

# NAPOMLE NEWSLETTER

## NO CHILD LEFT BEHIND: A BRIEF DISCUSSION

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National Association of Professors of  
Middle Level Education

In 2001, shortly after George W. Bush became president, he moved to fulfill one of his campaign promises...to reform public education. The driving force behind the legislation he proposed was to assure that those parents whose children attended "failing" public schools would have the opportunity to move their children to a non-failing school and to assure that every child is taught by a teacher of "high quality." The term "failing public school" was defined by the administration as one whose students did not make one year's progress for one year in school (called Annual Yearly Progress -- AYP).

However, there are two problems that immediately come to mind with this concept: 1) what was a parent to do if he/she lived in an area that had only one school for that grade level as is the case for many school districts located in rural areas; and 2) what were parents to do if they wanted to remove their child from a "failing" public school and send him/her child to a non-failing school (one that was not deemed "failing") if the non-failing school had no room for additional students?

At first blush, the concept of AYP sounds right...that for one year of schooling a student should gain one year of academic achievement. However, this logic falls short when implemented in the real world of today's schools when it comes to actually tracking students to ascertain if they are gaining one year for every year in school. While many people will say that it is the urban schools that have difficulties tracking students, the reality is that many rural schools also have

problems with this as well. Urban areas have found that keeping up with where children attend school is difficult at best since, in many poor areas, students move from school to school at the end of a month because their parent(s) is unable to meet the monthly rent. While the rent issue is not as prominent in rural areas, the life style (agriculturally based) does present a problem for these school officials. Many students in rural areas move with the seasons -- planting/harvesting. The bottom line is that tracking students becomes all but impossible, an issue that the proponents of AYP will tell you that they have taken that into account and that tracking is possible and parental ability to move their children to a non-failing school is limited at best.

In addition to NCLB addressing the issue of AYP/non-failing schools, is the notion that all teachers in public schools would be "highly qualified;" that no student would be taught by a teacher who was not "highly qualified." The problem with this concept was that the term went undefined and was left up to each state to define as they saw fit. Nonetheless, the promise was to place a highly qualified teacher in every classroom to ensure that no child is left behind. How can anyone argue with such a goal? For all too long we have known that, throughout our country, there are teachers who were hired only because they knew someone on the school board and schools that cannot attract "highly qualified" teachers." Issues such as these were addressed by Jonathon Kozol in his landmark work Savage

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Inequalities -- a must read for anyone who sincerely cares about K-12 education. So, how can we agree that students deserve the best education possible, that we must correct the savage inequalities, and that a highly qualified teacher in every classroom is an honorable goal, but have so much disagreement with the legislation that was passed with bi-partisan support?

First off, there is disagreement about the term "highly qualified teacher." To those of us who are professional educators, this term refers to someone who has been accepted into a teacher preparation program at an institution of higher learner, who has studied content similar to that of their peers in the arts and sciences, has completed a series of pedagogy courses, and who has participated in several field-based experiences under the supervision of master teachers and university supervisors who themselves were outstanding teachers. These field-based experiences are designed to help the prospective teacher link the theory of teaching and the content to be taught with the "real world" experiences of teaching. However, there is a teacher shortage in some parts of this country -- these areas include: the south, the west, and several urban areas. However, since the passage of NCLB, there is a growing opinion among those in positions of authority at the state and federal level that anyone can teach...that all a person needs to be a successful teacher is content. Therefore, several states have moved to permit individuals with bachelor's degrees to take "qualifying exams" in various content areas and, upon passing these exams, grant them a teaching license and assigned them to classrooms.

This "test and teach" approach is heralded by the Bush administration's Secretary of Education as a viable solution to the teacher shortage. However, for an administration who insists on having research-based decisions about teaching, they completely ignore the research about

these pretenders of the teaching profession. In a recent article, Laczko-Kerr and Berliner found that the students of those who entered teaching through "Teach for America" did not score as well on standardized tests as those students who had teachers trained with pedagogy linked to field experiences. They conclude "the policy of hiring under prepared teachers for the schools that serve American's poor looks like an act of class warfare, a concept that Americans find hard to accept" (p. 41).

