

Historical Perspective of the Collegiate Middle Level Association (CMLA)

Helping CMLA chapter members and their advisors have a better understanding of the history and structure of CMLA

By John Swaim

Collegiate Middle Level Association Background

The University of Northern Colorado (UNC) Middle School Teacher Preparation Program was one of the first programs for the specialized preparation of middle school teachers during the 1980s. There was only a small group of UNC students enrolled in this initial program, but they were excited and enthusiastic about being middle school teachers.

This small group of students established the foundation for what has now become a nationally recognized forum for students preparing to be middle school teachers. Ned Gilardino and Stephanie Burkant were two of the students who provided the early leadership that ultimately led to what the Collegiate Middle Level Association (CMLA) has become today.

This group of students was fortunate to attend the National Middle School Association (NMSA) Annual Conference held in Denver (1988) while they were students during their middle school teacher preparation program.

Little did I know that these six students, while at the 1988 conference, would discover a way to connect our program with students in other colleges and universities who were also in the stages of developing middle school teacher education programs. After returning to campus, our UNC students were reassured that our program was one of the teacher education programs on the cutting edge of preparing middle level teachers.

It should be noted that in the 1980s most preservice teacher education programs only had programs for elementary and secondary teachers. Middle school teacher education programs were just emerging.

During their time at the conference our UNC students were able to exchange names and addresses (this was prior to cell phones) with a handful of other middle school teacher education students who were also attending the conference. As a result, correspondence took place between the schools describing the requirements for their programs and concerns about becoming a middle school teacher.

The conversations that occurred between them lead to advanced planning to meet at the next NMSA national conference. NMSA was then contacted and a meeting room and a time were made available at the conference specifically for students preparing to be middle school teachers. NMSA continued to provide time in the conference schedule at subsequent conferences for them to meet. The meeting continued to grow as more middle school teacher education programs grew. These meetings grew from a sharing session of a few students preparing to be middle school teachers to what is now the Collegiate Middle Level Association.

As middle schools began to become more popular, demand for teachers prepared to teach at this level also increased. However, teacher education programs at colleges and universities were slow to add middle level licensure to their teacher education programs.

NMSA, a fledgling but growing organization by the mid 1980s, was the only educational association at that time that recognized, encouraged, supported and provided opportunities for students preparing to teach at the middle school level. In fact, the total number of students in middle school teacher preparation programs actually began to increase during that time in spite of the fact that most universities had not yet implemented middle school programs on their own campuses. The total number of students in middle school preparation programs continued to increase.

In 1989 the middle school student association was first known as the Student Association of Middle School Education (SAME), whose membership was based on individual NMSA student memberships rather than university chapter membership. Later the name was changed to National Collegiate Middle School Association (nCmsa), 1992.

In 1995, NMSA offered nCmsa the opportunity to become an affiliate member, at the same time they offered that National Association for Professors of Middle Level Education to become an affiliate member. This was the first time two educational associations, other than state middle school associations, had been asked to be affiliate members. nCmsa took this opportunity to develop a constitution to guide and direct the association under its current name *Collegiate Middle Level Association*.

A group of middle school professors, students, and a representative from NMSA drafted the original constitution, which was approved by NMSA. The constitution changed the structure from an individual membership to an institutional membership by creating chapters at universities with middle school teacher education programs. It also created a host site for the officers at a designated university chapter, and an advisor committee consisting of chapter advisors. Duties and responsibilities for both groups were likewise designated.

In 2016, CMLA was moved from an external affiliate member to an internal part of the NMSA structure. During this time NMSA was also restructuring the association. The proposed new name was the Association for Middle Level Education (AMLE). CMLA was asked to convert their constitution to a policy and procedure handbook. (See Handbook for more detailed information).

The new restructuring of the association gave CMLA an opportunity to develop their own identity within AMLE. CMLA began to offer professional activities especially for students preparing to be middle school teachers. One of the first activities was a Spring Leadership Symposium for officers of the various chapters. This became so popular that some chapters sent more of their members than just the officers.

The first Spring Leadership Symposia were held at AMLE Headquarters. They were later held at the designated host site. Because travel expenses became a problem for chapters to attend the Leadership Symposium, it was replaced by the CMLA Summit (2016) offered at the AMLE Annual Conference, which was more cost effective. (For further information see the section on the Summit.)

