Schools To Watch®
A School Self-Study and Rating Rubric©

Revised: September, 2018

Instructions:

The Schools To Watch® Program is a copyright protected program of the National Forum to Accelerate Middle-Grades Reform. Criteria established by the National Forum is used as the basis for the Forum's Schools To Watch® Program, which focuses on school improvement efforts characterized by a continuous trajectory toward success. The following Self Study and Rating Rubric© may be used freely by any middle grades or secondary school to study and rate its practices. No adaptations to this self-study and rubric may be used without written permission from the Schools To Watch Fidelity Committee and Board of the National Forum to Accelerate Middle-Grades Reform. The rubric will take 20-25 minutes to complete.

This is a continuing-improvement tool as well as a mandatory self-rating for schools interested in applying for a state Schools To Watch® designation.

The rubric is divided into four domains: **Academic Excellence, Developmental Responsiveness**, **Social Equity**, and **Organizational Structures and Processes**. Under each domain there are general criteria followed by detailed examples of possible evidence of the criteria. It is important to note that the detailed example evidence under each general criteria is not a comprehensive, all-inclusive list of practices for that criteria, but rather are examples. Self-rate each general criteria and each detailed example evidence of the criteria. If an example of possible evidence does not apply to your school (e.g., if your school does not have before- and/or after-school tutoring), leave it blank. **Your self-ratings should reflect your perceptions for your whole school,** not for your specific classroom, grade level, or subject. The ultimate goal is to be consistently excellent and rate a well-evidenced score of 4.0 in every component (general and detail) of every section. Even when that ultimate goal is reached, a true high performing middle school will continue to seek ways to improve as new challenges arise.

A **4** in any general and detail component means the practice is highly and completely implemented, systemic, coherent in every classroom, by every teacher, across the school.
A **3** in any general and detail component means that there is a high degree or maturing quality of implementation that is systemic, but it may not be coherent or of the highest quality in every classroom and by every teacher, but certainly by most, 75 percent or better.
A **2** in any general and detail component means that there is a mixed, fair, immature quality of implementation. A 2 also means that practices may include many teachers but not the majority. The program may be too new to have realized accountable results or to be evaluated as effective.
A **1** in any general and detail component means that the practice may just have gotten started, (very immature), or is only practiced by a handful of practitioners.

Throughout the rubric, references to "All Students" mean English learners, students with disabilities, gifted and honors students, students living in poverty, and any other subgroup of students served at your school.

District: *School:*

Academic Excellence

High-performing schools with middle grades are academically excellent. They challenge all students to use their minds well.

General Criteria	Detailed <u>Example</u> Evidence of Criteria	4	3	2	1	Self-Rating
1. All students are expected to meet high academic standards.		4	3	2	1	Average ____
	• Expectations are clear for students and parents.	4	3	2	1	Average _____
	• Teachers provide students with exemplars of high quality work that meet the performance standard or level so that students know what high quality work should be like.	4	3	2	1	
	• Students revise their work based on meaningful feedback until they meet or exceed the performance standard or level.	4	3	2	1	
2. Curriculum, instruction, assessment, and appropriate academic interventions are aligned with high standards.		4	3	2	1	Average ____
	• The vision guides what students should know and be able to do, and it is coherent.	4	3	2	1	Average _____
	• Students and teachers understand what students are learning and why. In any class and at any time, students can explain the importance of what they are learning.	4	3	2	1	
	• The curriculum is rigorous, non-repetitive, and moves forward substantially.	4	3	2	1	
	• Work is demanding and steadily progresses.	4	3	2	1	
3. The curriculum emphasizes deep understanding of important concepts and the development of essential skills.		4	3	2	1	Average ____
	• Teachers make connections across the disciplines to reinforce important concepts and assist students in thinking critically and applying what they have learned to solve real-world problems.	4	3	2	1	Average _____
	• Teachers incorporate academic and informational literacy into their course work (i.e., reading, writing, note taking, researching, listening, and speaking).	4	3	2	1	

