Introduction

Since 1966 when Donald Eichhorn introduced the term transescent, meaning a young person in transition from childhood to adolescence, the educational field has been replete with discussions of effective ways to educate middle level learners. This period spanning the early 1960s is generally recognized as the era that launched the modern middle school movement. Although the 1960s movement initiated substantial debate, educational thinkers as far back as the turn of the twentieth century discussed the unique nature of this age group. A debate ensued that resulted in these early reformers calling for the reorganization of American schooling, which led to the development of the junior high school model. Regardless of the position reformers took on how exactly to organize schools, it was evident that educators agreed that young adolescent learners are distinctly developmentally different than young children and older adolescents.

Because young adolescent learners constitute a distinctly unique developmental group, research has been conducted to guide the reform of middle level schools and the preparation of middle level teachers. Evidence to support the reform in middle level education around the country has been growing since the early 1960s. The leaders in this area no longer promote a revision in how schools in the middle are organized and conduct business based solely on the combined wisdom of these scholars. Currently there is a significant body of research that supports the efforts to reform middle level schools in such a way as to focus this work on the developmental characteristics and needs of young adolescents. In a foreword to the definitive guide to middle level research, What Current Research Says to the Middle Level Practitioner, John Lounsbury states:

The middle school movement is an educational success story unparalleled in our history. In little over three decades the face of American education has been remade; the intermediate level of education has been given a long overdue identity and has, in fact, been recognized as the level leading in instituting significant educational reform (Irvin, ed., 1997).

The research base that now supports the work being done across the nation to rethink how schools address the unique needs of young adolescent learners stresses different ways of organizing and delivering instruction in our nation’s middle level schools. These ideas also have serious implications for how teachers should be prepared to work in effective middle level schools.

As the Carnegie Corporation stated in its ground breaking report, Turning Points: Preparing America’s Youth for the 21st Century, assignment to a middle grade school is, all too frequently, the last choice of teachers who are prepared for elementary and secondary education. This situation must change drastically. The success of the transformed middle grade school will stand or fall on the willingness of teachers and other staff to invest their efforts in the young adolescent students (Carnegie Corp., 1989). If this situation is to truly change, teacher preparation must respond to this call for teachers specially educated to teach young adolescents.

The history of debate of the 1960s also served to reinforce the need for educators who recognize that the middle level years comprise a unique and separate period in human development. Perhaps the only other period with as much change in the areas of physical, intellectual, social and emotional growth is from birth to 3 years. Middle level learners need teachers who are knowledgeable about the developmental patterns of young adolescents. They need teachers who understand and know how to employ a wide variety of instructional strategies to make connections with their young adolescent learners. They need teachers who can address the curricular problems that confront educators as they grapple with what content materials to use. These issues have prompted hearty deliberation about how to reform middle level teacher education and certification.

Along with the discussions of the 1960s came the revision of teacher certification requirements across the country. In 1968 there were two states with special middle level teacher certification. By 1978 fifteen states had a distinct middle grades teaching license. That number moved to over thirty by the early 1990s. Currently there is a license, an endorsement, or both, to teach in the middle grades in forty-four states.
In 1997 the Illinois State Board of Education began reviewing teacher credentials for the purpose of granting a middle grades endorsement. The current requirements include three semester hours of middle grade philosophy, curriculum, instruction and methods, and three semester hours of young adolescent psychology. Although this modification places Illinois among those states that provide some form of middle level certification, a recent gathering of educators from around the state provided feedback that suggests that these requirements are inadequate. This gathering of teacher educators, school administrators, Illinois State Board of Education representatives, agents of Regional Offices of Education, and the State Superintendent of Schools provided important direction to the Illinois State Board Education to convene an advisory panel to address these concerns.

The advisory panel had its first meeting on February 22, 2000. The panel is comprised of three public school teachers, six school administrators, three superintendents, five representatives from higher education, one parent, and one agent of a Regional Office of Education. The following is the charge to the committee from Mike Long, Professional Preparation Division Head.

**Charge to the Committee**

- Define the appropriate grade levels for the middle level
- Examine national standards in the content areas, the Illinois Learning Standards, and the Illinois Professional Teaching Standards
- Identify the essential requirements for middle-grade teachers
- Make a recommendation about a teaching certificate
- Suggest what content areas are appropriate
- Recommend what clinical experiences are appropriate

**Appropriate Grade Levels for the Middle Level**

After much study and deliberation, the panel recommends that *middle grades should be defined as grades 5 through 9*. This would include students who are between the ages of 10 and 15. Although middle level is sometimes defined as other grade configurations, the format that the panel believes best fits the Illinois model is grades 5 through 9. This grade configuration is not intended to suggest that middle level buildings should be organized in a 5-9 model. The grades 5-9 range reflects a particular developmental level. This range includes all possible configurations of schools that serve middle level learners in this developmental group. Some schools may be 5-8, some 6-8, still others 7-8. The panel included grade nine at the top of this range because some schools may include grade nine in the middle grade building. In addition, a school may have students in a ninth grade teaming environment housed in a high school, but following the middle school model of teaming. The 5-9 range is a configuration inclusive of an age group rather than an expected grade configuration found in schools throughout the state.

The panel asserts that the 5-9 grade configuration best addresses the needs of young adolescent learners in Illinois. This grade level configuration is one of the most common ones found in certification across the country essentially tied with the 5-8 configuration. Therefore this broader range of grades 5 through 9 is recommended.

**Research Base:**

- The grade span defined as middle level varies from state to state. Thirteen states define it as grades 5-9; another 13 specify grades 5-8, and six more designate grade 4-8. Only four states restrict the definition to just three grades – three states specify grades 6-8 and one more refers to grades 7-9. Five more states use other grade spans such as 4-9, 5-10, or 6-9. One state leaves the definition of middle grades to the discretion of individual districts (Useem, Barends, and Lindermeyer, 1999).
• McEwin et al. (1996) concluded that decisions regarding grade organization are increasingly being made based on what is best for young adolescents rather than on expediency and tradition.

