*

Through action research, my committee and I will collect information, discuss, and work with our colleagues to collect and analyze more data to determine the validity of our candidacy for an excellence in education award. Using data tools, such as surveys, observations, interviews, and collaborative discussions with our colleagues and committee members, our committee will determine the best practices of our school. Data analysis and discussion will assist in developing a nomination letter for an award of excellence, collecting evidence for an application, as well as developing an action plan that will continue our growth in all areas. Ultimately, our goal will be to improve student learning by improving our school to make it even better than it is currently. The categories the NH "ED" ies uses in determining schools of excellence will be evaluated and critiqued. They include the areas of: curriculum and instruction, the learning process, achievement, community involvement, leadership, and school climate.

Collaborative action research is valuable tool for our committee to use for its investigation of our school. Collaborative action research is a process that enables teachers to

improve the teaching-learning process while also contributing to the development of their own profession (Sagor, 1992, p. 6). By using this technique, we will be able to investigate all aspects of our school environment and be able to use the information in order to improve the education of our school community. As stated in Richard Sagor's book, Guiding School Improvement with Action Research, "when teachers are encouraged to share their learning, the collective capacity of the school grows geometrically" (2000, p. 35). With the use of action research, our teachers will have the opportunity to examine what makes a middle school exemplary. In using criteria developed by the "ED"ies organization we will evaluate our school, collect data in several formats, make decisions as to how can we contribute to the overall success of our success of our school building, and ultimately celebrate our efforts.

Settings and Participants

In order to investigate my school for its candidacy for a school of excellence award, I recruited volunteers to work on a committee as well as incorporated the entire staff to become involved. My committee consists of 14 members from my school building. They include the building administrators, core academic classroom teachers, the school librarian, and the music teacher. As I stated earlier, it would be unfair to classify them as merely classroom teachers, because the individuals who work at my school are dedicated individuals who are role models for adolescents and adults alike. The committee and entire school staff meets on a regular basis to discuss current school practices, identify our successes and strengths, examine areas which we view as weak, and suggest and develop an action plan for improvement. By examining our strengths as well as areas in need of improvement, our school will evolve as an exemplary school. In order to investigate our school practices and to be a part of this action research project,

all committee members and entire staff signed a consent form (see Appendix A: Committee and Staff Member Consent Form).

Phases of Inquiry

In order to inquire about my school's candidacy for an excellence in education award, I recruited staff members to work collaboratively on a committee. Volunteers, dedicated educators, explored the elements of exemplary middle schools within our school. Committee meetings began in June of 2008. At our first committee meeting we established an environment of mutual trust and honesty, an environment in which individuals could talk freely in order to face the perceptions of our school. All committee members agreed that everyone was committed to improving our school and the best way to accomplish this was to be able to be honest with one another. We spoke honestly about our reservations, which included that other staff members may perceive information shared, in a negative way. It was determined that what was said in committee meetings was not to be repeated outside of our meetings. We also discussed our goal to make our school an exemplary candidate for an "ED" ies award.

All committee members signed a consent form (see Appendix A: Committee and Staff Member Consent Form). Our first meeting explored our school's strengths and weaknesses. Collectively, we shared our thoughts and opinions of our school and what aspects of our school we felt we needed to focus our attention on.

All members of the committee independently completed the New England League of Middle Schools *Self-Assessment Survey for the Spotlight School Recognition Program* (see Appendix B: NELMS Spotlight Survey) in order to create a base line for how we view our school in terms of curriculum, instruction, professional growth, teaming, governance, school environment, and parent and community involvement. This survey allowed us the opportunity to

share our perspectives of our school in terms of common practice, attitude, and understanding the needs of the students and others within our school.

The members of the committee discussed the essential questions that were provided to us by the "ED" ies Board of Directors to guide us in our data collection and analysis. These questions are:

How does the school personalize to meet the needs of all students?

What are the key data trends in your school and how are they used?

How has a school initiative or innovation had a positive impact?

What are the key strengths of your school?

How will you inspire other school to strive for excellence? (http://www.edies.org)

The committee members formed small research groups to discuss these questions and to identify where and how to collect data about each question.

Our next step incorporated the entire staff. Each member of our school community had a voice in our decision of whether to nominate ourselves for an excellence in education award. We asked the entire professional staff to provide answers to the questions listed above as well as answer the same survey that committee members completed earlier. Data was collected from the entire staff and analyzed by the committee. Trends in data were sought from a variety of sources including the analysis of the self-assessment surveys, observations, and collaborative discussions to focused questions (see questions above). In their small groups, teams of committee members continued to collect evidence to answer the questions asked by the "ED" ies Board of Directors (see questions above). The answers to these questions helped the committee to create its final nomination letter for the "ED" ies Board of Directors.

In addition, our school created an application for the NELMS Spotlight School Award. This award will be used as a stepping-stone for our preparation for the “ED” ies application requirements. This award requires our committee to come to a consensus regarding our survey and discussion data, compile testing results and attendance records, and write a letter as to what makes our school a spotlight school. Creating a complete application for the Spotlight Award allowed the committee to further analyze our candidacy for an “ED” ies award.

If our school is selected to complete an “ED” ies award application, the committee will then work on collecting the additional evidence required by the award application. If our school is not nominated for the application process, the committee will use the categories created by the “ED”ies Board to develop an action plan for school improvement based upon the strengths and weaknesses identified. Our committee work will continue to evolve as we continually re-evaluate our school in order to create the conditions that are required for identification as an exemplary school.

Data Analysis

Action research is the logical method for educators to use when researching aspects of their school environment. Richard Sagor, in his book, Guiding School Improvement with Action Research, states there are three fundamental reasons why teacher researchers should hold themselves in to the highest quality of standards possible because of their obligation to students, the need for personal and collective efficacy and the need to add to the professional knowledge base (2000, p. 109). My committee holds these standards. We are dedicated professionals who are determined to create the best possible school for our students and community. By collecting data, our committee plans to have a lasting impact on the future of our school. In order to maintain the validity our data, we establish an environment in which all members of the

committee can speak openly and the recordings of our meetings are reliable and used as primary sources. Reliability of our data is maintained through the involvement of the entire professional staff as well as the committee members. Therefore, we establish an accurate representation of the entire school community.

Based on the theory of triangulation, my committee will be exploring the elements of an exemplary middle school and whether our school possesses those elements. Our plan for triangulation is to use a variety of collection tools to create an accurate picture of our school. We used focused discussions using guiding questions, observations, teacher surveys, testing, and attendance records as data collection tools to determine whether our school would be considered a viable candidate for a New Hampshire School of Excellence Award.

According to Richard Sagor, “one misconception that many educators have about research is that it is only helpful when it is “generalizable” (2000, p. 157). This research project uses generalization to a degree that is established by the “ED” ies Board of Directors. The “ED”ies committee has established a criterion that identifies common elements for all schools to be judged and classified as exemplary, yet in order to examine my school’s candidacy for an “ED”ies award, the data is specific to my school building, and the current professional staff, at the current time. Therefore it is not “generalizable.” In other words, the results from this research project may not be the same results that would be reached at another school or even at this school given different professional staff or a different period of time. However, this research is valuable because the committee uses the “ED”ies rubric to see how they apply to our school. Although our school is unique and specific to us, the rubric is useful for the committee to confirm our candidacy for an award and create an action plan for improvement.

Based on the data analysis, our committee evaluated our school and created the letter and materials for nomination for a NH “ED”ies award, developed an application for a NELMS Spotlight School Award, and, if selected, will create the materials for a NH “ED” ies award, and if not selected will determine what areas are in need of improvement and develop an action plan for continued growth. The committee will review data collected from committee members and professional staff using: the NELMS Spotlight Survey (see Appendix C: NELMS Spotlight Survey), the Evaluation rubric developed by the NH Excellence in Education Board of Directors (see Appendix E: Evaluation Rubric and newly revised rubric, Appendix G: Evaluation Rubric #2), and focused discussion using the guiding questions provided by the “ED”ies Board of Directors. The final result of our data analysis will be to submit a nomination letter for an “ED”ies award, (see Appendix F: EDies Nomination Letter), create a completed NELMS Spotlight School application, (see Appendix D: Spotlight School Application Letter) as well as, to develop an action plan for continued growth and the possibility of the completion of an “ED” ies award application.

Debriefing

Members of my school committee and professional staff will be presented with the results of data analysis. Every member in our school staff will have access to our completed project. The committee concluded the project by creating a nomination letter requesting an application to the NH Excellence in Education Board of Directors, creating a completed NELMS Spotlight School application (see Appendix D: Spotlight School Application Letter), as well as developing an action plan for continued school improvements to create an exemplary middle school. All committee members developed an increased depth of knowledge in curriculum and instruction, the learning process, student achievement, community involvement, leadership, and

school climate as a result of their participation in this research project. Committee members and professional staff received a summary of the data collected from the research conducted and the results were shared at a faculty meeting. All participants in our school had a voice as to how to improve our school to make it exemplary on an ongoing basis.

Chapter 4: Results

Results

Based on the NELMS Spotlight Survey (see Appendix C: NELMS Spotlight Survey) and the newly revised EDies rubric (see Appendix G: EDies School Evaluation Rubric #2), I was able to calculate where my school's strengths and weaknesses lie in each category investigated. Analyzing the school for its exemplary qualities using the NELMS Spotlight Survey was based on examining curriculum, instruction, middle school professional development, teaming, democratic participation, school environment, and parent and community involvement. These are the categories of the rubric.

In terms of curriculum, the school found areas of strength in the uses of state standards that are almost always used as a basis for the design of our curriculum. Test data and student work are almost always used to design units of study, assess progress, and improve instruction. My school employs the use of curriculum mapping to ensure that our curriculums match the state and local standards. Student-centered learning is almost always supported through a variety of approaches to instruction and assessment. The school district has provided professional learning opportunities for all faculty members to facilitate research and the use of best practices in curriculum and instruction. Curriculum across the grade levels is usually articulated so that skills and best practices are shared.

See data below.

