

Former Presidents Reflect on 20 Years of NCSSSMST

Compiled by Elizabeth Templin

The Consortium celebrated its 20th anniversary at the 2008 Professional Conference in Dallas, Texas in February 2008. Founding president Stephanie Pace Marshall and former presidents Joan Barber, Janet Hugo, Ron Laugen, Cheryl Lindeman, Dennis Lundgren, and Betty Stapp responded to questions about the organization and their involvement with NCSSSMST over the last 20 years.

Q: What was NCSSSMST like when you first got involved?

Stephanie Pace Marshall: NCSSSMST began in the spirit of Margaret Mead: “Never doubt that a small group of committed citizens can change the world; indeed, it is the only thing that ever has.” In 1988, a group of fifteen specialized schools decided that our common purposes and shared interests would be better served if we joined together to create a formal alliance and partnership. In a real sense the “founding fifteen” were the midwives of a unique institutional and professional collaboration that has advanced STEM education and talent identification and development in our nation.

Cheryl Lindeman: I had the opportunity to go to Thomas Jefferson High School for Science and Technology and represent our school at the 1988 gathering of like-minded educators working at new types of schools. How do we learn from each other, we asked? From then on it is history— I’ve been involved with NCSSSMST for 20 years!

Joan Barber: My impression when I first got involved was that it was an organization that had to be outstanding because it included other specialized science and mathematics schools like mine, the North Carolina School of Science and Mathematics. When I came to NCSSM as an administrator, it was clear NCSSSMST was

moving at a fast pace and was being positioned to have a national presence.

Betty Stapp: At my first Professional Conference (in New Orleans), I was impressed with the goals of the organization and the progressive stance of the Board in promoting math, science and technology innovation. The organization seemed to be desirous of moving to a new level and a more active role in improving education.

Dennis Lundgren: By 1992, the Consortium had a little over 40 institutional members. We were very dependent on individual schools to create and carry our major events. At the same time, we had a group of leaders with a vision of what the Consortium could become.

Ron Laugen: When I first got involved with NCSSSMST in the early 90’s, I was impressed with the commitment of the people I met, both to their own schools and to the new organization. We knew then how important it was that we develop multiple ways for people to connect. What I most remember was how much everything had to be done on a shoestring budget.

Janet Hugo: I remember wondering what the organization really did beyond offering three yearly events – Student Conference, Student Research Symposium, and Professional Conference. I enjoyed the networking that was available at the conferences. It was great to be able to share information with other school administrators and teachers.

Q: How has NCSSSMST changed over the years?

SPM: NCSSSMST has clearly evolved from an idea to a becoming a national leader in STEM

teaching and learning, especially for talented and motivated students seeking to pursue advanced study and/or careers in STEM fields. Since the creation of our first strategic plan, NCSSMST has continued to become more strategic, proactive and connected—seeking not only to engage Consortium members, but the broader STEM community.

We have dramatically increased and diversified our membership by creating an affiliate partner status, and enrolling like-minded universities, corporations, and foundation; created annual student research conferences and staff professional development conferences; developed a thoughtful and respected journal for student and staff contributions; collaborated in joint longitudinal research of consortium students and national research initiatives; and shared institutional “best” and “most promising” practices. With the anticipated publication of our second book, *Schools Like Ours*, we will become an even more influential resource for STEM talent development.

BS: Since my first meeting, we have greatly increased its membership as well as become more active in developing products to improve curricula, teaching and learning. The organization has also been more proactive in seeking involvement with other math, science and technology organizations.

JB: The most obvious one is the membership, growing from 15 original member schools to over 100 institutional members and 110 affiliates and associates. Our publications on student research and starting new specialized schools are major accomplishments in connection with our mission to create synergies among schools engaged in educational innovation. And the outstanding new NCSSMST website.

