

**Christa McAuliffe Award
For Exemplary Programs in Teacher Education
Final Proposal**

Program: Michigan Schools in the Middle

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Award Category: Outstanding Professional Development Programs

Describe your program mission, goals, etc.

Early adolescence (ages 10 to 15) is a period of both enormous opportunities and enormous risks. Although many of these youth reach late adolescence healthy and ready for the challenges of high school and adult life, early adolescence for many others is the beginning of a downward spiral. Far too many young adolescents do not come out of the spiral because their basic human needs are not being met, and, as a result, millions never reach their full potential. In 1989 *Turning Points* described this dilemma and challenged educational programs to help meet the needs of those youth who do not have the family circumstances, household income, or educational support to help them be successful (Carnegie).

While *Turning Points* and other research focused on national issues, few states had programs focusing on middle level education. Michigan was no exception. Middle level teacher preparation programs were virtually non-existent in the state of Michigan. When the Kellogg Foundation sought to assist low-performing middle level schools in 1993, Michigan Schools in the Middle (MSIM) applied for and received funding for three years. The result of that initial funding led to the development of the mission, goals, and key components of a program that is now self-sustaining.

The **mission** of the Michigan Schools in the Middle program is to provide pre-service and in-service middle level teacher preparation and professional development support for teachers and other middle level education stakeholders so that developmentally responsive, academically excellent, and socially equitable middle level schools will be available to meet the needs of young adolescents in Michigan. This mission is carried out through the focus on five distinct yet related goals developed by the program members. These **goals and objectives** are:

- **Develop and implement an undergraduate middle level teacher preparation program.**
 - Increase the enrollment in this program to the level of sustainability.
 - Form an undergraduate student organization in affiliation with the National Middle School Association.
 - Recruit excellent Middle Level Teacher Educators to teach the undergraduate courses.
 - Develop a state endorsed undergraduate Middle Level Education program.
- **Develop and implement a graduate middle level teacher preparation program.**
 - Increase the enrollment in this program to the level of sustainability.
 - Offer the graduate courses on weekends and summers to accommodate students' schedules.
 - Recruit excellent Middle Level Teacher Educators to teach the graduate courses.
 - Offer an endorsement program (18 hours) to middle level teachers.
- **Design, implement, and validate a Professional Development Program.**
 - Provide results-based professional development to middle-level schools.
 - Work in conjunction with other Middle Start Partner Organizations to develop and implement a middle grades school reform model.
 - Invite schools to participate in the Middle Start Self-Study, a comprehensive school assessment tool
 - Train and coordinate facilitators.
 - Develop materials to augment professional development.
 - Offer an annual Leadership Institute for Middle Level Principals.
 - Offer summer workshops to educate teachers in new instructional strategies and in curriculum and assessment techniques.
 - Offer graduate credit for all long-term, on site professional development workshops.
- **Establish the Michigan Center for Excellence in Middle Level Education.**
 - Collect print and video materials for the creation of a resource library.
 - Provide research materials to member schools.

- Publish a monthly newsletter.
- Provide quarterly reports highlighting Center activities and programs.
- Develop and continuously update the website: www.schoolsinthemiddle.org.
- **Influence policy at the state and local levels in relation to teacher preparation/certification for middle level educators.**
 - Help develop program standards for the Michigan Middle Level Endorsement.
 - Design a competency test for State certification in Middle Level Education.
 - Support other institutions in developing programs for middle level education at the graduate and undergraduate level.

