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## A Plan for Implementing the Middle School in Elkhorn, Nebraska

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*University of Nebraska at Omaha*

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A PLAN FOR IMPLEMENTING THE MIDDLE SCHOOL  
IN ELKHORN, NEBRASKA

Presented to the

Graduate Faculty  
University of Nebraska  
at Omaha

In Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree  
Specialist in Education

University of Nebraska at Omaha

by

Barry Stark

June, 1980

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FIELD PROJECT ACCEPTANCE

Accepted for the Graduate Faculty, University of Nebraska,  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree  
Specialist in Education, University of Nebraska at Omaha.

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A PLAN FOR IMPLEMENTING THE MIDDLE SCHOOL  
IN ELKHORN, NEBRASKA

Statement of the Problem

The purpose of this study will be to develop a plan that will identify the logical sequence to be followed in implementing the Middle School in Elkhorn, Nebraska Public School District.

The major characteristics of this plan are:

- A. The philosophy of the Elkhorn Middle School
- B. The objectives of the Elkhorn Middle School
- C. The curriculum of the Elkhorn Middle School
- D. The evaluation design for assessing the Elkhorn Middle School program

Procedure

1. A review of the literature relative to the broad area of middle schools will be surveyed to identify characteristics common to middle schools.

2. Attendance and participation by the researcher at regional, state, and national conferences will be completed in order to identify characteristics and obtain information as presented by experts in the area of middle school operation and organization.

3. Participation by the researcher in visitations to middle schools in the eastern Nebraska region in order to observe these schools in operation and to identify with the practitioners such areas as philosophy, objectives and

curriculum.

4. For the purpose of developing the plan, the information gathered from the review of literature will be synthesized with the information gathered from the middle school practitioners and experts as interviewed or heard by the writer.

5. An evaluation process will be developed to assess the Elkhorn Middle School Program.



Chapter 1  
INTRODUCTION

The Elkhorn, Nebraska School District 10 is located in northwestern Douglas County. The district covers approximately thirty square miles and maintains grades kindergarten through twelve. The district maintains three elementary buildings, each housing kindergarten through sixth grades. The junior-senior high building houses grades seven through twelve. This alignment is to be maintained through the 1979-80 school year.

In December, 1978, the patrons of the Elkhorn School District approved a bond referendum of approximately \$6.5 million calling for a new senior high school and a new elementary school. The bond referendum was made necessary by the transition of the Elkhorn School District from a small rural district to an intermediate-size suburban district. To illustrate this transition, the student enrollment in the Elkhorn School District in 1975 was 1,129 students. By December, 1978, the enrollment had increased by 58% to 1,789 students.<sup>1</sup> Since the 1974-75 school year, enrollment has increased eleven per cent annually.<sup>2</sup> The enrollment figure through November, 1979 totaled 1,829 students.

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<sup>1</sup>Barry Burton, "Elkhorn Public School District, Elkhorn, Nebraska - Study of Growth 1978-1983", 1978, p.3.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

Housing increased comparatively to provide for the influx of families. The complexion of the district began to change during this tremendous growth period (1974 - present), from predominantly rural and skilled labor to one of partially rural/skilled labor and partially professional.

Along with this growth and the ensuing bond issue, there became a need to reorganize the grade level housing alignment. The Board of Education determined that the senior high school would house grades nine through twelve. The task of investigating the middle school concept and its feasibility for the Elkhorn School District was assigned to the writer. This project is a result of that investigation and will serve as a plan to implement the Middle School for the Elkhorn, Nebraska School District.

#### Statement of the Problem

The purpose of this study will be to develop a plan that will identify the logical sequence to be followed in implementing the Middle School in the Elkhorn, Nebraska Public School District.

The major characteristics of this plan will be:

- A. The philosophy of the Elkhorn Middle School
- B. The objectives of the Elkhorn Middle School
- C. The curriculum of the Elkhorn Middle School
- D. The organizational characteristics of the Elkhorn Middle School
- E. An evaluation design for assessing the

Elkhorn Middle School program.

Procedure

1. A review of the literature relative to the broad area of middle schools will be surveyed to identify characteristics common to middle schools.

2. Attendance and participation by the writer at regional, state and national conferences will be completed in order to identify characteristics and obtain information as presented by experts in the area of middle school operation and organization.

3. Visitations of middle schools in eastern Nebraska in order to observe these schools in operation and identify the overall operation of these schools with the practitioners.

4. For the purpose of developing the plan, the information gathered from the review of literature will be synthesized with the information gathered from practitioners and experts as interviewed with or heard by the writer.

5. The information gathered will be used to develop an implementation plan for the Elkhorn Middle School.

Delimitations

The plan will be limited to the areas of:

- A. Middle School History and Philosophy
- B. Researched and Observed Characteristics of Middle School-age Students
- C. Middle School Curriculum Design

D. A Plan for the Implementation of the  
Elkhorn Middle School

Significance of the Study

This study will be used as a guide to implement a new educational concept to the Elkhorn School District. The accumulated information and research will serve to reduce the number of problems associated with the establishment of a new educational housing plan within a school district.

This study will offer a logical, sequential implementation plan that could be utilized in part or in total by other school districts that would be moving toward a similar educational housing plan.

