

Academic Affairs Excellence Awards

Application Form



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*college selection required before being forwarded to university

^university awards

College nominees' final applications received by Center for Teaching and Learning (ctl@gcsu.edu) by March 1.

Please insert the required documentation in the pages below for the award category you have noted above. Detailed information associated with each award is available online at the [Center for Teaching and Learning website](#).



Application for the 2026 Teaching Excellence Award for Programs/Department

Submitted by:

Drs. Rachel Bray, Andrea Christoff, and Miriam Jordan
Middle Grades Education Program

Department of Teacher Education
John H. Lounsbury College of Education
Spring 2026

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Nomination Letter



19 February 2026

University Teaching Excellence Awards Committee
Georgia College & State University
Milledgeville, GA 31061

Greetings, Members of the University Teaching Excellence Awards Committee:

I am honored to nominate the Middle Grades Education Program in the John H. Lounsbury College of Education for the University Teaching Excellence for Department or Program Award. This exceptional program exemplifies the highest standards of pedagogical innovation, inquiry-oriented teaching and learning, as well as meaningful, challenging, and relevant learning experiences for teacher candidates as they develop their professional identities as middle grades educators.

Grounded in Dr. Lounsbury's belief that all children and youth must have a full education to sustain our democratic society, the program faculty enact this philosophy through intentionally designed and scaffolded learning experiences over two years. Dr. Lounsbury emphasized that preparing youth for "participatory citizenship" requires the ability to "understand issues, think critically, vote intelligently, and develop as distinctive individuals on the way to becoming responsible citizens, productive workers, and contributors to the general welfare." Middle Grades faculty implement this vision, which also aligns with our liberal arts mission, through learning experiences that are responsive to teacher candidates' needs, interests, and professional aspirations.

Across the two years in the cohort, teacher candidates engage in a coherent professional preparation program that fosters leadership, collaboration, and personal responsibility—preparing them to act as instructional leaders, dependable colleagues, and reflective practitioners who can work both independently and as part of effective school teams. Through sustained coursework and clinical practice, teacher candidates develop a strong professional identity as middle grades educators who are developmentally responsive and knowledgeable about young adolescents.

A hallmark of the program is its commitment to distinctive, high-impact learning experiences that were in place well before such practices were widely named in higher education. For example, the Collegiate Middle Level Association (CMLA) provides sustained opportunities for leadership, service, and professional learning. Since 2005, teacher candidates have planned and facilitated an annual Summit Conference that brings together preservice and in-service teachers to engage in professional development centered on the needs of young adolescents. This long-

standing practice reflects the program's deep commitment to service, professional engagement, and community-building within the middle grades profession.

The program's inquiry-oriented pedagogy cultivates curiosity and helps develop candidates as teacher-researchers. Teacher candidates investigate aspects of their teaching practice and publicly share their findings at local, state, and national conferences. For more than 15 consecutive years, candidates have attended and presented at professional conferences—a noteworthy record that demonstrates both the rigor of the program and its emphasis on scholarly, reflective practice. These experiences help to empower candidates to enter the profession as thoughtful educators who continuously examine and improve their practice.

The program's excellence is further affirmed by national and international recognition. In 2025, it was the only undergraduate middle level teacher preparation program in the country to be designated an Association for Middle Level Education (AMLE) *Distinguished Teacher Preparation Program*. This prestigious distinction recognizes institutions that demonstrate exceptional programming, interdisciplinary curriculum, and policies and practices that prioritize pedagogies tailored to the unique developmental needs of young adolescents. As AMLE is the only international organization devoted exclusively to middle school education, this recognition underscores the program's leadership and influence in the field. Additionally, the program earned National Recognition from the Council for the Accreditation of Educator Preparation (CAEP) and AMLE, further highlighting the strength, coherence, and impact of its curriculum and clinical experiences. The program's Specialized Professional Association (SPA) accreditation and consistent record of candidate engagement in professional conferences provide additional evidence of sustained quality and continuous improvement.

Above all, the Middle Grades Education Program stands as a model of excellence in teacher preparation. Its faculty demonstrate an unwavering commitment to developmentally appropriate, inquiry-driven, and responsive pedagogy. They help to develop professional educators who understand the complex needs of young adolescents and possess the skills and dispositions to create inclusive, engaging, and intellectually rigorous middle school learning environments.