WMS Self-Assessment Survey for Spotlight School Recognition Program

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Not evident			Seldom		Usually		Always evident	

Curriculum

	Standard Description	AVG.
1	The use of state standards as a basis or curriculum design	8
2	Test data and students work are used to design units of study, asses progress, and improve instruction.	7
3	Student-centered learning is supported through a variety of approaches to instruction and assessment.	7
4	A full array of unified arts experiences are provided for every student.	5.5
5	Curriculum across the grade levels is articulated so that skills and best practices are shared.	6.1
6	The curriculum integrates the different disciplines to allow students to see the interconnectedness of the skills, concepts, and content they are learning and how these are applied in the world beyond school.	5.8

Average Score _6.6_

A weakness for the school in terms of curriculum is that a full array of unified arts experiences is only sometimes provided for every student. This is explained by the fact that our school does not provide technology education, family and consumer science, or any other unified art that may be considered as a vocational skill. The curriculum usually integrates the different disciplines to allow students to see the interconnectedness of the skills, concepts, and content they are learning. Yet, how these skills are applied in the world beyond school is limited in our school building.

In terms of instruction, our school almost always uses a variety of instructional arrangements including but not limited to: cooperative learning, small group and large group instruction, flexible grouping, and differentiated instruction. A variety of grouping arrangements within a primarily mixed ability environment is almost always utilized. Daily team planning time for the purpose of dealing with curriculum development, common team concerns, scheduling, grouping, and conferencing is usually provided within our school schedule. Ongoing instruction and assessment to designing lessons is almost always utilized.

See data below.

WMS Self-Assessment Survey for Spotlight School Recognition Program

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9

Not evident Seldom Usually Always evident

Instruction

	Standard Description	AVG.
1	A variety of instructional arrangements including but not limited to: cooperative learning, small group and large group instruction, flexible grouping, and differentiated instruction is utilized	7.3
2	A variety of grouping arrangements within a primarily mixed ability environment is utilized	7.3
3	Daily team planning time for the purpose of dealing with curriculum development, common team concerns, scheduling, grouping and conferencing is provided	6.5
4	Staff is provided with daily individual planning time	5
5	Ongoing instruction and assessment to designing lessons is used	7
6	A student progress reporting system based on standards is utilized	4.1
7	The interests, needs, and concerns of every student through organized curricular and co-curricular programs are recognized and encouraged	6.0

Average score 6.1

In terms of our weaknesses in instruction, the staff is seldom provided with daily individual planning time. There doesn't seem to be enough time in the day based on the demands placed before us each day. Another weakness for the school is that the student progress reporting system is seldom utilized based on standards. Yet, the interests, needs, and concerns of every student through organized curricular and co-curricular programs are usually recognized and encouraged.

Data from the survey that was completed indicates that members of this committee believe that in terms of middle level teachers, professional growth within the context of our school's vision, mission and goal statements are almost always encouraged. A process for continuous staff improvements, which connects research to best practices including workshop attendance, conferences and coaching in the content areas are usually encouraged.

See data below.

WMS Self-Assessment Survey for Spotlight School Recognition Program

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9

Not evident Seldom Usually Always evident

Middle Level Teachers

	Standard Description	AVG.
1	professional growth within the context of a school's vision, mission and goal statements are encouraged	7.0
2	a process for continuous staff improvements that connects research to best practices including workshop attendance, conferences and coaching in the content areas are encouraged	6.1
3	ongoing professional development on the physical, emotional, intellectual and social characteristics of young adolescents and the best middle level practices are provided	5.5
4	teacher participation in designing and applying school improvement goals, staff development training, and other professional activities is ensured	5.5
5	professional growth within the context of a school's vision, mission and goal statement is encouraged	7.1
6	the staff is proficient in using a variety of instructional and authentic assessment strategies, which provide for effective student learning is ensured	6.4
7	curriculum across the grade levels so that skills and best practices are	6.1

	shared are to be articulated	

Average score 6.2

Area of weakness for our school in terms of professional development lies in the exploration of the physical, emotional, intellectual, and social characteristics of young adolescents. Professional development opportunities that deal with the characteristics of middle school students are seldomly provided. Staff development training centered around applying school improvement goals and other activities concentrating on teacher participation is seldom. The staff is proficient in using a variety of instructional and authentic assessment strategies, which provide for effective student learning yet, it is seldomly ensured. Curriculum across the grade levels so that skills and best practices are shared are seldom articulated.

In terms of school environment, our school committee found that this is an area of strength for our school. A variety of age appropriate social experiences and activities are almost always offered. A safe, caring, and healthy environment that promotes student responsibility and meaningful parent involvement is almost always provided. A variety of activities that are inclusive and support participation of every student is almost always provided. Our students support each other and respect individual differences almost always. An advisory program to ensure that every student is well known by at least one adult is evident. Utilizing healthy physical activities are seldomly embedded in our students' routine each day.

See data below.

WMS Self-Assessment Survey for Spotlight School Recognition Program

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Not evident			Seldom		Usually		Always evident	

School Environment

	Standard Description	AVG.
1	a variety of age appropriate social experiences and activities are offered	7.6
2	a safe, caring, and healthy environment that promotes student responsibility and meaningful parent involvement is provided	6.9
3	a variety of activities that are inclusive and support participation of every student is provided	7
4	Healthy, physical activities are embedded each day	5.2
5	students support each other and respect individual differences is expected	6.9
6	advisory programs to ensure that every student is well known by at least one adult	7.8

Average Score _6.9_

As we examined the school in terms of governing democratically, we found that the students, parents, and community members are almost always involved in meaningful democratic participation focusing on matters that clearly affect them. The participation of data collection is almost always essential to continuing school improvements focused on student learning. The creation of inquiry groups are usually required to investigate the causes and potential solutions to school based problems. Comprehensive school improvement plans are almost always developed and adopted based upon data. Sustained support for student achievement from district level personnel is almost always received. This was an area of strength for our school.

See data below.

WMS Self-Assessment Survey for Spotlight School Recognition Program

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9

Not evident Seldom Usually Always evident

Govern Democratically

	Standard Description	AVG.

1	students, parents and community members are involved in meaningful democratic participation focusing on matters that clearly affect them	6.5
2	participation of data collection is essential to continuing school improvements focused on student learning	6.8
3	the creation of inquiry groups are required to investigate the causes and potential solutions to school based problems	5.9
4	comprehensive school improvement plans are developed and adopted based upon data	7
5	Sustained support for student achievement from district level personnel is received	6.4

Average Score 6.5

It is clear that members of this committee believe that it is almost always frequent that our school involves parents and the community to describe how the assessing and evaluating methods are used to report student performance to our families. Keeping families aware of student progress in relationship to instructional standards is evident. The promotion and importance of being open and receptive to the concerns of students, families, and community is evident. The school believes in the importance of open communication with the parents and community.

See data below.

WMS Self-Assessment Survey for Spotlight School Recognition Program

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9

Not evident Seldom Usually Always evident

Involving the Community

	Standard Description	AVG.
1	describe how assessing and evaluating the methods used to report student performance to families	7
2	Describe how keeping families aware of student progress in relationship to instructional standards	7.9

3	Describe the promotion and importance of being open and receptive to the concerns of students, families, and community	7.9
4	Describe the regular and meaningful opportunities for students to engage in community service and service learning is provided	4.6
5	Describe how the community as an educational resource and an environment that promotes learning is utilized	4.6

Average Score 6.4

A weakness in terms of involving parents and the community comes in the creation of regular and meaningful opportunities for students to engage in community service and service-learning. Using the community as an educational resource and an environment that promotes learning is seldomly utilized. Our school needs to engage our students more in their community.

Teaming is an important aspect of our school environment, yet according to the data our school did not fare as strong as we initially thought. We concluded that in terms of the guidelines for the productive use of daily team planning time is usually established and a team notebook of minutes and agendas are usually maintained. An effective and cooperative orientation and transition process to serve the needs of parents and students in making transitions are almost always developed and implemented elementary to middle school as well as almost always developed and implemented middle to high school. An area of strength for our school- is that there is an effective method for implementing new students entering the middle school.

See data below.

WMS Self-Assessment Survey for Spotlight School Recognition Program

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9

Not evident Seldom Usually Always evident

Teaming

	Standard Description	AVG.

1	guidelines for the productive use of daily team planning time is established	6.1
2	ways for teams to regularly self-assess and develop goals for self-improvement are established	4.5
3	successes and improvement needs within a team so that learning skills and best practices are shared and coordinated are articulated	5.1
4	a leadership team, which facilitates and encourages the development of teaming and an integrated approach to learning are utilized	5
5	A school wide atmosphere of cooperation and caring through positive interpersonal relationships are demonstrated	5.4
6	A team notebook of minutes and agendas are maintained	6
7	An effective and cooperative orientation and transition process to serve the needs of parents and students in making transitions: Are developed and implemented elementary to middle school	6.9
8	An effective and cooperative orientation and transition process to serve the needs of parents and students in making transitions: Are developed and implemented middle to high school	6.7
9	An effective and cooperative orientation and transition process to serve the needs of parents and students in making transitions: Are developed and implemented for new students entering middle school	6.4
10	A unity of purpose and a shared sense of team spirit by both students and teachers are developed	5.1

Average score 5.7

The weakness we found in teaming includes the way teams regularly self-assess and develop goals for self-improvement. This is seldomly established. Successes and improvement needs within a team so that learning skills and best practices are shared and coordinated are seldomly articulated. A leadership team, which facilitates and encourages the development of teaming and an integrated approach to learning, are seldomly utilized. A school wide atmosphere

of cooperation and caring through positive interpersonal relationships are seldomly demonstrated. A unity of purpose and a shared sense of team spirit by both students and teachers are seldomly developed.

After reflecting on the results of the NELMS survey, we decided that our school would be a viable candidate for the New Hampshire Excellence in Education Award. The next step was to evaluate ourselves based upon the EDies rubric and investigate the areas in which we may need to improve. The EDies rubric focus on personalization and relationships, rigor and high standards, relevance, engagement, and whole community involvement, results, and empowered educators.

