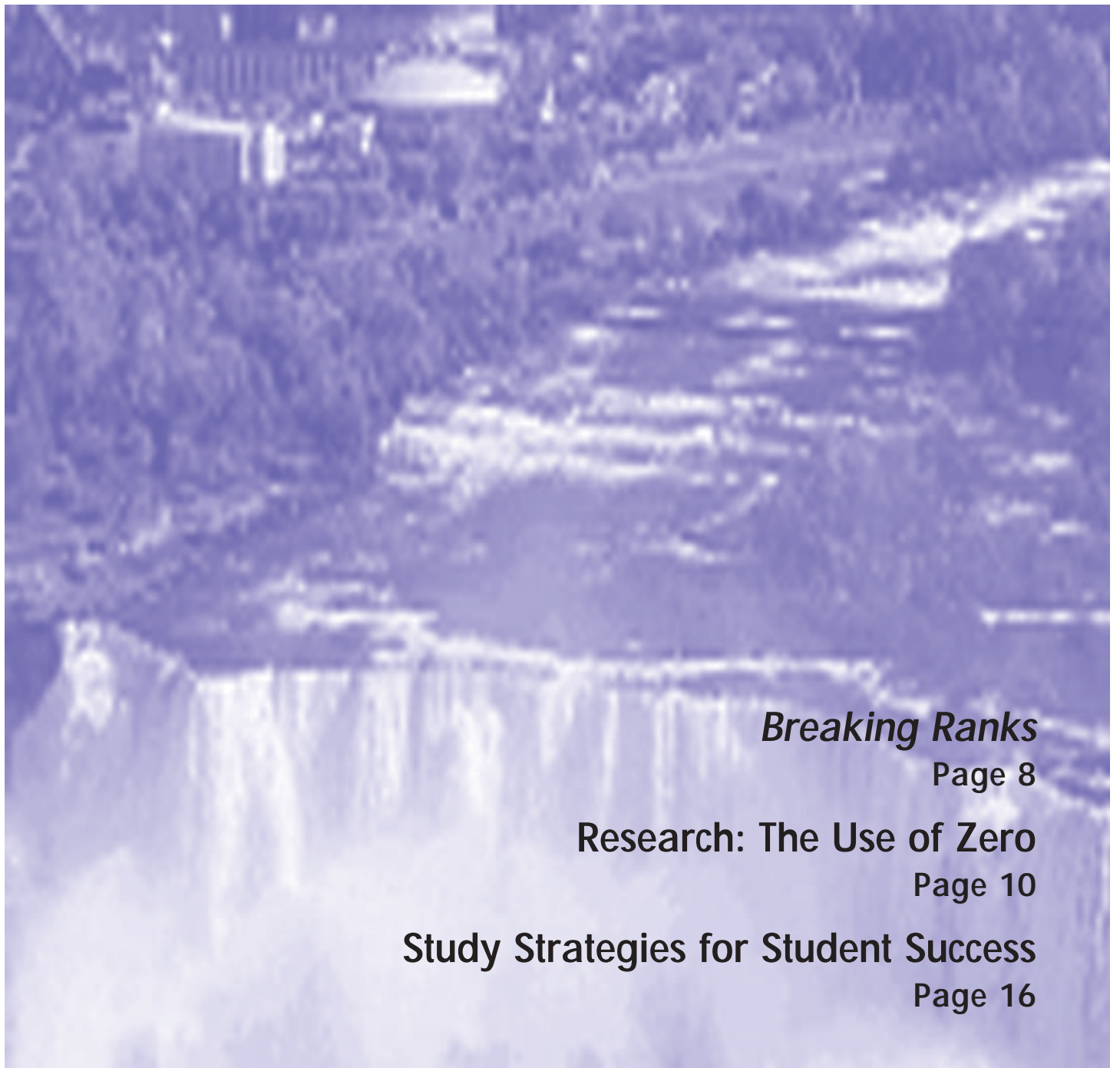


# **IN** Transition

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.

## **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.

## **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.

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NYSMSA's 26<sup>th</sup> Annual Conference will be held in Niagara Falls, NY on October 19-21, 2006.



# A few thoughts from the President...

Jeannette Stern, Ed.D.



Jeannette Stern

On March 1, the National Association of Secondary School Principals (NASSP) issued *Breaking Ranks in the Middle: Strategies for Leading Middle Level Reform*. This report was developed in

collaboration with the Education Alliance at Brown University, a group of middle-level practitioners and experts. It offers nine recommendations for principals, working closely with their educational communities, that will improve student achievement. The nine recommendations are:

1. Establish academically rigorous standards, align curriculum to ensure success in high school, and employ teaching strategies that will facilitate this.
2. Create teacher teams with common planning time to create more and higher quality interactions between teachers and students.
3. Provide structured planning time to align curricula across grades and schools to address the academic, developmental, social, and personal needs of students, especially during critical periods (like transitional years).
4. Implement an advisory program or other supportive programs to ensure that each student has an adult to meet with to discuss academic and personal development.

5. Ensure that teachers use multiple means of assessing student progress and achievement.
6. Entrust teachers with the opportunities to use flexible scheduling to accommodate teaching strategies consistent with student learning and also allow for planning time, teaming, and lesson planning.
7. Institute shared leadership opportunities so all the stakeholders have meaningful input and communication.
8. Align all programs and structures so that all social, economic, and racial/ethnic groups have open and equal access.
9. Align all professional development so that all members of the educational community can learn the content, instructional strategies, and student developmental issues necessary to provide a successful environment for all.

If one were to look at the essence of these nine recommendations carefully, restructure them a bit, and change some of the wording, the NYS *Essential Elements* and the new *Regents Policy Statement* should immediately come to mind. In reviewing them, there are the following common threads:

1. an emphasis on high academic standards and personal youth development;
2. the need for professional development for all of the educational community;
3. the call for continuous and meaningful communication with all stakeholders;
4. and a programmatic structure with the flexibility to enable these recommendations to occur.

While educators often become frustrated with what is perceived to be the bureaucracy and requirements of government, we at the middle level are now in the enviable position of being ahead of the curve. Each of the strategies and recommendations described in the “new” *Breaking Ranks* has already been incorporated into **policy** and **regulation** in New York. Our colleagues across the country, with whom I meet periodically, are envious of our forward thinking and the willingness of our State Education Department, Board of Regents and legislature to codify what we know to be solid practice.

Yet, why then don't we have the success that all these recommendations say should come with implementation? Having the foundation of policy and regulation are wonderful beginnings, but unless the practices and programs are instituted with fidelity, all that is left are words on a page. Unless there is a common understanding of what a rigorous, developmentally-appropriate program should look like and a common agreement to institute and support this kind of program, we are no better off than the states who will look at *Breaking Ranks* as an ideal too difficult for reality.

What then is missing? Those of you who devote your career to “those in the middle” need to become conversant with the New York State policies and regulations. You need to evaluate the programs you currently participate in and see if they meet the recommendations (and regulations) endorsed by our state. You need to attend local meetings and regional and state conferences to ensure that you are introduced to the best research-based strategies for teaching at this level, which will then ensure that your students receive the best education they can get. You need to share the knowledge you gain with your students' parents, to ensure they can do their part as strong partners in the education of the youth of the state. There needs to be a renewed

commitment to what we have known since the start of the millennium, but which other state and federal organizations are just realizing now: a solid program at the middle level is one that is academically rigorous and developmentally strong, with all stakeholders conversant in a common vision for success.

How to begin this process? Take the initiative yourself. The first cohort of **NYS Essential Elements Schools to Watch** are identified on page 7 of this *In Transition*. Contact them and find out how they began. Register for the Corning Institute in June to engage in concentrated learning in one strand of middle-level education. Make a commitment to attend our statewide conference in October in Niagara Falls, where you can hear from state and national experts in middle level or interact with your colleagues around the state who are enabling great things to happen in their schools. Come hear John Nori, NASSP's Director of Instructional Leadership Resources, speak on *Breaking Ranks* and then see how the recommendations have already been in place around this state for years.

Whatever you do, please do not sit back and do nothing. The future of our students depend on your action now! Make a commitment to attend at least one event that will help you make a positive difference in the lives of your students, your colleagues, and yourself.



# The Executive Director's Message

## Dennis M. Tosetto



Dennis Tosetto

Frequently, we become caught up in the maintenance of our school programs and don't seem to have the time needed to keep up with current research and cutting-edge innovative methods. As a result, more and more time is devoted to

paper work, assessment concerns, and budgetary issues while instructional progress may take a back seat to pressing operational needs.

Here are a couple of important questions to ask yourself. How would you rate the overall program in your school with regard to SED's Middle-Level Essential Elements? Are you and the educators with whom you work as knowledgeable as they should be about the latest instructional methods and processes? Fortunately, NYSMSA can help you keep up to date with how to implement the best programs and practices in your classroom and school.

So, what does your association have in store for you in the near future? The NYSMSA/CMoG Middle-Level Institute will begin on Monday, June 26, and run through mid-day on Wednesday, June 28, 2006. This will be our fourth annual institute at the ultra-modern Corning Museum of Glass (CMoG), and has been rated as outstanding by participants for each of the previous three years.

Our Middle-Level Institute is limited to about 120 participants and features six different program offerings. Participants select one of these workshops and receive ten hours of intensive hands-on instruction from our expert instructors. Additionally, each day is organized to ensure collegial collaboration through special activities ranging from an elegant picnic with glass blowers to an evening reception at the Rockwell Museum of Western Art.