• Regardless of grade span, principals rated their programs higher if they used effective middle school practices. Therefore, it is not only grade span that determines the effectiveness of middle schools, but the implementation of developmentally appropriate programs for young adolescent learners as well (National Middle School Association, 1995).

• Epstein and Mac Iver (1990) concluded that grade span makes a real difference in the education of young adolescents because middle schools implement more of the middle school practices that are focused on the developmental needs of these young learners.

• These combinations range from the beginning grade level of fifth grade through various ending grade levels such as eighth or ninth (Alexander and McEwin, 1987).

• By 1981, when school leaders were asked why their schools transitioned to different grade patterns, Valentine and collaborators were told, “to provide a program best suited to the needs of the middle level age student” (Valentine, et al., 1981).

Proposed Certification Standards

The standards that were studied by the panel include the NMSA/NCATE Middle Level Teacher Preparation Standards, the INTASC Core Standards, the Illinois Professional Teaching Standards, the ISBE Content-Area Standards, Illinois State University Middle Level Teacher Education Program Standards, Appalachian State University Middle Grades Education Program Standards.

The study of these different sets of standards focusing upon teacher preparation resulted in the development of an entirely new set of Middle Level Certification Standards. This panel has developed a set of standards that comprise the essential requirements for middle level teachers including knowledge and performance indicators for young adolescent development, middle school organization, advisor/advisee/advocacy, middle level curriculum, middle level instruction and delivery, assessment, collaborative relationships, communication, reflection and professional growth, and professional conduct and leadership.

Essential Requirements for Middle Level Teachers

“The National Commission on Teaching and America’s Future reports that what teachers know and are able to do represents the greatest determinant of what students learn. Therefore, there must be a direct link between expectations and standards for student learning and expectations and standards for teachers and other educational personnel. Standards provide a common reference point for determining whether those expectations have been met. Standards also clarify the criteria for licensing, placing emphasis on the performance of educators rather than on the number of semester hours devoted to coursework” (ISBE, 1997).

Although national and state standards that apply to the broad range of K-12 teaching levels have been developed in recent years, standards that focus specifically on what the middle level teacher should know and be able to do are long overdue. Recent reports on middle level education and the preparation of teachers for this unique and separate developmental level indicate that the time for specific standards for middle level teachers has come.

“At the present time, there are only a few graduate education programs that prepare middle grade teachers, as opposed to elementary or secondary school teachers. Yet early adolescent transition is a distinct phase requiring special understanding of the conjunction of changes that a young person is undergoing and that have a bearing on learning. To orient teachers effectively for the middle grades, professional education programs must incorporate courses in adolescent development, team teaching, and the design and assessment of demanding interdisciplinary curricula. They must also offer special training to work with students and families of different economic, ethnic, and religious backgrounds” (Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development, 1996).
This panel has developed a set of standards that comprise the essential requirements for middle level teachers including knowledge and performance indicators for young adolescent development, middle school organization, advisor/advisee/advocacy, middle level curriculum, middle level instruction and delivery, assessment, collaborative relationships, communication, reflection and professional growth, and professional conduct and leadership.

Research Base:

- Above all else, prospective middle grade teachers need to understand adolescent development through courses and direct experience in middle grade schools (Carnegie Corp., 1989).

- For more than eighty years, the literature has included calls for the preparation of teachers who are specifically prepared to teach young adolescent (Dickinson & Butler, 1994; Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development, 1989; George & McEwin, 1978; Van Til, Vars, & Lounsbury, 1961; Elliot, 1949; Floyd, 1932; Koos, 1927; Douglas, 1920).

- There is a growing consensus among middle level teachers regarding the benefits and importance of comprehensive, specialized middle level teacher preparation (Page, Page, Dickinson, Warkentin & Tibbles, 1992; Jenkins & Jenkins, 1991; DeMedio & Mazur-Stewart, 1990; Keefe, Clark, Nickerson, & Valentine, 1983; Boyer, 1983; Valentine, Clark, Nickerson & Keefe, 1981).

- Results of a study in 1995 indicated that there is a strong consensus among highly effective middle level teachers regarding which teacher characteristics are critical and essential for highly effective teachers of young adolescents, e.g., highly effective teachers are sensitive to individual differences, cultural backgrounds, and exceptionalities of young adolescents, treat them with respect, and celebrate their special nature; highly effective teachers are committed to integrating curriculum (Arth, Lounsbury, McEwin, Swaim, 1995).

- Elements essential to effective middle level teacher preparation programs have been researched based on current trends in the field, best practice of middle level teacher preparation, and the field’s growing knowledge/research base. These elements include:

  (a) A collaborative teacher preparation partnership between faculty at middle level schools and university-based middle level teacher educators that is responsible for all aspects of a site-based middle level teacher preparation program;
  (b) A thorough study of early adolescence and the needs of young adolescents;
  (c) A comprehensive study of middle level philosophy and organization;
  (d) An intensive focus on planning, teaching, and assessment using developmentally and culturally responsive practices;
  (e) Early and continuing middle level field experiences in a variety of good middle level settings;
  (f) Study and practice in the collaborative role of middle level teachers in working with colleagues, families, and community members; and
  (g) Preparation in two or more broad teaching fields (Swaim & Stefanich, 1996; McEwin, Dickinson, Erb & Scales, 1995; McEwin & Dickinson, 1995; Scales, 1992; Alexander & McEwin, 1988).

- A result of the neglect by teacher preparation institutions, state departments of education and the teaching profession to develop and require specialized programs for middle level teacher preparation is that thousands of young adolescent are being taught by teachers who are, at least initially, inadequately prepared to be highly successful with young adolescent learners (McEwin, 1992; McEwin, Dickinson, Erb, & Scales, 1995; Scales & McEwin, 1994, 1996).
A 1991 study conducted across eight states revealed that only 17% of middle level teachers in those states had received any specialized professional preparation to teach young adolescents (Scales, 1992).