DL: We have grown – passing the 100 institutional member mark. We have impacted national policy with the report, *Addressing the STEM Challenge by Expanding Specialty Math and Science High Schools*, as well as through contacts with our elected officials. We have a National Office with an Executive Director to make the work of the Consortium more effective. We increasingly share

exemplary programs through our publications, conferences, networking and involvement with other organizations.

RL: Rejoining the Board after almost ten years, it was easy to say, “We have changed with the times.” We have more members and affiliates, a bigger budget, more programs and publications, and we are being recognized as a player on the national stage because of the important contributions of our member schools across the country. In particular, I believe members’ collaborative relationships with each other and with partners such as the Siemens Foundation, the College Board, and the Keystone and Sloan Foundations have benefited all.

JH: I have seen a tremendous amount of growth from an organization that was almost entirely a direct service-based one to one that now has a national leadership role. We have developed a very real sense of purpose and are accomplishing goals in a systematic and organized manner.

Q: How has your involvement with NCSSMST influenced your professional goals?

SPM: Helping to establish and lead the Consortium for its first two years was a professional joy. It is always gratifying to help to bring a powerful idea to life when you believe that it will have significance and far reaching impact.

CL: NCSSMST has allowed me to reach out and embrace the scientific culture of our country - meeting people who want to be involved in our future leadership— and will spend time doing it without thinking about the time needed to produce the program, product, etc.

JB: My involvement with the Consortium has influenced me professionally because it gave me a comparable group to interact with as I have executed our mission, being a catalyst for educational improvement in science, mathematics and technology in North Carolina and the nation. The Consortium was a very valuable resource for me when I came to NCSSM - the annual Professional Conference gave me an opportunity

to network with peer professionals who work at schools, which, in many cases, are a short step from, if not at, a college level.

BS: My involvement with NCSSMST has given me many opportunities I would never had had such as working with a tremendous number of dedicated educational professionals, given me insight into the myriad differences in schools and students across the nation, and provided me opportunities to develop materials and projects to improve math, science and technology education across the United States. I still desire to work on related projects and develop new magnet schools.

DL: My involvement with the people and programs of the Consortium inspires me tremendously. I am always charged up after a conference or meeting. I find the creativity, skill and enthusiasm of Consortium folks to be very exciting. Personally, I enjoy some great, great friendships with my Consortium colleagues.

RL: As a brand new administrator of a specialized school (having not administrated before), I realized the importance of "consorting" with people who were planning and doing what I was hired to do. Simply said, my NCSSMST experience has been the centerpiece of my professional growth and life as a specialized school administrator. I am proud to continue my involvement with NCSSMST into my retirement.

JH: Professionally, I have grown along with the organization. I have a much clearer picture of what I need to do as an educator and administrator for the future of my school. I have learned a great deal from the other directors on the Board and from members of the organization. I have developed an even stronger belief in the work that I do because of my association with NCSSMST.

Q: What is your best NCSSMST memory or the achievement you are most proud of?
SPM: I have two. The first was welcoming the delegates and convening our first Consortium conference in 1988. It was thrilling to see that we were indeed real and that people believed in us

enough to actually show up! The second was IMSA's hosting of the 2000 NCSSMST conference with the theme, "Liberating Goodness and Genius." We had two phenomenal keynote speakers who helped us to soar. Robert Galvin, Chairman of Motorola, delivered a spectacular address on our theme, and Benjamin Zander, Conductor of the Boston Symphony, led us in our afternoon of "possibility thinking." It was a fantastic launch into the new Millennium!

CL: During my tenure as President, I was able to establish the annual Research Symposium. The first year at Carnegie Mellon University is a special memory for me — Robotics Scientist Red Whitaker was a dinner keynote. We ate on white linen tablecloths within his lab with the robots all around us! One of the group's robots was part of the NASA MARS project. It is still a highlight of my year to go and see the students' posters and hear their presentations.

