

Success in the Middle Act (S. 2227)

Problem: Many middle level students do not receive the appropriate instruction and other supports to be successful in the rigorous high school coursework that will prepare them for college and the workforce.

- According to the 2007 National Assessment on Educational Progress (NAEP), fewer than one-third of the students in eighth grade can read and write with proficiency; in math, again less than one-third percent of students in eighth grade perform at the proficient level, and nearly 30% score below the basic level.
- Sixth-grade students who do not attend school regularly, who receive poor behavior marks, or who fail math or English have no more than a 10% chance of graduating high school on time and a 20% chance of graduating one year late.
- Only 11% of eighth-grade students taking ACT's EXPLORE assessment are on track to succeed in first-year college-level English, Algebra, Biology, and social science courses.
- If Title I was distributed on the basis of student populations, middle level schools (representing 23% of the nation's student population) would receive approximately \$2.92 billion of the current Title I allocation. Yet, of the \$12.7 billion appropriated in FY 2005 for Title I, only \$1.27 billion (10%) is allocated to middle level schools by the states.

Solution: Success in the Middle Act would offer federal support to improve the education of middle grades students in low-performing schools by:

- Authorizing \$1 billion a year for states to provide competitive grants to local school districts to improve low-performing schools containing middle grades. Using research findings and promising practices, states would develop detailed plans to improve middle school student achievement. Comprehensive centers, universities, and non-profits would provide technical assistance in developing these plans. State plans will:
 - describe what students are required to know and do to successfully complete the middle grades and make the transition to succeed in an academically rigorous high school, as well as what supports are available for meeting those goals; and
 - be evaluated by rigorous peer review to determine the likely effectiveness of the plan and the resources needed for implementation.
- Developing and utilizing early identification data systems to identify those students most at risk of subsequently dropping out, and to assist school districts in providing targeted interventions to help all middle grades students succeed.
- Investing in effective strategies at the state and district level such as:
 - providing professional development and coaching to school leaders, teachers, and other school personnel in addressing the needs of diverse learners, and in using challenging and relevant curriculum and providing effective instruction; and
 - applying school-wide improvement efforts and student supports such as personal academic plans, mentoring, intensive reading and math instruction, and extended learning time that enables all students to stay on the path to graduation.
- Authorizing funds to generate and disseminate the results of research to identify and employ effective practices that support student learning and success at the middle level.

Sponsor: Sen. Barack Obama (D-IL)

Cosponsors: Sen. Jack Reed (D-RI) and Sen. Sheldon Whitehouse (D-RI)