

# IN Transition

Journal of the New York State Middle School Association



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# NYSMSA GOALS

The New York State Middle School Association (NYSMSA), representing the interests of those who serve the educational needs of young adolescents, recognized the uniqueness of middle-level students. NYSMSA is committed to helping to create and support educational programs in which all young adolescents can develop their natural capabilities to their fullest extent, building upon personal strengths and the richness of our state's culturally diverse population. The Association encourages both middle-level educators and community stakeholders to work collaboratively to meet the needs of emerging adolescents in developmentally-appropriate programs founded in academic rigor, but dealing with the intellectual, physical, emotional, and social needs of students of this age.

NYSMSA's goals are listed below. Taking into consideration current research and available resources, these goals will assist the Association in fostering the creation of new curricula in support of the NYS learning standards and, in general, supporting the improvement of instruction for middle-level students in New York State.

## **AWARENESS AND RESPONSIVENESS**

NYSMSA believes that we must:

- Promote a climate of acceptance and understanding of young adolescents;
- Stimulate and promote the development of the middle level as a distinct educational structure for young adolescents;
- Promote middle-level education and be a significant advocate for the appropriate education of young adolescents;
- Offer a variety of professional development activities that positively impact the attitudes, performances, and practices of middle-level educators.
- Compile, maintain, and respond to current research and development initiatives.

## **SUPPORT**

NYSMSA believes that we must:

- Be a significant source of information and resources on young adolescents and their schooling;
- Offer consultant support to schools and districts in refining and strengthening their middle-level programs;
- Provide a variety of resources (video, publication, teleconferences, position papers, etc.) in support of appropriate programs for young adolescents;
- Seek, secure, and provide grants and other financial resources to support planing and implementation of effective middle-level practices;
- Provide, throughout the year, member services to public and non-public urban, suburban, and rural schools;
- Engage regional directors who provide, assist, and support regional and state activities;
- Support the ongoing importance of communication and interaction between State Education Department personnel and members of the Association.

## **CURRICULUM, INSTRUCTION, & ASSESSMENT**

NYSMSA believes that we must:

- Influence the quality and content of pre-service and in-service education for prospective and practicing middle-level educators;
- Support teachers, schools, and districts in refining and strengthening their middle-level programs;
- Work with constituent groups to identify effective models for curricular, instructional, and assessment issues;
- Disseminate position papers that provide guidance on appropriate curricula, instruction, and assessment issues;
- Monitor the implementation of the NYS learning standards at the intermediate level, promoting programs with strong academic rigor within the framework of good middle-level practice;
- Monitor the intermediate assessment results, seeking to ensure the results measure good middle-level practice and are developmentally appropriate in scope, content, and administration.

## **COLLABORATION**

NYSMSA believes that we must:

- Work with other associations in sponsoring professional development activities;
- Implement a collaborative relationship with universities, departments of higher education, SED, SMSA, parent-teacher organizations, and other groups that impact on the lives of young adolescents;
- Develop and expand cooperative ventures and relationships with corporations and businesses;
- Create networks of educators, parents, and others involved in the lives of young adolescents;
- Serve on the boards of supportive organizations;
- Engage in continuous planning through participation and shared decision-making;
- Provide for internal assessment of all major Association functions with provisions for external audit where appropriate.

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A Hot Glass Workshop participant at the Corning Middle-Level Institute tries his hand at creating a flower.

Photo courtesy of Brian Sherman, Region X Director



# From the Editor's Desk

Peter T. Johnson



Approximately forty years ago, the then-voice-of-the-counter-culture, poet and songwriter Bob Dylan, wrote the words, “the times, they are a-changin’.”

Although the grammar-cop in me cringes at the informality of Dylan’s word choice, the meaning of those words still rings true today, particularly for those of us who are members of the educational “counter culture,” that group known as “middle level.”

As we begin another new school year, the Board of Regents is planning the next phase of revisions in its middle-level policies, and is (through NYSMSA) soliciting input from classroom and administrative practitioners, particularly on issues dealing with the “exploratory” courses in the middle-level curriculum. For more information on this ongoing dialogue, and to learn how you can have a voice in this vital discussion, be sure to read Dennis Tosetto’s “Executive Director’s Message” and Jeannette Stern’s “President’s Message” in this issue.

Both Dennis and Jeannette also share some reflections from this summer’s NYSMSA-sponsored Middle Level Institute at the Corning Museum of Glass. As a participant in that institute, I can assure you that some serious learning, networking, and sharing took place. Not only that, but the folks at CMoG and the Rockwell Museum treated us like royalty, catering to our every need. All that, and we got

to play with *HOT GLASS*! What better way to mark the end of a school year and the start of summer vacation?

You’ll find that “Lea’s Lessons” has returned, focusing in this issue on the differentiated classroom. Judith Dodge continues on that same topic in her look at options for raising standards while reducing student anxiety. Tom Phillips continues the examination of the classroom in his article on cooperative teaching. Jennifer Burke explores a link between education and a popular television show, while Jeff Craig invites readers to share his perspective on a middle-level school developing as a learning community. Nancy Doda takes fresh look at the concept of advisory programs in light of the *No Child Left Behind* legislation, and Warren Crouse further probes the history and issues underlying the federal (and/or state) legislation and local control debate. Add to that mix the language of the new *Regents Policy Statement on Middle-Level Education*, and you have some pretty intriguing reading for the start of a new year. Finally, we’ve included an invitation to join us in October at NYSMSA’s Annual Fall Conference, held this year at the Marx Hotel and OnCenter in Syracuse.

Yes, “the times, they are a-changin’,” particularly for those of us “in the middle.” But isn’t it change that has always helped us define who—and what—we are and will become? See you in Syracuse, where you’ll find some “Magic in the Middle” to help put that change into focus!

# A few thoughts from the President...

Jeannette Stern, Ed.D.



“There are two ways of meeting difficulties. You alter the difficulties or you alter yourself to meet them.”

— Phyllis Bottome

For many years, many people lamented the fact that the middle level seemed to be the stepchild in the educational family, the member that everyone forgot. That position no longer applies. Within this issue you will find the newly-approved Regents Policy Statement for middle-level education, a document that was finalized after input from a wide range of educational organizations around the state. As you read it, you will see that it references the *Essential Elements* of 2000 and provides the parameters within which a strong middle-level program should lie. And, lest you believe that the changes at the middle are over, watch for discussions on the new Commissioner’s Regulations coming to a place near you in the fall before approval of the Board of Regents, scheduled now for December.

Why all these changes? No one can answer this question better than all of you in the field. Students between the ages of 10 and 14 are so very different from those used as a basis of the previous Policy Statement issued in 1989. Not only have the students changed, but so have family structures, communities, society as a whole, and educational expectations for future success. This new policy statement addresses these changes. The regulations that will follow will provide a blueprint for ensuring that

students in the middle are provided with the best program to meet their varied and unique needs. Will we be able to meet these new challenges? Most assuredly so, since in many places around the state, we already have been and it is the state that needs to catch up with the successes in the field!



At our annual conference in Syracuse this October, each participant will have the opportunity to hear from Dr. David Payton, Supervisor of Middle Level Education, and Mr. Mark Barth, another SED official working specifically with those in the middle. There will be an opportunity for you to provide your input on the regulations in whatever format they are in at that time. Please strongly consider joining us in Syracuse and making your voice heard.

On behalf of all of us on the Board of the New York State Middle School Association, welcome to a new school year, one that will be filled with new experiences for us all!

In 2000, the Board of Regents adopted *The Essential Elements of Standards-Focused Middle Level Schools and Programs*. Since that time, there has been a great deal of discussion on how a middle-level program should be delivered in 21st century schools. Dr. David Payton, Supervisor of Middle-Level Education for the State Education Department, began to organize working sessions for the Middle-Level Liaisons and the External Council on Middle Level Education to provide field input on what should be included in a new policy statement. After many drafts, with the help of BOCES and the State Education Department, extensive input was gathered from around the state last spring. In July, the following policy statement on middle-level education was approved by the Board of Regents. Regulations to support this new policy statement are being formulated as you read this document. Watch for opportunities for you to comment on these proposals as well.

The Board of Regents and the State Education Department is to be commended for their new policy that references *The Essential Elements* and provides the parameters for a successful middle-level program.

We welcome your comments.

## Supporting Young Adolescents: Regents Policy Statement on Middle-Level Education (July 2003)

### Introduction

Young adolescents from ages 10 to 14 are undergoing personal transformations – physical, intellectual, emotional, social and psychological. The Board of Regents believes that the time these students spend in the middle grades, 5 through 8, is critical to both their personal growth and development and their success in high school.

Based on a series of statewide discussions with many groups and a thorough review of the research on effective middle level education practices, the Regents and the State Education Department have identified seven essential elements of standards-focused middle-level schools and programs. This policy statement reflects these seven key factors.

The challenge to middle-level education is to make the change from childhood to adolescence and from the elementary grades to the high school a positive period of intellectual and personal development. For many students, this is a hopeful time of life. However, for some youngsters emerging adolescence is a stressful time. These personal difficulties may be exacerbated in cases where either the home or the community (including the school) in which the young person lives and learns offers limited opportunities for positive role models, employment, and a satisfying lifestyle.

Educators, parents, families, and communities must recognize that they need to work together to assist students in a changing society. Educators need to recognize and assume a shared responsibility not only for their students' intellectual and educational development, but also for their students' personal, social, emotional, and physical development. The entire school community must share responsibility for the success of all students, assuring high-quality instruction, course content, and support and other services in the middle-level grades, and promoting high expectations for all students, regardless of disability, limited English proficiency, religion, sex, color, race, or national origin.

The following seven essential elements must be in place in standards-focused schools with middle-level grades if young adolescents are to succeed academically and develop as individuals:

1. A philosophy and mission that reflect the intellectual and developmental needs and characteristics of young adolescents.
2. An educational program that is comprehensive, challenging, purposeful, integrated, relevant, and standards-based.
3. An organization and structure that support both academic excellence and personal development.
4. Classroom instruction appropriate to the needs and characteristics of young adolescents provided by skilled and knowledgeable teachers.
5. Strong educational leadership and a building administration that encourage, facilitate, and sustain involvement, participation, and partnerships.
6. A network of academic and personal support available for all students.
7. Professional learning for all staff that is ongoing, planned, purposeful, and collaboratively developed.

In a standards-focused middle-level school or program, the goals of academic achievement and personal development for each student are not in conflict or in competition. Rather, they are compatible, complementary, and mutually supportive. From a young adolescent's perspective, the essential elements of a successful standards-focused middle-level school or program must contain the following components.

### Philosophy, Mission, and Vision

**Every young adolescent deserves a school that values academic achievement and personal development and provides a supportive environment free from violence, bullying, harassment, and other negative behaviors.** Students in the middle grades are in a unique period of development, a period of rapid intellectual, physical, social, and emotional change. The philosophy, mission, and vision of a school with middle-level grades must reflect the dual purposes of middle-level education (academic achievement and personal development). They must also stress the positive development of the individual and affirm the school's responsibility to assist all students in making a successful transition from the elementary grades to high school and from childhood to adolescence.

