ILLINOIS STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION MEETING

August 21, 2002

TO: Illinois State Board of Education

FROM: Robert E. Schiller, Superintendent
       Christopher Koch, Director

Agenda Topic: Middle Level Certification Survey Status Report

Materials: Middle Level Certificate Survey Response Data File

Staff Contact: Michael Long

Purposes of Agenda Item

• Provide an update on survey responses concerning the proposed middle level certificate;
• Offer a preliminary analysis of the survey results; and
• Propose options on next steps.

Expected Outcomes of Agenda Item

• Awareness of the development and distribution of the middle level certificate survey; and
• Provide guidance to staff on next steps.

Background Information

At the May, 2002, State Board meeting, members indicated some stakeholder groups were either not aware of the proposed middle level certificate or were not informed of its purpose and provisions. Several members of the Board hosted public information sessions in the spring on this issue and learned that participants cited differing concerns regarding the proposal. Isolating the precise nature of the concerns, however, was difficult.

The Board charged staff with the task of detailing the issues that most clearly articulated the objections to the proposed certificate. Identifying the various constituencies that harbor the concerns was critical as well. Once the issues and the groups were defined, staff was to design and implement strategies to mitigate the concerns. This report addresses the first phase of the charge.
The proposed middle level certificate has been brought to the Board four times over the past two years, and the recommendation has been shared with the educational community (e.g., teachers, administrators, etc.) on several occasions as well. However, the complexity of the issue and its anticipated impact on the achievement of middle grade students, staffing needs, program development, and more have created concerns. Staff has met with stakeholders, such as regional superintendents of education, teachers, administrators, and representatives of higher education, and has modified many of the original recommendations of the advisory panel. However, until now there has not been a systematic effort to define the issues that trouble various constituencies.

Survey Development

In June, 2002, Division of Professional Preparation and Recruitment staff designed a survey to be directed to teachers, administrators, higher education personnel, and others in order to garner feedback on issues related to the proposed certificate. Staff collaborated with colleagues in the Division of Data Analysis and Progress Reporting in the development of the survey items and the analysis of the responses. Assistance from the Data Systems Division allowed the survey to be posted electronically and for respondents to reply on-line as well. The survey can be found at:

http://stappsdev.isbe.net/midlevelcert

There are two parts to the survey. The first provides background information on the middle level certificate issue and offers responses to commonly asked questions. Through a hyperlink, respondents can also examine the standards and knowledge and performance indicators for the proposed certificate.

The second component seeks demographic information from the respondents (e.g., teachers, district administrator, etc.). Each category is more finely divided into more specific occupational roles (e.g., elementary teacher, district superintendent, etc.). This part was included in order to differentiate concerns by category and position.

Survey Design

The seven survey items reflect commonly expressed concerns regarding the certificate. Issues of supply, impact on employability, hiring flexibility, and adequacy of proposed and current preparation have been heard by staff and Board members. In fact, many of these issues constituted the rationale for the compromise with the Certification Committee of the Regional Superintendents’ Association.

The second portion of the survey identifies seven items for which a reply is requested. Respondents can choose across a range from “strongly agree” to the item to “strongly disagree.” Options of “agree” or “disagree” are also available as is a “no opinion” choice. Numeric scores of 1 through 5 are associated with each response, so that a 1
indicates “strongly disagree,” 3 a “no opinion,” and a 5 conveys strong agreement with the item.

Survey Distribution

On July 8, the instrument was delivered electronically to teachers, district administrators, building administrators, school board members, regional superintendents, and higher education personnel. The cooperation of several professional associations facilitated the distribution of the survey. Responses to the seven-item survey were submitted on-line and aggregated in a data file. The response period ended on July 30.

Survey Analysis

Over the three weeks the survey was accessible, 554 responses were received. (Please see the attached Survey Response Data File, Table 1.) Of the 554, 29.6% (n=164) of the replies came from district administrators, with 26.4% (n=146) of the total represented by classroom teachers. More than 20% of the reactions (n=112) were from building administrators, and 17.7% (n=98) of the respondents were from higher education. Thirty-four (6.1%) regional office of education personnel participated.

The distribution method required stakeholders (e.g., the Illinois Education Association, the Illinois Association of School Administrators, etc.) to direct the instrument to their members through list serves or other communication models established by the associations. The total membership population of each stakeholder group prevented is not known and thereby prevents a determination of a response rate. Similarly, it is not known if the survey was shared with individuals outside the stakeholder lists.

Through a disaggregation of the responses, the following observations are suggested (see attachment, Survey Response Data File, Table 2).

- There appears to be a moderate discrepancy among those who believe the proposed certificate is the best way to ensure appropriate preparation for middle level teachers (item #1, 51.8%) and those who contends the current six semester hour middle grade endorsement on the elementary or high school certificate provides adequate training (item #3, 57.4%). This suggests, perhaps, a distinction between quality and adequacy.
- Higher education personnel (e.g., administrators, faculty, etc.) seem to support a separate certificate to a greater extent than public school respondents. (See replies to items 1, 2, and 4.) This may suggest colleges and universities are more aware of the research in the field or lend more credence to the research.
- More than any other constituent group, college and university officials believe higher education will prepare a sufficient number of middle level certificate holders by 2009 to address anticipated demand (item #2, 37.4%). However, a contradictory reaction among higher education respondents is found in response to item #5, the certificate will cause or aggravate a shortage of middle grade
teachers. To this item, 50% of the university respondents concur with a shortage possibility, although 37% previously indicated colleges could produce enough a sufficient number of teachers.