For these reasons, I wholeheartedly and enthusiastically nominate the Middle Grades Education Program for the University Teaching Excellence Award for Department or Program. The program's sustained record of innovation, scholarly engagement, leadership development, and national recognition makes it an exemplary model of teaching excellence and an invaluable asset to our university and the profession—demonstrating through its graduates that “teachers remain our nation's greatest resource for good,” as Dr. Lounsbury so powerfully affirmed.

Thank you for your consideration of this nomination.

Sincerely,



Joanne L. Previts
Interim Dean
The John H. Lounsbury College of Education
Georgia College & State University

Narrative for Program Teaching Excellence

The John H. Lounsbury College of Education (JHL COE) Middle Grades undergraduate and graduate teacher preparation program is recognized throughout the state and beyond for its high-quality preparation of teachers of young adolescents. Fulfilling the JHL COE philosophy as Architects of Change, the GCSU Middle Grades (MG) programs are fully approved by the Georgia Professional Standards Commission (GaPSC), with the undergraduate program recently awarded National Recognition by the Council for Accreditation of Education Preparation (CAEP). In 2025, the Association for Middle Level Education (AMLE) recognized the GCSU Middle Grades Education program as an inaugural [AMLE Distinguished Teacher Preparation Program](#)—we were the only undergraduate program in the country chosen for this honor.

A Distinctive, Standards-Driven Curriculum

Our commitment to excellence and student success is demonstrated in the numerous leadership and distinct learning opportunities we offer our students. Our faculty develop curriculum unique to middle grades, aligning with the AMLE standards and integrating the middle level philosophical values of our seminal text, *This We Believe* (Bishop & Harrison, 2021). We model middle level concepts such as Teaming and Advisory and develop curriculum that aligns with the five essential attributes that characterize successful middle schools: responsive, challenging, empowering, equitable, and engaging (AMLE, 2026). Our esteemed former colleague, John H. Lounsbury, inspires us with his vision and role as a founding leader of the middle school movement, reminding us, "We teach more by who we are than by what we teach." Although implementing High Impact Practices (AAC&U, 2007) is encouraged in all GCSU programs, the middle grades education program has been on the forefront of this effort, establishing multiple learning experiences that foster candidate leadership abilities, develop critical thinking skills, and deepen their impacts as educators.

The Mentor-Led Field-Based Cohort

In our undergraduate program, we accomplish distinction through our mentor-led, two-year field-based cohort model. Operating in a true cohort fashion, middle grades candidates take 95% of their on-campus courses together, creating a Common Intellectual Experience and High Impact Practice (AAC&U, 2007). Candidates also apply their learning by spending a minimum of 2–3 days per week in local classrooms throughout their entire program of study, resulting in over 1,000 hours of authentic classroom experience. Mentor Leaders for both programs also function as University Supervisors, observing and offering feedback to candidates while they are teaching, either in person or online. Principals frequently tell us our candidates are more than prepared to lead a classroom on their first day. In addition, our students are equipped to teach two content areas—a heavier course load, but one that situates them well for the integrative nature of middle level learning.

The Middle Grades Mentor Leader for both programs loops with their cohort, ensuring consistency in student growth and development. As stated in our AMLE Distinguished Program narrative, "The Mentor Leader serves many roles: Middle Grades course instructor; field placement supervisor; academic advisor; Collegiate Middle Level

Association (CMLA) advisor; surrogate parent." Using the middle school concept of a Trusted Adult, we develop relationships with our students—getting to know them, understanding how they learn, and what they need to succeed. We frequently meet one on one with students, either in person or online, checking in on them, answering their questions, and advocating for their learning opportunities.

The Middle Grades MAT Program

The fully online Middle Grades Master of Arts in Teaching (MAT) program was initiated with the vision of preparing teachers to meet the critical need for math, science, and STEM teachers in Georgia's grades 4–8 classrooms. The STEM-focused program aligns with the JHL COE middle grades emphasis on curriculum integration through a succession of three focused performance tasks requiring integration of mathematics and science with other content areas and real-world relevant content. This online program has the advantage of reaching potential teachers in any city, county or rural school district in Georgia. It also addresses the need for increasing the diversity of the science and mathematics teacher population. This program has been at the forefront of this effort. We have served teacher candidates in at least 46 Georgia school systems and several other states. Of the 72 students entering the program between 2022 and 2024, 53 (76%) have graduated on schedule.

