
Gearing Up for Middle School **Interim Project Overview & Report for 2013-2014**

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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* is designed to furnish 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 second pilot year in 2013-14. *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 during spring, summer and fall as a child prepares to transition to middle school. The number of classes offered during each session tends to vary by site location though the program design includes three classes for each session.

In 2013-2014 the program operated at five pilot sites in North Dakota with a number of families who participated and completed formal evaluations. The three pilot sites that furnished participant feedback were at Ellendale Public School, Lisbon Middle School, and Maple Valley High School. 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 2013-14. This document is an interim report based on information available at the time.

It should further be noted that currently the program is in a "pilot phase" and there is substantial variation and experimentation by local sites with regard to usage of program content, delivery model for the program and families targeted for participation. Thus, the vast majority of feedback provided concerns perceptions of program content and activities, and a minimal amount of information intended to document program impact or effectiveness. This is appropriate for a program that is in the development and pilot testing phase. The findings highlighted below were based on responses from 52 student-age participants and 28 parent participants in the program at three different pilot sites (Ellendale, Lisbon and Maple Valley).

Pilot Sites and Program Participation

- Ellendale, ND
 - Met in 3 sessions; combined lessons into a single 2.5-hour session each time; targeted incoming 7th grade students and parents (21 incoming students).
 - Session #1 – 12 students and parents (14); Session #2 – 17 students and parents (15); Session #3 – 10 students and parents (8).
- Lisbon, ND
 - Met in 4 sessions (two spring, two fall); combined lessons in 1.5-hour session each time; targeted incoming 5th grade students and parents (52 incoming students).
 - Session #1 – 15 students and parents; Session #2 – 27 students and parents; Session #3 – 45 students and parents; Session #4 – 1 student and parent (due to competition with other scheduled activities).
- Maple Valley, ND
 - Met in 3 sessions; combined lessons into a single 3-hour session each time.
 - Session #1 – 14 students and parents; Session #2 – 14 students and parents; Session #3 – 3 students and parents (due to conflict with parent-teacher conferences).
- West Fargo, ND – Cheney Middle School
 - Planned three sessions (spring, summer, fall).
 - Only 2 students registered; program cancelled due to “lack of interest.”
- West Fargo, ND – Liberty Middle School
 - Met in 3 sessions; combined lessons into a single 1.5-hour session each time; targeted incoming 6th grade students.
 - Session #1 – 12 students and parents; Session #2 – 5 students and parents; Session #3 – 1 student and parent.
- **Program demographics based on data from sites providing feedback**
 - Students – 60% female, 40% male; Average age, 11.5 years
 - Parents – 93% female, 7% male; Average age, 40.5 years

Pilot Site Locations



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 (2013-14)

Question	Middle School Students
1) Overall value of program	3.42
2) Value of materials and learning activities	3.27
3) Value of session #1	3.23
4) Value of session #2	3.15
5) Value of session #3	3.39

Table 2: General Impacts of Gearing Up for Middle School Program – Student Responses (2013-14)

Question	Middle School Students
1) Increased knowledge about growth and development at middle school age	3.24
2) Increased communication with parents about things affecting you as you grow and develop	2.88
3) Increased ideas to prepare for middle school experience	3.10
4) Influenced the relationship with your parent	3.16
5) Increased knowledge about preparing for middle school	3.25
6) Increased confidence in preparation for middle school experience	3.40
7) Increased resources to prepare effectively for middle school	3.29

- **General value of the program** - Students expressed fairly positive feelings about the general value of the program, with **42% indicating it was very or extremely useful to them, while 44% felt it was somewhat useful.** Among participants in the 2013-14 pilot program, 44% said the handouts and learning activities were very useful to them. Finally, between 73% and 84% of students agreed the different sessions were somewhat to extremely useful to them.
- **General impacts of program participation** - Among students, **71% indicated the program increased their knowledge of growth and development at middle school age somewhat to very much; 57% noted it increased their communication with parents about things affecting them as students somewhat to very much; 63% felt it increased their ideas to prepare for the middle school experience; 65% felt it influenced the relationship with their parent positively somewhat to very much; 71% said it increased their confidence in their preparation for middle school; and 69% said it increased their resources to prepare effectively for middle school somewhat very much.**

Table 3: General Value of Gearing Up for Middle School Program – Parent Responses (2013-14)

Question	Middle School Parents
1) Overall value of program	3.79
2) Value of materials and learning activities	3.71
3) Value of session #1	4.43
4) Value of session #2	4.40
5) Value of session #3	4.50

Table 4: General Impacts of Gearing Up for Middle School Program – Parent Responses (2013-14)

Question	Middle School Parents
1) Increased knowledge about child’s growth and development at middle school age	3.70
2) Increased desire to communicate with child about things affecting him or her as he or she grows and develops	3.63
3) Increased ideas to guide child’s development and choices	3.64
4) Influenced the relationship with your middle school student	3.75
5) Increased knowledge about the transition to middle school	3.79
6) Increased confidence in transition to middle school experience	3.68
7) Increased resources to prepare effectively for middle school	3.68

- **General value of the program** - Parents also expressed quite positive feelings about the general value of the program, with **93% indicating it was somewhat to extremely useful to them**. Among participants in the 2013-14 pilot program, 64% said the handouts and learning activities were very useful to them. Finally, 100% of parents agreed the different sessions were very or extremely useful to them.
- **General impacts of program participation** - Among parents, **63% indicated the program increased their knowledge of growth and development at middle school age a lot or very much; 59% noted it increased their desire to communicate with their child about things affecting them as students a lot or very much; 57% felt it increased their ideas to guide their child’s development and choices a lot or very much; 64% felt it influenced the relationship with their child positively a lot to very much; 71% said it increased their knowledge about the transition to middle school a lot to very much; 64% said it increased their confidence in preparation for their child’s transition to middle school; and 61% 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 think the whole program was insightful and was very helpful.
 - I like learning strategies and skills to work with my daughter during this life-changing time in her life.
 - [I liked the] community atmosphere – parents with parents, kids with kids, different needs. Also, an opportunity to slow down and re-focus on what transitions are taking place in our family.
 - The material was highly relevant. This program helped me focus on my behavior and responses. Great speakers. Scavenger hunt was great! Great food.
 - [I liked] the chance to get to know my child’s teachers and the middle school.
 - It made my student feel much less nervous about being in middle school. [It] gave us a very good idea about what to expect since we’ve never had a child attend middle school till this year.
 - My child had little to no anxiety and I feel this program contributed significantly to that. Thank you for all your hard work.
 - We both (child and parent) enjoyed the sessions. Beginning with the child and parent projects was fun. I also found the parent sessions very informative and helpful.
 - This would be a great program to continue with for upcoming classes.
 - Would recommend this program for future use. Thanks.
 - I hope it continues as our other children move into middle school so they can all have a better understanding of middle school. . . . Thank you to all who helped.
 - Very good 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:
 - It was fun!
 - It was a great program for me to learn more.
 - I liked the games and activities.
 - I love it.
 - I learned about the middle school.
 - It teaches us to be prepared and ready for classes.
 - I think they should do it again next year for the 5th graders!
 - It helped me prepare for middle school. It helped me know where the classrooms were; it was great overall.
 - I learned a lot about things I need to know. Helped me so I wasn’t nervous.
 - I am glad the students got to see the school before the first day so we weren’t overwhelmed and scared.
 - I was very nervous for 7th grade, and going to these sessions really made me feel more comfortable.

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.