

Middle School Life Science

Students in middle school develop understanding of key concepts to help them make sense of life science. The ideas build upon students' science understanding from earlier grades and from the disciplinary core ideas, science and engineering practices, and crosscutting concepts of other experiences with physical and earth sciences. There are four life science disciplinary core ideas in middle school: 1) *From Molecules to Organisms: Structures and Processes*, 2) *Ecosystems: Interactions, Energy, and Dynamics*, 3) *Heredity: Inheritance and Variation of Traits*, 4) *Biological Evolution: Unity and Diversity*. The performance expectations in middle school blend the core ideas with scientific and engineering practices and crosscutting concepts to support students in developing useable knowledge across the science disciplines. While the performance expectations in middle school life science couple particular practices with specific disciplinary core ideas, instructional decisions should include use of many science and engineering practices integrated in the performance expectations.

The performance expectations in **LS1: From Molecules to Organisms: Structures and Processes** help students formulate an answer to the question, "How can one explain the ways cells contribute to the function of living organisms." The LS1 Disciplinary Core Idea from the *NRC Framework* is organized into four sub-ideas: Structure and Function, Growth and Development of Organisms, Organization for Matter and Energy Flow in Organisms, and Information Processing. Students can gather information and use this information to support explanations of the structure and function relationship of cells. They can communicate understanding of cell theory. They have a basic understanding of the role of cells in body systems and how those systems work to support the life functions of the organism. The understanding of cells provides a context for the plant process of photosynthesis and the movement of matter and energy needed for the cell. Students can construct an explanation for how environmental and genetic factors affect growth of organisms. They can connect this to the role of animal behaviors in reproduction of animals as well as the dependence of some plants on animal behaviors for their reproduction. Crosscutting concepts of cause and effect, structure and function, and matter and energy are called out as organizing concepts for the core ideas about processes of living organisms.

The performance expectations in **LS2: Interactions, Energy, and Dynamics Relationships in Ecosystems** help students formulate an answer to the question, "How does a system of living and non-living things operate to meet the needs of the organisms in an ecosystem?" The LS2 Disciplinary Core Idea is divided into three sub-ideas: Interdependent Relationships in Ecosystems; Cycles of Matter and Energy Transfer in Ecosystems; and Ecosystem Dynamics, Functioning, and Resilience. Students can analyze and interpret data, develop models, and construct arguments and demonstrate a deeper understanding of resources and the cycling of matter and the flow of energy in ecosystems. They can also study patterns of the interactions among organisms within an ecosystem. They consider biotic and abiotic factors in an ecosystem and the effects these factors have on population. They evaluate competing design solutions for maintaining biodiversity and ecosystem services.

The performance expectations in **LS3: Heredity: Inheritance and Variation of Traits** help students formulate an answer to the question, "How do living organisms pass traits from one generation to the next?" The LS3 Disciplinary Core Idea from the *NRC Framework* includes two sub-ideas: Inheritance of Traits, and Variation of Traits. Students can use models to describe



ways gene mutations and sexual reproduction contribute to genetic variation. Crosscutting concepts of cause and effect and structure and function provide students with a deeper understanding of how gene structure determines differences in the functioning of organisms.

The performance expectations in **LS4: Biological Evolution: Unity and Diversity** help students formulate an answer to the question, “How do organisms change over time in response to changes in the environment?” The LS4 Disciplinary Core Idea is divided into four sub-ideas: Evidence of Common Ancestry and Diversity, Natural Selection, Adaptation, and Biodiversity and Humans. Students can construct explanations based on evidence to support fundamental understandings of natural selection and evolution. They can use ideas of genetic variation in a population to make sense of organisms surviving and reproducing, hence passing on the traits of the species. They are able to use fossil records and anatomical similarities of the relationships among organisms and species to support their understanding. Crosscutting concepts of patterns and structure and function contribute to the evidence students can use to describe biological evolution.