In a study of 1,798 middle level schools, 62% of the respondents estimated that less than 25% of teachers at those schools had any kind of specialized middle level professional preparation (McEwin, Dickinson, & Jenkins, 1996).


The components listed below include only those that are unique and/or need special focus in middle level teacher preparation. They do not include other elements that are essential to any type of teacher preparation program (e.g., diversity issues, effective use of instructional technology, etc.). They include:

(a) a thorough study of early adolescence and the needs of young adolescents;
(b) a comprehensive study of middle level philosophy and organization;
(c) a thorough study of middle level curriculum;
(d) an intensive focus on planning, teaching, and assessment using developmentally and culturally responsive practices;
(e) early and continuing middle level field experiences in a variety of good middle level settings;
(f) study and practice in the collaborative role of middle level teachers in working with colleagues, families, and community members;
(g) preparation in two or more broad teaching fields; and,
(h) a collaborative teacher preparation partnership between faculty at middle level schools and university-based middle level teacher educators that is responsible for all aspects of a site-based middle level teacher preparation program. (McEwin & Dickinson, 1996).

Programmatic components found in the literature (such as the list above) are not experimental or based solely on theory. They have been the components of highly successful middle level teacher preparation programs for many years (McEwin & Dickinson, 1995; Swaim & Stefanich, 1996).

Teaching Certificate Recommendation

The panel has studied certification patterns across the United States. It is the recommendation of the panel that a separate certificate for middle level teacher certification in Illinois be established. The panel’s recommendation is that a new Middle Level Certificate be made available as soon as possible covering grades 5 through 9. Middle level endorsements on the current elementary and secondary certificates should be phased out through a five-year plan. The panel strongly believes that a five-year phase out of the current endorsements on the elementary and secondary certificates would provide adequate pools of certified teachers through any possible anticipated teacher shortage.

At the conclusion of the five-year phase out of endorsements, the panel recommends a change in the configuration of the current teaching certificate ranges. The recommendation suggests that a teacher candidate completing an elementary teacher education program receive a K-6 certificate. A teacher candidate completing a secondary teacher education program should receive a 9-12 certificate. By adding the separate Middle Level Certificate, this panel recommends the following certificate ranges:

Elementary Education K-6
Middle Level Education 5-9
Secondary Education 9-12
It is anticipated that an elementary education major who would want to extend the range of possibilities in
the job search would choose to complete a dual certification in both elementary and middle grades. In
the same manner, a secondary education major may choose to complete both the secondary and middle
grades certificate prior to graduation. The work to be completed beyond the first certificate requirements
would include meeting the standards in the Middle Level Certification Standards that were not covered in
the elementary or secondary program. There are some overlapping standards between the elementary
and middle grades standards. The level of overlap between the middle grades and secondary standards
would need to be identified by separate teacher education programs. The dual certification requirements
would provide a stronger and more focused preparation allowing the certificate recipient to be equally
qualified in each of the certificate areas.

In regards to teaching certificates covering grades K-12, it should be the responsibility of institutions that
offer K-12 programs to require preparation at the middle level. The state certification test for the K-12
certificates should include questions on middle level education. The questions to be used on the K-12
test could be some of the same questions used on a new general middle grades test.

It is the intention of the panel that teachers earning certificates/endorsements prior to the implementation
date of the new Middle Level Certificate be “grandfathered.” The only conditions under which a
certificated teacher should need to complete new requirements for the Middle Level Certificate would
include teachers who pursue a teaching position at the middle level after the implementation date who
have not been certified to teach at the middle level prior to the implementation date. Teachers who stay
with the same employer would be grandfathered for the length of their career. If a teacher chooses to
change employers after the five-year phase in period, it is proposed that those individuals be granted a
two-year provisional period in which to complete the proper certification.

McEwin & Dickinson (1995) suggest that certificates that overlap render their requirements largely
ineffective. Although there is some agreement on the panel with this point, it is the consensus of this
group that due to the large number of school districts in Illinois, particularly those that are K-12 unit
districts, and possible teacher shortages on the horizon, our certification options should remain relatively
flexible at this time.

- States in the 1990s moved in the direction of offering and/or requiring middle grades licenses or
endorsements to an elementary or secondary license. Forty-four out of the 50 states and the
District of Columbia currently offer such credentials. Twenty-eight of these states offer full
certification/licensure while the rest offer only an endorsement option to an elementary or
secondary certificate. In 1992 only 33 states had such credentials. Eleven states offer a license
and an endorsement. Of the 42 states offering middle level credentials in 1999, 14 require either
a middle level certificate or license of endorsement to teach in the middle grades, up from 11

- Although the need for specially prepared middle level teachers has been recognized in the
literature for over 70 years (Douglas, 1920), most young adolescents are taught today by
teachers whose initial professional preparation and interests rest with teaching other age groups,
or who were interested in a middle level teaching career but found no specialized middle level
teacher preparation programs available (Irvin, et al., 1997).

- A 1995 study compared the knowledge base of two groups of middle level student teachers, one
group with specialized middle level teacher preparation and the other with elementary (1-8) or
secondary (7-12) rather than middle level preparation. Results showed specially prepared
teachers made significantly more favorable scores on knowledge, planning, videotaped teaching
performance, and attitude toward middle level teaching than generally prepared preservice
teachers (Stahler, 1995).

- Teachers prepared to teach at the senior high school level are seldom licensed to teach young
children in elementary schools and teachers prepared to teach young children are typically not
permitted to teach in senior high schools. Yet, the belief about the middle seems to be “any
preparation will do – no specialization needed.” This belief, and the resulting policies, which it
creates, must be reversed, and the interest of young adolescents and their teachers are given
high priority (McEwin & Dickinson, 1995).
• A lack of professionally prepared teachers for the middle level stems from a limited number of specialized middle level preparation programs, special graduate courses in middle level education, and advanced degree programs for future leaders of middle level reform (NCATE-Approved Curriculum Guidelines, 1991).

