Examples of sub-group activities or mini-courses made possible by the increased instructional time made available by integrating, for general education purposes, the study of math, science, language arts and social studies.

- Advanced math, writing, programming, media skills, etc. classes
- Garden
- Survey parent expertise and ways of utilizing this expertise
- Stage music, drama, dance performances
- Address a difficult school problem
- Publish a literary booklet
- Free reading
- Internet search competitions
- Life skills instruction
- Self-chosen projects for those with intense interest
- Art shows
- Community service
- Comic strip/graphic novel production
- Photographic documentation
- Contact foreign peers (many possible projects)
- Serious, structured physical activity
- Rehearsal/practice time
- Food preparation
- Occupational studies

Examples of Science-Related Groups (similar possibilities in other subjects):

- Local geology: Rocks, soil, typography
- Solar system: Model earth’s axial tilt/seasons, moon phases
- Weather systems investigations
- Botany in the target area: Inventory/classify plants and weeds
- Biology: Protozoa in grass infusion, insects as systems
- Aerodynamics: Paper airplanes or kites as systems, build wind tunnel, etc.
- Electrical systems investigation—start with flashlight analysis, conductors, insulators, etc.
• Mechanical engineering: e.g. create a system to store and release energy.
• Home systems: Electrical, plumbing, sewage, trash, food supply, etc
• Chemistry in food preparation
• Physics of musical instruments

More from “How to fix the mess we call middle school” by Valerie Strauss, at:

To which “dottie b” responded: “I love the life skills idea! Here are some suggestions (might be a little dated. I'm not a spring chicken.)”

• First aid and CPR
• Nutrition
• Basic cooking skills
• Basic sewing skills - sew a button, darn a sock (do people do that anymore?), hem
• How cars work
• Basic auto skills - change a tire, change oil, basic road emergencies - they don't need drivers' licenses for this
• Basic childcare skills - change a diaper, etc. Prep for babysitting and parenthood.
• Lawnmower care
• Basic plumbing skills
• Basic electrical skills
• Caulk a tub
• Paint a wall
• Keyboarding skills
• Mastering internet research
• Tree, bird, and plant identification
• Getting around town - where to get info on location and routes; learn where things are; reading a map; using GPS; planning a route
• Basic music skills in some instrument
• And lots and lots and lots of reading!

Tell me and I'll forget;
show me and I may remember;
involve me and I'll understand.

Chinese proverb

John Holt: "We teachers like to think that we can transplant our own mental models into the minds of children by means of explanations. It can’t be done." How Children Learn, Pitman, 1967.