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Celebrating 25 Years of the National Association of Professors of Middle Level Education

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Celebrating 25 Years of the National Association of Professors of Middle Level Education

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This year we are celebrating 25 years of the National Association of Professors of Middle Level Education (NAPOMLE) by honoring the past while envisioning the future.

In the spirit of Sankofa, we reached out to some past-presidents and leaders of NAPOMLE for words of inspiration. We honor those who have gone before us. Below are messages to NAPOMLE on our Silver Anniversary from past presidents John Myers (1997-1998), Jay Hertzog (1997 & beyond), Barbara Blackburn (2005-2006), Nancy Ruppert (2010-2012), Nancy Mizelle (2014-2016), Kim Winter (2016-2018), Gary Senn (2018-2020), Hilary Dack (2020-2022) and from our current president, Bridget Coleman (2022-2024). Join us as we reflect on the past while preparing for the future.

The National Association of Professors of Middle Level Education brings together middle level education professors from around our nation. From its inception, NAPOMLE has strived to provide “a forum for middle level educators to share information and ideas, and to network with one another to the benefit of the middle grades movement.” Using archives housed in the John H. Lounsbury College of Education at Georgia College and State University, we located a few nuggets of history to share.

Georgia middle level professors, like many other professors across the country, participated with their respective state middle level conferences prior to forming groups for professors. Georgia professors were the first affiliates to join the National Middle School

Association (now, the Association for Middle Level Education). However, their affiliation (1998) began about ten years earlier as Professors of Middle Level Education in Georgia. The following is a transcript of a document initiated by Jay Hertzog illustrating that NAPOMLE resulted from professors collaborating and finding inspiration to expand their own ideas.

Dear Department Chair,

GREETINGS! This past Friday, Neila Connors from Valdosta State, Ron Sheppard from Georgia Southern, Bill Stephens from Valdosta State, and I, Jay Hertzog, also from Valdosta, were sitting around the registration desk at the Georgia Middle School Conference and we began talking about the subjects we teach. This conversation was a carry-over from a similar conversation we had had with some of our colleagues who had attended an NCATE Knowledge Base session at Valdosta back in November.

As the conversation continued, we began to realize that each of us was expanding our own teaching style through the interaction in which we were engaged...much the same as classroom teachers do when they attend a conference and exchange the ways in which they teach their subjects. In each setting, those of us who were present indicated that it would be a good idea to try and get all of the middle level professors in our state together to exchange ideas, textbook recommendations, course syllabi, T-6 and T-6 program requirements, ideas that work for you, share the research and/or writing in which you are engaged, etc.

I have attached an information sheet to determine interest in setting a meeting date, location, etc., as well as a survey form to determine the "who teaches what" at your school. Please copy this form and distribute it to your middle grades' faculty and return them to me in the self-addressed envelope by 10 March 1989.

Thanking you in advance for your assistance.

Sincerely,

*C. Jay Hertzog
Department of Middle Grades Education
Valdosta State College*

Dear Department Chair,

GREETINGS! This past Friday, Nella Connors from Valdosta State, Ron Sheppard from Georgia Southern, Bill Stephens from Valdosta State, and I, Jay Hertzog, also from Valdosta, Georgia Middle School registration desk at the Georgia Middle School Conference and we began talking about the subjects we teach. This conversation was a carry-over from a similar conversation we had had with some of our colleagues who had attended an NCATE Knowledge Base session at Valdosta back in November.