- Item #5 engendered the largest number of “strongly disagree” responses (21.7%, n=120) of all the survey statements. Apparently, public school officials do not have confidence in the capacity of higher education to meet future middle school staffing needs.

- Hiring officials (i.e., district and building administrators) express the greatest concern that a certificate will compromise hiring flexibility (72.4% and 74.7% respectively). Nearly three out of five (58.2%) college and university respondents concur with the superintendents and principals.

- The majority of all respondents believe a new certificate will either cause or exacerbate a shortage of middle level teachers in 2009. While forecasting supply and demand eight years out is problematic, there is a clear perception that there will not be enough middle grade teachers in 2009 and that a certificate will aggravate the condition.

**Analysis and Implications for Policy, Budget, Legislative Action and Communications**

**Analysis**

It appears that the survey targeted the greatest concerns among the stakeholders. Employability, job mobility, supply and demand, and hiring flexibility engendered strong reactions from nearly all respondents. While the survey results suggest the proposed certificate is the best approach to ensuring a quality middle level teaching force, a majority support the adequacy of the current endorsement. Posited against the other survey items, this discrepancy may be explained by the belief that the endorsement affords greater latitude in hiring and eligibility for employment. The survey did not reveal the extent to which these perceptions are motivated by a simple reluctance to change.

With the distribution of the survey in mid-summer when most school and university personnel were away, it is possible that the 554 responses do not afford the refined data necessary to develop effective change strategies. A data analyst in the Division of Data Analysis and Progress Reporting writes that “no group showed either a sufficient support or volume of aversion to the [certificate] to justify being ignored in a promotional campaign.”

If the survey were to be made available again in late August and into September, the number of responses would certainly increase. As teachers, administrators, and university faculty return to their assignments later this month, the opportunity to participate will be expanded to those not available in July. Extending this opportunity may encourage the involvement of school board members, department chairpersons, and human resource officers. In the first iteration, only one school board member, one curriculum director, one department chair, and six personnel officials responded.
Finally, awareness of the middle level certificate issue will be enhanced by making the survey available again.

As a caveat, however, it is difficult to know if a greater participation rate will yield more statistically significant differentiation in attitudes and beliefs. Again, the data analyst reports that “the differences found in the analyses were statistically significant, but indicated differences in degree, not kind.” Providing the opportunity for more people to share their reactions, however, will assure the agency’s interest in soliciting feedback.

**Policy Implications**

The principal policy consideration of the Board centers on the acceptance of a new certificate and concomitant revisions to the elementary and secondary certificates. This action will require a more comprehensive study of the issues and the development of strategies to ameliorate the concerns expressed by various constituencies.

**Budget Implications**

Technical assistance to institutions designing middle level certificate training programs must be intense. Only a few middle grade preparation models currently exist, and some of these will need to be redesigned to meet the standards. Colleges and universities constructing programs without a pre-existent foundation will demand dedicated support from agency staff.

There is no anticipated budget impact in instituting the new certificate. Presuming adequate and qualified staff, technical assistance can be focused on this program by employing current appropriations.

**Legislative Action**

The implementation of the policy will require statutory changes in the elementary and secondary teaching certificates. New rules also will be required as well as the modification of some existent rules.

**Communications**

Upon receipt of the final data and the subsequent analysis, communications will be required to develop strategies to address the identified concerns and issues among the various stakeholders. This will require a sophisticated and intensive effort to provide accurate information to assure the middle level certificate will in fact enhance student achievement and will not compromise the opportunity for current or future teachers and administrators to secure employment and appropriately staff middle grade classrooms.
Pros and Cons of Various Actions

Positively, extending the survey response period will result in

- more feedback, particularly among some underrepresented groups in the first iteration;
- the potential for a finer distinction among the various issues which can yield a more targeted informational campaign; and
- a sense among stakeholders that the State Board is sincerely interested in their reaction to the issues.

However, devoting another month to surveying will result in

- a delay in the development of an informational campaign; and
- the potential for the same response distribution as experienced in the July effort.

Superintendent’s Recommendation

The Board should

- direct staff to distribute the survey again between August 26 and September 17 to garner additional feedback on the issues;
- direct staff to target stakeholders underrepresented in the first distribution, including teachers and school board members; and
- direct staff to report to the Board on the survey findings and analyses at the October meeting.

Next Steps

Pending Board adoption of the Superintendent’s recommendations, staff will inform the constituent groups surveyed in July that the questionnaire will be open for responses on August 26. Moreover, staff will be in direct contact with the School Board association to encourage greater participation among its members, and the teacher unions will be urged to extend the opportunity to more of their membership.