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2 = Fair quality, mixed implementation, immature practice, sporadic by some – SIGNIFICANT IMPROVEMENT NEEDED
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District: *School:*

Academic Excellence (continued)

General Criteria	Detailed <u>Example</u> Evidence of Criteria	Self-Rating				
4. **Instructional strategies include a variety of challenging and engaging activities that are clearly related to the grade-level standards, concepts, and skills being taught.**		**4**	**3**	**2**	**1**	Average ____
	• To reach students, teachers draw from a common subset of instructional strategies and activities such as the following examples:					Average _____
	• Direct instruction	4	3	2	1	
	• Cooperative learning	4	3	2	1	
	• Project-based learning	4	3	2	1	
	• Inquiry-based learning/simulations	4	3	2	1	
	• Hands-on learning	4	3	2	1	
	• Integrated technology	4	3	2	1	
	• Differentiated instruction	4	3	2	1	
	• Personalized learning	4	3	2	1	
	• STEM/STEAM activities	4	3	2	1	
5. **Teachers use a variety of methods to assess and monitor the progress of student learning (e.g., tests, quizzes, assignments, exhibitions, projects, performance tasks, portfolios, student conferences).**		**4**	**3**	**2**	**1**	Average ____
	• Teachers use common, frequent, formative assessments to check for understanding of key concepts and the achievement of their students.	4	3	2	1	Average _____
	• Teachers use formative assessment results to inform/guide instruction.	4	3	2	1	
	• Teachers use common, frequent, summative assessments to check for understanding of key concepts and the achievement of their students.	4	3	2	1	
	• Students learn how to assess their own and others' work against the performance standards, expectations, or levels.	4	3	2	1	
6. **The faculty and master schedule provide students time to meet rigorous academic standards.**		**4**	**3**	**2**	**1**	Average ____
	• Students are provided more time to learn the content, concepts or skills if needed.	4	3	2	1	Average _____
	• Flexible scheduling enables students to engage in academic interventions, enrichment, extended projects, hands-on experiences, and inquiry-based learning.	4	3	2	1	

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District: *School:*

Academic Excellence (continued)

General Criteria	Detailed Example Evidence of Criteria	4	3	2	1	Self-Rating
7. Students are provided the support they need to meet rigorous academic standards.		**4**	**3**	**2**	**1**	Average ____
	• Teachers know what each student has learned and still needs to learn.	4	3	2	1	Average
	• Students have multiple opportunities to succeed and receive extra help as needed, such as:					
	○ co-teaching or collaborative resource model	4	3	2	1	———
	○ support and intervention classes	4	3	2	1	
	○ before-and/or after-school tutoring	4	3	2	1	
8. The adults in the school are provided time and frequent opportunities to enhance student achievement by working with colleagues to deepen their knowledge and to improve their standards-based practice.		**4**	**3**	**2**	**1**	Average ____
	• Teachers collaborate in making decisions about rigorous curriculum, standards-based assessment practice, effective instructional methods, and evaluation of student work.	4	3	2	1	Average
	• The professional learning community employs coaching, mentoring, and peer observation as a means of continuous instructional improvement	4	3	2	1	———
	• Teachers participate in learning walks/instructional rounds.	4	3	2	1	

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District: *School:*

Developmental Responsiveness

High-performing schools with middle grades are sensitive to the unique developmental challenges of early adolescence.

