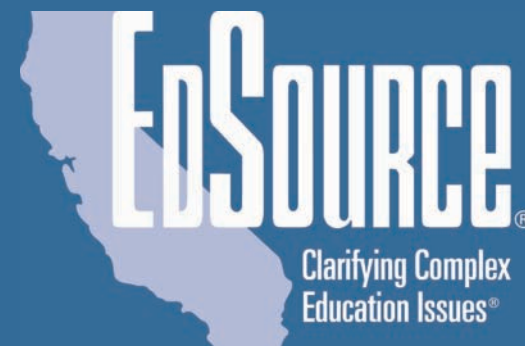


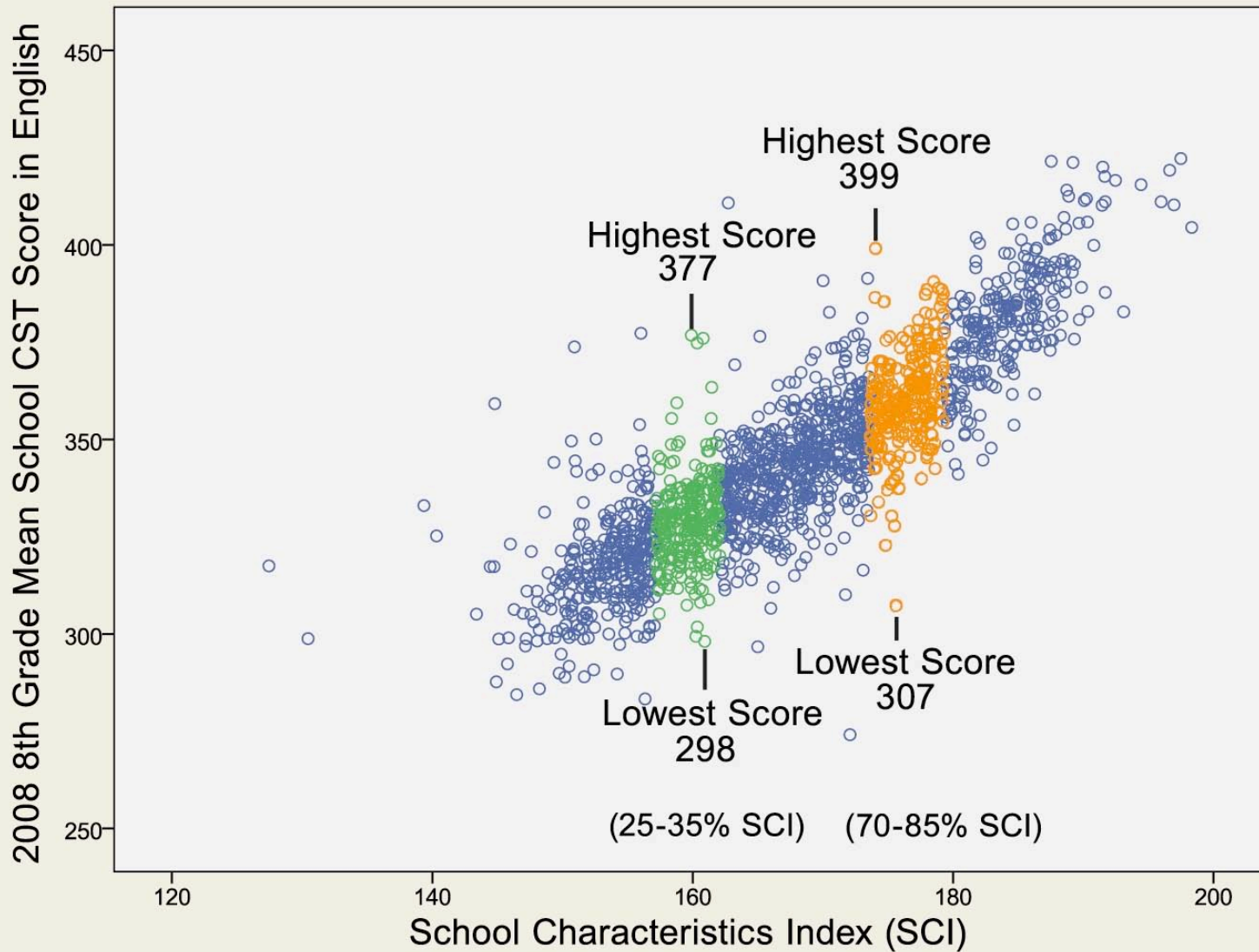


# Gaining Ground in the Middle Grades: Why Some Schools Do Better

A Large-Scale Study of  
Middle Grades Practices  
and Student Outcomes



### In Every Socio-Economic Group, Some Middle Grades Schools Perform Much Better Than Others on CSTs: Why?



## The importance of the middle grades

- **Many students** --- even those previously on track -- **begin to lose ground** in key subject areas.
- These years are **the last best chance** to identify students at risk of academic failure and to get them back on grade level or better.
- Success in **key middle grades subjects** -- and on the CSTs -- **should set students up** to pass the CAHSEE and **to succeed in a rigorous high school curriculum.**