### Educational Program

**Every young adolescent needs a challenging, standards-based course of study that is comprehensive, integrated, and relevant.** They need an educational program that is enhanced by genuine involvement of students, their parents, their families, and the greater school community. Further, they need an educational program that emphasizes and promotes the requisite academic knowledge and skills needed to succeed in school — both middle-level and high school — and in later life. The educational program should be fully aligned with the State's 28 learning standards and emphasize the natural connections and linkages among the standards. Middle grades instruction must build upon the foundational knowledge and skills of the elementary grades and, in doing so, prepare students for success in high school.

Literacy and numeracy are key to the educational program. English language arts — reading, writing, listening and speaking — and mathematics are emphasized across the subject areas with expectations for performance that are consistent across and within the disciplines and commonly understood by both

teachers and students. Strategies for reading are applied in all the content areas and writing experiences are provided in a variety of forms. Mathematics instruction builds on basic skills and emphasizes conceptual understanding and problem-solving skills. The educational program also promotes both an understanding and the use of the concepts of technology; fosters an understanding and an appreciation of the arts; teaches how to access, organize, and apply information using various media and data bases; helps students understand and apply positive health concepts and practices and participate in healthful physical activities; and develops skills to explore new subject areas.

The educational program also encourages students to pursue personal interests, engage in school and community activities (e.g., sports, clubs, etc.), explore potential futures and careers, and develop useful social, interpersonal, and life skills needed to live a full and productive life. It also offers opportunities for the development of personal responsibility and self-direction.

Up-to-date learning aids (e.g., textbooks, current adolescent literature, laboratory equipment, etc.), instructional materials, and instructional technology are used to support the educational program. Targeted and timely academic intervention services must be provided so that students do not fall behind in meeting the learning standards. These additional academic instruction and/or student support services that address barriers to learning are critical in the middle grades to ensure that all students achieve the State's learning standards and graduate from high school. Such services are particularly important to students with disabilities and those who are English language learners to ensure they are successful in the general academic program.

## Organization and Structure

**Young adolescents learn and develop best in a school that is organized and structured to promote both academic achievement and personal development.** Organizational effectiveness and school success are not contingent upon a particular grade or school configuration. What is critical is that a school is organized and structured to help young adolescents make the transition from the elementary to the high school grades, from childhood to adolescence.

The organization and structure should help make all students, staff, parents, and families feel secure, valued, and respected as significant contributors to the school community. Teachers must be provided with regular opportunities to interact and collaborate to ensure that instruction is consistent and inter-related across and within the subject areas. Scheduling flexibility is necessary to provide a comprehensive educational program, interdisciplinary curricula, targeted and timely academic intervention services, co-curricular and extra-curricular activities, and opportunities for students to engage in leadership and community service projects.

The organization and structure connect youngsters to adults and to other students in the school and community and provide opportunities for increasingly independent learning experiences and responsibilities within a safe and structured environment. Each student needs a caring adult advocate in the school who knows that student personally and well. The organization and structure provide time during the school day that is necessary to ensure opportunities for additional instruction and personal support are available for students who need extra help to meet the State's standards.

## Classroom Instruction

**Every young adolescent requires skilled and caring teachers who have a thorough understanding of their subject(s) and of the students whom they teach.** Young adolescents learn and

develop best when they are treated with respect, involved in their learning, engaged with challenging content that has meaning and connections for them, and receive assurances that they are capable, worthy people. Teachers need to recognize and understand the changes that are occurring within their students, design and deliver a challenging curriculum based on the State's learning standards, and accept responsibility for each student's learning and development. They need to have an extensive understanding of their subject matter and of different approaches to student learning. A variety of successful instructional techniques and processes that reflect best practices (e.g., differentiated instruction, cooperative learning, etc.) must be used and capitalize on the unique characteristics and individual needs of young adolescents.

Teachers must provide instruction that is purposeful, challenging, relevant, integrated, and standards-based and use classroom assessments that are useful indicators of individual student growth and performance to monitor each student's progress and to plan instruction. They ensure that performance expectations are consistent and interrelated across and within subject areas. Student data, both personal and achievement, are used to make curricular and instructional decisions and technology and other instructional resources support and enhance learning. Teachers use flexible grouping based upon pupil needs, ways of learning, and interests, and employ interdisciplinary approaches to help students integrate their studies and to fulfill their potential. Opportunities are created for students to develop social, interpersonal, and leadership skills in addition to academic proficiency.

Teachers consult with each other and with other school personnel about instructional, curricular, and other student-related issues. They also inform and involve parents in their children's education by helping them understand the instructional program, their children's progress, and how to help their children at home with schoolwork, school decisions, and successful development through early adolescence.

## Educational Leadership

**Every young adolescent should be educated in schools that have knowledgeable, effective, and caring leaders.** Students learn and develop best when the adults in the school community have high expectations for students and staff, share and support a common vision, and work together to achieve common purposes. The personnel in effective schools with middle-level grades share leadership responsibilities. For the school to prosper, those in positions of leadership must know and understand the needs and developmental characteristics of young adolescents and the essential elements of a standards-focused, high-performing school with middle-level grades. They must articulate and maintain high standards for classroom instruction and student performance and support and encourage teachers to take risks, explore, question, and try new instructional approaches. They must also ensure and facilitate inter-school cooperation, collaboration, and communication with feeder elementary schools and receiving high schools.

Educational leaders promote school/community partnerships and involve parents and other members of the community in school activities and initiatives that benefit students. They create, promote, and sustain a school culture and climate of mutual support and collective responsibility for the educational and personal development of every young adolescent. They also ensure students are provided with opportunities to assume significant and meaningful leadership roles in the school.

## Student Academic and Personal Support

**Every young adolescent needs access to a system that supports both academic achievement and personal development.** Caring adults are a significant positive influence for young adolescents. To

ensure a comprehensive network of academic and personal support is available for students and their families, schools with middle-level grades must maintain two-way communication with parents and families and ensure that all students and their families have access to counseling and guidance services to make educational, career, and life choices. Trained professionals (including school counselors who know and understand the needs, characteristics, and behaviors of young adolescents), special prevention and intervention programs, and community resources must be available to support those who require additional services to cope with the changes of early adolescence and/or the academic demands of middle-level education, especially students with disabilities and those who are English language learners. Students also need to be provided with opportunities to have access to adult mentors and positive role models. Parents, families, and community groups must be informed of the essential role they play in ensuring students attend school and access available services, expanding and enhancing venues for significant learning, promoting youth development, and supporting positive school change.

## Professional Learning

**Every young adolescent deserves an educational setting that values continuous improvement and ongoing professional learning.** Young adolescents need highly qualified, well-trained, knowledgeable, caring teachers, administrators, and other school staff if they are to succeed. Schools with middle-level grades need to be professional learning communities where adults in the school engage in programs of growth and development that are ongoing, planned, purposeful, and collaboratively developed. At the core of professional growth should be specific subject area expertise, a knowledge and understanding of the linkages among the 28 learning standards, research-based instructional practices that have proven successful in raising student achievement and, at the practical level, the developmental characteristics of young adolescents. School staff must understand, not only theoretically but also operationally, how to implement the essential elements of a standards-focused, high-performing school with middle-level grades.

## Summary

The University of the State of New York and all of its resources are unified in the mission to raise the knowledge, skill, and opportunity of all people in the State. The Board of Regents believes that the middle-level grades, grades 5 through 8, are a vital link in the education of youth, a critical period of individual growth and development, and a key to success in high school. A high performing, standards-focused school with middle-level grades addresses both academic performance and personal development. It ensures that young adolescents are prepared and ready to make a successful transition to high school, academically and personally. Creating effective schools with middle-level grades will necessitate systemic change and require a philosophy and mission committed to developing the whole child, a challenging and rigorous educational program, a supportive organization and structure, skilled and knowledgeable teachers who use effective instructional practices, strong leadership, a network of support appropriate to the needs and characteristics of young adolescents, ongoing professional learning, and a strong will to succeed.

# Lea's Lessons

Lea Macdonald, Region VI Co-Director



## A Place for All: Building the Differentiated Classroom

*If students aren't learning from the way we teach, then we need to teach them in the way that they learn.*

I have attended and presented at many conferences during the last year where I have been asked to address the topic of differentiated instruction. This fall my school district, like many others across the region and state, cited differentiated instruction as the number one goal for the school year 2003-2004. Why is this concept such an important issue in education today and what can we as educators do to better understand and implement this aspect of “best practice” at the middle level? How can teachers meet the needs of the diverse learners in their classrooms?

Differentiated instruction is simply a way of thinking about teaching and learning. It puts the student in the center of all that we do in the classroom. It means changing the pace, level, or kind of instruction we provide in response to individual learner's needs. In this introductory article on differentiated instruction, I hope to focus on the key principles and goals and lay the foundation for future articles on how to create and maintain a differentiated classroom.

If we look at the developmental diversity in a middle-level classroom, it becomes clear how difficult a task it is to match curriculum to a student's level of understanding. In addition to different learning styles, readiness levels, and cognitive abilities, socioeconomic factors and cultural backgrounds must be taken into account. Over the past few years efforts to de-

crease tracking and ability grouping as well as the inclusion of special needs children into a regular classroom has increased the diversity even further. In order for young adolescents to experience success, schools need to begin where learners are. According to *Turning Points 2000* (Jackson & Davis, 2000), “classes should include students of diverse needs, achievement levels, interests and learning styles, and instruction should be differentiated to take advantage of the diversity, not ignore it.”

Our students enter the doors of the middle school with boundless energy and a great enthusiasm for learning; however, these same students often leave our middle schools feeling apprehensive and dismayed as they enter the high school. Middle schools that aspire to be successful in educating young adolescents must attend to their varying needs, interests, and readiness levels.

To begin with, classrooms today are often characterized by a “one size fits all” method of instruction. Teachers tend to rely on this method where every student is expected to read the same textbook, do the same activity, work at the same pace, do the same homework, and take the same test. The result is frustration on the part of the students and the teachers. There are those students who find the work to be unchallenging and therefore boring, others who find the work too difficult and give up, and those whose learning styles or intelligences are not addressed and subsequently lose interest in school. Teachers feel frustrated in their efforts to reach every learner.

Many teachers, through trial and error, have found that they can genuinely challenge and

engage their students by differentiating instruction. According to Carol Ann Tomlinson, Associate Professor at the University of Virginia, this type of classroom is characterized by these principles:

- Students and teachers accept and respect one another's differences.
- The teacher provides challenging instruction motivating students to work at the highest possible level.
- It involves meaningful learning that focuses on essential understandings.
- The teacher is a facilitator. The aim is to help students become self-reliant learners.
- Flexible grouping is evident.
- The teacher uses a variety of instructional strategies to connect instruction to student needs.
- Assessment is an ongoing diagnostic tool that guides instruction and students are assessed in multiple ways.
- Students are often given choices about topics they wish to study or ways they want to demonstrate what they have learned.