## Chapter II

### REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The middle school, as it is known today, began its growth in the mid 1960's.<sup>3</sup> The middle school traditionally houses any combination of grades four through eight. The major difference between the middle school and the junior high school is the absence of the ninth grade at the middle school level.

There were three prominent factors that led to the emergence of the middle schools during the 1960's. These factors were:

1. A need for an intermediate step between elementary schools and senior high schools. This step was needed to help students remain in school and to bridge the gap between childhood and adolescence.

2. Psychological studies that determined the need to provide for individual differences among students. These needs were social, emotional, physical, biological and intellectual.

3. The theory advanced by G. Stanley Hall (the culture-epoch theory) which stated that the future of mankind would be determined in large measure by the quality of

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<sup>3</sup>Statement by Robert Malinka, Project Director of the National Middle School Resource Center, Indianapolis, in a personal interview, Dearborn, Michigan, October 31, 1979.

education received at the age of adolescence.<sup>4</sup>

The theme of meeting the needs of adolescents has prevailed as the middle school theme for more than a decade. With the tremendous growth in the number of middle schools nationally, as will be outlined later, this theme has proven to be much more than just a slogan for some bandwagon novelty. The middle school concept is a viable, practical, effective phase of education.

In 1963, there were approximately 1,100 middle schools nationally. By 1976, that number had increased three-fold to more than 3,700 middle schools.<sup>5</sup> In 1968, the Midwestern Middle School Association was formed as an alliance of teachers, administrators, counselors and other professional personnel associated specifically with middle schools in the Great Lakes and Great Plains regions. There were approximately one hundred members who chartered the MMSA.<sup>6</sup> In 1973, the National Middle School Association was chartered in Indianapolis with approximately 550 members. This enrollment grew to over 1,850 members in 1979.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>4</sup>J.H. Lounsbury and Gordon Vars. A Curriculum for Middle School Years, (New York: Harper and Row, 1978) pp. 16-17.

<sup>5</sup>Statement by Louis Romano, President, National Middle School Association, in a personal interview, Dearborn, Michigan, November 1, 1979.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid.

The middle schools of the 1980's will be identified by specific characteristics, differing from the elementary level and from the senior high level. These characteristics include:

1. Existence for the benefit of the students.

Priority will be given to the academic and social needs of students.

2. Making use of research findings concerning the nature and needs of students. Curriculum and programs will be designed to facilitate those needs.

3. Orientation toward people. The feelings of students about themselves is important for social and emotional growth. Trust and respect are in evidence and individuality is encouraged.

4. Focusing on the development of basic skills. Curriculum content provides this vehicle. Emphasis is on language skills, reading, and math.

5. Recognizing that learning is an individual process. Individual attention is given wherever needed.

6. Developing positive attitudes, values, and self-concepts. The total administrative, teaching and counseling staff are involved in helping to guide students toward these goals.

7. Selecting the teaching staff to fit into the total program. Interest in, and ability to work with students

within this age group is a requisite for staff selection.<sup>8</sup>

As the theme of meeting the needs of students is expressed by many experts, authors, and practitioners in the middle school field, the needs of these middle school-age people should be outlined.

According to Jean Piaget, the developmental psychologist, a child will experience four stages of mental (cognitive) development. The stages are:

1. Sensorimotor - age birth to eighteen months
2. Pre-Operational - age eighteen months to seven years.
3. Concrete Operational - age seven years to twelve years
4. Formal Operational - age twelve years onward<sup>9</sup>.

Using Piaget's developmental model, one is able to observe that movement from stage to stage is a lengthy process, with the advanced stages lasting from five years through life.

Piaget's theory most closely aligns itself with the middle school characteristics previously outlined, i.e. designing curriculum to meet specific individual needs of students; and recognition of learning as an individual process.

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<sup>8</sup>William Morrison, "Good Schools for Middle Grade Youngsters: Characteristics, Practices, and Recommendations, Fairborn: National Middle School Association Publications, 1978) pp. 1-4.

<sup>9</sup>John Travers, Educational Psychology, (New York: Harper and Row, 1979) p. 120.



Educational programs using Piaget's theory as a reference would be planned "...to match the child's level of development"...and would plan"...environments that respond to the child"...<sup>10</sup>

The need for a separate educational structure, i.e. the middle school, may be inferred from the research by Dr. Donald Hamacheck. He has concluded that middle school-age students' patterns of personality may be broken up or loosened in order for emerging adolescent changes to be incorporated into that personality.<sup>11</sup> It is Dr. Hamacheck's determination that the outcome of this developmental phase is not improvement of the personality but rather a disorganization of the personality. The disorganization is not permanent, but must occur in order for a higher level of organization and integration to be achieved.<sup>12</sup> Might this disorganization be the transition from Piaget's pre-operational stage to his concrete-operational stage? If that is so, a separate educational facility to provide for the academic, social, emotional, and psychological needs of people undergoing this major transition is more of a necessity than many educators may realize.

Additional research by Dr. Conrad Toepfer, an authority in the area of adolescent research, determined four major

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<sup>10</sup>Robert A. Magoon, Education and Psychology Past, Present, and Future (Columbus: Charles E. Merrill Publishing Company, 1973) p. 41.