Description of key program components and affiliations

- **University training of middle-grades teachers, both pre-service and in-service**
 - The Department of Teacher Education and Professional Development at Central Michigan University and Michigan Schools in the Middle have designed three programs for university students interested in middle level education. This collaborative effort has led to an undergraduate minor in middle level education, a graduate level middle level endorsement program, and a Master of Arts Middle Level Education program.
 - Undergraduate students enrolled in the middle level programs must include, as a part of their coursework, expertise in two broad fields of study such as mathematics, social studies, language arts, or science.
- **Comprehensive program of professional development and technical assistance for practicing middle-grades teachers and schools**
 - The comprehensive Michigan Schools in the Middle program also includes a component of networking so schools, educational organizations, and professional development providers across the state can sustain and strengthen reform efforts related to middle level education.
- **Advocating for changes in state certification policies related to middle-grades education**
 - As a result of the efforts of Michigan Schools in the Middle and others, a middle level endorsement has been established at the state level.
- **Development and maintenance of a comprehensive library of print and video resources related to middle-grades education**
 - Included in the MSIM offices is the largest collection of middle grades materials in the United States. University faculty teaching methods courses in the College of Education and in the arts and sciences at CMU have access to these materials as do students and middle level educators. In addition, 250 member schools regularly access the library as do the students enrolled in the graduate and undergraduate middle level programs.

Reference:

Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development. (1989). *Turning Points: Preparing American Youth for the 21st Century*. The report of the task force on the education of young adolescents. New York: Carnegie Corporation of New York.

What evidence do you have that demonstrates the program's positive impact on teacher candidates?

Since its inception, the Department of Teacher Education and Professional Development at Central Michigan University supported by Michigan Schools in the Middle has produced 68 graduates who have earned the undergraduate minor in middle level education (which includes the Michigan Middle Level Endorsement), approximately 105 graduate students who have earned the Michigan Middle Level Endorsement, and approximately 73 graduate students who have earned the Master of Arts in Middle Level Education (which for some includes the Michigan Middle Level Endorsement). Although there is no information regarding the cumulative GPA of the graduate students, the average GPA of the 68 undergraduate students is 3.50, indicating the high caliber of motivated students who choose to engage in middle level education. In addition, since 1997 when the state of Michigan initiated its annual Michigan Test for Teacher Certification in Middle Level Education for those people earning the Michigan Middle Level Endorsement, the pass rate for CMU students is 100%. At this point in time, there are approximately 100 undergraduate students and 160 graduate students currently seeking middle level endorsement and/or specializations.

The Middle Level Education program at CMU is lead by two nationally recognized experts in the field. Both Norma Bailey and Peggy Burke are outstanding educators and professionals and they bring unequaled passion, knowledge base, and commitment to excellence to their work with middle level program undergraduates and graduates. The work of these two professionals helps to inform the work of Michigan Schools in the Middle and, at the same time, the middle level program is kept current and grounded in practicality through the close working relationship between Michigan Schools in the Middle and the Middle Level Education program.

Positive Impact on Undergraduate Students

Students graduating with the middle level minor are highly employable, a number of them even before they complete their student teaching experience. All who have sought employment are currently employed in a variety of settings, ranging from urban (Bay City - 1421 students) to suburban (Chesterfield - 659 students) to rural (Brethren - 270 students), ranging in socioeconomic status from districts with 50% or more free or reduced lunch to affluent districts. Even before they leave the university CMU students with the middle level endorsement are recognized by professionals in the field as having the knowledge and skills necessary to be excellent teachers. One retired principal who interviewed the students during their exit interviews was particularly impressed with the students knowledge of middle grades best practices in curriculum, instruction, and assessment. Another administrator recommended preferential hiring.

The students themselves feel that the program has positively impacted their learning, and thus their teaching, although most of them are yet very young teachers, given the newness of the middle level education program. Several of the graduates have made comments such as the following: "It was easy to pass the Michigan competency test for the endorsement"; "I felt confident entering the classroom as a novice teacher, having knowledge of current resources and research in middle level education"; "I am more comfortable working with young adolescents than are other beginning teachers"; "I have used my knowledge of scheduling to help create a more developmentally responsive schedule for young adolescents"; "I am a more effective educator because I have a deeper understanding of who the middle school student is and his/her needs and characteristics"; "I am more knowledgeable and more effective with young adolescents than colleagues who have not had this middle level education background"; and "I have been asked to serve on the district's "Middle School Task Force" committee because of my expertise in middle level education."

Principals who employ and supervise these CMU graduates value the expertise and leadership they bring to their schools, both rural and suburban. In fact, school districts are now beginning to request middle level preparation in their employment vacancy postings, although it is by no means

universal since CMU is the only university with an undergraduate middle level education program in Michigan and one of only a few offering the middle level endorsement at the graduate level.

