

**ADMINISTRATORS' PERCEPTIONS OF MIDDLE SCHOOL IN TWO RURAL  
DISTRICTS: A COMPANION TO THE TAURISANO STUDY**

**THESIS**

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

<u>Chapter</u>	<u>Page</u>
I. INTRODUCTION.....	1
Need for the Study.....	1
Purpose.....	2
Research Questions.....	3
Limitations of the Study.....	3
II. REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE.....	4
Introduction.....	4
The Junior High School.....	5
The Emergence of the Middle School.....	6
Essential Elements of a Middle School.....	8
III. DESIGN OF THE STUDY.....	13
Purpose.....	13
Research Questions.....	13
Methodology.....	14
Subjects.....	14
Instruments.....	14
Procedures.....	15
Analysis.....	16
IV. ANALYSIS OF THE DATA.....	17
Purpose.....	17
Results of the Administrator Survey.....	17
Table 1-Percentages of Current Middle School Administrators' Responses.....	29
Table 2-Percentages of Middle School Administrators' Ideal Responses.....	30
Table 3-Percentages of Administrators' Responses: Currently vs. Ideally.....	31
Table 4-Teachers' and Administrators' Perceptions: Currently vs. Ideally.....	32
V. CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS.....	33
Conclusions.....	33
Implications for the Classroom.....	41
Implications for Further Research.....	43
REFERENCES.....	45

## TABLE OF CONTENTS (continued)

APPENDICES.....	48
A: Table 1-Teachers' Current Responses (Taurisano study).....	48
B: Table 2-Teachers' Ideal Responses (Taurisano study).....	50
C: Table 3-Percentages of Administrators' Responses:	
Currently vs. Ideally.....	52
D: Middle School Survey.....	54

## **ABSTRACT**

The purpose of this study was to identify administrators' perceptions of the current practices in their middle school as compared to what they believe a middle school should be doing. The findings of this study were also compared to the Taurisano study, which focuses on teachers' perceptions of the middle school concept.

The subjects involved were 11 administrators from two rural school districts in Western New York. One of the school districts have 28 middle level teachers, 321 middle level students, and 3 administrators. The other school district involved consists of 42 middle level teachers, 500 middle level students, and 8 administrators. The administrators involved included 7 principals, 3 assistant principals, and a superintendent with various levels of experience.

A survey that was developed by the researcher was used to obtain the information in this study. The subjects were asked to respond to 15 statements that dealt with middle school practices. The subjects were instructed to respond to each statement by circling the choice that best described their opinion. The choices included: agree, somewhat agree, somewhat disagree, disagree, and not sure. A space for additional comments was also provided.

The findings reveal that the administrators involved in this study recognize the essential elements of a middle school and largely agree that they should be implemented in a middle school, however only 64% of them could agree that their middle school had already implemented the elements. In fact, there were very few elements of which more than 90% of the administrators could agree were already present in their middle school. Therefore, even though the administrators involved in this study understand the ideal model of a middle school, many of them recognize that their school does not meet that ideal.

# CHAPTER I

## INTRODUCTION

### Need for the Study

Even though many school districts have already changed their junior high schools to middle schools, it seems that many districts may have only jumped onto the middle school bandwagon. In other words, schools are changing their name to include middle school, yet they have not restructured programs and instruction to respond to the characteristics of an adolescent. Ideally, all middle schools should have implemented the essential elements of a middle school, since middle schools should exist to meet the needs of the adolescent learner.

Teachers and administrators need to take a look at what their middle school is currently doing, and determine which essential elements of a middle school they need to consider implementing. This is particularly important since “Research efforts are reported to be low quality...” and “Most often, the research was conducted by someone who advocated some particular aspect of middle schooling” (Kenneth et al., 1986, p. 22).

## **Purpose**

The purpose of this study was to identify administrators' perceptions of the current practices in their middle school as compared to what they believe a middle school should be doing.

The purpose of asking the subjects about the current practices of their middle school as well as the ideal practices of a middle school was to determine the extent to which each middle school involved had implemented the essential elements of a middle school. The findings of this comparison should provide the school districts with valuable information that will help them determine how their middle school compares with the ideal middle school.

The findings from this study were also compared to the findings from the Taurisano study, which investigates teachers' perceptions of middle school. This comparison will demonstrate how similar or different teachers and administrators perceive their middle school.

## **Research Questions**

1. What are administrators' perceptions of the current practices in their middle school?
2. What are administrators' perceptions of what a middle school should be doing?
3. How do administrators' perceptions compare with teachers' perceptions, as found in the Taurisano study?

## **Limitations of the Study**

One factor that could have affected the validity of this study is the how truthful the subjects were when they completed the survey. Even though the subjects remained anonymous, it is impossible to know whether the subjects were completely honest when responding to the survey.

Another limitation of this study was the small number of subjects that were surveyed. Since school districts generally have only one to two administrators per building, the number of administrators between the two school districts involved totaled only eleven. Therefore, the results of this study should not be generalized to represent the perceptions of all administrators in Western New York.

## **CHAPTER II**

### **REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE**

#### **Introduction**

The middle school movement caused many school districts across the country to begin to restructure their junior high schools. In the past, junior high schools focused on preparing students for high school. In other words, junior high schools served as a bridge between the elementary school and the high school, placing emphasis on departmentalization and subject specialization (Alexander, 1995). On the other hand, those in favor of middle schools argue that adolescents have unique developmental characteristics that need to be considered when creating programs. “The middle school is a philosophy and belief about children, their unique needs, who they are, and how they grow and learn.” (DeVita, Pumerantz, & Wilklow, 1970, p. 25). This controversy continues to separate advocates of the junior high school philosophy from advocates of the middle school philosophy. As a result of this debate, many school districts have restructured their junior high schools without truly adopting the middle school philosophy. There are several schools that are calling themselves “middle schools” when, in fact, they are only implementing selected elements of the middle school concept.

## **The Junior High School**

The emergence of the junior high school occurred due to a variety of societal factors. “The origin of the junior high school is usually attributed to dissatisfaction with the two level 8-4 plan...” (George & Alexander, 1993, p. 25).

