

Middle School Strategy for the Harold K.L. Castle Foundation (SY23-24 through SY26-27)

The Foundation will focus on two areas of support in years 1 and 2 that support the systems, structures and leadership of our public middle schools:

- (1) Fund complementary grants that support the DOE middle level team** in their work to create a unified vision of what a successful Hawai'i middle school looks like and institutionalize language, practices and support structures around that vision. As a result of our partnership, we hope to see awareness of the importance of middle school grades increase, along with the engagement of school staff and students.
- (2) Encourage more intentional transitions between elementary, middle and high school.** Creating a sense of culture and community is one of the main points of emphasis outlined in the Association of Middle Level Education [Characteristics of Successful Middle Schools](#), and it is a challenge to build and reinforce that culture within these short years. However, what would it mean for student engagement if that time could be expanded through experiences that build from a students' current to future school?
- (3) Increase support for student academic performance, especially in math.** By the time public school students in Hawaii reach 8th grade, [only 1 out of 3](#) (33%) students are proficient in math and just half (51%) are proficient in English Language Arts. We hope to lift up and scale strategies that help to improve outcomes for students.
- (4) Create a robust pipeline for middle school leaders**, by increasing interest in middle school education as a career as well as retention of current middle school staff. Turnover is high for administrators, with some seeing their tenure a stepping stone instead of a career. How might we encourage and support education leaders making a commitment to serve middle school students?

Once our middle schools have a strong foundation, we expect our work in years 3 and 4 to expand to include community organizations that partner with middle schools to expand student opportunity.

- (5) Support for community organizations partnering with middle schools** to offer programs or student support in line with the school's academic plan, and to help with student engagement, behavior and improving students' social-emotional learning skills. We think that community organizations partnered closely with schools can expand the breadth of support for student success, especially when there is a high level of trust between both entities, and we will prioritize piloting and scaling programs that demonstrate such close coordination.

If successful, their efforts will lay the foundation for middle level education and create conditions that will help students succeed as they transition to high school and beyond. Specifically, we would expect to see significant improvement in the following areas over time:

- Improved student academic achievement, especially in math;
- Increased student engagement in their learning;
- Increased teacher engagement and readiness to teach effectively for this age group; and
- Improved preparation of school leaders for the middle years

We would welcome your questions, comments, and guidance on this proposed strategy. Please contact Maria Quidez at mquidez@castlefoundation.org for more information or to talk story.