• A majority of prospective and practicing middle level teachers are unlikely to pursue specialized middle level professional preparation if this commitment is not rewarded or required to practice their profession (McEwin, Dickinson, Erb & Scales, 1995).

• Most teacher preparation institutions are unlikely to develop middle level teacher preparation programs when there is no specialized license required for middle level teaching (McEwin, Dickinson, Erb, & Scales, 1995).

• Some of the major barriers to the universal implementation of specialized middle level teacher preparation and licensure include:
  (a) the unavailability of specially prepared middle level teachers;
  (b) the negative stereotyped image of young adolescents;
  (c) the presence of too few advocates at teacher preparation institutions and state agencies;
  (d) the desire for flexibility in assignment of middle level teachers;
  (e) the public’s lack of knowledge about appropriate middle level schooling;
  (f) the lack of program comprehensiveness;
  (g) teacher resistance to change;
  (h) problems, real or perceived, with other teacher preparation programs; and,
  (i) the limited number of instructors in teacher preparation programs with the depth of middle level knowledge and experience needed (McEwin & Dickinson, 1995, 1996).

• A major reason middle level teacher preparation programs are not universally available in many states is the failure of these states to implement licensure regulations which promote the specialized knowledge and performances needed to successfully teach young adolescents (McEwin & Dickinson, 1996).

• Whether it should be the case or not, in the large majority of teacher preparation institutions, program development follows licensure requirements (McEwin & Dickinson, 1996).

• Eighty-two percent of all middle level teacher preparation programs in 1991 were in states where middle level licensure/endorsements were available. Additionally, 57 percent of all special middle level teacher preparation programs were in only five states – states where special licensure was required for middle level teaching (McEwin, 1992; McEwin & Dickinson, 1995).

Content Areas

It is the recommendation of the panel that all middle grades teachers be prepared in one subject area to be certified at the middle level, but strongly recommends preparation in at least two subject areas. The NMSA/NCATE standards for approval of middle level teacher education programs require preparation in at least two subject areas. It is an important component of the middle school philosophy that learners interact with a curriculum that is integrated and interdisciplinary. In this way, the learner is able to see the connections between different content areas. Prospective teachers who are prepared in only one content area may be limited in their ability to plan and implement lessons that illustrate these curricular connections for young adolescent learners. Multiple discipline preparation facilitates the teacher’s ability to plan and implement curricula that are integrated and interdisciplinary in nature. It is the recommendation of the panel that teacher candidates be required to prepare in one subject area that is broad, multidisciplinary, and encompasses the major areas within that field, but that these teacher candidates be strongly advised to prepare in two or more.
The focus on curriculum integration is the heart of curriculum work at the middle level. This is how middle level learners learn best. Through curriculum integration, teachers endeavor to connect the subject areas rather than teach them in a separate, isolated manner. With that said, it needs to be clear that the emphasis on curriculum integration study is not intended to supersede the need for strong preparation in at least one subject area that is broad, multidisciplinary, and encompasses the major areas within that field. These subject area preparation concerns are equally important.

In addition, the panel recommends that all middle level teachers in Illinois should have appropriate preparation in the teaching of reading at the middle level. Educators and public school administrators in middle level schools have been describing a condition that may be problematic. There seems to be an assumption that middle level learners arrive in middle schools already reading at grade level. Since this may, indeed, not be the case, it is certainly important for middle level educators to know how to teach reading. Middle level educators complain that much of the middle level reading curriculum teachers are working with in Illinois schools is literature based. If students are not reading up to grade level, then this heavy concentration on literature may be assuming too much. There appears to be a widely held belief that teacher preparation in the pedagogy of teaching reading at the middle level seems to be overlooked. This preparation should include a breadth of communication skills including the pedagogy of reading, writing, grammar and vocabulary development.

Research Base:

- Effective middle level teachers should possess a depth and breadth of knowledge in two content areas which are broad, multidisciplinary, and encompass the major areas within those field, e.g., science, not just biology; social science, not just history (NMSA/NCATE Middle Level Teacher Preparation Standards).

- The components listed below include only those that are unique and/or need special focus in middle level teacher preparation. They do not include other elements that are essential to any type of teacher preparation program (e.g., diversity issues, effective use of instructional technology). They include:

  (a) a thorough study of early adolescence and the needs of young adolescents;
  (b) a comprehensive study of middle level philosophy and organization;
  (c) a thorough study of middle level curriculum;
  (d) an intensive focus on planning, teaching, and assessment using developmentally and culturally responsive practices;
  (e) early and continuing middle level field experiences in a variety of good middle level settings;
  (f) study and practice in the collaborative role of middle level teachers in working with colleagues, families, and community members;
  (g) preparation in two or more broad teaching fields; and,
  (h) a collaborative teacher preparation partnership between faculty at middle level schools and university-based middle level teacher educators that is responsible for all aspects of a site-based middle level teacher preparation program. (McEwin & Dickinson, 1996).

- The 1991 NMSA position paper on professional certification state the essential elements of a middle level teacher education program as follows:

  (a) Thorough study of the nature and needs of young adolescents;
  (b) Middle level curriculum and instruction to include teaming, advisory, and exploratory preparation;
  (c) Broad academic background, including concentrations in at least two academic areas at the undergraduate level;
  (d) Specialized methods and reading courses; and
  (e) Early and continuing field experiences in good middle schools (NMSA, 1991)
• It is important that prospective middle level teachers have knowledge of middle level curriculum that emphasizes interdisciplinary and integrative learning. Therefore, this content preparation must expand beyond one field to two or more teaching fields. This preparation in the multiple fields should have a thorough academic underpinning of content, content pedagogy, and the connections and interrelationships among the fields and other areas of knowledge (McEwin & Dickinson, 1996).

• Studies conducted over more than 60 years suggest that almost without exception, students in any type of integrated curricular program not only do as well as, but often do better than, students in a conventional departmentalized program (Mickelson, 1957; Alberty, 1960; Wright, 1956, 1963; Armstrong, 1977; Cotton, 1982, Arhar, Johnston, and Markle, 1992; and Lee & Smith, 1992).