In other words, people were not satisfied with kindergarten through eighth grade as one level and ninth through twelfth grade as another level. In addition, Van Til, Vars, and Lounsbury (1961) pointed out that colleges were concerned about getting students that were better prepared, and colleges felt that students should be exposed to college preparatory courses before ninth grade. A third factor that attributed to the junior high school movement was the increased birth rate after World War I, which led to overcrowded schools. In order to alleviate this situation, many districts moved grades 7-9 into a separate building (George & Alexander, 1993).

As a result of organizational changes, improvements were sought to be made in educational programs. Tye (1985) in George et al. (1992) reflects this in the following statement:

The school was to be based on the characteristics of young adolescents and concerned with all aspects of growth and development. It would be a school designed to provide continued work in learning skills while bringing more depth to the curriculum that had been the case in the elementary schools. It would emphasize guidance and exploration, independence and responsibility. The junior high school would provide the final portion of education and offer a transition to the high school years. (p. 3)

## **The Emergence of the Middle School**

The decline of the junior high school and the emergence of the middle school began after several dissatisfactions from the junior high school concept developed. “Various individuals, including many spokespersons, began expressing dissatisfaction with and possible alternatives to both the junior high school and the earlier, still continuing 8-4 elementary-high school organization. The 6-3-3 and the 8-4 plans were both considered by many as unsuitable to the needs and interests of early adolescents”(George & Anderson, 1993, p.25). For adolescents, departmentalized or specialized subject areas were considered too “abrupt” a change from the typical elementary self-contained classrooms. Also, it was believed that the adolescent’s interests and the subject areas in the departmentalized junior high school lacked a relationship (George & Anderson, 1993).

According to Williamson (1995), another dissatisfaction with the junior high school concept that led to the emergence of the middle school was that, “In many cases the junior high school was nothing more than a “junior” version of the senior high school program. Frequently, classes were organized into content specific departments, students were assigned to classes in similar ways, and many of the curricular and co-curricular offerings were identical to those offered in the comprehensive high school (p.378). Also, George, Stevenson, Thomason, and Beane (1992) found that the

programs imitated high school programs, leaving no room for individual growth, and putting unnecessary pressure on young learners. In other words, the junior high school did not have its own identity, since the programs and subject matter were ultimately controlled by the high school's needs.

Along with the dissatisfaction of the junior high becoming a mini-high school, other factors led to the emergence of the middle school concept. One such factor was the junior high school's failure to meet its population's needs according to the physical development of its youngsters. Recent studies showed that the average age in which students reached puberty had dropped. Since the rationale of the junior high school was to serve children who entered pubescence at a particular age, and evidence about adolescent growth changed significantly, the junior high school concept, which addressed the modern adolescents physical growth, was no longer accurate. This realization led up to one of the strongest reasons for developing a new school for the middle grades (Williamson, 1995).

Finally, another factor that precipitated the emergence of the middle school was, "The Sputnik induced obsession with academic mastery, particularly in mathematics and sciences..." (Lounsbury, 1992, p.10). Due to this obsession, people were becoming increasingly concerned that American children were not being sufficiently prepared for the new technological advances occurring. As a result, dissatisfaction occurred with the junior high schools because research evidence showed

that students at the middle levels were more capable of thinking on a more abstract basis than they were previously thought to. The need to restructure and reorganize curriculum at the middle level was a concern of many who wanted to emerge into a new, more modern middle school (DeVita et al., 1970).

Eventually, junior high schools began to be replaced with middle schools. This movement was driven by factors that had little to do with education and the needs of adolescents, yet educators started to understand the characteristics of adolescents better because of this movement. It became evident that middle school programs should not imitate high school programs, nor should they exist solely to provide a holding place between elementary school and high school (George & Alexander, 1993).

### **Essential Elements of a Middle School**

As a result of the middle school movement, many school districts have changed their junior high schools to middle schools. However, every school that is called a middle school is not always a middle school. Lounsbury (1990) pointed out that even though more schools are implementing characteristics of a middle school, there is still a long way to go. He also stated that, "The middle school concept is still more promise than practice" (p.10).

Alexander and McEwin (1989) conducted a national survey which suggested that the middle school concept is becoming more evident in schools, yet not as

widespread as the number of middle schools that exist. George and Alexander (1993) point out that the literature on the middle school movement does not always provide desirable characteristics of a middle school for educators to learn from. Therefore, many educational leaders have been forced to interpret the literature their own way. However, listings of desirable characteristics began to increase through the publications of various professional journals.

The National Middle School Association provides a list of essential elements of a middle school in their publication *This We Believe*. This list of elements is widely accepted as a working definition of a middle school. In fact, the list often serves as a benchmark for middle level educators to measure their schools against ( Irvin, Valentine, & Clark, 1994). The essential elements include:

- Curriculum that is challenging, integrative, and exploratory
- Varied teaching and learning approaches
- Assessment and evaluation that promote learning
- Flexible organizational structures
- Programs and policies that foster health, wellness, and safety
- Comprehensive guidance and support services

Irvin et al. (1994) point out that the authors of *This We Believe* recognize that there may be other characteristics of a middle school that are valid and important. In fact, there are many publications which list the desirable characteristics of a middle school.

George and Alexander (1993) state that, “ Although there were differences among the various listings, most stressed the same matters of curriculum, instructional organization, teacher guidance, instructional methodology, and middle school orientation and articulation that had been persistent in the sources already cited”(p.38).

George and Oldaker (1985) surveyed 160 middle schools that were identified as exemplary by judges, inquiring about the characteristics of their school. The features that schools had in common included a flexibly scheduled day, interdisciplinary team organization, advisor-advisee teacher guidance program, a favorable school learning climate, curriculum provisions for student personal development, and so on.

