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DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

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Greetings:

My name is Perry Riffel. I have been a professor of middle level education at Valparaiso University for the past 20 years. I also have worked with the Indiana Professional Standards Board in developing the adopted standards for middle grade teachers i.e. Early Adolescence Generalist. I am also on the advisory board of the Indiana Middle Level Education Association.

I commend the efforts of the Department of Education in Indiana to improve the quality of student performance and of teachers of all students. There are several issues with the proposal to change the licensing structure from the current system to the grade level configurations of K-6 and 6-12. This proposed configuration ignores the essential need to prepare teachers to address the complexities of living and learning as a young adolescent.

The change proposal is strong in its recommendation that all teachers be knowledgeable in their content fields. A strong content background gives teachers the foundations of addressing the intellectual needs of all students at any grade level. The research base that has driven the focus of attention on early adolescence began around 1920. This was the time period when the concept of a junior high school was being considered. In the absence of mandatory attendance laws in so many states, the junior high was designed to lower the drop out rate of young adolescents and provide a curriculum which would lead toward career exploration and choices. By 1950 the research began to focus on the total needs of students in transition from childhood to young adults. The challenge was for schools to not only address the intellectual needs of this group, but also the physical, social, and emotional competing and often conflicting needs of early adolescents.

Teachers of young adolescents need to be competent to teach their subject matter, but they must also understand and respond to the human growth and developmental needs. Teachers of young adolescents must have an inviting personality, a sense of humor, empathy, and communication skills that are neatly focused on this developmental group. Teachers are or can be the perfect role models for young adolescents, and schools leaders must attend to being developmentally responsive to all of the complex needs of these students through policy making. These skills, passions, and commitments can only be discovered and developed through specific teacher

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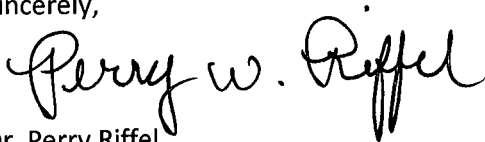
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preparation with hours of instruction, classroom observations and mentoring from our best university instructors and classroom teachers. The proposed license structure does not prohibit this specific preparation of teachers, nor does it recognize the importance of focused teacher preparation to meet the needs of young adolescents.

The past thirty years have seen a wealth of research that clearly places middle level education as a unique opportunity to assist young people through these often troublesome years. This research base cannot be ignored or it will minimize and reverse the focus on the middle years. Before making a license structure revision, I would challenge policy makers to consider the recommendation and findings of the Carnegie Commission as stated in their publication, Turning Points (1982). I can think of no other document that has had the impact on middle level education and young adolescent development.

Policy makers would do well to listen to other voices that have spoken on the matter of separate middle level teacher preparation. The National Middle School Association (NMSA) is the voice that has led to state policy changes in license structures in other states. The NMSA has a strong presence as the program review panel for The National Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE). The standards presented by the NMSA and adopted by NCATE for individual collegiate program reviews are available through the NMSA website.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Perry W. Riffel". The signature is written in a cursive style with a prominent dot above the 'i' in "Riffel".

Dr. Perry Riffel,
Certification Adviser