ILLINOIS STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION MEETING
October 16, 2002

TO: Illinois State Board of Education
FROM: Robert E. Schiller, Superintendent
Christopher Koch, Director

Agenda Topic: Action Item: Middle Level Certification: Survey Results and Next Steps

Materials: Middle Level Certification Survey Comparison: July and September (Table 1)
Middle Level Certification Survey Response Data File (Table 2)
Middle Level Certification Survey Item Analysis (Attachment 3)
University Capacity Survey Results (Attachment 4)
Summary of AIMS Survey Results (Attachment 5)

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Purposes of Agenda Item

• To inform the Board of the final results of the Middle Level Certification Survey;
• To advise the Board of information received from colleges and universities concerning potential capacity for middle level certification programming; and
• To propose the enhancement of the present middle level endorsement as an alternative to middle level certification.

Expected Outcome(s) of Agenda Item

• To understand the issues surrounding the proposed recommendations for the development of a middle level teaching certificate; and
• To direct staff to work with the advisory panel and other stakeholders in enhancing the current middle level endorsement based on standards and performance expectations.

Background Information

At its August 21 meeting, the State Board accepted the findings of a survey on middle level certification distributed by staff in July. The purpose of the questionnaire was to define critical issues that seemed to be causing concern or confusion regarding the
The proposed certificate. The seven-item instrument was designed to determine which of the issues were most important to multiple stakeholder groups, including teachers, building and district administrators, higher education faculty, regional superintendents of education, and others. Flexibility in assigning teachers, educator supply, capacity to meet anticipated demand, and job mobility were among the concerns cited most frequently by constituent groups, and respondents were asked to react to these in the survey.

Concomitant with the State Board survey, the Association of Illinois Middle Level Schools (AIMS) developed and distributed a different questionnaire. (See Attachment 5: Summary of AIMS Survey Results) While the survey was not constructed to directly address the issues under consideration by the State Board, results indicate there are strong advocates of middle level education and the rigorous preparation of teachers who work in the middle grades. The questionnaire also reflected a strong belief in the importance of professional development as a vehicle for advancing the skills and abilities of middle grade teachers.

In the July distribution of the State Board survey, 554 responses were received, with most coming from district administrators (29.6%) and classroom teachers (26.4%). The results suggested a moderate level of statistical significance among the surveyed groups, with the higher education community expressing slightly stronger support for the proposed certificate than public school personnel. In the August report to the Board, members learned that nearly all entities contended that teacher education institutions would be unable to produce sufficient numbers of certificate-prepared teachers to meet demand, and most indicated that the development of a middle level certificate would create or exacerbate a demand problem in 2009. The July administration also revealed that the issues of job mobility and assignment flexibility were important.

To increase participation in the questionnaire, the Board directed staff to re-open the survey on August 26 and to make it available for comment through the middle of September. The purpose of this action was to allow education personnel who were away from their positions in July to respond to the survey items.

Survey Analysis

The number of respondents increased from 554 in July to 775 (39.9%), with the greatest difference occurring among classroom teachers who represented 61.5% of the jump. (See Table 1: Middle Level Certification Survey Comparison: July and September) Higher education feedback rose by nearly 47% from 98 in July to 144 by mid-September, and participation by regional superintendents increased by more than 61% since July.

When the results of the two survey administrations are combined, teachers represented 36.4% of the 775, district officials (e.g., superintendents, etc.) comprised 22.3% of the total, and building administrators were 15.6% of the final number. Higher education faculty and administrators and regional office personnel totaled 18.6% and 7.1% of the
participants. Of the sub-groups, middle level teachers (18.5%), district superintendents (17.2%), and principals (13.3%) were represented to the greatest extent. (See Table 2: Middle Level Certification Survey Response Data File)

It is not clear if the re-issuance was made available to school board members because staff did not receive feedback from the school board association confirming its redistribution. Only one school board member replied in July, and that number did not change by mid-September. The Illinois Association of School Administrators chose not to re-issue the survey in August and September.

Staff in the Division of Professional Preparation and Recruitment worked with their colleagues in the Division of Data Analysis and Progress Reporting to analyze the survey data. Independent interpretations of the results were performed in each division followed by a joint analysis by the division representatives. For each survey item, the independent and collaborative interpretations were consistent.

Through a disaggregation of the data, the following observations are suggested. (See Attachment 3: University Capacity Survey Analysis)