### What Do We Differentiate?

Differentiated instruction usually involves modifications in one or more of the following areas: content, process, and product. First, you can differentiate content (a) when you pre-assess students' skills and knowledge, then match learners with appropriate activities according to readiness; (b) when you give students choices about topics to explore in greater depth; and (c) when you provide students with basic and advanced resources that match their current levels of understanding. The second area is process, the "how" of teaching. In a differentiated classroom the way you teach reflects the learning styles and preferences of your students. For example, having decided to group students based on learning styles, you assign students to groups of visual, kinesthetic, and auditory learners. The visual learners draw pictures comparing two elements in a story. The auditory

learners discuss the elements of the story and prepare an oral presentation. The kinesthetic learners create a 2-minute reenactment that represents the similarities of the story. The final area that can be differentiated is the product, the end result of learning. Products are differentiated when you plan units that reflect many ways to demonstrate what has been learned and when you provide a menu of project ideas for students to choose from. During the unit on the American Revolution, students chose project ideas from a matrix of 25 possible ideas. My classroom was full of maps, dioramas, poems, illustrations, cookbooks, PowerPoint presentations, video documentaries, and creative stories. Parents commented on the diversity of quality projects at our "Revolutionary Fair." Students had a choice about their topics and the quality of the finished products clearly showed that students put forth their best effort.

### Why Do We Differentiate?

Middle schools are gateways to the future for children who enter them. Equality of opportunity is the foundation of our society and it is our responsibility as educators to make each classroom a "place for all" learners. There is evidence based on many research studies that tracking struggling learners impairs their chances for positive learning experiences. We also have evidence that advanced learners become unmotivated to learn as the pace, curriculum, and activities are below their capabilities. The "one size fits all" classrooms inevitably fail to meet the needs of all learners. Differentiated classrooms are a promising alternative to the traditional classrooms of the past.

In the next installment of *Lea's Lessons*, I will talk specifically about *Differentiation in Action*, sharing assessment and instructional strategies that work across the content areas. I welcome your feedback and questions. Please email me at [macdonald@nysmsa.org](mailto:macdonald@nysmsa.org).

# The Emergence of a Standards-Focused, Middle-Level Learning Community

Jeff Craig, Region I Director



I am absolutely convinced that the “secret” to school improvement is the development of a Learning Community. In our case, a standards-focused, middle level learning community is what Arcadia Middle School has become. We have a lot of evidence of the success of our learning community, too (which will be shared during the course of this article). If you use the construct of a professional learning community in your school, you’ll have a scaffold for meeting the Learning Standards and implementing the Essential Elements. Establishing a Professional Learning Community helps guide your school improvement efforts without falling prey to the flavor of the month - initiative of the year mentality. Consider:

The most promising strategy for sustained, substantive school improvement is building the capacity of school personnel to function as a professional learning community. The path to change in the classroom lies within and through professional learning communities (McLaughlin, 1994).

## Begin with the End in Mind

There is more to being a standards-focused middle school than being aligned to the NYS Learning Standards. The school itself should have learning standards. Arcadia Middle School has two learning standards for our learning community (with an additional learning standard for teacher induction). Applying the backward design approach to school-wide learning standards, here are our learning standards:

- Staff new to Arcadia Middle School know how to act as a learning community (collaboration, mutual respect, support, consistent expectations).

- Staff will act as a learning community (collaboration, mutual respect, support).
- Everyone will act in a positive, respectful, supportive manner in every interaction (Mutual respect, consistent expectations, safety).

The learning standards for our school come from our school vision. We happen to have five components to our vision of becoming a learning community. This vision was developed through a series of staff meetings (with really good food). The specific aspects of our vision that each standard addresses are indicated parenthetically after each standard.

Quite simply, this is where we want our school to go. At a glance, it might seem like any reference to student learning is absent from our learning standards. Certainly, student learning is the overarching standard for our school and district. As a matter of fact, our mission statement is very simple and powerful: Student Learning is the Goal. Additionally, the Learning Standards for our students have been well articulated through the NYS Learning Standards documents, content guides, and local curricula. The learning standards mentioned here for us cover what is missing from the learning standards for our students.

Another pre-determined set of learning standards for our school can be found in the *Essential Elements of Standards Focused Middle Level Schools and Programs* (NYSED, 1998). The seven elements from that document are also our ends, with regard to the organization of our school and the programs that occur within. Our school’s learning standards tell us how we are to act while working toward the Learning Standards and Essential Elements.

These are, you might say, the learning standards for the adult part of our school community. I think it is absolutely impossible to meet the expectations for schools today without working as a professional learning community. Professional collaboration is the only way we can get it all done.

## Evidence

Once our learning standards were delineated, we wondered what the evidence might be that would tell us whether or not we are reaching these standards. Again, this is an application of Backward Design (Wiggins and McTighe, 1999). We identified the evidence that would accompany each of our standards. For example:

Standard: Staff will act as a learning community (collaboration, mutual respect, supportive).

Evidence:

- Collaboratively developed, delivered, and assessed unit plans
- Study (and book) group participation
- Peer observations occur (administration coverage)
- Peer review of standards-based units and other work
- Homework: Weekly article to read
- Action Research
- Increased Monday Teas (these are informal, single topic discussion opportunities)
- Learning Team Work (see separate list of actions)
- School Improvement Plans regularly used and adjusted
- Articles for staff reading are suggested by teachers

The degree to which the items in the above list are evident gives us information about how we are progressing toward the learning standard. As you can see, some of the evidence would be summative (unit plans, for example) and some of the evidence is formative (Monday Teas, for example, occur throughout the year). Some of the evidence that is listed above references some

of the actions we will take during the year. Those items become evidence when they are observed as occurring.

## Actions

All of the discussion of our learning standards, and the evidence that they are being fulfilled, is well and good. You might be wondering, however, how we're achieving our standards (and therefore, our vision). I'll explain that next. Once more, though, I want to express how important it is that you know where you want to go before you start the journey. Michael Fullan (NSDC address, 2002) used the metaphor of moving a boulder that I think can help here.

If you think of a boulder representing the status quo, it is obviously a formidable task to move it. Consider that boulder once you get it in motion; once a boulder is rolling it is awfully tough to change its course! Therefore, before you start to move the boulder, make sure you get it rolling in the right direction. Figure out where you want your boulder (school) to go, and then apply the various pressures that will initiate motion. Again, begin with the end in mind (Covey, 1994).

So, our standards and evidence told us where we wanted our boulder to roll. The trick was then to get moving. Obviously, this is a multi-year process. For some time, I have been formally and informally advocating the qualities of professional learning communities. I've also encouraged collaboration. I've always modeled good instructional strategies in all staff meetings and professional development opportunities. I've always tried to walk the talk and model these aspects. So, in some ways, I'd been pushing, pulling, and tugging the boulder. In retrospect, I think the boulder was rocking back and forth a little bit. It almost took off several times, but the inertia of the status quo remained considerable.

All the while, my own vision was emerging and I was continually learning more and more

about how to manage a large system such as a school of 1000 students and a staff greater than 100. Also, each year, personnel changes were made. Each time a teacher retired or transferred, I looked for people who shared my vision. I looked for people with energy and enthusiasm, people who wanted to collaborate with others and who knew the task before us was going to require a lot of hard work. Each year, the culture of the building became more and more collaborative and professional. The boulder was rocking.

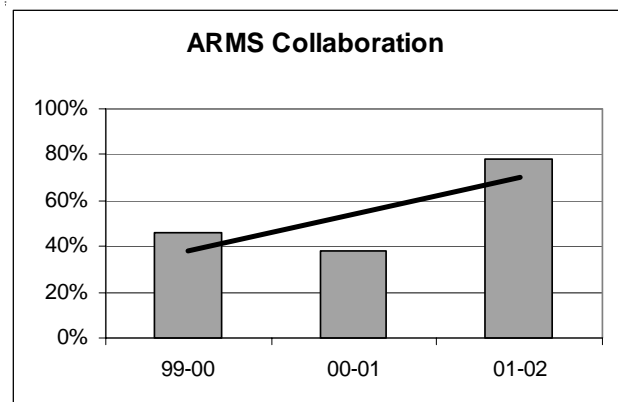
This year, however, we endeavored to do more than just push and tug when we could. Quite simply, we have aligned just about everything we do to get us closer to our vision of a learning community. We constructed a map of all our building activities to ensure that everything is aligned to our learning standards. If you look at a slice of our “Professional Learning Map” (page 14) you can see how it resembles a curriculum map for a school. Simply, we’ve applied some of the principles of curriculum mapping to our school improvement efforts. To begin with, we identified all the strands of school improvement in our school community:

- Essential Questions
- ARMS Community Meetings (All staff)
- Weekly Articles
- Learning Teams
- New Teacher Induction
- Standards Area Meetings
- Monday Teas
- Department of Curriculum Instruction Activities
- Standards Based Planning Cadre Actions
- ARMS Administrative Focus

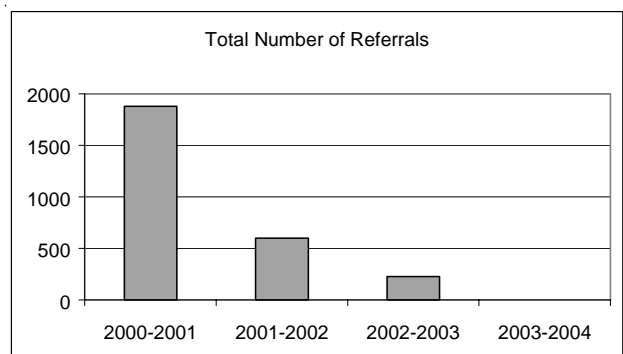
Then, we looked at the year as a whole, all the while making sure we worked *backward*. Backward Design is a cornerstone of our approach to planning for instruction. The same thing must hold true for all planning. The NYS Learning Standards, the Essential Elements, and our school standards were the context for the map we constructed. We kept asking ourselves:

*Where do we want our school community to go? How will we know if we get there? How will we get there?* These questions, in order, are the questions we ask ourselves all the time, in every situation we face.

And so, as we work through the plans, we are making progress toward those learning standards. As we move forward, the most remarkable thing is happening. The whole culture and climate of the building is becoming that of a professional learning community. Morale is ever increasing. We are having fun at work. The collaboration is skyrocketing, as indicated in the graph below that shows the percent of staff reporting meaningful collaboration is occurring:



As the culture and climate of the building changes for adults, it also changes for students. The emergence of a professional learning community, juxtaposed with a fresh approach to student conduct, resulted in this change in the number of referrals to the student center:



As you can see in both charts, the improvement is remarkable. At the same time, and perhaps most important, student achievement is on the rise. The trend lines on our NYS Intermediate Level tests all indicate that we are moving in the right direction. So, the evidence is there for what we're doing.

Of course, the value of professional learning communities is evident in a lot of professional

literature. It could be argued that it is the only common element of all school improvement success stories. When working in a professional learning community, everything just feels a little better. A positive and professional experience is contagious and contributes to an excitement and wonder as we work to make our school a professional learning community, where *Student and Adult Learning is the Goal*.