How will this notion of "highly qualified" teachers who can pass the content test impact the middle level. Personally, I can only speak for the issue as it is in Pennsylvania (though I'm certain other states have adopted similar guidelines). Pennsylvania now mandates that elementary certified teachers who have been teaching at the middle level for years must pass a content test in the area they have been teaching to acquire certification at the middle level in Pennsylvania. Those who pass the test will be permitted to continue teaching at the middle level and will be considered "highly qualified," while those who do not pass the test will have to return to elementary classrooms where they may not have taught for 15 or 20 years. Personally, as a former middle school principal in Pennsylvania, I wanted my sixth grade teachers to be elementary certified, my seventh grade teachers to be secondary certified for science and math and elementary certified for reading, language arts and social studies; and all of my eighth grade teachers to have secondary content certification. In today's "highly qualified" world, such an approach would not work.

Finally, many states are now looking at the certification of secondary special education teachers and requiring them to have content area specialties. The plus side of this requirement will mean that secondary schools will be forced to implement inclusive classrooms with the special education teacher serving as a consultant rather than continuing the "pull-out" special education programs

of the 70's and 80's. However, on the negative side will be the lack of coursework and field experiences in exceptionalities that will occur since candidates will now have to name at least one area of content specialty. Where this will lead, no one knows; but one thing is certain, something or someone will suffer due to the lack of understanding about and knowledge of exceptionalities on the part of the teacher.

As you probably know, there are many other issues that need to be discussed related to NCLB; however, it is my hope that this writing has stimulated thought and caused you to question -- both me and NCLB. Engage in discussions about its various components, determine how it benefits or hinders education in your area, and above all, NEVER accept the good intentions of a legislator or president without question.

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## Message from the President: Barbara Blackburn

*The dogmas of the quiet past are inadequate to the stormy present. The occasion is piled high with difficulty, and we must rise with the occasion. As our case is new, so we must think anew and act anew. —Abraham Lincoln*

Recently, I ran across this quote, and was struck by it's pertinence to our profession. The educational climate seems to be filled with thunder and lightning and middle level education is at the center of the storm. As I have talked (either in person or via email) with many of you, we each face challenges. For some of us, it is the battle of a lack of state level certification. For others, it is trying to create a true "middle school" teacher preparation program that is not simply a watered-down secondary program. As your new president, I cannot tell you that the challenges will go away, or even decrease. But, my commitment to you is that we will work together as an

association to support each other in the skirmishes, and that we will attempt to find new solutions to these ongoing issues.

I am particularly excited about the Teacher Preparation Conference and the opportunity it provided each of us to come together, share ideas, and participate in our own professional development. Thank you to all who supported NAPOMLE by visiting the Best Practices exhibits during the networking session and attending the breakout session on Forming State Professors' Groups (in fact, consider starting a group in your state!). We also distributed an electronic version of our most recent journal to highlight that publication.

I'd like to thank the entire Board of Directors. Many of them are serving for the first time, and they are excited about "thinking outside the box" in providing leadership to the association. They have been quite busy since their election or appointment, reviewing proposals for the Best Practices session, and reviewing submissions from universities asking to host the journal. Our focus for next year is to build a database of information for each state (including colleges and universities, certification, and contacts). If you are interested in serving as a state liaison to provide information, please let me know. I'd also like to note that Shirley Theriot has done a wonderful job as president for the last two years. Her work has provided the foundation for our current successes.

As we move forward, we have challenges. We are currently seeking a new home for the journal, we need to continue to raise our visibility and increase our membership, and we must respond to the concerns raised by members as to the need for increased collaboration and networking. Many of you are in the situation I face—I am the only middle level professor on my campus. My work with NAPOMLE has allowed me to regain my sense of participation in the middle level education teacher preparation

community, and it balances the isolation that I sometimes feel on my campus. From conversations, I know some of you share my thoughts. I look forward to continuing to build on the strength of our association, in order to meet the challenges we face. Thank you for allowing me to serve as your president, and don't hesitate to contact me with concerns, questions, or to volunteer to help!

### ***NaPOMLE Activities 2003-2004***

**At the 2003 Business meeting, feedback from the membership focused on five areas for improvement: increased communication, increased visibility, increased involvement and membership, information about certification across states, and advocacy (political action). During our most recent business meeting, we shared an update of key activities from 2004:**

