MARYLAND STATE DEPARTMENT OF
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Ad Hoc Middle-Level Work Group Report

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Dean, College of Education
Bowie State University

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Report of the Ad Hoc Middle-Level Work Group

Introduction

In recent years at the national and state levels, increased attention has focused on middle grades education and the decline in student performance. In 1998 Dr. Nancy Grasmick, State Superintendent of Schools, concerned by declining middle grades in achievement, convened the Middle Learning Years Task Force. The final report of that Task Force proposed recommendations which clustered around three primary areas; upgrading instruction, redefining teacher education programs, and restructuring school environments.

Several years later, Dr. Grasmick convened a Middle School Certification Committee to develop recommendations concerning regulatory language for middle school certification at Maryland colleges and universities and the development of initial preparation of programs for middle school certification.

Maryland continues to address persistent issues concerning the needs of the middle-level learner and to develop strategies for ensuring that performance of the middle-level learner increases. The Maryland Middle School Steering Committee, commissioned by Dr. Nancy S. Grasmick, State Superintendent of Schools, produced a pro-active, extensive report delineating strategies for improving middle-level education in Maryland schools. The Maryland Middle School Steering Committee, comprised of representatives from all stakeholder groups with an interest in middle-level education, issued the June 2008 report, *The Critical Middle: A Reason for Hope* (Appendix A). The Report listed sixteen (16) recommendations as ways to improve the quality of education for the middle-level learner.

The Charge

The Critical Middle: A Reason for Hope charged the Division of Certification and Accreditation, Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE), with implementing Recommendation 10: "Ensure that teachers are prepared to work specifically with the middle-level learner." In response to this recommendation, Dr. Grasmick established the Ad Hoc Middle-Level Work Group to (1) refine elementary and secondary preparation programs based on the National Middle School Association standards and the instructional recommendations in this report [*The Critical Middle: A Reason for Hope*] and (2) identify the courses necessary for the recertification of middle-level teachers."

Staff will submit the report produced by this Work Group to Dr. Grasmick for her review. Staff then will present the final report to the Deans, Directors, and Chairpersons of Teacher Education in colleges and universities, Maryland Superintendents, Assistant Superintendents and Directors of Human Resources in Maryland local school systems, and the Maryland Professional Development School (PDS) Network.

Process of the Work Group

The Division of Certification and Accreditation convened the Ad Hoc Middle-Level Work Group on February 27, 2009. The Work Group consisted of representatives from the Maryland State Department of Education, colleges and universities, and central office and school-based representatives from local school systems. The initial meeting of the Work Group scheduled in January, 2009, was cancelled due to inclement weather. At the February 27 meeting, Co-chairs, Dr. Joann Ericson, Certification, and Dr. Virginia Pilato, Program Approval and Assessment, presented the Charge (Appendix B), which includes Guiding Principles that specify regulations, reports, and policies that provided the framework for the group's deliberations and suggestions (Appendix C). The work of the group was to identify options for teacher preparation programs, local school systems, and teachers in making teacher preparation and professional development decisions, given existing regulations and policies.

During the initial meeting, group members reviewed relevant materials (which also had been sent electronically prior to the meeting) and identified the manner in which they wished to pursue their work. Given the option of working as two separate sub-groups or as a group of the whole, the group decided to address each aspect of the charge (teacher preparation and recertification) as a whole group. Work Group members anticipate that institutions of higher education will use the suggestions in this report to audit their existing programs and make refinements, as needed.

The Work Group held additional meetings on March 11, 2009, April 3, 2009, May 14, 2009, and June 18, 2009. When Dr. Virginia Pilato left the Maryland State Department of Education in March, 2009, Dr. Maggie Madden, Program Approval and Assessment, assumed the duties of Co-chair with Dr. Ericson. The Work Group began by addressing issues pertaining to teacher preparation, focusing on options for elementary and secondary preparation programs to address more specifically the needs of the middle-level learner. Elementary and secondary certification areas overlap with the middle level (grades 4-9) certification area. Since all certified teachers at the elementary (grades 1-6) or secondary (grades 7-12) level have the possibility of teaching a middle-level learner, it is increasingly important for both elementary and secondary prepared teachers to have an understanding of the unique educational needs of the middle-level learner.

At the meetings, the group separated into two sub-groups: one focused on options for elementary preparation programs and the other focused on secondary preparation programs. Each group systematically moved through the elements of the National Middle School Association standards and *The Critical Middle: A Reason for Hope*, sharing their recommendations at the end of each meeting. At the May 14, 2009, the group as a whole addressed recommendations for recertification options.