<sup>11</sup>Donald Hamacheck, Psychology in Teaching, Learning, and Growth, (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 1979) p. 128.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid, p. 129.

needs of middle school-age people (ages 10-14 years). These needs are:

1. Exploration of individual interests
2. Development of a realistic and positive self-concept
3. Development of individual, social, intellectual, and living skills
4. Formulation of future roles in ensuing school, occupational, and social settings<sup>13</sup>.

James J. Fenwick outlined eight characteristics of middle school students (ages 10-14 years) that appear to cover many of the areas that relate strongly to that age category.

The characteristics are:

1. The experiencing of turbulent, shifting, and sometimes conflicting emotions;
2. The tendency to lack self-confidence, appear moody, and introspective;
3. Peer opinion causing either joy or dismay;
4. The unpredictability in students' responses to adult affection - a tendency to show either rejection or ambivalence;
5. The impact of rapid physical growth and bodily changes---producing erratic behavior patterns;
6. Personal values and attitudes developed over the

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<sup>13</sup>Conrad Toepfer, "No Greater Potential: The Emerging Adolescent Learner," Middle School Journal, 4:3, Spring, 1973.

years may begin to be questioned and even rejected;

7. The development of an idealistic attitude;
8. The establishment of a clearly defined feminine or masculine sex role. Peer influence, media, and the student's own physical changes play a large role in the student's self-concept.<sup>14</sup>

Understanding and working with the middle school-age student involves being aware of their needs and characteristics. Dr. Toepfer offers a three-step procedure to meet those needs:

1. Identify and study adolescents' needs and characteristics in the local setting (school);
2. Develop a curricular rationale which will compliment those needs;
3. Organize an administrative vehicle to expedite the program.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>14</sup>James J. Fenwick, "Insights into the Middle School Years," Educational Leadership 34: 77-80, April, 1977.

<sup>15</sup>Toepfer, op. cit., p. 6.

## REVIEW OF ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Interviews

Mr. Terry Bailey, Counselor, York Middle School, York, Nebraska. School Visitation, October 10, 1979.

The single most important factor in the success of the York Middle School was a commitment to the middle school concept by the entire York School District---from the Board of Education to the community. All staff, kindergarten through twelfth grade was informed of the planning.

Several elements were noted in observing the school in operation and in talking with Mr. Bailey. These elements were:

1. Extremely positive attitude toward middle school prevailed among the faculty, the clerical staff, custodial staff and students.
2. Curricular and extra-curricular programming was designed to accomodate student needs:
  - A. Basic, regular, and honors courses were offered;
  - B. Block scheduling of specific classes was incorporated;
  - C. Class size was maintained from sixteen to twenty students.
3. Student participation in contributing to the school's operation was observed.
  - A. Strong student government served in an advisory capacity to the administration,

- B. Faculty was represented in an advisory capacity in the student government;
4. A strong teacher-advisor program. This student-family, as it is called at York, meets daily during the school day with planned activities for the students. The ratio is fifteen students to one teacher. Academic, social, personal, and fun-type activities are planned for each of the twenty student-families. This program is instrumental in the commitment that the York Middle School made to effectively meet the total needs of their students.

School enrollment, in Mr. Bailey's opinion, would ideally be 125 students per grade level.

Mr. Jack Tillman, Wahoo Middle School, Wahoo, Nebraska.  
School visitation, October 30, 1979.

Curricular programming was the key to the operation of Wahoo Middle School. This was a very traditional school with the following characteristics for grades six through eight:

1. Departmental scheduling for grade level;
2. Students in grades seven and eight must choose one elective each semester from a total offering of four;
3. Organized, structured discipline;

#### 4. Homeroom period each day.

The curriculum offered at Wahoo Middle School was very basic---English, Math, Social Studies, Science, Reading, and Spelling. There was no failing grade, but rather an incomplete grade which caused the student to complete that course before he/she could move ahead to the next course.

In observing classroom settings, the atmosphere that was predominant was one of student-centered teaching. There was a large degree of student participation, questions and answers, and student projects in many of the classes.

The attitude that prevailed was one of offering students a solid, basic education. The staff enjoyed their relationship with the students and the students that I spoke with were very positive about the teachers and the school in general. In Mr. Tillman's opinion, a school enrollment would ideally be 300 students for a school containing 6, 7, and 8th grades.

#### Convention

The National Middle School Association Annual Convention was attended by the writer. The convention was held in Dearborn, Michigan from October 30 - November 2, 1979.

The two objectives of the writer in attending this convention were to obtain information relative to middle school philosophy, curriculum and general characteristics. The second objective was to participate in small group discussions and to attend the sessions being conducted by the

experts in the broad area of middle schools to obtain specific information from the presenters' areas of expertise. These objectives were accomplished.

Practitioners were unanimous in their agreement that the middle school curriculum should be exploratory to some degree. This philosophy was put into perspective by Dr. Sherrel Bergmann. She stated that in order to accommodate middle school-age students' natural curiosity, intellectual development, and their rapidly changing interest, a curriculum must be designed to offer maximum content exposure in academic and special interest areas using a shorter concentration of time.<sup>16</sup>

The basic curriculum (Language Arts, Science, Math and Social Studies) is traditionally offered for the entire school year.

Any additions to the basic curriculum would be offered for periods of time less than the entire school year, dependent upon local needs and requirements.<sup>17</sup>

Philosophically, the middle school should be administered to offer each student the opportunity to develop a positive self-concept and to provide a setting that will

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<sup>16</sup>Statement by Dr. Sherrel Bergmann, Associate Dean, National College of Education, Evanston, Illinois, in a personal interview, Dearborn, Michigan, November 2, 1979.