2002-2003 Professional Learning Map: Arcadia Middle School								
	Essential Question	ARMS Community Meetings (All staff)	Weekly Articles	Learning Teams	New Teacher Induction	Standards Area Meetings	Monday Teas	Department Curriculum Instruction Activities
<b>S e p t e m b e r</b>	What does a learning community look like and act like?	3 <sup>rd</sup> : Student conduct 4 <sup>th</sup> : Learning Teams 17 <sup>th</sup> : Learning Teams diagnostic assessment	6 <sup>th</sup> : The School as a Professional Learning Community 13 <sup>th</sup> : Attributes of Professional Learning Communities 20 <sup>th</sup> : Teamwork 27 <sup>th</sup> : More on Learning Communities	Diagnosis of current reality and prioritization	August 22 <sup>nd</sup> : Building induction September 5 <sup>th</sup> : First day gift September 11 <sup>th</sup> : Collaboration with parents	10 <sup>th</sup> : In addition to opening the year stuff, brainstorm possibilities of the Learning Teams	None scheduled	Using data from last year to inform instructional decisions this year.
<b>O c t o b e r</b>	Is standards-based planning a better way to plan?	1 <sup>st</sup> : An Introductory level peer review of last year's units 15 <sup>th</sup> : Peer review intro cont'd.; Learning Team work time 29 <sup>th</sup> : Middle School Conference Day with Jay McTighe	4 <sup>th</sup> : FISH: Our Workplace 11 <sup>th</sup> : Are the Best Curricular Designs Backward? 18 <sup>th</sup> : Indicators of Teaching for Understanding 25 <sup>th</sup> : Top 10 Questions I Ask Myself While Planning	Prioritization based on diagnosis; starting on priorities.	2 <sup>nd</sup> : Teachers First — Centrally based topic 16 <sup>th</sup> : Teachers Two — Student success 21 <sup>st</sup> -25 <sup>th</sup> : Collaboration Week (co-obs, co-teach, peer-obs, etc.)	Natural opportunities to Plan Backward	None scheduled	11 <sup>th</sup> : Superintendent's Conference Day More on using data to inform classroom decisions. And, how to include this in the School Improvement Plan.

Jeff Craig  
Arcadia Middle School  
130 Island Cottage Road  
Rochester, New York 14612

# Consultant Teaching: Ensuring Success for Students and Staff

Thomas J. Phillips, Region IV Director



Consultant Teaching is a concept that is not new to the field of education. Many schools across the country implemented this model as an answer to the regulatory need to reduce or eliminate self-contained special education classes. The problem with this approach is that, while the goal to change the delivery of special education services has been achieved, the effectiveness of the Consultant Teaching model has been compromised. Consultant Teaching requires many elements to be in place if student needs are to be met. It is an instructional model that focuses on collaboration between the classroom teacher and the special educator. Administrators must organize and plan implementation of the Consultant Teaching model around the key elements of effective co-teaching. Educators must realize that Consultant Teaching is an instructional strategy that can be effective in meeting the needs of special education students in the regular education setting. Consultant Teaching is not a means of reducing or eliminating self-contained special education classes.

So what are the elements of an effective Consultant Teaching model? While not all-inclusive, there are critical elements that must be in place to ensure successful implementation. First, there must be a commitment to on-going professional development for staff. The professional development program must focus on curriculum modification, individual student assessment, instructional planning, and a review of strategies of co-teaching implementation in the classroom. Teachers must understand the requirements of effective co-teaching before they are asked to implement this concept in their classroom. Expectations must be clearly defined

by the school administration and teachers must be a critical part of the planning process. Professional development must be collaboratively planned and focus on the identified needs of the staff and students which they will be responsible for teaching.

Another critical element of co-teaching implementation is common preparation time for collaborative planning between the classroom teachers and the special educator. Time must be identified in the daily schedule for teachers to discuss, assess, and plan instruction based on the needs of their students. This time can be part of the team planning time as long as the co-teacher is assigned to an identified team. This common preparation time must foster a shared responsibility for instruction and assessment for both student work and effectiveness of the co-taught lesson. The instructional staff must be comfortable in the role of “Reflective Practitioner.” All teachers who are members of the team must be part of the Consultant Teaching process.

Curriculum integration is critical to ensuring success within the Consultant Teaching model. Through curriculum integration, learning becomes less segmented in that instructional support is related to classroom instruction. Skill development becomes a focus of instruction rather than a bi-product of content-focused curriculum. Through curriculum integration, students and teachers establish a sense of relevance to instruction and learning. Student assessment is integrated across the curriculum in an effort to measure skill development rather than individual subject-centered, content-based assessment. Through the Consultant Teaching model curriculum integration becomes the

impetus for collaboration between teachers and provides a focus for skill development as part of the instructional process.

While Consultant Teaching is not new to the field of education, the implementation has been inconsistent. Teachers, administrators and parents must work together to ensure successful implementation of the Consultant Teaching model. Critical elements needed to ensure effective implementation include on-going professional development, common planning time, and curriculum integration. Teachers must work collaboratively with school administration in identifying the needs of the students and staff as related to professional development planning. Daily common planning time must be an inclusive element within the school's master schedule. Finally curriculum integration must be a focus of the instructional practice within entire school. While not easy, once the commitment to these elements has been made the Consultant Teaching model can and will serve as a vehicle to increase student achievement school-wide.

## Co-Teaching

### Co-Teaching Benefits

- Responsibility and accountability is shared between professionals.
- Students benefit from the different teaching styles of the two teachers.
- Lost instructional time is minimized because students are not moving between regular classrooms and special education classrooms.
- Learning is less fragmented because instructional support is related to classroom content.
- Special educator is seen as instructional modification specialist rather than a content expert for all subject areas.

### Co-Teaching Activities

- Joint planning
- Shared responsibility for instruction

- Shared responsibility for evaluating student performance
- Joint review and evaluation of co-taught lessons and effectiveness of instruction.
- Sharing honest feedback with each other.

**Co-Teaching Issues** (which need to be addressed and agreed upon)

- Time
  1. Where do we find it?
  2. How will we use our time together?
- Instruction
  1. What will we teach?
  2. What are our preferred teaching styles?
  3. How will we share instruction?
  4. How will we evaluate effectiveness of our instruction?
- Student Behavior
  1. If we could each only have 3 class rules, what would those be?
  2. How will we be consistent in dealing with behavior?
  3. What will our plans be for proactively dealing with behavior?
- Communication
  1. Who will communicate with parents?
  2. Who will communicate with students?
  3. How will we deal with our communication needs?
- Evaluation
  1. How will we assess student work?
  2. Who will assess student work?
  3. How will we monitor ongoing student progress?
- Logistics
  1. How do we explain co-teaching to students?
  2. How do we explain co-teaching to parents?
  3. How will the classroom be arranged?
  4. How will teacher space be shared?

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Thomas J. Phillips  
South Seneca Middle School  
7263 Main Street  
Ovid, New York 14521

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Syracuse, New York  
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- Banquet with Keynote Speaker

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- Trade Exhibit
- Workshops
- General Assembly
- Featured Presentations

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- Complimentary Continental Breeakfast
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## Raising Standards, Reducing Anxiety: Addressing the Social and Emotional Needs of Middle School Students

Judith Dodge

Students have distinctive differences at every age level, but nowhere are these differences more apparent than in the middle school student. The teacher's challenge is to motivate both the struggling and advanced learners, while, at the same time, making sure that the average learner is equally engaged in quality work. This is no easy task. How is it possible for one teacher to recognize and enhance the individual talents of all his/her students while preparing students for the rigors of the new standards and assessments?

The current movement to address the needs of our diverse student population through "differentiation of instruction" holds great promise. In a differentiated classroom, students' social and emotional needs are met by providing: "choice" of assignments, multiple intelligence-based activities, flexible groups, a variety of teaching methods, and "tiered" assignments based on student "readiness."

Giving students a choice of assignment, a choice of homework, a choice of class work activity or project, sparks improved motivation. Suddenly, the student feels empowered; there is greater ownership and, certainly, greater interest in completing the assignment. The "choice" could include outlining, drawing posters with captions of key ideas, creating an annotated timeline, presenting a lesson on the overhead, or making up test questions. "Choice" could be offered once a week or every day.

Providing options for learning experiences, performance tasks, and final products based on multiple intelligences and learning styles results in greater student enthusiasm and an increase in integration of the new knowledge. Whereas teachers used to grade 30 (or 130!) written

reports on the same topic, they now accept multiple "Show-What-You-Know" products that allow students to explore, debate, experience, design, and experiment in new ways to demonstrate deep understanding of a topic.

Using "flexible groups" allows instruction to become more targeted and productive. Students who need a brief review can be pulled aside while others are engaged in individual tasks. A class that is too large can be split in half and the teacher can address half of his students, while the other half are reading or writing. The groups can then be switched. To build a sense of community and cooperation, the teacher can form small groups and teach students how to work together and be accountable for their own learning. "Learning together as a member of a small learning team is much more needs-satisfying, especially to the needs for power and belonging, than learning individually," suggests William Glasser (1990). Research has shown that student motivation increases when these needs are being met.

When a teacher uses "instructional intelligence" (Forsten, Grant & Hollas, 2002), she acquires a broad repertoire of teaching strategies and chooses when to use them appropriately. While she might be most comfortable lecturing, she knows that after briefly introducing a topic, setting the context, providing personal anecdotes, and/or "frontloading" some information (Beuhl, 1995), she must quickly switch to other methodologies. Establishing set "study partners" for daily interaction and employing instructional strategies such as Jigsaw activities, Task Rotations, Learning Centers, Socratic Seminars, Literature Circles, etc., puts the responsibility of learning where it belongs—on the student. By

using “instructional intelligence,” the teacher reaches out to different types of learners.

Finally, when “tiering” a lesson, the teacher chooses one concept and creates three pathways to understanding: one for the struggling learner, one for the on-grade level learner, and one for the advanced learner. Each learning activity varies in its level of complexity, abstractness, and open-endedness (Tomlinson, 1999). Too often we modify lessons only for our struggling learners, but ignore those few students who already understand the concept and should be challenged further. A “tiered” lesson addresses multiple levels of readiness and satisfies all students’ emotional needs to feel safe, yet challenged, at appropriate levels. Struggling learners will receive scaffolding in the form of provided word banks, readings on their level, manipulatives, out-of-sequence sentence strips, color-coded or highlighted information, teacher assistance, etc. On-grade level learners work on a task applying the concept with minimal scaffolding and minimal teacher assistance. Advanced learners use the concept independently and create something original, engage in more advanced research, compare the concept over time periods and across cultures, or work on multi-step tasks.

Changing from a “traditional classroom” teacher to a “differentiated classroom” teacher is not easy; it requires a shift in philosophy. No longer can the teacher teach to the “middle,” hoping that all students will learn. According to Dr. Mel Levine, “To treat everyone the same is to treat them unequally” (Levine, 2002). Today’s teachers must grow in their new role as facilitators in a “student-centered” classroom where students are *actively* engaged through a variety of activities, methodologies and groupings that respect individual differences.

