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A Walk-through for Each Recommendation

Gauge your school community's progress in enacting the California Department of Education's 12 Recommendations for Middle Grades Success.

With each checklist, a person can walk through the school and capture a snapshot of evidence that the school community is implementing one of the California Department of Education's (CDE) 12 Recommendations for Middle Grades Success.

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Recommendation 1—Rigor

This walk-through checklist is provided to help school teams informally gauge their progress in implementing the Recommendation on rigor.

Check	Evidence of recommendation implementation
	All adults use a variety of strategies to communicate to students high expectations for college and career.
	Schoolwide communications keep students and parents informed about high expectations.
	Grade-level standards and standards-based reporting are explained in school newsletters, Web pages, and to parents at meetings, through progress reports, e-mails, and phone calls.
	Hallways and classrooms feature examples of high-quality student writing, math, science, history, and creative projects with meaningful teacher commentary.
	Teachers work together to choose exemplars of student work that demonstrate grade-level proficiency.
	There is observable evidence that instructional commentary and timely feedback from teachers are not unique to some classrooms, but an expectation for all classrooms.
	Teachers post daily/weekly agendas in classrooms and on a Web pages; students use personal planners to stay organized.
	When asked, students and teachers can explain how the lessons or activities in which they are engaged will help them meet targeted standard(s).
	All students can explain what they must know and be able to do to meet the performance level required of the standard(s).
	Exemplars of previous student work with teacher commentary are posted in the classroom so that students know the expectations for quality work.
	There is observable evidence in student portfolios that students have received timely and meaningful feedback ("instructional commentary") from their teacher that will assist them with revising their work.
	Students can explain how they use teacher feedback to revise their work until it meets or exceeds the proficient level.
	The campus has a high-quality library/media room and homework lab where students receive daily tutoring and have access before, during, and after school.

	Administrators, teachers, and counselors can explain independently the school's numerous coordinated strategies to help each student achieve grade-level proficiency and academic literacy.
	There is evidence that the teachers scaffold the lessons with visuals, mind maps, graphic organizers, academic vocabulary, and other preparatory organizers.
	There is an articulated schoolwide plan to provide additional time and help each student learn when he or she cannot meet expectations and keep up with the rigorous curriculum.
	Intervention opportunities are accessible to every student during and beyond the school day.
	There is evidence from portfolios, pacing guides, and lesson plans that all teachers in a department are covering the breadth, depth, and rigor of grade-level standards.
	Teachers use current instructional materials adopted by the State Board of Education as the foundation for grade-level curriculum.
	Each student is provided with the materials necessary to complete high-quality work.
	Each classroom posts the day's standard(s) on the board, and the lesson reflects the grade-level rigor expected of the standard.
	Rubrics for evaluating student performance levels are clearly visible and aligned to both the assignment and the standards.

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Recommendation 2—Instruction, Assessment, and Intervention

This walk-through checklist is provided to help school teams informally gauge their progress in implementing the Recommendation on instruction, assessment, and intervention.

Check	Evidence of recommendation implementation
	Instruction
	Students in all classes are observed actively engaged in such exercises as:
	▪ Academic literacy: Reading challenging material, writing multi-paragraph compositions, and speaking or presenting
	▪ Discussing and summarizing
	▪ Answering or posing questions and hypotheses
	▪ Demonstrating
	▪ Calculating
	▪ Practicing
	▪ Applying new knowledge
	▪ Participating in simulations and laboratories
	▪ Taking notes while actively listening
	▪ Graphing and mind mapping
	▪ Researching
	▪ Solving problems
	▪ Organizing their work
	▪ Developing study skills

