



Taking Center Stage

Executive Summary

In 1998, State Superintendent of Public Instruction Delaine Eastin established the Middle Grades former Task Force to provide guidance to educators on implementing standards-based education and to update the 1987 grade-level document, *Caught in the Middle*. After nearly three years of work, a new grade-span reform document titled *Taking Center Stage: A Commitment to Standards-based Education for California's Middle Grades Students* was published and distributed to schools and county and district superintendents in March 2001.

Taking Center Stage builds on and extends *Caught in the Middle* by showing how to combine a rich student-centered middle grades philosophy with the rigors of a standards-based education.

The document provides clear recommendations on how schools can achieve a coordinated system in which standards, assessment, accountability, and curriculum are aligned and focus on ensuring that all students meet grade-level standards.

Taking Center Stage builds on and extends *Caught in the Middle* by showing how to combine a rich student-centered middle grades philosophy with the rigors of a standards-based education. The 271-page document is designed for classroom teachers and principals and provides a wealth of theoretical and practical information about implementing standards-based education in the middle grades. Included are discussions about:

- ⌘ Standards-based education
- ⌘ Content and performance standards
- ⌘ Assessment local, state, formative, and summative
- ⌘ Accountability
- ⌘ Differentiated instruction
- ⌘ The ways in which middle-grade students learn
- ⌘ The urgency in ensuring that all students attain the standards
- ⌘ Academic literacy as a key to equal access for all students
- ⌘ The end of social promotion and the development of strategies to avoid retention
- ⌘ The creation of high-quality after-hours programs for middle grade students
- ⌘ The importance of health, safety, and individual resilience
- ⌘ Site-based, standards-oriented professional development

Taking Center Stage is the companion to two other grade-span reform documents, *Elementary Makes the Grade* and *Aiming High*. All three documents were developed around seven-key concepts. Taken together, the three documents provide schools and districts with the blueprints they will need to develop a quality, articulated, and comprehensive, standards-based program for each and every student.

Reciprocal Accountability

An important theme that is woven throughout *Taking Center Stage* is the need for all stakeholders (including students, parents, teachers, administrators, school boards, the state, and the public) to assume both personal and collective responsibility for ensuring that every student receives the kind of support necessary for achieving the standards.

Differentiated Instruction

Another important theme in *Taking Center Stage* is the need for differentiated instruction for all students. Some characteristics of a differentiated middle grades classroom are as follows:

- ▶ Curricular content is presented in multiple ways deductively, inductively, aurally, orally, visually, or by "hands-on" doing.
- ▶ Direct instruction and discovery instruction are complementary strategies used to enhance learning.
- ▶ Relevant content standards are made explicit throughout, and after instruction.
- ▶ Teachers assign work to individual students, small groups, and the whole class.
- ▶ Formative assessment is frequently used to group and regroup students to ensure that every student receives the most pertinent and highest quality instructional program possible.
- ▶ Student progress is reported in ways that parents, students, and teachers fully understand and that are consistent with the standards.
- ▶ Students who are not making adequate progress are supported by re-teaching, tutoring, and additional learning time.
- ▶ Teachers play the role of "academic coaches" moving all students as far as possible.

Locally Developed Standards-based Assessment System

Taking Center Stage develops a persuasive rationale for why districts should develop their own local, standards-based assessment system to work in parallel with the state's system. Local assessments are necessary because they fill a role that statewide assessments cannot. Generally, statewide assessments assess only those standards that can be measured through paper-and-pencil format in a limited amount of time. The absence of some standards from a paper-and-pencil statewide assessment does not mean that these standards are unimportant or inconsequential. Local standards-based assessments are needed to fill the gap. As *Taking Center Stage* says: "A great need exists at the local level for assessments employing performance tasks . . . the 'doing' of the content standards."

"A system of accountability ultimately means that each and every stakeholder assumes both a personal and a collective responsibility."

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Standards-based Professional Development at the School Site

A direct relationship exists between a school's effectiveness in implementing standards-based education and the knowledge and skills possessed by the school's professional staff. *Taking Center Stage* concludes by noting that "School-based professional development is critical to the success of standards-based education."

The document calls for an emphasis on collegial professional development at the school site level: "School-based staff development is one of the most potent ways of building collegial norms among teachers and principals." *Taking Center Stage* also calls for time and resources to be allocated to this purpose.

More Information

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| Copies of <i>Taking Center Stage</i> may be purchased for \$13.50 through CDE Press at 1-800-995-4099 |
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