The EDies rubric uses a different scale (see Appendix: EDies Evaluation Rubric #2) and the lower the score, the better. The data resulting from the survey that was completed shows that members of this committee believe that in terms of Personalization and Relationships the school engages parents and families as partners in each student's education and encourages their participation in school programs and parent support groups is almost exemplary for our school. It is evident that the school climate is safe, positive, respectful, and supportive which results in a sense of pride and ownership among our staff and students. A system for effective and ongoing communication with students, parents/guardians, and school personnel, designed to keep them informed about the types of available support services and identified student needs is exemplary. It is evident that the school has a formal, on-going program through which each student has an adult member of the school community, in addition to the school guidance counselor, who personalizes each student's educational experience, knows the student well, and assists the student in achieving the school-wide expectations for student learning. This is an area of strength for our school.

See data below

WMS Self-Assessment Survey for EDies School Selection Rubric

1	2	3
Exemplary	Fully Evident	Partially or not yet evident

Personalization and Relationships

	Standard Description	AVG.
1	The school engages parents and families as partners in each student's education and encourages their participation in school programs and parent support groups is as a basis for personalization	1.6
2	A school climate that is safe, positive, respectful and supportive is resulting in a sense of pride and ownership	2.2
3	A system for effective and ongoing communication with students, parents/guardians, and school personnel, designed to keep them informed about the types of available support services and identified student needs	1.3
4	The school has a formal, on-going program through which each student has an adult member of the school community, in addition to the school guidance counselor, who personalizes each student's educational experience, knows the student well, and assists the student in achieving the school-wide expectations for student learning	1.8

Average score 1.4

Rigor and High Standards for the school curriculum is almost exemplary, because it is aligned with the school-wide academic expectations and shall ensure that all students have sufficient opportunity to practice and achieve each of those expectations. Our entire school staff is exemplary, because they are involved in promoting the well-being and learning of students. Our faculty is considered almost exemplary because our certified/licensed personnel and support staff provide effective counseling, health, special education, and library media services. Our school's mission statement represents the exemplary school community's fundamental values

and beliefs about student learning. Student grouping patterns are fully evident and reflect the diversity of the student body, foster heterogeneity, reflect current research and best practices, and support the achievement of the school's mission and expectations for student learning. The curriculum is exemplary, with appropriate integration and emphasis on depth of understanding over breadth of coverage. The school is exemplary in providing a wide range of materials, technologies, and other library/information services that are responsive to the school's student population are available to students and faculty, and utilized to improve teaching and learning. The school policies are almost exemplary in their placement for the selection and removal of information resources and the use of technologies and the internet. It is exemplary in providing rigorous standards which address the whole child and clearly identify what students are expected to know and be able to do across the curriculum. The school standards are exemplary in being contained within local curriculum competencies, national standards, the NH Grade Level/ Grade Span Expectations, and the NH K-12 Curriculum Frameworks. Rigor and high standards is clearly a strength for our middle school.

See data below.

WMS Self-Assessment Survey for EDies School Selection Rubric

1	2	3
Exemplary	Fully Evident	Partially or not yet evident

Rigor and High Standards

	Standard Description	AVG.
1	The school curriculum is aligned with the school-wide academic expectations and shall ensure that all students have sufficient opportunity to practice and achieve each of those expectations	1.5
2	All school staff are involved in promoting the well-being and learning of students	1.2

3	A certified/licensed personnel and support staff provide effective counseling, health, special education, and library media services	1.5
4	our school's mission statement represents the school community's fundamental values and beliefs about student learning	1.4
5	Student grouping patterns reflect the diversity of the student body, foster heterogeneity, reflect current research and best practices, and support the achievement of the school's mission and expectations for student learning	2.0
6	The curriculum has appropriate integration and emphasis on depth of understanding over breadth of coverage	1.0
7	The school is providing a wide range of materials, technologies, and other library/information services that are responsive to the school's student population are available to students and faculty, and utilized to improve teaching and learning	1.3
8	The school policies are in their placement for the selection and removal of information resources and the use of technologies and the internet	1.6
9	The school provides rigorous standards in place which address the whole child and clearly identify what students are expected to know and be able to do across the curriculum	1.0
10	The school standards are contained within local curriculum competencies, national standards, the NH Grade Level/ Grade Span Expectations, and the NH K-12 Curriculum Frameworks	1.1

Average score 1.4

In terms of Relevance, Engagement, and Whole Community Involvement it is fully evident that our school schedule is driven by the school's mission and expectations for student learning and supports the effective implementation of curriculum, instruction, and assessment. Student support personnel are fully evident in the enhancement of student learning by interacting and working cooperatively with professional and other staff and my maximizing community resources to address the academic, social, emotional, and physical needs of students. It is fully evident that the school curriculum is engaging all students in inquiry, problem-solving, and

higher-order thinking as well as providing opportunities for the authentic application of knowledge and skills. The middle school is fully evident when it comes to providing opportunities for all students to extend learning beyond traditional offerings and settings. It is almost exemplary in the way that teachers use feedback from a variety of sources, including other teachers, students, supervisors, and parents, as a means of improving instruction. Our students are provided with formal and informal opportunities to assess their own learning at an almost exemplary rate. The integration of technology and being supportive of teaching and learning is almost exemplary. The mission statement and expectations for student learning are exemplary in their development by the school community and are approved and supported by the professional staff and school board and any other school-wide governing organizations.

See data below.

WMS Self-Assessment Survey for EDies School Selection Rubric

1	2	3
Exemplary	Fully Evident	Partially or not yet evident

Relevance, Engagement, and Whole Community Involvement:

	Standard Description	AVG.
1	The school fosters productive business/community/ higher education partnerships that support student learning	2.5
2	The school schedule is driven by the school's mission and expectations for student learning and supports the effective implementation of curriculum, instruction, and assessment	2.1
3	Student support personnel enhances the student learning by interacting and working cooperatively with professional and other staff and my maximizing community resources to address the academic, social, emotional, and physical needs of students	2.0
4	The school curriculum is engaging all students in inquiry, problem-solving, and higher-order thinking as well as providing opportunities for	2.0

	the authentic application of knowledge and skills	
5	There is effective curricular coordination and articulation between and among all academic areas within the school as well as with sending-schools in the district	2.7
6	The school provides opportunities for all students to extend learning beyond traditional offerings and settings	2.0
7	Teachers use feedback from a variety of sources, including other teachers, students, supervisors, and parents, as a means of improving instruction	1.5
8	The students are provided with formal and informal opportunities to assess their own learning	1.5
9	The school is integrating technology and being supportive of teaching and learning	1.5
10	The mission statement and expectations for student are developed by the school community and are approved and supported by the professional staff and school board and any other school-wide governing organizations	1.3

Average score 1.9

An area of weakness for us in regards to the rubric category for Relevance, Engagement, and Whole Community Involvement- is that our school is only almost fully evident in fostering productive business/community/ higher education partnerships that support student learning. We also concluded that there is only partial evidence in effective curricular coordination and articulation between and among all academic areas within the school as well as with sending-schools in the district. This will be an area for further investigation.

As we examine the data, it is clear that members of this committee believe that in terms of the Results category- the school's instructional strategies are fully evident in personalizing instruction; making connections across disciplines; engaging students as active and self-directed learners; involving all students in higher order thinking to promote depth of understanding;

providing opportunities for students to apply knowledge or skills; and promoting student self-assessment and self-reflection. Students are being informed of the learning goals for each learning activity. It is fully evident that a variety of assessment strategies are used to determine student knowledge, skills, and competencies and to assess student growth over time. School-wide academic, civic, and social learning expectations are defined, measurable, and reflect the school's mission. It is fully evident that the school has indicators by which we assess the school's progress in achieving school-wide civic and social expectations.

See data below.

WMS Self-Assessment Survey for EDies School Selection Rubric

1	2	3
Exemplary	Fully Evident	Partially or not yet evident

Results

	Standard Description	AVG.
1	The school's instructional strategies personalizes instruction; makes connections across disciplines; engages students as active and self-directed learners; involves all students in higher order thinking to promote depth of understanding; provides opportunities for students to apply knowledge or skills; and promotes student self-assessment and self-reflection	1.9
2	Students are informed of the learning goals for each learning activity	2.2
3	A variety of assessment strategies are used to determine student knowledge, skills, and competencies and to assess student growth over time	1.8
4	School-wide academic, civic, and social learning expectations are defined, measurable, and reflect the school's mission	1.8
5	The school has indicators by which we assesses the school's progress in achieving school-wide civic and social expectations	1.9

Average Score 1.9

In terms of Empowered Educators our teachers, as well as administrators, are exemplary in providing leadership essential to the improvement of the school. It is fully evident that the teachers are meeting collaboratively to discuss and share student work and the results of student assessment for the purpose of revising the curriculum and improving instructional strategies. Professional development activities for the middle school are exemplary in the support of the development and implementation of the curriculum. The professional development program is fully evident in being guided by identified instructional needs and provides opportunities for teachers to develop and improve their instructional practices. The professional development program is almost exemplary in providing opportunities for teachers to collaborate in developing a broad range of student assessment strategies. Teachers are exemplary in their knowledge about current research or effective instructional approaches and reflective about their own practice. The teacher: student ratio in almost exemplary in allowing teachers to meet the learning needs of individual learners. Our teachers are exemplary experts in the content areas they teach.

See data below.

