MIDDLE LEVEL SECTION 2020 ELECTIONS

The Middle Level Section Steering Committee (MLSSC) members are elected each year to a four-year term. The Chair is elected from the MLSSC for a two-year term and serves on the NCTE Executive Committee representing the interests of the middle membership.

The Nominating Committee prepares a slate of candidates for vacancies that occur annually on the Middle Level Section Steering Committee and selects candidates for the succeeding year’s Middle Level Section Nominating Committee. The candidate who receives the largest number of votes in the election will chair the committee.

About the 2020 Candidates

Under the constitution of NCTE, every spring each Section (Elementary, Middle Level, Secondary, College) elects members of its own Section Steering Committee and members of the Section Nominating Committee. The following nominations were made by a nominating committee elected by the section membership in spring 2019.

The Middle Level Section Nominating Committee this year consists of Haley Shaffer, Poland Middle School, OH, chair; Jason Griffith, Penn State University, State College; and Maggie Beattie Roberts, West Hartford, CT.

Names on the ballot are presented in random order. The biographical information concerning the nominee’s experience and service to NCTE was supplied by the individual nominee.

View candidate bios below.

Middle Level Section Steering Committee
(two to be elected, term to expire November 2024)

Section Committee members elect a chair who will represent section concerns on the NCTE Executive Committee. Through correspondence and meetings once or twice a year, the members identify and explore issues of section concerns. Often the Section Committee will suggest new programs or revisions to present Council programs that may benefit section members. The Committee helps plan section conferences and portions of the NCTE Annual Convention that will be of interest to section members.

NICOLE HERNANDEZ CRAIG, M.T.S.S. Coach, English Language Arts Teacher, Orange County Public Schools, FL. Formerly: Instructional coach. Membership(s): NCTE, IRA. Award(s): Phi Kappa Phi Honor Society. Program Contribution(s): NCTE, UCF Literacy Symposium.

Position Statement: During Middle School, students should be allowed to be the voice of change. Unfortunately, their role is a passive one. I am committed to engaging students moving beyond the desk into becoming part of uncomfortable conversations that eliminate ignorance, encourage application, and inspire understanding.
SONAM J. SHAHANI, Language arts, social studies teacher, Houston, TX. Formerly: Sixth grade language arts teacher, Columbus, OH; fifth grade teacher, American School of Bombay, Mumbai, India. Membership(s): NCTE, OCTELA, TCTELA, AMLE. Award(s): OCTELA Outstanding Language Arts Educator Nominee, NCTE Outstanding Middle Level Educator Award in the English Language Arts Nominee. Publication(s): AMLE Middle School Journal, Teacher Talk; NBC-4 Education Today. Program Contribution(s): TCTELA, OCTELA, ISACS Chapter Lead, AMLE.

Position Statement: I believe that success is no longer determined solely by a student’s reading, writing, and math skills. True success belongs to those who are able to critically consider diverse perspectives, communicate with agency, and channel their thinking to purposeful action. Middle school is a time when students begin to understand themselves and others through literature and writing, and they realize that how they communicate has the power to change the world. Thus, I am eager to advocate for the Middle Level Section of the NCTE as it leads the national literacy discussion with the goal of developing students as whole individuals, emphasizing the connection between mind, body, and character, in preparation to be global citizens.

ALEX CORBITT, Doctoral student, literacy and equity, Boston College. Formerly: Seventh grade language arts teacher, The Bronx School of Young Leaders, Bronx, NY; NYCWP Assignments Matter instructional coach. Membership(s): NCTE, LRA, AERA. Award(s): ILA 30 Under 30 Literacy Leader, Apple Distinguished Educator, Penguin Random House Teacher Award for Literacy. Publication(s): English Journal, Voices from the Middle, VFM Podcast. Program Contribution(s): NCTE, NYSEC, LRA.

Position Statement: As a middle school teacher I worked with kids to co-plan literacy experiences that centered their intersectional identities. I believe that listening to and sustaining diverse student voices should be at the heart of NCTE’s mission. Looking ahead, I will advocate for literacy initiatives that prioritize issues of climate change. Climate change is a pressing equity issue that disproportionately affects low income folx of color. As educators, we must work with today’s youth to preserve tomorrow’s Earth.

SARAH BONNER, Eighth grade language arts teacher, Heyworth Junior High School, Heyworth, IL; adjunct professor, doctoral candidate, Illinois State University, Normal, IL. Formerly: Middle Level Nominating Committee. Membership(s): NCTE, SLAM Assembly. Award(s): NCTE Media Literacy Award, NCTE Richard Halle Outstanding Middle Level Educator Award. Publication(s): Chapters in Critical Media Literacy and Fake News in Post-Truth America; NCTE Principles in Practice (forthcoming); articles in Voices from the Middle, Middle School Journal, Middle School Review. Program Contribution(s): NCTE, regional and district presentations.

Position Statement: Currently, as a classroom teacher, teacher-educator, and doctoral researcher, my passion has always been (and, continues to be) related to the middle school experience. Middle school offers a unique opportunity to engage students in not only meaningful and important work related to the shaping of their identities; but it also invites an awakening to the world through student-driven discoveries. I am beyond excited to advocate at NCTE for all that encompasses the middle level experience and have an opportunity to help our section advance in ways that support all students.

Middle Level Section Nominating Committee

(three to be elected, term to expire August 2021)
JEREMY HYLER, 6-8 English and science teacher, Fulton Middle School, Middleton, MI; columnist at MiddleWeb. Formerly: Co-director of CRWP, ATEG Vice-President. Membership(s): NCTE, NWP, AMLE, MACUL, IRA. Award(s): Nominated for 2020 Michigan Teacher of the Year, nominated for 2015 MACUL Technology Using Teacher of the Year. Publication(s): Ask, Explore, Write!: An Inquiry-Driven Approach to Science and Literacy Learning, From Texting to Teaching: Grammar Instruction in a Digital Age, Create, Compose, Connect: Reading, Writing, and Learning with Digital tools. Program Contribution(s): NCTE, MACUL, MRA, IRA, NWP, MAMSE, MSTA.

