



Middle Grades Experience Working Group Update

School Committee Meeting - June 8, 2026

Who We Are?

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Strategy

Our Mission

A working group formed to design a clearly defined middle-grade program tailored to the developmental needs of sixth–eighth grade students and to prepare them effectively for the transition to secondary education.

What is the problem we are trying to solve?

- ❖ **Explore** the middle school experience and improve upon it
- ❖ **Identify** maintain and scale best practices
- ❖ **Prepare** students for the ninth grade and beyond
- ❖ **Develop** recommendations for implementation and training

Our Vision

Somerville Public Schools' middle schools cultivate **curious, capable, and compassionate** young people who are ready to thrive in high school and beyond. Through meaningful opportunities for **voice and choice**, students explore a wide range of interests, ideas, and perspectives, developing a strong sense of identity and purpose.

Middle school classrooms prioritize **rigorous instruction** paired with **responsive intervention** so that every student is **supported, challenged, and prepared** for the demands of high school. Students build **habits of mind**—such as perseverance, collaboration, critical thinking, and responsibility—that help them become thoughtful learners and engaged community members.

An architectural rendering of a modern, multi-story building with a prominent glass facade and a large, white, grid-like structure on the upper levels. The building is set in an urban environment with a sidewalk, streetlights, and other buildings in the background. The entire image is overlaid with a semi-transparent blue filter. The text "Our Process" is centered in the middle of the image in a white, bold, sans-serif font.

Our Process

What We Did

- We met 8 times for approximately 12 hrs
- We created sub-committees
- We surveyed students & educators
- We reviewed data and research
- We developed recommendations

Our Sub-Committees

1. Developmental Experience
2. Readiness/Transition
3. Data & Stakeholder Input
4. Scheduling

Data & Resources

- ★ Principal surveys (SY24-25)
- ★ Middle grade & 9th grade educator surveys (SY25-SY26)
- ★ District-wide middle school schedules
- ★ Student surveys (still awaiting results)
- ★ Report card samples
- ★ Placement results for 9th grade courses
- ★ District materials (Strategic Plan, Vision for Excellent Instruction, DILT presentation)
- ★ Research/modules (Yardsticks, New Solutions K-12)
- ★ *And more...*

Key Themes

Strengths

- ❖ **Leadership structures are already in place:** All schools report leadership opportunities, 6/6 participate in SEAT, 5/6 have student council, and 5/6 have reading buddies.
- ❖ **Students bring important readiness strengths:** 9th grade teachers identified reading fluency/stamina and collaborative work skills as strengths.
- ❖ **Transition supports already exist:** Schools are using K-8 visits, student visits to the high school, high school orientation, and Highlander Habits as a foundation.

Key Themes

Areas for growth:

- ❖ **Increase consistency and equitable access:** Much of this work is already happening, but access to voice, choice, leadership, specials, and transition supports varies by school and student schedule.
- ❖ **Strengthen academic independence and executive function:** 9th grade teachers reported gaps in students completing independent work, with broader needs around organization, time management, and high school preparedness.
- ❖ **Systematize vertical alignment:** Educators expressed interest in more structured academic alignment across grades, especially between middle grades and high school.

An architectural rendering of a modern, multi-story building with a prominent glass facade and a large, cantilevered upper section. The building is set in an urban environment with a paved plaza, a young tree, and a group of people walking. The entire image is overlaid with a semi-transparent green filter. The text "Our Recommendations" is centered in white, bold font.

Our Recommendations

1. Create a Districtwide Middle Grades Framework

Develop a shared grades 6–8 framework for ***choice, leadership, student voice, and executive function skill-building***. Ensure every student has access regardless of school, special education, or multilingual learner

2. Ensure Consistent Leadership Opportunities

Guarantee each middle grades student access to at least one meaningful ***leadership opportunity*** annually. Offer opportunities during the school day when possible, including X Block, advisory, lunch, SEAT, school council, peer mentoring, service projects, or student-led activities.

3. Expand World Language Access

Treat Spanish and/or another world language as part of the core middle grades experience. Build from existing pilots, including Healey’s 6th grade Spanish model, and identify schools for phased expansion in 2026–27 and beyond.

4. Build Habits of Learning and Executive Function Skills

Create a middle grades version of ***Highlander Habits*** focused on organization, time management, academic independence, study skills, problem-solving, and self-advocacy. Reinforce these skills through classes, advisory, X Block, and transition activities.

5. Strengthen 6–9 Vertical Alignment

Create **structured collaboration** between middle grades and 9th grade educators by subject area. Use paid summer work and CPT to align grading, content expectations, student work review, and placement/readiness practices.

6. Make High School Transition Supports More Coherent

Curate existing 8th grade readiness activities and connect them to MyCAP, advisory, Highlander Habits/BE SHS, 9th grade orientation, and X Block so students experience a **clearer transition** into high school.

7. Pilot, Reflect, and Scale

Identify schools already **piloting** or ready to pilot key models in 2026–27, including **choice-based specialists**, 6th grade Spanish, language blocks, peer mentoring, and expanded leadership. Convene educators, administrators, and students in January 2027 to review implementation and recommend next steps.

8. Expand Mentorship Opportunities

Use peer mentor pilots and the ECHO project to explore **middle school mentoring**, reading buddies, and possible 10th–12th grade mentorship for 9th graders during X Block.

Implementation

- ❖ **Convene summer work groups** by subject/priority area, with stipends and facilitation
- ❖ **Pilot in 2026–27** at schools already testing or ready to test key models
- ❖ **Use existing structures** such as CPT and PD for ongoing implementation support
- ❖ **Monitor progress throughout the year** using educator, student, administrator and family feedback
- ❖ **Reconvene in January 2027** to review pilots, identify lessons learned, and plan for scale
- ❖ **Provide clear facilitation and accountability** so recommendations move from planning to practice



Thank you!!