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Sincerely,

C. Jay Hertzog
 Department of Middle Grades Education
 Valdosta State College
 Valdosta, GA 31698
 (912) 333 5929

The results of that meeting brought Georgia Middle Level professors together for the first time on September 28, 1989. The following agenda included opening remarks by Jay Hertzog,

FRIDAY, 29 SEPTEMBER 1989

KILPATRICK EDUCATION CENTER
 GEORGIA COLLEGE
 MILLEDGEVILLE, GEORGIA

9 - 10 AM - Registration, coffee, materials exhibit - Atrium

10 - 10:10 - Opening Session - Dr. C. Jay Hertzog, Presiding - Room 160

10:10 - 10:25 - Welcome and Greetings
 Dr. Edward M Wolpert, Dean, School of Education
 Georgia College

10:25 - 10:45 - "Middle Level Education in Georgia - Yesterday, Today, and Tomorrow"
 Dr. John Lounsbury, Editor, Middle School Journal

10:45 - 10:55 - "Getting to Know Each Other" - Dr. Nella Connors

10:55 - 11:00 - B R E A K

11:00 - 11:30 - Research Report - Dr. Nancy Bell
 "The Difference Between More and Less Effective Teams"

11:30 - 12 N - "Around the State in Middle Level"
 a. West Georgia - Dr. Laquetta Manson
 b. University of Georgia - Dr. Cy Hawn
 c. Georgia College - Dr. Frank Thompson
 d. Valdosta State College - Dr. James Conn

12:00 Noon

12:30 PM - NCATE Update - Dr. Jay Hertzog

12:30 - 1:30 - Luncheon - Hoke Dining Room
 Speaker - Ms. Candace Norton, Department of Education

1:30 - 2:00 - Georgia Council for Teachers of Mathematics Report - Room 160
 Ms. Sheila Woo and Dr. Jane Barnard

2:00 - 2:15 - B R E A K

2:15 - 2:30 - GMSA/NMSA/NASSP Update
 Dr. Nella A. Connors and Dr. John Lounsbury

2:30 - 3:00 - Open discussions of courses

3:00 - Reconvene

3:00 - 3:30 - Evaluation and "Where Do We Go From Here?" - Dr. C. Jay Hertzog

3:30 - Adjourn

This fall we caught up with Jay Hertzog and asked him to reflect on the early years. He shared the following:

"Middle level education...as one of my mentors, Al Arth used to call it at times -- "the range of the strange." I totally agree with that statement about middle level education having served 13

years as a middle school administrator and 7 years as a professor in the first “stand-alone” middle level department in higher education. I saw first-hand how volatile these students can be...happy, sad, confused, in love, and depressed all based on how one of their friends looked at them. Furthermore, as a founder, along with John Lounsbury, of the first statewide (Georgia) and national middle level association for those who prepare teachers for the middle level, it is my opinion that these students are the most impressionable of all the grade levels. It is imperative that those who teach and serve in support capacities in middle level schools have received a quality background in the nuances of the students with whom they will interact. I have seen too often teachers/support staff get assigned to the middle level and then anxiously await their "turn" to go to the high school. Middle level teaching/administration must be a passion, a love, and a commitment to helping students in that age range develop, mature, and learn...anything less should not be permitted.” – NAPOMLE Founding Leader (1997), Jay Hertzog, Ph.D.

Commenting on the spirit of community and collaboration in the early years, Nancy Ruppert wrote:

“I joined the faculty of Shorter College, in Rome Georgia in 1987 to coordinate the middle grades program. When my Chair gave me the information that middle level professors would be meeting I was thrilled... When I was asked to present the results of my dissertation, I was even more pleased. I found myself in a room with people I had read about, heard about; I remember the energy in the room and the passion. Jay Hertzog and the Valdosta State team, John Lounsbury and John Myers were giants in the field. I remember feeling, “You are welcome here!” and “Let’s do this!” I also remember thinking how much fun it was to gather as middle level professors. They fed my spirit. What fun to join creative, visionary colleagues/advocates who were passionate and welcoming. Those fun people became my lifelong colleagues and friends.” - Nancy Bell Ruppert, NAPOMLE president (2010-2012).

Fast forward to 1997. In the archives is a document examining the purposes and a little bit of the history. NAPOMLE was organized for five purposes:

- To provide a professional network;
- To contribute to an expanded base of research on middle level education;
- To serve as advocates for the middle school movement;
- To share advocacy by supporting the Association for Middle Level Education;
- and
- To publish a journal.

