

OUR COMMITMENT TO MIDDLE LEVEL EDUCATORS

Highly Qualified: A Balanced Approach

Thomas Edison knew science, but could he have taught a class of seventh graders? Some may have considered him highly qualified, but would his students have passed a proficiency test?

The majority of students tested under the No Child Left Behind law are young adolescents—10- to 15-year-olds. These young students are at a pivotal point in their development. They are establishing habits, forming their personal identities, exploring their ever-expanding worlds. Their brains are undergoing a significant period of growth and change.

As education association presidents and as middle level educators, we are concerned that as No Child Left Behind is implemented the focus on *what* to teach is not in sync with the equally important focus of knowing *how* to teach that content effectively to these young adolescents. They need support in all aspects of their development.

Each one of these 14 million middle school students deserves the very best education at this stage in their lives. They deserve effective middle level schools that assure the success of every student by focusing on academic excellence *and* responding to his or her unique needs and interests. They deserve to be taught by educators who recognize that no two students think, learn, and grow in exactly the same way or at the same pace. They need the benefit of such proven practices as teaching teams, student assessment portfolios, hands-on instruction, and project-based learning.

Those middle level schools that have achieved such academic excellence have not done so by accident. Success happens because caring and committed teachers know the content of the subjects they teach *and* have the knowledge and skills to teach

those subjects effectively to middle school students. It happens because collaborative and caring principals understand young adolescents *and* know what best practices can help guarantee that all young adolescents learn in a challenging, yet developmentally responsive atmosphere.

Without both content knowledge and an understanding of the unique learning needs of adolescents—our definition of “highly qualified”—teachers and principals cannot make certain that students will learn to their full potential. Not only will middle level schools fail to meet the expectations of parents, of community members, and of NCLB testing mandates, but worst of all, of the students themselves.

Defining what highly qualified teachers and principals do and know shouldn't be an “either/or” choice. We must all work together at the federal, state, and local levels to find a balanced approach to teacher and principal preparation—one that addresses the needs of the whole child and ensures educators are skilled not only in what to teach, but how.

We are committed to working individually and collaboratively to:

- Promote and provide professional development programs that address young adolescent development and learning needs.
- Promote and support teacher and administrator preparation programs that integrate effective middle grades instructional strategies with rigorous content expertise.
- Provide information to and work with policymakers to ensure no young adolescent is left behind.

A balanced approach to educating young adolescents is the only way to ensure these special young people develop as scholars and as citizens.



Anthony Harduar
Principal, Central Elementary School, Fensdale, Washington
President, National Association of Elementary School Principals



Linda Robinson
Principal, Alvin Junior High, Alvin, Texas
President, National Middle School Association



Keith D. Taton
Principal, Central Middle School, Anchorage, Alaska
President, National Association of Secondary School Principals

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OF SECONDARY SCHOOL
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National Association of Elementary School Principals

1615 Duke Street, Alexandria, VA 22314-3483 • 800-38-NAESP • www.naesep.org

National Middle School Association

4151 Executive Parkway, Suite 300, Westerville, OH 43081 • 800-528-NMSA • www.nmsa.org

National Association of Secondary School Principals

1904 Association Drive, Reston, VA 20191-1537 • 800-253-7746 • www.principals.org