ILLINOIS STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION

May 15, 2002

Agenda Topic: Proposed Middle Level Certificate and Standards

Materials: None

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Purposes of Agenda Item

• Report on the meeting with regional superintendents concerning middle level certification;

• Identify modifications to the middle level proposal shared with the State Board on January 16, 2002; and

• Provide staff recommendations on the middle level certificate.

Expected Outcomes of the Agenda Item

• Understand the modifications to the advisory panel’s original recommendations;

• Accept the staff modifications; and

• Direct staff to prepare legislative language.

Background Information

In June 2000, the State Board adopted content standards for nearly 30 teaching fields and three administrative specializations. A few months prior to the Board action, six advisory panels were convened to develop recommendations and to design knowledge and performance standards for four School Service Personnel Certificate endorsements, directors of special education, and middle level educators. The procedures and population used to develop these standards replicated that employed for the teacher and administrator standards.
The 19-member panel first met in February 2000. Membership included public school teachers, building principals and district superintendents, representatives of higher education, a parent, and an assistant Regional Superintendent. Dr. Deborah Curtis from Illinois State University convened the advisory group. Meetings continued through the spring and into the late fall 2000, when the first draft of recommendations was produced.

The panel’s report and a staff report were shared with the State Teacher Certification and the State Board of Education at their December 2000 meetings. State Board members encouraged the panel to meet again before distributing the report publicly. Specifically, the advisory group was asked to consider issues such as writing and vocabulary, content depth in one field rather than breadth in two fields, and collaboration with parents in developing an understanding of the middle school structure. The panel met in January 2001 and introduced the changes suggested by the Board.

The first iteration of the middle level standards and recommendations was distributed in February and March 2001. More than 5000 hard copies were shared with members of various professional associations, the IEA and the IFT, and the State Teacher Certification Board. To encourage additional feedback and comment, the panel’s proposals were posted on the agency website, and nine public forums attracting about 75 people were held throughout the state, primarily in regional offices of education. Several members of the advisory group made formal presentations on the recommendations at state conferences, including the Association of Illinois Middle Schools.

Most of the feedback was positive, acknowledging the need for a more comprehensive preparation of middle level educators than is currently afforded by the six semester hour endorsement. Some respondents, however, questioned an increase in requirements when shortages existed in nearly all teaching specializations.

The staff report to the State Board in May 2001 detailed the comments on the panel’s recommendations as well as the feedback garnered on the school service personnel and director of special education standards. While the Board acknowledged the modifications made by the panel in January 2001, the members posed additional questions for consideration by the advisory group. Specifically, the panel was encouraged to affirm the practices of other states, to discuss the impact of the certificate on teacher shortages, and, of course, to consider the feedback received from the public. The panel was advised to issue another draft in November 2001.

The advisory panel was reconvened for a second time in June. Following the directives of the Board a final report was issued in late November 2001. In response to the inquiries of the Board in May, the advisory group found that 26 states offer a distinct middle school license and 18 others provide an
endorsement on an existent certificate. These data indicate a 75% increase in the number of states requiring a middle level credential in the past seven years, with the greatest number of states (i.e., 10 of 14) adding a certificate. Iowa is the only state bordering Illinois that does not offer a middle level certificate. Seven states have no credential for middle level teaching at all.

The panel’s report further confronted the potential adverse impact on teacher supply. In response, the members proposed extending the eligibility for the six semester hour endorsement until 2009, but to initiate middle level certificate programs in 2004. The proposed time period will allow a phase-in of the certificate programs.

Staff reviewed the advisory panel draft and prepared an analysis for consideration by the State Teacher Certification Board at its January 2002 meeting. Following a discussion, the Certification Board, with one dissenting vote, accepted the panel’s recommendations. The representative of the regional superintendents voted against the proposals.

After the action by the Certification Board, the State Board of Education considered recommendations calling for the development of a middle level teaching certificate based on knowledge and performance standards required for teaching in grades 5 through 9 on January 16, 2002. In the course of presenting the recommendations to Board members, staff indicated regional superintendents of education had expressed concerns regarding some implications of the panel’s work. In response to these concerns, the Board delayed action on the middle level recommendations until February and directed staff to meet with the regional superintendents.