Who are we? What do we do?

The purposes of the organization are to:

- Provide a professional network to enhance the exchange of information and ideas, as well as, to encourage the discussion of topics related to the preparation of middle level educators.
- Contribute to the development of an expanded middle level research base, and provide additional means for sharing and disseminating current research and ideas among those interested in middle level education,
- Serve actively as advocates for the middle school movement, especially in terms of promoting middle level concepts among various publics commonly dealt with in the preparation of middle level educators, and
- Share in the advocacy for the middle school movement by supporting the stated purposes and goals of the Association of Middle Level Educators.
- NAPOMLE also publishes a journal, *Current Issues in Middle Level Education*. Articles in the journal regularly focus on best teaching practices in colleges and universities, school-university partnerships, and other topics of interest to faculty.

HISTORY

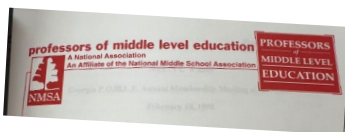
The National Association of Professors of Middle Level Education (NAPOMLE) was chartered on October 28, 1997 as the 55th affiliate of the National Middle School Association (NMSA). The charter was signed by 56 middle level professors from across the nation, and listed the following as charter institutional members: Clark Atlanta University, Georgia Southwestern University, Clayton State University (GA), Valdosta State University, Miami University (OH), Georgia College and State University, University of Wisconsin at Platteville, Phillips University, the University of Cincinnati, the College of Charleston, Southeast Missouri State University, Bridgewater State College (MA), Northeastern Illinois University (Chicago), State University of West Georgia, and Georgia Southern University. John Lounsbury was the first to sign, and added the signature of William Alexander (deceased) in remembrance of one of the other founders of the middle school movement.

While the creation of NAPOMLE occurred as a result of collaboration among a group of middle level professors from across the nation, it evolved from an association that existed more than a decade before in Georgia, the Georgia Professors of Middle Level Education, established by John Lounsbury, Jay Hertzog, and others. Both organizations were established to provide a forum for middle level educators to share information and ideas, and to network with one another to the benefit of the middle grades movement. A steering committee was formed which developed a Constitution and Bylaws based on a model provided by NMSA, and application was made for affiliate status. Upon approval of the charter in 1997, John Myers of the State University of West Georgia was elected as first president of the association.

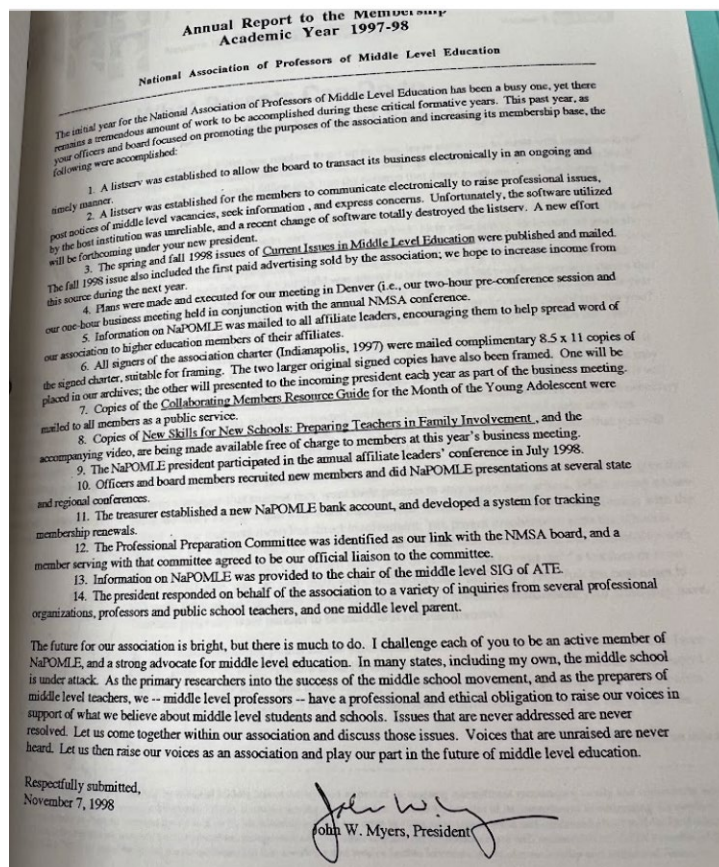
On October 28, 1997, fifty six middle level professors gathered and signed the original charter of the Professors of Middle Level Education. A document of this meeting states that “John Lounsbury was the first to sign, and added the signature of William Alexander (deceased) in remembrance of one of the other founders of the middle school movement.”