- The statistical significance illustrated in the July results dissipated in the final aggregate. While higher education personnel expressed a greater belief in the value of the proposed certificate than other groups in the July administration, the significance faded in the final results. In fact, the responses to all issues suggest each group shares the same concerns and to approximately the same extent. Staff found the analysis of variance within each group (e.g., classroom teachers, building administrators, etc.) to be greater than the variance among the various groups. For instance, the differentiation of opinion within the classroom teacher group on all issues was determined to be greater than the differentiation between that group and the others.
- Slightly more respondents agreed (48.6%) that the proposed certificate is the best way to ensure teacher qualifications in working with middle level learners than those who disagreed (45.8%). (Item #1) The percent of agreement and disagreement was approximately the same for each group, with regional superintendents expressing the lowest concurrence. Middle level teachers appear to be more convinced of the value of the certificate (67.5%) than their elementary (48.6%) and high school colleagues (30%).
- In contrast to the data on the value of the certificate, 58% of the replies indicated the current six semester hour endorsement is adequate for middle grade teaching. (Item #3) While the aggregated percentage of those holding this belief did not change between July (57.4%) and September, the percent of higher education representatives supporting the endorsement jumped from 40.8% in mid-summer to 57.6% by the end of the response period.
- As with the July issuance of the survey, less than 1 in 4 respondents expressed confidence in the ability of colleges and universities to produce a sufficient number of certified middle level teachers to meet anticipated demand. (Item #2)
Even higher education officials (52.1%) suggested it would be difficult to provide an adequate supply of middle grade teachers.

- More than half of the respondents (51.5%) believe preservice candidates will not enroll in middle level training programs because teachers only become committed to middle grade instruction after they experience it. (Item #4) When responses to this item were disaggregated, current middle level teachers agreed (68.5%) with the statement to about the same extent as elementary (60.3%) or high school educators (66.7%).

- Nearly two of every three responses (65.1%) indicated that the creation of a certificate for middle level teaching would create or exacerbate a teacher shortage in 2009. (Item #5) Regional office personnel (74.5%) and building administrators (76.3%) seemed to share this concern at a slightly greater rate than other groups.

- Seventy-five percent of the respondents agreed that the establishment of a certificate to teach in the middle grades would limit flexibility in making teaching assignments by administrators. (Item #6) Regional office respondents expressed this concern to a greater extent (83.7%) than district officials (74%) or building administrators (73.5%).

- The perceived constraints on job mobility (Item #7) were shared by more than 60% of the respondents. Little differentiation was illustrated across the various groups, with regional superintendents (67.2%), building administrators (60.3%) classroom teachers (61.4%), district officials (60.1%) higher education personnel (61.1%) expressing the concern to the same degree.

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

**Analysis**

In analyzing the survey results, several issues surfaced. These include a focus on the issues, the personalization of the issues, and the power of perception, particularly against an unknown reality.

**Focus on the Issues**

As noted in the August report to the Board, the most common concerns seem to have been captured by the survey. In the various presentations staff has conducted on the proposed certificate, the issues of job mobility, supply and demand, employability, and flexibility in assigning teachers represent the most frequent counterpoints to a certificate focused on middle level teaching. While many (approximately 50%) still maintain that the certificate is a better way to ensure appropriate preparation for middle level educators, the respondents seem to think that the issues cited above are of greater concern. This is underscored by 58% of the respondents who indicated that the current six semester hour endorsement “is adequate for the preparation of teachers for the middle grades.”
Personalization of the Issues

Many respondents expressed concerns that appear to have understandable personal implications. For instance, the prospect of reduced job mobility – and employability – seems to have resonated with various groups. Although the recommendation shared with the Board in May proposed that the six semester hour endorsement continue until 2009 and that holders of the endorsement remain eligible for employment for as long as their certificates remain valid, many respondents felt that their ability to move from elementary or high school teaching into the middle grades would be adversely impacted by the establishment of a certificate.

The Power of Perception

It is not uncommon to expect that current conditions and circumstances will extend into the future. While not uncommon, the practice is not terribly precise. When the middle school endorsement was implemented in 1997, many predicted that colleges and universities would not offer the coursework, and candidates would not seek the endorsement. At present, more than 80% of the colleges and universities provide study for the endorsement, and 21,000 teachers have appended it to their elementary or secondary certificates.

In the July survey results, 55.5% of the respondents disagreed with the statement that colleges and universities could produce a sufficient number of graduates in middle level certification to meet demand. Public school personnel (e.g., administrators, regional superintendents, etc.) expressed the strongest objection to the item. In part, this impression may be based on an unverified anticipated demand coupled with an unsubstantiated capacity by teacher education institutions.

A perception shared by many of the respondents is that teacher shortages for the middle grades would either be created or exacerbated by the development of a middle level certificate. Moreover, the perception among the respondents was that the shortage would occur in 2009, the date the panel suggested for all new middle level teachers to be certified.

Projecting supply and demand seven years (i.e., 2009) into the future is risky. Researchers concede that the farther out the target year, the shakier the credibility of the estimations. Therefore, suggesting that there is a relationship between the creation of a middle level certificate and teacher shortages in 2009 is difficult when it is not possible at this time to predict with any accuracy relative supply and demand more than three years into the future. Staff in the Division of Data Analysis and Program Reporting indicates projecting demand for middle level teachers cannot be assured with any accuracy until 2006. Despite the absence of data, the perception remains that the certificate will result in shortages of teachers.

Similarly, more than 70% of the respondents believed that colleges and universities could not develop programs to meet demand. To learn if teacher education institutions
would design and implement middle level certificate programs, an eight-question survey (See Attachment 4: Middle Level Certificate Program Questionnaire Data Results) was sent to each of the 57 approved preparation colleges and universities in the State. (A few institutions [e.g., Keller Graduate School of Management, Erickson Institute, Hebrew Theological Seminary, etc.] do not offer programming in elementary or secondary education and therefore reported no interest in designing a middle level certificate offering.)