WMS Self-Assessment Survey for EDies School Selection Rubric

1	2	3
Exemplary	Fully Evident	Partially or not yet evident

Empowered Educators

	Standard Description	AVG.
1	The teachers as well as administrators provide leadership essential to the improvement of the school	1.4
2	The teachers are meeting collaboratively to discuss and share student work and the results of student assessment for the purpose of revising the curriculum and improving instructional strategies	1.8

3	Professional development activities for the school are in support of the development and implementation of the curriculum	1.3
4	The school's professional development program is being guided by identified instructional needs and provides opportunities for teachers to develop and improve their instructional practices	1.8
5	The school's professional development program provides opportunities for teachers to collaborate in developing a broad range of student assessment strategies	1.5
6	The teachers are knowledgeable about current research or effective instructional approaches and reflective about their own practice	1.4
7	The teacher: student ratio allows teachers to meet the learning needs of individual learners	1.5
8	The teachers are experts in the content areas they teach	1.0

Average Score 1.4

Limitations

Limitations of this study center on the committee members' work. It can be difficult for teachers to assess their own work; identifying areas of weakness can be a struggle. In order to alleviate this, names were eliminated from the surveys and committee members work collaboratively to create a true assessment for each standard of the survey. Another limitation of the study included administrative involvement. As areas of weaknesses were identified, the school administrators began quite defensive. It is difficult to admit the possibility of school practices or programs that are failing and that improvement are needed. In order to alleviate defensive administrators, the committee met without administration present to discuss difficult issues. In addition, time and schedule constraints are limitations that are difficult to avoid when working in a school. Other school scheduled events and weather constraints made it difficult to stay on a regular meeting schedule. Members were not always able to attend monthly meetings. In order to curb this problem, I would meet with committee members individually.

Action Plan

Once our school committee analyzed the results of the NELMS Spotlight Rubric (see Appendix C: NELMS Spotlight School Rubric) and the revised EDies evaluation rubric (see Appendix G: EDies Evaluation Rubric #2) we decided to move forward in the application process for a New Hampshire School of Excellence Award and devise an action plan for school improvement. Our school is a responsive school that adapts to the needs of its students. Our focus is to examine our weaknesses and find ways to improve.

In terms of Curriculum the lowest areas for the school were in the ability to establish a full array of unified arts experiences for every student, articulating curriculum across grade levels so that skills and best practices are shared, and integrating the different disciplines to allow students to see the interconnectedness of the skills, concepts, and content they are learning and how these are applied in the world beyond school. The question for the committee was: how could we improve this?

We came up with a plan to give students more opportunities for unified arts experiences by providing an array of afterschool activities and clubs that focus on the arts. Examples of these activities would include, but are not limited to a recycled percussion club, knitting club, mural painting, book beat, art club, game club, creative writing club, cable club and a variety of sports activities.

Sharing best practices is a skill that our teachers want to engage in more, yet are limited by time constraints. In order to alleviate some of the time issues, our school devised a new schedule allowing teachers more time during the school day to work in their professional learning committees to share and work on their content specialty. The teachers are dedicated to collaboration and vertical alignment.

In response to integrating the different disciplines to allow students to see the interconnectedness of the skills, concepts, and content they are learning and how these are applied in the world beyond school. The committee spoke with the newly hired deans of our high school and established times in which they can meet with our eighth graders to discuss their future and what skills they will need to require. We have also implemented a Career Day in which professionals visit our school to speak with our eighth graders about their careers and provide them with valuable information about their vocations.

Focusing on Instruction, our school committee found that the staff is seldomly provided with time for daily individual planning. Improving this area continues to be a weakness for us. Schedule changes and the assessment of time used are constantly being examined. Unfortunately, this seems to be a constant struggle for our teachers due to the demands placed on them daily. The committee also viewed the concept of a student progress reporting system based on standards. Currently, this practice is seldom utilized. In order to take action, our administration has our team leaders reading articles and books on the creation of standard based report cards. This is an area that will be investigated for future use.

Data from the surveys indicate that our school was weak in terms of the ongoing professional development on the physical, emotional, intellectual and social characteristics of young adolescents and the best middle level practices. In order to improve this, our school suggested possible topic for staff development to our administrators and central office. The rubric also illustrated that teacher participation in designing and applying school improvement goals, staff development training, and other professional activities is seldom ensured. The school community has taken steps to remedy this situation by developing a Superintendant Council in which teachers from all of our district schools meet once a month with the superintendant to

discuss issues, concerns, and make suggestions for improvement. This has become a very useful tool in empowering our educators.

School environment was our highest scoring area yet, we found two areas of concern. These would include: the creation of inquiry groups to investigate the causes and potential solutions to school based problems and in embedding healthy, physical activities each day. In order to improve in these areas we have developed several strategies that include incorporating healthy physical activities into our Advisory program each day and establishing a Principal's Luncheon once a month for students to meet with the administration to discuss school based problems and concerns.

Involving parents and the community can be difficult for many schools. Our committee found that our middle school does a good job in involving our community in the school. The problems we discovered were in the creation of regular and meaningful opportunities for students to engage in community service and service learning as well as using the community as an educational resource. We have taken action to establish ways to utilize our community more effectively. Our advisory program has provided our staff and students with an array of opportunities for community service projects on a monthly basis. We have also implemented a new afterschool club that focuses on community service and helping others. It has been a great success so far.

A surprise for our committee was that the area of most concern was Teaming. Our school has always prided itself on the fact that our teachers are willing to collaborate and share with one another, yet we scored ourselves weak in this area. Improvement is needed in how teams self-assess and develop goals for self-improvement; the sharing and coordination of the successes and improvement needs within a team need to be addressed so that learning skills and best practices

improve. Our leadership team, which facilitates and encourages the development of teaming and an integrated approach to learning, needs to be utilized more effectively and a school wide atmosphere of cooperation and caring through positive interpersonal relationships, needs to be fostered. A unity of purpose and a shared sense of team spirit by both students and teachers is a goal of our building. In order to make our school a better place, our committee has met with our administration and team leaders to strategize ways to encourage better communication and collaboration with one another.

Summary

After careful consideration, I have concluded that my school is a viable candidate for the honor of a New Hampshire School of Excellence. Our administration and staff exemplify high achievement and dedication. As a staff we are invested in providing quality curriculum and instruction through teaming and collaboration, emphasizing high overall academic achievement for all. Our school cares about each and every student that comes through our doors, not just academically, but as whole people. We are committed to the development of lifelong learners for both our students and staff. Our school is responsive to the needs of our students, staff, and community. Every student is respected, cared for, and challenged by the dedicated staff of our building. Our middle school recognizes that the most important aspect of a School of Excellence is that the spotlight is on the student and that a school always has room for improvement.

This project was intended to bring recognition to the dedicated staff and students of my school. The greatest aspect of this project was that a committee was able to come together to truly assess the strengths and weaknesses of our building. The committee was committed to making school wide improvements in order to become an exemplary middle school. Regardless

of whether our school is recognized by the state of New Hampshire has a School of Excellence, our school is an excellent school because we care about our students, staff, and community.

References

Andrews, P. G., Caskey, M. M., & Anfara, V. A., Jr. (2007). "Research Summary: Characteristics of Exemplary Schools for Young Adolescents." Retrieved May 18, 2008 from http://www.nmsa.org/Research/ResearchSummaies/ExemplarySchools/tabid/256/Default.aspx

Anfara, Vincent A. (2006, Jan.) "The Evidence for the Core Curriculum- Past and Present." Middle School Journal, vol. 37, no. 3, 48-53.

Armstrong, Thomas. The Best Schools: How Human Development Research Should Inform Educational Practice. Alexandria, VA: ASCD, 2006.

Brandt, Ron, (2003, Winter). "Is this school a learning organization? 10 ways to tell." Journal of Staff Development, vol. 24, no. 1. Retrieved May 23, 2008 from http://www.nsdc.org/library/publications/jsd/brandt241.cfm

Caskey, Micki M. Ed. (2008) "Key Characteristics of Middle School Performance." *Research in Middle Level Education*. NMSA. vol. 31. No. 5, 1-17. Retrieved from http://www.nmsa.org/Publications/RMLEOnline/Articles/Vol1No5/tabid/1572/Default.aspx

Cassellius, Brenda, (2006, May). "Using Relationships, Responsibility, and Respect to Get From "Good to Great" in Memphis Middle Schools." Middle School Journal, vol. 37 no. 5, 4-15.

Danielson, Charlotte. (2007, Sept.) "The Many Faces of Leadership." Educational Leadership, vol. 65, no. 1, 14-19

Danielson, Charlotte. Enhancing Professional Practice: A Framework for Teaching. Alexandria, VA. ASCD, 1996.

Danielson, Charlotte. Teacher Leadership That Strengthens Professional Practice. Alexandria, VA. ASCD, 2006.

Eisner, Elliot W. (2004, Jan.) "Preparing for Today and Tomorrow." Educational Leadership, vol. 61, no. 4, 6-10.

Epstein, Dr. Joyce. (2008). National Network of Partnership Schools. John Hopkins University. June 12, 2008 Retrieved from http://www.csos.jhu.edu/P2000/

Honawar, Vaishali. (2008) "Working Smarter by Working Together." Education Week, vol. 27 n31 p25-27. April 2008. June 11, 2008. Retrieved from http://web.edscohost.com/ehost/delivery?vid=8&hid=4&sid=761a471d-0143-422f-8063-6...

King, Deborah. (2002, May) "The Changing Shape of Leadership." Educational Leadership, vol. 59, no. 8, 61-63.

Lambert, Linda. (2005) "Leadership for Lasting Reform." Educational Leadership, February 2005. Vol. 62. No. 5 p. 62-65.

Lieberman, Joyce, and David A. Walker. (2007) "Connecting Curriculum and Instruction to National Teaching Standards." The Educational Forum, vol 71. Spring 2007. 274-282.

Maiga, Hassimi O. (1995) "Bridging Classroom, Curriculum, and Community: The Gao School Museum." *Theory into Practice*, vol. 34 n3 p. 209-215.

Malouff, John M., Sally E. Rooke, Nicola S. Schutte, Roxanne M. Foster, and Navjot Bhullar. (2008) *Methods of Motivational Teaching* excerpt. University of New England. Australia. 3. June 10, 2008 Retrieved from http://www.eric.ed.gov/ERICDocs/data/ericdocs2sq1/content_storage_01/0000019b/80/3b/6d/49.pc

Marzano, Robert J. What Works in Schools: Translating Research into Action. Alexandria, VA. ASCD, 2003.

