



**the**  
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## **Welcome from Neal Tam, New GMSA President**

### **GMSA Members!**

I am truly excited by the challenge of leading this organization over the next two years and I thank you for your membership in GMSA. I hope that we can continue to grow our organization by increasing membership, offering more services to members, and growing our annual conference.

We have an outstanding board of directors consisting of a diverse mix of administrators, college level faculty and students, retired educators, and active teachers. Each member of the board brings creative ideas to help make our organization beneficial to all of Georgia's middle grades teachers.

**Go ahead and mark your calendars for the 39<sup>th</sup> Annual GMSA Conference, to be held February 26-28, 2017! The 2017 conference will be held at the Rainwater Conference Center in Valdosta.**

Take advantage of the benefits of being a GMSA member. Apply for teacher grants, team of the year awards, or nominate someone for the educator of the year award. Highlight the exciting instruction taking place in your classroom by submitting a proposal to present. Or, simply attend to learn more about what is working well in middle schools throughout our state. Look for more information on our website!

If there is a way GMSA can better serve you, please let me know!

Keep up the great work!!

*Neal Tam, President*

## GMSA 2016 Conference Recap

### “Great Morning!”

With these words, Dr. Cedrick Gray, our keynote speaker, greeted attendees at the GMSA 2016 General Session. This year’s GMSA conference was held in February at the Columbus Trade & Convention Center. Middle grades educators from across Georgia convened to learn and share under the theme: *There is a HERO in you! What are your super powers?*

In his keynote address, Dr. Gray shared several words of wisdom:

“It’s better to wear out than to rust out!”

“The opportunity to fight [for students] is also the opportunity to win.”

“It’s [teaching] not just your job, it’s not just your career-- it’s your calling.”

Dr. Gray explained that middle school students need guidance to “walk into their promise” of who they can be and become. Echoing the conference theme of “There is a HERO in you: What are your superpowers?” Dr. Gray noted that “we need heroes” and said to the audience that “you have been gifted.”

He explained his understanding of HERO:

**H** is to give hope to those that don’t have it

**E** is for exposure: to bring students in front of great people and expose them to greatness

**R** is to reinforce ideas like good values

**O** is to open hearts, open mind, open arms-- to share our gifts with students

Dr. Gray concluded by reminding the audience of the saying that with great power comes great responsibility.

Throughout the conference, presenters shared their own super powers in sessions about technology integration, storytelling, student engagement, STEM, diversity, and differentiation. Everyone left with great ideas and inspiration to take back to their schools!

Make your plans now to be a part of GMSA 2017, which will be in Valdosta from February 26-28. Nominate a colleague for an award, submit a proposal for a presentation, apply for a teacher grant—GMSA provides several opportunities for *YOU* to become involved.

## Congratulations GMSA Award Winners!

At the conference, we recognized several award winners. The GMSA Educator of the Year is Christy Todd of Rising Starr Middle School (Nancy Blair, Principal). The Teacher Grant Winner is Becky Ridge of Hahira Middle School (Stacy Dickey, Principal). Consider nominating a colleague for Educator of the Year, or consider submitting a proposal for a GMSA grant.

Two Teams of the Year were recognized. One team is from Haralson County Middle School

(Brian Ridley, Principal) and includes Amber Crumley, Amy Duke, Kathy Hurston, Meagan Richardson, Maegan Rutherford, and Annice Wycoff. The other team is from Liberty Middle School (Cheryl Riddle, Principal) and includes Erin Kirby, Brandy Mann, Leeanne Mullinax, Sherrie O'Hara, and Sue Sciorrotta. Congratulations on your work as teams for your students!

## Lighthouse Schools to Watch Update

*An update from Georgia Lighthouse Schools to Watch*



The National Forum to Accelerate Middle Grades Reform sponsors the Schools to Watch (STW) program. Crabapple Middle School was first designated in 2003, the initial year of this prestigious program, along with 12 other schools in Georgia, North Carolina, and California. Every three years, schools that are STW must re-apply for re-designation in order to remain in the program.

In Georgia the STW program is called Georgia Lighthouse Schools to Watch. Schools across the country that are part of this rigorous program are all centered around a rubric of research-based best practices for middle schools built on four domains: academic excellence, developmental responsiveness, social equity, and organizational structures and supports.

At the GMSA conference in February, several schools were newly identified or re-designated as Lighthouse Schools to Watch.