	■ Reviewing, correcting, and editing work
	■ Working on projects or conducting research as a whole class or in small teams.
	There are posted, observable, standards-based rubrics for open-ended assignments and grading criteria for other assignments.
	High levels of student engagement, critical thinking, or challenging grade-level work are evident on bulletin boards and in portfolios.
	Students are seen demonstrating their competence and mastery of standards in a variety of ways.
	If interviewed, students can explain which concepts they are learning.
	Any given student's schedule indicates that she or he has taken, or is on course to take, classes in all the recommended and required middle grades subjects (English-language arts, mathematics, history/social science, science, physical education, health, visual and performing arts, foreign/world language, and career education).
	Lesson plans indicate that students are receiving grade-level, standards-based, interdisciplinary assignments.
	There is evidence that student assignments are routinely evaluated by teachers. Student work has been evaluated by the teacher and has meaningful written suggestions for improvement.
	Assessment
	Teachers' syllabi and grading records reflect use of common, grade-level assessments in every classroom on a regular schedule, including quizzes, assignments, projects, oral reports, and tests.
	Teacher team agendas and minutes reflect frequent meetings to review the results of common assessments and discuss how to adapt instruction to help more students reach proficiency.
	Students are engaged in accelerated academic interventions before, during, and after school.
	There is an articulated, schoolwide plan to provide additional time and help each student learn when he or she cannot meet expectations or keep up with the rigorous curriculum.
	Intervention
	There is evidence that teachers differentiate instruction for students who have not yet attained proficiency.
	Teachers are observed tutoring individual students.
	Teachers and students discuss study skills they use to reinforce learning.
	Student work and activity is convincingly aligned to grade-level standards. ■ If work is not at grade level for all students, the teacher can clearly articulate (orally or through the lesson plan pacing guide) how the work or activity will scaffold up to grade-level standards. ■ If work is not at grade level for some students, the teacher can clearly articulate the differentiated plan of instruction for students with specific needs.

	The teacher can clearly articulate (from the results of common assessments) what students have learned and still need to know.

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Recommendation 3—Time

This walk-through checklist is provided to help school teams informally gauge their progress in implementing the Recommendation on time.

Check	Evidence of recommendation implementation
	The school's master schedule reflects all courses outlined in California *Education Code*, Section 51220, including English/language arts, history/social sciences, mathematics (eighth-grade algebra), science, foreign language, physical education, health, visual and performing arts, and career education.
	The school/district complies with and monitors implementation of recommended instructional minutes for the adopted programs of reading/language arts and mathematics
	The school's master schedule reflects that core courses and academic intervention courses occur during the same block so that students can easily move back into the grade-level courses after mastering intervention courses.
	Flexible scheduling allows all students enough time during class for extended inquiry-based projects and hands-on experiences.
	Flexible scheduling allows time for all students to revise their work based on feedback from teachers until they meet or exceed California standards.
	Teachers make adequate time during each class to go over the homework instructions and ensure that all students understand how to do the homework.
	There is an articulated, schoolwide plan to provide additional time and help each student learn when he or she cannot meet expectations or keep up with the rigorous curriculum.
	A copy of the "elective course wheel" illustrates numerous opportunities for all students to experience and explore interest-based subjects.
	A counselor is present on campus to assist students facing difficulties and challenges; the counselor's schedule is accessible to all students and reflects available counseling time.
	There are regularly scheduled assemblies and celebrations to promote student bonding and build school community. These are publicized in the school calendar, in newsletters, and on the school Web site.
	Student attendance records or sign-in logs show high participation rates in before-, during, and after-school enrichment courses, academic interventions, and extracurricular activities.

	The master schedule allots time for a daily advisory class for every student.
	The schedule includes regular opportunities for teachers to sponsor clubs and coach athletic teams.
	Agendas and the school schedule show that teacher teams meet regularly to collaboratively plan rigorous lessons, develop common/schoolwide assessments, evaluate formative/benchmark assessments for remediation and enrichment, and review individual student evaluation strategies to know what each student has learned and still needs to learn.
	Regularly scheduled late start/early release days allow for department and grade-level meetings.

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Recommendation 4—Relevance

This walk-through checklist is provided to help school teams informally gauge their progress in implementing the Recommendation on relevance.

Check	Evidence of recommendation implementation
	Catalog of course offerings lists a rich set of core classes and a wide variety of electives or enrichment opportunities from which all students may choose.
	Technology is used for classroom instruction and for student use in every classroom. Technology in the library/media center is used to enhance both core content and academic interventions.
	Visual and performing arts (VAPA) instruction is offered in elective courses and integrated throughout the curriculum.
	Examples of student creative expression, including essays, poetry, and artwork are displayed throughout the school, district, and the community.
	Teachers and students can discuss the coordinated, schoolwide career exploration strand and the benefits of the annual career fair.
	Students can explain the connections between their lessons and the real world.
	Students can explain how their service-learning projects develop citizenship skills, address real-world problems, align with personal and career interests, and improve their school, community, state, nation, and the world.
	Student assemblies, drama offerings, art displays, book selections, and library/media center materials demonstrate multicultural appreciation.
	School staff members can discuss adolescent characteristics and how to engage their students as learners.
	Teachers regularly introduce cross-curricular connections and reinforce them with projects involving research and project-based learning.
	Students can describe how classrooms, schoolwide communications, and school events feature opportunities for student expression, student leadership, and a forum for student issues.