• “Teams may plan and carry out interdisciplinary units from time to time, but few do much more than correlate subjects, if each team member continues to function as a specialist in one particular subject” (Irvin, et al., 1997).

• “As we enter the 21st century, teachers are facing a difficult challenge. Many students in middle and high school content area classes are unable to learn content material by reading texts” (Lenski, Wham & Johns, 1999).

• The range of academic performance in a classroom can be as much as two-thirds the age of the students (e.g., an eight-year range among 12-year-olds), which means that, for example, students in a sixth-grade class could range from second to tenth grade in reading and writing performance. Teachers must consider how to meet the developmental needs of this range of students (Combs, 1997).

• In the elementary grades, children read books, but the body of literature they encounter in reading class is largely narrative. As a result of this narrow focus, children experience difficulty when they read more formal and content-driven texts in the upper grades (Farnan & Kelly, 1993).

• Because one of the most important purposes of reading in the middle and high schools is for students to read to learn content information (Brozo & Simpson, 1995), students must have the ability to read content texts, or to be content literate (Lenski, Wham & Johns, 1999).

Clinical Experiences

It is strongly recommended by the panel that teacher preparation programs should engage students in early and continuous experiences in middle level classrooms throughout the teacher preparation sequence. Teachers earning the proposed Middle Level Certificate should be required to complete student teaching in grades 5 through 9.

The panel feels strongly that teacher candidates earning a dual certificate in either middle/elementary or middle/secondary must complete clinical experiences that include grades in both certificate areas. These clinical experiences must involve more than observation. They should be active and participatory experiences in the range of classrooms. Teacher education programs need to require clinical experiences for their majors that cover the full range of the certificate the teacher candidates are earning. The panel believes that no fewer than 60 clock hours should be demanded for pre-student teaching clinical work, although the members agree that aggressive and effective assessments of candidate performance against the standards and indicators is a greater affirmation of competence than the accumulation of contact hours in these experiences.

When an undergraduate pursuing dual certification chooses to student teach at the middle level, there should be a requirement for intensive and extensive clinical experiences at a grade level in the other certificate that is not an overlapping grade. These hours may take place during student teaching or outside of the student teaching experience. The converse applies for the dual certification candidate who chooses to student teach at the elementary level or the secondary level. Should the teacher candidate
student teach at a grade level that includes the overlap between certificates, for example fifth grade or sixth grade for elementary, or ninth grade for secondary, then that individual must complete the additional clinical hours required in a lower elementary grade for the elementary/middle dual, or grades 10, 11, or 12 for the secondary/middle dual. This should assure strong preparation for each certificate area.

Research Base:

- **Field Experiences.** Field experiences in grades 5-8 will provide: early and continuing involvement in a variety of middle level settings; observation, participation, and teaching experiences ranging from individual to large group setting; full-time student teaching of at least 10 seeks, supervised by a qualified teacher and a university/college supervisor (NMSA/NCATE-Approved Teacher Education Curriculum Guidelines, 1990).

- Early and continuous field experiences provide a learning laboratory for interns for formal study and application where education faculties (school site and university-based) can teach, supervise, and advise (McEwin, Dickinson, 1996).

- Middle level teacher education should allow prospective teachers to experience working with young adolescents throughout their teacher education program (Swaim & Stefanich, 1996).

- There are four distinct purposes of middle school field experiences:
  
  (a) expanding and enriching developmental knowledge;
  (b) contact with diverse learners;
  (c) practice in finding one’s teaching self; and,
  (d) practice in operating in a middle level organization. (McEwin, Dickinson, Erb, and Scales, 1995).

- **Keys to success for middle level field experiences in a middle level teacher education program:**
  
  (a) early assignments with a continuing and identifiable sequence of development;
  (b) assignments to teams where interns can experience the broad range of roles of middle level teachers;
  (c) use of multiple school settings that provide interns with the ability to compare and contrast how different schools respond to young adolescent development;
  (d) work with a variety of instructors/mentors/coaches/advisors;
  (e) movement from observation to participation, from working with small groups to large collections of students, from close supervision to more independent control, and from apprenticeships to independent teachers; and,
  (f) placement in structurally different schools and schools with diverse populations of young adolescents (McEwin, Dickinson, 1996).

- For those undergraduates who are interested in a teaching career, opportunities to observe young adolescents in schools and other community settings, and to interact with middle level learners should be available as early as the freshman year (Carnegie Corp., 1989).

**Implementation**

In Illinois, teacher candidates take two certification tests. For elementary teachers a general elementary test and a basic skills test are required. For secondary teachers a basic skills test and a subject area test are required. It is the recommendation of this panel that the new Middle Level Certificate candidates take a basic skills test, a general middle grades test, and one subject area test that is designed to assess knowledge of middle grades subject area content.

The panel would like to emphasize the need to inform parents and community members about this model of schooling. This model of schooling may depart from the experience of many parents and community members. Middle grade schools need to establish parent and community education as a priority. Effective and active communication practices are essential to the level of school and community collaboration necessary to promote positive middle grades programs.
It is also evident that teacher education programs need to address these issues as programs are examined and revised to align with the Middle Level Certification Standards. There are resources throughout the state that can assist with this important work. The Association of Illinois Middle-Level Schools (AIMS) is a service agency with both human and material resources available to assist institutions of higher education. The Illinois State Board of Education, in collaboration with IBHE and the Community College Board, has been successful in acquiring a Teacher Quality Enhancement (TQE) Grant that is primarily focused on the middle level. Collaboration between ISBE, AIMS, and the partners in the TQE Grant should provide excellent resources for helping institutions of higher education identify and assist faculty in providing programs that address these important standards for middle grades teacher education.

