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**NYC PRINCIPALS AND TEACHERS TRAVEL TO MICHIGAN TO SEE
MIDDLE-GRADES SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT IN ACTION**

***AED Middle Start Hosts Trip to Foster Collaboration and Knowledge-building among
Middle-Grades Educators***

Grand Rapids, MI (February 28, 2007) – Middle Start is hosting a three day exploratory trip that will bring a team of New York City middle-grades educators to two middle schools in Michigan that have made major improvements in student learning using Middle Start's ABCI™ program (*Achievement By Continuous Improvement*). ABCI is a comprehensive school improvement model that helps schools to organize around the central goal that all students will produce quality work and succeed in meeting standards. With two full day site visits, the NYC team will function as a study group, observing classes; meeting with students, teachers, and administrators; and reviewing and analyzing the data collected to date.

In designing this trip, we began to see two equally important objectives," explained Patrick Montesano, the Vice President and Director of the Middle Start National Center at AED. "The first is to provide an opportunity for the New York City team to learn more about Middle Start ABCI by visiting two Michigan Middle Start ABCI schools that serve similar populations and have been receiving noteworthy results with the program over the past three to four years. And the second is to help them determine how the program might need to be adapted to best meet the needs and circumstances of their individual schools.

The Middle Start schools being visited in Michigan are Fennville Middle School in Fennville, Michigan, and Steele Middle School, in Muskegon, Michigan, both 6-8 schools demonstrating Adequate Yearly Progress for 2005-2006. Both Fennville and Steele have adopted the ABCI philosophy often called "Learning to Mastery," where every student is taught – and re-taught if necessary – the subject material until they know it. All students have every opportunity to succeed at learning. As the staff at Steele put it, "Failure is not an option."

Middle Start Regional Director, Steve Hoelscher, selected these two schools as the subject of the study group because "both schools have seen significant reduction in failure grades and increases in A and B grades." Mr. Hoelscher added, "Over the past three years of participation in ABCI, both of these schools have shown gains in English Language Arts and Math on the MEAP assessments, our state standardized test, and they credit ABCI as being their catalyst for change."

The traveling team from New York City will consist of representatives from Cypress Hills Community School/P.S. 89, Twenty-First Century Academy for Community Leadership/P.S. 210, and Shuan Wen School/P.S. 184, all of which are K-8 schools in the New York City Public Schools, and a representative from *New Visions for Public Schools*, the local education fund associated with these schools. "All three of these New York City schools are K-8, and were started by elementary experts," said Maud Abeel, Program Officer at the Academy for Educational Development, Middle Start. "They became interested in ABCI because of their interest in strengthening their middle-grades programs." This trip will provide the team with the opportunity to see some of these approaches being implemented in kindred schools in another region of the country.

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About Middle Start

Middle Start is a nationally recognized program of the Academy for Educational Development (AED) dedicated to improving teaching and learning and ensuring academic success and healthy development for every middle-grades student. With over a decade of experience, Middle Start helps schools develop the characteristics of high performing middle-grades schools including: academically challenging environments that support the diverse needs of ALL learners; personalized learning communities informed by the stages of young adolescent development; and making smart use of data through reflective review and self-assessment to ensure continuous improvement. The Middle Start National Center at AED provides leadership and support to regional Middle Start networks. For more information visit the company website at: www.middlestart.org.

About the Academy for Educational Development (AED)

Founded in 1961, AED is an independent nonprofit organization committed to solving critical social problems in the United States and throughout the world. AED works with schools, school systems, families, and community-based organizations on comprehensive school and community improvement initiatives, as well as programs addressing specific education issues. For more information about AED's work in education, visit: <http://www.aed.org/Education>.