Similar findings were reported in a national study conducted by Cawelti (1988) for the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development. Cawelti conducted a national survey of 672 schools and he concluded:

...middle schools are much more likely to use a teacher-advisor program, provide transition and articulation activities, use interdisciplinary teaching and block schedules, and provide staff development activities that extend the range of teaching strategies appropriate to their students. (p. 4)

Along the same lines as the previously mentioned studies, the Carnegie Task Force on Education of Young Adolescents presented its findings in *Turning Points*:

*Preparing Youth for the 21st Century* (1989). This task force made several recommendations which parallel the findings of the other studies:

- Create small communities for learning... schools-within-schools or houses, students grouped together as teams...
- Teach a core academic program...
- Ensure success for all students...
- Empower teachers and administrators to make decisions about middle grade students...
- Staff middle grade schools with teachers who are experts at teaching young adolescents...
- Improve academic performance through fostering the health and fitness of young adolescents...
- Reengage families in the education of young adolescents...
- Connect schools with communities... (1989, p. 9)

Other studies that reported the elements of a middle school are the national surveys conducted by the Effective Middle Grades Program at the John Hopkins University Center for Research on Elementary and Middle Schools (CREMS). Both Epstein (1990) and MacIver (1990) identified elements of a middle school that were

being implemented or planned to be implemented. For example, advisory programs, interdisciplinary team organization, school transition programs, flexible scheduling, exploratory courses, parental involvement, cooperative learning, and variations of long-term teacher-student relationships.

Irvin et al. sum up the condition of the middle level schools:

Middle level education came of age during the 1980s. To be sure, much maturing is still ahead, but the difficult developmental steps have been taken that can ensure a rewarding maturity... While middle level education certainly has come of age and developed a unique identity in the realm of K-12 education, much has yet to be accomplished before the typical middle level school across the country has positively addressed each of the ten essential elements.(p. 58)

## **CHAPTER III**

### **DESIGN OF THE STUDY**

#### **Purpose**

The purpose of this study was to identify administrators' perceptions of the current practices in their middle school as compared to what they believe a middle school should be doing.

The purpose of asking the subjects about the current practices of their middle school as well as the ideal practices of a middle school was to determine the extent to which each middle school involved had implemented the essential elements of a middle school.

The findings from this study were also compared to the findings from the Taurisano study, which investigates teachers' perceptions of middle school.

#### **Research Questions**

1. What are administrators' perceptions of the current practices in their middle school?
2. What are administrators' perceptions of what a middle school should be doing?
3. How do administrators' perceptions compare with teachers' perceptions, as found in the Taurisano study?

## **Methodology**

### **Subjects**

The subjects of this study included 11 administrators from two rural school districts in Western New York. One of the school districts have 28 middle level teachers, 321 middle level students, and 3 administrators. The other school district involved consists of 42 middle level teachers, 500 middle level students, and 8 administrators. The administrators involved included 7 principals, 3 assistant principals, and a superintendent with various levels of experience. All subjects participated in this study voluntarily and they remained anonymous.

### **Instruments**

The data for this study were obtained from a survey that was developed by the researcher by studying the essential elements of a middle school. The survey was designed to determine administrators' perceptions of the current practices in their middle school, as well as their idea of an effective middle school. This survey will also be used to determine teachers' attitudes in the Taurisano study, the companion to this study.

On the survey, the administrators were asked to respond to 15 statements that dealt with middle school practices. The subjects were instructed to respond to each statement by circling the choice that best described their opinion. These choices included: agree, somewhat agree, somewhat disagree, disagree, and not sure. The subjects were also given space to make additional comments.

### **Procedures**

After obtaining permission from the administrators in both of the school districts involved, the researchers of this companion study distributed the surveys with the cover letter to all administrators and teachers in both districts.

The cover letter that was attached to each survey explained the purpose of the survey and asked the administrators to take some time to respond to the statements. The subjects were assured of anonymity and asked to return the survey to the researchers mailbox within two weeks.

Administrators in one district were given white surveys, while the administrators in the other district were given pink surveys. The surveys were color coded so that the researchers could determine which district each survey came from, however the content was identical.

At the conclusion of the two weeks, the researchers gathered all of the surveys that were returned and recorded the responses to each statement.

### **Analysis**

The data from the surveys were analyzed using a quantitative form of descriptive analysis. The responses to each statement were recorded and compared. Also, the responses of the teachers from the Taurisano study were compared with the findings from this study.

## **CHAPTER IV**

### **ANALYSIS OF THE DATA**

#### **Purpose**

The purpose of this study was to identify administrators' perceptions of the current practices in their middle school as compared to what they believe a middle school should be doing.

The purpose of asking the subjects about the current practices of their middle school as well as the ideal practices of a middle school was to determine the extent to which each middle school involved had implemented the essential elements of a middle school.

The findings from this study were also compared to the findings from the Taurisano study, which investigates teachers' perceptions of middle school.

#### **Results of the Administrator Survey**

The statistical analysis of the administrators survey for this study and the teacher survey from the Taurisano study are included in Tables 1-4 at the end of this chapter. Table 1 reports the percentages of responses based on the administrators' perceptions of what is currently happening in their middle school, while Table 2 reports the administrators' perceptions of what should be happening ideally.

In these tables, the percentages were computed and reported according to the statement number on the survey. For this chapter, the percentages were

rounded off to the nearest percent. The raw data for the surveys are included in Appendices B-C.

**Statement 1: Middle school teachers pay attention to the developmental characteristics of adolescents(physical, social, emotional, moral, and intellectual).**

Table 1 shows that, when considering this statement in regards to what their middle school is currently doing, 36% of the administrators agreed, 36% somewhat agreed, 27% somewhat disagreed, none disagreed, and none were undecided. In comparison, Table 2 shows that 73% agreed that their middle school should be doing this, 27% somewhat agreed, and none somewhat disagreed, disagreed, or were undecided.

When looking at these two tables, it becomes clear that a much larger number of administrators agreed or somewhat agreed (100%) that this should be happening ideally as opposed to those who disagreed or somewhat disagreed (0%). The same is true with the responses to the current situation, since 73% of administrators agreed or somewhat agreed, while only 27% somewhat disagreed and none disagreed.

Also, there is a much larger number of administrators who agreed or somewhat agreed that this should be happening (100%), while only 73% of administrators could agree or somewhat agree that this is already happening in their school.

**Statement 2: The middle school curriculum is based on both academic and personal needs of the middle level students.**

Table 1 shows that 27% of the administrators agreed that this is currently happening, 36% somewhat agreed, 36% somewhat disagreed, none disagreed or were undecided. Table 2 shows that 72% agreed this should be happening, 27% somewhat agreed, and none somewhat disagreed, disagreed, or were undecided.

Again, a large number of administrators agreed or somewhat agreed (100%) that this should be happening, while none somewhat disagreed, disagreed, or were undecided. Furthermore, 64% of the administrators agreed or somewhat agreed that this is currently happening, while only 36% somewhat disagreed and none disagreed or were undecided.