Positive Impact on Graduate Students

Students earning the Michigan Middle Level Endorsement or the Master of Arts in Middle Level Education work in a variety of settings, ranging from urban (e.g., Detroit) to suburban (e.g., Saginaw Township) to rural (e.g., Evart), representing all socioeconomic levels. Since the middle level graduate courses are offered at CMU during the summers and on weekends during the academic years, students come from all parts of Michigan, from the Detroit Metropolitan area in the south to the Upper Peninsula in the north.

Students suggested that the middle level program helped develop leadership skills and expertise to help promote positive change, helped new teachers create more engaging learning environments, and helped recent graduates assist students with the transition from elementary school to middle school. One student simply stated that the program gave her the confidence she needed to be an effective middle school teacher.

The CMU middle level teachers are also recognized by their principals as possessing the knowledge and skills necessary to be excellent middle level teachers as well as leaders in their buildings. Dave Nizinski, principal of a large suburban school, stated, "I have witnessed first hand the positive impact that [CMU middle level graduates] can have on moving a building toward becoming a high performing middle school. These individuals possess a strong knowledge base regarding the needs and characteristics of young adolescents, and this is reflected in the instructional practices they use with students in their classrooms. They are also involved in key leadership roles in the W. P. School Improvement Team. They are very articulate on topics involving the education of young adolescents and have a strong influence on the programs provided to our students."

Positive Impact on Middle Level Education at the Regional, State and National Levels

One of the tenets of CMU's middle level teacher education program and Michigan Schools in the Middle is that middle level educators, as professionals, have a responsibility to raise their voices for young adolescents and extend their knowledge and influence beyond the doors of their classrooms and their schools. This emphasis begins at the undergraduate level with the Collegiate Middle Level Association at Central Michigan University (CMLACMU), a local chapter of the Collegiate Middle Level Association (CMLA), an affiliate of the National Middle School Association. CMLACMU, the largest local chapter in the nation, provides excellent biweekly professional development meetings for its members, often presented by graduates of the middle level master's program. Approximately 20 students each year attend the annual conference of the National Middle School Association, and approximately 35 students each year attend the annual conference of the Michigan Association of Middle School Educators, thus engaging in professional behaviors early on in their careers. In addition, the local officers were chosen to serve as the host site and national officers for CMLA during the years 2000-2002.

Many people associated with CMU's teacher education program and Michigan Schools in the Middle have made presentations at regional, state and national middle level education conferences, thus impacting middle level education beyond their own schools. Several faculty members, consultants with Michigan Schools in the Middle, graduate students, and faculty of schools who have received significant professional development from Michigan Schools in the Middle have presented more than 45 sessions at the annual conferences of the National Middle School Association and more than 80 sessions at the annual conferences of the Michigan Association of Middle School Educators. Of these presentations, three were made by teachers who had recently earned their Minor in Middle Level Education, and 16 were made by teachers who had completed the graduate program. Thus, the learning of these program graduates is significantly affecting middle level education in the state of Michigan and across the nation.

What evidence do you have that demonstrates the program's positive impact on P-12 pupil learning?

Michigan Schools in the Middle (MSIM) has pioneered a multifaceted program for increasing student learning in middle-grades schools. This approach centers on offering results-based *professional development* to the staffs of middle-grades schools and guiding schools through long-term *comprehensive school reform*. Each component of the program results in *increased academic achievement* for middle-grades students.

Professional Development

A crucial aspect of Michigan Schools in the Middle's services to schools is professional development. All of MSIM's professional development focuses on improving teacher practices in ways that boost student achievement. Since 1997, MSIM has provided more than 2,000 days of staff development services for approximately 80 schools. This work adheres to standards established by the National Staff Development Council (NSDC) which place student learning at the center of all professional development. The NSDC suggests that staff development which focuses on improving teachers' knowledge of content, pedagogy, and subject-specific teaching strategies is a crucial element in increasing student learning. This is particularly true for middle school teachers because so many are teaching subjects which are not in their major areas of expertise and because a large portion of them have not been specifically prepared to teach young adolescents.