<sup>17</sup>Ibid.

emphasize participation rather than competition.<sup>18</sup>

This attitude and philosophical base was shared by a majority of the practitioners and experts in attendance at this convention, as determined by conversations between the writer and those persons.

Characteristically, the middle schools offer a three-grade alignment (grades 6, 7, and 8). Emphasis is on a total program providing for a continuation of skill development (from the elementary grades) and an initiation of exploratory programs, i.e. vocational education; foreign language; extra-curricular activities, that will be continued on the high school level.<sup>19</sup>

An observation made by the writer at this convention depicted the greatest number of middle school practitioners as genuinely concerned with and knowledgeable of the social, psychological, academic and physical needs of the middle school-age students enrolled in their schools. This observation was made as a result of social conversations. The attitude displayed by most of these practitioners was one of pride, in being associated with the middle school, and willingness to share, as demonstrated by the programs,

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<sup>18</sup>Statement by Dr. Zacharie Clements, Professor of Education, University of Vermont, Keynote Speaker, First General Session, National Middle School Association Convention, Dearborn, Michigan, October 31, 1979.

<sup>19</sup>Statement by Dr. James Fox, Superintendent of Schools Mansfield, Ohio, at a small group session, Dearborn, Michigan, October 31, 1979.



planning, and total operation of their schools that were freely discussed among the convention participants.

## Chapter III

THE PLAN FOR IMPLEMENTING THE  
ELKHORN MIDDLE SCHOOL

The plan for implementing the Elkhorn Middle School was a direct result of the rapid student enrollment increase. Beginning with the 1974-75 school year, student enrollment increased eleven per cent annually through the 1978-79 school year. This increase placed two elementary buildings and the Junior-Senior High School at capacity enrollment.

During the early months of the 1977-78 school year, the writer was directed by the Board of Education and the central administration to investigate alternative student distribution patterns in an effort to deal with the capacity enrollment. The goal was to aid the Board in their planning by providing them with information in order to determine which student distribution pattern would be the most economically and educationally feasible approach for the Elkhorn School District.

The methods of investigation were very basic. The writer made personal visits to middle schools and junior high schools in the eastern and central regions of Nebraska gathering information. Information was requested from the National Association of Secondary School Principals and the National Middle Schools Association regarding the operation, management, and feasibility of the junior high school and the middle school, respectively.

In January of 1978, the writer offered to the Board the results of his investigation. The recommendation was then made to the Board that the middle school concept would best serve the educational and economic needs of the Elkhorn School District. The Board took this recommendation under advisement.

At the April, 1978 Board meeting, the Board approved the middle school plan. The writer was directed to develop an implementation plan for the Elkhorn Middle School. In support of this method of student distribution, the Board voted to present to the school district patrons a \$6.5 million bond referendum calling for a new Senior High School and a new Elementary School. The Senior High School would serve students in grades nine through twelve and the elementary schools would serve students in grades kindergarten through five. This distribution would allow the Middle School to serve grades six through eight. The adoption of this concept would be determined by the voters in December, 1978.

The final step of this planning process was the development of an implementation plan. The writer was directed by the central administration to develop this plan in order to facilitate an orderly and smooth transition from a junior-senior high school concept to a middle school concept in anticipation of the voters passing the referendum. The planning began in the fall of 1978.

The writer targeted four major areas in developing

the Elkhorn Middle School implementation plan. These areas are: Building and Enrollment Status of the Junior-Senior High School; Organizational Structure; Community Involvement; and Evaluation.

The purpose of discussing the target areas will be to offer personnel from other school districts experiencing a similar transition a plan that they could consider in implementing their middle school.

#### BUILDING AND ENROLLMENT STATUS OF THE JUNIOR-SENIOR HIGH SCHOOL

##### Enrollment

The planning for new buildings and for alternative student distribution patterns was initiated by the exceptional increase in student enrollment in the Elkhorn School District. From the 1974-75 school year through 1978-79 school year, enrollment increased throughout the District an average of eleven per cent annually. During the 1977-78 school year, the Junior-Senior High School approached capacity enrollment (775 students) with an enrollment of 715 students. The projected enrollment for the 1978-79 school year was 785 students.

The operation of the Junior-Senior High School at capacity caused the Board of Education to consider alternative student distribution patterns. In order to adopt an alternative distribution pattern, there would be a need to provide a facility for distributing those students in a

different manner.

### The Referendum

In April, 1978, the Elkhorn Board of Education approved the middle school plan. In order to adequately adopt that plan, the decision was then made to offer the District patrons the opportunity to approve or reject the plan. A \$6.5 million bond referendum would be placed on the ballot in December, 1978, calling for one new senior high school and a new elementary school to effectively deal with the tremendous enrollment increase.

In December, the patrons strongly supported the referendum by sixty per cent. This support allowed the Board, administration, and faculty to begin actively preparing for this new middle school concept.

### Student Distribution Pattern

In reaching their decision to plan for the Middle School, the Board wanted to utilize both new and existing facilities to their maximum potential. By distributing students in a kindergarten through fifth grade; sixth through eighth grade; and ninth through twelfth grade-level pattern, the three elementary buildings, the Middle School, and the Senior High School would not reach their enrollment capacities for several years. This pattern would alleviate the need for additional buildings for the immediate future.

## ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE

As was previously stated, the writer was directed by the Board at the beginning of the 1977-78 school year to investigate and report to the Board regarding alternative student distribution patterns. This process was completed in January, 1978, and in April, 1978, the Board voted to adopt the middle school concept---subject to voter approval of the referendum scheduled for December, 1978.

The writer was also directed to begin implementation plans for the Middle School in anticipation of the voters' acceptance of the referendum.

### Programmatic Review

In view of the referendum passing by the sixty percent margin, the Board determined that planning for the Middle School could begin officially. In May, 1979 the writer was named principal of the Middle School in order to begin program, curriculum and faculty planning.

During the summer months of 1979, an extensive review of literature was completed by the principal. This literature dealt exclusively with characteristics of middle schools; learning styles of middle school-age students; and traits and characteristics of middle school-age students.

### Staff Involvement

In September, 1979, the first information and planning meeting was held for all district faculty members. At this

meeting the current fifth through eighth grade faculty members were told that they would be considered first for transferring to the Middle School. The transferring process would be automatic, keeping the existing staff at their current grade levels. Individual requests for relocating would be handled individually and would be made if there were space available in the building and grade level requested.

The dates for future meetings were set in addition to explaining to those faculty members in what direction the planning for the 1980-81 school year was headed. The year (1980-81) was extremely significant, as that was the scheduled date for the opening of the Middle School.

In addition to the regularly (monthly until January, then bi-weekly through May, 1980) scheduled meetings, visitations to area middle schools were planned during October and early November, 1979. The principal determined the format to be followed for the visitations.

1. The visitation team would always include the principal and counselor.
2. The faculty members on the team would each be from a different curricular area.
3. Whenever possible, a faculty member would only serve on one team. This would allow for more faculty members to be able to serve on a visitation team.
4. Each team member was to obtain as much information

as possible regarding specific departmental organization or specific operations of the building in general that he/she felt would be of interest to the Elkhorn Middle School operation. This information would be shared at the next faculty planning meeting following the visitation.

The visitation sites were Wahoo, York and Ralston Middle Schools in Nebraska. The principal attended the National Middle Schools Association Conference in November, 1979, at which time he visited one middle school in each of the Detroit suburbs of Southfield and Madison Heights, Michigan.

#### Staff Selection

The final selection of staff was completed by November, 1979 by the Principal and by the Associate Superintendent for Curriculum and Personnel. The existing sixth, seventh and eighth grade faculty was individually interviewed by the Principal and the Associate Superintendent and offered their same teaching positions as part of the Middle School Faculty. All teachers elected to serve on the Middle School Faculty.

#### Faculty Planning Committee

At the December, 1979 monthly Middle School planning meeting, the Principal appointed three grade-level teachers representing each of the grades within the Middle School to



serve as team leaders. The team leader's responsibility was to help the Principal plan all future planning meetings; to serve as a liaison between his/her grade level and the Principal; and to serve as a discussion leader or coordinator as necessary through the summer planning sessions, ending in August, 1980.

At this same December planning meeting, the faculty was asked to give priority to the items that each grade level considered the most important for which they were to plan. As a result of this priority list, the agendas for the subsequent months for the Middle School planning meetings were established. The priority list contained the following items:

1. Curriculum
2. Scheduling
3. Activities
4. Parental Involvement
5. Reporting Student Progress
6. Extra Duty Assignments
7. Homeroom/Teacher Advisor.

### Publicity

The publicity for the Middle School was carried out in two ways. One way was the newspaper articles that appeared in area papers (Omaha World Hearld and Douglas County Gazette) carrying information to the community. The second method was the area elementary school meeting, open to the public and held at each of the three elementary schools in

the Elkhorn District.

Parents appreciated a face-to-face contact with the Principal, who was the Middle School representative at each of these three meetings. It is the opinion of this writer that by meeting with the public and keeping them informed as accurately as possible, it was possible to develop several parents into community public relations personnel who would discuss the Middle School concept in a positive and factual manner.

These three meetings were planned for March and April and were completed to the satisfaction of the Principal.

#### COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

##### Community Survey

A survey for distribution among parents of fourth through seventh grade students in the Elkhorn District was designed by the Principal and the Associate Superintendent for Curriculum. The purpose of this survey was to determine the support for the middle school concept by a limited population (those parents having children in the Middle School during the first and/or second year of operation) and which types of programs and curriculum that population felt was needed in the Middle School.

The survey was sent home with students in those grade levels (fourth through seventh) in early October, 1979. Three hundred and seventy-four were distributed. By mid-October, 1979, two hundred and fifty-eight were returned.

The survey was tabulated with that number (258) returned as no more surveys were received. The return of the surveys was sixty-nine per cent.

Of the seven survey questions, two were extremely significant to the principal. These were:

Question 1:

Are you acquainted with the Middle School concept?

210 yes

48 no

Question 3:

Do you favor this concept for Elkhorn?

207 yes

25 no

18 need more information

The complete survey and the tabulated results are found in the Appendix to this Field Project.

The results of this survey were made to the Board of Education in December, 1979 as part of a comprehensive report relative to the planning for the Middle School.

