

SUCCESS IN THE MIDDLE ACT (H.R. 3006/S. 1362)

Problem: Many middle grades (5-8) students do not receive the appropriate instruction and other supports to be successful in the rigorous high school coursework that will prepare them for college and the workforce.

“The middle grades will play a pivotal role in enabling the nation to reach President Obama’s goal of graduating all students from high school prepared for college or advanced career training. In high poverty neighborhoods, in particular, our research and school improvement work indicate that students’ middle grades experiences have tremendous impact on the extent to which they will close achievement gaps, graduate from high school, and be prepared for college.”

Putting Middle Grade Students on the Graduation Path (Balfanz, 2009)

- According to the 2007 National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), only one-third of the students in eighth grade can read and write with proficiency; in math, less than one-third of students in eighth grade perform at the proficient level, and nearly 30% score below the basic level.
- Sixth-grade students who do not attend school regularly, who receive poor behavior marks, or who fail math or English have no more than a 10% chance of graduating high school on time, and only a 20% chance of graduating one year late.
- According to ACT, the level of academic achievement that students attain by eighth grade has a larger impact on the students’ college and career readiness than anything that happens academically in high school.
- Middle schools are almost twice as likely as elementary schools to be identified for improvement, corrective action, or restructuring (22% versus 13%).

Solution: *Success in the Middle Act* would authorize federal investments in improving the education of middle grades students in low-performing schools.

- Title I authorizes spending \$1 billion annually on formula grants to states, to provide grants to local school districts to improve low-performing schools that contain middle grades. In addition, 1% of appropriated funds are set aside to evaluate the grant’s effectiveness. The Secretary of Education is required to establish a peer-review process that includes participation of experts and educators to evaluate state grant applications and provide feedback and technical assistance.
- States receiving grants would implement a plan to improve student achievement that describes what students are required to know and do to successfully complete the middle grades and transition to and succeed in an academically rigorous high school that prepares them for postsecondary education and the workplace. This plan would include the development of early warning and intervention systems to identify those students most at-risk of dropping out and intervene appropriately to help them succeed. States are also required to enlist an outside entity to prepare a need analysis and set forth a plan to strengthen middle grades policies and practices.
- States and districts would invest in proven strategies, such as:
 - ⇒ Providing professional development and coaching to school leaders, teachers and other school personnel in addressing the needs of diverse learners and in using challenging and relevant research-based best practices and curriculum;
 - ⇒ Developing and implementing comprehensive, school-wide improvement efforts in eligible schools (schools containing middle grades (5-8) from which more than 50% of students go on to

attend a high school with a graduation rate of less than 60%, or schools containing middle grades in which more than 25% of students who finish their first middle grades year in the school exhibit key risk factors and early warning signs, including attendance below 90%; a failing grade in English or math or two failing grades in any courses; suspension or other evidence of poor behavior; or schools containing middle grades in which more than 50% of students in middle grades do not perform at a proficient level on state NCLB math and reading tests); and

⇒ Implementing student supports, such as extended learning time and personal academic plans that enable all students to stay on the path to graduation.

- Title II authorizes an additional \$100 million to facilitate the generation, dissemination, and application of research to identify promising practices in middle grades education, as well as review existing research on middle grades education practices. This research will assist in the implementation of effective practices that lead to continual student learning and high academic achievement at the middle level.

111th Congress

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