The quality of MSIM's professional development is thoughtfully guided by the program director that is a recent graduate of the NSDC's Academy XII, a two and one-half year program which trains and provides learning and networking opportunities to professionals engaged in providing professional development. Pat Benson is also an invited member of the National Forum To Accelerate Middle-Grades Reform. This organization is comprised of 65 members representing national, regional, and state organizations, which work to foster academic achievement for the nation's young adolescents. Benson serves on the Forum's leadership committee. Pat also serves on Michigan Middle Start's steering committee and co-chairs the model development work group of this organization. She is a frequent presenter at national conferences and recently published *High-Performing Teams*, a resource for middle school teams.

MSIM's commitment to quality has resulted in state and national recognition for providing outstanding professional development to schools throughout Michigan. Dick Corbett, one of two meta-analysts conducting a third party evaluation of Middle Start schools, states, "School staff reported that the Michigan Schools in the Middle people offered compelling, practical, and professionally-presented assistance in helping their schools adopt and implement recognized best practices for Middle Schools, such as teacher teams, common planning times, and instructionally-focused scheduling strategies." Patrick Montesano of the Academy for Educational Development affirms this in stating, "Michigan Schools in the Middle has applied its renowned expertise in early adolescent development, middle-level education, and professional development to hundreds of teachers in the schools served by Michigan Middle Start and to hundreds of others in related networks throughout the state."

Evidence of Effectiveness: Not surprisingly, schools, which have established an ongoing relationship with MSIM, have witnessed the greatest increases in student outcomes. Michigan, like many other states, has developed its own measures of student achievement: the Michigan Education Assessment Program (MEAP). These sets of assessments are linked to curricular standards and are designed as criterion-referenced tests. At the middle level, for example, seventh grade students are tested on their abilities to demonstrate achievement in Reading and Writing as measured by benchmarks. Results from individual students, schools, and school districts are used to determine student achievement. While MSIM recognizes that the MEAP is only a single measure, it is an excellent measure of student learning and achievement as it is directly linked to the state-mandated K-12 curriculum.

White Pine Middle School is a particularly good example of how MSIM has impacted student achievement. White Pine is a suburban school with a 6-8 grade configuration and a student population of 1200, and it has been collaborating with MSIM since 1995 to achieve excellence. The school's students have shown steady increases in standardized state assessment test (MEAP) scores, particularly in Reading and Social Studies, each year since 1995. These results are particularly impressive given that the at-risk student population for White Pine has increased from 8% to 22% during this period of time and the number of students receiving Ds and Es on their report cards has decreased from more than 40% to less than 10%. (See Appendix A for specific details.)

Comprehensive School Reform

In addition to its teacher preparation programs and professional development, MSIM assists schools with long-term Comprehensive School Reform (CSR.) Since 1999, the Michigan Department of Education has granted funding to high-poverty, low achieving P-12 schools across the state to engage in three-year programs of comprehensive reform. MSIM has provided the leadership coaching and professional development for 25 of these schools, all of which selected the "Middle Start" model for comprehensive reform. The Middle Start model provides schools with extensive in-school coaching, professional development, and leadership training. MSIM's coaches work with school personnel to gather data about student achievement and teacher practices; to perform gap analyses to identify areas in which changes in classroom practices could augment student achievement; and to educate all stakeholders, including teachers, administrators, support staff, families, and community members, about issues important to middle-grades education. The Middle Start model fosters professional learning communities through its principles and practices and its focus on job-embedded professional development practices. Specifically, middle-grades educators are introduced to three cutting-edge strategies for instruction: Looking at Student Work, Lesson Study, and Understanding by Design, all of which focus on teacher practice, reflection and collaboration. Research has demonstrated that these are the three most effective strategies in increasing student achievement.