In this climate of assessment-driven instruction, it is ever more important to create an environment which reduces anxiety so that all students can do their best. By empowering students through choice, recognizing and adapt-

ing for their differences, and challenging them at appropriate levels, teachers cultivate a supportive environment that nourishes the social and emotional needs of students and embraces all types of learners.

The irony of raising standards is this: As we lessen the “skill and drill” test-prep mentality, and we replace it with more creative standards-based instruction, we ultimately prepare our students to reach greater heights on the state assessments. Differentiated instruction, with its focus on respect for individual learners, is an appropriate response to helping each learner reach his/her fullest potential. ©2003 Judith Dodge

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Judy Dodge  
Educational Consultant & Author  
judydodge@judydodge.com

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## Relationships in the Middle School: Rethinking Advisory

Nancy Doda, Ph.D.

### What went wrong?

In the past 35 years of middle school reform, the concept often labeled Advisory has had a mixed and messy history. While there are certainly spectacular stories of success—stories of teachers, administrators and students who found ways of transforming ordinary schools into extraordinarily caring and responsive learning communities—there are many more middle schools where Advisory was never fully understood, embraced, or actualized. In spite of its intent to make middle schools more attentive to students' emotional, intellectual, social, and personal needs, to build more compassionate and caring school cultures, Advisory was all too often deflated from this gigantic notion about reaching young people into a large notebook of affective exercises reticent advisors were supposed to do to kids. In other places, wavering commitment was assuaged by offering Advisory only to the youngest members of the middle school suggesting that such a soft-hearted program was only needed by learners when they are young. Likewise, in a similar attempt to make the whole affective thing more palatable to already over-taxed teachers, some middle schools just had an extended Homeroom of ten minutes which proved to be hardly enough time to do anything significant. In yet other schools, Advisory lost its momentum as district curriculum demands escalated, eventually overriding the other side of the report card.

Today, there is some question about what matters most on the political education agenda but it does not appear to be Advisory or any initiative on relationships or affiliation. The *No Child Left Behind* legislation in the United States is focused so fervently on raising student

achievement (e.g., test scores) and accelerating school academic performance and productivity, energies devoted to relationships, personal development, citizenship, service, community, ethics, compassion, are competing in a less-than-encouraging milieu. Ironically, in spite of recent tragic national and international events involving escalating world violence, conversations in today's middle schools are more inclined to center on raising standards of achievement rather than raising standards of civility or community.

But is Advisory doomed? Without question, unsuccessful Advisory efforts, coupled with the current education reform thrust, have the potential to jeopardize the future of the Advisory concept for our next generation of young people. Already, some middle schools have dismissed Advisory as a middle school thing of the past. But I hardly think Advisory is defunct. In fact, I have every reason to believe that it may very well be reemerging as the number one consideration for millennium middle schools.

Life in our modern world is not growing less stressful, less toxic, less painful. In fact, there is evidence to suggest that with each passing year our young people face increasing threats to their emotional, psychological, and social welfare and development. Finding meaning, finding love, finding hope, finding friends, finding worth, are increasingly more complex undertakings for all of us, especially our tentative young adolescents.

These social demands, coupled with the perils of puberty, are frequently referenced as a rationale for advisory — and rightfully so. Yet if we do not expand our thinking about Advisory

to embrace enhanced student learning, we are not only missing one pressing rationale, we are also failing our students in a most profound way. Every year in middle schools, kids fall through the cracks, not only socially but also intellectually. They do so not only because they are affectively vulnerable, but also because they lose the wonder and passion for learning they may have possessed as younger school attendees.

Warm and caring middle schools can enhance student learning, but warmth and affection cannot compete with the damage done to student learning when curriculum and instruction drive students away. If students cannot find themselves in the curriculum, if what they are learning cannot be connected with the world in which they live, if classroom life is characterized by textbook work, little student voice or choice in planning and conducting their learning, a majority of time in class working alone on paper and pencil tasks, then no amount of Advisory alone will transform the quality of the school experience for our young people.

As long as we separate affect and cognition, Advisory will be tentative and can be easily dismissed as a nonessential. If we embrace Advisory, however, as a powerful opportunity to enhance our efforts to reach and teach our young people, then affect and achievement become codependent and no middle schools should be without it.

### What to Do?

In some ways, my advice is rather simple. Advisory, or whatever we choose to call it (i.e.; Home base, Prime Time, Morning Meetings, etc.), is our commitment to creating caring schools—schools dedicated to building commu-

nity where our children are actively respected, valued, taken seriously, understood; where they can learn to care about each other, develop compassion, participate in a model democratic, humane, community; where they can be encouraged, coached, supported; and where student voice can be at the forefront of curriculum.

When we consider how much we actually know about the relationship between caring schools and student achievement, if nothing else, all secondary schools should take very seriously the need to raise standards of care, affiliation, and community. This advice is only a place of beginning. What must be determined by each school is exactly how this caring will be cultivated and sustained over time, with many different young people and delivered by many different teachers.

While there are no panaceas or magic formulas, our middle school history offers much wisdom. What have we learned?

1. Teaming and Advisory work synergistically. When teaching teams discuss students, conference with kids, mentor students, help students assess themselves, ask students to do reflective journaling, conference with students one-on-one, plan team constitutions, they are in every way conducting activities that constitute Advisory. Furthermore, when teams build curriculum from their students' questions and concerns, plan thematic units around the students' interests and needs, they are engaging in some of the most responsive affective work middle school teachers can do. According to James Beane, "...when the kids come first," advisory is at work.
2. While it is not always imperative to have a block of time set aside in the daily schedule

## Warm and caring middle schools can enhance student learning...

for Advisory, more often than not, if it's not in the day, it's forgotten or neglected. The exception is usually found in progressive two-teacher teams, whose vision of curriculum and time center so squarely on a small shared group of kids. They find ways to build it in. In most cases, however, the schedule may very well be destiny when it comes to protecting the Advisory thrust in middle schools that still have one foot stuck in the junior high structure and culture. Daily gatherings (e.g., 25 minutes) during which students have the chance to be heard, to share ideas and thoughts in a democratic community setting, to process new learning, to practice being a decent community member, to learn about their peers, to solve problems that arise, are essential to success.

3. Many schools flounder with Advisory because the faculty and administration are unclear about its goals and purposes. In desperation, some middle schools borrow and attempt to transplant another school's program, only to find that they really need to identify and embrace their own Advisory aspirations for their kids and their school. Knowing where you are headed is critical to any initiative, especially one that can be viewed with confusion or even suspicion. Start with the end in mind, as Stephen Covey once postulated (Covey, 1989). A successful reemergence of Advisory will demand clearer articulation of just what we can hope to achieve with such an initiative, what results we're after, and how we will know Advisory-like efforts are making a difference. In some schools, data collection on how the school feels to students can provide useful leverage to justify a move in this direction.
4. The Advisory concept has long been advocated as a means to establishing close ties between teachers and students. For years, the middle school community has argued that every middle school child ought to have at least one adult to know him or her well and to be an active adult support. Establishing strong ties is key to Advisory, and yet these ties ought not be artificial or apart from teaching and learning. I have come to believe that teachers are best equipped to be advocates for the students they actually teach. Consequently, when forming actual cohort groups for Advisory, I recommend organizing groups within a team, and having Exploratory staff and specialists co-advise side by side with core teachers. This not only bridges the gap between exploratory and core by bringing them into a co-teaching situation, it allows students to see the faculty as connected in caring. Moreover, to advise someone is to come to know them well as whole people. I believe that great teaching emerges out of a deep knowledge of students as persons and as learners. Advisory for me has always meant knowing my students well enough to make the curriculum work for them, not for me. As a classroom teacher, I would want to add the Advisory dimension to my relationship with those I teach. In that way, I can strengthen and deepen those relationships and hence deepen students' learning. When I initiated dialogue journals with my Advisory students, I did so because I wondered what excited kids, what made them frustrated, what they wondered about, or what confused them. In reading their weekly journal entries, I became better able to plan lessons with them and for them. Moreover, I was able to know when I was losing someone along the way.
5. While middle schools vary in the actual number of minutes and/or days devoted to a scheduled Advisory time, most confess that planning for inviting and helpful activities is the common challenge shared by all. Prepared materials and resources are needed and helpful, yet feedback from many students suggests that they find only certain kinds of Advisory activities authentic and meaningful. It has been my repeated discov-

ery that students respond to:

- Talking about important stuff (e.g.; reflecting on common learning or shared experiences)
- Learning more about themselves and each other
- Making decisions which shape or impact their learning experiences, as members of the same team or learning community
- Participating in service projects
- Discussing important community and world events
- Deliberating on real moral dilemmas
- Interactive structures, processes and games

None of these works magic, but they engage more students than do activities that often attempt to probe the psyches of young adolescents or employ deadly paper-and-pencil worksheets. Instead, in planning for success in Advisory:

- Use Advisory as a chance to make curriculum more personal and meaningful
  - Use Advisory to know students as people and learners
  - Use Advisory as a chance to build community between children
  - Use Advisory to coach, mentor, and support
  - Use Advisory to build alliances with the student, staff, and families
6. Advisors often suffer from the same burden that taxes middle school teachers in general—that of assuming too much authority, and working far too hard, only to find students are less invested in the end. This disappointing reality is all too characteristic of middle level teaching. Young adolescents want desperately to have some power over their lives in and out of school. The best Advisors embrace their role as the “guide by the side,” and strive to be energetic and focused facilitators who set kids on a journey and help them make the most of the trip. With Advisory, like good teaching, this means sharing power and participation with

students. It often means letting go of perfection, or some vision of it at least. It may also mean letting students see you as a learner and as a teacher and creating opportunities for them to be both as well.

7. Perhaps the most profound shift that needs to be made in fashioning successful Advisory initiatives is the shift in attention from teacher-student relationships to student-to-student relationships and the quality of student community life. Pervasive bullying cliques, harsh and snide student criticism, and general disrespectful peer relations, are all prime targets for a powerful Advisory component. Emotional harm occurs to young adolescents’ self-esteem and sense of psychological safety when they encounter unkind peer treatment. Feeling safe in school is a prerequisite for learning and achievement.

As schools and advisors plan for the nature of advisory activities, there should be a hefty dose of time devoted to building tolerant, caring, and respectful peer relationships. Keep in mind that you cannot talk kids into kindness. Kind and caring attitudes are cultivated over time as young people are engaged face to face in various team-building endeavors. While some community building may involve typical getting-to-know-you activities and group process work, it is also important to recognize that students learn to know and appreciate their differences when they are required to pool resources to solve real and complex problems.

At Radnor Middle School in Wayne, PA, Mark Springer and his teammate Dawn plan a weeklong opening with their 8<sup>th</sup> grade team of 45 students that centers on a mini-theme, “Parachutes.” Mark explains that they introduce the team of students to a poem, which refers to the parachute as a metaphor for the notion of opening hearts and minds. They then proceed to move their students right into design and pro-

duction activities, which demand teamwork. Is this Advisory? Indeed, it is.

