

## HIGHLIGHTED BACKGROUND

DR. DEBORAH KASAK

Deborah is the Executive Director for the National Forum to Accelerate Middle-Grades Reform. The National Forum is an affiliation of the country's most prominent associations, foundations, researchers and practitioners united to speak in one voice about needed improvements in the middle grades. Its signature program is the Schools to Watch initiative now in 19 states representing over 70% of the country's young adolescent students. In 2010, 242 schools have been identified as a STW in their respective states. An annual STW conference is held yearly in June in DC.

In August 2010, the National Forum's Investing in Innovation (i3) application was among the highest rated proposals in the U. S. Department of Education rigorous competition. The \$5 million federal grant will be supported by another 20% private matching dollars and 3 regional hubs will be doing intensive school reform work with 18 consortium schools. The Schools to Watch: School Transformation Network 4-year grant is under the direction of the Forum.

She oversaw the Forum's USDE grant to improve mathematic outcomes for students in middle grades. The grant partners the Forum with 4 of its CSR partners in order to address the needs of special populations such as ELL, special education and rural students.

Previously, she was the executive director of the Association of Illinois Middle-Level Schools for eight years. She helped create the Illinois Middle Grades Network, a network of demonstration/partnership schools begun in 1989 with the assistance of an U.S. Department of Education grant. She oversaw the operation of one of the first regional centers for the National Turning Points Design Model. She was actively involved with the middle grades self-study process and collaborated with staff at the Center for Prevention Research and Development at the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign. She has presented widely on all aspects of middle grades development.

Deborah served as president of the National Middle School Association in 2001-02 and served on the NMSA Board for seven years.

She has received most of her educational preparation at the University of Illinois. She holds a bachelor's degree in speech and drama education, a master's degree in student personnel work, an advanced certificate in educational psychology and a doctoral degree in educational administration.

[www.schoolstowatch.org](http://www.schoolstowatch.org)

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