This document also states that, “While the creation of NAPOMLE occurred as a result of collaboration among a group of middle level professors from across the nation, it evolved from an association that existed more than a decade before in Georgia, the Georgia Professors of Middle Level Education, established by John Lounsbury, Jay Hertzog, and others. Both organizations were established to provide a forum for middle level educators to share information and ideas, and to network with one another to the benefit of the middle grades movement... Upon approval of the charter in 1997, John Myers of the State University of West

Georgia was elected as first president of the association.” An early logo of the organization is below:

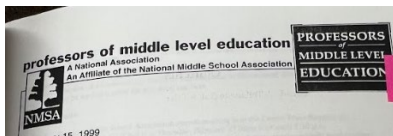


In an annual report on November 7, 1998, John Myers, then NAPOMLE president, shared a list of initiatives. He concluded with a final statement that rings true today.



He wrote, “The future for our association is bright, but there is much to do. I challenge each of you to be an active member of NaPOMLE, and a strong advocate for middle level education. In many states, including my own, the middle school is under attack. As the primary researchers into the success of the middle school movement, and as the preparers of middle level teachers, we – middle level professors – have a professional and ethical obligation to raise our voices in support of what we believe about middle level students and schools. Issues that are never addressed are never resolved. Let us come together within our association and discuss those issues. Voices that are unraised are never heard. Let us then raise our voices as an association and play our part in the future of middle level education.”

On February 16, 1999, then-president Alison Brooke Bunte wrote in a letter that “NAPOMLE provides a network for professors of middle level education. The organization grew out of the Georgia POMLE, a state level organization that nurtured the idea that a national vehicle for sharing ideas, building linkages, and meeting other professors of middle level education should exist. Our new organization owes a debt to Georgia POMLE for their leadership and vision. In appreciation, NAPOMLE has granted Georgia POMLE affiliate status, making them the first state affiliate of NAPOMLE.... Goals for this year include a list serve, a Web page, the development of a logo, a newsletter, and the development of a five year plan... We need everyone to spread the word about NAPOMLE so that it can grow into an organization that will help forward the cause of middle level education.”



Below we share statements from other past presidents of the National Association of Professors of Middle Level Education.

Barbara R. Blackburn, Ph.D, president 2005-2006

“Years ago, when I stumbled into teaching middle school, I had not received much training; just a couple of additional courses, which did not prepare me appropriately. 20 years later, when I received my PhD, I took a job launching and coordinating the first graduate middle school education program in the state of SC. I was teaching teachers who were just like me-- they did not have specialized middle school training at the undergraduate level. That was one of the best experiences of my career--to work with teachers who were excited to learn how to be better middle school educators. Because I wanted to model professional activity, I became the President of NAPOMLE, which allowed me to facilitate networking and sharing of best practices. I remember one professor said, "I'm at a small university and NAPOMLE lets me feel like I'm part of a group of middle level educators. I'm not alone." Supporting professors of middle level education was one of our major successes.”