- 1. NaPOMLE distributed two electronic newsletters, which included a new column focusing on individual state's certification status and efforts. The NaPOMLE website was also launched. NaPOMLE published two journals (fall and spring).**
- 2. NAPOMLE sponsored a "Best Practices Showcase" for the NMSA Annual Conference, and we will sponsor a similar Best Practices Showcase during the networking reception at the upcoming NMSA Teacher Education Symposium (see titles of presentations elsewhere in this newsletter).**
- 3. Barbara Blackburn presented "Starting a State Professors' Group to Support Your Association" at the NMSA Affiliate Summit (July, 2004). She also discussed the procedures for starting a state POMLE with state association leaders. NAPOMLE is sponsoring a breakout session at the Teacher Education Symposium for a panel discussion on the topic of Forming State Professors' Groups (professors from Ohio, Oregon, and South Carolina will participate).**

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***Elmhurst College / Lincoln  
Middle School  
Professional Development  
School Partnership***

**Dr. Brian B. Kahn**  
Assistant Professor of Education,  
Elmhurst College

This partnership began in February of 2003 and is continually moving forward. Initiated by conversations between Glen Purpura, Principal at Lincoln Middle School and Judy Kaminski, Director of Field Experiences at Elmhurst College, this PDS offers preservice teachers the opportunity to experience the middle school classroom in the very diverse setting of Schiller Park, Illinois. Funded in part by the local Inland Real Estate Group, the initial plan for the partnership was presented to the Board of Education in February and the advisory team was in place by April. This team consists of four teachers, the principal, Judy Kaminski, and Dr. Brian B. Kahn from Elmhurst College who acts as Site Director for the PDS. Students in Dr. Kahn's middle school methods course complete twenty hours of field experience at LMS and the college is busy recruiting education majors to intern in the building. At present, fifteen teachers in the building host Elmhurst students and two interns have begun their four-semester experience at the site.

The partnership is guided by the five NCATE PDS Standards, which are revisited at the end of each academic year. Of course, collaboration is at the heart of the PDS as we continue to build strong relationships amongst all participants. A number of initiatives are presently being implemented including the following:

- The development of a reading practicum course to be held at
- the middle school
- A series of workshops held for the staff in the summer and during the school year that address a number of middle school issues and for which participants can receive

professional development credits

- The gathering of data in order to track the impact of the preservice candidate on student learning
- Teambuilding activities held at the middle school to assist all participants in strengthening the collaborative relationship
- Regular celebrations of our success as well as meaningful dialogue concerning all aspects of the partnership

At present, the advisory team meets twice each semester and again in the summer to monitor progress and plan events for the upcoming semester. Everyone involved remains confident that the partnership will continue to thrive and evolve. Each semester, more teachers step forward and volunteer to host an Elmhurst student as they involve themselves in the business of their own professional development. Professional Development School relationships offer many opportunities to all involved including the teachers and their candidates, the professors, and the students in the classrooms. The Elmhurst College / Lincoln Middle School partnership will continue to serve us as long as the spirit of collaboration remains alive.

### ***Celebration of Best Practices***

On Friday, February 4th, at the Symposium on Middle Level Teacher Preparation presented by National Middle School Association in Columbus, OH we had a **Celebration of Best Practices** coordinated by the National Association of Professors of Middle Level Education (NAPOMLE). Topics presented were:

*The "Laser Talk," An Advocacy Tool*  
Peggy Gaskill, Walden University

*Cognitive Coaching Relationships: Building Collaboration into Teacher Training*

Paul Parkison, University of Southern Indiana

*An Assignment that Develops Teacher Candidate Ability*

*to Assess and Analyze Impact on Middle School Student Learning*

Lynn Stallings & Susan Stockdale, Kennesaw State University

*ESOL "Rounds": A Best Practice in Middle Level Teacher Preparation*

David Virtue, University of South Carolina

*Designing an Overview Middle Level Teacher Preparation Course*

Sara Davis Powell, College of Charleston

*Dealing with "Dispositions"*

Vikki Spencer, Missouri Southern State University

*Facilitating Teachers' Richer Understanding of their Students: Using Critical Case Studies.*

Pat Williams-Boyd, Eastern Michigan University

*The Use of Ethnography in Early Field Experiences for Preservice Teachers*

Alecia Youngblood-Jackson, Appalachian State University

*PALS—An After School Program*

Elizabeth Dore, Radford University

*A Methods Course Connecting the College of Education Faculty, College of Arts and Science Faculty, and Classroom Teacher to Benefit the Middle School Teacher Candidate*

Anita Dutrow, Presbyterian College

*Creating a Formal College-Middle Level School Partnership Network: One College's Story*