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Recommendation 5—Relationships

This walk-through checklist is provided to help school teams informally gauge their progress in implementing the Recommendation on relationships.

Check	Evidence of recommendation implementation
	Teachers, administrators, and support staff are observed greeting students and one another with respect, courtesy, and enthusiasm. School staff members know students by name and greet them as they walk around campus.
	Teachers explain how regular collaboration in grade-level and department teams fosters close collegial relationships and how staff interactions model caring behaviors for the students.
	Students can list and describe the school's wide variety of co-curricular options and how these opportunities reinforce peer relationships.
	Students feel a sense of safety and comfort because classrooms are orderly. Each classroom is bright, clean, and covered with colorful, interesting, and informative posters, lists of the standards, and examples of student work. Teachers arrange chairs and desks so students can face each other and get to know each other better.
	Students can explain how their small learning communities (grade-level teams) allow them to know and be known by a small group of teachers and by a core group of students and how that encourages them to communicate matters of concern to teachers.
	Counselors, advisors, or teachers loop (have multi-year relationships) with students during their middle grades experience.
	Staff and students can explain how advisory periods allow time for all students to discuss issues of concern with a caring adult.
	All students can identify their adult mentor with whom they discuss and plan their academic and career goals.

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Recommendation 6—Transitions

This walk-through checklist is provided to help school teams informally gauge their progress in implementing the Recommendation on transitions.

Check	Evidence of recommendation implementation
	The school calendar lists events that help family members understand how to prepare their students for the middle grades.
	A binder includes copies of fliers that notify non-English speaking parents about translation services or special events to introduce them to the middle grades.
	The school calendar shows that each year the school community hosts a series of welcoming events to help students make the transition to the middle grades.
	The counseling staff can explain strategies and events that help eighth-grade students and parents prepare for high school. The school staff members can discuss intervention and nonpromotion options that help students whose skills are not at grade level prepare for high school.
	Department team members can explain how curricula, assessments, and instructional materials are aligned with both feeder elementary schools and destination high schools to ensure that students continue through a coherent progression from one grade level to the next.
	There are articulation meetings with faculty members of both feeder elementary schools and destination high schools.
	There are articulation agreements with faculty members of both feeder elementary schools and destination high schools. Articulation plans are kept in departmental binders. The binders include agendas, records of agreements, and copies of common assessments designed by the cross-age teams.

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Recommendation 7—Access

This walk-through checklist is provided to help school teams informally gauge their progress in implementing the Recommendation on access.

Check	Evidence of recommendation implementation
	All teachers on the campus are highly qualified according to NCLB and AB 466.
	All teachers are observed maintaining well organized classes with procedures and routines that are a part of a classroom management which allows all students the liberty to learn.
	All staff members can discuss the additional training they received to teach young adolescents and to develop academic literacy for all students, including English learners and those in special education.
	All students have access to academic content at their grade level.
	Students are observed using more than the textbook to access information, including technology to do research.
	Students are observed working on solving complex problems using higher order thinking rather than answering simple knowledge and comprehension questions.
	A three-year comparison of school data shows an upward trend in scores for all subgroups.
	Year-to-year comparisons show that the achievement gap among subgroups of the school's populations is closing.
	All teaching teams can identify students who are at risk of failing or need additional enrichment activities.
	Class schedule shows how intervention/enrichment options are available within the school day. Teacher teams can explain how intervention classes are fluid and do not keep a student tracked in remediation.
	All classrooms contain sufficient amounts of grade-level texts and materials.
	Access to technology is available in all classrooms.
	Libraries contain books representing world cultures.
	Students can tell you how they are involved in leadership roles or are represented by someone who has a

	voice in what happens at school.
	Doors are open making teachers, administrators, and staff available for students who desire to become involved or make connections.
	Student recognition displays reflect the variety of ways students have contributed to the betterment of themselves, their school, and their community.
	Records indicate that teacher teams engage in careful data analysis to see if any subgroup of students is not experiencing access to the full curricular offerings, leadership opportunities, or to any other aspects of campus life. Immediate corrections address any inequities that arise.
	Course descriptions show a wide variety of exploratory or elective classes that all students may choose to take.
	The school Web site posts co-curricular activities designed to allow students to discover new competence in areas which include sports, visual and performing arts, technology, and a variety of clubs either academically enriching or for amusement.
	All facilities are safe and decent.
	Communications from the school are available in the home languages of the students.
	Students indicate that the school policies are fair and that they have equal access to all aspects of campus life.
	Teachers have access to records that indicate that their classes are heterogeneous as they include gifted and honor students, students with disabilities, and English learners among the others.

