

Executive Summary

Durham Public Schools

6th-8th Grades

What is the purpose of the project?

The developmental project is a summary report on child development at the sixth through eighth grade level. It was created to share with the district's superintendent, board of education, parents, and newly hired sixth through eighth grade teachers what students should be able to do developmentally at this age.

How was the project created?

The project was created through the use of school visit data as well as child development research, predominantly from Chip Wood's *Yardsticks: Children in the Classroom, Ages 4-14*. The project team conducted half-day visits to three of the district's middle schools.

What are the primary findings of the project?

Students in this age range need classroom activities that are both challenging and engaging while also providing for the opportunity to work cooperatively with their peers. They need frequent opportunities for movement and can benefit from flexible seating in their classroom.

While a developmentally appropriate ELA and math curricula are essential, it is also important to begin to teach students in this age range how to be members of a democratic society. With this comes the need for these students to be taught social-emotional skills that will allow them to be productive members of society.

Students in this age range need to be in a classroom environment that is nurturing with positive language. They need opportunities to fail and to learn and grow from their mistakes. They need frequent opportunities to express their creativity and individuality as well.

Students in this age group are impulsive, have worries about school and inclusion, and are sensitive to peer pressure. They also need adult empathy, time to talk to peers, and have an expanded view of the world around them.

How is the school district meeting the needs of students in grades 3-5?

Durham Public Schools seeks to serve the needs of each of our students. Many things that should be happening for students in grades 6 through 8 are happening. Most middle schools have developmentally appropriate math and ELA curriculums. These curriculums involve students in challenging activities and exercises and hold students to high expectations.

Positive language is used throughout the schools in the district, predominantly through Capturing Kids Hearts and PBIS, all approaches to behavior management, teaching, and learning. The district is in the midst of incorporating restorative practices into all middle schools, which will allow discipline to be restorative rather than punitive.

There is some focus on social/emotional learning in pockets of Durham middle schools. There is no set curriculum; however, some schools are beginning to pilot Second Step or Zones of Regulation.

There are a few essential missing resources. First off, all students do not have access to a research-based, vetted, and spiraling curriculum. Some schools have a curriculum, while others are forced to cobble together resources to create their own. This is likely to put students in these schools at a disadvantage when compared to their peers at schools with solid curricula. The district is currently in the process of selecting and adopting both ELA and math curricula for middle schools across the district, which will allow each of its students equitable access to learning materials.

Also, students do not have adequate access to mental health services. The district needs more school counselors, social workers, and mental health professionals to work with these students. Mental and emotional health should not be a barrier to students' academic growth.