This year's Institute offerings are:

- ***Middle-Level Leadership that Works***, presented by Jeff Craig. Jeff is recognized as an instructional leader around the state. A frequent presenter on such topics as leadership, the Essential Elements, teams, integrated studies, and flexible block scheduling, his efforts have been focused on helping leaders build cultures of continuous improvement. His enthusiasm and energy are juxtaposed with experience and insight — resulting in a productive, engaging workshop.
- ***Commissioner's Regulations and the Three-Model Strategy to Implement the Regents Policy Statement on Middle-Level Education: Making Them Work for Middle-Level Schools***, presented by Dr. David Payton. David is the current Supervisor of the Middle-Level Education Program for the NYS Education Department. He is a 25-year plus veteran of the Department, with prior experience in public schools and post-secondary institutions. Under his direction, SED has made

middle-level education a successful State priority.

- ***Developing a Community of Learners: Using practical research-based strategies to increase students' skills and knowledge, while improving State Assessment scores***, presented by Dr. Paul Vermette and Cindy Kline. Paul, who began teaching in 1971, is now in his 21st year as a Teacher Educator at Niagara University. He has written and presented widely on topics of instruction, teacher change, diversity and cooperative learning. Cindy is a Spanish teacher at Dominic Savio MS in Niagara Falls.
- ***Connecting the State Assessments to the Middle-Level Student: Tackling the Elephant through Data Analysis***, presented by Jennifer Borgioli. Jennifer is the Data Coordinator for the Western Regional School Support Center (RSSC), providing technical assistance to teachers in Schools in Need of Improvement in the Western New York Region. She has published in the field of students with severe disabilities, gifted education and middle-level education, and is a fellow at the Center for the Study of Expertise in Teaching and Learning (CSETL). A former special education teacher, Jennifer discovered her inner data “geek” through her work with the RSSC and enjoys turning fellow educators into data enthusiasts.
- ***Making Writing Manageable for Middle-Level Students***, presented by Karen Adams. Karen is a middle-level English/Language Arts teacher at Newfane Middle School and an adjunct professor at Niagara University. She has been a 6 Traits trainer for six years, and has presented in-services throughout the Western New York area. She has worked on developing the English curriculum for the Orleans/Niagara Curriculum Council as

well as at her home school. Karen is currently on child-care leave, but continues to present 6 Traits workshops to help educators enhance their current writing program.

- ***CIA: Operation Mathematics***, presented by Lisa Sanders. (This program examines and explores Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment (CIA) in Middle-Level Mathematics.) Lisa Sanders is a mathematics coordinator with the Western Regional School Support Center, providing technical assistance to teachers and administrators in WNY Schools in Need of Improvement and Schools Under Registration Review. As a former 7-12 mathematics teacher, Lisa brings both experience and a love for teaching mathematics to children. Lisa convenes the Western New York Mathematics Consortium (WNYMATH) and coordinates its annual conference. Additionally, she has served on statewide committees, such as range-finding for the Intermediate Mathematics Assessment. Presently, Lisa is working with the New York State Consortium of High Quality Mathematics Educators to examine the alignment of the new Assessments to the Standards.

[A detailed outline of each Institute program offering, including registration information, is available online at www.nysmsa.org.](http://www.nysmsa.org)

NYSMSA's annual conference will begin in Niagara Falls on Thursday, October 19, 2006, and will run through Saturday, October 21. Typically, our Niagara Falls conference has the highest attendance of all our different venues across the state with between 2,500 to 3,200 participants.

The conference opens on Thursday, October 19, with five outstanding pre-conference workshops presented by nationally-recognized experts. They include:

***Managing Classrooms through Good Instruction*** with Jack Berckemeyer. Jack is the Assistant Executive Director for the National Middle School Association and is well known for his valuable presentations, including an excellent NYSMSA keynote address.

***READ – WRITE – THINK! Strategies to Foster Literacy across Content Areas*** with Lea Macdonald and Janie Fitzgerald. Lea has taught seventh grade social studies for the last thirteen years at Pleasantville Middle School and also has served as curriculum coordinator since 2004. Janie is a sixth grade English teacher at Scarsdale Middle School, a graduate of Bread Loaf School of English, and a middle school consultant. Both Lea and Janie have presented workshops for NYSMSA that were highly rated by participants.

***Breaking Ranks in the Middle*** with John Nori. John currently serves as the Director of Instructional Leadership Resources at the National Association of Secondary School Principals (NASSP). He brings 29 years as an English teacher, principal, and staff developer to his presentations and his practitioner's perspective provides principals with the realities of implementing the concepts put forth in *Breaking Ranks in the Middle: Strategies for Leading Middle Level Reform™*.

***The Changing Face of Mathematics Instruction*** with Nanci Smith. A former mathematics teacher, Nanci has taught at the secondary level and at Arizona State University. She is Nationally Board Certified in Adolescent and Young Adult Mathematics. Nanci has been an international consultant in differentiated instruction for ASCD for five years and has taught a Master's course in Differentiated Instruction for both Arizona State and Northern Arizona Universities.

***Ideas! Ideas! Ideas! The Teacher's Toolbox for Differentiating Instruction*** with Linda Tilton. Linda is the author of *The Teacher's Toolbox for Differentiating Instruction: 700*

*Strategies, Tips, Tools and Techniques and Inclusion: A Fresh Look — Practical Strategies to Help All Students Succeed*. She has over 30 years of experience in education. At the middle school level, she has been both a classroom teacher in English and reading, as well as a special education teacher.

A banquet with keynote speaker Jack Berckemeyer will occur later in the day on Thursday. Over 100 practitioner workshops along with several special presentations covering a wide range of topics are scheduled for Friday. Saturday's Breakfast with Champions will once again provide an opportunity to work with Dr. Giselle Martin-Kniep and fellows from the Center for the Study of Expertise on Teaching and Learning.

Conference information, including registration material, will be posted on our Website ([www.nysmsa.org](http://www.nysmsa.org)) as it becomes available. For questions, please contact Nancy Sampson, the local conference chair ([sampson@nysmsa.org](mailto:sampson@nysmsa.org)) or Linda Ruest, NYSMSA Conference Director ([ruest@nysmsa.org](mailto:ruest@nysmsa.org)).

# New York State's Essential Elements: Schools-to-Watch Program

## 2006 "Schools to Watch"

Twelve Corners Middle School  
Rochester, New York  
Terence Quinn, Principal

Moravia Middle School  
Moravia, New York  
Bruce MacBain, Principal

Pittsford Middle School  
Pittsford, New York  
Michael Pero and Scott Reinhart, Principals

Victor Junior High School  
Victor, New York  
Carl Christiansen, Principal

## 2006 "Rising Schools to Watch"

Sayville Middle School  
Sayville, New York  
Walter Schartner, Principal

Oliver W. Winch Middle School  
South Glens Falls, New York  
Mark Fish, Principal

# Congratulations!



## *Breaking Ranks, The Regents Policy Statement and The Essential Elements*

David A. Payton, Ph.D.

In March 2006 the National Association of Secondary School Principals released a new publication titled *Breaking Ranks in the Middle*, a companion document to its high school document, *Breaking Ranks II*. The philosophy and recommendations in *Breaking Ranks in the Middle* mirror those that are in the *Regents Policy Statement on Middle-Level Education* and the Department's *Essential Elements of Standards-Focused Middle-Level Schools and Programs*.

*Breaking Ranks in the Middle* contains multiple examples of research-based, good practice drawn from the experiences of the best middle-level schools in the country, including three from New York State (Cohoes Middle School, Port Chester Middle School, Lehman Alternative Community School in Ithaca). These practices align well with the philosophy and recommendations espoused in the Regents Policy Statement and the Department's Essential Elements. All three – *Breaking Ranks in the Middle*, the Regents Policy Statement, and the Department's Essential Elements – share the following core ideas:

- Student focus
- Academic challenge
- Supportive, personalized school environment
- Developmental appropriateness
- Effective instruction
- Ongoing professional learning
- Strong building leadership
- Appropriate structures/organization (teams, dedicated planning time, flexible schedule, etc.)

The difference between *Breaking Ranks in the Middle* and New York State's two documents is not in what they propose but in their purpose. *Breaking Ranks in the Middle* represents a strategy document for middle-level principals who are interested in leading their school to academic excellence. Its audience is middle-level principals and its focus is academic excellence. As stated in its release announcement: "...*Breaking Ranks in the Middle: Strategies for Leading Middle-Level Reform* challenges middle-level principals to take responsibility for improving the academic outcomes of all their students and for getting them on track for success in high school and beyond."

The *Regents Policy Statement on Middle-Level Education* and the Department's *Essential Elements of Standards-Focused Middle-Level Schools and Programs* target the middle-level educational community – students, teachers, parents, central office staff, boards of education, and, of course, administrators. Their major purpose is to define and describe a model middle-level school that addresses the dual needs of young adolescents (academic development and personal growth) well; as such, they deal more with describing the "what" of middle-level education rather than providing specific strategies related to "how" to transform a middle-level school. The Regents Policy Statement and the Department's Essential Elements also advocate for a comprehensive educational experience that reflects all of the State's 28 learning standards, including those related directly to numeracy and literacy.

*Breaking Ranks in the Middle* focuses less on describing "what" middle-level education is

and more on explaining the “how” of change at the middle level. It is a strategy document specifically for middle-level principals to use to transform their buildings into educational institutions that address the intellectual and development needs of each student. *Breaking Ranks in the Middle* presents a series of nine cornerstone strategies, 30 specific recommendations, and numerous examples from high performing middle-level schools for improving student achievement. Its target is a series of “essential learnings” in literature and language, writing, mathematics, social studies, science, and the arts.