Data-Driven Program Improvement

For both of our programs, our decisions are focused on delivering challenging, equitable, and empowering preparation for our candidates. The middle grades faculty meet monthly to review and analyze assessment data, using it to inform curricular decisions. We administer and collect data on eight programs and six-unit assessments. Faculty use this data to: (a) evaluate candidate progress, (b) administer changes that align with current standards, and (c) improve measures of student success. Five of the eight undergraduate program assessments are aligned with the candidate's field-based experiences, ensuring a relevant and meaningful connection between GCSU coursework and placement classrooms.

Leadership, Professional Learning, and Community

One of the things we are most proud of is the numerous leadership and learning opportunities we offer our students. Undergraduate students develop conference proposals from self-chosen inquiry projects and apply to present at the AMLE national conference. In November 2025, all eighteen seniors presented peer-reviewed research at the national conference in Indianapolis, Indiana—100% participation. In addition, many students are invited to attend and present at state and regional conferences. Social studies candidates have presented with their instructor at the Georgia Council for the Social Studies conference, highlighting their work in the Georgia Studies and the Nation course. This past year, they partnered with their instructor and the Georgia Historical Society to present on their learning from the embedded course Teaching Challenging Histories. In addition, several students recently presented with their GCSU literacy and instructional technology professors to share lesson plans developed from the PBS TV show, *Viewfinders*.

Candidates are frequently encouraged to engage with their communities. Senior candidates demonstrate their leadership skills by presenting their learning and appreciation to their local school boards, sharing the knowledge, skills, and dispositions they developed in their placements. Faculty work with candidates to develop their presentations and attend to support them.

These opportunities are possible because of the collaboration and dedication of our faculty. We work together to ensure our students have the support they need and the confidence to make it happen.

Middle Grades Program Fact Sheet

Enrolled Students	
Category	Number
Undergraduate Cohort Majors	38
Master of Arts in Teaching Majors	41
Total Enrollment	79
Faculty & Staff	
Category	Number
Total Faculty	3
Tenure Track	1
Non-Tenured Track	2
Faculty with Terminal Degrees	3

Programs of Study Offered

- Bachelor of Science in Middle Grades Education (in person)
- Master of Arts in Teaching in Middle Grades Education (online)

Grants Awarded

The Middle Grades program and the John H. Lounsbury College of Education actively support faculty in developing and sustaining excellent teaching. Faculty have received research grants to support course revision, pedagogical development, program growth, and student success measures.




- GREAT Grant- \$5.3 million Georgia Residency Educating Amazing Teachers Grant -a collaborative effort between The Southern Regional Education Board (SREB) and GCSU Middle Grades MAT Program 2020-2024. (Drs. Miriam Jordan and Nancy Mizelle Co-PIs). (Funding divided between SREB, GCSU and local schools hosting residents.)
- Georgia Power Foundation \$10,000 – Call Me MiSTER Program, (Dr. Rachel Bray 2024)
- Faculty Research Grant – \$3,800 Center for Teaching and Learning Civic Identity Development and Place-Based Education – (Dr. Andrea Christoff 2022)
- Mini-grant - \$2,981.38 Sandra Deal Center for Early Language and Literacy – (Dr. Rachel Bray 2025)

- Provost Summer Research Fellowship – Civic Identity Development and Place-Based Education (Dr. Andrea Christoff 2025)

National & State Recognition

- 2025 Inaugural AMLE Distinguished Teacher Preparation Program – only undergraduate program in the country
- CAEP National Recognition – undergraduate program
- Fully approved by the Georgia Professional Standards Commission (GaPSC)

