The 15 participating schools and systems in ASCD's Urban Middle Grades Network (UMGN) are striving to improve the academic achievement of disadvantaged youth. Last summer they convened their third meeting in Vail, Colorado, to refine their five-year school improvement plans in major content areas—writing, reading, mathematics, and speaking.

Participants also worked on grant proposals sponsored by the Edna McConnell Clark Foundation—underwriters of the UMGN project. In December, five sites were awarded $30,000 each, effective January 1, 1991: Wichita, Kansas; San Antonio, Texas; Seattle, Washington; Long Beach, California; and Denver, Colorado. The money is being used to support staff development initiatives to improve instruction and help students achieve high standards in one or more content areas. Grant recipients have one year to implement their proposed staff development plans.

Although not funded for this round of awards, the New Orleans, Louisiana, and Tucson, Arizona, teams were invited to submit revised proposals because of the potential merit of their initial grant submissions.

Finally, the 15 teams met again February 6–9 in Miami to revisit teams' progress in implementing the writing and communication components of their school improvement plans. Assessment issues in each area were also addressed, and the latest research, practice, and literature in mathematics and reading were presented by featured speakers and workshop leaders, including Steve Parsons, an 8th grade teacher from Fairfax, Virginia, who demonstrated research-based mathematics strategies with youngsters from Mays Middle School; Marie Carbo, who demonstrated strategies that have dramatically accelerated youngsters' reading achievement and turned unmotivated readers into avid readers; and Beverly Bimes-Michalak and Jim Chesebro, who offered concrete suggestions for increasing students' abilities to communicate clearly.

Project Facilitator is Helene Hodges, Director of Research and Information for ASCD.
Join the Network for School University Partnerships, which works to promote dialogue between schools and universities and develops professional practice schools, summer institutes, and ongoing programs during the school year to benefit schools and universities. For further information contact:
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If you are interested in writing for Educational Leadership, please keep in mind our audience practicing K-12 educators. The themes for the upcoming 1991-92 issues are now available and are published frequently. See page 79. If you would like a copy of our Guidelines for Writers, call ASCD's Publications Department (703-549-9110) and ask for Terry Lawhorn, ext. 427, Jennifer Beun, ext. 402, or Becky DeRigge, ext. 404. These new Guidelines will be available in early March.

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