Regardless of their purpose, *Breaking Ranks in the Middle*, the *Regents Policy Statement on Middle-Level Education*, and the *Department’s Essential Elements of Standards-Focused*

*Middle-Level Schools and Programs* all share a common vision – schools with middle-level grades that are addressing successfully the intellectual development and academic achievement of all students and the personal and social development of each student.

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**David A. Payton** is the Supervisor of Middle-Level Education for the New York State Education Department and serves on the NYSMSA Board of Directors as SED Liaison.

## New York State’s Essential Elements: Schools-to-Watch Recognition Program (Second Cohort, 2006-07)

Do you believe your middle-level school is a model for others? If so, please consider completing the application for the second cohort of schools in New York State’s Essential Elements: Schools-to-Watch Recognition Program.

New York State is seeking to identify a small number of diverse, high-performing, model middle-level schools that will constitute the second cohort of schools selected for inclusion in New York State’s Essential Elements: Schools-to-Watch Recognition Program. These schools must be academically excellent, developmentally appropriate, socially equitable, and organized to ensure continuous improvement, as they will serve as exemplars for the implementation of the *Regents Policy Statement on Middle-Level Education* and the State Education Department’s *Essential Elements of Standards-Focused Middle-Level Schools and Programs*.

Eligible schools and districts interested in being considered for the second cohort of New York’s Essential Elements: Schools-to-Watch Recognition Program should view and download the application announcement and related information at the New York State Middle School Association’s Web site ([www.nysmsa.org](http://www.nysmsa.org)) and follow the directions to complete the school self-rating and the formal application. Note that completed applications must be postmarked no later than Friday, October 13, 2006.



# Research at a Glance

Jeff Craig, NYSMSA Director of Research and Technology

## The Use of Zero in a Standards-Focused Middle School or Program

### Essential Element 4: Classroom Instruction

**Classroom instruction appropriate to the needs and characteristics of young adolescents provided by skilled and knowledgeable teachers.**

Teachers in middle-level classrooms understand and appreciate the emotional, intellectual, physical, psychological, and social changes that are occurring within their students and recognize the behaviors manifested by these changes. They use instructional techniques and processes that capitalize on the unique developmental characteristics and individual needs of early adolescents.

Successful middle-level teachers in a standards-focused school:

- Involve students in their learning, encouraging them to contribute to their learning experiences, to make choices, to explore, to question, to experience, to learn, and to grow.
- Inform and involve parents of middle-level students in their children's education by helping them understand the learning standards their children must meet, the instructional program, their children's progress, and how to help their children at home with schoolwork, school decisions, and successful development through adolescence.

Recently there has been increasing attention paid to reporting practices in middle schools and programs. Traditional grading and reporting practices are being compared to standards-based practices. In a standards-based environment, the assumption is that "The most important purpose for grades is to provide information or feedback to students and parents (Marzano, 2000)."

Another supposition of standards-based reporting is that grading is in fact, standards-based. In other words, feedback is given against pre-identified and agreed-upon criteria and standards rather than reporting on one student's standing as compared to others (norm-referenced).

While there are many aspects of grading, reporting, and feedback – far too many to include here, one seemingly small part of grading and reporting practices has increasingly come under greater scrutiny. That practice is the use of the zero. Whether to use zeros or not is a difficult question and one that causes a great deal of concern (Wormeli, 2006). There is a great deal of passion surrounding the issue. On the surface, it doesn't seem fair to give any grade other than a zero for missing work. In reality, it's far more complicated than that.

Typically, a zero is a grade given to a student when no credit is given because an assignment was not done. Occasionally, a zero is given as a grade when a student cheats in some way on an assignment or when one gets everything wrong, too. At the surface, this seems a logical approach to missing work. If a student does not do the assignment, then no, or zero, credit should be given. If there is no work then there should be no credit. A survey of the recent writing about this issue seems to converge on two

points: the use of zeros is not mathematically correct and the use of zeros does not motivate students to do their work. First, let's take a look at the mathematics involved.

There are different scales of measurement which you may recall from your tests, measurements, and statistics courses in graduate school. The four scales are nominal, ordinal, interval and ratio. Nominal scales place values into categories such as male or female. Ordinal scales describe order, such as more or less of a particular quality. Interval data means that the interval between each increment in the scale is equal, such as temperature on the Fahrenheit scale. Ratio data is similar to interval data in that each increment on the scale is equal; a ratio scale has the added requirement of a value of zero being assigned to the lowest end of the scale. A good example of ratio data is age. Which kind of scale do we use in our grading processes? If you answered interval or ratio you are probably wrong. If we use zeros, as is typically used, the most sophisticated scale of data we can maintain is ordinal, when an A is better than a B which is better than a C, etc. The problem is when you get to the definition of an F. That's when it all breaks down.

The typical grading scale consists of 10 point intervals between letter grades (Reeves, 2004). The difference between an A and a B is 10 points. The difference between a B and a C is 10 points. The situation starts to get tricky because in some systems the difference between a C and a D is 5 points (70 to 65) which means the difference between a D and an F (when zeros are used) is 60 to 65 points! Consider the picture of the ruler below to see just how flawed this approach is. Quite simply, the intervals in



What's wrong with this ruler? In fact, using this ruler to measure is just like equating an F with a "0."

the scale are unequal, rendering the entire scale useless. Could you use this ruler to measure anything accurately? Certainly not.

There's more to it than just unequal intervals. The reason it is important to understand these scales (nominal, ordinal, interval, and ratio) is that the nature of each kind of data permits different mathematical and statistical operations and interpretations. When calculating classroom grades, often calculate averages and means. The mathematical process of calculating a mean (or average) depends on data that is either interval scale or ratio scale. This means that all of our grade calculations, if we equate an F to a value of zero, are wrong. That's right, all of our calculations of averages, if we are using a 100-point scale with F as 0 then all of our calculations are mathematically wrong. To correct for this, equate a value of 60 to D and 50 to F, in which case you will at least have interval data. Another way to correct is to use a scale when an A is an 80, B is 60, C is 40, D is 20 and F is 0. A third way to correct for this is the method that was used long ago to correct for this mathematical flaw at colleges and universities, and that is to use a four-point scale. If you use a four-point scale your calculations will be accurate and fair. Douglas Reeves advocates that we give up entirely on the 100-point scale and switch to the four-point scale (2004). Rick Wormeli advocates assigning a value of sixty to an F (2006).

The second fundamental problem with the use of zeros is when zeros are used under the auspices of motivating student. This idea is not supported. Once a student receives a zero or two, on a 100 point scale, they quickly see that there is no way to recover and will tend to give up rather than suddenly become motivated (Reeves, 2004). Reeves points out that just a couple of zeros can result in a quarter or semester failure which can, in turn, have a very significant impact on a student's entire school record and career. Bruce Oliver makes the claim that "There is no practice in

education that discourages students more than the practice of giving a zero for an incomplete assignment or an assignment that is not turned in (2006).”

Instead of giving a zero for incomplete or missing work, an alternative that is advocated by many is to simply declare that zeros are not allowed and therefore negotiate alternatives in each situation (Page, 2002).

If we recall that the purpose of grading and reporting is ultimately about feedback and learning rather than punishment or labeling then we quickly see how zeros are harmful, mathematically inaccurate, and wrong (Wormeli, 2006).

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## Nominations for Fall 2006 Election

NYSMSA is governed by a Board of Directors elected by its membership. Nominations are needed for the following positions:

- **Secretary**
- **Director of Region II**
- **Director of Region IV**
- **Director of Region VI**
- **Director of Region VIII**

Officers serve for a period of two (2) years. Regional Directors serve for a period of three (3) years and must work in the regions they represent.

The Board, along with other association personnel, meets approximately six times a year to direct the course of our professional organization.

You may nominate an individual or self-nominate for any of the open positions. All candidates for office must be members of NYSMSA.

Please provide the following information about the nominee:

- Name
- Current Work Position
- Place and Address of Employment
- Work and Home Telephone Numbers
- Work Fax Number
- E-Mail Address
- Position being sought

In addition, please include a photograph and a paragraph discussing your reasons for seeking this position. All nominations must be postmarked no later than **July 29, 2006**.

**Mail to:** NYSMSA, P.O. Box 53, Pleasantville, NY 10570.

Ballots will be mailed to the membership in late August. Election results will be announced at the October 2006 conference.

# Lea's Lessons

Lea Macdonald



## Writing-to-Learn: Writing-to-Think!

*Middle school teachers are more willing to integrate writing strategies in their content areas when they can see how these strategies support their instructional goals, particularly related to understanding content and meeting the standards.*

In the last Lea's Lessons (Winter 2006), I shared the importance of integrating reading in the content area to promote student thinking and achievement. When content-area teachers incorporate writing in all areas of the curriculum — social studies, math, science, foreign language, music, art, physical education and language arts — students benefit in three ways: they have a resource for better understanding content; they practice a technique that aids retention; they improve their writing skills. Writing is a powerful tool for learning and communicating.

Across the curriculum, writing changes the climate of the classroom by encouraging active learning and thinking, and one cannot write without thinking. Teacher-centered classrooms become student-centered. The teacher becomes the facilitator, aiding students' understanding of the content to be learned. Assuming that students gain new knowledge by making associations with prior knowledge, the writing activities commonly used across the curriculum gives students opportunities to make those connections. With the hectic pace of back to back classes, students need the opportunity to assimilate information, make connections and formulate

questions on what still confuses them about the lesson. Writing-to-Learn forms and extends thinking and thus deepens understanding.