Middle Grades Faculty Profiles

	<p>Dr. Andrea Christoff is an Assistant Professor in her 5th year at Georgia College & State University and serves as the Undergraduate Middle Grades Education Program Coordinator.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In 2025, she was selected as a Georgia College Provost Summer Research Fellow for her research project in this area. • Has 9 years of successful experience as a public school educator
	<p>Dr. Miriam Jordan came to GCSU 13 years ago, after a 30+ year career in public education as a science teacher. She is a Lecturer in Middle Grades Education and serves as Graduate Program Coordinator for the Middle Grades Program.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • She has devoted her professional career to teaching and promoting science education in grades 4 -12, and as a science implementation specialist and curriculum developer for the Georgia Department of Education and Oconee RESA. • She was the COE 2023 nominee for the Excellence in Teaching Award. • She serves on the review panel for the Georgia Department of Education’s nominee for the annual national competition for the Presidential Award for Excellence in Mathematics and Science Teaching.
	<p>Dr. Rachel Bray is a Lecturer of Middle Grades Education in the Department of Teacher Education, where she has served since 2019 and transitioned to a permanent faculty role in 2025. Beyond the classroom, Dr. Bray serves in multiple leadership roles:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interim Director, Call Me MiSTER program (secured \$10,000 Georgia Power Foundation grant) • Campus Advisor, Collegiate Middle Level Association • University Senator (elected January 2026) • Chair, COE Acceptance, Representation, and Community Committee

- | | |
|--|---|
| | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Member, AMLE, NAPoMLE, and Georgia Association of Educators• 15 years as a public school educator in Georgia and Hawai'i |
|--|---|

WHAT MAKES OUR PROGRAM UNIQUE?

Focus on Collaboration

Although we are a small program, our focus on collaboration is one of our greatest strengths and one we believe is essential for successful middle grade schools. The middle grades faculty meet monthly to review and analyze program assessment data collectively, share teaching strategies, and engage in professional learning together. As CMLA faculty advisors, we work with candidates to plan Fireside and Summit events, co-present with students at state and national conferences, and team-teach across courses to model integrated curriculum design. Our collaboration with each other and our students models professional practices and dispositions. Being a part of a nationally recognized program and participating in these learning experiences provides students with real world experiences, leadership opportunities, and exposure to local and national expertise.

Modeling the middle level concept of teaming, the current and former GCSU middle grades faculty have joined forces in the last two years to co-teach the EDMG 4245 Curriculum course, providing our diverse expertise to middle level curriculum, instruction, and assessment planning. Offered in the spring of their junior year, students are tasked with planning and developing three unique assessments: (1) a ten-day integrative unit, (2) a classroom community and engagement plan, and (3) a cohort-created curriculum. Faculty work with the primary instructor to facilitate learning experiences that scaffold student learning for all three assessments. This model not only ensures that candidates receive instruction from specialists across the program but also puts into practice the very middle level philosophy the course teaches—that teaming, shared expertise, and collaborative professional relationships strengthen both teaching and learning. Candidates observe firsthand what it looks like for a professional team to plan together, respect each other's areas of knowledge, and work toward shared student learning goals.

Our collaborative culture extends to our students. Operating in a true cohort fashion, candidates take 95% of their on-campus courses together. This shared experience builds a culture of mutual support, professional identity, and collective growth. The middle grades faculty also work across disciplinary lines—coordinating with content faculty in English Language Arts, Social Studies, Science, and Mathematics to align field-based assignments with content coursework—ensuring candidates develop as integrated curriculum specialists.

Comprehensive System of Assessment

The Middle Grades Education program implements a systematic and comprehensive assessment agenda that administers and collects data through eight program

assessments. The program faculty use the collected data to (1) assess individual student progress toward the standard and (2) use the data to inform the collective effectiveness of the assessment and alignment with the standard. Integral to our assessments is the connection between our field-based model with education and content courses. Of our eight assessments, five have a field component, allowing our students to make a vital connection between theory and practice in real-world settings.

Our middle grades undergraduate and graduate MAT students are all completing programs of study that lead to initial certification and must meet the same standards. While their assessments are comparable, they are tailored to the differences that exist between undergraduate face-to-face delivery and graduate online delivery.

