

FROM THE EDITORS

Letter from the Editors

Welcome readers! We are excited to share the Fall 2026 edition of the NCMLE Journal with you.

The theme of this Fall issue is step-by-step, a reminder that the work of teaching, just like the school year itself, unfolds one day and one decision at a time. Our cover image, a stairway framed by falling autumn leaves, reflects both the back-to-school season and the steady forward progress that defines the beginning of a new academic year. Educators make countless decisions each day, often balancing competing demands, unexpected challenges, and opportunities to meet the unique needs of many students who grace their classroom doors. Rather than trying to anticipate every turn and future decision at once, the authors who contributed to this issue invite us to approach our forward progress with intention: taking the next step mindfully, learning meaningfully from the preceding step, and trusting the meaningful progress built over time.

This issue offers something for educators at every stage of their careers, including practical guidance for designing a classroom as a beginning teacher, a timely look at how artificial intelligence is showing up in middle grades classrooms, and relevant questions about what that means for teaching and learning. Additionally, authors featured in this issue address the ongoing challenge of balancing high expectations with teacher retention, and share strategies for building strong, effective teaming structures in middle grades schools.

Each of these unique pieces unite around a common thread: middle grades education works best when new teachers are set up well from the start, when schools stay thoughtful about the tools and pressures shaping the profession, and when educators have real structures including teams, expectations, and support to lean on. These structures must be stewarded with intention, and we hope this issue offers some useful footing for that work.

We are grateful to the authors who contributed their work and to the educators across North Carolina who continue to advocate for and support middle grades learners.



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