### Listening and Informing

The community involvement area contains two additional phases: listening and informing.

The listening phase includes the informal conversations and discussions between the Elkhorn District patrons and the administration in dealing with the separation of the seventh and eighth grades from the ninth through twelfth grades. This concern was given strong consideration by the

central administration and the Principal in planning for the Middle School.

The listening phase will be an on-going process with the establishment of a Parent Advisory Committee. This committee will begin meeting after the Middle School is in operation and will serve as an advisory group to the Principal and recommend to him their concerns or community feedback in improving the total Elkhorn Middle School program.

Informing the community was accomplished by the area elementary school meetings and by the establishment of Middle School Week in Elkhorn.

The last week in February, 1980, was designated by the Associate Superintendent and the Principal as Elkhorn Middle School Week. A local community room was used as an informal information center from 6:30 P.M. to 9:30 P.M. on Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday evenings of that week. The center was staffed each night by the Principal, the Counselor, a School Board Member (different one each night), faculty members and a Central Office Administrator.

The objectives of the center were to provide the entire community with another opportunity to discuss their concerns about the Middle School with any of the diversified representatives; to provide literature about the Middle School; to use audio-visual aids to explain the Middle School concept; and to serve as a first-hand information-giving service to the community.

Once the Middle School has opened, a regularly published building newsletter will be sent to all district patrons. This will inform Middle School parents as well as all other parents in the district of the programs and happenings in the Middle School.

A Parent-Teacher organization has been discussed, and there is a concern for this type of organization at the Middle School. A Parent-Teacher organization can receive and disseminate information very effectively. This method of informing the community is yet to be decided. It will be a topic for discussion at one of the first Parent Advisory Committee meetings.

The single most effective source of informing the community will be in maintaining a building that is open to the patrons. The principal and the faculty take pride in the program offered to the students. By allowing parents to gain a first hand view of the building in operation, the parents become the public relations representatives for the school. Word of mouth from neighbor-to-neighbor, discussing a positive, well-administered, and educationally effective building will enhance the community's support for that building better than any other method of school-sponsored communications.

## EVALUATION

The evaluation of the Elkhorn Middle School will be an on-going process. The purpose of the evaluation will be to determine which programs are meeting the needs of the students and which programs need to be revised or eliminated.

The evaluation will be a formal procedure using the following criteria:

1. The need for the Middle School in Elkhorn
2. The procedures, plans, and objectives used to implement and maintain the Middle School
3. The desired goals of the Middle School
4. The achieved goals of the Middle School.

Selection of the evaluation model is based upon the need to satisfy the above criteria. In the writer's opinion, the Stake Model<sup>20</sup> offers the best vehicle for accomplishing the evaluation in a comprehensive manner.

The Stake Model, named after Dr. Robert Stake, provides for the evaluator two major elements: the capacity to use both judgmental and descriptive components. The judgmental component enables the evaluator to gather reactions from students, teachers, parents, or other observers directly or indirectly involved with the Middle School. By collecting

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<sup>20</sup>B.R. Worthen and James Sanders. Educational Evaluation: Theory and Practice, (Worthington, Ohio: Jones Publishing Company, 1973) pp. 210-214.

these reactions from many sources, the judgment of the overall Middle School operation is less subject to any biases of an individual evaluator. The results of this phase of the evaluation will be reviewed by the building-level administrator for the purpose of improving the Middle School program.

The descriptive component is more objective and determines the relationship between the stated goals and objectives and the actual outcomes and results. Comparative results can be obtained by using school-wide achievement (standardized) test results, grade level reading ability throughout the building, individual course achievement as shown on the report cards, and school-wide participation in clubs or activities.

The descriptive component of a Stake evaluation program utilizes three dimensions:<sup>21</sup>

1. Antecedents - describing conditions existing prior to the program's implementation;
2. Transactional - discussing what the expected outcomes will be as a result of the program;
3. Outcome - what actually happened.

The Stake Model serves the following purposes:

1. It provides the administrator with a relationship between what was intended and what occurred;
2. It provides information from several sources

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<sup>21</sup>Ibid. p. 118.

through the judgmental component in order for the administrator to make decisions only he/she can make.

3. It provides for a broad view of the overall program. The program can be both described (subjectively) and judged (objectively) by using the dual components of this model.

The collected information is then used by the administrator to aid in his/her decisions regarding revision, elimination, or continuation of existing programs. These decisions will be partially based on input by the local population, who would have either a direct or an indirect interest in the Middle School.

This evaluation procedure can be implemented by the individual building when needed. The writer's recommendation is to undergo this evaluation after the first year and then every two years thereafter. Informal evaluation should be carried out annually by each department in order to maintain relevancy in each area.

This evaluation process will only be beneficial and foster program improvement if it is undertaken on a scheduled basis. The results must be carefully reviewed and the appropriate changes, additions, or eliminations must be made to maintain a first-rate program. Goals, objectives, programs, and personnel will only be as effective as the changes brought about by a well-planned, purposeful evaluation process.



## Chapter IV

### IMPLICATIONS OF THE PLAN

Chapter IV cites the specific implications of the plan that result from an analysis of that plan. The implications that are discussed are determined to be the most significant and relevant to the Elkhorn School District.

