

# GRADES 6-8 OVERVIEW

Students in the middle grades undergo physical, social, emotional, and intellectual changes that affect their daily learning experiences. Individuals progress from pre-adolescence to adolescence at vastly different rates. This process is neither sequential nor predictable and often includes periods of fluctuation between adolescence and pre-adolescence. While middle school students are sensitive to the opinions of peers, they are beginning to assert their independence when dealing with adults. Although some students are just beginning to navigate the digital world and understand their place in it, many are already proficient. Regardless of skill level, all students must continue to grow in their digital knowledge as our world continues to change.

Like students in earlier grades, middle school students engage through various learning styles and require differentiation in both instruction and assessment to reach their potential. They have varied interests, and their skill levels differ. Middle grades students thrive in collaborative groups, both heterogeneous and homogeneous. Heavy emphasis is placed on the sharing of ideas with supporting evidence in pairs, small groups, and in larger settings.

As they move from concrete thinking to abstract concepts, middle school students increasingly question others' messages and points of view and enhance their ability to express and justify their own. To acknowledge this transition in thinking, standards in the middle grades also transition from the earlier grades' explicit focus on building foundational literacy skills (with concurrent emphasis on reading and writing) to the application of foundational skills and knowledge to read and respond to various types of literature. Students transition to fully applying those skills in a literacy environment. The Course of Study for Grades 6-8 marks this progression by organizing standards into types of literacy (critical, digital, language, research, and vocabulary). An overarching concept at the beginning of each type focuses on its central task. These overarching concepts are the same in each grade from six through twelve.

Middle school learners are eager and filled with curiosity on a more analytical level. Thus, the world of reading expands for middle school students. Reading becomes more holistic and profound in subject matter. Sources of reading span all subject areas, cultures, and formats as students begin to recognize the interconnectedness of their world. These texts also become sources for research. Students in the middle level begin to discern the validity and credibility of information, as well as the importance of employing that discernment in today's world. Students also learn the importance of citing their sources to acknowledge the work of other academics and to build their own credibility as researchers and writers.

Writing in the middle grades becomes more rigorous as the emphasis on organization and textual evidence becomes a daily requirement. Writing is fostered and sustained by both shorter pieces of writing and longer, more challenging works. Students in Grades 6-8 hone their vocabulary literacy by paying attention to connotative meanings, understanding their audience, and expanding

their academic and domain-specific vocabulary. They also continue to develop their language and grammar skills as they review foundational knowledge and build upon it with new concepts in their writing, reading, listening, and speaking.

Grades 6-8 standards are designed to build a solid foundation as students transition to advanced competencies in Grades 9-12. The rigor and the depth of knowledge required in the standards gradually increase through the grades to prepare students for the challenges of high school work.

Notes on instruction:

When “including” appears in content standards, it should be construed as “including but not limited to.” The items listed must be taught; others may also be included in instruction.

Examples represent options that might prove useful in instruction of the standard. They are not intended to be exhaustive lists and the suggestions listed are not required to be taught.

Some standards are very close in meaning across the middle school grades. It is expected that rigor will be increased by selecting more challenging literature and requiring more advanced writing in successive grades.

Grade 6-8 Recurring Standards for English Language Arts, listed at the beginning of each grade level, are to be fully included in instruction.