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PRESS RELEASE

Contact: Lea Williams Rose
212-243-1110

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

NEW NATIONAL STUDY IDENTIFIES MIDDLE START AS A PROMISING SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT INTERVENTION

Middle Start Seen as Making a Positive Difference in Middle Grades

New York, NY – A new study conducted by the RAND Corporation identifies Middle Start as a promising school improvement initiative making a difference in the lives of middle-grades students.

The study called for wider implementation of the practices advanced by Middle Start, such as more rigorous curriculum, instruction, and student assessment; small learning communities; teacher teaming, and ongoing, high-quality professional development.

“The study reaffirms many of the basic tenets of our program, including the importance of rigorous academics for every student, coupled with an awareness of how young teens learn and grow,” said Patrick Montesano Vice President and Director of the Middle Start National Center at the Academy for Educational Development. “The RAND study shows that middle-grades educators need more opportunities to improve their practice and continue their own professional learning.”

The study also indicates that more research is needed on teaching and learning in the middle grades, particularly regarding the efficacy of middle schools that are separated from elementary and high schools. Since there is no rigorous research on the subject to date according to the report, it is premature to suggest that any single-grade configuration works best for middle-grades students.

“What matters most—and what *has* been borne out by the research to date—are the instructional practices that go on within the classroom,” said Montesano. “The most promising practices are bolstered by smaller learning communities within the school that provide personalized support for every student and opportunities for teachers to learn together. This can ensure that every student will be well prepared for high school.”

The RAND study doesn't address pre-service education for teachers and emphasizes instead more and better in-service learning. Middle Start has long advocated for appropriate levels of middle-grades teacher preparation before educators ever enter the classroom. "Teachers should always be provided with opportunities to improve on the job, but high-quality teacher education—with a particular focus on young teens—must be undertaken before teachers are assigned their own classrooms," Montesano said.

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; team structure; effective curriculum; student-centered instruction; meaningful student assessment; reflective review and self-study; as well as sustainable and meaningful 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. 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.

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