

Middle School Teacher Certification: A National Survey

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IN 1975 there may be between four and five thousand middle schools in the United States. This is especially true if such a school is defined as a separate intermediate school that combines one or more of the upper elementary grades (5 and 6) with the lower secondary grades (7 and 8). This is, of course, a dramatic increase in the number of such schools. Reorganization of the educational experience for emerging adolescents has become a high priority on the action agenda of hundreds of public school systems across the country.

As the number of the schools has increased, so has the concern that these schools be different programmatically as well as in name. Implicit in this concern is the assumption that middle school teachers must be different if their schools are to be, and that teacher education and certification are the keys to providing the schools with teachers trained to do the jobs required by the reorganization. In other words, the schools will not be different until teachers are provided with the training that will permit them to perform the necessary functions of a middle school teacher.

Many middle school faculties are composed of one group who have elementary school training and experience and another group who have secondary school training and experience. Often these staffs divide themselves in accordance with their back-

The authors report results of a national study of certification provisions for middle school teachers. They find beginnings of a supportive certification pattern that recognizes the special needs of the middle school.

ground, thus creating two widely varying staff subgroups, sometimes making it impossible to successfully implement appropriate programs.

Two things are necessary prerequisites, it seems, to effective middle school teacher education. First, there must be an adequate number of middle schools which are already fully functioning, to provide sites at which the training can occur. Second, there must be an adequate teacher certification pattern; one which will prompt initial efforts and lend continued long term support to teacher education activities.

In 1968, stimulated by an apparent lack of special middle school teacher certification, Pumerantz surveyed the 50 state departments of education to determine the extent to which special middle school teachers certification

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requirements had been established.¹ This 1968 survey revealed that only two states, Nebraska and Kentucky, had official middle school certification requirements. At that time nine other states² were in the process of planning a new set of specific requirements for certification at this level. In 1968, 39 states anticipated no change in certification to accommodate the middle school movement. Pumerantz hypothesized that one reason for the lack of change was that then existing overlapping certificates allowed teachers to be placed at the middle school level with little difficulty.

By early 1975 middle schools had at least doubled in number from the 1968 level. This system of schooling has become a predominant pattern of education in several states. A National Middle School Association

¹ Philip Pumerantz. "Few States Certify Teachers for Growing Middle Schools." *Phi Delta Kappan* 51 (2): 102; October 1969.

² Arkansas, Iowa, Minnesota, New Hampshire, North Carolina, Pennsylvania, South Carolina, Washington, and Wisconsin.

has emerged, as well as the establishment of state associations or leagues of schools in at least eight states. All of these factors made a review of the certification system essential.

Revising the original questionnaire used in the 1968 study, the authors of the present survey contacted appropriate officers in the

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state departments of education in each of the 50 states. Completed questionnaires were received from all states.

The questionnaire sought answers to the following issues:

1. How has the middle school movement expanded since 1968?
2. What new developments, if any, have occurred in the area of middle school teacher certification since 1968?
3. What new developments, if any, have occurred in the area of middle school certification for administrators and special personnel since 1968?
4. Are state universities developing programs to complement state middle school certification?

Extent of the Middle School Movement in 1975

The first question dealt with the existence of middle schools in each state. Forty-seven of the 50 states now reported having established middle schools officially recognized by the state department of education. State education directories and data from other sources known to the authors indicate that the three states which do not have officially recognized middle schools (Mississippi, Ohio, and California) do, in fact, have schools which refer to themselves as middle schools and/or which fit the definition of a middle school set forth in the questionnaire. It can therefore be reported, perhaps for the first time, that middle schools are in operation in all 50 states of the union.

Middle School Certification

The second question dealt with the certification of middle school teachers. Eight states now report a teacher's certificate *specifically* for the middle school: Colorado, Florida, Indiana, Kentucky, Nebraska, North Carolina, Minnesota, and West Virginia. Forty-two do not have a special certification.

An interesting pattern has developed among those states which now have special middle school certification programs. The pattern developed out of attempts to accommodate the vast numbers of teachers who were already teaching in these schools, and who were fully certified prior to the adoption of the special middle school certificates. Each of the states which now offer a new special middle school certification provides exceptions which make it possible to teach in the middle school with either an elementary or secondary certification. In these states, therefore, middle school certification is now possible, but not really mandatory.

Typically, those eight states which do

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have middle school certification allow teachers with just the elementary certificate to teach in grades five and six in a middle school, especially if it is a self-contained classroom situation. In the same manner, if a teacher possesses only the secondary certification he or she is considered suitably certified to teach in grades seven and eight of a middle school, but only in those subject areas for which the certificate has been endorsed.

