

Middle Grades Educators,

As education researchers for over 20 years, we have studied various aspects and components of middle grades education, including: student learning, academic indicators, and achievement; school structures (interdisciplinary teaming, common planning time, etc.); instructional practices at the team and classroom level; teacher certification; professional development; administrative leadership; and parent/family involvement. We have presented our middle-grades research at national, state, and regional conferences and published in a variety of journals (e.g., *Middle School Journal*, *Middle Grades Research Journal*).

Our prior research studies have relied on and involved analyses of national educational data from the [National Center for Education Statistics](#). NCES has a long and established history of conducting national large-scale, longitudinal studies of students, teachers, administrators, and schools across the U.S. You may be familiar with or have heard of some of their initiatives, including the *Core of Common Data*, *Schools and Staffing Survey*, *Early Childhood Longitudinal Study*, and *High School and Beyond*, to name but a few.

In 2012, NCES decided to initiate a new national, longitudinal study focusing on middle grades education. The [Middle Grades Longitudinal Study](#) of 2017–18 will be the first national study to follow a representative sample of students as they enter and move through the middle grades. NCES has successfully carried out elementary and high school longitudinal studies; however, until now, there has been a gap in their studies—specifically middle grades education.

The data collected through the MGLS surveys will provide a rich, descriptive picture of the experiences and lives of young adolescents during these critical years 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 student growth in these areas and student instruction. The MGLS will also have an emphasis on inclusiveness by including students in several of the Individuals with Disabilities Education (IDEA) categories. The first round of data collection will begin in fall 2018 with sixth graders and continue on a yearly basis over three years, following students from sixth to eighth grade.

We are respectfully requesting that if selected for participation, your district and school(s) participate in the new Middle Grades Longitudinal Study. Over the past two decades, education policy has become more data-driven. At the federal, state and local levels, there is a recognition of the importance of reliable and systematic information. Now, for the first time, NCES will be conducting a national study of middle grades schools and young adolescents. As education researchers, we fully support and applaud this effort. We are very excited that we will now have national-level data to examine various aspects and components of middle grades education. The data collected from the MGLS will provide an opportunity to examine evidence about the effectiveness of middle-grades' programs and practices.

### **What Can You Do to Support the MGLS?**

The MGLS will only be successful in building our knowledge and evidence base about middle-grades education if districts and schools like yours choose to participate. Without you, this important and much-needed study is not possible. We fully recognize that you are regularly inundated with requests to participate in data collection activities. However, the groundbreaking nature of the MGLS being the very first national effort to examine middle grades education, makes it a unique request. A request that elevates it as worthy of your consideration. A request we encourage you not to ignore. So, if your district or school receives a letter or a phone call inviting you to participate in the MGLS, we implore you to accept the invitation. The value to you of participating in the MGLS 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 middle-grades principals, teachers, students, and parents.

The benefits of participation in the MGLS include:

- 1) **Excitement** – It is exciting to be part of the groundbreaking MGLS, the first national study of the middle grades by the U.S. Department of Education.
- 2) **Contribution** – By participating in the MGLS, you can take pride in knowing that you are making a positive contribution to the field of middle-grades education.
- 3) **Reports** – Participating schools will receive a report following each of the three data collection points containing aggregate results which will allow schools to compare their school to other schools like theirs and to the national

averages. Schools without sufficient student participation will still receive results comparing schools like theirs to the national average.

- 4) **Incentives** – Everyone who participates in the MGLS will be compensated for their time. That includes schools, school coordinators, teachers, students, and parents. Compensation includes monetary compensation, gift cards, or token items.

### **What Does Participation in the MGLS Involve?**

During spring 2017, the MGLS team will begin to contact districts and schools that have been selected to participate in the national sample for the study. They anticipate that between 800 and 1,000 schools across the county will participate. The MGLS team will work with your district and school to minimize the burden on you, your faculty, your students, and your families.

Please be aware that your participation in the MGLS will not involve everyone at your school. Far from it, in fact. Data collection for the study will be with only a small sample of students, their teachers, and their families. For the first year, the MGLS team will select a sample of approximately 35 students from your sixth grade, along with their math teacher, and where applicable, their special education teacher. The principal will be asked to participate as well.

. Baseline data from sixth grade students will be collected in the winter of 2018. This sample will then be followed for the three years of the study. Annual follow-up data will be collected in the spring of 2019 and the spring of 2020 when most of the students in the sample will be in grade 7 and then grade 8. At each of the three-annual data collection time points, trained MGLS staff will be on-site at your school to collect the student data. School staff and parents will be asked to complete a Web survey, and parents will also have the option to complete the survey by phone.

We are impressed by the plans that the MGLS team have for using technology to streamline the data collection process and make it as easy as possible for participants. For example, they will bring in tablets for your students to complete their assessments and surveys. And, they will facilitate the administration with students. It is an impressive operation and one that will be customized to meet your school's schedule and current procedures.

### **Where can you get more information about the MGLS?**

For more information about the MGLS –

- Visit the following website: <https://surveys.nces.ed.gov/mgls>
- Email the MGLS team: Debbie Herget, [mgls@rti.org](mailto:mgls@rti.org)

Respectfully,

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