**Middle Grades Longitudinal Study of 2017-18 (MGLS:2017) -- Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)**

**What is MGLS:2017?**
The Middle Grades Longitudinal Study of 2017-18 (MGLS:2017) is a new, unprecedented study of middle grade students being conducted by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) within the U.S. Department of Education. RTI International is carrying out the MGLS:2017 data collection on behalf of NCES.

**What is the focus of MGLS:2017?**
The study will follow a cohort of sixth-grade students as they progress through the middle grade years, making the transition from elementary school and preparing for the transition into high school. The goals of the study are to assess students’ mathematics and reading skills, executive function, and socioemotional well-being, and to collect data on family and school factors that may encourage success during these important, yet generally understudied, years of education.

**When is the study being conducted?**
MGLS:2017 will begin in early 2018 with students in sixth grade. Planned follow-ups with the same students will occur in the winter/spring of 2019 and the winter/spring of 2020.

**Why is MGLS:2017 important?**
MGLS:2017 will help educators, researchers, and policymakers learn about student growth in math and reading as well as family and school factors that encourage success during the middle grade years. The data collected will provide a rich, descriptive picture of the experiences and lives of young adolescents during this critical time and will permit researchers to examine associations between contextual factors and student outcomes. Because mathematics and literacy skills are important for preparing students for high school and are linked with later education and career opportunities, the study is placing a focus on instruction and student growth in these areas.

**Why participate in MGLS:2017?**
Over the past two decades, education policy has become more data driven with a recognition of the importance of reliable and systematically collected information at the federal, state, and local levels. MGLS:2017 will provide, for the first time, national data for a longitudinal cohort that can be used to examine various aspects and components of middle grades education, as well as evidence about the effectiveness of middle grades programs and practices.

**How will my school benefit from participating in MGLS:2017?**
The value to you of participating in MGLS:2017 includes extrinsic benefits, such as monetary incentives, but the true value is an intrinsic one. It is your opportunity as a dedicated supporter and advocate of the middle grades to positively contribute to the success of middle grades education for our current and future principals, teachers, students, and parents. The benefits of participation in MGLS:2017 include: Excitement—the feeling of being part of the first national longitudinal study of the middle grades by the U.S. Department of Education; Contribution—you can take pride in knowing that you are making a positive contribution to the field of middle grades education; and Understanding—if enough of your school's students participate in the study, your school will receive a report showing how your students compare with students attending schools nationwide, as well as comparisons between your students and those at schools similar to yours on selected dimensions, such as public/private.
**How will MGLS:2017 data be used?**
MGLS:2017 data will allow researchers, educators, and policymakers to examine student development and achievement through this important stage of students’ education career. More generally, MGLS:2017 data will allow researchers to examine family and schooling factors related to students’ achievement. The study will capture changes in young people’s lives and their connections with communities, schools, teachers, families, parents, and peers, including:

- Academic (especially in math and reading), social, and interpersonal growth;
- Transitions from elementary school and preparations for transitions into high school;
- School connectedness, belongingness, and engagement;
- Characteristics of schools serving students in the middle grades and their relationship to student outcomes; and
- School progress of and outcomes for students’ with disabilities.

**How many schools and students will be involved in MGLS:2017?**
MGLS:2017 will involve a nationally representative sample of about 20,000 students enrolled in grade 6 from about 900 public and private schools.

**What is involved for students?**
Students will complete a direct-assessment of their math, reading, and other skills important to learning. Each student will also be asked to complete a survey about his or her school, social, and home experiences, and provide height and weight measurements. The student session will take about 90 minutes. Follow-up data collections will occur in the spring of 2019 and spring of 2020, when students are in the seventh and eighth grades, respectively, regardless of whether they have changed schools.

**What is involved for school staff?**
A school administrator will be asked to complete an approximately 40-minute web-based questionnaire about the school and the school environment. The math teachers of students selected for the study will complete web-based questionnaires about their background and classroom characteristics (approximately 20 minutes), as well as answer questions about the skills and abilities of specific students in the study (about 10 minutes per student). The special education teacher/provider for selected students with an Individualized Education Program (IEP) will be asked to complete web-based questionnaires about their background and the special education services they provide (about 10 minutes), as well as answer questions about the skills and abilities of specific students in the study (approximately 25 minutes per student). Paper-and-pencil versions of the surveys may be available upon request.

**What is involved for parents?**
One parent of each sampled student will complete a questionnaire via a web survey or a telephone interview. A paper-and-pencil version of the survey may also be available upon request. The questionnaire will take about 40 minutes to complete.

**Who will be responsible for the student data collection?**
Trained MGLS:2017 staff will facilitate the completion of the student assessments and questionnaires and provide all required materials. Schools will only be asked to designate a school contact to assist MGLS:2017 staff with in-school assessment arrangements.

**Do teachers need to help administer the assessments?**
No, trained MGLS:2017 staff will visit the school, bringing all required materials for administering the assessments. Exceptions will be made for students with IEP accommodations that may require the assistance of school personnel (e.g., if a student works one-on-one with an aide).

**Why are height and weight data collected in MGLS:2017?**
Height and weight measurements are important in understanding physical growth, puberty status, and obesity status at this important time of growth for adolescents. By collecting this data annually over the three years of the study, we will be able to better understand how physical growth patterns affect student learning and socioemotional well-being.

**Are there incentives for participating schools?**
MGLS:2017 recognizes the demands placed on schools from many sources throughout the school year, and will give a modest incentive to schools that agree to help. MGLS:2017 will also provide $150 for a school coordinator to serve as the central point of contact and manage the data collection at each school.
What happens if a student refuses to participate?
All participation is voluntary. There are no penalties for not participating in the study. When completing the questionnaires, respondents can skip any question they do not want to answer. If individuals or schools are hesitant to be a part of the study, please reach out to MGLS:2017 staff so we can address any concerns you may have.

Will the names of participants and their responses be kept confidential?
NCES is authorized to conduct MGLS:2017 by the Education Sciences Reform Act of 2002 (ESRA 2002, 20 U.S.C. §9543) and to collect students’ education records from education agencies or institutions for the purposes of evaluating federally supported education programs under the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA, 34 CFR §§ 99.31(a)(3) and 99.35). All of the information you provide may be used only for statistical purposes and may not be disclosed, or used, in identifiable form for any other purpose except as required by law (20 U.S.C. §9573 and 6 U.S.C. §151). All field staff and other staff working on the study have signed an affidavit of non-disclosure where they swear to abide by this law. Field staff have also undergone a criminal background check as a condition of employment. The collected information will be combined across respondents to produce statistical reports.

Who do I contact for further information about MGLS:2017?
For additional information, call the MGLS:2017 information number, 855-500-1432, or send an email to mgl@rti.org. You may also learn more about the study and education research focused on students in the middle grades by visiting the MGLS:2017 website at https://surveys.nces.ed.gov/MGLS/. 