Nancy Ruppert, Ed.D., president 2010-2012

“I think one of our biggest gifts has been to collaborate and share best practices with one another. In the early 2000s NMSA hosted a one day symposium attached to the national conference every other year. In 2005 Barbara Blackburn, from Winthrop College and David Strahan, from UNC Greensboro brought together professors from South Carolina and North Carolina to plan a Southeast Region POMLE meeting the year between. There were 10-15 of us gathered to plan the event. We called it SEPOMLE (kind of like Sea Pomle) and brought in John

Lounsbury, Ken McEwin, Sue Swaim who inspired us and celebrated with us in beautiful Charleston. Sara Powell from College of Charleston and I were asked to be co-chairs. SEPOMLE brought together professors to share, to imagine, to dream, and to inspire possibilities.”

“We met at one another’s universities to save money. In that first year we asked NMSA if we could have \$500, NAPOMLE gave us \$500, and College of Charleston allowed the planning committee leaders to stay in guest housing and helped pay for meals. Each year we expanded our reach to other professors across the country. Over the decades we met at College of Charleston, Appalachian State University, Georgia College and State University, and at Clemson’s satellite campus in Greenville, SC. Two specific events celebrated authors and middle level education moments. The first was in 2011, working with the Georgia Summit planning team (John Lounsbury, Joanne Previts, Dan Bauer, and Nancy Mizelle) who hosted the Middle Grades Summit at Georgia College and State University in 2011. Tracy Smith and Ken C. McKewin had just published *The legacy of middle school leaders: In their own words*. And in 2021, working with Bridget Coleman from USC Aiken and Amanda Wall from Georgia Southern, SEPOMLE hosted a virtual SEPOMLE to celebrate and hear from our Professors of Color and to celebrate the fifth edition of *The successful middle school: This we believe* written by Penny Bishop from the University of Vermont and Lisa Harrison from Ohio University. In all of our events NMSA/AMLE participated.”

“I think now we need to continue to expand our commitment and connections to welcome one another and charge our colleagues to address and redress equity, diversity, culture, and inclusion as our focus. Celebrating and helping our faculty of color share their voice and highlight their work in our classes, as thought leaders will carry this organization forward. It is our passion and dedication to young adolescents, and our constant care and advocacy for one another that will help the next generation of leaders thrive in an environment dedicated to making a difference in the lives of young adolescents.”

Nancy Mizelle, president 2014-2016

“I have always felt like NAPOMLE was important because it helps teacher educators. To me the emphasis on teacher preparation is critical to the long-term success of middle level education. What has been troublesome to MLE teacher educators is that we are very unique. We don’t have doctoral programs in MLE. How do you know what you’re supposed to be as an educator? NAPOMLE provides support, mentoring, and a place to be enculturated into what MLE is all about. For us to be successful as middle level teacher educators, it’s important that NAPOMLE be successful and continue. It’s a network of teacher educators who believe in MLE. Relationships are so important. We need to be connected and draw support from each other. We don’t have a lot of people in our individual states, but through NAPOMLE, we have a strong network. We can call on each other and share ideas. The purpose of NAPOMLE is to give

faculty a chance to have a place to go. It's what we should be about. The best practices session is a good thing. I wish we had contact with each other throughout the year, though, for us and particularly for new higher education faculty. New faculty are looking for others who are beginning faculty in middle level teacher education. They can't find it at their home institution. They find it through NAPOMLE."

Kim Winter, president 2016-2018

"NAPOMLE meant a great deal to me as a graduate student and young faculty member. I first attended an NMSA conference with my mentor, Dr. Tom Dickinson, back in 1996. I must admit that I felt like a fan girl back then. Most of the greats were still active and attending the conferences. I met some of my mentors and friends because of NAPOMLE - Jeanneine Jones, Nancy Mizelle, and Nancy Ruppert to name a few. Having a chance to learn from and interact with people such as Dr. Lounsbury had a huge impact on my life as a professional and teacher."