Following the May 14, 2009 meeting, MSDE staff developed an alignment chart listing the recommendations from each group concerning options for teacher preparation programs. Staff distributed the alignment charts to each committee member for review and feedback. Staff examined the recommendations for options that applied to both elementary and secondary preparation programs, and those that are specific to either elementary or secondary programs.

The report also includes recommendations concerning options for recertification for teachers of the middle-level learner.

Staff sent a draft of this report electronically to the Work Group prior to the June 18, 2009 meeting. At that meeting, Work Group members provided input and suggested refinement for the final report.

Required Elements for All Initial Certification Programs

Using the Maryland Higher Education Task Force Report (May, 1995), known as the *Redesign of Teacher Education in Maryland*, Maryland approved initial certification programs are required to address the four components of the *Redesign of Teacher Education in Maryland* [strong academic background, extensive internship, performance assessment and linkage with PreK-12 priorities] (Appendix D) in addition to national standards. Institutions of Higher Education use these components outlined in the *Maryland Institutional Performance Criteria based on the Redesign of Teacher Education* (Appendix E*).* Many recommendations of the Work Group included areas that are addressed in the *Redesign* including competencies related to the use of technology. All candidates in Maryland approved programs are required to demonstrate competency through the Maryland Teacher Technology Standards (MTTS) as part of their candidate assessment system. All initial certification programs provide opportunities for candidates to use current technologies in their classrooms and to demonstrate an understanding of how students learn.

In the respective college/university candidate assessment systems, all candidates in Maryland approved programs are required to demonstrate the ability to differentiate instruction to meet the needs of students with learning differences, including all aspects from special education to gifted and talented. Candidates should implement accelerated and enhanced strategies to differentiate instruction for the advanced/gifted learner and understand differences in gender-specific learning.

Also, through the candidate assessment system, candidates are required to develop and implement formative and summative assessments, making connections to the Maryland State Curriculum and elements of the School Improvement Plan in their extensive internship in a Professional Development School. Candidates should demonstrate that they are able to implement meaningful, purposeful assessment during instruction and use formative assessments frequently to modify instruction.

Recommendations for Refinement of Elementary and Secondary Preparation Programs

Using *The Critical Middle: A Reason for Hope* and the National Middle School Association Standards as a guide, recommendations from the Work Group include options for elementary and secondary preparation programs related to programmatic standards for initial middle-level teacher preparation and performance-based standards for initial middle-level teacher preparation. Although many of these recommendations are referenced in the specialized professional association standards for elementary and secondary programs, Work Group members stressed the

importance of focusing these elements on the middle-level learner. The Work Group recommends that the state consider a review of the current grades bands for middle-level (4-9) certification, as well as a review of the reading course requirements for middle-level certification (Reading in the Content Area I and II) to include elements related to the needs of the middle-level learner.

<h2 style="text-align:center">Programmatic Recommendations</h2>

Programmatic recommendations relate to the manner in which institutions of higher education structure their programs, including program content, course content and method of delivery, and field experiences (including internship and opportunities for candidates to interact with middle-level learners). The Work Group proposed the following recommendations:

Elementary and Secondary Teacher Preparation Programs should include:

Knowledge and Understanding of the Middle-Level Learner:
- Incorporate aspects of middle level pedagogy, the cognitive, social, emotional and physical attributes of the middle-level learner, and middle school philosophy within existing elementary and secondary programs. Programs should embed these aspects throughout their programs.

Field Experiences/Internship:
- Provide field experiences with middle-level learners across the certification grade band (4-9) in at least two grade levels. These experiences, which do not have to be connected to a specific course, provide an opportunity for candidates to become familiar with the middle-level learner. Options for these substantive experiences include extended day, extended year, and summer programs as well as virtual schools. Programs should consider early observation experience in the middle school or provide multiple opportunities for candidates to create and implement learning experiences for middle-level students. Interaction with middle-level should not be limited to observation.
- Include teacher candidates in articulation transition from elementary to middle and middle to high. Articulation transition enables candidates to have a perspective on the educational experiences of their students prior to and following the candidates' experiences with them.

Mathematics:
- Review content of mathematics courses, strengthening content as needed. Examining course content ensures that candidates have a conceptual understanding of algebra, scaffolding up from earliest grades in elementary to know what an eighth grade student is required to know and do. For secondary candidates, this involves scaffolding so they are able to understand where problems with algebra originate. Candidates need to have a conceptual understanding of mathematics including algebra, not just procedural knowledge. This involves providing instruction in how to make authentic connections and facilitate problem solution.