Mills, Dennis W. (2002). "Applying What We Know Student Learning Styles." Christian Web Hosting. Retrieved May 20, 2008 from http://www.csrnet.org/csrnet/articles/student-learning-styles.html

Mizell, Hayes. (2002, October) "What Parents Need to Know About Middle School Reform." Remarks from a public lecture in Nyack, New York sponsored by the Nyack Partners in Education. Retrieved May 23, 2008 from http://www.middleweb.com/HMparents.html

NAESP. (2001) Leading Learning Communities: Standards for What Principals Should Know and Be Able To Do. Alexandria, VA: National Association of Elementary School Principals. 2001

New Hampshire Excellence in Education Awards. (2007) Evaluation Rubric. May 6, 2008. Retreived from http://www.edies.org

Noddings, Nel. (2008) "All Our Students Thinking." Educational Leadership, vol.65 n5 p. 8-13. 6 pp June 14, 2008 Retrieved from http://web.ebscohost.com/delivery?vid=26&hid=7&sid=89f68849-cb9f-4084-b061-1...

Reeves, Cynthia., Scott Emerick, and Eric Hirsch. (2007) "Creating an Atmosphere of Trust: Lessons from Exemplary Schools." North Carolina Professional Teaching Standards Commission Brief. p9 June 10, 2008. Retrieved from http://web.edscohost.com

Sadinsky, Rebecca and Greg Tuke. (2003, December) "Powerful Schools." New Horizons for Learning: Transforming Education. Retrieved May 18, 2008 from http//www.newhorizons.org/trans/sandinsky.htm

Sagor, Richard. (2000) Guiding School Improvement with Action Research. Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development. 2000.

Sagor, Richard. (1992) How to Conduct Collaborative Action Research. Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development. 1992.

San Antonio, Donna Marie, (2002, April). "Broadening the World of Early Adolescents." Educational Leadership, vol. 63 no. 7, 8-13.

Smith, M. K. (1999) 'Learning theory', *the encyclopedia of informal education*, Retrieved May 20, 2008 from www.infed.org/biblio/b-learn.htm

The National Middle School Association, (1995) ""The Exemplary Middle School. Excerpt from *This We Believe*. Retrieved May 20, 2008 from http://www.designshare.com/Awards/2000/10031/10031_POE_4a.htm

Unknown. (1998-2008). Funderstanding. On Purpose Association. Retrieved May 19, 2008 from http//www.funderstanding.com

Unknown. (2008). In-Sites for Developing Creative/ Critical Habits of Mind. The Teacher Development Network. Retrieved May 18, 2008 from http//ozpk.tripod.com/insite%.html

United States Department of Education (2008). *No Child Left Behind*. Retrieved May 18, 2008 from http://www.ed.gov/index.jhtml

Wilkinson, Susan. (2008). *National Middle School Association Research Summary #4: Exemplary Middle Schools.* Retrieved May 18, 2008 from http://www.hup.sjsu.edu/faculty/susanwilkinson/Content/179/5%20NMSA%20Research%20Summary%204.pdf

Williamson, Ronald. (2007) "What are the Program Components of an Exemplary Middle School? Here's What We Think." *Journal of Educational Research*. National Middle School Association (Peer Review Journal). June 10, 2008. Retrieved from http://web.edscohost.com

Wilson, Leslie Owens. (1998) "What's the big attraction? Why teachers are drawn to using Multiple Intelligences Theory in their Classrooms." New Horizons for Learn. Retrieved May 19, 2008 from http://www.newhorizons.org/strategies/mi/wilson1.htm

Wormeli, Rick. (2006) "Differentiation for Tweens." *Educational Leadership*, April 2006. Vol. 63. No. 7 p.14-19.

Appendix A: Committee and Staff Member Consent Form

Brenda Morrow
112 Lowell Road
Windham, NH 03087
(603) 893-2636

May 20, 2008

Dear Staff and Possible Committee Member,

You have been asked to participate in an action research study conducted by me, a candidate in the New England College Master's of Science Educational Leadership program, in Henniker, NH. This research involves the study of the practices of exemplary middle schools and is part of my New England College course work. I am requesting your assistance for this study because you are a valuable member of our school. It is my opinion that our school would be a viable candidate for a NH Excellence in Education Award. Collaboratively, we will prove that our middle school has met the criteria in order to be recognized as a school of excellence.

The study involves:

1. Before the study begins and at the completion of the study, you will be asked to complete a survey that focuses on how you view our school in terms of curriculum and instruction, the learning process and achievement of students, community involvement, leadership, and school climate.
2. The committee members will collect data based on the six categories as they relate to our school through observation, interview, and data analysis.
3. The committee will discuss and analyze the data.
4. Through data analysis, the committee will be able to find gaps in our school and strategize ways to improve.
5. Throughout the research process, the committee will collaborate with one another describing their thoughts on the validity of our school's candidacy for an "ED" ies award.
6. The committee's final result of the study will be the completion of the "ED" ies award application.
7. All committee members will also complete a final reflection of their participation in the action research study.

The personal information you provide will be kept strictly confidential and your participation is voluntary. Only the committee will review the data. In addition, all data that is collected will be used for the improvement of our school. The results from this study will be incorporated into my final action research thesis and oral presentation and may be submitted to a professional journal, presented at conferences, or published in a text at a later date.

Please be assured that the success of this project depends on honesty, collaboration, and commitment of the group members.

You will develop an increased depth of knowledge in curriculum and instruction, the learning process and achievement of students, community involvement, leadership, and school climate as a result of your participation in this research. The risks to you are considered minimal. Committee meetings will be tape recorded for data collection only. Your quotes will be a valuable asset to my research project. You will receive a copy of the summary of the data collected from the research conducted.

Please be assured your name will be kept confidential in all reports submitted outside of our committee meetings.

There is no financial remuneration for participating in this study.

I strongly encourage your involvement in this committee. Your expertise would be a valuable asset to our committee, my research and ultimately to the improvement of the school community.

Three copies of this informed consent form have been provided. If you choose to participate in the study please sign indicating that you have read, understand, and agree to participate in this research. Return two copies to the researcher and retain one for your records.

Sincerely,

Brenda Morrow

_____

Name of participant (please print)

_____

Signature of participant

_____

Date

Research Practicum Instructor
Debra Nitschke-Shaw
New England College
Education Department
Center for Educational Innovation
Box 22
Henniker, NH 03242

Appendix B: Principal Consent Form

Brenda Morrow
112 Lowell Road
Windham, NH 03087
(603) 893-2636

May 20, 2008

Dear Principal Becht,

I am writing to ask your permission and support in order to conduct an action research project as a part of the New England College Master's of Science Educational Leadership program, in Henniker, NH using our school as the primary subject. This research involves the study of the practices of an exemplary middle school and is part of my New England College course work. I am requesting your assistance for this study because you are a valuable member of our school. It is my opinion that our school would be a viable candidate for a NH Excellence in Education Award. Collaboratively, we will prove that our middle school has met the criteria in order to be recognized as a school of excellence.

The study involves:

1. Before the study begins and at the completion of the study, you will be asked to complete a survey that focuses on how you view our school in terms of curriculum and instruction, the learning process and achievement of students, community involvement, leadership, and school climate.
2. The committee members will collect data based on the six categories as they relate to our school through observation, interview, and data analysis.
3. The committee will discuss and analyze the data.
4. Through data analysis, the committee will be able to find gaps in our school and strategize ways to improve.
5. Throughout the research process, the committee will collaborate with one another describing their thoughts on the validity of our school's candidacy for an "ED" ies award.
6. The committee's final result of the study will be the completion of the "ED" ies award application.
7. All committee members will also complete a final reflection of their participation in the action research study.

The personal information you provide will be kept strictly confidential and your participation is voluntary. Only the committee members will review the data. In addition, all data that is collected will be used for the improvement of our school. The results from this study will be incorporated into my final action research thesis and oral presentation and may be submitted to a professional journal, presented at conferences, or published in a text at a later date.

Please be assured that the success of this project depends on honesty, collaboration, and commitment of the group members.

The committee members will develop an increased depth of knowledge in curriculum and instruction, the learning process and achievement of students, community involvement, leadership, and school climate as a result of this action research project. The risks to you and our school are considered minimal. Committee meetings will be tape recorded for data collection only. Your quotes will be a valuable asset to my research project.

Please be assured your name will be kept confidential in all reports submitted outside of our committee meetings. You will receive a copy of the summary of the data collected from the research conducted.

I strongly encourage your support and involvement in the committee work. Your expertise would be a valuable asset to our committee, my research and ultimately to the improvement of the school community.

Three copies of this informed consent form have been provided. If you choose to participate in the study please sign indicating that you have read, understand, and agree to participate in this research. Return two copies to myself and retain one for your records.

Sincerely,

Brenda Morrow

_____

Name of participant (please print)

_____

Signature of participant

_____

Date

Research Practicum Instructor

Debra Nitschke-Shaw
New England College
Education Department
Center for Educational Innovation
Box 22
Henniker, NH 03242

Appendix C: NELMS Spotlight Survey

New England League of Middle Schools *Self-Assessment Survey for the Spotlight School Recognition Program* Retrieved from http://www.nelms.org/pdfs/2008/spotlight_school_app09.pdf

New England League of Middle Schools

Self-Assessment Survey for Spotlight School Recognition Program

Answer the following questions based on your perspective of the common practice, attitude or understanding in your school. Circle your response using the following scale.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9

not evident seldom usually always evident

* *

Curriculum

My school:

Uses state standards as a basis for the design of curriculum?

1____2____ 3____ 4____ 5____ 6____ 7____ 8____ 9

Not evident seldom usually always evident

Uses test data and student work to design units of study, assess progress, and improve instruction?

1____2____ 3____ 4____ 5____ 6____ 7____ 8____ 9

Not evident seldom usually always evident

Demonstrates support for student-centered learning through a variety of approaches to instruction and assessment?

1____2____ 3____ 4____ 5____ 6____ 7____ 8____ 9

Not evident seldom usually always evident

Provides a full array of unified arts experiences for every student?

1____2____ 3____ 4____ 5____ 6____ 7____ 8____ 9

Not evident seldom usually always evident

Articulates curriculum across the grade levels so that skills and best practices are shared?

1____2____ 3____ 4____ 5____ 6____ 7____ 8____ 9

Not evident seldom usually always evident

Implementes a curriculum that integrates the different disciplines to allow students to see the interconnectedness of the skills, concepts and content they are learning and how these are applied in the world beyond school?