JB: My highlight is my involvement with Increasing Underrepresented Populations in NCSSMST Schools project: being involved in discussions and programs regarding the Sloan Foundation grant; participating in presentations on the Sloan Programs at Professional Conferences; helping facilitate a Summer Institute at North Carolina Central University where a Strategic Plan for the recruitment and retention of underrepresented students in NCSSMST schools was developed; hosting at NCSSM the first Sloan Student Summer Program - July 2003; obtaining continuation funds for the second Sloan Student Summer Program July 8-15, 2005; and obtaining funding from Siemens Foundation 2006 for a third Siemens Student Summer Program at NCSSM for middle school students from North Carolina, South Carolina and Arkansas.

BS: My best NCSSMST memory is probably the writing and development of the 2001 Sloan Foundation Grant to improve minority student recruitment, retention and academic success in member schools. The subsequent workshops and summer programs over the years have improved the number of minority students in our schools as

well as improving retention and academic success. My second best memory was serving as host of the 1999 Professional Conference in Austin and the development of the Curricula Book in 1999 that proved very popular and is something the Board should consider updating in the near future.

DL: Wow, I could make a list. After a Board of Directors meeting in Arizona, several of us had stayed an extra day to take in the sights. Dottie Martin, Marty Shapiro and I, now all past presidents, and Larry Walker, a former Board member, had lunch together in Sedona. We began to map out plans to take the Consortium to the “next level,” building on the earlier work of leadership and moving to our next round of strategic planning. It was a wonderful, spontaneous session in a beautiful place. Many of our ideas developed in subsequent planning sessions have become a reality. Another cool experience as President was to welcome our members to the 2004 Professional Conference. Our setting was the Rose Center at the American Museum of Natural History in New York City.

RL: I am pleased with what I called my “transitional” presidential year (I was the last of the one-year term presidents). We got the web site up and laid the foundation for what we called the “professionalization” of the organization – with budget, bylaws, and an executive director.

Two kinds of memories, one generic and one specific. The general memory is the special feeling

I get recalling the many, many hours of discussions (in many, many venues!) with other professionals about what their schools and students are like, what they are doing, and how they are meeting the challenges of being involved in a specialized school. I learned so much from so many – I’d like to say THANKS!

I am most proud, however, of the 1998 Student Conference that we hosted at my school in Conroe ISD, Texas: *The World in 2020 – Transition to Sustainability*. Our team created the model for the kind of interactive student conferences that have been held since then and also the model using role-playing and the Internet that is key to the annual Keystone Policy Summits. I know I share memories with all the school people who have hosted Student Conferences – and that is when the last of the students and chaperones has departed and you can relax knowing it was successful and is over - the relief, pride, and exhaustion from a job well done!

JH: I can name three that stand out: putting together a format for the professional conferences that has been easy to replicate; hiring an Executive Director (even if only part-time); and making it my platform to move NCSSSMST to the national level by supporting the formation of national partnerships. One other thing will always stay with me – sharing hotel rooms with Cheryl Lindeman - that woman can go on four hours of sleep! It’s like rooming with the Energizer Bunny.

Dr. Stephanie Pace Marshall is the Founding President and President Emerita of the Illinois Mathematics and Science Academy and was founding President of the NCSSSMST.

Dr. Cheryl Lindeman is the current NCSSSMST Executive Director and is Biology Instructor/Partnership Coordinator at the Central Virginia Governor’s School for Science and Technology.

Dr. Betty Stapp was principal of the Arkansas School for Mathematics and Science and also Director of the Science Academy of Austin, Texas at LBJ HS; she currently works as a private consultant.

Dr. Joan Barber is the Vice-Chancellor for Student Life at the North Carolina School of Science and Mathematics.

Dennis Lundgren is the Director of Instructional Technology and Media Services at the Berrien County, Michigan Intermediate School District.

Dr. Ron Laugen is the retired Headmaster at Conroe ISD, Texas Academy of Science and Technology and is NCSSSMST Program Coordinator.

Dr. Janet Hugo is the Director of the Arkansas School for Mathematics, Sciences and Arts.