Another middle school suspends all typical first day scheduling and hosts an all day Advisory across the school. All teams plan how they will manage this day, which includes everything needed to insure a great start: interpersonal activities, team gatherings, paperwork, engaging students in generating a team constitution, and work on multiple intelligences and community resources.

There are many new wonderful tools for helping students learn more about each other and about being a member of a caring community. The National Middle School Association ([www.nmsa.org](http://www.nmsa.org)) has numerous new resources such as “Don’t Laugh At Me.” Moreover, the Southern Poverty Law Association’s Teach for Tolerance ([www.teachtolerance.org](http://www.teachtolerance.org)) has produced many innovative practices which give new meaning to Advisory. Finally, an organization called The Northeast Foundation for Children has a wonderful strategy entitled “The Circle of Power and Respect,” which has been a

huge success in many middle school Advisory programs and classes.

## Closing

I grow impatient with those who would argue that time spent on Advisory is time better spent on academics. Advisory is academic. What could be more academic than keeping our young people solidly invested in themselves, each other, their learning, and their school experiences? What could be more academic than cultivating a sense of why the world needs more decent people? We need Advisory. What choice do we have? After all, we can’t make children learn and we can’t make them want to do school, but if we can invite our young people to join us in the big conversations of life, perhaps their investment in schooling will follow.

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Nancy Doda, Ph.D.  
National Louis University  
Washington, D.C.  
[ndoda@aol.com](mailto:ndoda@aol.com)

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## Essential Elements of Standards-Focused Middle-Level Schools and Programs

(Adopted by NYS Education Department: December 1999)

- Essential Element 1: A philosophy and mission that reflect the intellectual and developmental needs and characteristics of young adolescents.
- Essential Element 2: An educational program that is comprehensive, challenging, purposeful, integrated, and standards-based.
- Essential Element 3: An organization and structure that support both academic excellence and personal development.
- Essential Element 4: Classroom instruction appropriate to the needs and characteristics of young adolescents provided by skilled and knowledgeable teachers.
- Essential Element 5: Strong educational leadership and a building administration that encourages, facilitates, and sustains involvement, participation, and partnerships.
- Essential Element 6: A network of academic and personal support available for students.
- Essential Element 7: Professional training and staff development that are ongoing, planned, purposeful, and collaborated.

# The First Annual Middle-Level Institute at the Corning Museum of Glass

Jeannette Stern, NYSMSA President



## A Shattering of Past Formats and Clearly One to Toast!

From Sunday, June 29 through Tuesday, July 1, some 50 middle-level educators came together at the Corning Museum of Glass to learn, network, and socialize. In addition to receiving ten hours of intensive hands-on instruction in one of five strands, participants were able to tour the museum and create hot glass art forms of their own. The five strands and facilitators were:

- Standards-based Middle-Level Leadership — Jeff Craig
- Magic in the Classroom: Bringing Your Curriculum to Life — Janie Fitzgerald and Lea Macdonald
- Meeting the Standards in a Middle-Level Mathematics Classroom — Nancy Sampson
- Engaging Diverse Learners in Meaningful Work: Using Collaboration to Meet the Needs of Middle-Level Students — Dr. Paul Vermette and Toby Marr
- 6 Traits of Writing: Strategies & Assessments for Improved Writing — Karen Adams

Under the able leadership of Dennis Tosetto, Executive Director of NYSMSA, and Ann Marks from the Corning Museum of Glass, the Institute ran smoothly from registration to evaluation. Snacks, a picnic dinner, hot glass activity, discounts at the museum stores, state-of-the-art AV equipment, and exceptional workshop materials all led to a unique experience. Limiting the groups to small numbers enabled not only networking but new friendships to develop.

Some of the comments about this experience:

“This workshop was a perfect blend of philosophy, theory, and activities, all based on sound educational research. The days were filled with such pertinent information. I will spend the rest of the summer reading, reflecting, and infusing these ideas into our 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> grade English curriculum.”

“I appreciated the opportunity to have days of intensive concentration on one specific area of middle level education. It was so much more valuable than a one- or two-hour quick fix, quick talk ‘how to.’ It is difficult to put into words the professional value this conference has provided me. I feel that I can’t repeat often enough the value of being able to spend the entire workshop on one area of concern. This is what my colleagues and self have been begging, pleading, and clamoring for. By the way, it would be hard to find a better facility to hold this conference. It was an incredibly inspiring place!”

“Networking with ‘middle school’ level professionals was one of the best aspects of the Institute. I leave with many ideas for immediate use in my 7<sup>th</sup> grade classroom.”

“The presenter was organized and used the teaching strategies as she presented the material. Although the material was voluminous, she chunked it into manageable bites that were palatable and digestible.”

“Who would think that I could be excited about getting back into a classroom with kids on July 1<sup>st</sup>!”

“The Institute was a magnificent time! I valued the time spent with colleagues to share

ideas. Middle level educators have so much talent and enthusiasm to offer, so it was great to have a chance to learn from each other. The CMoG provided terrific accommodations. Never before have I felt so welcomed and pampered – our every need was met. Also, the two evening receptions were a nice, relaxing time to socialize and network.”

“I am walking away with a wide variety of materials, ideas, and personal resources to enrich the program for my students. I also feel somewhat rejuvenated.”

“I am amazed on how deep the knowledge of strategies that were represented at the workshops. Even within our groups, the sharing of experiences and activities was collaborative and encouraging. I loved the things to bring back to my classroom to make a difference with my students! Thank you!”

“I loved trying my hand at glass making, and it gave me a chance to realize that doing something that seems easy for someone else, when I tried it myself, it wasn’t all that easy. Students feel this way with math often, so I was in their shoes. I will hold on to that feeling each time I look at my flower.”

“Location, location, location! Holding the Institute at CMoG was an ingenious idea. The location provided an inviting atmosphere for everyone to get together, learn, and have fun! All the necessary ingredients for a good lesson!”

“I greatly enjoyed this Institute because our presenters are from New York and they are middle school teachers. They understand middle school students, curriculum, and assessments.”

“The timing of the workshop was ideal – we are just finishing the school year and this time (for many) is a time of reflection on the past year’s work. Now I will be able to spend some

time thinking of how to incorporate these ideas into next year’s plans.”

“I can’t help but admit that I am going back to brag to those who didn’t want to ‘go to a summer conference – are you crazy?’ I guess I say, ‘YES, I AM.’ Thank you so much for such a valuable experience.”

“...a perfect blend of philosophy, theory, and activities, all based on sound educational research...”

Special Thanks to Ann Marks and the entire CMoG staff for enabling this facility to be the perfect place for this Institute. Thanks to our presenters who provided the “meat and potatoes” that will sustain the participants and enable them to provide new experiences for their students. And a special thanks to Dennis Tosetto, our Executive Director, the rest of the

Board of Directors, and Julie Schwartz, our Administrative Assistant, for providing the “person power” that enabled this new endeavor to be so successful.

Many participants asked if there could be a “Year 2” session next year for their particular strand. We will soon begin to look at next year’s format and we welcome both suggestions and people who would be willing to join the planning committee. Please contact Dennis Tosetto at [tosetto@nysmsa.org](mailto:tosetto@nysmsa.org).



# The Historical Precedent of Local Control in New York State

Warren F. Crouse, Ph.D.



## A Timely Need for Teacher and Administrative Reflection

*The research for this article is based on the unpublished dissertation by Warren F. Crouse, Ph.D., entitled, "State Education Policy Development in New York State Since 1935: Curriculum Implications for Local Education Agencies" (1986). Dr. Crouse currently serves as an Assistant Professor in Teacher Education at Niagara University. He completed his doctoral degree in Educational Research and Evaluation at the State University of New York at Buffalo. He has served as a middle school teacher for ten years and a middle level administrator for eight years. He has been previously published in both **In Transition** and **The Middle School Journal**.*

In our democracy we have come to believe in, appreciate, expect, and accept decision making on that level closest to the people. The local school board, by its very existence and the process by which it enacts educational policy, is an institution based on this essential fact. However, since the accountability movement of the mid-1970s and in particular during the administrations of former State Education Commissioner Gordon Ambach, and the present Commissioner, James Mills, mandates and regulations dealing with fundamental curriculum, instructional, and assessment concerns were directly issued by State Education authorities in Albany. These mandates that demanded local compliance with state directives, as in the Regents Action Plan and corresponding Part 100 Regulations, have seriously jeopardized this basic reality and lead one to question whether state policy makers themselves really believe in

local control. To defend against this encroachment of the state into an area traditionally reserved for the local citizenry, it is relevant for educators throughout the state to understand the historical antecedents of local autonomy and to use this knowledge to reassert their commitment to the historic "mandate" it represents. This issue is timely as the New York State Board of Regents positions itself to address middle level concerns.

Local control in public education has never been a "given." In 1959, Raold Campbell referred to the concept of local control as "folklore" and argued that real authority rested with the state. While local autonomy may have been debatable on the national level when Campbell wrote, in New York State it was a viable entity well into the 1970s. The New York State model worked because the Regents, Commissioner of Education, and State Education Department were advocates of democratic local control. Together with the local school boards, they had forged a democratic partnership of shared responsibility and authority for the best interest of education for the state's multitude of differing local communities. Throughout the better part of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, statements, action, and documents generated by the state reflected this well-respected partnership. As evidence, consider the historical research on the state's past commitment to the partnership.

The democratic tone of the New York State education system was set as early as the 1930s when the Regents authorized an independent audit of its schools, "The Regents Inquiry Into the Cost and Quality of Education." The major document produced by the Inquiry, Education for American Life: A New Program for the State

of New York, stated that schools should plan and implement programs “through the present New York State system under which the local citizens ultimately determine what is to be taught, how it is to be taught, and who is to do the teaching.”<sup>1</sup> (Underlining mine.)

The Regents Inquiry had a long-range impact on educational policy-making over the ensuing decades. As state educational leaders turned to the Inquiry for guidance and direction, its democratic spirit prevailed. The role of the New York State Education Department, for example, was shaped by the tone of the Inquiry. In the late 1940s the then Commissioner of Education, Frances Trow Spaulding, prioritized its duties as: first, to plan; second, to provide leadership to help local schools engage in good educational practice; and third, “the least important of its duties,” was its role as a regulatory agency.<sup>2</sup> (Underlining mine.) According to Spaulding, “to regulate...is almost always easier than to plan and stimulate. To make new requirements often seems a simpler method of getting improvement in practice than to educate and encourage.”<sup>3</sup> What he preferred was for the department to exert leadership to help local school districts execute policy.