Out of the 100% of administrators who agreed or somewhat agreed that this should be happening, only 64% could agree or somewhat agree that this was happening in their middle school.

**Statement 3: In the middle level classes, teachers experiment with the organization of time and people to best serve student needs.**

Table 1 shows that 9% of the administrators agreed that this is happening, 64% somewhat agreed, 27% somewhat disagreed, and none disagreed or were undecided. Table 2 shows that 73% of the administrators agreed that this should be happening, 18% somewhat agreed, 9% somewhat disagreed, and none disagreed or were undecided.

Table 2 shows that a much larger number of administrators agreed and somewhat agreed (91%) as compared to 9% who somewhat disagreed and none disagreed or were undecided. The same is true for Table 1, since 73% of the administrators agreed or somewhat agreed, while 27% somewhat disagreed and none disagreed or were undecided.

A large number of administrators agreed or somewhat agreed that this should be happening (91%), but only 73% agreed or somewhat agreed that this is happening in their middle school.

**Statement 4: In the middle school, students have the opportunity to use many different methods of learning.**

Table 1 shows that 18% agreed that this is happening, 55% somewhat agreed, 18% somewhat disagreed, 9% disagreed, and none were undecided. Table 2 shows that 73% agreed this should be happening, 27% somewhat agreed, and none somewhat disagreed, disagreed, or were undecided.

Table 2 shows that an overwhelming number of the administrators agreed or somewhat agreed that this should be happening (100%), while none somewhat disagreed, disagreed, or were undecided. Similarly, Table 1 shows that 73% of the administrators agreed or somewhat agreed that this was happening, while 27% somewhat disagreed or agreed and none were undecided.

For this statement, 100% of the administrators agreed or somewhat agreed that this should be happening, yet only 73% of them could agree or somewhat agree that this was happening in their school.

**Statement 5: Middle school teachers teach interdisciplinary units.**

Table 1 shows that 27% of the administrators agreed that this was currently happening, 55% somewhat agreed, 18% somewhat disagreed, and none disagreed or were undecided. Table 2 shows that 73% of the administrators agreed that this should be happening, 27% somewhat agreed, and none somewhat disagreed, disagreed, or were undecided.

Table 2 also shows that all of the administrators agreed or somewhat agreed that this should be happening, and none somewhat disagreed, disagreed, or were undecided. Similarly, Table 1 shows that 82% of the administrators agreed or somewhat agreed, while 18% somewhat disagreed and none disagreed or were undecided.

All of the administrators agreed or somewhat agreed that this should be happening, yet only 82% of them agreed or somewhat agreed that this was currently happening.

**Statement 6: The middle school program provides many opportunities for students to choose topics based on their interests.**

Table 1 shows that 18% of the administrators agreed that this was happening, 18% somewhat agreed, 27% somewhat disagreed, 36% disagreed, and none were undecided. Table 2 shows that 64% of administrators agreed that this should be happening, 36% somewhat agreed, and none somewhat disagreed, disagreed, or were undecided.

All of the administrators agreed or somewhat agreed that this should be happening, while none somewhat disagreed, disagreed, or were undecided. On the other hand, 36% agreed or somewhat agreed that this is happening, while 64% somewhat disagreed or disagreed.

While 100% of the administrators agreed or somewhat agreed that this should be happening in their school, only 36% could agree or somewhat agree that it is currently happening.

**Statement 7: The middle school program provides many hands-on learning experiences for students.**

Table 1 shows that 27% of the administrators agreed with this statement, 64% somewhat agreed, none somewhat disagreed, 9% disagreed, and none were undecided. Table 2 shows that 82% of the administrators agreed that this should be happening, 18% somewhat agreed, and none somewhat disagreed, disagreed, or were undecided.

Again, Table 2 shows that 100% of the administrators agreed or somewhat agreed that this should be happening in middle school, while none somewhat disagreed, agreed, or were undecided. Table 1 shows that while 91% of the administrators agreed or somewhat agreed that this was happening, only 9% of them disagreed and none somewhat disagreed or were undecided.

For this statement, 100% of the administrators agreed or somewhat agreed that this should be happening in middle schools, and 91% of them agreed or somewhat agreed that this was currently happening in their school.

**Statement 8: Within the middle school, students have opportunities to discuss home, school, and peer related problems through an advisor/advisee program.**

Table 1 shows that 9% of the administrators agreed that this was happening in their school, 9% somewhat agreed, 9% somewhat disagreed, 74% disagreed, and none were undecided. Table 2 shows that 64% of the administrators agreed that this should be happening, 36% somewhat agreed, and none somewhat disagreed, disagreed, or were undecided.

All of administrators agreed or somewhat agreed that this should be happening, while none somewhat disagreed, disagreed, or were undecided. On the other hand, Table 1 shows that only 18% agreed or somewhat agreed that this was happening as compared to 82% of them who somewhat disagreed or disagreed.

An overwhelming number of administrators agreed or somewhat agreed that this should be happening(100%), yet only 18% could agree or somewhat agree that it was happening.

**Statement 9: Instruction in the middle school is accommodated to the varied learning styles of the students.**

Table 1 shows that 27% of the administrators agreed that this was happening in their middle school, 55% somewhat agreed, 9% somewhat disagreed, 9% disagreed, and none were undecided. Table 2 shows that 74% of the administrators agreed that this should be happening, 27% somewhat agreed, and none somewhat disagreed, disagreed, or were undecided.

All of the administrators agreed or somewhat agreed that this should be happening, while none somewhat disagreed, disagreed, or were undecided. Furthermore, 82% of the administrators agreed or somewhat agreed that this was happening as compared to only 18% who somewhat disagreed or disagreed.

All of the administrators agreed or somewhat agreed that this should be happening, and 82% of them agreed or somewhat agreed that this was happening.

**Statement 10: Grading and reporting procedures in the middle school involve parents, students, and teachers in discussions on student progress.**

Table 1 shows that 27% of the administrators agreed that this was happening in their middle school, 27% somewhat agreed, 9% somewhat disagreed, 27% disagreed, and 9% were undecided. Table 2 shows that 91% of the administrators agreed that this should be happening, 9% somewhat agreed, and none somewhat disagreed, disagreed, or were undecided.

