
TAMS TIDBITS

Newsletter for the Tennessee Association of Middle Schools

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Annual Conference Held in Memphis

By Michelle K. Kornberger

The annual Tennessee Association of Middle Schools State Conference was held June 13-15th in Memphis, TN. Over six hundred teachers and administrators attended the three-day conference. Pre-conference attendees were treated to invigorating sessions with Michelle Pedigo and Randy Thompson.

Other notable speakers during the three-day conference included inspirational remarks from Janet Vernon with the National Middle School Association and classroom management expert Fred Jones.

Conference participants were able to attend a dinner cruise on the Mississippi River, golfing and a zoo tour.

At the conclusion of the three-day conference, new officers were sworn in on the Board of Trustees. Be on the lookout for information regarding next summer's conference in Nashville, TN!



Janet Vernon shares inspirational messages with teachers and administrators at the annual summer conference.

Look What's Coming Up!

October 16, 2004

Fall Drive-In Conference
Karns Middle School
Knoxville, TN

October 15, 2004

Deadline for Submission for
TAMS Journal

November 4-6, 2004

National Middle School Association
Annual Conference
Minneapolis, MN.

November 15, 2004

Deadline for Tidbits articles



Left: President Jada Meeks; Right: Past President Ashley Smith

From the Desk of the President

Thank you to those that helped make the TAMS State Conference in Memphis a success! It would not have been possible without the help of everyone from across the state of Tennessee participating and coming together to learn more about being a master level educator. The hard and tireless work given from the Memphis Conference was even more pleasant as each member experienced the great city of Memphis, the home of the Grizzlies, Redbirds, Elvis Presley and Beale Street. We hope you and your family enjoyed each event because it was planned with you in mind.

In a time where everyone is scrambling to make sure that his or her school makes Average Yearly Progress, it is understandable that we all need to pull together to review the best practices that work for everyone. My challenge to our state and governmental officials is to look at one factor concerning average yearly progress. It would be more effective if the data analyzed from year to year would not just look at grade eight for the previous year versus grade eight for the current year. A true assessment of leaving ***No Child Left Behind*** would look at the entry point of where a child started at the beginning of the school year versus how much that particular child improved academically at the end of the school year; true results of whether a child is not being left behind will be shown.

Logically, there is no real comparison of checking grade eight of one year versus grade eight of the second or third year. Is this a true sense of not leaving a child behind? How can we say that a child has progressed if we are not comparing their individual improvement over the course of a school year? One child in 8th grade last year might have started knowing thirty objectives at mastery levels versus a child starting this year in the 8th grade knowing only twenty objectives at mastery levels. Do we really want to know whether a child is being left behind? I am glad that we have begun to use criterion-referenced data to evaluate the results. However, I believe that if our state and government take a closer look, they would find that a real assessment of whether a child is not left behind is comparing a child to ***himself*** and to ***his*** level of improvement in the course of a school year.

We must be advocates of change in the middle schools. While in middle school, children not only grow academically, but emotionally and physically. Many don't understand the strengths that are within our students. I challenge you, as educators, to use the students' strengths to help your school be the best that it can be.



Jada Meeks is currently the principal at Geeter Middle School in Memphis, TN. You can email her at jadameeks@yahoo.com

How I Spent my Summer Vacation ... After the TAMS Conference

By Kim Ford

It's not often that I finish a book and can only say "Wow!" That happened this summer when I read *Chasing Vermeer* by Blue Balliett. In the tradition of E.L. Konigsburg's award-winning *From the Mixed-Up Files of Mrs. Basil E. Frankwiler*, this is an art mystery full of puzzles, codes and hidden messages. There are curricular connections to art, of course, but also to history, math and language. As I read, I found myself creating lessons and mentally gathering ancillary materials to bring into the room. I'd want art prints, maps, and a set of pentominoes. We'd study codes and write letters. We'd make lists of our favorite words and eat blue M&M's and study frogs.

For my older middle school readers, want to share *Keesha's House* by Helen Frost. This is one of the many novels in verse form that we are seeing so much of these days. Helen Frost does this better than most, and this story of kids who need a safe place will touch a cord. She also wrote *Spinning through the Universe*, which is the story of a year in a middle school classroom. Both books are excellent, and will be an asset to any poetry unit.

There's still a huge pile of unread books on my table – among them *The Outcasts of 19 Schuyler Place* by E.L. Konigsburg, *Swear to Howdy* by Wendelin Van Draanen, and *Olive's Ocean* by Kevin Henkes. I'll let you know how they turn out.



Thoughts for First Year Teachers....

Dear Dr. Nero,

I am a first-year middle school teacher and just barely holding my head above water. My problem is that my students do their work for a few minutes, and then seem to go wild. They lose interest in what we are doing...they talk...they want to move around the room. Can you give me some hints to keep my 7th graders on task during class?

-Desperate in Dodge

PLANNING is the key ingredient in good classroom management. Remember to try to plan lessons with a motivation segment where you relate what they are learning to students' experiences and interests. Plan a variety of instructional strategies, build in practice, plan for on-going assessment, include a closure activity and assign a reinforcement activity that could be homework or a project for the next day.

If you have a well-planned high quality lesson the management issues you described in your letter should improve. Let me know what happens.

- Dr. Ann B. Nero

INVITE A FRIEND TO JOIN TAMS!

As the new school year begins, one of your thoughts should be your commitment to your profession. Being advocates for the young people we interact with on a daily basis is crucial.

Advocacy comes in many forms:

- Talking to friends and neighbors about the importance and special satisfaction of teaching young adolescents.
- Expressing your views to your elected leaders
- Inviting your colleagues to join YOUR professional association.

Share some of the advantages of TAMS membership:

- **TAMS** Summer Conferences
- **TAMS** Drive-In Conferences

- **TAMS Tidbits**, the association newsletter
- **TAMS Journal** is published twice annually
- **TAMS** Awards are given for Teacher of the Year, Team of the Year and Administrator of the Year in each of the three grand divisions

To join, you may print the TAMS application by going to www.tams.net/TAMSAplication.pdf.

With membership you receive discounts to the annual conferences. Remember, NMSA will be in NASHVILLE in November 2006! Be an advocate for the middle level by renewing your membership and inviting your colleagues to join the professional organization dedicated to the middle level!

*Ashley Smith, Jr.
Past President and
Membership Chair*

Tennessee Association of Middle Schools Summer Conference
Nashville, Tennessee
Downtown Sheraton
June 13 - 15, 2005

Benefits of Membership

The *TAMS Tidbits* newsletter and *Journal* will be mailed to active members to help keep you current of educational developments both statewide and nationally.

Professional growth opportunities through regional and state conferences are available.

Information regarding our three yearly conferences will be mailed to members.

Membership will entitle you to discounted rates for both our Saturday morning drive-in conferences and the annual summer conference.

Most systems extend in-service credit for annual and drive-in conferences.

Members are eligible for special recognition through TAMS AWARDS.