General Criteria	Detailed Example Evidence of Criteria					Self-Rating
1. The staff creates a personalized environment that supports each student's intellectual, ethical, social, and physical development.		4	3	2	1	Average ____
	• Adults and students are grouped into smaller communities (e.g., teams, houses, academies) for enhanced teaching and learning.	4	3	2	1	Average _____
	• These small learning communities are characterized by stable, close, and mutually respectful relationships.	4	3	2	1	
	• Every student has a mentor, advisor, advocate, or other adult he/she trusts and stays in a relationship with throughout the middle grades experience.	4	3	2	1	
	• Pedagogy reflects and utilizes the uniqueness of each learner relative to brain research, learning styles/modalities, and/or temperaments.	4	3	2	1	
	• Students have regular opportunities to participate in physical development activities, (e.g., recess, clubs, extracurricular programs).	4	3	2	1	
2. The school provides access to comprehensive services to foster healthy physical, social, emotional, and intellectual development.		4	3	2	1	Average ____
	• Teachers are educated on ways to recognize student problems and when necessary, refer to the appropriate staff member.	4	3	2	1	Average _____
	• Students with difficulties, and their families, can get assistance.	4	3	2	1	
	• The school houses a wide range of support (e.g., nurses, counselors, resource teachers) to help students and families.	4	3	2	1	
	• The school offers parent education activities involving families.	4	3	2	1	
3. All teachers foster curiosity, creativity and the development of social skills in a structured and supportive environment.		4	3	2	1	Average ____
	• Teachers enhance standards-based learning by using a wide variety of instructional strategies.	4	3	2	1	Average _____
	• Teachers incorporate well-developed procedures and routines for effective classroom management.	4	3	2	1	
	• Teachers facilitate learning by deliberately teaching study and organizational skills.	4	3	2	1	
	• Teachers integrate creative activities in the lessons (e.g., current technologies, visual and performing arts, etc.).	4	3	2	1	

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District: *School:*

Developmental Responsiveness (continued)

General Criteria	Detailed <u>Example</u> Evidence of Criteria	Self-Rating				
4. The curriculum is both socially significant and relevant to the personal and career interests of young adolescents.		**4**	**3**	**2**	**1**	Average ____
	• Students are routinely provided opportunities in classes to talk about issues in their own lives, their community and their world.	4	3	2	1	Average
	• Students take action, make informed choices, work collaboratively, and learn to resolve conflicts.	4	3	2	1	_____
	• Students are provided opportunities to participate in decisions about topics of study.	4	3	2	1	
5. Teachers use an interdisciplinary approach to reinforce important concepts, skills, and address real-world problems.		**4**	**3**	**2**	**1**	Average ____
	• Teachers collaborate to create integrated activities that cross content boundaries.	4	3	2	1	Average
	• Students can work on the same project in several different classes.	4	3	2	1	_____
6. Students are provided multiple opportunities to explore a rich variety of topics and interests in order to develop their identity, learn about their strengths, discover and demonstrate their own competence, and plan for their future.		**4**	**3**	**2**	**1**	Average ____
	• Teachers and counselors provide opportunities to students to challenge themselves and set high academic, college, and career goals for their future.	4	3	2	1	Average
	• Students are provided with multiple opportunities to explore topics of interest to them.	4	3	2	1	
	• Students demonstrate competency in a variety of subjects as well as areas of interest.	4	3	2	1	_____
7 Students have opportunities for voice - posing questions, reflecting on experiences, and participating in decisions and leadership activities.		**4**	**3**	**2**	**1**	Average ____
	• All students have opportunities to participate in, or be represented (demographically, socio-economically, etc.) in what happens at school.	4	3	2	1	Average
	• School staff members have an "open-door" policy to encourage student involvement and connection.	4	3	2	1	_____
	• Students take an active role in school-family conferences and/or meetings.	4	3	2	1	

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District: *School:*

Developmental Responsiveness (continued)