Writing-to-Learn is often informal writing that is worked into a lesson. This kind of writing practice helps students become more comfortable with writing and encourages the use of writing as learning strategy. I'd like to share some effective informal strategies to weave writing into all the content areas.

### Learning Logs

Journals and learning logs are probably the best known of the Writing-to-Learn strategies. Students are asked to explore course content by writing in their journals. For example, a common use of learning logs in math and science classrooms would be to have students explain problem-solving processes in writing. In addition, learning logs can ask students across the curriculum to write in order to:

- React to class activities
- Explain new concepts and ideas
- Question the significance of what you've learned
- Explain assignments in your own words
- Question what you don't understand
- Evaluate a lesson — was it relevant?

### Double-entry journals

One variation of learning logs, double entry journals, are typically used to help students better understand course readings. On one side of the page students summarize important passages from the text. In an adjacent column, they may explain the significance of the passage, draw connections to

other readings or experiences, or discuss how the idea may be applied in real life.

### **Entrance and Exit Slips**

Entrance slips, often taking only a few minutes at the beginning of class, ask students to make a list of questions or write a few sentences describing what they already know about a topic. They may be collected and read anonymously as a way to begin class. Exit slips, done at the end of class, ask students to summarize what was discussed that day, or reflect on strategies they used to learn the new material. Ideally, these short writing exercises serve two purposes: they give teachers a quick means of assessing what students know about a topic; they give students the opportunity to process new ideas, identify trouble spots, and review, which may also help activate long-term memory.

### **Self-assessments**

To gauge students' understanding of a topic, or to help students monitor their own learning, I always give my students a self-assessment questionnaire. What was the most difficult part of this assignment? Why? What part are you most satisfied with? What will this project show me you have learned?

### **Lecturette**

When I need to deliver a good amount of information to my 7<sup>th</sup> graders I use this model. I lecture for 7 minutes as students take notes on a graphic organizer. They stop writing and share the information with a neighbor. I lecture again for 5-7 minutes. Once again they share information. I may repeat this scenario one more time. Finally, individually, each student will write a paragraph summarizing the content of the lecture.

### **Note to a Friend**

Middle school students love to write notes to each other. After a mini-lesson or lecture, ask students to pair up and write each other a letter summarizing 5 key points from today's lesson.

### **3 Minute Pause**

This is a powerful strategy for encouraging critical thinking and collaboration. After reading, viewing a movie or documentary, or listening to a lecture, students work in small groups to respond to the following 3 instructions:

- summarize the key points
- make connections text-to-text, text-to-self, or text-to-real-world
- formulate questions about what you've learned

### **ABC Brainstorming**

As a review for a unit test, my students find one concept, important person, fact, or event from the unit for each letter of the alphabet. Using these words, they write an extended response about the content learned.

Regardless of how teachers implement Writing-to-Learn strategies, informal writing helps students think about the content, reflect on their knowledge of the content and share their ideas with others.

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# Top Ten Reasons to Attend NYSMSA's 26<sup>th</sup> Annual Conference NIAGARA FALLS, NEW YORK OCTOBER 19-21, 2006

- #10 Held in the brand new, state-of-the-art Conference Center Niagara Falls in downtown Niagara Falls, NY
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- #5 NYS middle-level practitioners sharing classroom-tested lessons and instructional strategies
- #4 Nationally-acclaimed presenters presenting the latest research-based middle-level practices
- #3 Focus on NASSP's *Breaking Ranks in the Middle*
- #2 Focus on the *NYS Essential Elements of Middle-Level Education*



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## Student Strategies for Success: What's It All About?

Carolyn L. Hirst-Loucks and Kim P. Loucks

In today's climate of increased accountability, everyone involved in middle-level education has a focus on improved student achievement. It seems that English Language Arts and mathematics skills are those receiving the bulk of the attention as the skills that are fundamental for student success. Other content areas are vitally important for student learning, as well. And for students to realize their full potential and enhance achievement, there are a number of study strategies that will help. These strategies include setting goals, organizing time, reading, making sense of notes, completing homework, listening and preparing for tests.

From the Essential Elements of Standards-Focused Middle-Level Schools and Programs, Essential Element 2's rubric criteria states that "... an educational program [should be] comprehensive, challenging, purposeful, integrated, relevant and standards-based." Incorporating strategies such as those mentioned above will increase student achievement across ALL content areas.

### Setting Goals for Success

One nonacademic connection that can hook students into believing in the power and utility of goal setting is to look to athletes. In 2002, a group of sports psychologists spoke to U.S. Olympians to determine what made them successful. The researchers found seven consistent mental traits that led to success. (*Journal of Applied Sport Psychology*, September 2002.) One of the mental traits identified was that the athletes were highly motivated to improve. Often it seems difficult, if not impossible, to motivate students. Adult-support networks must persuade and convince students to continually

invest in their learning by constantly looking for ways to improve. Students will want to find their *WIIFM* ("What's in it for me?"). Once they are able to discover this and internalize the reasons, students will be motivated to set and continually flex their goals, striving to improve.

### Organizing for Success

An organized adolescent very often seems to be an oxymoron. One way to sell the benefits of being organized to students is to help them understand that the faster assigned work is completed, the quicker they can get to do other things. Students should understand and be able to apply the key factors for organization by:

- being on guard against procrastination;
- consciously planning how to best use study time;
- having all necessary supplies and materials in the study area;
- prioritizing so that study and work time can be effectively and efficiently managed.

### Reading for Success

Reading comprehension is the cornerstone for all learning. Effective reading strategies have been examined in countless studies. Research shows that use of reading skills helps people not only in school but also in life beyond school. Learning to learn entails acquiring relevant information and knowledge about specific content domains. How can we do this with our students? By giving students effective strategies with which to read both informational texts and fictional pieces, we can allow students to broaden their prior knowledge without ever leaving the classroom.

## Note-Making for Success

The research suggests that the act of taking notes, using whatever method a student chooses, increases cooperation, aids in retention, organizes information, and facilitates a deeper understanding of the material. Teachers come to view *note-making* as so much more than a way to record facts; it also leads to deeper student engagement, understanding and reflection (Fisher, Frey and Williams, 2002). The process of listening, reading and combining all that is heard and/or read is the process of making that information one's own. Students should be exposed to a variety of note-making strategies that fit their predominant learning style. Giving the students the knowledge of note-making structures and reinforced practice in this skill will give them the lifelong ability to listen and/or read material and effectively summarize it. Being able to summarize is a primary component of comprehension.

## Homework for Success

The purpose of homework, what it looks like, how long it should last, and who should be doing it are issues that quickly and passionately are a constant part of the homework debate. This debate has been raging for many, many years, and has seemingly risen to the top of educational conversation.

One of the keys to successful completion of homework lies in relevancy. If the work assigned has meaning, students are much more likely to complete assignments and get the necessary practice and reinforcement. In addition, consistent team/grade level/department homework policies have been shown to help increase homework compliance by students.

## Preparing for Tests for Success

Taking tests has become a non-negotiable. As students move through their school experience, they will encounter more and more tests. They need to have appropriate strategies to help them be as successful as possible. Students

should know that consistently keeping up with classwork, organizing previously completed work and reviewing on a regular basis is the best form of test preparation, even if it isn't the most glamorous. Students who are best prepared are able to determine what to study. They can identify essential concepts and skills as opposed to those that are trivial and not worth the attention. They can also reflect upon the material to be tested and accurately assess what they should review or relearn to meet the demands of the assessment.

## Home Support for Success

How can we best inform and empower parents and guardians to be the support mechanism for their children in regards to school performance? Between birth and age 18, children spend about 10 to 15% of their waking hours in school; parents and guardians must have the skills to manage the remaining time. To address this, schools would do well to consider parents and guardians as essential partners in the educational process. The school must deliberately design opportunities that will allow teachers, administrators and support personnel to reach out to parents and guardians and engage them in the partnership. To this end, parents and guardians must be able to frequently communicate with the school about the adolescent's progress.

## Listening for Success

Teachers frequently lament "they just aren't listening" and wonder just how many times directions will have to be repeated. So much of what students must know is acquired through listening. We spend over half of our time listening, as opposed to reading, speaking and writing. Once students have developed strong listening habits, there will be less of a need for the *teacher* to repeat everything.

From *What Work Requires of Schools: A SCANS Report for America 2000* (1991, p.

xviii), one of the foundational thinking skills demands that kids know how to learn; they should use “sufficient learning techniques to acquire and apply new knowledge and skills.” This becomes a mandate for teachers, administrators and parents to work in concert in helping students to learn and apply appropriate study strategies to their work, leading ALL to success.

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# The New York State Parent Education and Awareness Program

Susan L. Pollet



You do not have to know someone who is undergoing a separation, divorce or other child-centered litigation, you do not have to experience it yourself, nor do you have to view the recent film *The Squid and the Whale* to recognize that putting children in the middle of adult conflict can be detrimental to their health and well-being.

New York State's Chief Judge, Judith S. Kaye, announced in her 2001 State of the Judiciary Address an initiative to institutionalize parent education for separating and divorcing parents. A 19-member advisory board was created to oversee this process. The Advisory Board is comprised of individuals from across New York State and includes representatives in the fields of pediatrics, child psychiatry and psychology, social work, and family life science, as well as a matrimonial attorney and law guardian, and Family Court, Supreme Court and Appellate Division judges.