In at least one state (Florida) this overlap is only in one direction. Teachers who hold only the secondary certificate, for example, may teach in their subject area in all grades 7-12 regardless of whether the school is called a middle school, a junior high school, or something else. Teachers who have only a middle school certification, however, are

restricted to those schools officially recognized as middle schools by the state. This means that a teacher with only a middle school certificate cannot teach 12-year-olds in a school that is not designated to be a middle school. This would seem to present a severely limited opportunity for employment, as well as making the middle school certification almost a “second class” certificate.

Six of the eight states with middle school certification focus primarily on a subject specialization along the lines of the high school model. In these states the middle school certificate is valid only in subjects for which the teacher has subjected certification. In Kentucky (5-9) and North Carolina (4-9), however, the middle school certificate is valid for all subjects in the grades of the middle school, possibly permitting the middle school teacher to be much more interdisciplinary.

In addition to those states with middle school certification, at least 14 additional states were planning such a certificate or had the issue under some kind of study at the time of the survey.³

In the 1968 study, Pumerantz found nine states which were planning a middle school certificate or studying the issue. Two of these (New Hampshire, Washington) are no longer planning a special middle school certificate, considering their present certification sufficient. Planning and study are continuing in 1975 in five of the states which were doing so in 1968, but in at least several cases with a new sense of urgency and priority attached to the issue. Two of the states (North Carolina, Minnesota) which were studying the issue in 1968 presently have officially approved a middle school certificate in their states.

Thirty-nine states reported in 1968 that they were planning no change in certification and that they considered their present pattern adequate. In 1975 the number of states in this category had dropped to 27, indicating the increasing trend toward considering middle school certification.

³ Alabama, Arkansas, Iowa, Louisiana, Maine, Maryland, Michigan, Montana, Oklahoma, Pennsylvania, South Carolina, Tennessee, Wisconsin, and Wyoming.

Only one state, Colorado, is prepared to move into the area of an administrator's certificate *specifically* for the middle school. Building on the certification for junior high school principal, a special administration certificate for middle school requires a master's degree plus 15 semester hours with a "major" in Middle School/Junior High School and at least three years of appropriate teaching experience.

Nine other states now have the issue of administrative certification under study. Montana, Alabama, Tennessee, South Carolina, Oklahoma, Maine, Maryland, West Virginia, and Kentucky are all presently considering issuing such a certificate.

None of the rest of the states (40) are presently considering administrative certification. In almost every case, these states consider both elementary or secondary administrative certification to be adequate for middle school. A few states have K-12 administrative certification and fewer still have no administrative certification at all.

Middle school certification for special personnel is almost non-existent. Montana alone offers special middle school certification in the areas of guidance, music, and special education. The issue is presently under study in Alabama. All other states consider their present certification pattern for special personnel to be adequate for the middle school and no plans are under way to change.

Middle School Teacher Education

Nineteen states reported some level of activity now occurring in the area of university based preservice or other middle school teacher education programs. The extent of the involvement varies from offering a course or two at the graduate level, especially in those areas where certification does not exist, to fully functioning undergraduate programs preparing teachers for certification in some combination of grades 4 or 5 through 8 or 9. Universities in the following states are involved in some level of middle school teacher education: Arkansas, Colorado, Connecticut,

Florida, Iowa, Indiana, Kansas, Kentucky, Louisiana, Massachusetts, Minnesota, Nebraska, North Carolina, Pennsylvania, Texas, Vermont, West Virginia, Wisconsin, and Wyoming.

Also, universities in five states are either actively planning middle school teacher education programs or anticipate the need to do so in the future. New Mexico, Kentucky, Alabama, Maine, and Oklahoma fit this category. All other states reported present programs as adequate for preparing middle school teachers.

A number of significant facts come to light from this study. Certainly the knowledge that middle schools are functioning in all 50 states is important. Several states have already developed accreditation standards for the middle school (Arkansas, Montana, South Dakota). It is also evident that middle school certification is making some important headway. An increase from two states to eight states with special middle school teacher certification in the space of six years is encouraging. With 14 additional states planning such certification or studying the issue, it can be assumed that the number of states actually offering middle school certification is likely to continue to increase, albeit slowly. It is also apparent that the number of universities which are responding to the need to prepare middle school teachers is on the increase. All of these changes seem to encourage the belief that middle school staff development is assuming greater priority in the educational scene.

Hopefully, this trend, which seems obvious when comparing the national scenes of 1968 and 1975, will continue. Middle schools will be unique educational institutions when they are staffed by faculty who have received a special training program which enables them to implement what all too often have remained lofty theoretical constructs. These training programs appear to be at least partially dependent upon a supportive certification pattern which recognizes the special needs of the middle school. If the past is indeed prologue, the middle school movement just may have a chance to survive. □

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