

EDUCATING STUDENTS FROM ELEMENTARY SCHOOL TO SECONDARY SCHOOL AND BEYOND-A DIFFERING USE OF THE MIDDLE SCHOOL

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Now that it is widely recognized in the educator's forum that standardized assessments are necessary to determine if the students have adequate knowledge of what they were taught at every level of their education before being advanced to a higher level. There is concern about which of the different educational systems to employed. It is therefore noteworthy that the transition from elementary school to secondary school should not be automatic, depending on age only, but involve some standardized assessment controlled by some government/state/regional examination body. In my opinion the core basics of Mathematics and the correct use of the national language is a good enough assessment although basic science could be included. The age of transition from elementary school to secondary school should be 11 years old and the examination should be administered at that time. I should however mention that the teacher-based assessments throughout the year should be weighted for 15% of the transaction grade and the government/state/regional standardized assessment accounting for 85%.

Because of the nature of examinations grades/marks will vary from high to low. This therefore means that there should be a weighting grade/marks for which each secondary school accepts students. For example, a number of schools would accept students with grade A, some with grade B etc. It should be noted that before examination students with the help of their parents and teachers should be given chances to choose three or four secondary schools in preferential order that they would like to attend based on their expected performance. Zoning is a practice used to ensure that students would not have to travel far from their neighborhood. It should be emphasized that a radius of 10-15 miles from a student's neighborhood is an acceptable distance for all school systems.

In some school systems students once admitted to secondary pursue their education in one place, that is, there is no middle school/ junior high school system. The notion of the doctrine in many countries – developed and developing – that all students should be given a secondary school education has led to the situation where regardless of performance every student is admitted to a secondary school. This practice has created the situation whereby there is the promotion of students from one level of their secondary school education to a higher level without showing adequate achievement to be promoted to a higher level. Promotion becomes an age-related matter.

In school systems where there are middle schools/junior high schools all students must attend a middle/junior high school which is considered a lower stage of their secondary school education before they are transferred to high school –the advance stage of their secondary school education. Hence there is a two-step process to the secondary education. It must be emphasized that similar flaws occur in this system as the other one mentioned, that is, the one-step secondary education system.

The idea of a secondary education for all has been adopted to enforce the concept that every student receive the opportunity to pursue academia. However, not every student is academically incline, and those with vocational and technical abilities normally are forced to waste years in a system that is not their competencies. There is the need for a modification of the secondary education process. I propose a system with the middle school that is different from the norm. Since all elementary school students have to take assessment examinations, I would use a one-step secondary education system for students who received a

passing grade on the standardized test. For those students who did not receive passing grades on the standardized test the middle schools would be their option. The three-year curriculum of the middle school should be such that there would be technical, vocational and academic training equally weighted. Those students who showed interest and competence in technical and vocational studies would be transferred to technical and vocational schools after their third year in middle school. This would ensure that such students receive their training without wasting further years in an academic led system. Students from the middle school setting who showed interest and competence for academia would be transferred to a regular- one – step secondary education school. However, this would/should ensure that no student is left behind with the proposed use of the middle school. The emphasis of the one-step concept of secondary school education is to train for academia but it is very likely that some students would transition to technical and vocational studies.

Before moving on to colleges and universities all students at the secondary level in their final year should be assessed course by course through government/state/regional administered standardized test. A core number of passes can then be recommended by universities/colleges for acceptance to their curriculum. Teacher based assessment should be weighted for 10% of the final grade for each course and the standardized examination 90%.