What is the New York State Parent Education and Awareness Program? It is a program designed to educate divorcing or separating parents about the impact of their breakup on their children. The primary goal is to teach parents ways they can reduce the stress of family changes and protect their children from the negative effects of ongoing parental conflict in order to foster and promote their children's healthy adjustment and development.

How can you learn more about the Parent Education and Awareness Program? Following the guidelines developed by the Advisory Board, the Office of Court Administration certifies and monitors local providers of such services who wish to accept court-referred participants. The

New York State Parent Education and Awareness Program's Web site ([www.nycourts.gov/ip/parent-ed](http://www.nycourts.gov/ip/parent-ed)) contains all of the guidelines and procedures for certification, and all of the forms that the providers of the program must use. There are currently 48 certified parent education providers in 38 counties offering classes in 58 locations.

This is just a brief overview of the current status of The New York State Parent Education and Awareness Program. Experience and research have shown that parent education does make a positive difference for children and their parents who are experiencing divorce or separation and can help bring about a reduced need for court intervention. Currently, parent education is available in 38 counties. We are working to make parent education available in the remaining 24 counties in New York State. If your county or area does not have a parent education program and you have some suggestions as to potential providers, you can contact the program by e-mail ([nyparent-ed@courts.state.ny.us](mailto:nyparent-ed@courts.state.ny.us)), by toll-free number (888-809-2798), or write to the Parent Education Board, 140 Grand Street, Suite 701, White Plains NY 10601. Also, you can locate information about parent education at the parent education Web site ([www.nycourts.gov/ip/parent-ed](http://www.nycourts.gov/ip/parent-ed)). Finally, please tell parents about this important program. It can make all the difference in the lives of children and parents in this state.

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## The Learning Style Classroom

Nannette S. Armenti and Karen A. Maritato

Knowing a student's learning styles can assist the teacher in developing and implementing lesson plans. Two types of learning styles are present each day in middle school classrooms: global and analytic. Global learners need activities that build on experiences and familiar knowledge. Students are shown the whole picture first so that they can see where the lesson is taking them. Analytic learners need a well-thought-out and developed lesson plan. Lessons follow a step-by-step process. This may appear to be an overwhelming task for a teacher. However, most students have a combination of learning styles, which helps the teacher in developing a well-rounded lesson. Therefore all students will be able to walk away from the lesson with their individual needs met.

We used these learning styles to formulate a program for 8<sup>th</sup> grade students who were starting Math A1 and facing the New York State Assessments, all in one year. We were helped in this endeavor by two administrators in the Half Hollow Hills School District: Dr. Joan Della Valle, principal of Otsego Elementary School, who had been using learning styles on the elementary level for years; Dr. Selena Isles Smith, principal of West Hollow Middle School, who helped us coordinate and implement our program on the middle school level. Through several seminars with Dr. Della Valle, we were able to explore the needs of our students using their individual learning styles. First we administered a learning style profile survey provided through the Education Department of St. John's University. The survey was processed and then put into a homework prescription program that individually analyzed each student's learning style. Each student was given a homework

prescription plan that outlined his or her individual learning style. These results were shared with each student's parent. Not only did it give us an insight into each of our students, but it was also welcomed by the parents as a tool to better understand their child's study and work habits. Dr. Smith, our principal, gave us the opportunity to use this data to develop a program that surpassed our expectations within the first year.

Having each other as colleagues, we were able to commit to a program that not only helped our students but also, even in its developing stages, enabled us to receive benefits by developing our teaching strategies. As we progressed, we became more and more comfortable with these new strategies. We developed the program at a slow pace, but as time went on, we became more and more comfortable with the format. Eventually, we found all our lessons were falling into a natural rhythm that incorporated learning styles each day.

We always outlined our units, starting with a unit title, followed by subcategories along with time frames for each topic, quiz, review session and test. Most lessons opened with a global "do now." This gave our global learners the spark they needed to stay with the lesson. We proceeded with a variety of overhead lessons, board work, note sheets, hands-on activities, technology-based lessons, cooperative learning lessons, and "pair and share" activities. When trying a new activity, we would ask for student feedback, using their ideas to make any modifications they felt would be beneficial. Transitions from one activity to the next ran smoothly, taking away the need for constant teacher-directed activities.

All group and “pair share” workers were joined by using their different learning styles or by a combination of one low, two medium and one high achiever in each group. We even sat them each quarter using this technique. The students were not even aware of the arrangement. We ended most lessons with a summary sheet, which helped bring the lesson together and also provided the students with something concrete.

Our classroom became a place of relaxed alertness, diverse lessons, and predictability.

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## Fourth Annual Middle-Level Institute at The Corning Museum of Glass Monday, June 26- Wednesday, June 28, 2006

You are invited to join your middle-level colleagues from across New York State at the highly acclaimed fourth annual NYSMSA/CMoG Middle-Level Institute.

The Institute will be held at the Corning Museum of Glass’ ultra-modern facility. In addition to receiving ten hours of intensive hands-on middle-level instruction, participants will be able to spend considerable time perusing the glass exhibits that extend back to antiquity. Participants are also invited to exercise their own creativity with a hands-on glass-fusing project. Create your own work of art and then take it home.

### Choose one workshop for ten hours of expert hands-on instruction

(Each workshop will be limited to 25 participants)

- *Middle-Level Leadership That Works*
- *Commissioner’s Regulations and the Three Model Middle-Level Strategy*
- *Developing a Community of Learners: Using research-based strategies to increase students’ skills and knowledge, while improving state assessment scores*
- *Connecting the State Assessments to the Middle-Level Student: Tackling the Elephant through Data Analysis*
- *Making Writing Manageable for Middle-Level Students*
- *CIA: Operation Mathematics (Curriculum, Instruction & Assessment)*

### Program Schedule

#### Day 1 — Monday, June 26

**1:00-1:30 p.m.** Introductions and Orientation  
**1:30-4 p.m.** Workshops  
**4:00-5:00 p.m.** Join Museum Educators on a tour of The Corning Museum of Glass  
**6:30-8 p.m.** Picnic Dinner & Live Hot Glass Show

#### Day 2 — Tuesday, June 27

**9:00 a.m.-Noon** Workshops  
**Noon-1:20 p.m.** Lunch  
**1:20-4:40 p.m.** Workshops resume  
**5:00-6:30 p.m.** The Rockwell Museum of Art invites you to a reception and tour.

#### Day 3 — Wednesday, June 28

**9:00-11:00 a.m.** Workshops  
**11:10 a.m.-Noon** CMoG Closing Activity on the Summer Stage  
**1:20-2:45 p.m.** Summer Stage *You Design It*. Watch as the gaffers create one participant’s drawing in hot glass!

For detailed information including the complete Institute brochure and registration materials, please visit [www.nysmsa.org](http://www.nysmsa.org)



# Positive Youth Development: If Only Schools Were Like Baseball Teams!

Kate Thomsen

Think of how much more effective middle schools would be if they worked like baseball teams. Baseball teams bring highly skilled people together under the leadership of a coach who has a vision for winning. Members train together, practice together, and celebrate together. They know what they have to do to win, and they give it their all. Middle schools could be like baseball teams, too. Here's how.

Teachers often work on teams and plan together, but in practice, teachers' techniques are uniquely their own. Some utilize cooperative learning strategies; others do not. Some routinely integrate multiple intelligences strategies into their lessons; others do not. Some teachers are comfortable integrating service-learning into their curricula; others are not. If a school-wide plan for promoting positive youth development existed, all teachers would be regularly utilizing the approaches that are known to promote both academic excellence *and* personal/social development.

## PYD Challenges Schools

School-based positive youth development (PYD) challenges school personnel to think very differently about young people. In the positive youth development approach, students are no longer "vessels" to be filled, "problems to be solved," "risks to be mitigated," or subjects to be tested (Astroth, Brown, Poore & Timm, 2002). Rather, they are partners in their own development with voices to be heard. They are resources to be tapped rather than liabilities to be managed. They are people to be empowered rather than to be made compliant. Students are perceived as potential leaders, workers, parents and neighbors. They are understood to be *in the*

*process of* becoming adults, allowed to experiment with their ideas and to resolve any errors that might occur along the way. They are *hopeful* people who know that their voices matter, that they can depend upon caring adults to create safe environments where they will learn according to their unique styles, and that they will receive support and guidance when they need it.

Middle schools face state and federal mandates and are held accountable for the achievement of standards and outcomes. They answer to the governments, parents, and the community businesses for which they are preparing students to work. Their workforces are often under contract and flexibility is not always possible. As a result, middle schools face great challenges in integrating positive youth development into their rather inflexible systems and into teachers' existing pedagogy.

Even so, middle schools ought to be heartened by the fact that they are already in the ballpark, and caring educators have been helping their students "run the bases" of our educational system for quite some time. Educational theorists like Daniel Goleman (1995) and Howard Gardner (1983) have made significant contributions to the field of positive youth development within all school settings while never using the term "positive youth development." Indeed, many of the current educational trends, such as cooperative learning and learning styles theory, have aspects of PYD at their core.

## Middle Schools Are Already in the Ballpark

In order to integrate positive youth development into their schools, effective principals, like baseball managers, need many successful

techniques. One technique is to make sure that staffs within their buildings share the same vision. A school that promotes positive youth development envisions students *engaged in their own development*, making lasting relationships with staff and peers, participating in challenging learning experiences, and interacting within environments where they feel bonded to the school.