All of the administrators agreed or somewhat agreed that this should be happening, while none somewhat disagreed, disagreed, or were undecided. Table 1 shows that 55% agreed or somewhat agreed that this was happening as compared to 36% who somewhat disagreed or disagreed that this was happening.

Table 2 shows that 100% of the administrators agreed or somewhat agreed that this should be happening, but Table 1 shows that only 55% could agree or somewhat agree that this was happening.

**Statement 11: In the middle grades, teachers meet in teams to plan instruction.**

Table 1 shows that 55% of the administrators agreed that this was happening in their middle school, 36% somewhat agreed, 9% somewhat disagreed, and none disagreed or were undecided. Table 2 shows that 91% of the administrators agreed that this should be happening, 9% somewhat agreed, and none somewhat disagreed, disagreed, or were undecided.

Again, all of the administrators agreed or somewhat agreed that this should be happening, while none of them somewhat disagreed, disagreed, or were undecided. Also, 91% of the administrators agreed or somewhat agreed that this was happening, while 9% somewhat disagreed and none disagreed or were undecided.

For this statement, 100% of the administrators agreed or somewhat agreed that this should be happening, and 91% of them could agree or somewhat agree that this was happening.

**Statement 12: The middle school climate is warm, caring, and conducive to learning.**

Table 1 shows that 36% of the administrators agreed that this was happening in their middle school, 55% somewhat agreed, 9% somewhat disagreed, and none disagreed or were undecided. Table 2 shows that 91% of the administrators agreed that this should be happening, 9% somewhat agreed, and none somewhat disagreed, disagreed, or were undecided.

All of the administrators agreed or somewhat agreed that this should be happening, while none somewhat disagreed, disagreed, or were undecided. Similarly, 91% of the administrators agreed or somewhat agreed that this was happening, while 9% somewhat disagreed.

For this statement, 100% of the administrators agreed or somewhat agreed that this should be happening, and 91% of them agreed or somewhat agreed that this was happening in their middle school.

**Statement 13: The extra-curricular activities in the middle school are set up so that all students are able to find at least one activity to meet their interest.**

Table 1 shows that 45% of the administrators agreed that this was happening in their middle school, 45% somewhat agreed, none somewhat disagreed or disagreed, and 9% were undecided. Table 2 shows that 82% of the administrators agreed that this should be happening, 18% somewhat agreed, and none somewhat disagreed, disagreed, or were undecided.

All of the administrators agreed or somewhat agreed that this should be happening in middle school, while none somewhat disagreed, disagreed, or were undecided. Similarly, 91% of the administrators agreed or somewhat agreed that this was happening, while none somewhat disagreed or disagreed, and 9% were undecided.

For this statement, 100% of the administrators agreed or somewhat agreed that this should be happening, and 91% of them could agree or somewhat agree that it was happening in their middle school.

**Statement 14: Teachers in the middle school enjoy working with students at this age.**

Table 1 shows that 55% of the administrators agreed that this was happening in their middle school, 45% somewhat agreed, and none somewhat disagreed, disagreed, or were undecided. Table 2 shows that 82% agreed that this should be happening in the middle school, 18% somewhat agreed, and none somewhat disagreed, disagreed, or were undecided.

Again, all of the administrators agreed or somewhat agreed that this should be happening, while none somewhat disagreed, disagreed, or were undecided. The same is true for Table 1, since 100% of the administrators agreed or somewhat agreed that this was happening, and none somewhat disagreed, disagreed, or were undecided.

For this statement, all of the administrators agreed or somewhat agreed that this should be happening in their middle school, and 100% of them agreed or somewhat agreed that it was happening.

**Statement 15: The middle school has fully implemented the middle school concept.**

Table 1 shows that 18% of the administrators agree that this is true of their middle school, 45% somewhat agreed, 9% somewhat disagreed, 18% disagreed, and 9% were undecided. Table 2 shows that 91% of the administrators agreed that this should be true of a middle school, 9% somewhat agreed, and none somewhat disagreed, disagreed, or were undecided.

All of the administrators agreed or somewhat agreed that this should be true of a middle school, while none somewhat disagreed, disagreed, or were undecided. On the other hand, Table 1 shows that the responses were more widely distributed, since 64% of the administrators agreed or somewhat agreed that this was true of their middle school, 27% somewhat disagreed or disagreed, and 9% were undecided.

For this statement, 100% of the administrators agreed or somewhat agreed that this should be true of a middle school, yet only 64% could agree or somewhat agree that this was true of their middle school.

**Table 1**  
**Percentages of Current Middle School Administrators' Responses**

	A	SA	SD	D	NS
<b>Statements:</b>					
1.	36.36%	36.36%	27.27%	0.00%	0.00%
2.	27.27%	36.36%	36.36%	0.00%	0.00%
3.	9.09%	63.64%	27.27%	0.00%	0.00%
4.	18.18%	54.55%	18.18%	9.09%	0.00%
5.	27.27%	54.55%	18.18%	0.00%	0.00%
6.	18.18%	18.18%	27.27%	36.36%	0.00%
7.	27.27%	63.64%	0.00%	9.09%	0.00%
8.	9.09%	9.09%	9.09%	72.73%	0.00%
9.	27.27%	54.55%	9.09%	9.09%	0.00%
10.	27.27%	27.27%	9.09%	27.27%	9.09%
11.	54.55%	36.36%	9.09%	0.00%	0.00%
12.	36.36%	54.55%	9.09%	0.00%	0.00%
13.	45.45%	45.45%	0.00%	0.00%	9.09%
14.	54.55%	45.45%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%
15.	18.18%	45.45%	9.09%	18.18%	9.09%

**Table 2**  
**Percentages of Middle School Administrators' Ideal Responses**

	A	SA	SD	D	NS
<u>Statements:</u>					
1.	72.73%	27.27%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%
2.	72.73%	27.27%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%
3.	72.73%	18.18%	9.09%	0.00%	0.00%
4.	72.73%	27.27%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%
5.	72.73%	27.27%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%
6.	63.64%	36.36%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%
7.	81.82%	18.18%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%
8.	63.64%	36.36%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%
9.	72.73%	27.27%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%
10.	90.91%	9.09%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%
11.	90.91%	9.09%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%
12.	90.91%	9.09%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%
13.	81.82%	18.18%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%
14.	81.82%	18.18%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%
15.	90.91%	9.09%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%