Summary

It is the position of the panel that a brief comment must be made concerning educational leadership in effective middle schools. It is important to note that currently there are no standards relating to knowledge acquisition about middle level practices required of school administrators who earn an administrative certificate in Illinois. Current research suggests that effective middle grade school principals must be prepared to use a wide variety of leadership skills and practices in moving the work of the school forward. At the forefront of a possible list of such skills is the ability to engage in shared leadership and decision making. Lawler (1992) discovered that few principals have received training in these approaches to school leadership. It is a widely held opinion that no single individual is more important to initiating and sustaining improvement in middle grade school students’ performance than the school principal (Jackson & Davis, 2000). Studies suggest that the practices of principals are directly related to the level of changes in the school’s culture, student achievement and behavior, attendance, and teachers’ willingness to change instructional practices (Leithwood & Duke, 1993). The panel strongly urges an examination of administrator preparation programs to ensure that these issues directly related to leadership in the middle school are addressed.

A Final Note: Teacher Shortages

A final portion of this report focuses upon addressing the concerns that have been expressed about the projected teacher shortage. The panel has worked carefully to craft a document that is sensitive to these concerns. The five-year phase in of the proposed certification reorganization is the first piece that addresses these concerns. The “grandfathering” process will result in another effort to respond to teacher shortage concerns.

Through this process, teacher candidates and teachers already in the field will have a five-year window in which to earn the middle grades endorsement prior to the total shift in certification requirements. This five-year window needs to be well publicized in order for school districts to encourage their teachers to earn the endorsement. In addition, institutions of higher education will need to advise teacher candidates of the five-year window of opportunity. It is also likely that these same institutions of higher education will need the five-year window to develop changes is programming.

The practice of “grandfathering” teachers in the field who remain in their current teaching positions is also likely to help districts avoid a potential teacher shortage due to the recommended changes. This practice would be interpreted in such a way that for as long as a teacher remains an employee of the same school district, he/she will be grandfathered in at the time of the certification reorganization. At such time as the five-year window of opportunity closes on the endorsement, should this person choose to change employers, (s)he would be entitled to a 2 year provisional letter that would allow the person to work for a new employer while working to meet the requirements for the new certificate.

The work of this panel has moved from the receipt of the charge from the Illinois State Board of Education through public comment to this final draft and recommendations. The panel has drawn from a multitude of resources to complete its work. The deliberations in the development of the report and standards were lively, thorough, and well thought out. The diversity of backgrounds and expertise represented by members of this panel contributed greatly to the development process. The panel is confident that this
work represents a clear description of what an effective middle level teacher should know and be able to do. It is the consensus of this panel that the proposed recommendations in this report and accompanying standards will place Illinois at the forefront of model standards for the preparation of middle level teachers.

Resources


MIDDLE LEVEL CERTIFICATION STANDARDS

STANDARD 1 – Young Adolescent Development

The effective middle level teacher understands and respects the unique developmental characteristics of young adolescents (grades 5-9) in the physical, intellectual, social and emotional domains and can apply this knowledge in working with young adolescent students.

Knowledge Indicators: The effective middle level teacher

1A. Understands the major theories, theorists, and concepts that apply to the unique developmental characteristics of young adolescent development – physical, intellectual, social, and emotional.

1B. Understands the various components of young adolescent development and culture.

1C. Understands the impact of stress on young adolescents’ physical, intellectual, social, and emotional development.

1D. Understands the need of and procedures for working and connecting with families and community organizations to promote healthy, productive young adolescents.

1E. Understands young adolescent development with an appreciation of minority, gender, immigrant, and diverse cultures.

1F. Understands issues of young adolescent health and sexuality.

1G. Understands the range of individual differences of all young adolescents and the implications of these differences for teaching and learning.

Performance Indicators: The effective middle level teacher

1H. Creates adapts, and adjusts curriculum and teaching strategies to promote young adolescent learning, develop better study habits, encourage classroom participation and enhance organizational skills.

1I. Assesses student behavior and academic work based on what is developmentally appropriate for the young adolescent.

1J. Creates a classroom environment where young adolescents feel safe and supported.

1K. Utilizes learning theory, brain research, and knowledge of young adolescent culture to meet middle level learners’ needs.

1L. Demonstrates respect for the individual differences of students.

STANDARD 2 – Middle School Organization

The effective middle level teacher understands and demonstrates how a middle school is organized and is able to function within an interdisciplinary team (core and/or encore) to fulfill student, curriculum, and whole school needs.

Knowledge Indicators: The effective middle level teacher
2A. Understands organizational structure that includes interdisciplinary teaming, disciplinary teaming (core and/or encore), advisor/advisee programs, flexible block schedule, heterogeneous grouping and regrouping* within the team.

2B. Understands that middle schools are organized into smaller communities which include a common group of teachers and students in a common area with a common block of time.

2C. Understands the benefits and use of common planning time* among colleagues.

2D. Understands that middle school teams have a team leader and all members play an active role within the team.

2E. Understands team responsibilities, such as planning interdisciplinary units*, making curriculum connections, developing team goals, and maintaining team records, e.g., agendas, minutes, and follow-up communication.

2F. Understands that middle level students need to feel a sense of belonging to their team, teachers, classmates, and staff in order to enhance communication, discipline, and shared goals.

2G. Understands that shared decision-making* facilitates the development of curriculum, the school improvement process, and common rules.

**Performance Indicators:** The effective middle level teacher

2H. Actively participates on an interdisciplinary team (core and/or encore) demonstrating skills such as team building, team goal setting and assessment, maintaining team records, coordinating and assessing curriculum, and interdisciplinary units.

2I. Works within a flexible block schedule* to enhance curriculum connections among disciplines.

2J. Develops and teaches interdisciplinary units.

2K. Maintains lines of communication with students within the team, school, and community.

**STANDARD 3 – Advisor/Advisee/Advocacy**

The effective middle level teacher serves as both an advisor and an advocate for students.

**Knowledge Indicators:** The effective middle level teacher

3A. Understands the teacher’s role as an advisor and as an advocate.

3B. Understands how social groups function.

3C. Understands the young adolescent’s need to connect with others.

3D. Understands students in their family, school, and community contexts.

3E. Understands the services available from local community resources.