According to the NSDC standards, in order for staff development to result in increased student learning, it must not only be rich in content, but it must also address process standards which include purposeful follow-up, as well as contextual standards pertaining to organizational support from school administrators. Michigan Schools in the Middle provides structured follow-up to schools in the form of additional professional development, coaching, technical assistance, and modeling of instructional practices. MSIM firmly believes that professional development without follow-up is *malpractice* and refuses to work with schools which do not commit to ongoing work. Support is intentionally designed to assist schools as they move toward becoming professional learning communities in which teachers, administrators, and support staff are continually working to create shared vision, norms and values, to be reflective regarding teacher practice, to collaborate as educators, and to remain focused on student outcomes. Schools are trained to use a professional development planning model developed by Joellen Killion of NSDC which requires staffs to follow a five-step procedure: establish student target goals based on student performance data; identify teacher learning (professional development) needed to help students reach those goals; investigate multiple formats for professional development; give attention to ongoing support; and engage in comprehensive, ongoing evaluation.

MSIM also works to create leadership capacity in its Middle Start CSR schools, via its highly successful monthly seminars for leadership teams. These seminars introduce administrators and teacher leaders to research-based best practices in instruction, curriculum and assessment and are followed-up by onsite coaching in the schools. These seminars have resulted in the evolution of administrators from managers to instructional leaders and have produced principals who now take responsibility for helping their colleagues join them in comprehensive reform efforts to improve student outcomes.

Evidence of Effectiveness:

In 1999 fourteen high-needs middle-grades schools (with 50% or more of their students eligible for free and/or reduced lunches based on family income) commenced the three year reform process with MSIM. Of these fourteen schools, thirteen had 6-8 grade configurations, and one served a fourth and fifth grade population. In an effort to gauge the long-term effect of MSIM's comprehensive school reform model on student achievement, the thirteen 6-8 schools' student MEAP scores during the third year of model implementation were compared with scores from Michigan middle schools with the same grade configuration and comparable demographics (50% or more of their students are eligible for free and reduced lunches.) In all five tested areas (Reading, Writing, Math, Science and Social Studies), students at MSIM's comprehensive reform schools outperformed their peers. This gap was most noticeable in the gate keeping areas of Reading and Mathematics. In Reading, 33.7% of MSIM's CSR students achieved a passing score as compared to 28.4% of the students from comparable schools. In Mathematics, 33.9% of MSIM's CSR students passed compared with 25% from the comparable schools. (See Appendix B for full details.)

In 2002 eleven new grants were awarded to high-needs middle schools to engage in comprehensive reform with MSIM. While the first year of the reform process is primarily devoted to establishing a common vision and goals and to using data to drive decisions, several of MSIM's schools have already engaged in ongoing professional development to improve student achievement. Early evidence indicates marked increases in student learning. Richardson Middle School, located in northern Michigan, focused on professional development to help teachers improve student literacy in the area of writing. Led by the Leadership Team, the staff developed a writing rubric, which aligns with MEAP and collected baseline data in October 2002, which indicated that approximately 20% of their students were scoring at a satisfactory level. A writing assessment was given again in February 2003 using the same rubric and results indicated that 52% of the students were writing at a satisfactory level.

