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***ALLIANCE FOR EXCELLENT EDUCATION RELEASES REPORT
ON NCLB & MIDDLE SCHOOLS***

WASHINGTON, DC, July 8, 2003— America’s middle schools have a problem. Like elementary and high schools, they must meet a barrage of new requirements as the result of the federal No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB). But NCLB treats middle schools like high schools some of the time, like elementary schools at other times, and lets individual states determine their status in some situations. NCLB’s testing and adequate yearly progress requirements are fairly straightforward, but mandates related to the placement of “highly qualified” teachers in middle school classrooms are anything but clear.

Today, the Alliance for Excellent Education is releasing a policy brief, *NCLB and Middle Schools: Confronting the Challenges*, that clarifies the NCLB mandates particular to middle schools. The report describes the difficulties that school boards, superintendents, and school administrators are likely to face as they try to meet the NCLB requirements by their impending deadlines, and offers a series of recommendations designed to help train middle school teachers in academics and in meeting the unique developmental needs of their students, provide them with critical professional development resources, and provide incentives to attract highly qualified teachers to high needs areas.

Every school day in America approximately 3,000 middle and high school students drop out of school. With a national graduation rate of only 69 percent, the country has more than 6 million adolescents at-risk of leaving school without a diploma, unprepared for work or success in life.

Since its passage in 2001, the landmark NCLB has raised hopes that changes in the country’s educational system will help stem the flow of students from America’s middle and high schools. The law covers grades kindergarten through 12, but little attention has thus far focused on the impact of NCLB on middle schools.

The most significant challenge to middle schools as they work to put NCLB mandates into practice is the implementation of teacher quality standards. Studies show that the most dominant factor affecting student academic gain is teacher quality. Accordingly, more stringent qualification standards are currently set by NCLB for many middle school teachers.

These mandates place a heavier burden on schools that are already strained in their efforts to attract highly qualified teachers. Schools with high poverty rates are particularly challenged in their attempts to recruit and retain qualified teachers, yet their needs are the greatest. In high-poverty middle schools more than 50 percent of classes are taught by teachers who did not major in the course subject.

Middle schools also are treated differently under NCLB depending on whether they are designated as an elementary or high school; these variations in school classification can cause tremendous confusion. Middle schools that are designated as elementary schools might share the same testing or adequate yearly progress requirements, while the NCLB standards for teacher quality may differ if the middle school is in a K-12 institution, but considered a separate “school within a school.” Teacher quality standards for

middle schools designated as high schools demand that teachers hold a major in each subject each teaches. These requirements present real challenges for school districts as they try to hire and retain middle school teachers.

The Alliance's report offers five recommendations to address these problems – professional development, specific college programs providing academic majors for middle school teachers, implement professional preparation training specific to middle school teachers, end “add-on” certifications, and provide financial incentives like tax credits and loan forgiveness. These five actions are steps state and federal legislators can take to meet the middle school challenges and help prepare students to successfully complete high school.

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The Alliance for Excellent Education is a national policy, advocacy, and research organization created to help middle and high school students receive an excellent education. The Alliance focuses on America's six million most at-risk secondary students—those in the lowest achievement quartile—who are most likely to leave school without a diploma or graduate unprepared for a productive future. For more information about the Alliance for Excellent Education, visit www.All4Ed.org.