1____2____ 3____ 4____ 5____ 6____ 7____ 8____ 9

Not evident seldom usually always evident

Instruction

My school:

Utilizes a variety of instructional arrangements including but not limited to: cooperative learning, small group and large group instruction, flexible grouping practices, and differentiated instruction?
1____2____ 3____ 4____ 5____ 6____ 7____ 8____ 9
Not evident seldom usually always evident

Utilizes a variety of grouping arrangements within a primarily mixed ability environment?
1____2____ 3____ 4____ 5____ 6____ 7____ 8____ 9
Not evident seldom usually always evident

Provides daily team planning time for the purpose of dealing with curriculum development, common team concerns, scheduling, grouping and conferencing?
1____2____ 3____ 4____ 5____ 6____ 7____ 8____ 9
Not evident seldom usually always evident

Provides staff with daily individual planning time?
1____2____ 3____ 4____ 5____ 6____ 7____ 8____ 9
Not evident seldom usually always evident

Uses ongoing instruction and assessment to design lessons?
1____2____ 3____ 4____ 5____ 6____ 7____ 8____ 9
Not evident seldom usually always evident

Utilizes a student progress reporting system based on standards?
1____2____ 3____ 4____ 5____ 6____ 7____ 8____ 9
Not evident seldom usually always evident

Recognizes and encourages the interests, needs, and concerns of every student through organized curricular and co-curricular programs?
1____2____ 3____ 4____ 5____ 6____ 7____ 8____ 9
Not evident seldom usually always evident

* *

Middle Level Teachers

My school:

Encourages professional growth within the context of a school's vision, mission and goal statements?
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9

Establishing a process for continuous staff improvement that connects research to best practices including workshop attendance, conferences and coaching in the content areas?
1____2____ 3____ 4____ 5____ 6____ 7____ 8____ 9
Not evident seldom usually always evident

Provides ongoing professional development on the physical, emotional, intellectual and social characteristics of young adolescents and the best middle level practices?
1____2____ 3____ 4____ 5____ 6____ 7____ 8____ 9

Not evident seldom usually always evident

Ensures teacher participation in designing and applying school improvement goals, staff development training, and other professional activities?
1____2____ 3____ 4____ 5____ 6____ 7____ 8____ 9
Not evident seldom usually always evident

Encourages professional growth within the context of a school's vision, mission and goal statements?
1____2____ 3____ 4____ 5____ 6____ 7____ 8____ 9
Not evident seldom usually always evident

Ensures that staff is proficient in using a variety of instructional and authentic assessment strategies, which provide for effective student learning?
1____2____ 3____ 4____ 5____ 6____ 7____ 8____ 9
Not evident seldom usually always evident

Articulates curriculum across the grade levels so that skills and best practices are shared?
1____2____ 3____ 4____ 5____ 6____ 7____ 8____ 9
Not evident seldom usually always evident

Teaming

My school:

Establishes guidelines for the productive use of daily team planning time?
1____2____ 3____ 4____ 5____ 6____ 7____ 8____ 9
Not evident seldom usually always evident

Establishes ways for teams to regularly self-assess and develop goals for self-improvement?
1____2____ 3____ 4____ 5____ 6____ 7____ 8____ 9
Not evident seldom usually always evident

Articulates successes and improvement needs within a team so that learning skills and best practices are shared and coordinated?
1____2____ 3____ 4____ 5____ 6____ 7____ 8____ 9
Not evident seldom usually always evident

Utilizes a leadership team, that facilitates and encourages the development of teaming and an integrated approach to learning?
1____2____ 3____ 4____ 5____ 6____ 7____ 8____ 9
Not evident seldom usually always evident

Demonstrates a school wide atmosphere of cooperation and caring through positive interpersonal relationships?
1____2____ 3____ 4____ 5____ 6____ 7____ 8____ 9
Not evident seldom usually always evident

Maintains a team notebook of minutes and agendas?
1____2____ 3____ 4____ 5____ 6____ 7____ 8____ 9
Not evident seldom usually always evident

Develops and implements an effective and cooperative orientation and transition process to serve the needs of parents and students in making the following transitions:

a. elementary to middle school?
1____2____ 3____ 4____ 5____ 6____ 7____ 8____ 9
Not evident seldom usually always evident

b. middle to high school?
1____2____ 3____ 4____ 5____ 6____ 7____ 8____ 9
Not evident seldom usually always evident

c. for new students entering the middle school?
1____2____ 3____ 4____ 5____ 6____ 7____ 8____ 9
Not evident seldom usually always evident

Developes a unity of purpose and a shared sense of team spirit by both students and teachers?
1____2____ 3____ 4____ 5____ 6____ 7____ 8____ 9
Not evident seldom usually always evident

* *

Govern Democratically

My school:
Involves students, parents and community members in meaningful democratic participation focusing on matters that clearly affect them?
1____2____ 3____ 4____ 5____ 6____ 7____ 8____ 9
Not evident seldom usually always evident

Participates annually in data collection essential to continuing school improvement focused on student learning?
1____2____ 3____ 4____ 5____ 6____ 7____ 8____ 9
Not evident seldom usually always evident

Requires the creation of inquiry groups created to investigate the causes and potential solutions to school based problems?
1____2____ 3____ 4____ 5____ 6____ 7____ 8____ 9
Not evident seldom usually always evident

Develops and adopts a data-driven, comprehensive school improvement plan?
1____2____ 3____ 4____ 5____ 6____ 7____ 8____ 9
Not evident seldom usually always evident

Receives sustained support for student achievement from district level personnel?
1____2____ 3____ 4____ 5____ 6____ 7____ 8____ 9
Not evident seldom usually always evident

School Environment

My school:
Offers a variety of age appropriate social experiences and activities?
1____2____ 3____ 4____ 5____ 6____ 7____ 8____ 9
Not evident seldom usually always evident

Provides a safe, caring, and healthy environment that promotes student responsibility and meaningful parent involvement?
1____2____ 3____ 4____ 5____ 6____ 7____ 8____ 9
Not evident seldom usually always evident

Provides a variety of activities that are inclusive and support participation of every student?
1____2____ 3____ 4____ 5____ 6____ 7____ 8____ 9
Not evident seldom usually always evident

Embeds healthy, physical activities into each day?
1____2____ 3____ 4____ 5____ 6____ 7____ 8____ 9
Not evident seldom usually always evident

Expects students to support each other and respect individual differences?
1____2____ 3____ 4____ 5____ 6____ 7____ 8____ 9
Not evident seldom usually always evident

Creates advisory programs to ensure that every student is well known by at least one adult?
1____2____ 3____ 4____ 5____ 6____ 7____ 8____ 9
Not evident seldom usually always evident

* *

Involving Parents and Community

My school:

Frequently assesses and evaluates the methods used to report student performance to families?
1____2____ 3____ 4____ 5____ 6____ 7____ 8____ 9
Not evident seldom usually always evident

Keeps families aware of student progress in relationship to instructional standards through frequent communication?
1____2____ 3____ 4____ 5____ 6____ 7____ 8____ 9
Not evident seldom usually always evident

Promotes the importance of being open and receptive to the concerns of students, families, and community?
1____2____ 3____ 4____ 5____ 6____ 7____ 8____ 9
Not evident seldom usually always evident

Provides regular and meaningful opportunities for students to engage in community service and service learning activities?
1____2____ 3____ 4____ 5____ 6____ 7____ 8____ 9
Not evident seldom usually always evident

Utilizes the community as an educational resource and an environment to promote relevant learning?
1____2____ 3____ 4____ 5____ 6____ 7____ 8____ 9
Not evident seldom usually always evident

Appendix D: Spotlight School Award Application Letter

What makes your Middle Level School and Spotlight School?

Windham Middle School is a Spotlight School. Our administration and staff are proud to report high achievement and dedication. Our middle school cares about each and every student that comes through our doors. We have a dedicated staff that cares about curriculum and instruction, teaming and collaboration, school climate, the community, and the overall achievement for all. Our school is committed to education and the overall well being of our students.

Windham Middle School offers a strong academic program based on achievement scores and state standards. Curriculum mapping and teacher collaboration ensures that our teachers are providing academic opportunities for all children to reach a level of success. We offer enrichment opportunities as well as remedial support. Our curriculum is carefully designed to meet the needs of all learners. Teachers are dedicated to integrating different disciplines, to assist the students in their efforts to make connections to the real world. Units of study are designed to meet the state standards, assess progress, and improve instruction. One student stated, "What I like most about this school is that we learn many different things on different topics. We also have choices on what classes we can take like band, chorus, music appreciation, or French, Spanish, or ILS. The school offers different levels of learning so if you are having trouble you can have help or if you're really good, then you can step up a level."

The use of various techniques for instruction makes Windham Middle School a Spotlight School. Our teachers believe in differentiation, the benefits of cooperative learning, small and large group instruction, and flexible grouping. The staff recognizes that every student is unique. A staff member remarked, "I think our biggest strength is that we have a staff that genuinely care for students and want them to do well. Our staff is dedicated to education and to our students' well being." Professional development is an important component of our school. Staff members are given a multitude of opportunities for professional growth and improved instruction. The process of continuous staff improvement connects our building to current research on best practices and lends itself to the continued improvement in student achievement.

Teaming and collaboration is second nature for our school. Our faculty recognizes the enormous benefit from working together. "Staff gets along well, creating good conditions for effective team work. Administrators are fair, respectful, and exert good leadership. Teachers provide interesting and challenging work for kids. These all serve to create positive, friendly atmosphere," a staff member responds. Professional Learning Communities within our school building allow teachers the chance to share best practices and skills. Our teacher mentoring program assists new teachers (in our building) by paring them with experienced staff members. There is a shared sense of unity and purpose when collaborating with one another. "Supportive staff, supportive parents, and team collaboration," a staff member relates.