Integrated STEM Instruction:
- Provide opportunities for candidates to make cross-disciplinary applications and to apply technological solutions. Integrated STEM instruction gives candidates the opportunity to work with other content teachers in a team approach. This could be woven into a methods course, focusing on collaborative planning. Specific sub-topics could be identified for integration, focusing on problem-solving and inter-relationships.

Disciplinary Literacy:
- Revise secondary reading courses to include elements pertinent to the middle-level learner such as gender differences in learning to read, and adolescent and young adolescent literature. Reading is an essential element for all middle-level learners, particularly those who are reading below-grade level. Courses should include outcomes specific to the middle-level learner, including a view of the fourth and fifth grade students. Courses also should address issues of struggling readers/writers at the middle/high level.
- Infuse disciplinary literacy throughout all programs, providing opportunities for candidates to incorporate aspect of neuroscience and its implications on teaching and learning for the middle-level learner.
- Provide opportunities for teacher candidates to model and promote international literacy in order to gain a greater understanding of the global community.

Assessment System – Dispositions:
- Include professional dispositions related to the middle-level learner (grades 4-9) in the assessment system. Working with middle-level learners requires sensitivity to their cognitive, social, emotional and physical needs.

<center>**Performance-Based Teacher Candidate Competency Recommendations**</center>

Performance-based standards for teacher candidate competency include the knowledge, performance and professional dispositions that candidates should understand and demonstrate in their programs through assessments in courses, seminars, field experiences, and the internship. Candidates should demonstrate knowledge and understanding of the cognitive, social, emotional and physical needs of the middle-level learner. The Work Group proposed the following recommendations:

Candidates should:

Disciplinary Literacy:
- Demonstrate the understanding and ability to use reading, writing and thinking strategies specific to their respective content areas. Candidates demonstrate this by developing and implementing interdisciplinary assessments.

Fine Arts:
- Demonstrate the ability to integrate the arts within their classrooms. Using art in instruction involves understanding the connection between the fine arts and reading, including visual literacy.

Skills for Lifelong Learning:
- Demonstrate the ability to include critical thinking, problem-solving, organization, communication, and 21st Century Skills of middle-level learners when planning instruction.
- Demonstrate an understanding of cognitive, social, emotional and physical issues affecting the adolescent.
- Demonstrate that they value and model learning as a life-long process.

School Leadership:
- Demonstrate an understanding of how teachers as leaders believe they can make a difference in their classrooms and their schools through participation in a strong leadership team.
- Demonstrate the ability to work successfully as a member of an interdisciplinary team.

Assessment:
- Demonstrate the ability to provide meaningful, specific, and descriptive feedback as an assessment tool.
- Incorporate authentic higher order thinking assessments to identify strengths, using a variety of developmentally responsive assessment measures.

Skill Mastery:
- Demonstrate the ability to identify essential elements of instruction, re-teaching, extending and enriching when appropriate.
- Demonstrate the ability to design appropriate scaffolds for instructing the middle-level learner.

Parent and Student Partnerships:
- Understand the importance of educating parents on the developmental needs of adolescents.
- Facilitate young adolescent participation in community activities and services that contribute to their welfare and learning.
- Understand the importance of privacy and confidentiality of information when working with family members.
- Understand how the school learns from the contributions of parents, emphasizing two-way communication.

Organizational Structure:
- Understand the need to facilitate the transition from elementary to middle and middle to high.
- Understand how middle-level learners fit into various organizational structures.
- Understand the nature of middle school structures including grade arrangement, interdisciplinary teaming, and various scheduling options.

Certification Renewal Options

The second component of the charge, "to identify the courses necessary for the recertification of middle-level teachers", generated productive discussion regarding the effectiveness of additional courses as a unique recertification requirement. Using the existing regulations (Appendix D) as guidelines, the Work Group proposed the following recommendations:

- Provide an alternative method to traditional teacher observation implementing a project-based approach such as *The Framework for Teaching* by Charlotte Danielson, an equivalent credit option currently being used successfully in some local school systems;
- Encourage additional experiences/courses at the discretion of local school systems in conjunction with the Professional Development Plan (PDP) required for recertification;
- Encourage local school systems to develop middle-level specific Continuing Professional Development (CPD) courses to include: neuroscience and its implications for learning, 21st century skills, STEM, technology, etc.; and
- Encourage colleges/universities to develop graduate courses to address the middle-level learner as part of the continuing professional development requirement for certificate holders.