AMLE has always been supportive of middle school teacher education, which goes back to its roots as an association. Likewise, AMLE has not only provided excellent professional development for middle school educators, but it has also provided valuable professional development for preservice students pursuing careers as middle school teachers. For example: (1) AMLE has defrayed the cost of attending the annual conference for the officers at the host site; (2) provided a session at the annual conference for CMLA (3) underwritten the cost for the Summit at the annual conference; (4) maintained a CMLA website that includes information about the CMLA Grant; and (5) provided access to materials and publications by AMLE.

History of CMLA Host Site and Advisory Chair

Year	Host Site	CMLA Advisory Chair
2019	Augusta University	S. Pettit
2017	Georgia College/State University	N. Mizelle
2015	Otterbein University	D. Ross
2013	Appalachian State University	L. Ramirez
2011	Central Michigan University	N. Bailey
2009	Morehead State University	K. Lafferty
2007	Otterbein University	D. Ross
2005	Georgia College/State University	N. Mizelle
2003	University of Dayton	C. Mathews
2001	Ashland University	D. Kommer
1999	Appalachian State University	K. McEwin
1997	Illinois State University	D. Hatch
1996	Otterbein University	J. Swaim

- 1995 CMLA Collegiate Middle Level Association (Current Constitution for CMLA written and approved)
- 1992 - 1995 nCmsa - National Collegiate Middle School Association (nCmsa recognized by NMSA as an Affiliate Member)
- 1989 – 1992 SAME - Student Association for Middle School Education (First middle school college student association)

CMLA Host Site

The new CMLA Constitution changed membership from an individual membership to an institutional membership comprised of CMLA chapters. The host site is an essential site because the CMLA officers are selected from that site. This gives the officers the opportunity to work together and assume leadership of the association, provide contact with all the other chapters, and assume a leadership role in planning the CMLA Summit.

The Policy and Procedures Handbook (formerly the CMLA Constitution) clearly spelled out the selection process for the host site. However, the selection of the host site has been on a more voluntary basis rather than a set selection basis. The host site advisor serves as the chair of the Advisor Committee.

Being the advisor of the host site has many advantages for both the advisor and their students such as (1) financial assistance for CMLA officers to attend the annual conference, (2) professional development for their students involving the planning and presentation at a national conference, (3) visibility for the university, (4) a professional activity that a faculty member (advisor) can highlight on her or his own faculty vitae, and (5) the Advisor Committee only officially meets once a year during the AMLE Annual Conference.

Former CMLA officers and advisors have said that their experiences as officers during the host site was one of, if not the best professional development experiences they have had as a preservice teacher. Student leadership under the guidance of teacher education faculty is the key factor to the success of CMLA. The host site gives officers the platform from which they can be involved professionally.

Descriptions and responsibilities for the officers at the host site and the selection process for the host site may be found in the current CLMA official Policy and Procedure Handbook

CLMA Advisor Committee and Chairperson

CMLA is a student-oriented association under the guidance and advisement from higher education faculty with backgrounds and interests in middle level teacher education.

Thus, the Advisor Committee is made up of all the advisors of the chapters. The officers of the Advisor Committee consist of the following designated positions: The chair of the Advisor Committee, advisor for the host site, CMLA student president, CMLA Grant advisor, an at-large member from the main advisor committee, and a representative from AMLE.

The Faculty Advisor from the most recent outgoing CMLA host site will chair the CMLA Advisor Committee. The Advisor Committee usually meets once a year at the AMLE Annual Conference.

As in the past, the host site advisor and the chair of the Advisor Committee have been combined. In the past, the selection of these two positions has been on a volunteer basis with final approval by the Advisor Committee. It has been found that one person having the responsibility for both positions provides better overall leadership and coordination for CMLA. Such an arrangement has successfully worked in the past and it is anticipated that it will continue to work in the future.

Advantages for Students

- Without exception, past students have said this experience is one of the best professional development experiences they have had in their teacher education program.
- Opportunity for the students and advisor to work with AMLE Headquarters on the planning of the CMLA Summit.
- An influential activity that students could add to their resume.
- CMLA officer's cost for attending the AMLE Annual Conference is defrayed.

Advantages for Advisors

- Without exception, past advisors have said this has been a great experience for their students and has supplemented and reinforced the middle school teacher program on their campus.
- A professional development activity that could be added to the advisor's vitae.
- Brings positive visibility to the department within the university.
- As the chair of the Advisor Committee you would have only two minimal responsibilities: (1) Once a year chairing the CMLA advisor meeting at the AMLE Annual Conference and (2) conducting the selection of the host site and the chair of the Advisor Committee every two years.