Undergraduate Middle Grades Education

Assessment	Course and Time Given
Middle Level Concepts	EDMG 3003 – Junior Fall
Graphic Organizer of Theories	EDMG 3212 – Junior Fall
Integrated Curriculum Map	EDMG 4245 – Junior Spring
Concept Map and Year Long Plan	EDRD 3160 – Senior Fall
Teacher Work Sample	EDMG 4218 and 4001 – Senior Fall
AMLE Aligned Observation Instrument	EDMG 4960 – Senior Spring
Capstone and Exit Portfolio	EDMG 4243 – Senior Spring
Working with Families and Communities	EDMG 4150 – Senior Spring

M.A.T. Middle Grades Education

Assessment	Course and Time Given
Graphic Organizer and Rationale of Theories	EDMG 5214—Fall I
Team Inquiry Project	EDMG 5214--Fall I
Working with Families and Communities	EDMG 5001--Spring I
*Integrated Curriculum Unit	EDMG 5245—fall I
*STEM Lesson Sequence	EDMG 6242-- Spring 1
*Teacher Work Sample	EDMG 5960 – Fall II or Spring II
AMLE Teacher Observation Instrument	EDMG 5960 –Fall II or Spring II
Initial Capstone Portfolio (EDMG 5960)	EDMG 5960 – Fall II or Spring II

*These three assessments allow the MAT student and the assessor to analyze growth in planning, implementation, and assessment across three semesters. They are assessed with similar rubrics, with the acceptable level of performance increasing each semester.

Teacher Work Sample (TWS)

One program assessment that demonstrates the effectiveness of our students' learning and the success of our program is the Teacher Work Sample (TWS). Organized as a multi-part semester-long assessment, the TWS connects directly to candidates' field-based experiences, requiring them to plan, teach, and assess a unit of instruction in

their placement classrooms. Candidates analyze student learning data and use it to inform their instructional decisions, mirroring the practices of career professionals. This assessment is a hallmark of our program's commitment to the integration of theory and practice. As this is an essential assessment, the faculty have worked together over the past several years to ensure its' accessibility, reliability and validity.

Capstone

The Capstone experience serves as the culminating assessment for Middle Grades Education candidates, integrating the full arc of their cohort experience into a single, comprehensive demonstration of professional readiness. In the Capstone course, candidates compile an Exit Portfolio in Watermark/SL&L that includes justifications for each of the five 2022 AMLE Standards, carefully selected artifacts from their coursework and field placements, a teaching philosophy, a Professional Learning Plan, and an overarching narrative that weaves their growth into a coherent professional story. Candidates then present their portfolios to a panel of faculty and educational stakeholders in a formal Capstone Presentation, where they articulate their development across all five standards, respond to panel questions, and demonstrate readiness to enter the profession.

Innovation in Teaching

We are continuously looking for opportunities to meet our students' needs and improve the quality of our program. For example, both Drs. Jordan and Christoff have created content courses that specifically meet the grades 4-8 Georgia Standards requirements. Dr. Jordan created both an undergraduate middle grades science course entitled Conceptions of Science and a graduate STEM Essentials course. Dr. Christoff created and taught a middle grades social studies course entitled Georgia Studies and the Nation. In 2024, Dr. Christoff altered a classroom management assignment to make it more relevant to the environment of current middle grades classrooms. To prepare, she was accepted into the Inclusive Leadership Program offered by the Office of Inclusion and Belonging, where she learned about how inclusion, accessibility, and belonging can support the classroom and students. These innovations by both Drs. Jordan and Christoff provide students the dedicated knowledge and skills they need to become content experts in their field. In addition, these changes demonstrate how the middle grades faculty are willing and able to adapt their curriculum to meet the needs of current middle schools and the developmental needs of the young adolescents they serve.

Meeting State Workforce Needs

Our program fills a critical state need for quality middle grades educators. Because of a shortage of fully certified middle grades teachers, school systems across Georgia are forced to employ provisionally certified teachers to fill vacant positions. The GCSU Middle Grades program directly addresses this need. Every candidate is prepared to teach two content areas, including the required English Language Arts certification for the undergraduates, which directly supports Georgia's Literacy Plan: Vision 2030. With this inclusion in our program, we are doing our part to ensure Georgia's classrooms are staffed with highly qualified, fully certified educators.

