



## Mid South Middle Start School Reform Initiative Boosts Student Achievement in Mississippi Middle-Grade Schools

A longitudinal study by the Center for Prevention Research and Development (CPRD) at the University of Illinois finds that five Mississippi middle-grade schools involved in the Mid South Middle Start school reform initiative, sponsored by the **Foundation for the Mid South (FMS)** show gains in student achievement. Analysis of statewide academic achievement data reveals that Mississippi Mid South Middle Start schools outpaced a state comparison group of schools:

	Percent Passing at Proficient or Advanced <sup>1</sup>			
	2001	2002	2003	Gain
<b>7<sup>th</sup> Grade Reading</b>				
Mid South Middle Start schools	35.7	40.1	43.9	8.2
State comparison group schools <sup>2</sup>	42.9	48.4	50.5	7.6
<b>8<sup>th</sup> Grade Reading</b>				
Mid South Middle Start schools	27.1	29.4	39.3	12.2
State comparison group schools	36.5	37.6	45.4	8.9
<b>7<sup>th</sup> Grade Math</b>				
Mid South Middle Start schools	20.6	27.8	35.8	15.2
State comparison group schools	26.2	32.1	39.6	13.4
<b>8<sup>th</sup> Grade Math</b>				
Mid South Middle Start schools	21.9	27.3	29.2	7.3
State comparison group schools	26.5	33.0	36.0	9.5

<sup>1</sup> As measured by the Mississippi Curriculum Test (MCT).

<sup>2</sup> State comparison group schools (124 schools) are Mississippi public schools with comparable percentages of free/reduced-priced lunch students to Mid South Middle Start schools (72% or more).

### Key findings:

- Mississippi Mid South Middle Start schools show larger gains in 7<sup>th</sup> grade reading, 8<sup>th</sup> grade reading, and 7<sup>th</sup> grade math achievement scores from 2001 to 2003 than a state comparison group of schools with the same percentage of free/reduced-priced lunch students. The state comparison group, however, show larger gains in 8<sup>th</sup> grade math scores.
- Mississippi Mid South Middle Start schools follow the statewide achievement trends for reading and math. For both subjects, Middle Start schools show larger gains than the state.
- Although Mid South Middle Start schools have slightly lower achievement scores than the state comparison group in both 2001 and 2003, their gains in achievement have begun to close the gap in scores by 2003.
- Research has demonstrated that increases in academic achievement are not usually measurable until 4-5 years after implementation of comprehensive school reform programs. The progress of the Mississippi Mid South Middle Start schools is, therefore, encouraging and further progress remains likely.

### Mid South Middle Start Initiative

The Mid South Middle Start Initiative is a component of FMS's Educational program area. The purpose of Middle Start is to help build and foster a regional movement to improve middle-level education in the Mid South. It seeks to accomplish this through building the capacity of schools to restructure their campus following a research-based middle level model of educational reform. Middle Start seeks to make the Mid South a region that is characterized by high-performing middle schools for young

adolescents that are developmentally responsive, academically excellent, and socially equitable. It assists schools in accomplishing six goals related to practice, policy, and public support:

- To improve academic outcomes;
- To encourage changes in policies and practices;
- To build capacity within the region;
- To improve curriculum and instruction;
- To increase public awareness, and
- To foster schools' collaboration with the private sector and community agencies.

### Mid South Middle Start Services

Guided by current research and practice emphasizing the developmental needs of young adolescents, Mid South Middle Start schools receive the following services:

- **An on-site coach** who works one-on-one with a school leadership team and links the school with high-quality professional development programs that address the school's specific teaching and learning priorities;
- **Administration of the School Improvement Self-Study surveys**, analysis of results, and professional development in using the results to refine school improvement goals;
- **A regional partnership** of agencies, universities, and advocacy groups that create a local network of institutional support and services; and
- **Ongoing leadership** workshops and school networking conferences.

### Mid South Middle Start Principals Comment on the Initiative

"Middle Start has provided our school with a blueprint for success. We have received so much support and guidance over the past three years. This blueprint and support has laid the foundation for true change in our school. This change will surely benefit many students for years to come. We are constantly engaged in self-reflection, study, and implementation of those practices that will benefit middle level students." Middle Start Principal

"Our school could not have been as functional without the help and guidance of Mid South Middle Start. The various programs and workshops that were initiated through this effort have been instrumental in our benchmark test scores improving." Middle Start Teacher

"Through Mid South Middle Start, we are learning to tap into the resources of our teachers, parents, community, churches, and philanthropic organizations." Middle Start Principal

#### Mid South Middle Start Partnership

Mid South Middle Start is a middle-grades reform initiative undertaken by the Foundation for the Mid South, with the support of the W. K. Kellogg Foundation and in collaboration with the Academy for Educational Development, the Center for Prevention Research and Development at the University of Illinois, and school and other educational organizations in Arkansas, Louisiana, and Mississippi.

The Mid South Middle Start Partnership guides and supports schools in the following areas:

- Orientation to Middle Start.
- Administration and review of the school Self-Study.
- Assistance in creating, implementing, and refining a school improvement action plan.
- Assistance in selecting professional development.
- Leadership development and networking.
- Statewide networking.
- Coordination, support, research, and management.

**For more information about Mid South Middle Start, please contact:**



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