Gary Senn, president 2018-2020

"Middle level education is the central core that binds together and provides the bridge for young people transitioning from elementary to secondary educational experiences. It is one of the most tumultuous, exciting, impactful, moving, and foundational periods of human life. I see the educational system as a mountain range where the highest and most amazing peaks are in the middle. While there are certainly some challenges during the middle level years, I have maintained many of my middle school characteristics such as silliness, thinking outside of the box, uncontrollable urges to jump out of my seat, asserting independence, questioning why, wanting to know who I am and how I fit into this universe, and being a little mischievous; which have contributed to me earning the moniker of "Middle School Gary." My first full-time teaching position was at the middle level. I remember being frustrated because I seemed to be spending more time dealing with the endocrine system of my students than teaching the subject material. How freeing it was when I realized that the turbulent endocrine systems provided wonderful opportunities to encourage the development of young people. As I became involved in teacher preparation programs, I found NAPOMLE to be an organization that was instrumental in supporting the middle level teaching profession. I enjoyed and cherished how the group provided important developmental opportunities for me and was very excited to contribute back to this illustrious community by serving as an officer."

Hilary Dack, president 2020-2022

"I've been grateful for NAPOMLE every year since joining as a first-year professor of middle grades education. I view this organization as a hub for instructional innovation in teacher preparation and a catalyst for programmatic change. It has offered a network of dedicated peers keen to share best practices for the benefit of future middle level teachers across diverse contexts. I'm a better educator for it. From my term as President, I am particularly pleased with

the partnership we established with the NAPOMLE MLER-SIG Professional Learning Collaborative and envision great potential for future impact.”

As we look forward, we share a message from the newest president of NAPOMLE.

Bridget Coleman, president as of 2022

“What an honor to stand on the shoulders of giants! As NAPOMLE embarks on its next 25 years, we keep in mind the advice and lessons learned from previous leaders. We look back at the legacy of NAPOMLE with appreciation for its role and its members. We appreciate and honor the work of our past and current NAPOMLE leaders. Thank you for inspiring us to keep innovating in middle level education!”

A Partial List of NAPOMLE Presidents

John Myers, 1997-1998

Alison Brooke Bunte, 1999-2000

Saundra Bryn, 2000-2001

Barb Whinery, 2003-2004

Shirley Theriot (Shirley Theriot-Fogleman), 2004-2005

Barbara Blackburn, 2005-2006

Betty Dore, 2006-2008

John Niska, 2008-2010

Nancy Ruppert, 2010-2012

Bob Ziengefuss, 2012-2014

Nancy B. Mizelle, 2014-2016

Kim Winter, 2016-2018

Gary Senn, 2018-2020

Hillary Dack, 2020-2022

Bridget Coleman, 2022-

While we recognize that much has been accomplished in NAPOMLE's 25 years of being focused on the middle, we also reckon with the fact that there is so much more to do. The NAPOMLE network is a lifeline for our efforts in middle level teacher education. The collaborations are particularly powerful for faculty in smaller programs. There is strength in numbers. We continue to strive to serve, as our founders intended 25 years ago, as a forum for middle level educators to share information and ideas, and to network with one another to the benefit of the middle grades movement (NAPOMLE.org).

NAPOMLE is the organization that supports and elevates middle level teacher educators! Gains achieved will only last if we continue to press forward with strong advocacy for middle level education and focused teacher preparation. As some states attempt to handle the current teacher shortage by revisiting the notion of more general certification spans, we must increase our advocacy efforts to emphasize the value of middle grades certification and the unique needs of young adolescents. NAPOMLE stands ready to provide assistance and use its voice to share the importance of middle grades teacher preparation.

As we move forward, our vision for the future work of NAPOMLE includes increased, intentional outreach to new middle level teacher educators. We will continue traditional practices like our annual meeting and Best Practices session at the AMLE Conference. We plan to continue our relatively new endeavors such as the 2021 and 2022 virtual panel discussions facilitated through our partnership with the NAPOMLE MLER-SIG Professional Learning Collaborative. We look forward to gathering in forthcoming regional professors symposiums - virtual and in-person. While the organization as a whole has sustained over two decades, it is the contributions of each member that strengthen the overall impact of the National Association for Professors of Middle Level Education - what it has been and what it will be.