

A Brief History of the Assembly of State Coordinators of English Language Arts (ASCELA)

by

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State coordinators of English Language Arts and Reading looking to connect with one another first met at the annual NCTE meetings of the CEE Commission on Supervision and Curriculum Development. In the early 1980s, going to NCTE for the first few times as a representative of the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, I attended those meetings and took part in activities such as implementing a state *Survey on Curriculum Guidelines, State Publications and Related Staff Development* and developing a *Handbook for Supervisors of English Language Arts*. Although a few state-level people tried to promote these worthwhile ends, the lack of a well-established group with a clear identity limited our results as we tried to reach out to our busy and preoccupied colleagues.

However, the work of the Commission enabled several state consultants to meet and begin informally to discuss the possibility of forming an organization of and for state consultants. Judy Gilbert of Colorado, Barbara Wolfe of Oregon, Lory Nels Johnson of Iowa, and Mel Riggs of Kansas were among the organizers who contacted state departments of education to identify state ELA people and to invite them to a meeting at the NCTE fall convention to discuss the establishment of such a group. In 1987, this informal network of people met for the first time as an organization. In 1989, we applied to NCTE to become the Assembly of State Coordinators of English Language Arts (ASCELA).

Meeting annually on the Thursday before the NCTE convention, the ASCELA members shared information on initiatives and issues in their states and offered support and encouragement to one another in an increasingly charged atmosphere of “educational reform.” Meetings in specific locales sometimes included special activities or speakers. Speakers at recent meetings have included Edmund Farrell (Wisconsin, 2000), Kyleen Beers (Baltimore, 2001), and Richard Vacca (Atlanta, 2002). The 1999 Denver meeting (see [ASCELA Photo Gallery](#)) was preceded by a daytrip to the Eagle Rock School in the mountains outside Estes Park, where former ASCELA member Lois Easton greeted the group with a birthday cake commemorating our 10th anniversary. The meeting in Milwaukee in 2000 included a presentation on Wisconsin writers by Ginny Moore

Kruse, Director of the Cooperative Children's Book Center at the University of Wisconsin. Other activities at the annual meetings included planning proposals for sessions at NCTE meetings, drafting formal responses to NCTE issues, enjoying professional development speakers and activities, and electing officers.

With members ranging from Oregon to Connecticut and from Maryland to Arizona, it was a challenge for ASCELA members to meet more often than at the NCTE Annual Convention, and not all members were able to meetings annually. As education became ever more politicized, the coordinators recognized the importance of staying linked and of finding ways to honor and protect the work of the classroom teacher. In addition to the annual meeting, ASCELA members regularly communicated, first, via a newsletter, then via an online NCTE listserv. Newsletter editors were Lory Nels Johnson of Iowa (1988-92) and Jan Clinard of Montana (1992-95). The listserv keeper was Clarence Bina of North Dakota (1995-2002), followed by Mike Kelley of Delaware.

In the first few years, founding members including Barbara Wolfe, Judy Gilbert, and Mel Riggs served terms as president. Later, ASCELA presidents often came from the region or state where the meeting would be held:

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| 1995 San Diego | Jan Clinard, Montana |
| 1996 Chicago | Lory Nels Johnson, Iowa |
| 1997 Detroit | Sheila Potter, Michigan |
| 1998 Nashville | Kathryne Pugh, Tennessee |
| 1999 Denver | Stevie Quate, Colorado |
| 2000 Milwaukee | Ellen Last, Wisconsin |
| 2001 Baltimore | Phyllis Ayers, Virginia |
| 2002 Atlanta | Christine Sullivan, Connecticut |