General Criteria	Detailed Example Evidence of Criteria	Self-Rating				
8. The school staff members develop alliances with families to enhance and support the well-being of the children.		4	3	2	1	Average ____
	• Parents are meaningfully involved in all aspects of the school.	4	3	2	1	Average
	• Parents are informed, included, and involved as partners and decision-makers in their children's education.	4	3	2	1	
	• The school uses an extensive array of communication strategies to encourage parent involvement.	4	3	2	1	———
9. Staff members provide all students with opportunities to develop citizenship skills, to use the community as a classroom, and to engage the community in providing resources and support.		4	3	2	1	Average ____
	• Students take on projects to improve their school, community, state, nation, and/or world.	4	3	2	1	Average
	• Members of the community engage in meaningful learning opportunities with the school.	4	3	2	1	———
10. The school provides age-appropriate, co-curricular activities to foster social skills and character, and to develop interests beyond the classroom environment.		4	3	2	1	Average ____
	• Student co-curricular activities include a wide range of interests—team sports, clubs, exploratory opportunities, service opportunities, and a rich program in the visual and performing arts.	4	3	2	1	Average
	• Co-curricular programs are infused with activities that help students develop relevant life skills.	4	3	2	1	———

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District: *School:*

Social Equity

High performing schools with middle grades are socially equitable, democratic, and fair. They provide every student with high-quality teachers, resources, learning opportunities, and supports. They keep positive options open for all students.

General Criteria	Detailed <u>Example</u> Evidence of Criteria	Self-Rating				
1. To the fullest extent possible, all students, including English learners, students with disabilities, gifted and honors students, participate in heterogeneous classes with high academic and behavioral expectations.		**4**	**3**	**2**	**1**	Average _____
	• Faculty and administrators are committed to helping each student produce proficient work.	4	3	2	1	Average
	• Evidence of this commitment includes tutoring, mentoring, enrichment assignments, differentiated instruction, special adaptations, supplemental classes and other supports.	4	3	2	1	
	• Accelerated, short-term interventions for students with similar needs are fluid.	4	3	2	1	_____
2. Students are provided the opportunity to use many and varied approaches to achieve and demonstrate competence and mastery of standards.		**4**	**3**	**2**	**1**	Average _____
	• Teachers differentiate instruction in order to give each student equal opportunity to comprehend the standards-based curriculum.	4	3	2	1	Average
	• Teachers provide a variety of learning experiences so all students have opportunities to master a challenging curriculum.	4	3	2	1	
	• Teachers provide learning activities that represent varying learning styles so all students have opportunities to master standards.	4	3	2	1	_____
3. Teachers continually adapt curriculum, instruction, assessment, and scheduling to meet their students' diverse and changing needs.		**4**	**3**	**2**	**1**	Average _____
	• The faculty is always seeking ways to improve programs, curriculum, and assessment to better meet student needs.	4	3	2	1	Average
	• Teachers assess mastery continuously and modify their instruction to meet current needs.	4	3	2	1	
	• The schedule provides flexibility for teachers to meet the specific instructional needs of students.	4	3	2	1	_____
4. All students have equal access to valued knowledge in all school classes and activities.		**4**	**3**	**2**	**1**	Average _____
	• To the fullest extent possible, students use technology to do research and analyze data, read more than textbooks, and understand how to solve complex problems.	4	3	2	1	Average
	• To the fullest extent possible, students with disabilities are in regular education classrooms.	4	3	2	1	
	• All students have access to interest-based classes, activities, or opportunities.	4	3	2	1	_____

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District: *School:*

Social Equity (continued)

General Criteria	Detailed <u>Example</u> Evidence of Criteria					Self-Rating
5. Students have ongoing opportunities to learn about and appreciate their own and others' cultures.		4	3	2	1	Average ____
	• The school values knowledge from the diverse cultures represented in the school, community, and our nation.	4	3	2	1	Average _____
	• Materials in the media center represent all of the cultures of the students.	4	3	2	1	
	• Families have opportunities to share their traditions and beliefs (e.g., international night, talent show, hall of flags).	4	3	2	1	
	• Multiple viewpoints are encouraged and the school ensures they are reflected in the curriculum and instruction in order to reflect the ethnic diversity of students.	4	3	2	1	
6. The school community knows every student well.		4	3	2	1	Average ____
	• Each student is appreciated and respected.	4	3	2	1	Average _____
	• Staff members do not use negative labels or discuss students in negative ways.	4	3	2	1	
	• Every student has an adult advocate and supporter in the school.	4	3	2	1	
7. To the fullest extent possible, the faculty welcomes and encourages the active participation of all its families and makes sure that all its families are an integral part of the school.		4	3	2	1	Average ____
	• Efforts are made to eliminate barriers (e.g., transportation, childcare, translation) to attend school events.	4	3	2	1	Average _____
	• Multiple forms of communication are used with families and communication is two way (e.g., Twitter, Facebook, email).	4	3	2	1	
	• Families have a voice in the decision-making process of the school (e.g., parent coffees, PTA/PTO, school-based councils, parent advisory group).	4	3	2	1	
	• Opportunities are provided for families to engage in supporting student learning (e.g., parenting classes, literacy programs, accessing information about student progress, making meaningful connections to the curriculum).	4	3	2	1	
	• The school creates opportunities for families to understand what students are learning and why.	4	3	2	1	