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Recommendation 8—Safety, Resilience, and Health

This walk-through checklist is provided to help school teams informally gauge their progress in implementing the Recommendation on safety, resilience and health.

Check	Evidence of recommendation implementation
	Staff can name school practices or procedures that keep the students safe, healthy, and engaged.
	Students can explain the school's positive discipline policy, show visitors where the discipline policy is posted in hallways, student planners, and in notices to parents, and procedures for submitting anonymous tips.
	All teachers can explain classroom management strategies they use to maintain creative, supportive, and structured learning environments.
	A review of discipline and suspension data shows yearly improvement.
	A review of disciplinary actions and nonpromotion issues, broken down by subgroup, shows that the staff analyzes data to ensure equal access. Records also show corrective actions they use to address issues of inequity.
	Year-to-year comparisons show more equal distribution of disciplinary actions and of nonpromotion among all the school's subgroups.
	Photos, names, or trophies are on display to show the students who have been recognized for good character qualities.
	School Web sites or schedules show club opportunities that help develop youth assets.
	Students and adults greet each other in a respectful, caring manner, can discuss the school's expectations for civil behavior, and can explain how to resolve conflicts.
	All staff members can explain the school's bully-prevention, violence-prevention, and crisis response procedures and have received training to handle student problems.
	Service-learning projects are on display and show how students researched topics that had to do with improving the school, community, state, nation, or the world.
	Co-curricular activities have elements of building character and improving social skills.
	Student programs include required health instruction.

	Physical education classes are not just filled with physical activities, but are observed having the objective of promoting an active lifestyle, improving health, motor skill development, and better cognitive performance. The curriculum helps students develop positive social skills, learn to cooperate with others, and learn to accept responsibility for their own actions.
	The school facilities are clean and attractive.
	Adults supervise the playground, hallways, bus loading zones, and meal areas.
	Every student can say the name of an adult that he or she can turn to for support or assistance.
	A full-time counseling staff is available to provide counseling and referrals to mentors and community health services.
	Counselors can explain how they assist students beyond academics to include socio-emotional and physical issues.
	In the counseling office, there are services, or access to services, for students and their families that are having difficulties.
	The school Web site and school brochures list parent education classes such as how to help their children study, how to help their children cope with middle grades, how to get their children on track for college, and how to parent the young adolescent.
	Staff members include resource teachers, nurses, counselors, and psychologists to help students in all areas of their lives—social, emotional, intellectual, and physical.

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Recommendation 9—Leadership

This walk-through checklist is provided to help school teams informally gauge their progress in implementing the Recommendation on leadership.

Check	Evidence of recommendation implementation
	Reports and financial statements show the support given to the school by district, county, and state agencies.
	The district/school budget reflects the instructional vision of the district/school.
	Teachers and students can discuss how the principal sets the school vision for high achievement by all students and provides leadership to help each teacher team implement the vision in all activities.
	Records from team meetings show that teacher leaders keep team norms, set agendas, and report to the principal on team progress toward closing the achievement gap.
	There is an articulated schoolwide plan to provide additional time and help for all students to learn when they cannot meet expectations or keep up with the rigorous curriculum.
	Students can explain the leadership they provide in a wide variety of school activities.
	The shared vision of the school is posted throughout the school and the resulting successes are evident.
	Parents can explain the leadership they provide to help school staff achieve short- and long-term goals for student success.
	Minutes from the teacher leadership team shows that leadership is shared in that their decisions drive the school toward continual improvement and goals as stated in the vision.
	Teachers can discuss how they review school, district and state test data at regular intervals to ensure student progress and identify where improvement needs to be made.
	There are common benchmarks that teachers use for formative and summative assessment and the results drive changes in the vision and practices of the school.

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Recommendation 10—Professional Learning

This walk-through checklist is provided to help school teams informally gauge their progress in implementing the Recommendation on professional learning.