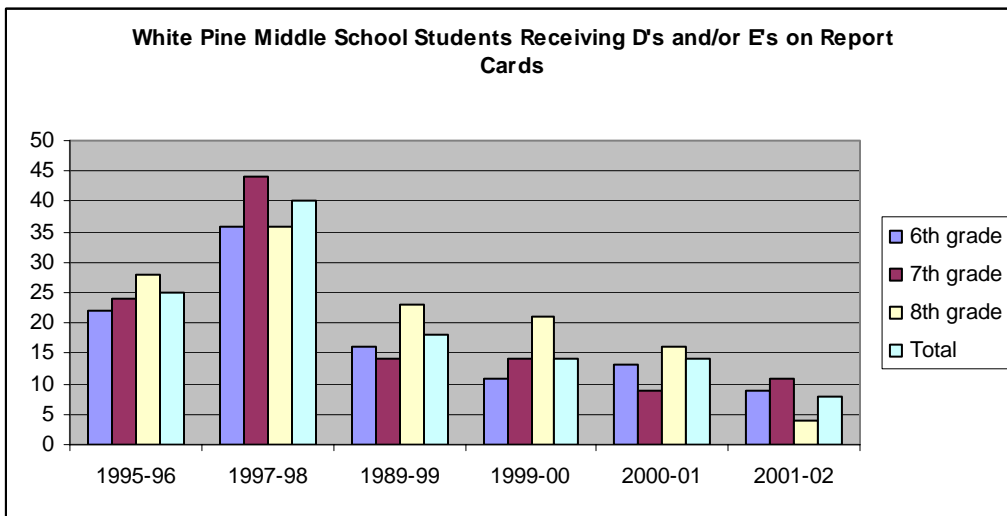
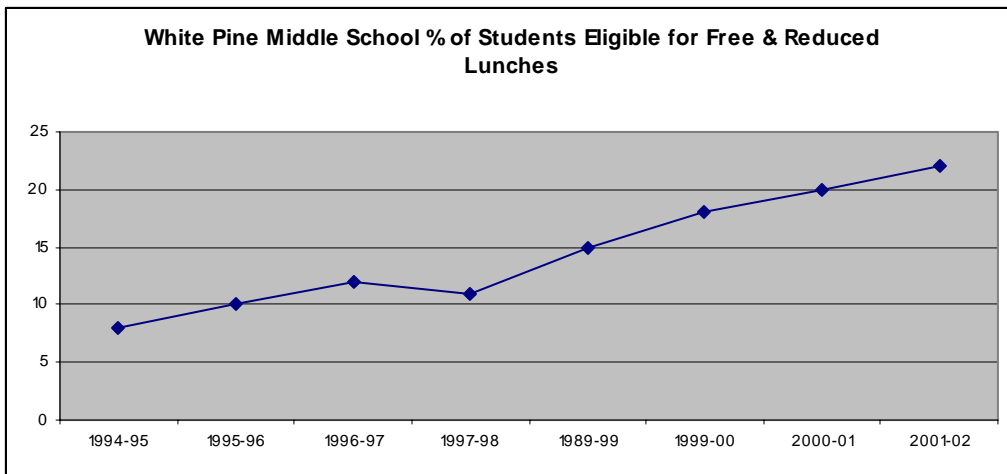
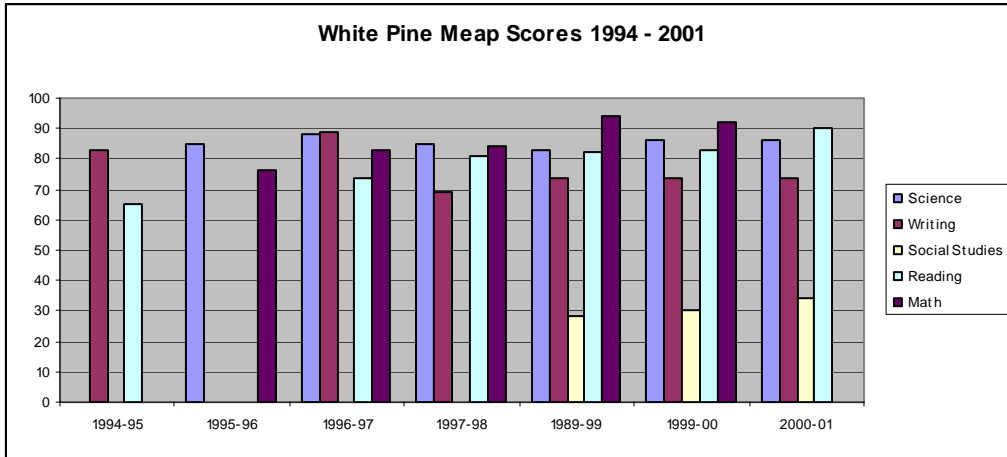
Mancelona, another northern Michigan rural middle school, also focused professional development around increasing students' writing literacy skills. Baseline data collected in September 2002 indicated that only 21% of their students were able to write at a satisfactory level. A follow-up assessment conducted in May 2003 indicated that 38% of the students were writing at a satisfactory level.

A third MSIM Middle Start School in its first of model implementation focused on reading literacy and throughout the year trained the entire staff in using reading strategies in the content areas to increase students' ability to comprehend difficult text. In the spring of 2002, fifth graders were tested to determine their reading grade-level abilities. During 2002-03, Montabella Middle School focused attention on helping those sixth grade students who had been reading below their grade level at the end of the fifth grade. Post-testing conducted in March 2003 indicated that of these identified students; nearly 30 percent had increased their reading ability by two or more grade levels during this one year time period. During this same period of time, the average sixth grade Montabella student had increased his/her reading ability by slightly more than one year.