**Table 3**  
**Percentages of Administrators' Responses:**  
**Currently vs. Ideally**

	<u>Currently</u>	<u>Ideally</u>
<u>Statements:</u>	<u>A or SA</u>	<u>A or SA</u>
1	73%	100%
2	64%	100%
3	73%	91%
4	73%	100%
5	82%	100%
6	36%	100%
7	91%	100%
8	18%	100%
9	82%	100%
10	55%	100%
11	91%	100%
12	91%	100%
13	91%	100%
14	100%	100%
15	64%	100%

**Table 4**  
**Teachers' and Administrators' Perceptions: Currently vs. Ideally**

	<u>Teachers:</u> <u>Currently</u>	<u>Administrators:</u> <u>Currently</u>	<u>Teachers:</u> <u>Ideally</u>	<u>Administrators:</u> <u>Ideally</u>
<u>Statements:</u>	A or SA	A or SA	A or SA	A or SA
1	98%	73%	98%	100%
2	69%	64%	94%	100%
3	72%	73%	99%	91%
4	69%	73%	98%	100%
5	66%	82%	98%	100%
6	28%	36%	82%	100%
7	86%	91%	100%	100%
8	35%	18%	96%	100%
9	61%	82%	96%	100%
10	70%	55%	96%	100%
11	81%	91%	100%	100%
12	94%	91%	98%	100%
13	72%	91%	98%	100%
14	90%	100%	98%	100%
15	69%	64%	100%	100%

## **CHAPTER V**

### **CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS**

#### **Conclusions**

This study seems to support some of the statements reported in earlier related research that many middle schools are only a middle school in name because they have failed to fully implement all of the elements of a true middle school. The findings indicate that the two districts involved in this study have implemented many of the elements of a middle school, yet there are still some important pieces missing.

It is interesting to note that even when administrators and teachers could not agree that a particular statement was representative of their middle school, they did understand that the statement represented an essential element of the middle school concept. As a matter of fact, almost all of the administrators agreed that the fifteen statements should be true of their middle school.

All the administrators surveyed agreed that teachers should pay attention to the developmental characteristics of adolescents, including physical, social, emotional, moral, and intellectual aspects. However, only three quarters of the administrators felt that the teachers in their school were currently doing this. Table 4 shows that, in comparison, the Taurisano study reported that almost all of the

teachers (98%) felt that they were currently paying attention to the developmental characteristics of adolescents. An overwhelming number of teachers (98%) also agreed that this was an important element of an ideal middle school. In other words, both administrators and teachers agreed that ideally teachers should pay attention to the developmental characteristics of adolescents, however they have different perceptions of what is currently happening.

For the second statement, all of the administrators agreed that the middle school curriculum should be based on both academic and personal needs of the middle level student, and almost all of the teachers (99%) also agreed with this statement. However, only a little over half of the administrators (64%) agreed that this was currently true of their middle school, and the Taurisano study showed that the teachers' perceptions were very similar, since almost the same percentage (69%) agreed. These results indicate that both administrators and teachers seem to agree that their middle school curriculum is not yet totally based on the needs of the middle level student, even though they agreed that it should.

A great number of the administrators (91%) also agreed that teachers of middle level classes should experiment with organization of time and people to best serve the students' needs, yet only three quarters of them agreed that this was true of their middle level teachers. Similarly, the Taurisano study showed that

almost all (99%) of the teachers felt that they should experiment with the organization of time and people to fit the students' needs, while about three quarters of them agreed that teachers were currently doing this in their school. Once again, the results seem to indicate that the teachers and the administrators recognize that this is an essential element of a middle school, however not all of them feel that this is currently happening in their middle school.

For the fourth statement, all of the administrators agreed that students should have the opportunity to use many different methods of learning in middle school, but only about three quarters of them agreed that this was currently true of their middle school. In the same way, a large number (98%) of the teachers agreed that this was an important element of a middle school, yet less than three quarters (69%) of them agreed that this was true of their middle school. It seems that while almost a perfect percentage of teachers and administrators agreed that middle schools should provide many different methods of learning, about a quarter of both the administrators and the teachers feel that their middle school still needs to work on providing the students with different methods of learning.

All of the administrators agreed that middle school teachers should teach interdisciplinary units, and a good percentage (82%) agreed that their middle school teachers were doing this. On the other hand, the Taurisano study showed

that a lower percentage (66%) of teachers felt that the teachers in their school were teaching interdisciplinary units, even though almost all of them (98%) agreed that teachers should be doing this. The results of this statement seem to indicate that while both administrators and teachers could largely agree that teachers should be teaching interdisciplinary units in the middle school, the teachers have a different perception of what is currently happening in their schools. A much lower percentage of teachers than administrators feel that this is currently happening in their school.

The results of the sixth statement showed that all of the administrators agreed that a middle school program should provide many opportunities for students to choose topics based on their interests. However, less than half (36%) of the administrators felt that this was currently happening in their middle school. According to the results from the Taurisano study, a little over three quarters (82%) of the teachers thought that the middle school program should provide this opportunity to students, yet only about one quarter (28%) of them agreed that their middle school was doing this. For this statement, it seems that the teachers and the administrators have similar perceptions, since a large percentage of both could not agree that their middle school provides opportunities for students to choose topics of interest to them.

Based on the findings of the seventh statement, all of the administrators and the teachers agreed that the middle school program should provide many hands-on learning experiences for students. A slightly greater percentage of administrators (91%) than teachers (86%) agreed that their middle school was actually doing this. These results may indicate that the administrators and teachers who were surveyed generally feel that their middle school is already providing hands-on learning experiences for the students.

For the eighth statement, all of the administrators agreed that the middle level students should have opportunities to discuss home, school, and peer related problems through an advisor/advisee program. However, a very low percentage (18%) of them felt that their middle school was currently providing this service. Similarly, the Taurisano study showed that almost all of the teachers (96%) agreed that their school should have an advisor/advisee program, but less than half (35%) agreed that their school already provided this service. The findings from this statement show that even though almost all of the administrators and teachers recognize that this is an essential element of a middle school, a very low percentage of each group can agree that their school has implemented this program. It seems that the administrators and the teachers have very similar perceptions in regards to this statement.