3F. Understands the components of a successful advisory program.*

**Performance Indicators:** The effective middle level teacher

3G. Demonstrates support of young adolescents and is sensitive to the challenges they face daily.
3H. Develops advisory program activities to engage students.

3I. Develops and maintains a mentoring relationship with students.

3J. Demonstrates sensitivity to the various economic and cultural influences that affect students’ lives.

3K. Establishes and maintains a positive climate in the advisory program.

STANDARD 4 - Middle Level Curriculum

The effective middle level teacher understands and demonstrates the central concepts, tools of inquiry, and structures of subject area content and creates integrated learning experiences that develop all students’ competence in subject matter and skills at the appropriate developmental levels.

Knowledge Indicators: The effective middle level teacher

4A. Understands district, state, and national standards as they apply to middle level curriculum.

4B. Possesses a depth and breadth of knowledge in at least one content area* that is broad, multidisciplinary, and encompasses the major areas within that field* (preparation in at least two content areas is strongly recommended).

4C. Understands vertical articulation of curriculum within individual content areas.

4D. Understands that interdisciplinary connections are used to analyze concepts, problems, and real-world situations within and across content areas.

4E. Understands the instructional strategies necessary to make interdisciplinary connections within and across content areas.

4F. Understands that assessment of student learning is integral to curriculum development.

4G. Understands reading as a process of constructing meaning through the interaction of the reader’s existing knowledge and experience, the information suggested by written language, and the context of the reading situation.

Performance Indicators: The effective middle level teacher

4H. Uses applicable district, state, and national standards in designing curriculum.

4I. Designs and implements an interdisciplinary curriculum.

4J. Uses instructional strategies that develop analytic and problem-solving skills related to real-world situations within and across content areas.

4K. Interprets and communicates knowledge and ideas from diverse cultural perspectives.

4L. Uses assessment of student learning to design curriculum.

4M. Promotes the development of a literate environment that fosters interest and growth in all aspects of literacy.
**STANDARD 5 – Middle Level Instruction and Delivery**

The effective middle level teacher uses a variety of instructional strategies to support student learning.

**Knowledge Indicators:** *The effective middle level teacher*

5A. Understands district, state, and national standards as they apply to middle level instruction.

5B. Understands the teacher’s role in the school improvement process.

5C. Understands the cognitive processes, principles, and techniques associated with various instructional strategies.

5D. Understands how to enhance learning through the use of a wide variety of disciplinary and interdisciplinary materials and resources.

5E. Understands the importance of addressing reading and writing in all content areas.

5F. Understands characteristics of gifted and talented and the areas of exceptionality in learning as defined in the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and the Illinois Administrative Code.

5G. Understands the process of second-language acquisition and strategies to support the learning of students whose first language is not English.

**Performance Indicators:** *The effective middle level teacher*

5H. Uses district, state, and national standards in the delivery of middle level instruction.

5I. Uses multiple teaching and learning strategies to promote the development of problem solving and critical thinking skills.

5J. Varies role as instructor, facilitator, or coach in relation to the content and goals of instruction.

5K. Presents lessons in a variety of ways to convey concepts, provide alternate explanations, present diverse perspectives, and engage students in active learning experiences.

5L. Demonstrates an interconnection between disciplines.

5M. Selects and uses a wide range of instructional resources and technological tools to support learning.

5N. Plans and teaches lessons that incorporate reading and writing in all content areas.

5O. Identifies and accesses appropriate services, resources, and strategies to assist students with exceptional learning needs.
**STANDARD 6 – Assessment**

The effective middle level teacher understands and uses formal and informal assessment to evaluate and support the continuous physical, intellectual, social, and emotional development of young adolescents.

**Knowledge Indicators:** *The effective middle level teacher*

6A. Understands the characteristics, purposes, advantages, and limitations of different types of assessments.

6B. Understands the use of a variety of assessment tools to evaluate how young adolescents learn and to determine what they know and are able to do.

6C. Understands measurement theory and assessment-related issues such as validity, reliability, bias, and scoring.

6D. Understands how to select, construct, and use appropriate assessment and evaluation strategies and instruments in the instructional process.

6E. Understands the use of standardized, formal, and informal reading assessments, including ongoing observations.

**Performance Indicators:** *The effective middle level teacher*

6F. Creates and applies appropriate pre-assessment and assessment for differentiated learning strategies to promote each student’s success.

6G. Develops and uses a wide variety of formal and informal assessments to evaluate students’ progress and performances.

6H. Uses multiple approaches to assessment and evaluation of learning based on research and exemplary practice.

6I. Uses student assessment results to diagnose student learning and to modify plans and instructional strategies.

6J. Uses varied assessments that evaluate the application of the full range of thinking skills.

6K. Involves students in self-assessment, reflection, and goal setting.

6L. Maintains useful, accurate, and ethical records of student work and performance, and communicates student progress knowledgeably and responsibly to students, parents, school, and community.

6M. Selects and uses appropriate instructional resources and technologies to monitor and assess student progress towards meeting national, state, and local standards.

**STANDARD 7 – Collaborative Relationships**

The effective middle level teacher understands the community’s role in education and develops and maintains collaborative relationships with colleagues, family, and the community.

**Knowledge Indicators:** *The effective middle level teacher*
7A. Recognizes schools as organizations within the larger community context and can explain the benefits, barriers, and techniques for working collaboratively with colleagues, family, and community.

7B. Realizes the benefits of and techniques for working collaboratively within the school environment.

7C. Understands the need for collaboration between school and business/industry.

7D. Recognizes the potential benefits of working with civic and service organizations.

7E. Understands the value and practice of service learning* as an educational tool.

7F. Understands the relationship between the community served and the teaching and learning environment of the school.

7G. Recognizes the continuum of the education process across all levels of schooling, i.e., elementary, middle, secondary.

**Performance Indicators:** The effective middle level teacher

7H. Initiates partnerships and participates in collaborative decision making.

7I. Develops relationships with parents/family and other community professionals to gain an understanding of students' lives outside of the school.