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Summary

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The recommendations of the Ad-Hoc Middle-Level Work Group provide suggestions for elementary and secondary teacher preparations programs and those who develop and implement continuing professional development opportunities for teachers to ensure that the cognitive, social, emotional and physical needs of the middle-learner are essential elements of ensuring that the middle-learner, regardless of grade level, receives the highest quality instruction. These recommendations serve as a mechanism for the review of existing programs in order to make revisions and the development of other experiences/opportunities for recertification, as needed.

Appendix

Appendix A

➤ *The Critical Middle*, 2008 Report of the Maryland Middle School Steering Committee

http://www.marylandpublicschools.org/NR/rdonlyres/FCB60C1D-6CC2-4270-BDAA-153D67247324/17162/Middle_School_Task_Force_Report_6_4_09.pdf

Appendix B

➤ National Middle School Association (NMSA) Standards

http://www.nmsa.org/portals/0/doc/preparation/standards/NMSA_Initial_Standards_July_2005.doc

Appendix C

➤ Ad Hoc Middle-Level Work Group Charge and Guiding Principles **(Next page)**

<u>**Appendix C**</u>

Maryland State Department of Education
Division of Certification and Accreditation

Ad Hoc Middle-Level Work Group

<u>**Charge**</u>**:**

The Ad Hoc Middle-Level Work Group is asked to address Recommendation 10 of the 2008 report of the Maryland Middle School Steering Committee, *The Critical Middle*, *Teacher Preparation: Ensure that teachers are prepared to work specifically with the middle-level learner*. Specifically, the recommendation includes the establishment of an ad hoc middle-level work group, consisting of PreK-16 representatives, to " (1) refine elementary and secondary preparation programs based on National Middle School Association standards and the instructional recommendations in this report as well as to (2) identify the courses necessary for the recertification of middle-level teachers." **Suggestions and options for addressing this charge will be presented to Dr. Nancy Grasmick, State Superintendent of Schools.**

<u>**Guiding Principles**</u>:

1. *The Critical Middle*, the 2008 report of the Maryland Middle School Steering Committee, highlights needs and strategies for improving teaching and learning in middle schools.

2. To help ensure the highest level of quality among Maryland's teachers, Maryland must maintain high standards in teacher preparation and professional development.

3. The following regulations, reports, and policies provide the framework of the work group's deliberations and suggestions:

   ➢ COMAR 13A.12.01.11, Renewal of Certificates
   ➢ COMAR 13A.12.02.05, Middle School Education Grades 4-9
   ➢ COMAR 13A.07.06.01, Programs for Professionally Certified Personnel
   ➢ National Middle School Association (NMSA) Standards
   ➢ *The Critical Middle*, 2008 Report of the Maryland Middle School Steering Committee
   ➢ Maryland Higher Education Commission, *Teacher Education Task Force Report,* May 17, 1995
   ➢ *Helping Teachers Help All Students: The Importance of High-Quality Professional Development*, 2004 Report of the Professional Development Advisory Committee, which includes the Maryland Professional Development Standards, pp. 44-50.

4. **Given existing regulations and policies, the Ad Hoc Middle-Level Work Group will identify options for teacher preparation programs, local school systems, and teachers in making teacher preparation and professional development decisions.**

Appendix D

- COMAR 13A.12.01.11, Renewal of Certificates

  http://www.dsd.state.md.us/comar/13a/13a.12.01.11.htm

- COMAR 13A.12.02.05, Middle School Education Grades 4-9

  http://www.dsd.state.md.us/comar/13a/13a.12.02.05.htm

- COMAR 13A.07.06.01, Programs for Professionally Certified Personnel

  http://www.dsd.state.md.us/comar/13a/13a.07.06.01.htm

- *Helping Teachers Help All Students: The Importance of High-Quality Professional Development*, 2004 Report of the Professional Development Advisory Committee, which includes the Maryland Professional Development Standards, pp. 44-50.

  http://www.marylandpublicschools.org/NR/rdonlyres/DF957230-EC07-4FEE-B904-7FEB176BD978/12207/PDACFinalReportNC.pdf

Appendix E

- Maryland Higher Education Commission, *Teacher Education Task Force Report,* May 17, 1995

  http://marylandpublicschools.org/NR/rdonlyres/2C7FFCC4-3F21-4B62-9406-311B06CDF2DB/1496/Redesign_Teacher Ed.pdf

Appendix F

- Maryland Institutional Performance Criteria based on the Redesign of Teacher Education

  http://marylandpublicschools.org/NR/rdonlyres/2C7FFCC4-3F21-4B62-9406-311B06CDF2DB/19746/InstitutionalPerformanceCriteria31109.pdf