Check	Evidence of recommendation implementation
	Staff records show that only highly qualified teachers (HQT) are teaching their respective credentialed courses.
	Teachers appear to reflect the school's demographics and find ways to connect to all students.
	Agendas and minutes of staff meetings show the focus is on intensive, high quality, ongoing professional learning that is specifically relevant to middle grades students.
	Agendas and minutes of staff meetings show that the school's teachers share best practices, strategies, and success stories.
	Teachers, through proper training, are seen as being sensitive to young adolescents' physical, intellectual, emotional, and ethical growth. They are trained to recognize age-related problems.
	Every staff member can describe the content and the focus of ongoing professional development both in the school and from outside trainings.
	Professional development agendas show commitment to learning about how to provide specific feedback to enhance student learning.
	Staff meeting agendas show schoolwide professional development to help teachers learn how to tie lessons to grade-level standards.
	All teaching team members can describe and report the benefits of the support and training they receive to function as a professional learning community, including coaching, mentoring, and peer observations.
	Agendas from weekly team meetings show that members use the time to design and analyze results from common assessments, improve instructional strategies, design cross-curricular connections, plan interventions for struggling students, and coordinate community-building experiences.
	There is evidence of peer observations used for coaching and mentoring with the goal of improving instructional methods.
	The bell schedule shows that there is time built in the school day for teacher collaboration.

	Staff agendas show that there is ongoing teacher collaboration by subject and by grade level.
	Agendas from professional learning sessions throughout the year show continuous learning about how to help young adolescents learn standards-based content.
	Students use academic language to talk about meeting their targets and goals, and ongoing progress in general with mastering the California Grade-Level Standards.
	The school leadership team can describe the current year's coordinated professional learning plan for each team and for the entire school staff, including the goals of the professional learning plan and the success of the previous year's plan.

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Recommendation 11—Accountability

This walk-through checklist is provided to help school teams informally gauge their progress in implementing the Recommendation on accountability.

Check	Evidence of recommendation implementation
	Agendas from district and school staff meetings demonstrate a review of state and federal requirements for middle grades achievement and an action plan to comply with them.
	Agendas and minutes of teacher team meetings document discussions of the district vision for high achievement for all students.
	The principal, leadership team members, teachers, and families/guardians can describe their commitment for every student to meet grade-level standards.
	Students can explain their progress toward proficiency on grade-level standards during student-led parent conferences.
	The school displays its current and targeted Academic Performance Index score and invites parents, teachers, students, and the community in its quest to improve student learning and achievement.
	A review of school budgets shows adequate funding for each of the school's priorities for student achievement, including release time for staff development, staffing and funding for instructional materials, technology, and library/media centers.
	Minutes of teacher team meetings show regular data analysis and how the team translates data results into differentiated instruction and interventions for students who need additional challenges or who struggle.
	Staff can show the benchmark tests that are used as continuous evidence of student progress and as a basis for making academic decisions so that each student will have the necessary support to produce proficient work.
	Each team member can discuss the team's analysis of data of at-risk students who are not achieving, including dates, types, and results of all interventions.
	There is evidence from student portfolios and standards-based reporting that students are becoming proficient with standards.
	Newsletters, agendas, or minutes demonstrate how the staff is always seeking to improve programs, instruction, instructional material, and means of assessment, to meet the changing needs of students.

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Recommendation 12—Partnerships

This walk-through checklist is provided to help school teams informally gauge their progress in implementing the Recommendation on partnerships.

Check	Evidence of recommendation implementation
	A review of the school Web site, newsletters, and agendas reveals a rich set of opportunities for parents or guardians and families to be involved in the school
	The school posts a full menu of co-curricular options, including sports, clubs, service-learning, and career exploration, in the predominant languages of the community so that all families know about the options available to students either before, during, or after school.
	Parents can be seen as volunteers serving in meaningful positions at the school.
	Partners (including families) can explain the ways they bring multicultural experiences into the lives of young people.
	Staff members can describe the way that partners have helped students focus on setting goals for higher education and careers.
	Students can explain how a project they completed included improving the school, community, state, nation, and the world.
	The school staff can explain the contents of the mentor training binder and refer visitors to the staff member who is responsible for coordinating mentor training and documenting mentor participation with students.
	The principal can explain how the staff works with colleges and universities to recruit, mentor student teachers, and provide counseling interns opportunities to work with students.
	A review of the school Web site, newsletters, and agendas reveals information about interpreter services, meals, transportation, and childcare services that ensures families are not excluded from being involved.
	Each member of the leadership team can access the log of partners' names, hours, fingerprinting records, types of projects they participate in, and results on student achievement so that he or she can help pair students with mentors.
	Pictures of partners and students are prominent on school publications and throughout the school.
	Community members can be observed tutoring students or making presentations in classes.

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