Editorial Remarks:
Organizing for Equity in the Middle Grades

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For this theme issue, we invited middle level scholars to consider how organizational structures in middle level education can foster equitable learning outcomes for young adolescents. The resulting five essays explore the structure of middle grades schooling from a range of perspectives, from the conceptual framing offered by Main, Pomykal Franz, Falbe, and Ellerbrock to the concrete suggestions by Brown. Each of these authors thoughtfully examines the potential of middle grades organizational structures to advance socially just and equitable learning for young adolescents.

In her essay, Andrews begins by providing us with a historical and cultural discussion of how middle grades philosophy and practice came to be. She notes the White supremacist origins of high schools and junior schools and how John Lounsbury advocated for the middle school concept. Andrews explain how the middle grades structures of detracking, interdisciplinary teaming, and flexible scheduling can support equity and justice. Throughout her piece, Andrews emphasizes the importance of relationships and creating spaces for belonging.

Next, authors Main, Pomykal Franz, and Ellerbrock explore how to promote equity and social justice in middle schools through their framework of people, place, and time. This essay relies on a previous article by Ellerbrock et al. (2018) to make the case that *how* middle grades structures are implemented affords particular outcomes for certain groups of students. They encourage us, as middle level scholars, to be cognizant of what those outcomes may be when advocating for one change over another. Their examination of people explores how students and teachers can be organized to create equitable opportunities in interdisciplinary teams. They see place as any location wherever young adolescents are learning and assert that

these settings require us to implement the middle school concept in those spaces in order for equitable learning to happen. Finally, they advocate for flexible schedules to provide time for project-based, in-depth authentic learning.

Brown bases his essay on his many school visits over the course of his career, as a professor and on behalf of school districts. His specific recommendations address policy and organizational changes ranging from developing a mission statement to flexible scheduling, to interdisciplinary teaming structures. In the end Brown sees the process of having these conversations about making schools more equitable as the most encouraging aspect of the transformation of socially just middle schools.

While the previous three essays discuss multiple structures for more equitable learning, Moulton directs his attention to one: a safe, tightly knit advisory system. Building from Gay's concept of culturally responsive pedagogy (2000), Moulton walks us through the obstacles and opportunities that exist when creating an advisory system that is culturally responsive and sustaining for all young adolescents and educators.

Finally, Smith wraps up this special issue by setting these essays in the socio-political context of today. She describes the tensions in understanding the purpose of schooling. Referencing Ladson-Billings (1995) and Paris (2012), Smith argues that, as educators pursuing just practice in this contemporary context, we should critically examine the organizational structures of middle grades schooling. Smith then walks us through how the integration of culturally relevant/sustaining pedagogy with five structures of middle grades practice - teaming, advisory, flexible scheduling, and grouping - can support a socially just learning environment for young adolescents.

References

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