All of the administrators agreed that instruction in the middle school should be accommodated to the varied learning styles of the students, and a great percentage (82%) of them felt that this was already true of the instruction in their middle school. As reported in the Taurisano study, a lower percentage of teachers (61%) agreed that their middle school was currently doing this, even though almost all of them (96%) agreed that this should be happening in a middle school. These findings seem to indicate that administrators and teachers have different perceptions of what is currently happening in their middle school, since there is a significant difference between the percentage of administrators and teachers that agreed that this is already happening in their school. On the other hand, both teachers and administrators could agree that this is an essential element of a middle school.

For the tenth statement, all of the administrators agreed that grading and reporting procedures in the middle school should involve parents, students, and teachers in discussions on student progress. However, only about half of the administrators agreed that this was already happening in their middle school. According to the Taurisano study, almost all of the teachers (96%) agreed that this is an important element of a middle school, yet less than three quarters (70%) of them indicated that this was happening in their school. It is interesting to note

that a lower percentage of administrators than teachers feel that this is already in place at their middle school. While both groups strongly believe that this is an essential element of a middle school, more teachers feel that their school has already implemented this element.

All of the administrators and teachers agreed that teachers in the middle grades should meet in teams to plan instruction. Almost all of the administrators (91%) also agreed that their teachers were already planning in teams, while the Taurisano study reported that a lower percentage (81%) of teachers agreed that this was true. Once again, both administrators and teachers agreed on what should be happening in the middle school, yet they perceived what has already been implemented differently. Ten percent more administrators than teachers believe that their teachers already meet in teams to plan instruction.

All of the administrators agreed that the middle school climate should be warm, caring, and conducive to learning, and a good percentage of them (91%) felt that this was true of their middle school. The Taurisano study reported that almost all (98%) of the teachers agreed that this should be true of a middle school, and a large percentage (94%) agreed that this was true of their own middle school. These findings seem to indicate that administrators and teachers agree once again that this is an important part of a middle school. Also, a high percentage of each

group felt that their middle school was already warm, caring, and conducive to learning.

The findings of the thirteenth statement showed that all of the administrators agreed that the extra-curricular activities in the middle school should be set up so that all students are able to find at least one activity to meet their interest. A great percentage (91%) of them also agreed that this was the case in their middle school. As the Taurisano study reported, almost all (98%) of the teachers agreed that this should be happening in a middle school, yet only about three quarters of them felt that this was already happening in their school.

Based on the results of the fourteenth statement, all of the administrators agreed that teachers in the middle school should enjoy working with students at this age, and they all also agreed that this was true of their middle level teachers. Similarly, the Taurisano study reported that a great percentage (98%) of the teachers agreed that teachers in a middle school should enjoy the students at that age, and most of them (90%) felt that this was true of the teachers in their school.

Although all of the administrators agreed that a middle school should fully implement the middle school concept, not all of them could agree that this was true of their school. In fact, only a little over half of the administrators (64%) felt that their middle school had fully implemented the middle school concept. As the

Taurisano study reported, the teachers' perceptions are almost identical for this statement. All of the teachers agreed that a middle school should fully implement the middle school concept, while less than three quarters (69%) agreed that their middle school had already done this. The results of this statement seem to indicate that administrators and teachers generally agree that their middle school has not yet fully implemented the elements of a middle school, even though the two groups did not always have the same perceptions in regards to each particular statement of the survey. It seems that both the administrators and the teachers can agree that there is still work to be done before their middle school is not just a middle school in name.

### **Implications for the Classroom**

The findings from this study clearly show what administrators' and teachers' perceptions are of an ideal middle school and how effectively their school has implemented them. This information is valuable in determining which essential elements have already been implemented in a middle school, and in which areas the schools need to improve. In fact, any school at the middle level can use this information to help them develop an effective middle school that meets the needs of their students. The results of the surveys also clearly show that even when

schools are called a middle school, they may not necessarily meet all of the essential criteria of an ideal middle school.

It seems that administrators and teachers at the middle school level need to have more conversations about their understanding of the ideal middle school concept. According to the results of the study, both groups generally recognize the elements of an effective middle school, yet they often indicated that their school had not implemented a particular element. Middle level educators need to make the ideal middle school concept a goal that they are constantly striving to reach. In fact, administrators and teachers should make the essential elements of a middle school the driving force behind anything they develop and/or change in their school. By doing this, middle level educators can better insure that their school provides a solid education that meets the needs of the adolescents to whom they serve.

In addition, administrators and teachers need to constantly assess how well their middle school is meeting the needs of their students. This study shows that even though both groups realize that their school could better serve the students, they often had different perceptions of which elements were already implemented. Since the administrators and teachers seem to understand the essential elements, both groups should meet consistently to evaluate to what degree their school has

implemented them. This is the only way that teachers and administrators can be sure that everyone is on the same page and working to make their middle school more like the ideal concept.

### **Implications for Further Research**

Ever since the middle school concept emerged, very little research has been done to investigate how well middle level schools are meeting the needs of their students. Most of the research available deals with the essential elements of a middle school, but says nothing about how well the schools are actually implementing these elements. Therefore, even though this study begins to answer that question, there is a great need for more research to better answer this and many other questions concerning our middle schools.

For example, in what direction is the middle school concept going and for what reasons? Is there still a need for junior high schools? How can schools better implement the essential elements of a middle school? Are all of the elements still effective and necessary? Have any new elements emerged? What else can middle schools do to better meet their students' needs? What are the obstacles to overcome when changing to a middle school? What are the limitations? Is the middle school concept the best way to meet adolescents' needs? How can

teachers and administrators better communicate about the success of their middle school programs? Finally, how can middle level educators better assess how well their middle school utilizes the essential elements?

This study could be replicated on a much larger scale, involving more school districts in urban, rural, and suburban areas and comparing their responses. The sample of respondents could also be extended to include students, parents, and community members. In addition to completing the survey, respondents could be interviewed so that more subjective responses could be analyzed.

Furthermore, a longitudinal study could be conducted over a long period of time to see if teachers' and administrators' perceptions of the middle school concept change over time.