A positive school climate is important to Windham Middle School. A parent remarks, “Our experience at WMS has so far surpassed my expectations I don’t know where to begin. My son’s teachers have been engaging, helpful, and keep him excited about learning. The principal shows a level of involvement, concern, and energy that is astounding. There is a fair amount of attention given to respecting each other, which helps me feel that he is safe there. There are so many afterschool clubs, teams, and activities to help kids grow in other areas as well as helping build a wonderful sense of school spirit.” Windham Middle School provides a safe environment that promotes student responsibility, parent involvement, and staff participation. Respect and responsibility encourage students to celebrate differences and strive for success. A student comments, “I liked the various groups of friends that there are. There aren’t just “populars” and “geeks.” There are different types of people. I came to this school as “the new kid” and knew like three people. Other people that I was just meeting were very nice to me and they treated me like I was one of their friends already. That was nice because I was very nervous t o come to this school for the first time.”

Keeping the community involved and aware of school practices ensures that WMS is a Spotlight School. Faculty members are encouraged to communicate with parents frequently. Parents can access PowerSchool to view their child’s grades and general school conduct. All teachers have their own websites where students and their families can stay current with daily assignments and announcements. Our school promotes communication with the community to be open and receptive to the concerns of our students, their families and our community. The Parent Teacher Association is very active within our building. Volunteers are a welcome addition to our school environment.

Windham Middle School is a Spotlight School. We are committed to the development of lifelong learners. Every student is respected, cared for, and challenged by the dedicated staff of our building. All students are paired with a faculty advisor in order to promote successful and meaningful connections. WMS recognizes that the most important aspect of a Spotlight School is that the spotlight is on the student.

Please consider the Windham Middle School as a school worthy of the NELMS honor as a Spotlight School. Attached is additional information to assist you in your decision.

Appendix E: EDies Evaluation Rubric

New Hampshire Excellence in Education Awards. (2007) Evaluation Rubric. May 6, 2008. Retreived from http://www.edies.org/2007-08_Rubric.pdf

Appendix F: EDies Nomination Letter

December 2008

To the "EDies" Committee:

Windham Middle School is a New Hampshire School of Excellence. Our administration and staff exemplify high achievement and dedication. As a staff we are invested in providing quality curriculum and instruction through teaming and collaboration, emphasizing high overall academic achievement for all. Our school cares about each and every student that comes through our doors, not just academically, but as whole people. Please consider Windham Middle School a School of Excellence based on the criteria of personalization, data, innovation, the "ED"ies School of Excellence rubric, and inspiration.

Personalization:

Windham Middle School strives to meet the needs of all students recognizing that adolescent needs and interests are varied and unique. To this end we offer multiple opportunities for students to grow and mature. Our school community is committed to providing many and varied resources to both students and teachers.

Academically, the WMS staff utilizes differentiated instruction so that all students may reach their individual learning potential. Instruction includes tiered assignments and projects, levels within classes, graduated rubrics, student choice in assignments or books, modifications and accommodations, group learning, and student collaboration. Teachers use research-based instructional models and are able to measure effective instruction based on student performance. Teachers work in collaborative teams to develop formative assessments and data-driven instruction. Teams work together to solve personal issues that may affect their students.

WMS has a number of interventions in place to support our students. Besides the Special Education department mandated by the state, WMS offers a Literacy Success Program, ESOL Program, STAR Program for at-risk students, Academic Saturdays for students who are falling behind, individual and group counseling, and a district psychologist. Homework Club is offered to assist students in homework completion or to provide extra help after school. We are also fortunate to have a School Resource Officer on a part-time basis. This year, WMS has instituted a new Advisory Program in which an adult meets with a small community of students, on a daily basis, in order to foster their academic and social development while building relationships.

WMS recognizes the importance of developing well-rounded students and offers many extra curricular opportunities. Clubs that are available outside school hours include: Yearbook, Drama, Student Council, M2M Mentoring, Peer Assistants, Cable Club, Earth Shuttle, Golf, Bowling, Skiing, Tennis, Art, Volleyball, Game Club, Recycled Percussion, Drum Line, Jazz Band, Select Chorus, Strings, Honors Band, and Book Beat. Our school also offers a Spelling Bee and Geography Bee each year. Intramural and interscholastic sports and curriculum-related field trips are offered throughout the year. WMS students, teachers, and parents reach out to the community by organizing food, clothing, and toy drives that benefit people both in Windham and in surrounding towns.

Windham Middle School recognizes each student as a unique individual. We encourage these individuals to form a cohesive school community that is tolerant and appreciates the differences and similarities among its members. The educators of WMS are dedicated to challenge each student to maximize their growth emotionally, socially, and intellectually.

Data:

Windham Middle School staff utilizes various sources of data in order to improve instruction, curriculum, and overall community relations. The NECAP, Northwest Evaluation Association (NWEA), and different types of school-wide surveys are key sources of data that our school uses to guide our teaching and learning processes.

As required by the state, our students take the NECAP tests every fall. Each year our students score very well. In 2007, we had a significantly higher percentage of students scoring proficient than the state average, in all grades and all content areas. In all three grades (6-8) more than 80% of students scored proficient in reading, which highlights the quality of our reading instruction. In the area of mathematics, more than 70% of our students scored proficient. We have recently implemented the Connected Math Program (CMP), which uses an investigative and hands-on approach to math education and really stresses mathematical reasoning. The math department supplements this curriculum with practice in basic skills and we look forward to seeing the affects this new curriculum has on our students' performance on state-wide tests. Finally, in the area of writing about two-thirds of our students scored proficient. The area of writing has been targeted by the staff as an area for growth and our Language Arts department is participating in the Collaborative Assessment Project (CAP) to improve instruction by ensuring their curriculum aligns with state standards.

Windham Middle School also administers the NWEA test to all students in the fall and spring and to a sampling of students in the winter. This assessment provides teachers, students, and parents with valuable data on each child and his/her growth over the course of the year. Teachers use this data to enhance instruction by creating differentiated instructional strategies and groupings. The data is also useful in assessing areas of strength and weakness for individual students, as well as entire classes.

Windham Middle School also collects data from different types of surveys given to members of the WMS community. Each year parents of 8th grade students are mailed an exit survey. They are asked to comment on their experiences at Windham Middle School. This information is used as feedback for teachers and administrators. We also participated in the My Voice Survey, which helped to promote our "Follow the Child" initiative. In the fall of 2007, WMS conducted a Bullying Survey in order to measure the student perception of bullying within our school. During the spring of 2007, Windham Middle School administered the District Questionnaire Response, which is an online survey given to parents, teachers, and students. The results of these surveys provided valuable information about the climate of the school. The parent surveys showed that parents feel we provide a safe learning environment that meets our students' academic needs and prepares them for the future. The student surveys indicated that our students believe they are treated fairly and are cared for by the staff. Students also feel they are challenged as individual learners. Finally, the staff surveys showed that our staff is motivated and feel an intrinsic reward for the work they do.

In addition to a commitment to collecting data, Windham Middle School has a strong commitment to utilizing the data it collects. Starting in 2007, WMS has had a data team, composed of staff members from all grade levels as well as administration, which meets monthly to analyze data trends and brainstorm ways to help teachers better use the data to improve instruction and ensure that our students are given instruction appropriate and necessary for their individual learning needs.

Innovation:

What initially began as Ignite in 2002, M2M is now a school-specific student –to- student mentoring program. A highlight of every sixth grader's introduction to Windham Middle School, M2M was designed to assist incoming students with the initial transition and challenges of middle school life. M2M has had a positive impact on our school climate and community.

Individually, the leadership role given to the mentors in the program has led to elevated self esteem and self awareness for our students. Mentors show genuine pride in the importance of their role as mentors. Currently we have nineteen 7th and 8th graders serving on the M2M Executive Board, and an additional 65 students serving as M2M mentors for 6th graders. The M2M Board and mentors total 22% of the 7th and 8th grade population. The typical social competition that is sometimes prominent in schools is reduced because students from all interest areas and abilities work together as mentors. Meeting monthly with their groups, mentors also initiate one-to-one contact with their mentees at various times during the year, such as birthdays. Bulletin boards in the school display pictures of the mentors, and the monthly topic of discussion which include respect, friendship, gossip, and bullying.

Not only do the mentors have a sense of belonging within their group, but the sixth graders they work with in turn feel an immediate sense of belonging to the Windham Middle School community. Social barriers between grade levels have been broken down because of the program. Sixth grade students feel more comfortable in the hallways with upperclassmen because they know them as mentors.

The program has been self-perpetuating and continues to thrive. This is evidenced by the number of 6th graders who excitedly collect signatures in the spring from their teachers, recommending them as mentors for the program.

EDies Rubric:

Windham Middle School strives for personalization and strong relationships. There is a strong Parent Teacher Student partnership. Teachers use PowerSchool, TeacherWeb and Moodle to encourage two-way communication. Our daily bulletin provides up-to-the-minute information for parents and volunteers. Windham Middle School has a website with links to current events, teacher websites, newsletters, and forms for downloading. Windham Middle School is a Blue Ribbon Winner for volunteer involvement and a Gold Circle School Partnership Award Winner. The relationship with PTA is strong. PTA provides a training program for all volunteers and our school encourages volunteerism across the curriculum. From helping students research Ancient Greece to guiding a Physical Education orienteering course, volunteers are everywhere at WMS.

Windham Middle School shows exemplary curriculum and instruction with rigor and high standards. Teachers use research based instructional models and are able to measure effective instruction based on student performance. Using NECAP and NWEA data, teachers are able to differentiate instruction and create resources for all programs and grade levels. Using Performance Pathways, teachers have designed curriculum maps in all curriculum areas, based on state curriculum frameworks, common formative and common summative evaluations. A certified Media Generalist serves our students in a variety of ways, from book talks to study skills curriculum design. An Enrichment teacher is available to help both the teachers and students enhance and advance higher-level learning. Health and safety are major concerns of our school. A professional registered nurse is available on site and works with our guidance counselor in our Wellness Suite. A full time certified health teacher works with students in all

grade levels. A Health Committee meets to create opportunities for students and staff. There are wellness programs for our staff throughout the year including fitness programs, snowshoeing, and after school walks on our nature trail. A School Resource Officer is available at our school for classroom activities, chaperoning dances, and acting as a liaison with our Police Department. We have a Safety Committee with a safety plan in place.

