



**National Middle School Association**

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Dear Colleague,

We know, without a doubt, that well-prepared teachers are more successful in the classroom than teachers who are not as accomplished. At least 100 studies in the past decade have documented that highly skilled, highly effective teachers help students learn more. In a 1998 study involving a half million elementary and middle grades students in 3,000 Texas schools, researchers (Hanushek, Kain, and Rivkin) found that the most important factor in student achievement was teacher quality. An instructor's impact on student achievement is so profound that children with effective teachers are estimated to learn up to a full grade level more in a single year than those who have weak teachers.

At a time when raising student achievement has become the focus of national, state, and local education policies, we must not forget the critical importance of professional development for teachers. The federal No Child Left Behind Act requires states to place highly qualified teachers in every classroom by the end of the 2005-06 school year. The law also requires schools to test students in grades 3-8 and show adequate yearly progress. Because nearly all of the testing occurs in the middle grades, schools will not reach their goals unless states make it a priority to support and fund professional development for teachers, particularly at the middle level.

The best way to increase the effectiveness of middle grades teachers is through targeted, ongoing, job-embedded professional development (National Staff Development Council) that helps them address the unique needs of their 10- to 15-year-old students. Yet, few middle grades teachers receive such training, which means they may not know how to effectively adopt proven practices such as interdisciplinary team teaching, hands-on instruction, and project-based learning. In addition, most teachers who work with young adolescents do not have specific middle level certification or licensure because it is not offered in their state. In a recent study of 8,300 middle grades teachers in four U.S. states, University of Illinois researchers Nancy Flowers and Steven Mertens found that "the frequency and depth of most professional development currently provided to classroom teachers falls well short of meeting their needs." A nationally representative survey conducted by the National Center for Education Statistics (2001) found that "in nine out of ten content areas, teachers typically reported that they had spent the equivalent of 1 day or less on the professional development activity during the previous year."

National Middle School Association (NMSA) is committed to improving teachers' skills so they can effectively serve all 14 million middle grades students with engaging and rigorous instruction that reflects their knowledge of this age group. But we cannot accomplish this task by ourselves. We need policymakers like you to pay careful attention to professional development and to work with us as we ensure that every school has sufficient resources for this purpose.

How can we achieve this goal together?

First, we must persuade voters, elected officials, and other policymakers that teachers' professional development is too important to limit or leave to chance. Helping teachers acquire skills throughout the year must be a valued — and fully funded — part of each school's improvement plan. No other expenditure will do more to raise student achievement.

Second, we must insist that professional development not be restricted to the one or two designated days during the year that many school districts offer. Quality professional development is an investment that will result in improved teacher performance and student learning. School districts, even in times of financial challenges, need to commit themselves to adequate professional development time and funding.

Third, we must ensure that all middle grades teachers, both new and experienced, have access to a balanced approach to professional development that includes both deep understanding of their content subject and sound instructional methods for young adolescent students. They further need a wide range of professional development options. Attending workshops, observing excellent educators in their classrooms, receiving on-the-job coaching from specialists, and participating in online tutorials and other technology-based study sessions — all of these approaches and more must be widely available to teachers.

You hold the future of our children in your hands. Please join us as we work together at the federal, state, and local levels to find a deep and balanced approach to professional development for teachers, one that ensures educators are skilled not only in what to teach, but how.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Sue Swaim".

Sue Swaim  
Executive Director



# RESEARCH IN SUPPORT OF PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT FOR TEACHERS

## NMSA BELIEFS

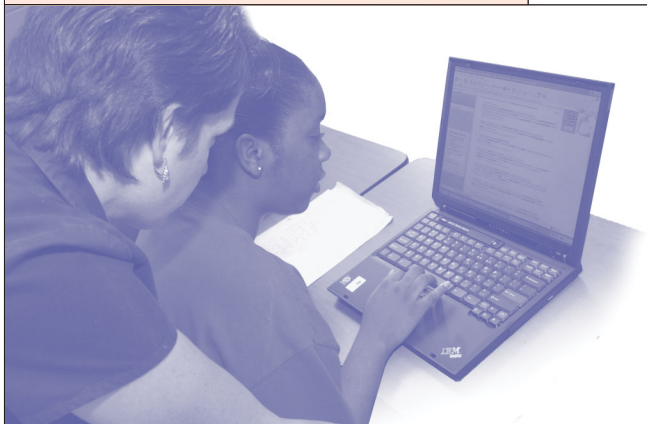
### National Middle School Association strongly believes that:

- Teachers who are well-prepared and trained are more effective in the classroom and therefore have the greatest impact on student learning.
- The best way to increase teacher effectiveness in the classroom is through regular, high quality professional development.
- Professional development for middle grades teachers should focus on the uniqueness of young adolescent students and encompass both content knowledge and instructional strategies.

## CURRENT RESEARCH FINDINGS

### Research in support of the value and need for teacher professional development:

- Teachers report that the more time they spend in professional development, the more likely they were to indicate that it had improved their instruction<sup>1</sup>.
- Professional development activities can be linked to increased student achievement. The National Staff Development Council (NSDC) has identified 26 staff development programs documenting such evidence<sup>2</sup>.
- Middle grades teachers are not currently engaged in regular professional development. Teachers participate in professional development activities an average of only *several times a year*<sup>3</sup>.
- Middle grades teachers are not currently getting balanced professional development; the most frequent types of professional development activities occur within their own school. Professional development activities outside the school occur much less frequently<sup>3</sup>.
- Middle grades teachers, themselves, indicate a high need for additional professional development—in multiple areas, not just one or two<sup>3</sup>.



### Action Steps / Recommendations

- 1) Policymakers, states, and districts must provide adequate funding for teacher professional development throughout the year.
- 2) Schools should dedicate a minimum of 10 percent of their budgets, excluding salaries and benefits, to professional development and devote at least 25 percent of a teacher's work time to learning and collaborating with colleagues.
- 3) States and school districts must ensure that new and experienced middle grades teachers have access to a wide range of professional development activities that encompass both their subject content area and effective instructional strategies AND reflect the needs of young adolescents.



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1. National Center for Education Statistics. (2001, June). *Teacher preparation and professional development: 2000*. (NCES 2001-088). Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education.  
2. Killion, J. (1999). *What works in the middle: Results-based staff development*. Oxford, OH: National Staff Development Council.  
3. Flowers, N., & Mertens, S. B. (2003). Professional development for middle-grades teachers: Does one size fit all? In P. G. Andrews & V. Anfara, Jr. (Eds.), *Leaders for a movement: Professional preparation and development of middle level teachers and administrators* (pp.145-160). Greenwich, CT: Information Age Publishing.