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## **Appendix A**

### **Table 1: Teachers' Current Responses**

**Table 1**  
**Percentages of Current Middle School Teachers' Responses**

	A	SA	SD	D	NS
<b>Statements:</b>					
1.	35.29%	62.75%	1.96%	0.00%	0.00%
2.	19.61%	49.02%	21.57%	7.84%	1.96%
3.	17.65%	54.90%	15.69%	9.80%	1.96%
4.	23.53%	45.10%	23.53%	7.84%	0.00%
5.	25.49%	41.18%	23.53%	9.80%	0.00%
6.	5.88%	21.57%	31.37%	41.18%	0.00%
7.	45.10%	41.18%	11.76%	1.96%	0.00%
8.	3.92%	31.37%	25.49%	35.29%	3.92%
9.	7.84%	52.94%	25.49%	9.80%	3.92%
10.	27.45%	43.14%	15.69%	9.80%	3.92%
11.	50.98%	29.41%	9.80%	9.80%	0.00%
12.	35.29%	58.82%	5.88%	0.00%	0.00%
13.	41.18%	31.37%	13.73%	11.76%	0.00%
14.	37.25%	52.94%	9.80%	0.00%	0.00%
15.	13.73%	54.90%	19.61%	11.76%	0.00%

## **Appendix B**

### **Table 2: Teachers' Ideal Responses**

**Table 2**  
**Percentages of Middle School Teachers' Ideal Responses**

	A	SA	SD	D	NS
<b>Statements:</b>					
1.	92.16%	5.88%	1.96%	0.00%	0.00%
2.	80.39%	13.73%	3.92%	0.00%	1.96%
3.	74.51%	23.53%	0.00%	1.96%	0.00%
4.	78.43%	19.61%	0.00%	1.96%	0.00%
5.	78.43%	19.61%	0.00%	1.96%	0.00%
6.	33.33%	49.02%	13.73%	3.92%	0.00%
7.	80.39%	19.61%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%
8.	68.63%	27.45%	3.92%	0.00%	0.00%
9.	64.71%	31.37%	1.96%	0.00%	1.96%
10.	68.63%	27.45%	0.00%	1.96%	1.96%
11.	88.24%	11.76%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%
12.	82.35%	15.69%	0.00%	0.00%	1.96%
13.	80.39%	17.65%	1.96%	0.00%	0.00%
14.	88.24%	9.80%	0.00%	0.00%	1.96%
15.	82.35%	17.65%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%

## **Appendix C**

**Table 3: Percentages of Teachers' Responses:  
Currently vs. Ideally**

**Table 3**  
**Percentages of Teachers' Responses:**  
**Currently vs. Ideally**

	<u>Currently</u>	<u>Ideally</u>
<u>Statements:</u>	<u>A or SA</u>	<u>A or SA</u>
1	98%	98%
2	69%	94%
3	72%	99%
4	69%	98%
5	66%	98%
6	28%	82%
7	86%	100%
8	35%	96%
9	61%	96%
10	70%	96%
11	81%	100%
12	94%	98%
13	72%	98%
14	90%	98%
15	69%	100%

**Appendix D**  
**Middle School Survey**

## Middle School Survey

**Please check the appropriate response:** I am a(n): \_\_\_\_\_ administrator \_\_\_\_\_ middle school teacher

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**Directions:** For each item in the survey, please mark one response in each column.

- 1) Please respond to all items marked “Currently” by circling the choice which identifies your perception of the practices that currently exist in your school.
- 2) Please respond to all items marked “Ideally” by circling the choice, which identifies your perception of how the practices should exist in your school.

A= Agree	SA= Somewhat agree	SD= Somewhat disagree	D= Disagree	NS= Not sure
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	<u>Currently</u>	<u>Ideally</u>
1) Middle school teachers pay attention to the developmental characteristics of adolescents (physical, social, emotional, moral, and intellectual).	A SA SD D NS	A SA SD D NS
2) The middle school curriculum is based on both academic and personal need of the middle level students.	A SA SD D NS	A SA SD D NS
3) In the middle level classes, teachers experiment with the organization of time and people to best serve student need.	A SA SD D NS	A SA SD D NS
4) In the middle school, students have the opportunity to use many different method of learning.	A SA SD D NS	A SA SD D NS
5) Middle school teachers teach interdisciplinary units.	A SA SD D NS	A SA SD D NS
6) The middle school program provides many opportunities for students to choose topics based on their interests.	A SA SD D NS	A SA SD D NS
7) The middle school program provides many hands-on learning experiences for students.	A SA SD D NS	A SA SD D NS

<b>A= Agree</b>	<b>SA= Somewhat agree</b>	<b>SD= Somewhat disagree</b>	<b>D= Disagree</b>	<b>NS= Not sure</b>
-----------------	---------------------------	------------------------------	--------------------	---------------------

- |   |   |    |    |   |    |   |    |    |   |    |
|---|---|----|----|---|----|---|----|----|---|----|
| 8) Within the middle school, students have opportunities to discuss home, school, and peer related problems through an advisor/ advisee program.        | A | SA | SD | D | NS | A | SA | SD | D | NS |
| 9) Instruction in the middle school is accommodated to the varied learning styles of the students.  | A | SA | SD | D | NS | A | SA | SD | D | NS |
| 10) Grading and reporting procedures in the middle school involve parents, students, and teachers in discussions on student progress.                   | A | SA | SD | D | NS | A | SA | SD | D | NS |
| 11) In the middle grades, teachers meet in teams to plan instruction.   | A | SA | SD | D | NS | A | SA | SD | D | NS |
| 12) The middle school climate is warm, caring, and conducive to learning.   | A | SA | SD | D | NS | A | SA | SD | D | NS |
| 13) The extra-curricular activities in the middle school are set up so that all students are able to find at least one activity to meet their interest. | A | SA | SD | D | NS | A | SA | SD | D | NS |
| 14) Teachers in the middle school enjoy working with students at this age.  | A | SA | SD | D | NS | A | SA | SD | D | NS |
| 15) The middle school has fully implemented the middle school concept.  | A | SA | SD | D | NS | A | SA | SD | D | NS |

**Please feel free to make any comments and/or any clarifications below:**

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**Thank you for your time and cooperation in filling out this survey.**

**\*\*\*Please return to Karen Crowe or Dana Taurisano by Wednesday, December 10<sup>th</sup>.**