Literacy

One of the required content areas that every undergraduate candidate is prepared to teach is English Language Arts. The state of Georgia's Literacy Plan: Vision 2030 establishes a goal of ensuring that every educator is prepared to teach reading. Being certified in English Language Arts means our candidates understand the importance of literacy, can meet the needs of young adolescent readers, and are able to apply literacy standards across all the content areas they teach. Our program directly supports this statewide priority.

Need for Middle Grades Mathematics and Science Teachers

Our Middle Grades MAT program was created in response to the need for math, science and STEM teachers in the state of Georgia. One of the advantages of our online program is that we can reach potential teachers in any city, county or rural school district in Georgia. In addition to this general need, an even more specific need is to increase the diversity in the science and mathematics teacher population. Our program has been successful in that effort. at the forefront of this effort. Between 2022 and 2024, we enrolled 70 students, with 53 (76%) completing the program in six semesters.

Diversity of the MAT Program

The extraordinary diversity that exists in the MAT program is one of its great strengths. The age of teacher candidates ranges from students who recently earned an undergraduate degree to mid-life career changers to those over 65 who still want to become teachers. Over the past four cohorts, approximately 3% of candidates noted that English is their second language; 3% identified as LGBTQ+; and 8.4% came to the U.S. from other nations. The largest subgroup is African American females at 37.5%, followed by White females at 23.6%, White males at 16.6%, African American males at 13.6%, and other at 8.4%. This diversity introduces different perspectives on the nature of science into course discussions and develops professional educators who will go on to teach the diverse student populations in Georgia's schools. Notably, typically over 90% of MAT candidates are already teaching provisionally as teachers-of-record and need the program to become professionally certified. The table on page 16 indicates the number of MAT students entering per year and the number who graduate from that group in six semesters. This graduation rate is as high or higher than comparable programs and we are one of the few institutions, possibly the only one in Georgia, that requires two content concentrations (science and math) for the MAT program.

SREB Teacher Residency Partnership

In addition to our online MAT Program, and as a further response to a stated need for more science and math teachers, the MAT middle grades program partnered with the Southern Regional Education Board (SREB) from 2020–2024 to provide a teacher residency program. Candidates in this program worked as residents every day for the entire school year in the classroom of a highly qualified middle grades mathematics or science teacher. They received a stipend comparable to the salary of a provisionally certified teacher, along with on-the-job coaching from their GCSU Mentor Leader and SREB staff, with online classes in the evenings. Using this model, residents completed the program in 13 months, compared to a standard 5–6 semester program of study.

GaPSC Teacher Pipeline Summit

Dr. Rachel Bray represents the Middle Grades program on the GaPSC Teacher Pipeline Summit, a state-level initiative focused on addressing educator shortages across Georgia. Her participation ensures that our program and the JHL College of Education remain informed by and responsive to the state's most pressing teacher pipeline challenges. Last year, Dr. Bray was instrumental in facilitating the first Pipeline Summit, bringing together educators and legislators from across the state, to GCSU. Her middle grades education students served as volunteers, making crucial connections with state educators and decision makers.

High Impact Practices

The middle grades education program has been a leader in implementing High Impact Practices (AACU, 2007) to our curriculum. We feel strongly that offering multiple opportunities for leadership, community, and real-world applications is key to the success of our students and our program.

Study Abroad to the Bahamas

Beginning with diligent planning in 2023, Dr. Jordan was successful in designing and gaining approval for a study abroad GC2Y course, Diversity in Education-San Salvador, Bahamas. This is only the second study abroad program to originate from the College of Education. The program, which was implemented in summer 2025, is grounded in the principles of place-based learning and the concepts of assemblage theory. San Salvador, a small island with a unique location and intriguing history provides the setting for exploring and engaging with culture, history, economy, religion, ecology, geology and geography. The students then relate these factors and trends to working with students in the local K-6 school. The students study the Bahamian curriculum and design place-based lessons. The expected outcome is that students develop the skills for analyzing factors influencing student learning and education and will be able to apply the principles of place-based education in their own teaching careers.

Study Away to Washington, D.C.

In 2026, Dr. Christoff will lead students on an inaugural Study Away experience titled Civic Literacy and Engagement in Washington, D.C.—the first Study Away program offered at GCSU. The purpose of the program is fourfold: (1) to help students gain knowledge on the history of the United States, the nature of democracy, and how the national government functions; (2) to develop their personal and collective civic identity; (3) to learn how to advocate for issues that matter to them and their students; and (4) to apply their learning to creating civic curriculum for their classrooms.