In the same way that baseball players must have core skills such as throwing, catching and batting, school personnel who are focused on positive youth development must have a solid core of knowledge from which to draw. The following three trends lay a solid core of knowledge for school-based PYD teams.

### Brain-based Emotional Intelligence

An understanding of how *emotions* promote learning, as well as hinder it, is as essential to a school team as the ability to throw a ball is to a baseball team. This theory recognizes that emotions play as big a part in a child's learning as do intellectual ability or access to fine teachers. Goleman (1995) made the connection between emotions and the ability to learn in his book, *Emotional Intelligence*. Other educators who have researched the brain and learning have elaborated on the topic, leaving little doubt that students who are struggling with emotional issues are less likely to be able to learn (Wolfe, 2001; Jensen, 1998; Sprenger, 2001).

Students are individuals with emotional histories that accompany them into their classrooms, and teachers need to be adept at recognizing emotions and managing these histories. School personnel who understand this principle and take measures to assist students in managing emotions are incorporating aspects of positive youth development. Teachers who understand the impact of emotions on learning can incorporate strategies on a daily basis that give students of all ages opportunities to cope effectively with their emotions and free up the "working memory" (Thomsen, 2002). As a

result, students will take these strategies into their adult lives and be able to navigate life's challenges better. These simple strategies help staff develop relationships with students and communicate to them that they are more to us than their test scores.

- Start out class by simply asking students to rate their day so far on a scale of 1-10.
- Teach kids how to identify stress in their bodies so they can be aware of their own responses and work toward self-calming.
- Find out when your kids are having birthdays and acknowledge them – high school, too!
- Help kids develop empathy for others by discussing diversity and challenges people face.

### Multiple Intelligences and Learning Styles

*Multiple intelligences* theory is another key element of an effective team, as important as an outfielder's ability to catch a fly ball. Recognizing that students are capable of being "smart" in at least eight ways, educators who utilize multiple intelligences theory "pitch" their content to students in ways that ensure that they can really "catch it". These intelligences are: logical/mathematical, linguistic, musical, spatial, interpersonal, intrapersonal, naturalist, and bodily/kinesthetic. Gardner (1997, p. 20) postulates that educators often overlook the many ways in which a child is intelligent, especially if the child in question is not thriving (testing well) mathematically or linguistically.

Unfortunately for many students, they are not given standardized tests in the areas in which they excel. Many students who struggle in school come to the conclusion that they are not "smart" when that is not the case. To avoid this, Gardner (1997, p. 21) advises that the best way to teach a child something new is to utilize his or her strongest intelligence. For example, musically intelligent children would likely learn the times tables easier if they were put to music.

Kinesthetically intelligent children would do better if they were allowed to physically move about or handle things as they learn.

Just like a pitcher must be adept at both throwing a fastball *and* reading the catcher's signals, school personnel must understand both multiple intelligences *and* the signals of students' *learning styles*. The skill of addressing learning styles cannot be separated from the ability to integrate multiple intelligences into classroom lessons. Silver, Strong, and Perini (2000) integrate Gardner's theories with their studies of learning styles. Each style has a strong preference for learning and interacting with others. By utilizing multiple intelligences and learning style theories in their teaching, middle school educators are better able to *engage students in their learning*. Here are a few simple ways to start:

- Help your students discover their strongest intelligence and their preference for learning and interacting with others. There are many surveys already available.
- Have students think of famous people and ask them to decide what their strongest intelligence is and what their learning style might be.
- Allow students to do a project in any way they wish (musically, artistically, danced, written, etc.)
- Offer students opportunities to contribute in the way that best suits their personalities. Outgoing students might give tours and greet visitors; others might care for plants and animals; others might coordinate sending cards to sick or grieving students.

## Building Character

Just as baseball players must be capable of taking their turns at bat, school personnel must "step up to the plate." When it comes to *building character*, middle school educators must first model the character traits they expect their students to acquire, and then reinforce the traits when students demonstrate them.

In middle schools, character education is often perceived as an *activity* when it is actually a *process*. Schools that engage their students in the process of building character are participating in positive youth development. Character education programs often focus entirely on the students, neglecting to hold staffs responsible for their actions and interactions. *Building* character, on the other hand, is a process and a joint effort between both adults and students. These character-building strategies promote bonding and connection to school, and may be incorporated into daily routines:

- Make sure that new students never eat alone. Pair them with other students to ease their transition. Be sure to prepare the "welcoming" students for the importance of their role.
- Show the respect to students that you wish to receive from them. Never assume they know how to be respectful. Teach them first by your example and expect that they will eventually be comfortable with the behavior.
- Create opportunities for students to contribute to others in some way.
- Ask for students' ideas and suggestions when creating classroom rules and procedures.

Baseball players enter a game equipped with their core skills of throwing, catching and batting, but they also need additional tricks up their sleeves to help them win games. The same is true for educators. Middle school personnel may rely on the three core elements we just mentioned to form the foundation for a great team effort, but additional strategies need to be developed if the team expects to *connect* kids to school and *engage* them in their own development.

## Service-learning and Peer Leadership

In the game of baseball, players work together, know each other's quirks and personalities, and encourage one another to be successful. They cheer from the dugouts and bolster those who may have become disheartened. Teamwork

in a baseball game is like *service-learning* and *peer leadership* in middle schools. These are strategies that teachers can use to transform students' lives.

When students seem unmotivated, disruptive or lacking in self-esteem, service-learning or peer leadership ought to be part of the game strategy. Students who are marginally connected to school become engaged when they can see, first, a value in what they are learning, and second, that they have something to offer to others. Too often, students sit in classrooms and absorb information year after year, rarely connecting the information to the real world. Only very rarely do they get to see how they can make a meaningful contribution to this process.

Service-learning and peer leadership are strategies that can get middle school kids to show up at school because they know that someone, possibly a younger student or maybe a nursing home resident, is eagerly awaiting their arrival. Once they see that what they do is valued and appreciated, students are eager to remain engaged, just like baseball players stay in the game when they believe they can contribute towards a winning effort.

Often, academic areas improve because of the confidence gained through the experience of service. Service-learning and peer leadership can take many forms, and can range from very simple to more complicated (Thomsen, 2006). While there is little cost involved, coordination of projects is often time-consuming, but well worth every minute invested. Whatever form they take, service-learning and peer leadership strategies engage students in meaningful work, increase bonding to school, and foster relationships between adults and students.

## Mentoring

Where would players be without their coaches? Even the most talented baseball player needs a coach to help him stay on track and reach his full potential. In middle schools, the coaching function is filled by *mentoring* pro-

grams that connect students to caring, committed adults (or older students). This strategy is a powerful one to use when students throw us curve balls. A middle school student who has not responded to our interventions may need a caring adult more than anything else we can offer.

None of us entered adulthood alone. If we think about it, we can remember people, places or experiences that helped guide us on our path. Mentors become the allies that youths need when they are unsure of themselves. They listen without judgment, ask questions that teach, and give the most precious gift of all, their time. Youths need *quantity and quality* time with adults. They need to know that someone will be there for them no matter what.

When we wonder why some middle-level students seem to be so unmotivated to succeed in school, we must remember that it is hard to care about yourself when it appears that no one cares about you. Mentors prove that these students are worth caring about because they are willing to give them their time. Every positive youth development approach underscores *relationship* as its core because without relationship, nothing is possible; with it, magic can happen.

## Cooperative Learning

Once again, baseball teams can be living examples of cooperation. It would be impossible to win a game if teams played like nine individuals competing with one another. In middle schools, students learn the value of cooperation and team effort through *cooperative learning*. These are strategies that, when implemented properly and consistently, have immense powers to positively influence students' development. Skillful teachers can utilize these strategies to help students interact with groups to improve social skills.

As students work together on tasks, they learn more about themselves and those with whom they are working. Cooperative learning

makes it easier to understand the concept of teamwork and the importance of each team member's contribution. Cooperative learning brings the interpersonal and intrapersonal intelligences to every group task. The skills associated with these intelligences are skills for life, and the earlier they are honed, the better.

### Playing the Game!

Any coach knows that finding the right players is only half of the job. The other half is to get the players to work as a team to create the environment in which students can thrive. Principals must make sure that each member of their team *knows the score* at all times when it comes to individual students. Wise middle school principals and their teams know that students are full of surprises. When you least expect it, they throw you a curve!

Baseball players do not hit home runs by accident, and neither do educators. Like professional ball players, effective educators work hard, practice, and are managed by people who know how to spot talent and nurture it. They focus on shared goals and work as a team for the benefit of their students. As they face the challenges of integrating PYD, middle school principals and school personnel must remember that they are already in the ballpark, and when schools play like baseball teams, our students are the winners.

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# CALL FOR PRESENTERS

NYS MIDDLE SCHOOL ASSOCIATION

26<sup>TH</sup> ANNUAL CONFERENCE

NIAGARA FALLS, NY • OCTOBER 19-21, 2006

As part of the **2006 NYSMSA Annual Conference**, one-hour workshops will be scheduled throughout the day on **Friday, October 20, 2006**. Individuals or groups of individuals are invited to submit a Call for Presenters application on any topic related to middle-level education.

Please note that **all workshop presenters MUST be registered for the conference** and that **registration fees cannot be waived**. Please return completed Call for Presenters application forms by June 16, 2006. Thank you.

