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INDIANA SELECTED FOR 2009 MIDDLE-GRADES REFORM PROGRAM
State to identify "Schools to Watch"

Pinehurst, NC – In its continuing effort to replicate the programs and practices of outstanding middle grades, the National Forum to Accelerate Middle-Grades Reform has selected Indiana to implement its acclaimed "Schools to Watch" program.

Indiana was chosen after a competitive selection process in which the state team demonstrated the capacity, commitment, and vision to partner with the Forum to establish the program. Indiana will now work with the Forum to select "Schools to Watch" at the middle level.

The state joins Arkansas, California, Colorado, Florida, Georgia, Illinois, Kentucky, Michigan, New Jersey, New York, North Carolina, Ohio, Oregon, Pennsylvania, South Carolina, Utah and Virginia which were previously selected and have since chosen exceptional middle-grades schools in each of their own states. To date, over 50% of the nation's middle schoolers are now in 17 Schools to Watch states with over 160 schools designated "Schools to Watch." Indiana now becomes the 18th state.

Launched in 1999, Schools to Watch[®] began as a national program that identified four middle-grades schools that were not only academically excellent, developmentally responsive, and socially equitable, but also had the organizational supports to sustain the school's success. Members of the National Forum selected the schools based on the extent to which they met a number of demanding criteria and data which Forum observers collected during site visits. Following the selections, the four schools were inundated with calls and flooded with visitors interested in seeing middle-grades schools that work and using the criteria for their own staff development and school assessments. The Forum web site (www.schoolstowatch.org) features online tours of the schools and detailed information about the selection criteria.

In today's announcement, the National Forum selected Indiana to replicate the Schools to Watch program as a way to identify exemplary middle-grades schools. The state clearly proved to the Forum review team that it has already garnered significant support for middle-grades school improvement and is mobilizing a number of in-state resources to carry out this program. Indiana will receive technical training and support from the Forum to implement their Schools to Watch programs.

“This is not simply an awards program. This approach to identifying great middle grades builds a mechanism and educates new audiences on the criteria required to turn our proven vision into reality to reach high performance and meet AYP. It’s driven by local leaders and partner organizations who really know their schools and can map that against best practice,” said Deborah Kasak, executive director of the National Forum to Accelerate Middle-Grades Reform.

The Indiana partners advancing the program include the Center of Excellence in Leadership of Learning, Indiana Middle Level Education Association, Indiana Principal Leadership Academy, Indiana Association of Schools Principals and the Indiana Department of Education.

The National Forum to Accelerate Middle-Grades Reform is an alliance of educators, researchers, national associations, and officers of professional organizations and foundations, dedicated to improving education in the middle grades. The Forum seeks to improve student learning dramatically by advocating that schools provide strong academics, respond to students' needs and interests, and ensure equal access to high-quality classes. To learn more, visit www.mgforum.org.

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