

Month of the Young Adolescent



Rationale of Month of the Young Adolescent

An Open Letter from Sue Swaim, Executive Director, National Middle School Association

Dear Friend,

October 2005 marks the launch of the ninth annual Month of the Young Adolescent, a national collaborative effort of education, health, and youth-oriented organizations. Initiated by National Middle School Association (NMSA), Month of the Young Adolescent brings together a wide range of organizations to focus on the needs of this important age range, ages 10 to 15.

Four key messages will be promoted throughout the month of October:

- The importance of parents being knowledgeable about young adolescents and being actively involved in their lives.
- The understanding that healthy bodies plus healthy minds equal healthy young adolescents.
- The realization that the education young adolescents experience during this formative period of life will, in large measure, determine the future for all citizens.
- The knowledge that every young adolescent should have the opportunity to pursue his or her dreams and aspirations, and post-secondary education should be a possibility for all.

Why should we focus on a collaborative national campaign regarding young adolescents? The general public has lacked an adequate understanding of youth in the transition period between childhood and adolescence. As a result, young adolescents often have been “growing up forgotten.” Unfortunately the English language contains no single word for this life stage, having only the terms infancy, childhood, adolescence, and adulthood to designate periods of life. Yet it is during the period of early adolescence, generally between the ages of 10 and 15, when young people leave childhood and move toward full adolescence that they make major decisions about their values, standards, attitudes, and personal beliefs. Many of these decisions direct their behavior throughout their lives.

Through the Month of the Young Adolescent celebration, we are focusing on the developmental needs and characteristics of young adolescents and how these influence parenting practices, health conditions, and educational programs for this age group. Working together, we can highlight the need for strong educational partnerships among the school, parents, students, and community members so that every 10- to 15-year-old will have the opportunity to become all he or she can and should become.

All of us are mindful that the issues we are celebrating during the Month of the Young Adolescent deserve year-round attention and commitment if we are to accomplish what we must to ensure the well-being of all young adolescents. Therefore, as an outgrowth of this special month, we believe the following things will occur:

1. Parents and communities will become more knowledgeable about the needs of young adolescents and how they may appropriately respond to them.
2. More links will be developed between home and school with the common goal of implementing high-quality education for every young adolescent.
3. There will be an increase in mutually supported activities between the school and community. A foundation of common understandings will be developed to enhance further community involvement in the education of young adolescents.
4. Parents, educators, and community members, at large, will understand better the need to help young adolescents make wise decisions on a day-to-day basis as well as help them become healthy, productive, and ethical adult citizens.

This collaborative approach continues to be important to the success of this initiative because it will take all of us working together to make a real difference in the lives of 10- to 15-year-olds. We invite you to join with us in this important initiative. The young adolescents with whom we work and live on a daily basis deserve our best efforts if each is to have the chance to become all he or she can and should be. Together, we can make a difference ... to ensure a bright future for all young adolescents.

Sincerely,



Sue Swaim
NMSA Executive Director

