



**PRESS RELEASE**

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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

### **Middle School Turnaround: A Model for Excellence in the Middle Grades**

**New York, NY, June 15, 2005.** Six years ago, Harrison Middle School in Harrison, Michigan was struggling. Similar to many low-performing middle schools faced with a myriad of challenges in a high-poverty area, the school was striving to provide an excellent education to all its students, 60 percent of whom received free or reduced-price lunch. Since then, Harrison's story has changed dramatically as the school has managed to meet Adequate Yearly Progress for the last five years.

By partnering with Middle Start, a comprehensive school improvement program, the school got on a fast track to student achievement. The school has made organizational changes (e.g., interdisciplinary teaming and block scheduling), and has developed professional learning communities. The professional learning communities focus on student learning and ways to reach struggling students.

According to Ron Wilson, principal of Harrison, "What we found most useful was the support from Middle Start and the program's sensitivity to our unique culture. Every school is different, and Middle Start was responsive to our individual needs while at the same time guiding us through a difficult reform process that is anything but typical."

Harrison is a model for other middle schools throughout the U.S. "There are many middle-grades schools struggling with the demands of No Child Left Behind, shrinking state budgets, and numerous local challenges, making it more difficult than ever for schools to realize their promise to students to deliver a quality education," according to Patrick Montesano, vice president and director of the Middle Start National Center at the Academy for Educational Development. "But increased student achievement is possible—with a combination of vision, skills, and resources."

**About Middle Start.** The Middle Start initiative combines on-site coaching and professional development and partner resources to strengthen student achievement in schools with middle grades. Guided by current research and practice emphasizing the developmental needs of young adolescents, Middle Start upholds the three goals that create the foundation for student success—academic excellence, developmental responsiveness, and social equity—and it does so through small learning communities and teams; effective curriculum and student-centered instruction; meaningful student assessment; reflective review and self-study; and sustainable partnerships. The Middle Start National Center at the Academy for Educational Development provides leadership and support to regional Middle Start partnerships and school networks. For more information visit [www.middlestart.org](http://www.middlestart.org).

**About the Academy for Educational Development (AED).** Founded in 1961, the Academy for Educational Development (AED) is an independent, nonprofit organization committed to addressing human development and educational needs in the United States and throughout the world. The AED Center for School and Community Services in New York City has a strong commitment to excellence and equity in education. The Center designs, implements, and evaluates model educational and youth development programs; provides technical assistance and capacity building to schools, school districts, and community-based organizations; and disseminates information on issues relevant to youth through conferences, seminars, and publications.

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