NAME OF PRIMARY PRESENTER \_\_\_\_\_

POSITION \_\_\_\_\_

SCHOOL/ORGANIZATION NAME & ADDRESS

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

PHONE (WORK) \_\_\_\_\_ (HOME) \_\_\_\_\_ FAX \_\_\_\_\_

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DO YOU OR DOES YOUR SCHOOL HOLD A MEMBERSHIP IN NYSMSA?  YES  NO

CHECK HERE IF YOU ARE REGISTERED AS A TRADE EXHIBITOR AT THIS CONFERENCE.

(Please note: Trade exhibitors **may not** promote their products during workshops; they may only promote developmentally appropriate instructional practices, using their products as models.)

**Application Deadline: June 16, 2006**

PLEASE ADDRESS ALL COMPLETED APPLICATIONS AND QUESTIONS TO:

NANCY SAMPSON  
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(over)

TITLE OF PROPOSED PRESENTATION:

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ABSTRACT (For inclusion in program; please limit to fifty words or less.):

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PRIMARY FOCUS / STANDARDS AREA ADDRESSED (check appropriate box/es):

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Arts  | <input type="checkbox"/> Social Studies           |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Career Development/Occupational Studies           | <input type="checkbox"/> Advisory                 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> English Language Arts                             | <input type="checkbox"/> Instructional Strategies |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Health/Physical Education/Family Consumer Science | <input type="checkbox"/> Leadership               |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Languages Other Than English                      | <input type="checkbox"/> Middle-Level Philosophy  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Math/Science/Technology                           | <input type="checkbox"/> Other                    |

WORKSHOP FORMAT (check one)

- lecture       interactive       discussion       demonstration

OVERHEAD PROJECTOR AND SCREEN ARE AVAILABLE IN ALL WORKSHOP ROOMS.  
LCD PROJECTORS ARE AVAILABLE IN SOME WORKSHOP ROOMS.

- Check here if overhead is needed.       Check here if LCD projector is needed.

OTHER PRESENTERS IN YOUR GROUP (if applicable):

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Position \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Phone \_\_\_\_\_ FAX \_\_\_\_\_ E-mail \_\_\_\_\_

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Position \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

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Phone \_\_\_\_\_ FAX \_\_\_\_\_ E-mail \_\_\_\_\_



# A Student Speaks...

## Bullying in Middle School

Christina McCabe

Middle school is a defining, transitional period in a student's life, when students begin to seek autonomy from their parents and begin to look to their peers as role models (Espelage, 2002). It is at this time that popularity begins playing a major role in school settings (Espelage, 2002). These social changes cause students to want to gain acceptance from their peers. In order to gain this acceptance, some students behave antagonistically, bullying other students. This is especially true if older students have established bullying as the norm at the middle school because younger students will bully in order to fit in and become popular (Espelage, 2002).

In today's middle schools, bullying plays a significant role in the development of students. It is most prevalent from the sixth to the eighth grade. Bullying is any abusive, negative behavior, where one or more students use their strength or status to intimidate, humiliate, or injure another student repeatedly over time (Banks, 1997). There are a variety of different types of bullying, including physical, verbal, relational, sexual and technological (cyber). Physical bullying occurs when one student injures or threatens another student. Verbal bullying involves the teasing and/or insulting of another student. Relational aggression is a form of social bullying, which is very common among young adolescent girls and involves actions such as rumor spreading, secret divulg-

ing, backstabbing, exclusion, and insulting (Skowronski, Weaver, Sach & Kelly, 2005). Relational aggression is often accompanied by cyber bullying. This form of bullying occurs when students use e-mail, instant messages, and Web sites to damage someone mentally, socially, or academically (Skowronski et al., 2005). This type of bullying is becoming very popular among young adolescents because it is one of the fastest ways to spread rumors, and it allows the bully to remain nameless (Skowronski et al., 2005). Unlike relational aggression, however, cyber bullying is used by both boys and girls (Banks, 1997). With so many forms of bullying, it becomes obvious that many students are at risk for being bullied. One study reported that 29.9% of middle school students are somehow involved in bullying (Espelage, 2002). In one group of students, 13 % reported that they were a bully, 10.9% reported that they were a victim, and 6% reported that they were both a bully and a victim (Espelage, 2002). On top of this, in 1998 the US Department of Education reported that 75% of all students will be bullied in some manner during their school career (Nishina & Juvonen, 2005). These statistics allow adults to realize the significant impact that bullying has on today's school system.

With these statistics in mind, it is important for educators to be able to identify bullies and their victims. Young adolescents who bully are typically students who feel the need to be

*One of the goals of every educator is to help others become educators. We are taking this notion one step further by printing exceptional papers from undergraduate and graduate students who are enrolled in courses geared to teaching "in the middle." For those of you who are teaching at the university level, if you have articles you feel are worthy of sharing, please e-mail them to us at [editor@nysmsa.org](mailto:editor@nysmsa.org) and be sure to include written permission from the author.*

powerful and to be in control (Banks, 1997). These students have little anxiety and high self-esteem (Banks, 1997). These adolescents frequently come from homes where there is a lack of parental warmth, involvement, and supervision, and physical punishment is commonplace (Banks, 1997). It is also common for bullies to come from families where substance abuse is prevalent and where families use poor problem-solving models (Espelage, Bosworth & Simon, 2000). Family situations such as these often lead young adolescents to become defiant, oppositional, and apt to break the rules; therefore, educators can often easily identify these students as potential bullies (Banks, 1997). It is important to note, however, that not all bullies come from backgrounds such as these. Studies show that the most innocent young adolescents may be the most hostile in their bullying actions (Skowronski *et al.*, 2005). Therefore, some bullies are popular, charismatic, and receive positive attention from adults (Skowronski *et al.*, 2005). These personality traits make it difficult for educators to recognize them as bullies. These “innocent” bullies typically use relational aggression as their method of bullying. They avoid being caught due to the secretive, evasive manner in which they bully (Skowronski *et al.*, 2005). This, therefore, allows them to socially isolate their victim, while increasing their own social status (Skowronski *et al.*, 2005). Relational aggression bullies typically are driven by jealousy, anger, the need for attention, and the fear of competition (Skowronski *et al.*, 2005). With two distinctively different types of bullies, it is important for educators to recognize that it is difficult to identify bullies. Educators must also be aware that there is a subset of students who encourage bullies to continue their behavior. These students do not bully other students, but they do serve as reinforcers or assistants (Packman, Lepkowski, Overton & Smaby, 2005). They typically encourage bullies by laughing at their antics and egging them on (Packman *et al.*, 2005). It is important for educators to be able to identify bullies and

reinforcers in order to reduce and eliminate bullying in their school.

Like bullies, victims of bullying can come from a variety of different backgrounds, which can make it difficult for educators to identify them. The typical victim is anxious, insecure, and cautious. He or she has low self-esteem, which makes them easy targets (Banks, 1997). These students also lack social skills and friends, and often have overprotective parents (Banks, 1997). While this is the stereotypical victim, it is important to note that victims can in fact come from any status or clique. As previously stated, this is especially true when considering relational aggression. With this form of bullying, victims are often friends with the bully. The bully uses their friendship to spread rumors about them, which can lead to the victim being excluded from the group. Educators must be aware that any student can be a victim of bullying.

The act of bullying produces a variety of negative effects on the victim’s social, emotional, and intellectual development. Victims of bullying typically fear school because they view it as an unsafe, hostile environment (Banks, 1997). This fear of school leads a victim of bullying to be frequently absent from school and, therefore, leads to low academic achievement (Nishina & Juvonen, 2005). On top of absenteeism, victims suffer from social isolation, chronic anxiety, and depression (Packman *et al.*, 2005). In extreme cases, bullying can lead to suicide and varying degrees of violent behavior (Banks, 1997). Some of the most extreme acts of violence that have occurred include school shootings, such as Columbine.

Although victims of bullying deal with it every day, most do not report it to adults. This allows the vicious cycle of bullying to continue as an established norm at many schools. There are various reasons victims of bullying do not tell adults. Some victims believe that teachers, parents, and administrators are ineffective at

solving problems such as bullying. They believe that adults will do little to stop bullying because it is often viewed as a rite of passage (Banks, 1997). Other victims fear that if they make adults aware of the problem, it will only become worse (Banks, 1997). Therefore, they continue to endure their current bullying.

Since many educators are never made aware of the bullying that occurs at school, it becomes important for teachers and administrators to realize the need for an effective anti-bullying policy. While many schools have an established policy, it is important to re-evaluate it on a regular basis. Unfortunately, many schools have adopted an overly simplistic policy to reduce bullying, referred to as zero tolerance (Packman et al., 2005). In order to eliminate bullying, it is necessary to adopt a comprehensive, school-wide intervention and prevention program (Banks, 1997). This program must establish an environment characterized by: “(a) warmth, positive interest, and involvement from adults; (b) firm limits on unacceptable behavior; (c) consistent application of non-punitive, non-physical sanctions for unacceptable behavior or violation of rules; and (d) adults who act as authorities and positive role models” (Packman et al., 2005). At many schools, this type of program is initiated by adults. In order to make it truly effective, however, it is necessary for school personnel to understand the importance of involving students at every level. Allowing students to come up with solutions to bullying problems and encouraging them to take on leadership roles can make for a more effective program (Packman et al., 2005). It is important to involve students in this because the students are the ones experiencing the bullying. In order to establish a student-driven intervention policy, it is necessary to promote the three A’s: Awareness, Avenues, and Assimilation (Packman et al., 2005) Awareness requires all school personnel and students to be aware of bullying actions (Packman et al., 2005). Schools must acknowledge that bullying is indeed a problem, which

cannot be ignored (Packman et al., 2005). Avenues refer to the importance of strategic planning (Packman et al., 2005). Students must understand that adults will help them and that they can be trusted (Packman et al., 2005). Assimilation encourages schools to establish a culture of respect and acceptance (Packman et al., 2005). A student-driven anti-bullying campaign, however, does not require that all adult participation be eliminated. Counselors, for example, must emphasize that bullying is a continuum of behaviors, and must break away from the common practice of looking to identify bullies (Espelage et al., 2000). It is also important that educators are educated about bullying. They need to be made aware of what bullying looks like and what they need to do to stop it. Educators can set out to alleviate bullying in schools by providing students with positive adult role models who will help them sort out their problems (Espelage et al., 2000). At the middle school level, it is important to establish an advisory program and a strong support staff through the guidance department (Espelage et al., 2000). By working together, students and educators will feel more comfortable discussing bullying and will be able to work together to eliminate it.