These eight items need to be a part of a well written letter going out to all chapter advisors inviting them to apply for their Chapter to be the host site and for them to assume the position of the chair of the Advisory Committee.

Description of the Advisor Committee and the roles for the chair of the Advisor Committee can be found in the CMLA Policy and Procedures Handbook.

CMLA Handbook

AMLE has always been the major supporter of CMLA. CMLA, on the other hand, has provided AMLE with a connection to students who are going into middle school teaching and might be prospective members of AMLE.

Even before CMLA became an official organization, AMLE recognized and supported those individual students who were committed to becoming middle school teachers. It was not until 2016 when AMLE revised their structure that they moved CMLA status as an affiliate member into more an internal part of AMLE rather than recognizing them as an external affiliate member.

The revision required that a policy handbook should guide the internal programs within AMLE. This meant that the CMLA Constitution would need to be incorporated into handbook format. There was a draft of the handbook made by AMLE Headquarters. There were concerns that the draft from Headquarters did not accurately represent the existing CMLA Constitution.

The draft from headquarters had eliminated the need for a host site. Under the Constitution the host site had served as the selected chapter for the officers of CMLA. It was felt that the host site was a critical place for the officers to operate from and was essential to maintain its reputation as a student-led association. The headquarters' draft not only limited the opportunity for the students to be involved, but also increased the advisor's role in the association. However, the existing handbook not only includes definitive statements supporting the host site and Advisor Committee as defined by the original CMLA Constitution, but also suggestions from the headquarters draft.

CMLA Summit

The CMLA Summit originally began with the CMLA Spring Leadership Conference. The first few years the Spring Leadership Conference was held at NMSA (AMLE) Headquarters. It was then moved to the campuses of the host site chapters. However, due to the cost of traveling to the various host site chapters, attendance dropped off. Thus, it was renamed the Summit and became part of the AMLE Annual Conference.

The Summit is a jointly planned project between the CMLA host site and AMLE. AMLE does the logistics and the CMLA officers do the majority of the program planning, which involve professional development activities and the opportunity for CMLA chapters to engage in meaningful conversation about middle school education. The Summit draws 80-90 students from various chapters and has received positive feedback from the participants and their chapter advisors.

Although the Summit and the previous Spring Leadership Symposium were considered national events for CMLA the chapters have also been active in sponsoring their own campus activities as well as professional development

activities for their members. The following is a list of a few of those activities and professional development opportunities:

- Student board member of their middle school state association
- Georgia Summit for CMLA students, middle school teachers, and administrators
- Sponsor middle school Academic Bowl
- Involvement in Middle Level Education Month
- Shadow study invited middle school students to shadow CMLA students for a day on campus
- Invited school safety officer to speak at CMLA meeting
- Sponsored a panel on anti-bullying
- Involved in after-school program for middle school students
- Made a homecoming float featuring middle school education with middle school students on the float.

For further activities see the CMLA website at www.amle.org/cmla

CMLA Grant

Donors have provided more than \$250,000 to the AMLE Foundation. Although this amount of money is impressive, more importantly it represents the support of middle level educators for AMLE. The Foundation Fund Committee has identified four purposes. One of those is the preparation of middle school teachers. The other three deal with the recognition of outstanding middle level educators, a grant recognizing middle schools using integrated curriculum, and research on middle level education

The Collegiate Middle Level Association is an organization made up of students preparing to be middle school teachers. They are members of CMLA chapters on campuses that have middle school teacher education programs. The CMLA grant sponsored by the Foundation offers up to two for \$2,500 awards to help defray the cost of at least two students from a CMLA Chapter to attend the AMLE Annual Conference.

In 2018, \$500 was added to help defray the cost of the advisor to also attend the AMLE Annual Conference with their students. The CMLA Foundation Grant was developed to recognize the CMLA chapters that have demonstrated commitment to the preparation of future middle level teachers.

More information on applying for the CMLA Chapter Grant.

The applications for the Grant are evaluated by a panel of four judges who are respected middle level teacher educators that represent the following organizations: Two members of the AMLE Foundation Committee, Chairperson of the AMLE Preparation Committee, and the Executive Director of National Association of Middle School Professors. Past recipients