Collegiate Middle Level Association (CMLA)

By far, the most meaningful way the middle grades education program develops students' leadership skills is through their participation in the Collegiate Middle Level Association (CMLA). A student-run organization and affiliate of AMLE, CMLA offers professional learning and community to all education students in the College of Education. The faculty operates as advisors, guiding and offering advice to the student board. CMLA meets monthly, and our chapter is one of the strongest in the country—

over the course of its existence, every junior and senior undergraduate has not only belonged but also contributed to its success.

It is through CMLA that the Fireside and Summit events are facilitated, community service projects for local schools are implemented, professional development opportunities come to fruition, and community is developed among members. As advisors, we work with the CMLA board to organize meetings, manage finances, and structure bylaws. By attending all events and providing guidance on proposals and decisions, we demonstrate what it means to be a teacher leader. Students learn how to be good colleagues, become effective leaders, and become advocates for middle grades education.

Fireside and Summit

Fireside is a faculty-supported, CMLA-planned evening professional development event that gives junior and senior candidates an opportunity to engage in personal learning conversations with education experts. Now in its 26th year, Summit is a full-day professional development conference for the College of Education and its local school communities. Planned entirely by senior middle grades students, Summit has gained the attention of middle-level programs across the state and country. These events provide candidates with authentic learning opportunities in leadership, fundraising, publicity, speaker coordination, and professional event management.

Accomplishments of Program Completers

Program Completers Data

Year	UG Students Enrolled	UG Completers	% UG Completers*	MAT Students Enrolled	MAT Students Completers	% MAT Completers
2024-25	39	21	100	18	14	78
2023-24	36	11	100	19	13	68
2022-23	35	24	100	35	26	72

* In 2025, all twenty-one undergraduate teacher candidates successfully defended their Capstones, were recommended for GaPSC certification, passed at least one GACE assessment, and all who sought middle school employment secured positions in Georgia before graduation.

Accreditation and Assessment Ratings

Association for Middle Level Education

The middle grades education program is aligned with the Council for Accreditation of Educational Preparation (CAEP) and uses the Association for Middle Level Education (AMLE) Teacher Preparation Standards to guide and assess our program. After completing our Specialized Professional Associations (SPA) review in 2025, the undergraduate middle grades program achieved National Recognition with AMLE and CAEP for teacher preparation. Also in 2025, AMLE recognized the GCSU Middle

Grades Education program as an inaugural AMLE Distinguished Teacher Preparation Program—the only undergraduate program in the country chosen for this honor. These distinctions demonstrate that our program ensures students receive a high-quality education that effectively prepares them for their roles as professional middle grades educators.

GACE Candidate Performance Data

The Georgia Assessment for the Certification of Educators (GACE) data for the middle grades content area criterion-referenced Georgia licensure assessments measure the knowledge and skills necessary to teach individual content in grades 4–8. All undergraduate candidates are prepared in English Language Arts (ELA) and choose one additional content area (Math, Science, or Social Studies). The total score for all assessments is 270, with 220 as the threshold for induction-level passage and 250 for professional-level passage. Highlighted cells indicate that GCSU candidates outperformed the state average.

Content Area	State 2023–24	Program 2023–24	State 2024–25	Program 2024–25
Language Arts	239.15	246.06	237.55	258
Mathematics	252.92	271	239.65	260
Science	247.14	264	243.61	237
Social Science	242.96	250.2	243.5	248.08

**Highlighted cells (green) indicate GCSU program scores above the state average. Pass score: Induction 220 / Professional 250 out of 270.*

Principal Surveys of Graduate Effectiveness

As an approved Educational Preparation Program (EPP) in the state of Georgia, the middle grades education program receives data from the Georgia Professional Standards Commission (GaPSC). The GaPSC annually surveys educator employers during GCSU graduates' first year of employment at a Georgia public school. This 31-item survey polls district employers about inductee teachers' performance and preparedness based on the Georgia Teacher Assessment on Performance Standards (TAPS). A rating of 3 indicates proficiency. In 2025, employers rated GCSU completers above similar EPPs in seven of the ten TAPS standards, and above six of the ten standards in 2024.

