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# *Gearing Up for Middle School*

## **Project Overview & Report for 2012-2013**

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### **Executive Summary**

The academic and social expectations for school-age children making the transition to middle school today are intensive. In order to aid such children in gaining knowledge and self-confidence, parents and youth both can benefit from learning about transitions in middle school and receiving supportive tools to prepare for the middle school experience. *Gearing Up for Middle School* provides support by improving transitions to middle school, providing learning activities and parent education opportunities, and partnering with local schools to work with incoming middle school children and their families.

North Dakota State University (NDSU) and the NDSU Extension Service, in partnership with the South East Education Cooperative (SEEC) and the ND Department of Public Instruction (DPI), have developed the *Gearing Up for Middle School* program as a pilot project in North Dakota. The program experienced its first pilot year in 2012-13. *Gearing Up for Middle School* is a family education opportunity for parents and their children who will be entering middle school in the following year. Families meet in three sessions of three classes each (9 total sessions).

In 2012-2013 the program operated at two pilot sites in North Dakota with 20 to 25 families who participated and completed evaluations. The two pilot sites for the program were at Jamestown Middle School and Maple Valley. This brief executive summary provides highlights of findings gathered through evaluation of the *Gearing Up for Middle School* program's pilot sessions in the program year 2012-13.

- **Program participation**
  - Jamestown, ND – 13 middle school students and parents
  - Maple Valley, ND – 7 middle school students and parents
- **Program demographics**
  - Students – 60% female, 40% male; Average age, 11.4 years
  - Parents – 95% female, 5% male; Average age, 41.7 years

### **Summary of Key Findings**

The key findings associated with responses of program participants are listed in the tables below. Participants responded on a scale of 1 to 5 (1=low to 5=high).

**Table 1: General Value of Gearing Up for Middle School Program – Student Responses (2012-13)**

Question	Middle School Students
1) Overall value of program	3.7
2) Value of materials and learning activities	3.7
3) Value of session on planning and decision making	3.89
4) Value of session on interests and choices	4.16
5) Value of session on physical growth and healthy lifestyles	4.20

**Table 2: General Impacts of Gearing Up for Middle School Program – Student Responses (2012-13)**

Question	Middle School Students
1) Increased knowledge about growth and development at middle school age	3.5
2) Increased communication with parents about things affecting you as you grow and develop	3.25
3) Increased ideas to prepare for middle school experience	3.5
4) Influenced the relationship with your parent	2.95
5) Increased knowledge about preparing for middle school	3.69
6) Increased confidence in preparation for middle school experience	3.69
7) Increased resources to prepare effectively for middle school	3.94

- **General value of the program** - Students expressed quite positive feelings about the general value of the program, with **65% indicating it was very or extremely useful to them.** Among participants in the 2012-13 pilot program, 55% said the handouts and learning activities were very useful to them. Finally, between 68% and 85% of students agreed the different sessions were very or extremely useful to them.
- **General impacts of program participation** - Among students, **60% indicated the program increased their knowledge of growth and development at middle school age a lot or very much; 50% noted it increased their communication with parents about things affecting them as students a lot or very much; 50% felt it increased their ideas to prepare for the middle school experience; 50% felt it influenced the relationship with their parent positively somewhat to very much; 58% said it increased their confidence in their preparation for middle school; and 63% said it increased their resources to prepare effectively for middle school a lot or very much.**

**Table 3: General Value of Gearing Up for Middle School Program – Parent Responses (2012-13)**

Question	Middle School Parents
1) Overall value of program	4.1
2) Value of materials and learning activities	4.0
3) Value of session on brain development and mental growth	4.1
4) Value of session on social development and emotional wellness	4.05
5) Value of session on physical growth and healthy lifestyles	4.09

**Table 4: General Impacts of Gearing Up for Middle School Program – Parent Responses (2012-13)**

Question	Middle School Parents
1) Increased knowledge about child’s growth and development at middle school age	3.48
2) Increased desire to communicate with child about things affecting him or her as he or she grows and develops	4.0
3) Increased ideas to guide child’s development and choices	3.86
4) Influenced the relationship with your middle school student	3.76
5) Increased knowledge about the transition to middle school	3.48
6) Increased confidence in transition to middle school experience	3.57
7) Increased resources to prepare effectively for middle school	3.62

- **General value of the program** - Parents also expressed quite positive feelings about the general value of the program, with **80% indicating it was very or extremely useful to them**. Among participants in the 2012-13 pilot program, 71% said the handouts and learning activities were very useful to them. Finally, between 75% and 80% of parents agreed the different sessions were very or extremely useful to them.
- **General impacts of program participation** - Among parents, **43% indicated the program increased their knowledge of growth and development at middle school age a lot or very much; 76% noted it increased their desire to communicate with their child about things affecting them as students a lot or very much; 76% felt it increased their ideas to guide their child’s development and choices a lot or very much; 71% felt it influenced the relationship with their child positively a lot to very much; 52% said it increased their knowledge about the transition to middle school a lot to very much; 57% said it increased their confidence in preparation for their child’s transition to middle school; and 62% said it increased their resources to prepare their child effectively for middle school a lot or very much.**

- **Qualitative feedback on outcomes from parents in the program** – Parents who participated in the program shared a variety of comments that highlighted positive impacts:
  - I liked doing the activities with my daughter. I learned a lot about her discussing the survey with her.
  - I enjoyed the speakers and content.
  - I liked that my child could meet other middle school students and two teachers, and appreciated enjoyable activities in a middle school environment.
  - Very informative – lots of stuff I had no clue about.
  - It established a comfort level for my son.
  - It calmed my nerves.
  - Discussions and experiments were good.
  - Very good program.
  - I liked the activities with the kids at the beginning.
  - I learned some things about my daughter, such as that she enjoys baking.
  - Please keep offering programs like this.
  - Very interesting and knowledgeable.
  - Thank you for your efforts!
  - I thought it was informative and helpful. It gave me a better understanding of where my daughter is coming from.
  - This is a beneficial program. I think the kids get nervous about going into a new situation, so this transition information is helpful.
  - Great program!
  
- **Qualitative feedback on outcomes from children in the program** – Students who participated in the program shared a variety of comments that highlighted positive benefits:
  - I liked the groups.
  - I liked the activities.
  - It helps you know what to expect in middle school.
  - I liked all of the helpful information.
  - I like doing the games and that I will be ready for middle school.
  - I like the fun activities we do before the class session with our parents.
  - I learned things I didn't know about.
  - I know more about physical activity and health.
  - I learned about the dress code.
  - I need more sleep for my body!
  - Very good program.
  - It was good.
  - I would want some of the other people in my class to come to this excellent place.
  - Well, I think that they have done really good on making it fun and interesting.

The findings from the brief assessment of the pilot project of *Gearing Up for Middle School* indicate that positive changes are occurring that strengthen parent and student knowledge and practices and assist them in preparing for the transition to middle school.