## Methodology: large scale survey

- Reviewed **30 years of middle grades reports** & recommendations, and research.
- **Consulted with many individuals** and organizations, including many in this room.
- **Created over 900 questions:** neutrally phrased, concrete, actionable.
- **Created three separate surveys** --- for superintendents, principals, and ELA/Math teachers.
- **Included overlap between surveys** to measure consistency and alignment of response.

# Extraordinary participation rate!

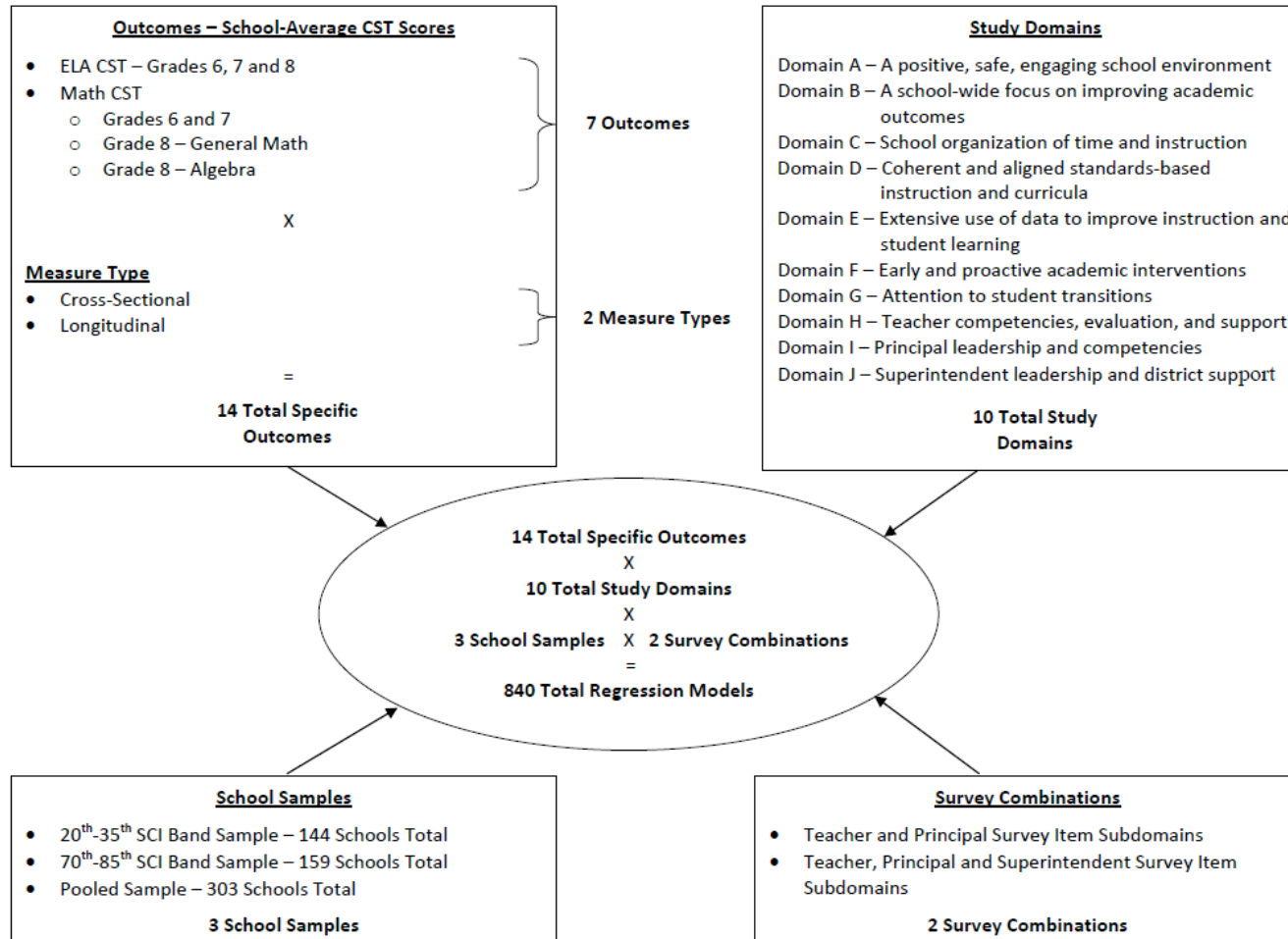
- **303 schools** out of 528 eligible in bands
- **All principals**
- **3,752 ELA/Math teachers (88%)**
- **157 superintendents** representing 244 (80%) of the schools