In addition to criterion-referenced standardized test scores, other indicators of the efficacy of MSIM's programs include increases in schools' reported frequency of utilizing practices demonstrated to increase student achievement, such as interdisciplinary team practice, coordination of curriculum and student assignments, parental contact, small-group instruction, curriculum integration, and instructional and assessment practices shown to be effective in teaching young adolescents. Schools also show decreases in student behavioral problems along with increased student and teacher satisfaction with their school experiences. All of these improvements ultimately lead to greater student learning. (See Appendix C for a summary of this data).

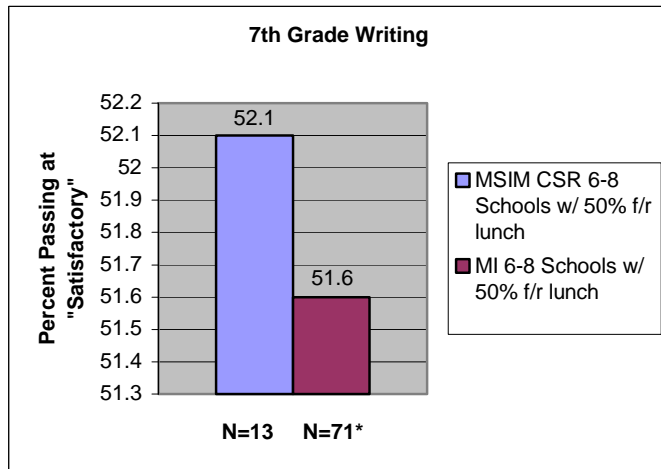
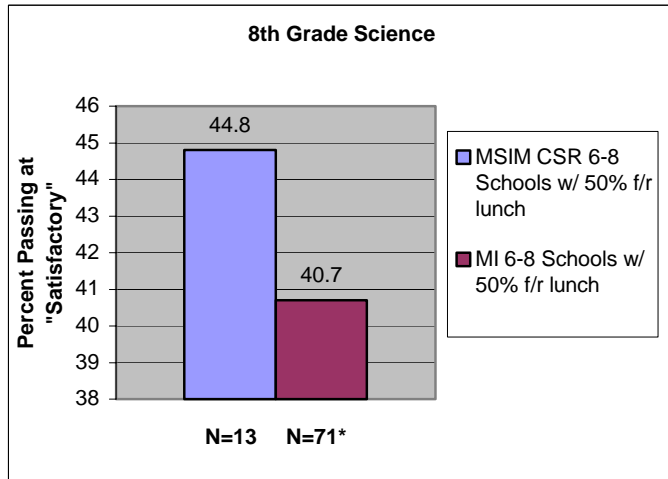
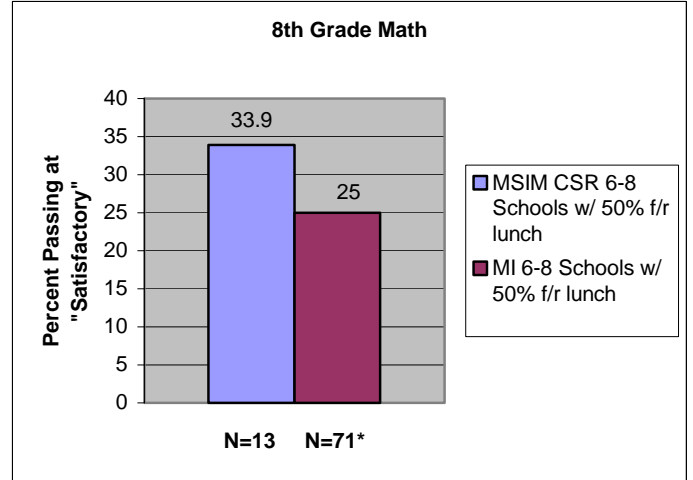
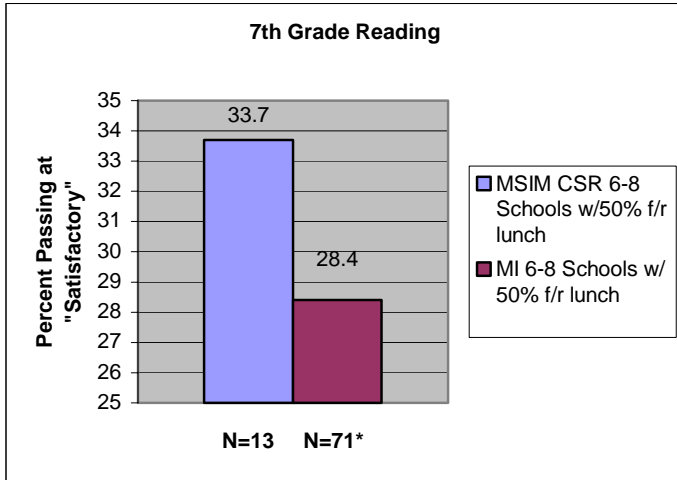
Appendix A