Standard	GCSU 2025	State 2025	GCSU 2024	State 2024	GCSU 2023	State 2023
1: Learning Development	3.44	3.35	3.49	3.47	3.42	3.48
2: Learning Differences	3.22	3.12	3.12	3.14	3.19	3.23
3: Learning Environments	3.32	3.28	3.33	3.38	3.33	3.37
4: Content Knowledge	3.33	3.28	3.43	3.43	3.34	3.37
5: Application of Content	3.25	3.25	3.41	3.45	3.25	3.32
6: Assessment	3.26	3.23	3.41	3.40	3.26	3.34

7: Planning for Instruction	3.24	3.25	3.44	3.41	3.19	3.27
8: Instructional Strategies	3.38	3.32	3.49	3.47	3.38	3.41
9: Professional & Ethical Practice	3.35	3.36	3.56	3.55	3.43	3.47
10: Leadership & Collaboration	3.35	3.38	3.67	3.61	3.43	3.45

Highlighted cells (green) indicate GCSU scores above similar EPPs. Proficiency = 3.0.

State, Regional, and National Conference Presentations

Collaborating with our middle grades faculty and students is an integral part of our program as it models professional behavior. Our students gain valuable experience sharing their learning and meeting colleagues that provide guidance and advice for their future careers.

Conference Presentations with Faculty Colleagues

Bray, R., Christoff, A., Jordan, M., Pettit, S. K., & Previts, J. (2025, November). *Beyond individual expertise: The power of teamwork in middle level curriculum* [NAPoMLE Best Practices Roundtable]. Association for Middle Level Education Annual Conference, Indianapolis, IN.

Bray, R., Christoff, A. & Jordan, M. (2023). *Finding our way and charting our paths with the new standards*. National Association of Professors of Middle Level Education. Round Table Presentation. November 2, 2023. National Harbor, MD.

Christoff, A., & Bray, R. (2024, May 17). *Recruiting and retaining undergraduate middle grades students* [Conference session]. NAPoMLE Southeast Symposium, Asheville, NC.

Jordan, M. (2024, May 17) *Recruitment and retention for graduate program diversity*. (Conference Session) Southeastern Association of Professors of Middle Level Educators Symposium, Asheville, NC.

Conference Presentations with Students

Middle Grades Education candidates have presented at the AMLE National Conference every year from 2021 to 2025, contributing a total of 33 presentations. All presentations were developed from candidates' inquiry projects with guidance from their Mentor Leader, who supported students through idea development, proposal drafting, and revision throughout the process.

Conference Presentations with Faculty and Students

Christoff, A., Mosley, L., Desrosiers, E., Hilsmier, M., Denney, K., Sanacore, G., & Abercrombie, A. (2025, October 23). *Building partnerships to teach challenging histories* [Conference session]. Georgia Council for the Social Studies Annual Conference, Athens, GA.

- Jordan, M., Guy, D., Teed, R., Wright, T. (2024, November) *Embedding service learning in a science content course*. Roundtable Presentation, NAPOMLE/AMLE Conference, Nashville, TN.
- Jordan, M., Teed, R., Wright, T. (2024, October) *Engaging students in science service learning and pedagogical content knowledge*. CMLA Summit, Lounsbury College of Education, GCSU, Milledgeville, GA.
- Christoff, A., Bradley, J., Lecours, J., & Matthews, B. (2023, October 27). *Using local history to understand Georgia* [Conference session]. Georgia Council for the Social Studies Annual Conference, Athens, GA.

The middle grades program faculty are committed to providing a high-quality education to our students while modeling and facilitating middle level education concepts and philosophy. We strive to continue and build upon the example set by Dr. Lounsbury, who says, “the importance of middle level education can never be overestimated” (2010 p. 43). We agree and will work to make a difference in the lives of our students and the young adolescents they serve.

References

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<https://www.amle.org/the-middle-school-model/>
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- Bishop, P.A. & Harrison, L.M. (2021). *The successful middle school: This we believe*. Association for Middle Level Education.
- Lounsbury, J. H. (2010). This we believe: Keys to educating young adolescents. *Middle School Journal*, 41(3), 52-53.