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News Release

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14 QUALITIES ANNOUNCED FOR EFFECTIVE MIDDLE SCHOOLS AS 'ROADMAP TO ACHIEVEMENT'

(WASHINGTON, D.C.) – National Middle School Association (NMSA), the nation's only educational organization focusing on middle level schools, today announced 14 qualities that "have the potential to dramatically improve the academic and developmental growth of 10- to 15-year-olds."

The announcement was made this morning at the National Press Club, and the recommendations in the NMSA position statement, *This We Believe: Successful Schools for Young Adolescents*, will be formally released tomorrow at the association's 30th annual conference in Atlanta. A companion document, *Research and Resources in Support of This We Believe*, will also be released.

"There is now ample research and experience in schools that tells us what works in providing the best education for young adolescents," said NMSA President Linda Robinson, principal, Alvin Junior High School, near Houston. "What works are these 14 qualities. When they are all in place, students learn academically and grow developmentally."

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“It’s important to note that there are schools in our country that are well on their way to providing the best possible education for young adolescents,” said Sue Swaim, NMSA executive director. “Yet, having some successful schools is not enough. All schools must rise to this higher standard.”

The 14 qualities focus on both cultural and programmatic aspects of a middle level school. Among eight cultural qualities are educators who are trained specifically to work with this unique age group, leaders who are willing to change and take risks for their students, high expectations for each and every student and educator, and family and community partnerships.

With those qualities, schools should have six programmatic components in place, including challenging and relevant curriculum, assessment programs designed to improve an individual child’s learning, use of teaching teams, and multiple learning and teaching approaches, among others.

(A full list of the 14 qualities is attached to this release.)

“Policymakers must have all 14 qualities in place in their middle level schools,” said Robinson. “Having one or even ten will not result in the most effective learning for young adolescents.”

NMSA called for policymakers to act now to implement these recommendations.

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“Young adolescents deserve the best possible education at any time, for this age span has been called the second most important time in a person’s development,” said Swaim. “Now, however, the nation is focused on ‘No Child Left Behind.’ This piece of legislation calls for considerable mandated testing, most of which focuses on middle level students. If this nation is to achieve the goals of ‘No Child Left Behind’, attention must be focused on middle level schools. These reports will give communities and their schools a roadmap to success with the resources to achieve that success.”

The companion document, *Research and Resources in Support of This We Believe*, documents research studies that indicate the 14 qualities are key to improving middle level schools and suggests resources educators can use in implementing those qualities.

A summary of *This We Believe: Successful Schools for Young Adolescents* can be found on the NMSA website, www.nmsa.org, and both documents can be purchased by contacting NMSA at, 1-800-528-NMSA.

(NOTE TO REPORTERS: The summary includes each of the 14 qualities and a brief description of them and can be downloaded from the NMSA website after 10 a.m. Nov. 5)

National Middle School Association believes successful schools for young adolescents are characterized by a culture that includes

- **Educators who value working with this age group and are prepared to do so.** Effective middle level educators understand the developmental uniqueness of the age group, the curriculum they teach, and effective learning and assessment strategies. They need specific teacher preparation before entering the classroom and continuous professional development as they pursue their careers.
- **Courageous, collaborative leadership.** Middle level leaders understand adolescents, the society, and the theory and practice of middle level education. As the prime determiner of the school culture, the principal influences student achievement and teacher effectiveness by advocating, nurturing, and sustaining an effective instructional program.
- **A shared vision that guides decisions.** All decisions made about the school should be guided by a shared vision and the mission statement derived from it.
- **An inviting, supportive, and safe environment.** A successful school is an inviting, supportive, and safe place, a joyful community that promotes in-depth learning and enhances students' physical and emotional well-being. In such a school, human relationships are paramount.
- **High expectations for every member of the learning community.** Educators and students hold themselves and each other to high expectations. Such confidence promotes positive attitudes and behaviors and motivates students to tackle challenging learning activities. Successful schools recognize that young adolescents are capable of far more than adults often assume.
- **Students and teachers engaged in active learning.** The most successful learning strategies are ones that involve each student personally. When students routinely assume the role of teacher, and teachers demonstrate that they are still learners, a genuine learning community is present.
- **An adult advocate for every student.** Academic success and personal growth increase markedly when young adolescents' affective needs are met. All adults in successful middle level schools are advocates, advisors, and mentors.
- **School-initiated family and community partnerships.** Successful middle schools promote family involvement and take the initiative to develop needed home-school bonds. The involvement of family is linked to higher levels of student achievement and improved student behavior.

Therefore, successful schools for young adolescents provide

- **Curriculum that is relevant, challenging, integrative, and exploratory.** An effective curriculum is based on criteria of high quality and includes learning activities that create opportunities for students to pose and answer questions that are important to them. Such a curriculum provides direction for what young adolescents should know and be able to do and helps them achieve the attitudes and behaviors needed for a full, productive, and satisfying life.
- **Multiple learning and teaching approaches that respond to their diversity.** Since young adolescents learn best through engagement and interaction, learning strategies involve students in dialogue with teachers and with one another. Teaching approaches should enhance and accommodate the diverse skills, abilities, and prior knowledge of young adolescents, and draw upon students' individual learning styles.
- **Assessment and evaluation programs that promote quality learning.** Continuous, authentic, and appropriate assessment and evaluation measures provide evidence about every student's learning progress. Grades alone are inadequate expressions for assessing the many goals of middle level education.
- **Organizational structures that support meaningful relationships and learning.** The interdisciplinary team of two to four teachers working with a common group of students is the building block for a strong learning community with its sense of family, where students and teachers know one another well, feel safe and supported, and are encouraged to take intellectual risks.
- **School-wide efforts and policies that foster health, wellness, and safety.** A school that fosters physical and psychological safety strives to build resiliency in young people by maintaining an environment in which peaceful and safe interaction are expected and supported by written policies, scheduled professional development, and student-focused activities.
- **Multifaceted guidance and support services.** Developmentally responsive middle level schools provide both teachers and specialized professionals who are readily available to offer the assistance many students need in negotiating their lives both in and out of school.