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PRESS RELEASE

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For Immediate Release

Middle Start Teacher Recognized For Teacher Appreciation Week

New York, NY, May 11, 2006—The National Education Association (NEA) has designated this year's theme for Teacher Appreciation Week as "Great Teachers Make Great Public Schools." This theme encourages all of us to recognize the critical role teachers have in ensuring that all children receive a high-quality public education, and it also communicates a sense of teachers' challenging work. (NEA, 2006)

In honor of Teacher Appreciation Week, Middle Start is recognizing Mistie Rooks Thomas, a teacher at Ackerman High School, which is currently implementing the Middle Start comprehensive school improvement program. Ms. Rooks Thomas is a graduate of Ackerman High School and Mississippi State University. She has been teaching middle-grades reading, social studies, and math for 11 years. Last year she changed from teaching social studies and reading to math. Ms. Rooks Thomas has always loved math and "got the love naturally" because her mother was a math teacher. Ms. Rooks Thomas is also chairperson of the Ackerman School Leadership Team and has wholeheartedly embraced Middle Start Principles and Practices. According to the Middle Start coach, Wayne McLeod, "Mistie is a catalyst for middle level practices, and her classroom reflects her enthusiasm. She is seen as an asset to her school, students, and Middle Start."

Recently the local newspaper printed a story about Rooks Thomas's strategies for teaching a unit on probability to her eighth-grade math students. She was also instrumental in making last summer's Middle Start retreat a big success. Currently, she is helping organize an after school tutoring program to target "bubble students"¹ for review prior to the state benchmark exam.

¹ According to Dr. Buddy Fish, Education Professor at Jackson State University, "bubble students" are students who are about to become more proficient on the Mississippi Curriculum (MCT) test. WBLT on-line news – www.wblt.com accessed on May 9, 2006.

Through a partnership between the Middle Start National Center at the Academy for Educational Development (AED) and Ackerman High School, Ms. Rooks Thomas has helped Ackerman High School implement engaging instructional practices, such as teachers' using data to make decisions about instruction and helping students reflect on and review their work to foster their learning at higher levels.

About Ackerman High School

Ackerman High School, in Ackerman, Mississippi, has 489 students in grades 7-12. Of these students, 59% are white, 40% are black, and the remaining students are Hispanic, Asian/Pacific Islander, and/or American Indian (1%). The majority of students (68%) are eligible for free and reduced-price lunch. Middle-grades students in grades 7-8 make up nearly 35% of the student body. The student teacher ratio is 14:1. Principal Huffman is directing the school's involvement with Middle Start.

About Middle Start

Middle Start emphasizes three research-based goals that create the foundation for student success in grades 6 through 8: academic excellence; developmental responsiveness; and social equity. These goals can be achieved through small learning communities, student-centered instruction, meaningful assessments, reflective 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.

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.

Credits: Wayne McLeod (Middle Start Coach)

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