Leadership, not regulation, continued during the 1950s as the State Education Department recommended two new educational programs - one for elementary and the second for early secondary education. In transmitting these documents to local school districts Commissioner Lewis A. Wilson explained that the major emphasis of the programs “has been placed upon local responsibility in program planning.”<sup>4</sup> Both program documents acknowledged and respected local authority. The department suggested that local school districts engage in developing their own action plans to implement these programs. On the high school level, a Regents-sponsored study issued a document entitled Schools We Need – Now and for Tomorrow that emphasized “education is fundamental to our democratic way of life.” The

Regents recommended retention of “strong local school districts as the backbone of the educational system.”<sup>5</sup>

With the publicized failure of our educational system to ostensibly keep pace with the Soviets during the late 1950s, the issue of local control gained national attention as Americans questioned who was responsible for this national dishonor. In New York, a rhetorical shift in state policy became apparent when the new commissioner, James Allen, threatened local school districts, some of which he felt were derelict in their responsibility to produce strong, viable, educational programs, with state regulation. Before changing the state’s modus operandi, however, he felt that the Board of Regents must engage in long-range planning to respond to the need for qualitative improvement in education. To provide that direction, Allen issued a document entitled Goals and Plans for Education in New York State. In it were recommended ways for the state to respond to the challenges of the next decade. Thus, in spite of the national outcry, specific activities of Allen and the department were still guided by the democratic principle of local control. A major activity to provide a suggested process for change was Henry M. Brickell’s Organizing New York State for Educational Change. Brickell, a local educator serving as a temporary consultant, offered guidelines for the state to action plan to stimulate and promote educational excellence. However, the commissioner emphasized, “the recommended plan should in no way diminish local control of education.”<sup>6</sup> (Underlining mine.)

To assist local board members to work with professional educators in carrying out their role more effectively, the State Education Department published a study in 1965 entitled The Local Board of Education. That report noted that questions were being raised as to whether or not local school boards could do the job required of them. Each time that a local school board requested a “state ruling on a matter that should be decided locally it was an erosive surrender of

local control.”<sup>7</sup> The report encouraged courageous local leadership to assume a strong local school and community partnership that would respond to national interests. In spite of the critical nature of the report, the department did not choose to exercise its regulatory powers.

The democratic spirit continued into the 1970s. Commissioner Ewald Nyquist developed “Project Redesign” which fostered an educational system that was community centered, change initiated, democratic, goal oriented and affective as well as cognitively based. The major purpose of the redesign concept was that New York needed a school system that was “more responsive to the people.” Nyquist emphasized that “educational programs cannot be simply designed from the top and handed down whether they be handed from local administration to teachers or from state education agencies to local districts. The Department believes that each community must work through its own education redesign with support of, rather than control from, Albany.”<sup>8</sup>

In spite of an historic record that emphasized home rule, local autonomy was to suffer setbacks in the 1970s. With the Fleischmann Commission, Governor Rockefeller’s appointment of a “watch-dog,” Daniel Klepek, and the firing of Commissioner Nyquist, educational policy-making in New York began to feel the effects of political encroachment. Documents issued by state authorities began to usurp local autonomy. In 1974, the Regents adopted their Goals for Elementary, Secondary, and Continuing Education in New York State. Within the document the various roles of the State Education Department were restated. Regulation was now the role stated first and no mention was made of leadership, a role that had always been emphasized in prior statements, bulletins, and other past-practice documents. The department had begun to use its immense regulatory powers. The issuance of state mandates regarding educational testing programs offered proof to the fact that local control over educational programming

was being challenged by its own benevolent partner.

With the “Nation at Risk” mindset that emerged on April 23, 1983, state control over educational programming in New York came into direct conflict with its historic roots. With the state planned and initiated Regents Action Plan and Part 100 Regulations in 1984, New York State redefined the partnership that had traditionally marked the New York experience – the partner had become regulator. Significant new graduation, curriculum, program, and testing requirements have been thrust upon local school boards for them to implement. State officials were there to insure compliance. With the great diversity in size and character of local systems in New York State, however, it is difficult to envision that an educational program dictated for New York City could be uniformly applied and successful in Canaseraga, New York, a rural school district with slightly over 300 pupils. A superficial analysis of the results of the all Regents testing program reveals a dramatic disparity between urban, suburban, and rural school districts across the state. This disparity also prevails when district wealth is factored in.

Thus, since the 1970s, local control of education in New York State appears to be fast becoming an example of the “folklore” referred to by Campbell in 1959. State education authorities seemed convinced that the most effective method to promote desirable change is to employ the practice of mandating and applying uniform regulations for all to make sure that minimum standards are met. Given the increase of state control, complete loss of local control appears to be a possibility, and with it the demise of the local school board.

To reverse the present trend, democratic processes and home rule must once again become a practical example of democracy in action, for, as James Allen reminded the School Boards Association in 1961, “the first requisite for educational reform is the school as a unit,

with its approved curriculum based on its own needs, and evolved by its own staff.”<sup>9</sup>

Given the recent regulatory thrust of state policy makers, perhaps a return to leadership of the style of former Commissioner George D. Stoddard is in order. He stated, “I have a deep faith in the ability of persons and communities to arrive at good solutions, if all the facts are laid on the table in an atmosphere of mutual confidence. I have little faith in action through fiat or muscle flexing.”<sup>10</sup> What has happened to that faith and confidence by our state policy makers? Local teachers and administrators at all levels (especially the middle level) should begin to reflect and research what has happened, what is happening, and what will happen when local level administrators and teachers are prohibited from carrying out curriculum, instruction, and assessment decisions that have their own students in mind.

The question of local control over fundamental curriculum, instruction, and assessment is a concern for educational planners and practitioners in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Also, it is an important and relevant issue for dialogue and debate. The present standards-based Regents program is a one-size-fits-all autocratic mandated program. Combined with the Federal government’s “No Child Left Behind” program, teachers and building administrators have little time or energy to devote to curriculum and instructional matters that can benefit the learning needs of each individual child in each community’s school. This article challenges the professional education community to understand the historic roots of education in New York State. Reflect upon the standards- driven, high-stakes testing environment and its effects on all students. Study the needs of local schools, research successful student-centered programs and strategies, reflect, dialogue, debate, and reconstruct the educational future in New York State based on the needs of our children and the continuance of our participatory democracy. The historical record makes it clear. A deliberate and

systematic return to local control of curriculum, instruction, and assessment will help the state’s children and enhance democratic principles.

By researching past educational policy, a reconstruction of the state’s relationship with local schools and their children can take place, an agenda can be set to reflect for our next New York State Education Commissioner. For middle level educators, that agenda could include the recommendations of the Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development’s publication “Turning Points” which calls for empowering teachers and administrators by giving “teachers greater influence in the classroom”, establishing “building governance committees,” and designating “leaders for the teaching process.”<sup>11</sup>

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> Luther Gulick, *Education For American Life* (New York, 1938), p. ix.

<sup>2</sup> University of the State of New York, *Addresses and Paper of Francis Trow Spaulding, President of the University of the State of New York and Commissioner of Education from July 1, 1946 to March 25, 1950*.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>4</sup> University of the State of New York, *A Design for Early Secondary Education in New York State* (Albany, 1954) p. 3.

<sup>5</sup> University of the State of New York, *The Schools We Need – Now and For Tomorrow* (Albany, 1954) pp. 13-32.

<sup>6</sup> Henry M. Brickell, *Organizing New York For Educational Change* (Albany, 1961) p. 12.

<sup>7</sup> University of the State of New York, *The Local Board of Education* (Albany, 1965) pp. 24-25.

<sup>8</sup> Ewald Nyquist, “All the Isms are Wasms,” *Vital Speeches* (August 15, 1971) p. 645.

<sup>9</sup> “Inaction Laid to Local School Boards,” *The New York Times*. (October 3, 1961) p. 30.

<sup>10</sup> University of the State of New York, *Inauguration of George D. Stoddard, President of the University of the State of New York and Commissioner of Education*. (Albany, 1942) p. 71.

<sup>11</sup> Carnegie Corporation of New York, *Turning Points*. (Washington, D.C., 1990) p. 18.

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Warren F. Crouse, Ph.D.  
Niagara University

## Submission of Articles

*In Transition* is now accepting manuscripts for publication consideration. Our journal is produced by the New York State Middle School Association and is dedicated to those teachers, counselors, administrators, parents, and others serving the needs of students aged 10-15. *In Transition* is a juried publication; all manuscripts are reviewed and approved for publication by a panel of members from the NYSMSA Board of Directors.

Manuscripts describing successful programs, stimulating projects, exemplary teaching techniques, unique team concepts, action research, and promising practices are welcome! We are particularly interested in articles on implementing the new Standards, teaming, interdisciplinary instruction, authentic assessment, flexible scheduling, integrating technology into instructional programs, and application of the *Essential Elements*.

Please note the changes in the following format guidelines:

- LENGTH: 400-2,000 words (two to eight pages)
- FORMAT: MS Word or compatible, double space, Times New Roman 12, 1-inch margins. Citations of referenced works should follow current MLA or APA standards.
- ILLUSTRATIONS: All illustrations, tables, charts, photographs, etc. must be high quality, black and white or grayscale. Photographs must be in JPEG format and include captions identifying subjects, activity, and source or photographer. All illustrations become the property of NYSMSA.
- COVER PAGE: Each article submitted must include a cover page with the following information: Title, Author, Position, School OR Home Address (please indicate which), Telephone Number/s, E-Mail Address, AND a brief synopsis of the content of the manuscript.
- SUBMIT TO: All documents must be submitted as e-mail attachments to:  
Peter T. Johnson, NYSMSA Publications Director  
[johnson@nysmsa.org](mailto:johnson@nysmsa.org)  
***Please note: Only e-mail submissions will be considered; do not send fax or paper copies of manuscripts.***
- DEADLINES: Manuscripts must be received by August 15 for the fall issue, December 15 for the winter issue, March 15 for the spring issue.



# The Executive Director's Wrap-up

## Dennis M. Tosetto



I don't know about the rest of you, but for me, it's been a very interesting summer.

NYSMSA initiated its first annual Middle Level Institute at the Corning Museum of Glass (CMoG). We

couldn't have picked a better organization to co-sponsor this event. The CMoG folks were wonderful. They hosted the event professionally and ensured that everyone involved with the Institute was well taken care of. Both the accommodations and special activities were superb. In addition to receiving ten hours of intensive professional training, everyone had the opportunity to participate in numerous special team-building activities such as making a large flower out of molten glass.

The only problem with the workshops was that almost all of the participants rated each of the instructional programs offered during the institute as "outstanding," and the two who didn't give the top rating, rated the program as above average. Why is this a problem? The majority of participants formally stated that they want to return next year to a "part II" of the session that they attended this year, with the same instructors. We had planned to take the easy way out and just repeat what we did this year. Now we will have to figure out how to expand the program while keeping our high standards, and prepare for twice the enrollment

next summer. I guess if you're going to have a problem, that's the one to have.

Just about everyone who participated, wrote close to a full page of embarrassingly positive remarks about the Institute and, being smart operators, we asked them to give us permission to reproduce their kind words in our publications, so expect to see these written portions of the evaluations of the Institute in print over the course of the coming school year. What the heck; when you've got it, flaunt it.