Of the 45 responses, nearly 85% indicated they would consider developing a training program if the State Board were to adopt a middle level certificate. This compares favorably with the percentage (87%) of respondents that presently offer coursework for the six semester hour middle grade endorsement. Nearly two out of three (63.4%) reported the possibility of developing a certificate program exceeded 75%, and another 24% characterized the possibility as "probable."

Most institutions (61.5%) reported that they could design and implement a program by not later than 2005-2006, with a few suggesting it could take as long as 2007-2008. Two colleges stated "it will never happen," while two others claimed to be finalizing middle grade programs now.

Respondents were asked to estimate the number of completers who could be prepared through such programs when they were fully operational. One institution indicated it might produce two each year, while a few predicted outputs in excess of 100 annually. In total, colleges and universities estimated more than 1000 middle grade teachers could be trained each year. Because some institutions stated they could not develop programs until 2006, full capacity might not be reached until 2008 or 2009.

When asked to identify those factors that "would greatly influence" their institution's decision to offer middle level programming, the four most common responses were: candidate demand; market demand (i.e., public school needs); the availability of human and financial resources; and the complexity of the requirements for the certificate. Similarly, respondents were requested to detail the three greatest obstacles that might limit their ability to develop training programs. They reported, in order of frequency: insufficient human and financial resources; insufficient candidate demand; and a lack of available clinical placement sites.

**Summary**

Review of the aggregated and disaggregated data indicate there is no statistical significance that would suggest one discrete group has greater concerns than others. For instance, using the survey findings, it is not possible to intimate that district officials or classroom teachers have a more profound concern on any issue than building administrators, higher education personnel, or regional office officials. What is clear, however, is that each group has serious reluctance in accepting the proposed certificate.
The survey results do not allow for the defining of one issue as being more prevalent than others. Concerns were expressed commonly across the perceived inability of colleges and universities to develop programs to prepare sufficient numbers of teachers, the constraints imposed on job mobility and making instructional assignments, and the belief that the certificate will establish or aggravate teacher shortages in the middle grades. This realization makes it most difficult to construct a change strategy that cuts across all concerns and all stakeholders.

An analysis of variance (ANOVA) revealed that the differentiation within the participating groups is greater than the difference among the groups. Classroom teachers, for example, appear to be more sharply divided on the issues than that group is with building administrators and other stakeholders. The consequence of this finding is that it will be difficult to target an information campaign to one or two issues and to one or two groups. With all issues perceived to be important by all groups, addressing a few will not impact the other issues or groups.

Policy Implications:

As indicated in the August report, the primary policy issue confronting the Board has been the appropriateness of the proposed certificate. However, given the apparent breadth and depth of concern among so many stakeholders, it may be prudent to consider a different approach that will assure better preparation of middle school educators.

Staff suggests a shift away from the development of a new certificate and the reconfiguration of the elementary and high certificates; this new direction would redefine the current endorsement. The six semester hour endorsement is (1) simply not sufficient to assure appropriate preparation of middle level teachers, and (2) perpetuates a course-based model that the Board is abandoning. The middle level advisory panel has developed a comprehensive set of standards based on research and best practice. It seems at this time to be appropriate to redefine the present endorsement in terms of selected standards and performance indicators. Preparation predicated upon these standards will significantly advance the qualifications of middle level teachers in working with middle grade learners.

Budget Implications:

The only immediate budget implication if the Board were to endorse this new direction would be in convening the advisory panel and other stakeholder groups to provide input on the recommendation. The budget impact of this action can be absorbed into the present division budget.

Legislative Action:

At this time, no legislative action is necessary, and, if a more rigorous endorsement is developed, only a few rules’ changes would be needed.
Communication:

The Division of Public Service and Communications in the Department of Public Information will work with the Division of Professional Preparation in informing the education community of this new direction and will solicit input from interested parties. Moreover, Communications, in collaboration with Professional Preparation, will devise a systematic information delivery process that apprises the Board’s educational partners of the status of the endorsement discussion and the issues under consideration.

Pros and Cons of Various Actions

Support for a more rigorous endorsement will send a message that the State Board is concerned about middle level teaching and learning. It will also suggest that the Board has heard the concerns and is supporting a “middle ground.”

If the Board does not support an invigoration of the endorsement, “selling” the proposed certificate will be most difficult to the citizenry, the education community, the General Assembly, and a new Governor, particularly given the resistance that will likely be encountered if this course of action is selected.

Superintendent’s Recommendation

The Board should

- accept the middle level certificate survey results; and
- direct staff to collaborate with the middle level advisory panel and other stakeholders in the re-design of the present middle grade endorsement.

Next Steps

Staff will meet with the leadership of the middle level advisory panel for the purpose of reconvening interested members of the group to recommend a standards and performance-based endorsement. Moreover, staff will solicit representation from other partners (e.g., administrators, regional superintendents, etc.) to engage them in the process. A report to the State Board on the progress of the initiative will be available in the spring.