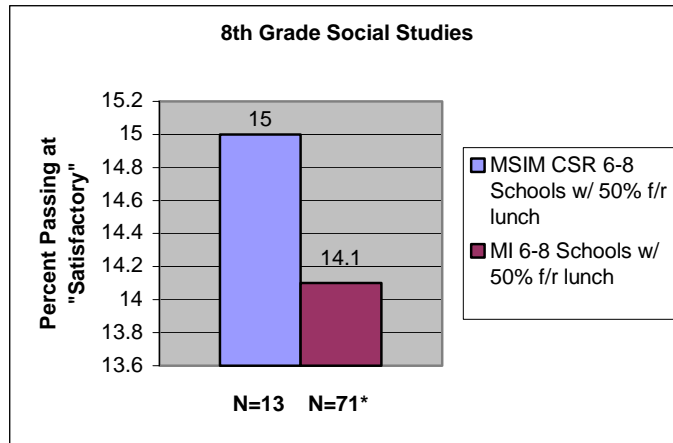
White Pine Middle School Data



2001-02 Michigan MEAP Data

MSIM CSR 6-8 Schools w/ 50% f/r Lunch vs. MI 6-8 Schools w/ 50% f/r lunch





Please note disparities in scale among graphs.

***Some of the 71 non-MSIM schools were engaged in implementing other comprehensive reform models.**

Appendix C
Findings from MSIM Michigan Middle Start CSRD Schools (99-01)

Center for Prevention Research & Development
University of Illinois

The following findings are from School Self-Study data collected by CPRD in 1999 and 2001 from 12 Middle Start CSRD schools in Michigan working with Michigan Schools in the Middle at Central Michigan University:

- The frequency of interdisciplinary team and classroom practices increased for nearly all practices since 1999.
- High levels of interdisciplinary teaming positively impacts team and classroom practices and student achievement.
- Students in Middle Start CSRD schools outperformed comparable state samples in 7th grade MEAP reading and math achievement scores over time.

1. Levels of Implementation of Teaming

Teaming with high CPT	6
Teaming with low CPT	2
Some or not teaming	4
TOTAL	12

2. Interdisciplinary Team Practices

Interdisciplinary Team Practices¹	1999	2001
Curriculum coordination	24	30
Coordination of student assignments	26	33
Parent contact	37	40
Contact with other staff	28	34

3. Classroom Practices

Classroom Practices²	1999	2001
Small group, active instruction	40	40
Integration & interdisciplinary practices	22	26
Authentic instruction and assessment	33	34
Critical thinking practices	42	44
Math skill practices	40	42
Reading skill practices	35	37
Writing skill practices	37	38

¹ Average scores range from 10 to 70 with (10) Never, (20) Once a year, (30) Several times a year, (40) Quarterly, (50) Monthly, (60) Weekly, and (70) Daily.

² Average scores range from 10 to 70 with (10) Never, (20) Several times a year, (30) Monthly, (40) Several times a month, (50) Weekly, (60) Several times a week, and (70) Daily.