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Press Release

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16 CHARACTERISTICS OF SUCCESSFUL MIDDLE GRADES SCHOOLS ARE CRITICAL TO PREPARING STUDENTS FOR THE FUTURE

(Westerville, OH) – National Middle School Association (NMSA), the nation’s only educational organization focusing exclusively on the education and well-being of young adolescents, today announced four essential attributes and 16 characteristics of schools that when implemented will dramatically improve the academic achievement and personal growth and development of 10- to 15-year-olds.

The announcement was made today at the association’s 36th Annual Conference and Exhibit in Indianapolis, Indiana, with the release of the association’s position statement, *This We Believe: Keys to Educating Young Adolescents* and the complementary document, *Research and Resources in Support of This We Believe*.

“A wealth of research tells us what works in providing the best education for young adolescents,” said NMSA President Cathie Thibodeau, a teacher in New England for 39 years.

“What works is to shape programs and practices around the attributes and characteristics identified in *This We Believe*.”

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“While there are many middle grades schools in our country and throughout the world that are on the way to providing the best possible education for young adolescents,” said Betty Edwards, NMSA executive director, “just having *some* successful schools is not enough. All schools must rise to the highest standard, and *This We Believe* provides the keys to achieving excellence for all.”

This We Believe includes four attributes that must be inherent in successful middle grades programs; schools must be developmentally responsive, challenging, empowering, and equitable. The 16 characteristics of successful schools are grouped into these areas: (1) curriculum, instruction, and assessment; (2) leadership and organization; and (3) culture and community. Among the characteristics are these concepts: students are engaged in active, purposeful learning; educators are specifically prepared to work with this unique age group; curriculum is challenging and exploratory; leaders are courageous and collaborative; and schools partner with families, businesses, and community groups.

(A full list of the 16 characteristics is attached to this release.)

“All 16 characteristics must be in place in schools that serve 10- to 15-year-olds,” said Cathie Thibodeau. “The characteristics are interdependent and not meant to be selectively considered when planning the highest quality educational experiences for middle grades students.”

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NMSA calls on communities, policymakers, and all who are concerned with the education of young adolescents to act now to implement these recommendations and to use the vision provided in *This We Believe* to advance the goals of the pending Success in the Middle legislation.

“Young adolescents go through some of the most rapid and profound personal and physical changes from ages 10 to 15. They form attitudes and values that have lifelong influence,” said Edwards. “Now it is widely recognized that during the middle grades we have the best chance to keep students on the path to graduation and prepared for success in college and career. These students deserve the best we have to offer.”

The companion document, *Research and Resources in Support of This We Believe*, includes the findings of many research studies that demonstrate the validity of the 16 characteristics as keys to improving middle grades schools.

A summary of *This We Believe: Keys to Educating Young Adolescents* can be found on the NMSA website at www.nmsa.org/twb and both books can be purchased at www.nmsa.org/store or by contacting National Middle School Association at 1-800-528-NMSA.