Windham Middle School is also in the forefront with the teaching and learning process, with relevance, engagement and whole community involvement. There are accommodations for learning styles. We are a technology-rich school, well supported by the community that employs a technology director for the school system, a computer technician at each school, and additional support staff to assist both students and teachers. One lab, two portable labs, Alpha Smarts, Smart Boards and over 100 palm handhelds enable students to become actively engaged in technology projects. Our district and administration provide professional development opportunities from formative assessments to ICT standard implementation. Teachers have Professional Learning Communities to spend time in collaboration. Each new teacher has a mentor. Students are able to achieve at Windham Middle School with alternative assessments, accommodations, together with a strong and supportive Special Education department. PLC time allows teachers to work on common rubrics, formative and summative assessments. A variety of performance measures are used to assess student achievement. School Climate at Windham Middle School is positive. Each student receives an agenda which includes the handbook with rules and information about the school. Students participate in Advisory, a small group of approximately 12 students and an Advisor, to discuss monthly themes, read, write and participate in school wide challenges. We have a One Book One School program, with Advisors reading from the same book and engaging students in discussions. Last year's book was *The Revealers*, this year we are reading *Payback*. Each 6th grade student has a mentor from 7th or 8th grade, part of our M2M program. Mentors apply for the opportunity to mentor, participate in training, and connect with 6th graders on a regular basis. Friendly competitions among grades include door decorating, non-perishable food collections, and themed spirit days.

There are many before and after school clubs and activities available for students as stated in the Personalization section of this letter. Dances are held once a month, with a special Windham Wonderland Dance in December to raise funds for Helping Hands, a local organization helping those in need. Sixth graders spend a week in October at Camp Bournedale in Plymouth MA, 7th and 8th graders have the opportunity to attend Earth Shuttle for a week in Florida, and 8th graders spend a week in Washington DC. We also offer Academic Saturdays for students who show a need for more than what Homework Club can offer.

Windham Middle School has strong team of empowered educators. There are several decision-making committees including: District Data, Scheduling, Advisory, and M2M. The District Data team is looking at test scores, achievement, and reading Bernhardt's *Using Data to Improve Learning in Middle Schools*. The Scheduling committee revised our schedule to include a 6 day partially blocked schedule. Team Leaders and Department Chairs meet monthly. Team Leaders are reading and discussing Jim Collins' *Good to Great*. Department Chairs are reading and discussing Marzano's *Classroom Assessments and Grading tha*t *Work*. Articles from ASCD and *Educational Leadership* are discussed among teams. Workshop days consist of support from specialists, such as our Technology Specialist with training on uploading ICT artifacts or training on formative assessments from Learning Innovations. Supports at the District Level include opportunities through My Learning Plan, our web-based staff development program and opportunities for writing grants for approval from the Teachers Grant and Incentive Fund

(TGIF.) Our mission statement, written and "unpacked" by our staff reads: "Windham Middle School is committed to providing a safe learning environment and encouraging individuals to be respectful of oneself and others and challenging each individual to maximize growth, emotionally, socially, and intellectually."

Inspiration:

If selected as a school representative of excellence, WMS will inspire other schools to strive for the same, both in our district and throughout the state. In our district it will be easy to share our award with the other two schools. These two schools provide the educational foundation for our WMS students, and we will honor their hard work if we are chosen as a school of excellence. To honor the faculty and staff from our elementary schools, WMS faculty and staff will host a celebration of their exemplary dedication to teaching.

WMS has an open door policy for other school districts and state agencies. This open invitation allows for schools throughout the state to come and observe our innovative programs. Through networking and sharing at professional workshops and conferences, teachers from around the state are exposed to what we offer at WMS. For instance, two of our teachers are annual presenters at the Christa McAuliffe Technology Conference, where other teachers from across the state learn about our school-wide use of hand-held devices. During an on-site visit, reading teachers from Cawley Middle School in Hooksett learned about our One Book One School Initiative and successfully implemented our model in their school this year.

The numerous articles in local newspapers about WMS programs and successes not only inform our townspeople but create a ripple effect throughout area schools who are inspired by our work. Activities we have publicized have been read about and in some cases inspired staff at other schools to try similar projects. In addition, participation on local listservs offers opportunities to share exemplary ideas with local colleagues.

Windham Middle School is a New Hampshire School of Excellence. We are committed to the development of lifelong learners for both our students and staff. Every student is respected, cared for, and challenged by the dedicated staff of our building. All students are paired with a faculty advisor in order to promote successful and meaningful connections. WMS recognizes that the most important aspect of a School of Excellence is that the spotlight is on the student.

Please consider the Windham Middle School as a school worthy of the New Hampshire Excellence in Education Award. Please contact Brenda Morrow at the Windham Middle School 112 A Lowell Rd. Windham, NH 03087 (603-893-2636) for any additional information to assist you in your decision. We look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

Brenda Morrow
"ED"ies Committee Chair
WMS Eighth Grade Teacher

Appendix G: EDies Evaluation Rubric #2

New Hampshire Excellence in Education Awards. (2008) Evaluation Rubric. May 6, 2008. Retreived from http://www.edies.org/pdf_documents/EDies_Rubric_09-08.pdf

NEW HAMPSHIRE EXCELLENCE IN EDUCATION AWARDS

The "ED"ies
PO Box 617 • Concord, New Hampshire 03302
Tel: 603.224.7447 800.852.3358 Fax: 603.224.5406
Email: info@edies.org • www.edies.org

School Selection Rubric

Personalization and Relationships

Indicator	Exemplary	Fully Evident	Partially or Not Yet Evident
The school engages parents and families as partners in each student's education and encourages their participation in school programs and parent support groups.			
The climate of the school is safe, positive, respectful and supportive, resulting in a sense of pride and ownership.			
There is a system for effective and ongoing communication with students, parents/guardians, and school personnel, designed to keep them informed about the types of available support services and identified student needs.			
The school has a formal, ongoing program through which each student has an adult member of the school community, in addition to the school guidance counselor, who personalizes each student's educational experience, knows the student well, and assists the student in achieving the school-wide expectations for student learning.			

Rigor and High Standards

Indicator	Exemplary	Fully Evident	Partially or Not Yet Evident
The curriculum is aligned with the school-wide academic expectations and shall ensure that all students have sufficient opportunity to practice and achieve each of those expectations.			
All school staff are involved in promoting the well-being and learning of students.			
There are sufficient certified/licensed personnel and support staff to provide effective counseling, health, special education, and library media services. The school's mission statement represents the school community's fundamental values and beliefs about student learning.			
Student grouping patterns reflect the diversity of the student body, foster heterogeneity, reflect current research and best practices, and support the achievement of the school's mission and expectations for student learning.			

Rigor and High Standards (continued)			
The curriculum is appropriately integrated and emphasizes depth of understanding over breadth of coverage.			
A wide range of materials, technologies, and other library/information services that are responsive to the school's student population are available to students and faculty, and utilized to improve teaching and learning.			
Policies are in place for the selection and removal of information resources and the use of technologies and the internet.			
Rigorous standards are in place which address the whole child and clearly identify what students are expected to know and be able to do across the curriculum.			
Standards are contained within local curriculum competencies, national standards, the NH Grade Level/Grade Span Expectations, and the NH K-12 Curriculum Frameworks.			

Relevance, Engagement, and Whole Community Involvement

Indicator	Exemplary	Fully Evident	Partially or Not Yet Evident
The school fosters productive business/community /higher education partnerships that support student learning.			
The schedule is driven by the school's mission and expectations for student learning and supports the effective implementation of curriculum, instruction, and assessment.			
Student support personnel enhance student learning by interacting and working cooperatively with professional and other staff and by maximizing community resources to address the academic, social, emotional, and physical needs of students.			
The curriculum engages all students in inquiry, problem-solving, and higher-order thinking as well as providing opportunities for the authentic application of knowledge and skills.			
There is effective curricular coordination and articulation between and among all academic areas within the school as well as with sending-schools in the district.			
The school provides opportunities for all students to extend learning beyond the traditional offerings and settings.			
Teachers use feedback from a variety of sources, including other teachers, students, supervisors, and parents, as a means of improving instruction.			
Students are provided with formal and informal opportunities to assess their own learning.			
Technology is integrated into and supportive of teaching and learning.			
The mission statement and expectations for student learning are developed by the school community and approved and supported by the professional staff and school board and any other school-wide governing organizations.			

RESULTS

Indicator	Exemplary	Fully Evident	Partially or Not Yet Evident
Instructional strategies personalize instruction; make connections across disciplines; engage students as active and self-directed learners; involve all students in higher order thinking to promote depth of understanding; provide opportunities for students to apply knowledge or skills; and promote student self-assessment and self-reflection.			
Students are informed of the learning goals for each learning activity.			
A variety of assessment strategies are used to determine student knowledge, skills, and competencies and to assess student growth over time.			
School-wide academic, civic, and social learning expectations are defined, measurable, and reflect the school's mission.			
The school has indicators by which it assesses the school's progress in achieving school-wide civic and social expectations.			

EMPOWERED EDUCATORS

Indicator	Exemplary	Fully Evident	Partially or Not Yet Evident
Teachers as well as administrators provide leadership essential to the improvement of the school.			
Teachers meet collaboratively to discuss and share student work and the results of student assessment for the purpose of revising the curriculum and improving instructional strategies.			
Professional development activities support the development and implementation of the curriculum.			
The school's professional development program is guided by identified instructional needs and provides opportunities for teachers to develop and improve their instructional strategies.			
The school's professional development program provides opportunities for teachers to collaborate in developing a broad range of student assessment strategies.			
Teachers are knowledgeable about current research or effective instructional approaches and reflective about their own practice.			
The teacher: student ratio allows teachers to meet the learning needs of individual learners.			
Teachers are experts in the content areas they teach.			

Rubric adapted from New *Hampshire's Vision for Redesign: Moving from High Schools to Learning Communities.* NH Department of Education, 2007.

Approved September 2008