A review of the plan implies that a great deal of planning was necessary to implement the Middle School. A school district considering a similar realignment must complete two major tasks prior to beginning any type of implementation. Those tasks are: the selection of a leader, coordinator, or person responsible for the overall process; and the development of a master plan or timetable to guide the group that is involved through the entire implementation process.

The initial planning stage should include the accumulation of the maximum amount of information, pro and con, relative to middle schools. Periodicals, publications, reports, contacts with middle school practitioners and experts are a requisite for a broad and solid planning foundation.

The leader or coordinator is responsible for establishing the procedures to be followed from the first day of planning up to the first day of operation of the building. The leader should also assign and/or select personnel to execute these procedures.

The selection of personnel is another implication of the plan. Initial screening of prospective staff members determines if those personnel are committed to the middle school philosophy and concept. All planning that will be undertaken will be time poorly spent if the selected staff is not a flexible, committed-to-middle-grade education, enthusiastic, group of professional educators. Curriculum, scheduling, and building arrangement become meaningless if the staff does not possess the willingness to work as a team, understanding middle school-age students' characteristics, and the personality and ability to relate to these students in transition.

The selection process consisted of interviewing the existing sixth, seventh, and eighth grade faculty within the district. Positions were offered to those teachers indicating their commitment to the middle school concept and as a result of reviewing their evaluations. Any openings would then be advertised and applications would be accepted for the purpose of interviewing. In Elkhorn, the selection process was directed by the Associate Superintendent, who seeks input from the building principal. The Associate Superintendent and the current junior high counselor (who will become the Middle School Counselor) were instrumental in developing the organizational structure and the scheduling process for this building. They helped to develop the team attitude and offered significant assistance, support and

insight into the general planning and the specific area of personnel selection.

Another implication of the plan is the curriculum and scheduling phase. The determination was made by the Associate Superintendent, counselor, and principal to offer the same curricular offerings as existed in the sixth, seventh, and eighth grades. The innovation would be developed by the entire group (teachers, administration, counselor) as to which of those courses would be elective, which would be required, and at which grade level the courses would be offered. Other considerations were the length of the course (quarter, semester, year) and the frequency of the class (daily, every other day, etc.).

Scheduling proved to be the most difficult and time-consuming process in the entire implementation process. As a result of the middle school visitations that were made, the literature that was read, and the advantages that were determined by the Middle School staff, the decision was made to use a block schedule for the core curriculum (Language Arts, Math, Science, and Social Studies) and place the electives and special area classes (art, music, physical education, etc.) at a time different than the core curriculum. This would allow for a great deal of flexibility in teacher scheduling and would precipitate a team concept as a result of the necessity to plan on a weekly basis within grade level.

Other scheduling problems that occur dealt with part-time Middle School/part-time Senior High staff. Vocal music and Spanish were both to be offered but were to be taught by one person each for grades six through twelve.

The entire scheduling process involved the better part of three months to develop curriculum for each grade level and to plan for the daily scheduling. The counselor accepted this responsibility and completed the task, using the input received from faculty and administration.

The final implication deals with community involvement. The community was involved in three ways:

1. A questionnaire was sent to parents of all fourth through seventh graders in the district. The purpose of the questionnaire was to determine community attitude toward establishment of a middle school.
2. The administration, counselors, teachers, and School Board members participated in an information center, providing an informal setting to receive literature and obtain middle school information on a one-to-one basis.
3. The principal attended civic organization meetings and scheduled a meeting for any interested parents at each of the three elementary schools. The purpose of these meetings was to acquaint the community with the Middle School.

program and to answer any questions.

The success enjoyed by implementing the Elkhorn Middle School is a direct result of the commitment to the Middle School philosophy by all the people involved. The implementation was an example of a unified team effort--- including the School Board, Superintendent, Associate Superintendent, Counselor, and classroom teachers. There were disagreements and differences of opinion along the way but never did anyone sway from the basic philosophy or concepts of the Middle School. This professionalism allowed for ideas and opinions to be discussed openly and be either accepted, rejected, or held for future consideration.

It is the writer's opinion that all staff members appreciated the opportunity to offer input into the implementation of the Elkhorn Middle School, thus making them partners in the entire process. This expertise on the part of the faculty should be an integral part in the planning for any new building opening.

## Chapter V

### SUMMARY

The plan for implementing the Elkhorn Middle School will serve as a practical approach and guide to other school districts implementing middle schools.

The needs assessment for such a project should include two requirements: an accepting community and a staff and faculty that are willing to work and are committed to the middle school philosophy. There were no curriculum experts, no child or educational psychologists, nor any nationally renowned consultants locally involved in implementing this Middle School. Information was obtained from existing faculty of grades six through eight, visitations made to area middle schools, and literature related to the middle schools. This information was discussed, accepted or rejected, then modified by the faculty and staff to fit the needs of the middle grade students of Elkhorn.

The time that was given to plan for this concept was adequate. One year of actual program planning allowed this group to move at a steady but unhurried pace to have all the phases of implementation met and the building ready for operation.

As this is a first experience in planning a new educational concept for a school district, the one ingredient that stands out is the willingness of many on the faculty to share and work at making this a successful educational

venture. It would be very easy for the group to leave all planning and input on decision making to the administrator, but this group has been active in determining the curriculum and programming for their building and offering what they feel is best for the students of Elkhorn. This cooperation and this support have been from the central office as well.