On February 6, 2002, staff, the convener of the middle level advisory panel, Dr. Deborah Curtis, and Dr. Debby Kasak, executive director of the Association of Illinois Middle Level Schools (AIMS), met with the Certification Committee of the Illinois Association of Regional Superintendents of School (IARSS). The purpose of the meeting was to identify the concerns of the regional superintendents and to explore resolutions. The meeting was cordial and productive.

**Proposal and Analysis**

While all Certification Committee members lauded the State Board and the advisory panel on the proposed standards, they expressed apprehension about a perceived inflexibility in the recommendations that could exacerbate the teacher shortage. They maintained that the current structure that requires a six semester hour endorsement on an elementary or high school certificate provides hiring latitude for superintendents. The members further commented that many rural school districts combine middle level students with younger or older learners. In this model, qualified K-9 and 6-12 teachers float freely between the middle grades and elementary and high school classrooms.
In response to these concerns, staff suggested a compromise designed (1) to afford the employment flexibility desired by the committee and (2) to move the State towards a middle level certificate as advocated by the advisory panel and middle grade educators. The staff proposal indicated:

1. All individuals currently qualified for a middle level teaching position will be able to retain their current qualifications and positions for as long as their certificates remain valid. They also will be eligible to transfer to another middle school position in the State for as long as they retain their certificate. (It is advised that continuing professional development necessary for renewal of their certificates should include study in middle level education.)

2. The present middle level endorsement option will expire on June 30, 2009. Until that time, individuals seeking to teach in the middle grades who do not possess other qualifications may earn the endorsement and will be eligible for employment in Illinois middle level classrooms. The qualifications and endorsements will remain valid for as long as the certificate is retained.

3. Preparation programs for middle level certification will commence on July 1, 2004. With this start date, the first middle level certificates will likely be issued in 2007 or 2008. After the endorsement option expires on June 30, 2009, districts employing first-time middle level teachers will be obliged to hire certificate holders. Inservice teachers may continue to be employed with the middle school endorsement or with other approved qualifications.

The provisions described above are to offset any unintended exacerbation of a teacher shortage and to institute rigorous knowledge and performance certification standards for the preparation of middle level educators.

The following section provides a brief explanation and rationale for each of the aforementioned modifications.

Provisions for Inservice Teachers

This provision reaffirms current practice. With the introduction of the 1997 middle grade endorsement, it was understood that inservice middle grade teachers would be allowed to teach in a middle level classroom in any district in the State without the endorsement. The middle grade advisory panel recommended called for middle level teachers without the 1997 endorsement to meet the six semester hour requirement to preserve their eligibility if they were moving from one district to another. Regional superintendents understandably presumed that the State Board was rescinding previous practice.
Staff has modified the advisory panel recommendation to reflect current practice. Under this provision, teachers with the middle grade endorsement or who are otherwise qualified (i.e., through a transcript review) will continue to be allowed to move from one district to another without incurring the need to obtain the endorsement or, if adopted, the middle level certificate. Certification Committee members accepted this provision.

**Expiration of the Middle School Endorsement**

The second proposal sunsets the middle school endorsement at June 30, 2009. After that date, employers will only be able to hire (1) individuals previously qualified or (2) certificate holders. New teachers will not be able to earn the six semester hour endorsement thereafter, and the certificate will become the “coin of the realm.”

This proposal is consistent with an early panel recommendation that called for the endorsement to be eliminated five years after the establishment of certificate programs (i.e., July 1, 2004). To assure a continued supply of appropriately qualified teachers after the initiation of the certificate programs requires the extension of the endorsement. In effect, for five years, new teachers will have two paths to the profession: the certificate or the endorsement. Of course, as with all program areas, staff will continuously monitor supply and demand patterns in the coming years.

**Initiation of Middle Level Certificate Training Programs**

The Certification Committee accepts July 1, 2004 as the commencement of middle level certification programming. Prior to implementation, legislative language establishing the certificate and its requirements must be approved by the General Assembly and the Governor. Subsequent to passage, rules must be written, comment must be solicited, and acceptance by the Joint Committee on Administrative Rules must be secured. Institutions then must be given time to design programs, develop appropriate human and financial resources, and recruit candidates. Further, the 2004 date is warranted in order to adjust some content area standards (e.g., English/Language Arts, foreign languages, etc.) to focus more intently on the subject needs of middle level learners and the Illinois Learning Standards.