John Niska, Rhode Island College

*Action Research to Improve Achievement in Reforming Middle Level Schools*

Joanne Arhar, Kent State University Associate Dean  
 Russ Bennett, Principal, Harnon Middle School  
 Maria Di Tommaso, Principal, Kimpton Middle School  
 Deborah Friesen, Kent State University Field Supervisor  
 Claudia Khourey-Bowers, Kent Stark University Assistant Professor  
 Teresa Rishel, Kent State University Assistant Professor

***The State of Middle School Certification in Missouri***

**Dr. Debby Bogle**

**Associate Professor**

**Missouri Western State College**

Young adolescents from 10 to 14 years of age exhibit a wide range of developmental characteristics which, while normal for them, may appear quite bizarre to many, and which can create unique challenges for educators. Having taught seventh and eighth grade students for twelve years, I can say unequivocally that these children are a whole new ballgame when it comes to developing responsive strategies that adequately address their needs.

In the past, many teachers who had been trained for elementary or secondary school teaching, took middle school assignments when no other jobs were available. Some of these teachers were quite successful and believed that they had found their true calling, but many others were eager to moved on to other assignments as soon as possible (Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development, 1989, p. 58).

In the National Middle School Association’s publication, *This We Believe* (1982), the National Association of Secondary School Principals’ document, *An Agenda for Excellence at the Middle Level*, (1985), and the Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development’s report, *Turning Points: Preparing American Youth for the 21<sup>st</sup>*

**The “State” of Middle Level Education: Missouri**



*Century*, (1989) arguments were made for the special preparation of middle level educators. Following these suggestions, the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) began issuing middle school teacher certification for all 5-9 middle school teachers on September 1, 1997. There were to be no exceptions. This new certification required middle school teachers to take courses in: middle school philosophy, organization, and curriculum; middle school methods, teaching reading in content areas, teaching writing and methods of teaching in specialty areas.

In an article appearing in the *Transescent* (1998), Dr. Susan Breck interviewed Dr. Kent King, Coordinator of the Supervision Section of DESE. In that interview Dr. King is quoted as saying that DESE was going to “hold firm to the middle level certification requirements in the core areas of concentration for purposes of district accreditation” although he did acknowledge, “that small and rural schools [were] having problems finding certified teachers especially in endorsement areas” (p. 6). DESE’s position, however, would soon change.

Jane Haskell, the Executive Director of the Missouri Middle School Association, expressed the views of the MMSA Executive Board regarding current middle level certification requirements by saying:

“Missouri’s former requirements for middle school teaching certification were a model for educational institutions throughout

the country. Endorsed by the National Middle School Association, these requirements helped to produce effective middle level educators who were prepared to address the unique academic, developmental, and social needs of middle school students. We believe that course work and field experiences, which define these needs, are essential.” (MMSA, 2004)

Since August 1, 2000, anyone holding a valid Missouri teaching certificate can receive middle level certification by simply taking the Praxis II in one content area. Subsequently, any teacher who has passed the Praxis II in a secondary content area has been able to easily pass the middle school content area which is significantly less strenuous than the former.

During the calendar year 2003, 1,417 Missouri teachers received middle school teaching certification: 54% as an initial certification after completing middle school coursework, and 46% by

simply taking the Praxis II in a content area. Between January and October of 2004, 1,062 teachers had received middle school teaching certification, but in those ten months, only 37% as an initial certification, and 63% by simply taking the Praxis II. (See table at the end of article)

Although middle school certification requirements are still listed on the DESE website, there has been a steady and sharp decrease in the number of college students preparing for middle level teaching through coursework and

middle level field experiences, and why should they when the state doesn't value it enough to require them to do so.

The "real McCoy" of middle school teaching certification, that which required special preparation at the middle level, lasted three years in Missouri, from September 1, 1997 until August 1, 2000. While the idea that anyone certified to teach at the elementary or secondary level can also teach at the middle level appears to be the common perception, the Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development (1989, 2000), the National Middle School Association (1982, 2001), the Missouri Middle School Association (2002), and many teachers who have

actually taught middle school know better. Missouri's Department of Elementary and Secondary Education have not kept their promise to "hold firm".

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Comparison of Middle School Certificates		
Year*	Initial Certificates	Added by Praxis II
1997	134	0
1998	781	0
1999	1019	0
2000	832	1*
2001	698	161
2002	797	397
2003	763	654
2004	388	674
<b>Total</b>	5412	1886
*date range is from 01-Jan through 31-Dec.		
**date range is 01-Aug through 31-Dec.		

(DESE, October 22, 2004)