7J. Develops relationships with families and community members in which individual differences and cultural diversity are respected.

7K. Involves the community in the exploration of curricular, career, and service learning opportunities.

7L. Seeks input and shares ideas and resources with school support personnel.

7M. Establishes collaborative relationships with elementary and secondary educators to ensure a smooth transition into and out of the middle grades for learners.

**STANDARD 8 – Communication**

The effective middle level teacher uses knowledge of effective written, verbal, nonverbal, and visual communication techniques to foster active inquiry, collaboration, and supportive interaction both in and out of the classroom.

**Knowledge Indicators:** The effective middle level teacher

8A. Understands communication theory (both verbal and nonverbal), language development, and the role of language in learning.

8B. Understands how individual, cultural, linguistic, and gender differences can affect communication with young adolescents.

8C. Understands the social, intellectual, and political implications of language use.

8D. Understands the importance of audience and purpose when communicating ideas.
**Performance Indicators:** *The effective middle level teacher*

8E. Treats young adolescents with dignity and respect.

8F. Communicates in a professional manner with other adults.

8G. Maintains active listening skills.

8H. Models correct grammar and appropriate sentence construction in both oral and written communication.

8I. Models accurate, effective modes of communication and uses a variety of communication tools, including technology.

8J. Uses effective questioning techniques and stimulates discussion in various ways for specific instructional purposes.

8K. Creates varied opportunities for students to use effective written, verbal, nonverbal, and visual communication.

8L. Communicates with students in a supportive manner and provides constructive feedback.

8M. Challenges every student to excel.

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**STANDARD 9 - Reflection and Professional Growth**

The effective middle level teacher is a reflective practitioner who actively seeks opportunities to grow professionally.

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**Knowledge Indicators:** *The effective middle level teacher*

9A. Understands that reflection is an integral part of professional growth and improvement of instruction.

9B. Understands various self-assessment and problem-solving strategies.

9C. Accepts formal and informal feedback as opportunities for professional growth.

9D. Can identify professional development resources, including professional literature, professional organizations, professional development opportunities, and procedures for action-based research.

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**Performance Indicators:** *The effective middle level teacher*

9E. Demonstrates knowledge of current issues in middle level education.

9F. Demonstrates commitment to life-long learning.

9G. Uses self-reflection and external feedback to modify performance.

9H. Is active in professional organizations, participates in workshops and conferences, and reads professional literature.
STANDARD 10 – Professional Conduct and Leadership

The effective middle level teacher understands that education is a profession and therefore maintains standards of professional conduct, serves as a positive role model, and provides leadership to improve student learning and well being.

Knowledge Indicators: The effective middle level teacher

10A. Understands the unique characteristics of education as a profession in a public school setting.

10B. Understands how school systems are organized and operate.

10C. Understands school and district policies and procedures.

10D. Understands legal issues in education.

10E. Understands the importance of active participation and leadership in professional organizations.

Performance Indicators: The effective middle level teacher

10F. Meets deadlines and is consistently on time for assigned duties, classes, and meetings.

10G. Exhibits a strong work ethic, which includes regular attendance, being prepared, demonstrating high quality work, accepting responsibility, and seeking solutions to problems.

10H. Respects the boundaries of professional responsibility and confidentiality when working with students, colleagues, and families.

10I. Shares professional knowledge and expertise about teaching and learning.

10J. Follows school and district policies and procedures.

10K. Participates actively in curriculum development, staff development, and continuing education.

10L. Participates in professional activities beyond the scope of the classroom.
Glossary of Terms

Advisory program – a teacher-based guidance effort that provides every student with one adult advisor who serves as an advocate and a small-group leader. The group meets frequently on a regular basis and typically focuses on personal/social development, educational advisement, school-wide communication and home-school-community relations.

Broad, multidisciplinary, and encompasses the major areas within that field – Content area preparation that meets this criterion would include examples such as science preparation that addresses physical science, earth science, and life science. An example in mathematics would include preparation that addresses problem solving, mathematical concepts, reasoning, probability, algebra, geometry, etc.

Common planning time – a period in the daily schedule when the teams of teachers who work with the same group of students are given time to plan together.

Content area – fundamental learning areas as defined in the Illinois Learning Standards, e.g., science, math, social studies, language arts, music, art, physical education, industrial technology, etc.

Core team – a group of two or more teachers from different subject areas, such as mathematics, science, social studies, language arts, or reading, who have a common group of students, a similar schedule with common planning, and who share the same part of the building.

Early adolescence – a distinct developmental stage of life usually defined as ages 10 to 15, grades 5 through 9.

Encore team – a group of two or more teachers from different subject areas such as music, art, physical education, family and consumer sciences, industrial technology, foreign languages, computers, who share responsibility for teaching all students in the building at some point during a school year, who have a similar schedule with common planning, and who may share the same part of the building.

Flexible block schedule – a flexible time arrangement, characteristic of middle grade schools that allows teams of teachers to schedule instructional time in flexible time periods to better meet the academic and social needs of the students.

Interdisciplinary team – a group of two or more teachers from different subject areas who have a common group of students, a similar schedule with common planning, and who share the same part of the building.

Interdisciplinary unit – a curricular unit of study developed to reflect multiple subject areas and skills in an integrated manner.

Middle level – grades five through nine.

Regrouping – a strategy for grouping students that remains flexible and changes as the need arises for different arrangements of students, such as grouping for the purpose of accommodating different interests, varied abilities physically, intellectually, socially, emotionally, or for the differentiation of instruction for any other purpose.

Service learning – an instructional strategy designed to enhance learning through the integration of community service, reflection, and study.
**Shared decision-making** – the practice of including not only the principal, but the teachers and other school personnel, in school management.

**Transescent (Young adolescent)** – a young person in transition from childhood to adolescence usually defined as ages 10 to 15, grades 5 through 9.

*Some of these definitions were adapted from Middle Grades Task Force Report: Last Best Chance, North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, 1991.*