Advisory panel members believe the July 1, 2004, date is reasonable. However, unanticipated delays in the legislative/rulemaking process may limit the initial number of institutions able to deliver programming. This would create a capacity problem that could require an extension of the availability of the endorsement beyond the June 30, 2009 expiration.

At the meeting, Dr. Curtis advised committee members that the structure of the proposed certificate could allow candidates to earn not only the middle grade
credential, but also a certificate in elementary or secondary education in four years of study. She pointed out that the Illinois State University middle grade program recommends entitlement for candidates with an elementary certificate and as many as four or five subject endorsements. Of course, colleges and universities will have to conduct early advising of prospective students in order for them to pursue two credentialing paths.

Final Recommendations

The January 2002 report to the Board outlined the recommendations of the advisory panel that are endorsed by staff. The complete set now includes:

- the development of a Middle Level Certificate for teaching in grades 5 through 9, and the redefining of the elementary (grades K through 6) and the high school (grades 9 through 12) certificates effective 2009;
- the establishment of middle level programming on July 1, 2004;
- the requirement that teacher preparation institutions include middle level certificate training for candidates seeking the K-12 certificate;
- the phase out of the current middle school endorsement effective June 30, 2009;
- the “grandfathering” of the qualifications, endorsements, and certificates of inservice teachers thereby allowing them to teach in middle level schools across the State as long as their certification is retained;
- the requirement that certified middle level teachers be prepared in two broad content areas;
- the mandatory inclusion in the certificate program of appropriate training in the teaching of reading to young adolescents, particularly in the content area;
- the requirement that all certificate programs engage candidates in early and continuous clinical experiences specifically and exclusively in middle grade classrooms;
- middle grade teachers appropriately qualified and/or endorsed may move from district to district without the need to meet additional requirements;
- the middle grade endorsement will expire on June 30, 2009; and
- middle level certificate programming will begin on July 1, 2004.

The final three bullets reflect the understanding of the Certification Committee members.

During the meeting, other issues were explored with the committee members. For instance, staff agreed to meet with the Division of Certificate Renewal and Leadership and to urge consideration of a middle school strand to the Administrators’ Academy. Staff also agreed to review the endorsement sunset date prior to its implementation. To do this, the State Board will conduct a comprehensive study of the supply of middle level educators and the anticipated demand. The review will include data on the number middle level candidates
enrolled in teacher training programs. Pending the results of the study, the State Board may consider extending the eligibility period for earning the middle grade endorsement. There is no action requested on these items.

Summary

The middle level advisory panel has met more than 40 times since February 2000. It has produced three draft reports that were presented to the State Teacher Certification Board and the State Board four times, including May 2002. Over that time, staff has provided numerous opportunities for comment from the public and the educational community. Indeed, the standards and the chance to comment are still available on the Division of Professional Preparation and Recruitment website.

In each meeting and in each report, the panel has affirmed the importance of rigorous, standards-driven preparation for middle level teachers. The current endorsement fails to define adequately the unique needs of the young adolescent and seeks to compress middle grade philosophy, curriculum, instructional methods, assessment, diagnosis and methods in reading in the content area, and the coordination and referral of students to health and social services into two courses.

Implications for Policy, Budget, Legislative Action, and Communications

Policy and Legislative Action

The principal policy consideration of the Board centers on the acceptance of a new certificate and concomitant revisions to the elementary and secondary certificates. The implementation of the policy will require statutory changes and the introduction of new rules as well as the modification of some existent rules.

Budget

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.

Communications
In the discussion with the regional superintendents, it was agreed that the State Board, in association with its partners (e.g., AIMS, the regional superintendents, etc.), must conduct an aggressive communication campaign to insure a common understanding of the program requirements as well as hiring and staffing provisions.

**Superintendent’s Recommendation**

The Board should

- adopt the revised recommendations for the middle level certificate; and
- authorize staff to commence the development of the legislative language necessary to affect the new certificate structure and standards that are consistent with provisions of the P.L. 107-110 (No Child Left Behind).

**Next Steps**

Pending approval from the Board, staff will solicit the legal department and governmental relations in the development of legislative language that establishes the middle level certificate and revises the existent elementary and secondary certificates.