New Lighthouse Schools to Watch:

Feagin Mill Middle School, Warner Robins	Jesse Davis, Principal
Liberty Middle School, Cumming	Cheryl Riddle, Principal
Risley Middle School, Brunswick	Lori Joiner, Principal
Riverside Middle School, Evans	Yvette Foster, Principal

Re-Designation I Lighthouse Schools to Watch:

Coastal Middle School, Savannah	Allison Schuster-Jones, Principal
Holcomb Bridge Middle School, Alpharetta	Chris Shearer, Principal
Marietta 6 <sup>th</sup> Grade Academy, Marietta	Corey Lawson, Principal

Re-Designation III Lighthouse Schools to Watch:

Lee County Middle School East

Kelli Duke, Principal

Lee County Middle School West

John Savelle, Principal

Re-Designation IV Lighthouse School to Watch:

Rising Starr Middle School

Nancy Blair, Principal

Further information about this school can be found on the National Forum website ([www.mgforum.org](http://www.mgforum.org)) and the Georgia Middle School Association website (<https://gamiddleschoolassociation.org/index.php/lighthouse-schools-watch/>).

*Congratulations!*

## **Eliot Wigginton and the Foxfire Philosophy**

*Leaner-Centered, Experiential & Community Based*

*This article was submitted by Dr. John Lounsbury.*

Eliot Wigginton received national acclaim for his work as a teacher in the Rabun Gap Nacooche School in Rabun County, Georgia. He was named Georgia's Teacher of the Year in 1986. His high school students interviewed local residents and prepared articles of the folklore practices and customs associated with farming and the rural life of southern Appalachia. The articles were published in a magazine which reached a national audience. Soon the magazine became a book with eleven other Foxfire volumes following. His book, *Sometimes a Shining Moment: The Foxfire Experience*, published in 1986, became an educational best seller and is still worth studying. There have been a major motion picture and two Broadway plays based on Wigginton's work.

The Foxfire philosophy of education is a leaner-centered, experiential & community based one. At the very heart of Foxfire is the conviction that students can learn about their community and about humanity only outside the classroom. In the classroom they can, with the help of their teachers and peers, examine, analyze, even celebrate what they've discovered, and compare their findings with those of others; but they must have the world outside the classroom as the primary motivation for learning and as the heart and soul of what they learn.

## Procrastinating On Purpose??

Usually we tell students to avoid procrastinating. But can procrastinating ever be a good thing to do? Adam Grant, professor at the Wharton School at UPenn and author of *Give and Take*, wrote a column for the New York Times in January extolling some of the benefits of procrastination. Grant clarifies that he does not mean completely putting off a project until the last minute. Instead, as he notes, some research suggests that it can be beneficial to start to consider an idea, and then give ourselves time to ponder. He writes,

Our first ideas, after all, are usually our most conventional. My senior thesis in college ended up replicating a bunch of existing ideas instead of introducing new ones. *When you procrastinate, you're more likely to let your mind wander. That gives you a better chance of stumbling onto the unusual and spotting unexpected patterns.* Nearly a century ago, the psychologist Bluma Zeigarnik found that people had a better memory for incomplete tasks than for complete ones. *When we finish a project, we file it away. But when it's in limbo, it stays active in our minds.*

Summer provides an opportunity for teachers to procrastinate as Grant describes by keeping ideas active in the backs of our minds. Perhaps we will think of a new way to differentiate, a different approach to difficult content, or strategies for promoting more inquiry, close reading, explanation, or other skill we want to cultivate in students.

The column is titled "Why I Taught Myself to Procrastinate" and can be found here: [www.nytimes.com/2016/01/17/opinion/sunday/why-i-taught-myself-to-procrastinate.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2016/01/17/opinion/sunday/why-i-taught-myself-to-procrastinate.html?_r=0)

Education is not preparation for life; education is life itself.

John Dewey

## Four!

Here is an interesting math puzzle to share with students. I first learned about this puzzle in a book titled *Math for Smarty Pants*, which now unfortunately seems to be out of print.

Ask a student to say any number- any number at all. Write that number in word form, and count the letters in the word.

Then write *that* number in word form, and count the letters in *that* word. Repeat the process...  
You will always get to FOUR!

Example:

20	twenty	six letters
6	six	three letters
3	three	five letters
5	five	four letters
4!		

Another Example:

512	five hundred twelve	seventeen letters
17	seventeen	nine letters
9	nine	four letters
4!		

*How does that work?*

Try to be a rainbow in someone's cloud.

Maya Angelou

## Mark Your Calendars

October 10-12 Mon-Wed	AMLE (Association for Middle Level Education) Annual Conference Austin, TX
October 9-15	Teen Read Week Sponsored by YALSA (Young Adult Library Services Association), a division of the American Library Association <a href="http://teenreadweek.ning.com/">http://teenreadweek.ning.com/</a>

*The Advocate* is the newsletter of the Georgia Middle School Association. Amanda Wall is the Editor. The President of GMSA is Neal Tam, and the Executive Director is Jim Allen. The editor welcomes submissions and notes from readers: [awall@georgiasouthern.edu](mailto:awall@georgiasouthern.edu). Find GMSA online at <https://gamiddleschoolassociation.org/>