

District 64 launches review of middle school program linked to 2020 Vision Strategic Plan

Park Ridge-Niles School District 64 has launched a review of its middle school program linked to its *2020 Vision Strategic Plan*. District 64 currently educates more than 1,500 students in grades 6-8 at Lincoln and Emerson middle schools.

“We have two great middle schools in District 64, but our continuous improvement mindset embodied in our *2020 Vision Strategic Plan* drives us to seek ways to grow,” Superintendent Laurie Heinz announced. “We want to ensure that our educational program includes opportunities that prepare students to be successful while in District 64 and when they head to high school and beyond,” she noted.

“As the Strategic Plan points out, our students will face a world in which access to knowledge and integration of technology will continue to grow, evolve, and change at a rapid pace,” Dr. Heinz observed. “To be ready for these unknown challenges, we must engage our students with a rich and rigorous curriculum and prepare them to be creative, innovative, agile, and resourceful problem-solvers,” she added.

District 64 most recently reviewed its middle school program beginning in 2006; a previous study was initiated in 1993.

District 64’s 29-person review committee is well-rounded, and includes teachers and administrators from both schools and representation from core and encore subjects, as well as all grades levels, according to Assistant Superintendent for Student Learning Lori Lopez.

“The committee is bringing staff together to explore diverse perspectives, seek shared understanding, and clarify goals for supporting student learning,” Dr. Lopez pointed out. “Program reviews enable us to clarify the vision and mission for our middle schools and to align our practices to support them,” she noted.

The committee launched its work this month and is being guided by Association of Middle Level Education (AMLE) consultant Dr. Ann McCarty. AMLE is the leading international organization focused exclusively on the unique needs of adolescent learners. Dr. McCarty is a member of AMLE’s Leadership faculty and has guided similar middle school study teams in other districts. She is the Executive Director of Teaching & Learning for the Bowling Green City Schools in Ohio, and previously served as a middle school administrator and teacher.

The committee’s initial discussions were framed around the [*16 Characteristics of Effective Middle Schools*](#) based on AMLE’s landmark position paper, [*This We Believe: Keys to Educating Young Adolescents*](#).

“Research and cumulative, empirical evidence have confirmed that these 16 characteristics, when present over time, lead to higher levels of student achievement and overall development,” AMLE reports.

As work continues, the committee will actively seek feedback from all stakeholders. District 64 will conduct a ThoughtExchange online conversation later this fall with staff, parents and community members. This is the second ThoughtExchange District 64 has conducted; the first in spring 2016 was focused on the Strategic Plan. Middle school students themselves also will be included in the process through focus groups conducted by Dr. McCarty.

The committee will provide consultative feedback to help inform a recommendation from District 64’s administration to the Board of Education later this school year. Progress updates will be available via the Middle School Program Review webpage on the [d64.org website](http://d64.org) and via the District 64 eNews newsletter. All community members are welcome to [subscribe to the eNews](#) via the website.