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District: *School:*

Social Equity (continued)

General Criteria	Detailed <u>Example</u> Evidence of Criteria	Self-Rating				
8. The school's reward system is designed to value diversity, civility, service, and democratic citizenship.		**4**	**3**	**2**	**1**	Average ____
	• The faculty recognizes the contributions of all its students.	4	3	2	1	Average
	• Awards are not limited to sports and academic honors.	4	3	2	1	_____
9. To the fullest extent possible, staff members understand and support the family backgrounds and values of its students.		4	3	2	1	Average ____
	• The school makes a special effort to recruit a culturally and linguistically diverse staff.	4	3	2	1	Average
	• Professional development is provided to help staff members understand, value, and respond to student and family diversity and the school's community.	4	3	2	1	_____
10. The school rules are clear, fair, and consistently applied.		**4**	**3**	**2**	**1**	Average ____
	• Students and parents are informed of school rules and understand the consequences if students break the rules.	4	3	2	1	
	• Staff members routinely analyze and act upon referral and suspension data to make sure that no one group of students is unfairly singled out by classroom and school staff.	4	3	2	1	Average
	• The school's disciplinary referrals and suspension rate are low as a result of proactive interventions that keep students engaged, resilient, healthy, safe, and respectful of one another.	4	3	2	1	_____

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District: *School:*

Organizational Structures and Processes

High-performing schools with middle grades are learning organizations that establish norms, structures, and organizational arrangements to support and sustain their trajectory toward excellence.

General Criteria	Detailed <u>Example</u> Evidence of Criteria					Self-Rating
1. A shared vision of what a high-performing school is and does, drives every facet of school change.		4	3	2	1	Average ____
	• The shared vision drives constant improvement.	4	3	2	1	Average
	• Shared, distributed, and sustained leadership propels the school forward and preserves its institutional memory and purpose.	4	3	2	1	
	• Everyone knows what the plan is and the vision is posted and evidenced by actions.	4	3	2	1	_____
2. The principal has the responsibility and authority to hold the school-improvement enterprise together, including day-to-day know-how, coordination, strategic planning, and communication.		4	3	2	1	Average ____
	• Lines of leadership for the school's improvement efforts are clear.	4	3	2	1	Average
	• The school leadership team has assumed the responsibility to make things happen.	4	3	2	1	
	• The principal makes sure that assignments for staff are clear and explicit and are completed in a timely manner.	4	3	2	1	_____
	• School leadership fosters and supports the development of teacher leaders.	4	3	2	1	
3. The school is a community of practice in which learning, experimentation, and the opportunity for reflection are the norm.		4	3	2	1	Average ____
	• School leadership fosters and supports interdependent collaboration.	4	3	2	1	Average
	• Expectations of continuous improvement permeate the school culture.	4	3	2	1	
	• Learning is on-going for everyone.	4	3	2	1	
	• Improvement plans are flexible and inclusive in meeting the needs of all students.	4	3	2	1	_____
	• The school community is student-centered.	4	3	2	1	
4. The school and district devote resources to content-rich professional learning, which is connected to reaching and sustaining the school vision and increasing student achievement.		4	3	2	1	Average ____
	• Professional learning is intensive, of high quality, ongoing, and relevant to middle-grades education.	4	3	2	1	Average
	• Teachers get professional support to improve instructional practice (i.e., classroom visitations, peer coaching, demonstration lessons, etc.).	4	3	2	1	
	• Opportunities for learning increase knowledge and skills, challenge outmoded beliefs and practices, and provide support in the classroom.	4	3	2	1	_____