## Goals of Analysis

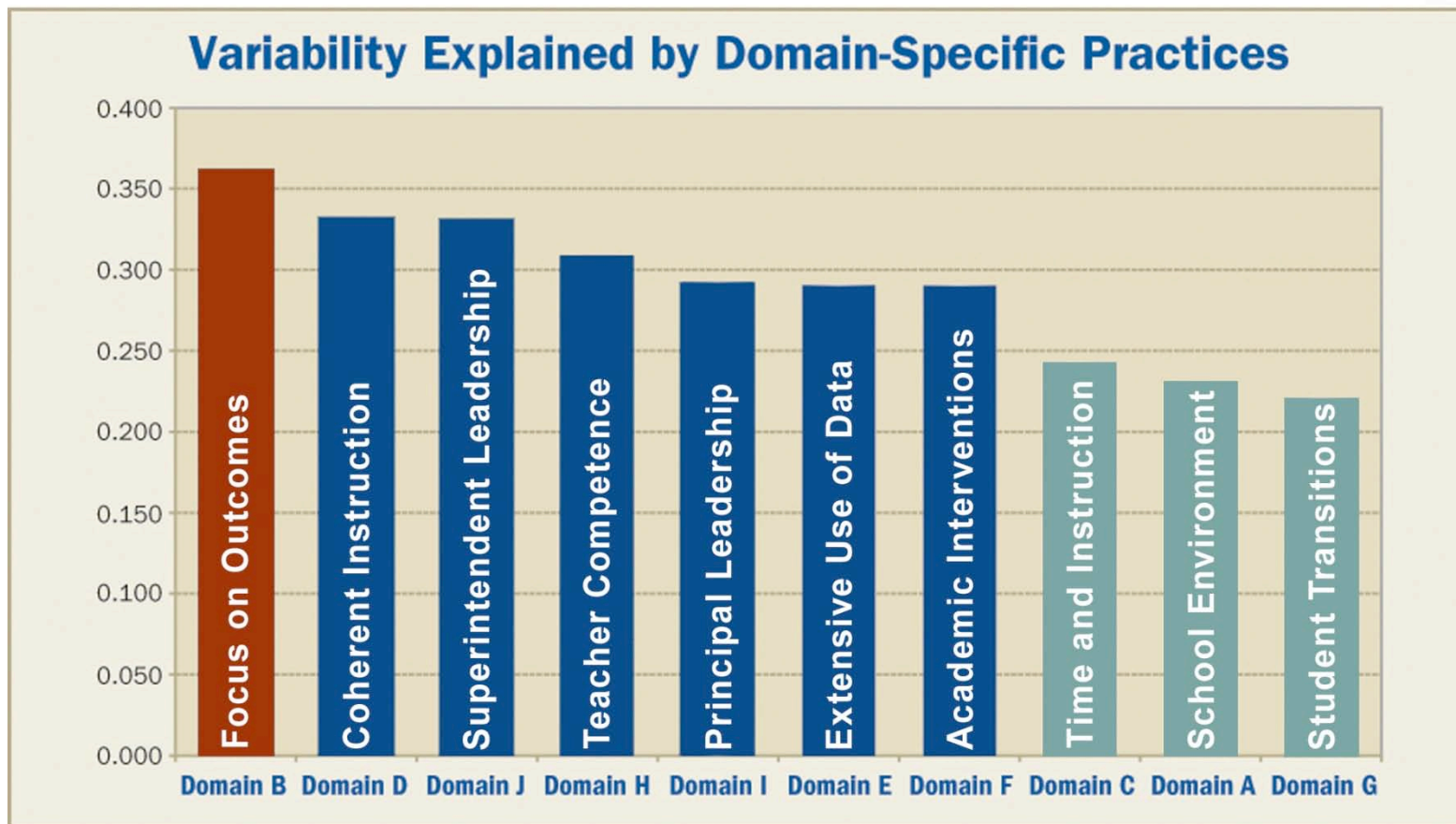
- Describe MG schooling practices in California
  - Prevalence of different instructional models and practices
  - Contrasts between lower and higher SCI bands, grade configurations, charter vs. noncharter, etc.
  