As you know, things are moving quickly on the middle-level front in New York State, and you can bet that NYSMSA is on the job! Members of your NYSMSA board have been meeting with fellow educators, members of SED, and members of the Board of Regents to share our thoughts and concerns, as well as providing professional assistance when called upon to do so. As you might guess, we have had more than our fair share of concern over issues relating to the development of new middle-level regulations. We appreciate hearing from our middle-level colleagues who keep us abreast of what is being discussed around the state with respect to middle-level education and of directions being taken in some regions that are not in the best interest of the middle level learner. Your concerns do not go unheard and I can tell you that NYSMSA does an excellent job of ensuring that both your collective suggestions and concerns are heard both at SED and by the Board of Regents.

Earlier this year, our new Chancellor, Robert Bennett, asked me to put together a small group of educators to meet with him regarding the development of the new middle-level regula-

tions. On August 11, 2003, the following educators met with Chancellor Bennett: Sue Allen, Assistant Superintendent, Hilton Central School District; Jeff Craig, Principal, Arcadia Middle School; Marianne Dixon, a teacher and CRS Point person for the Southside Elementary School in Buffalo; Margaret (Foster) Kaiser, Arts in Education Coordinator for Erie 1 BOCES; Joy Khatib, sixth grade ELA Teacher at Lewiston-Porter Middle School; Pat Loncto, consultant and retired Family and Consumer Science Teacher; Tom Phillips, Principal, South Seneca Middle School; Linda Ruest, Director of School Support Services, Erie 1 BOCES; Nancy Sampson, Math Teacher, Cuba-Rushford Middle School; Dr. Jeannette Stern, Principal, Wantagh Middle School; and Dennis Tosetto, retired Middle School Principal and NYSMSA Executive Director.

Prior to the meeting, we developed lists of suggestions and concerns as “talking points” so that we could cover as much non-redundant ground as possible in the three hours allocated for the meeting. It was fortunate that we had a copy of the list to give to the Chancellor, because as soon as the meeting started, he hit the ground running. It turns out that the Chancellor is a very effective leader, communicator, and facilitator. He soon had us sharing with him our thoughts on a wide variety of pertinent middle-level topics, and he picked our brains for information that would help him lead the Board of Regents to decisions that would be in the best interest of our students. There was no let-up; information was shared in both directions openly and honestly. Perhaps it was because we were all in agreement on the big issues, but somehow everything seemed to click, and I believe we collectively viewed it as one of the best and most effective meetings each of us has attended as educators.

While I do not believe it would be appropriate to include in this article the specifics of what was discussed during the meeting until the minutes of the meeting are approved as correct

by all concerned, I will list some of the key topics covered:

- Not allowing the push for flexibility to result in “damage” to exploratory programs
- Including in regulation, wording that will support the use of cutting edge organizational and instructional methodologies that are appropriate for the middle-level learner
- Requiring middle-level schools to establish comprehensive plans for ongoing teacher inservice
- Concerns about the administration and use of the Intermediate assessments
- The need for building capacity with parents of middle-level students
- The lack of compliance with the 1989 Middle Level Regents Policy Statement and expectations for new regulations
- Problems with some of the base-line information that is being used to direct change
- The need for accountability

Based upon not just this meeting, but also several previous discussions I have had with Chancellor Bennett over the years, I can tell you that he is “child centered.” He understands and can articulate the need for positive youth development, and he is dedicated to having our schools meet the social and emotional needs of the learner. I saw no support for “jiggling” regulations to make them more susceptible to dumping exploratory instructional programs such as art or Home and Careers Skills. We seemed to be in agreement that the problem we are experiencing is not a lack of funding, but, rather, the need to bring to all middle-level schools and classrooms more effective organizational structures and cutting edge methods. Your NYSMSA representatives were quick to state that NYSMSA stands ready to support this challenge with both its financial resources and the active support of its 20,000 members.

I must say that I walked into the meeting feeling that we were about to begin an uphill

battle. This sense of uneasiness was predicated upon discussions I kept hearing regarding the need to cut “non-essential” courses to allow schools to spend more time teaching the “real” academics. This line of thinking was brought front and center in a *New York Times* article (July 23, 2003; Metro Section B1 and B6) by David M. Herszenhorn. The first paragraph states that, “Under pressure to find time for the extra English and math classes required by the Education Department’s new standardized curriculum, the city’s junior high schools are slashing art, music and other electives, an unintended cost in the push to help students master basic skills.” It quotes Joseph D. Cantara, the principal of Intermediate School

237 in Flushing Queens as saying, “The art, music and everything else are basically out the window. Something has to go. What went is all the art, the music, and the foreign language.”

My spirits were lifted following our meeting with Chancellor Bennett and by a recent memo to Superintendents from Deputy Commissioner Kadamus that warns school districts to stop cutting required programs in anticipation of regulation changes. Perhaps the winds of change have shifted yet again.

New York State middle-level educators are invited to submit written comment to NYSMSA concerning the value of exploratory courses such as art, music, foreign language, and Home and Career Skills. Commentary should provide classroom examples of how these courses of study serve to reinforce and support those skills that are needed for success in the four core Intermediate Assessments and for becoming a productive adult. NYSMSA is developing an “amicus brief” that will be submitted to the Board of Regents in support of what we believe to be an appropriate and effective middle-level program for young adolescents. Submissions will be considered for inclusion, in part or in whole, in this NYSMSA document.

Please submit written comment to Dr. Jeannette Stern, NYSMSA President, at Wantagh Middle School, 3299 Beltagh Avenue, Wantagh, NY 11793 or by e-mail to [stern@nysmsa.org](mailto:stern@nysmsa.org) by **October 1, 2003** (if possible) **or no later than November 1, 2003**. The brief will be submitted to the Board of Regents well in advance of the finalization of new middle-level regulations.

# NYSMSA Board of Directors 2002-2003

## **President**

Jeannette Stern  
Wantagh Middle School  
3299 Beltagh Avenue  
Wantagh, NY 11793  
(516) 679-6350  
stern@nysmsa.org

## **Executive Director**

Dennis Tosetto  
NYSMSA West  
2201 Pine Avenue  
Niagara Falls, NY 14301  
(716) 282-6511  
tosetto@nysmsa.org

## **Vice President**

Susan Allen  
Hilton Central Schools  
225 West Avenue  
Hilton, NY 14468  
(585) 392-1000  
allen@nysmsa.org

## **Recording Secretary / Historian**

Teal Abel  
Indian River Middle School  
32735A County Route 29  
Philadelphia, NY 13673  
(315) 642-0125  
abel@nysmsa.org

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Linda Ruest  
WNY School Support Center  
Erie 1 BOCES  
1050 Maryvale Avenue  
Cheektowaga, NY 14225  
(716) 630-4275  
ruest@nysmsa.org

## **Director of Professional Development**

James Tobin  
Palmyra-Macedon Central  
Schools  
151 Hyde Parkway  
Palmyra, NY 14522  
(315) 597-3401  
tobin@nysmsa.org

## **Director of Research**

Kenneth Mitchell  
Robert E. Bell Middle School  
50 Senter Street  
Chappaqua, NY 10514  
(914) 238-6776  
mitchell@nysmsa.org

## **SED Liaison**

David Payton  
NYSED 462 EBA  
Albany, NY 12234  
(518) 474-5923  
payton@nysmsa.org

## **Journal Editor**

Peter Johnson  
Genesee Valley Middle  
School  
24 South Street  
Belmont, NY 14813  
(585) 268-7900  
johnson@nysmsa.org

## **Administrative Assistant**

Julie Schwartz  
NYSMSA  
P.O. Box 53  
Pleasantville, NY 10570  
(914) 747-9241  
schwartz@nysmsa.org

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Monroe #1  
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### **Region 1 Director**

Jeff Craig  
Greece Arcadia Middle  
School  
130 Island Cottage Road  
Rochester, NY 14612  
(585) 663-3200  
craig@nysmsa.org

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### **Region 2 Director**

Ron Ramsden  
Jamesville-DeWitt Middle  
School  
6280 Randall Road  
Jamesville, NY 13078  
(315) 445-8360  
ramsdn@nysmsa.org

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Hamilton-Fulton-Montgomery  
Herkimer  
Washington-Saratoga-Warren-  
Hamilton-Essex

## **Region 3 Director**

Chris Reed  
Glens Falls Middle School  
20 Quade Street  
Glens Falls, NY 12801  
(518) 793-3418  
reed@nysmsa.org

## **Region 4 BOCES**

Broome-Tioga  
Delaware-Chenango-  
Madison-Otsego  
Schuyler-Chemung-Tioga  
Tompkins-Seneca-Tioga

## **Region 4 Director**

Tom Phillips  
South Seneca Middle School  
7263 Main Street  
Ovid, NY 14521  
(607) 869-9636  
phillips@nysmsa.org

## **Region 5 BOCES**

Capital Region  
Otsego-Northern Catskills  
Questar III

## **Region 5 Acting Director**

Chris Reed  
Glens Falls Middle School  
20 Quade Street  
Glens Falls, NY 12801  
(518) 793-3418  
reed@nysmsa.org

## **Region 6 BOCES**

Dutchess  
Orange-Ulster  
Putnam-Northern Westchester  
Rockland  
Sullivan  
Ulster

## **Southern Westchester**

## **Region 6 Co-Directors**

Janie Fitzgerald  
Scarsdale Middle School  
134 Mamaroneck Road  
Scarsdale, NY 10583  
(914) 721-2600  
fitzgerald@nysmsa.org

Lea Macdonald  
Pleasantville Middle School  
40 Romer Avenue  
Pleasantville, NY 10570  
(914) 741-1451  
macdonald@nysmsa.org

## **Region 7**

ALL New York City Districts  
**Region 7 Director**  
Candice Scott  
IS 126  
31-51 21st Street  
Long Island City, NY 11106  
(718) 274-8316  
scott@nysmsa.org

## **Region 8 BOCES**

Nassau  
Eastern Suffolk  
Western Suffolk  
**Region 8 Director**  
Jody Smith  
John F. Kennedy Middle  
School  
500 Broadway  
Bethpage, NY 11714  
(516) 733-3791  
smith@nysmsa.org

## **Region 9 BOCES**

Cattaraugus-Allegany  
Erie #1  
Erie #2-Chautauqua-  
Cattaraugus  
Genesee Valley (except  
Livingston County; see  
Region 1)  
Orleans-Niagara  
**Region 9 Director**  
Nancy Sampson  
Cuba-Rushford Middle/High  
School  
5476 Route 305 N  
Cuba, NY 14727  
(585) 968-2650  
sampson@nysmsa.org

## **Region 10 BOCES**

Champlain Valley  
Franklin-Essex-Hamilton  
Jefferson-Lewis  
St. Lawrence-Lewis  
**Region 10 Director**  
Brian Sherman  
Indian River Middle School  
32735A County Route 29  
Philadelphia, NY 13673  
(315) 642-0125  
sherman@nysmsa.org

*Your region is determined by  
your school's BOCES; for  
retirees and businesses, it is  
based on place of residence  
or business location.*

# NYSMSA 23<sup>rd</sup> Annual Conference



Syracuse, New York  
October 23, 24 & 25, 2003  
Marx Hotel and ONCENTER



NYSMSA  
P.O. Box 53  
Pleasantville, NY 10570