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District: *School:*

Organizational Structures and Processes (continued)

General Criteria	Detailed **Example** Evidence of Criteria	Self-Rating				
5. The school is not an island unto itself; it is a part of a larger educational system, i.e., districts, networks and community partnerships.		**4**	**3**	**2**	**1**	Average ____
	• Deliberate vertical articulation and transition programs exist between feeder elementary schools and destination high schools.	4	3	2	1	Average _____
	• Deliberate articulation of curriculum between feeder elementary schools and destination high schools occurs.	4	3	2	1	
	• The district supports through funding and time its schools' participation in best practice networks, associations, learning communities, and professional learning focused on middle grades improvement and achievement.	4	3	2	1	
	• The school and district work collaboratively to bring coherence to curriculum, instruction, assessment, intervention, data collection, analysis, and accountability for student achievement.	4	3	2	1	
6. The school staff holds itself accountable for student success.		**4**	**3**	**2**	**1**	Average ____
	• The school collects, analyzes, and uses data (e.g., attendance, academics, behavior, parent surveys, etc.) as a basis for making decisions.	4	3	2	1	Average _____
	• School-generated evaluation data are used to identify areas for more extensive and intensive improvement.	4	3	2	1	
	• The school staff intentionally and explicitly reconsiders its vision and practices when data call them into question.	4	3	2	1	
	• The school leadership and teachers use data to examine instruction and determine instructional improvement.	4	3	2	1	
7. District and school staff possess and cultivate the collective will to persevere, believing it is their business to produce increased achievement and enhanced development of all students.		**4**	**3**	**2**	**1**	Average ____
	• Barriers are viewed as challenges, not problems.	4	3	2	1	Average _____
	• District and school staff assess and evaluate current programs regularly and adapt them as needed to maximize the level of student mastery.	4	3	2	1	

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District: *School:*

Organizational Structures and Processes (continued)

General Criteria	Detailed Example Evidence of Criteria	Self-Rating				
8. The school staff and district staff partner with colleges and universities.		**4**	**3**	**2**	**1**	Average ____
	• A mentoring program for new teachers is in place.	4	3	2	1	Average _____
	• The principal or district contacts colleges and universities when necessary for potential recruitment of new teachers.	4	3	2	1	
	• The school or district works collaboratively with colleges and universities to assist pre-service teachers.	4	3	2	1	
	• The school or district works with colleges and universities to provide professional development to faculty at the school.	4	3	2	1	
9. The school includes families and community members in setting and supporting the school's trajectory toward high performance.		**4**	**3**	**2**	**1**	Average ____
	• Families and community members are informed about the school's goals for student success and students' responsibility for meeting those goals.	4	3	2	1	Average _____
	• Representatives of all stakeholders are engaged in ongoing and reflective conversation and decision making about governance to promote school improvement.	4	3	2	1	
	• The school provides programs, resources, or information to educate families about adolescent behavior, school transition, etc.	4	3	2	1	

4 = High quality, complete, mature, and coherent implementation – NEARLY PERFECT, LITTLE ROOM FOR IMPROVEMENT
3 = Good quality, maturing but not fully implemented by all – GOOD QUALITY BUT STILL ROOM FOR REFINEMENT AND IMPROVEMENT
2 = Fair quality, mixed implementation, immature practice, sporadic by some – SIGNIFICANT IMPROVEMENT NEEDED
1 = Poor quality, low level of implementation, new program, by a few –CONSIDERABLE STRATEGIC PLANNING, CONSENSUS BUILDING AND IMPROVEMENT NEEDED