



# Focus on the Wonder Years: Challenges Facing the American Middle School

*Jaana Juvonen, Vi-Nhuan Le, Tessa Kaganoff, Catherine Augustine, Louay Constant*

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Young teens undergo multiple physical, social-emotional, and intellectual changes, which have been viewed as setting them apart from both younger and older students. The basic concept of a separate middle school was to better focus on and serve the special needs of children in their early teens. The question is whether middle schools, as currently designed and operated, are performing that function well. Or, as some have alleged, do they unintentionally encourage poor behavior, alienation, disengagement, and low achievement? This monograph is a comprehensive assessment of the American middle school. It presents observations on a variety of very real issues?troubling social climates and associated behavioral problems, teachers who lack subject-matter expertise, and parents who seem uninvolved, among others. The authors offer ways of tackling these issues: reassessing the organization of grades K-12; specifically assisting the students most in need; finding ways to prevent disciplinary problems; working with proven professional-development models; helping parents understand the school's goals and methods and how they can help their children learn at home; and exploring how other countries promote the well-being of and provide positive school climates for students of comparable age to support academic achievement.

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