Finally, timing must be right to make any major change in educational concept. Factors to consider are; buildings at capacity enrollment, and community demand.

In Elkhorn, the Junior-Senior High School is at capacity and the district passed a bond referendum that included five million dollars for a Senior High School. Also the community has become very vocal in favor of the separation of the Senior High from the Junior High.

The plans have been implemented and beginning with the 1980-81 school year, the Elkhorn School District will proudly open its team effort project: The Elkhorn Middle School.

## APPENDICES



ELKHORN PUBLIC SCHOOLS  
 QUESTIONNAIRE  
 For 4-5-6-7 Grade Parents

Beginning next year (1980-81), our ninth through twelfth grade students will be moving from our current Jr./Sr. High building to the new High School Building. With this in mind, the Elkhorn Public School District has been studying the merits of the middle school idea - a school for students in grades 6, 7, and 8. In our opinion the middle school is extremely sound from both educational and "age-grouping" points of view.

We would like to have your opinion regarding the middle school plan. Please answer the following questions carefully after you have had some time to read and discuss them with your family.

Question 1:

Have you read or are you acquainted with the Middle School concept?

\_\_\_\_\_ YES                      \_\_\_\_\_ NO

Question 2: (If the answer to #1 is YES, please complete Question 2)

How were you first made aware of the Middle School concept? (Check as many responses as are appropriate)

\_\_\_\_\_ From your children

\_\_\_\_\_ From "Highlights" (Elkhorn District Newsletter)

\_\_\_\_\_ From having previously attended a Middle School

\_\_\_\_\_ From newspaper or magazine articles

\_\_\_\_\_ From friends or neighbors

\_\_\_\_\_ Other (Please list)

Question 3:

In your opinion is the proposed sixth, seventh, and eighth grade arrangement a good arrangement for meeting the educational needs of youngsters in our District?

\_\_\_\_\_ YES          \_\_\_\_\_ NO          \_\_\_\_\_ NEED MORE INFORMATION

Please Comment:

Question 4:

In addition to the major subject areas (Math, Reading, Language Art, Social Studies, and Sciences) please indicate which of the following courses of study you would like to have included in the curriculum. (Check as many as you wish)

\_\_\_\_\_ Physical Ed. & Health

\_\_\_\_\_ Vocal Music

\_\_\_\_\_ Instrumental Music

\_\_\_\_\_ Home Economics

\_\_\_\_\_ Industrial Arts

\_\_\_\_\_ Foreign Language

\_\_\_\_\_ Art

\_\_\_\_\_ Career Education

\_\_\_\_\_ Business Education

\_\_\_\_\_ Other - Please List:

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Question 5:

In your opinion, which of the following types of activities are appropriate for Middle School youngsters?

\_\_\_\_\_ Special Interest Clubs (i.e. Foreign Language)

\_\_\_\_\_ Intramural Sports (after school hours, but no competition with other school districts)

\_\_\_\_\_ Inter Scholastic Sports (competing against other school districts)

\_\_\_\_\_ Cheerleading

\_\_\_\_\_ Spirit Club

\_\_\_\_\_ Hobby Clubs (i.e. Photography Club)

\_\_\_\_\_ Other - Please List:

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Question 6:

Would you be in favor of a P.T.O. at the Middle School level?

\_\_\_\_\_ YES      \_\_\_\_\_ NO      \_\_\_\_\_ NEED MORE INFORMATION

Question 7:

Would you be available to attend informational meetings regarding the Middle School concept?

\_\_\_\_\_ YES      \_\_\_\_\_ NO

Please return this questionnaire with your child on or before October 29, 1979.

Your answers will be used to assist the Board of Education, Administration, and teachers in building a strong educational program for Middle School aged youngsters.

Thank you for taking time to assist us in this important task.

For further information, please call:

Barry Stark  
289-2428

ELKHORN PUBLIC SCHOOLS  
QUESTIONNAIRE  
For 4-5-6-7 Grade Parents

Number Distributed: 374  
Number Returned: 258  
Percentage Returned: 69%

QUESTION 1:

Are you acquainted with the Middle School concept?

210 YES  
48 NO

QUESTION 2:

How were you first made aware of the Middle School concept?

66 From your children  
90 From Highlights (Elkhorn District Newsletter)  
31 Previously attended a Middle School  
38 Newspaper or magazine articles  
82 Friends or neighbors  
50 Other

QUESTION 3:

Do you favor this concept for Elkhorn?

207 YES  
25 NO  
18 Need More Information

QUESTION 4:

In addition to major subject areas, what courses of study would you like to have included?

203 Physical Ed. & Health  
161 Vocal Music

168 Instrumental Music  
157 Home Economics  
124 Industrial Arts  
155 Foreign Language  
166 Art  
93 Career Education  
67 Business Education

QUESTION 5:

Which types of activities do you feel are appropriate for Middle School youngsters?

107 Special Interest Clubs  
145 Intramural Sports  
105 Inter Scholastic Sports  
88 Cheerleading  
73 Spirit Club  
146 Hobby Clubs

QUESTION 6:

Would you be in favor of a P.T.O. at this level?

162 YES  
61 NO  
3 Need more information

QUESTION 7:

Would you attend informational meetings regarding the Middle School concept?

189 YES  
51 NO

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