- Relate variation in schooling practices to variation in student learning outcomes on the California Standards Tests in ELA and Math

# Regression Analyses



## The study's findings

One domain dominated; another six strong but varied; final three were always at the bottom in terms of impact.



## Strongest finding: an intense schoolwide focus on student outcomes

- The significant practices in this domain reflected a strong, integrated, comprehensive approach that clearly made **improved outcomes Job #1** for higher performing schools:
  - setting **measurable goals** on standards based tests
  - a shared school **mission that is future oriented**, to prepare students academically for a rigorous HS curriculum
  - **adults accept accountability** for improved student outcomes
  - the school expects **students and parents will share the responsibility** for student learning

## Finding: Curricula and instruction are closely aligned with standards

- **Implementation of standards based curricula and instructional practice is tight and coherent**
  - using the adopted aligned curriculum daily
  - emphasizing select key standards in grade/subject
  - teachers collaborating frequently to develop common benchmarks, and to break down the state content standards to identify prerequisite student skills
  
- **Strategies are implemented to further strengthen student learning in 7th and 8th grades**
  - For ELA, an 8th grade structured program to promote literacy
  - For Math, a multi-factoral policy for placing students into general math classes in grades 7 and 8.

## Finding: Extensive use of assessment and other student data

- **District plays strong leadership role** regarding provision and use of data
- Facility with and frequent use of data indicates a **changing role for principals**
- **Extensive use of assessment data by teachers** signals a culture shift with student outcomes at the center

## Finding: Emphasis on early identification and proactive intervention

- Attention is paid to the assessment and careful placement of **English Learner students**
- The records of **entering students** are reviewed for possible warning signs of academic struggle
- Principal ensures CPT for **subject area and intervention teachers** to meet to coordinate instruction
- **A comprehensive range of required and voluntary strategies** -- within and outside of the school day -- for three categories of students -- is in place at the school

## Finding: three domains emphasize the key and emerging roles of educators

- **The leadership of the superintendent and support from the district** or CMO was one of the strongest domains, especially associated with school “gains” on CSTs.
- **The changing role of the principal** in driving student outcome gains, orchestrating school improvement efforts, and serving as the linchpin between the district and teaching staff was documented throughout the findings.
- **School teachers with strong competencies work collectively** to improve student outcomes school-wide and individually to improve their own classroom instruction.

## Surprising “non-findings”

- **We could find no clear, consistent, or significant association** between school-wide student outcomes on California Standards Tests and:
  - **school grade configuration** (K-8, 5/6-8, 7-8)
  - OR
  - **school organization of teaching and instruction** (e.g., interdiSCiplinary, by subject, etc)

## Some implications for state and federal policy

- **Resources to the middle grades are important if we are serious about improving the graduation and college readiness rates of more students.** State and federal policymakers should examine the extent to which current policies and budget allocations either strengthen or inhibit the following important resources:
  - the provision of multiple student **intervention strategies**
  - the availability of ample **common planning time** for teachers
  - the availability of a user friendly **student data system** and training for school staff.
  - the availability of **student standards based exam data** in detail, disaggregated by grade, subject, subgroup, etc
  - the availability for incoming students of **data on course grades, attendance, and any serious behavior reports.**

## State and federal continued .....

- Student interventions at the middle level are important: **more federally or foundation funded research is needed to identify, develop, and make available interventions that are most effective** and cost efficient at improving middle grades student outcomes.
- Teachers quality is clearly very important, but its also time for **more state and federal focus on how the role of the principal has changed ---and on the kind of preparation, development, and support they need** to most effectively operate in this important and challenging role of driving and orchestrating school-wide improvements in measurable student outcomes.

## Some implications for school and district practice and policy

- **District and CMO superintendents need to be recognized for and accept responsibility for their role** in providing vision, leadership, and resources to improve middle grades student outcomes.
- Local educators can use these findings to **learn more about the inter-related practices that are working in some higher-performing schools.**
- Superintendents and principals can use the findings as a catalyst to engage their staff and teachers in **conversations about middle level mission, and the extent to which it helps focus and intensify efforts on improved student outcomes and preparation for student success in HS.**

## Follow up to the middle grades study

To be released early fall 2010: **an in-depth analysis of student outcomes in math and algebra against the related practices reported in the surveys**, including student participation rates in 8th grade Algebra, educator credentials, curriculum programs in use, and other data.

EdSource hopes to also develop a **Superintendent and Principal Guide** to the Study's Findings.

And more .....

# Thank you!

Go to [www.EdSource.org/middle-grades-study.html](http://www.EdSource.org/middle-grades-study.html) for free downloads of the study's:

- Narrative Summary
- Initial Research Report
- Technical Appendices