Position Statement: I am a middle school teacher, what is your superpower? It is rewarding being a part of a middle school student’s life. The middle level steering committee plays a vital role in helping middle school teachers to become the best they can be for their students. The opportunity to serve this committee would ensure more teachers and students needs are met.

HELENE SPAK, Middle School Reading/LA Coordinator, Northbrook, Illinois; Gifted Education Coordinator; Professional Development Coordinator. Formerly: 7th and 8th Grade Gifted Reading/LA Teacher. Membership(s): North Cook Regional Office of Education Governing Board, NCTE; ILA; IEA, Learning Forward, ASCD. Award(s): NSCDC Academy Graduate, Shirley Haven Support and Classified Staff Development Award. Publication(s): Tolerance Magazine, National Middle School Journal. Program Contribution(s): NCTE, ICE, IRA, NSBA.

Position Statement: Middle school literacy provides students with numerous opportunities to help them discover their identity. Much of today’s Young Adult literature supports diversity and encourages authentic, vibrant, and vital discussions. It is our responsibility to engage and motivate our students to value their literacy experiences in and out of the classroom. It would be a privilege to help select candidates who support the NCTE initiatives and advocate for adolescents.

SIERRA GILBERTSON, 7th and 8th grade English teacher, Fosston, MN; past president and assistant executive secretary, Minnesota Council of Teachers of English; reviewer, Voices from the Middle. Formerly: 5th-8th grade English teacher, Ponemah, MN; 6th-8th grade English teacher/interventionist, Louisville, KY; middle level chair, MCTE. Membership(s): NCTE, MCTE, AMLE, NAEA. Program Contribution(s): NCTE, MCTE, AMLE, NAEA, National Gallery of Art Summer Institute for Educators: Art and Thinking.

Position Statement: We each have our own set of expertise built on our unique experiences as educators. I will advocate for the inclusion of a wide variety of experiences, knowledge, and understanding among candidates for the middle level section steering and nominating committees. Heterogeneous committees provide a greater opportunity for members to learn from one another and further meet the needs of all teachers. When we support one another and learn from one another, we all become better teachers for our students.

RENÉ M. RODRÍGUEZ-ASTACIO, PhD Candidate (ABD), Penn State University. Formerly: Teaching assistant, Penn State University. Membership(s): NCTE, AERA, NWP, ChLA, ALAN. Publication(s): Does Nonfiction Equate Truth? Rethinking Disciplinary Boundaries Through Critical Literacy, co-author; Marking the Invisible: Articulating Whiteness in Social Studies Education, co-author; co-authored articles in South Carolina English Teacher, Journal of Language & Literacy Education. Program Contribution(s): NCTE, AERA, ChLA.

Position Statement: NCTE has a fundamental role in the teaching of English and literacy development. This role is particularly poignant as English teachers face challenges unique to our current times. We need to aspire for schooling that addresses and sustains our multiculturally and widely diverse student body. I am committed to working towards an NCTE and Middle Level section, representative of the work that we intend to achieve as leaders in our profession.
ELENA GARCIA, Sixth grade English language arts classroom teacher, Barr Middle School, Grand Island, NE. Formely: Secondary Section Nominating Committee Chair. Membership(s): NCTE, ALAN, ILA, AATE, EdTA, ASCD, AERA. Award(s): Christa McAuliffe Prize for Courage and Excellence in Education; Who’s Who Among America’s Teachers. Publication(s): The Diffusion of a Teaching Practice: How Secondary Teachers Describe Adopting Process Drama to Teach Reading Comprehension. Program Contribution(s): Literacy Unbound, Teachers College, Columbia University; Michigan Reading Association.

Position Statement: As a classroom teacher, I know how important a professional organization like NCTE is during these challenging times. It keeps me focused on what is most important—my students. As a member of the Middle Level Nominating Committee, I will advocate for diverse candidates who have a great depth of content knowledge, as well as a passion for middle level students.

SARA B. KAJDER, Associate professor, University of Georgia; co-editor, Voices from the Middle. Formely: Middle and high school English teacher; NCTE Middle Level Steering Committee chair/committee member, ELATE Executive Committee. Membership(s): NCTE, ELATE, ALAN, GCTE. Award(s): NCTE James Britton Award. Publication(s): Adolescents’ Digital Literacies (NCTE Principles in Practice); multiple articles in English Journal, Voices from the Middle, Journal of Research on Technology in Education, Journal of Technology in Teacher Education. Program Contribution(s): NCTE, ILA, ISTE, LRA, ASCD, AMLE.

Position Statement: NCTE’s Middle Level section is a hub of energy, inspiration and service to middle level learners and teachers. It is a space of advocacy, empowerment, agency, and opportunity. What we do matters in very significant ways. Serving on the nominating committee is at the foundation of this necessary work; we need leaders who are committed to growing our next work.

Important Information Regarding the 2020 Election

NCTE, ELATE, TYCA, and Section election ballots will be sent by email to current members in April. If NCTE does not have an email for you on file and you would like to receive a ballot by email, please visit “My Account” and add it to your membership record. (You may also use “My Account” to change your email address and update your member profile.) You can contact our NCTE Customer Service Department (877-369-6283) and speak with one of our representatives to update this information as well.

Elections will close at 11:59 pm Central Time, Monday, June 1, 2020. Results will be posted mid-June.

Questions: Please contact Linda Walters-Moore at NCTE Headquarters.