Bullying will affect three fourths of all students at one time or another, making it important for students and educators to be educated about bullying. Students and educators must work together to implement programs that promote a safe school environment and acknowledge bullying as a problem. Students must know that they can seek help when they are being bullied or when they are having other problems that may cause them to bully other students.

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**Sitting in this chair  
Is a Child, a  
Beautiful  
Vulnerable  
Fragile  
Child,  
Someone's Baby,  
Who is in the process  
of  
Developing  
Maturing  
Learning.  
Always remember to  
Treat this Child with  
Tolerance  
Dignity  
Respect,  
As if this is  
Your Baby  
Sitting in this chair.**

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## Environmental Learning in Middle Schools

Tim Grant

In their 1998 study, *Closing the Achievement Gap*, Gerald Lieberman and Linda Hoody concluded that students in programs in which the environment is used as the integrating context for learning not only demonstrated greater enthusiasm for learning and fewer discipline problems, but also outperformed their peers in traditional classrooms on standardized tests in all subjects. The following year, a Pennsylvania teacher, whose middle school program was profiled in the study, pointed out that his program included 40% of the students in his school but only 1% of its discipline problems.

Environmental learning is particularly well-suited to meeting the developmental needs of students in the middle school years. As *In Transition* readers know better than anyone, young people between 10 and 14 years of age are experiencing major intellectual, physical, and emotional changes. The National Middle School Association, in its 2003 publication *This We Believe: Successful Schools for Young Adolescents*, identified several characteristics of education that successfully meets the special learning needs of this age group. They include opportunities for active leadership; partnerships between schools and communities; curriculum that is relevant, integrative, exploratory, and developmentally appropriate; and the use of multiple learning strategies and interdisciplinary team teaching. The hands-on, multi-sensory, multidisciplinary nature of environmental learning fits this bill exactly.

Since 1991, my co-editor and I have had the pleasure of working with a great many inspired educators who have shared their innovative environmental learning ideas and activities in the pages of *Green Teacher* magazine. Sixteen months ago, we published *Teaching Green: The Middle*

*Years*. Subtitled *Hands-on Learning in Grades 6-8*, this large format paperback contains over 50 of the best teaching strategies and activities contributed to *Green Teacher* magazine in past years – all updated and revised for this special anthology. The book was designed to serve as a complete “green” teaching resource for middle school teachers, who will find in its pages a wealth of kid-tested ideas contributed by educators from across North America.

The learning activities and teaching strategies in the book engage adolescents in learning the fundamentals of citizenship for the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Some provide strategies that help young people learn about the ecosystems where they live, and what is needed to sustain them. Others explore what it takes to live sustainably on this planet. Still others help students recognize global disparities in resource use and their connections with other people and other species that share this planet. Finally, other articles and activities provide opportunities for young people to develop and reflect on their values. All of these learning strategies are designed to engage adolescents in learning the fundamentals of environmental citizenship in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

We designed this book to be welcoming to those less familiar with environmental learning. On the first page of each article, readers will find a handy summary box that indicates the subject connections, key concepts, skills to be developed as well as the time requirements and materials needed. At the back of the book, a glossary defines terms that may be new to some readers, and a curriculum index serves as a quick guide to subject links.

The environmental and social problems bedeviling humankind will not be solved by the

same kind of education that helped create these problems. It is our hope that this book will inspire educators to take a leading role in helping the next generation to develop knowledge, skills, and values that will enable them to enjoy and share the Earth's bounty while living within its means.

**Tim Grant** (tim@greenteacher.com) is the co-editor of *Green Teacher* magazine and five books including *Teaching Green – The Middle Years*; Green Teacher, PO Box 452, Niagara Falls NY 14304; (888) 804-1486.

## What Humans Need

**Key Concepts:** basic human needs, wants versus needs

**Time:** 30 to 40 minutes

**Skills:** critical thinking, cooperative learning

**Materials:** two 5x8 index cards per student

**Preparation:** The 30 words below represent various needs and wants. Write the words on index cards, one word per card. Prepare one set of 30 cards for every 15 students (i.e., for 30 students, prepare two sets of 30 cards). If there are more than 30 students, add more words and cards so that there are two different cards for each students.

### Procedure:

1. Divide the class into two groups, each of which ideally should work around a large rectangular table.
2. Give two index cards to each student. Divide the long table into four sections marked "highest priority," "high priority," "low priority," and "lowest priority." Dividing the table in this way allows students, if needed, to create rows within any of these sections that more finely reflect their ranking of the importance of some needs and wants over others.
3. As a warm-up exercise, ask students to imagine that they are living somewhere on the planet in the year 1600. What would have been their most important needs and wants at that time?
4. Ask students who think they have cards that represent items of the highest priority to place them under the "highest priority" section. Allow a few moments for the group to peruse the placements made. Next, ask students who think they hold cards with items that are a "high priority" to place them in that section.
5. Continue these steps until all the cards have been placed in the four sections. There will be some obvious low and lowest priority items, but students may feel that many needs vie with one another for the highest priority. While an item such as air conditioning would likely be deemed lowest priority — since electricity had yet to be invented in 1600 — this exercise helps students begin to separate basic needs from wants.
6. Ask students at each table to spend a minute examining the placements of the cards and then have them do a more complete ranking of the 30 items. Discussion is to be encouraged.
7. Before their interest flags, allow each student to move one card up or down and give a short explanation in support of the move. This procedure allows everyone to have a say and mitigates the natural tendency for the most outspoken students to control the priorities. (Note that groups do not need to come to consensus; it is the process of prioritizing that is of value.)
8. Now ask students to rank the cards according to their personal (modern day) views of what are the highest and lowest priority needs and wants. Once again, allow each student to move one card up or down and give a short explanation in support of the move.
9. The group activity will take at least 20 minutes, which leaves time afterward for individual statements and discussion about current priorities.

### Words:

books	self-esteem
heat	electricity
stereo	acceptance
food	hot water
bike	oxygen
water	shampoo
car	friends
clothes	television
bed	computer
pets	toilet
shelter	education
tools	refrigerator
health	meat
phone	medicine
fuel	air conditioning

This activity was excerpted from Barbara Duncan's article, "Living within Earth's Means," and is reprinted with permission from the book *Teaching Green — The Middle Years* (2004), edited by Tim Grant and Gail Littlejohn. For more information, go to [www.greenteacher.com](http://www.greenteacher.com) or call (888) 804-1486.



## A Rationale for Actively Capturing Institutional Memory

Dennis Tosetto, NYSMSA Executive Director

I can recall taking social studies classes during my junior high school days and wondering what purpose was being served. What bearing could what happened long before I was even born have on my future decisions or job responsibilities? I guess that I may have been a little slow on the uptake, but half a century later, I now know the answer. In fact, the older that I become, the more that I notice how the decisions that guide my professional life are based on the past. After all, if we don't learn from the past, we are bound to repeat it.

Most likely, your school and school district have developed plans to guide them into the future. It is also likely that you have developed plans for your professional future that fit into the direction in which your school and school district are progressing. As educators we understand the need for concrete plans as a means to move us forward and improve our productivity.

Planning for the future requires establishing a baseline of what presently exists and why, determining where you want to go or end up, and working through the dynamic dissidence between what is and where you want to be. We can either try bumbling through to meet a goal using a "hit or miss" methodology, or we can use one of the many excellent planning models that are currently available. In fact, because so many are already available, I won't be outlining for you yet another good planning model for change. Rather, I will be speaking to the need for every school and organization to maintain a formal history chronicling change and how to effectively accomplish this task.

The past guides our future and, as such, should be the baseline for all decision making. Certainly, we can all cite examples in our professional lives where we or our colleagues did not consider the past when making decisions and then found the past being repeated - and sometimes with very negative consequences.

Change is not only constant at the middle level; over the past two decades it has been volatile, as well. All one needs do is compare the traditional junior high school subject-centered culture of the 50's and 60's to the child-centered world that is evident in today's quality middle-level schools. The problem is that many educators new to the profession have little sense of the reality that we who experienced life in a junior high came to know.

The key question in guiding the development of an institutional memory is, "What did we do, and why did we do it?" Those of us who have been around for a while only have to recall the past (understanding that sometimes our recollections can become very different from reality over time), but newcomers to the school and community also need to be aware of how current programs and processes came to be, so they can better understand current realities and be better able to help move the program forward as team players. After all, how can someone be expected to enter the school community as a participative, productive member of the "team" without having access to its institutional memory?

Some good reasons to maintain a written institutional memory include the following:

- We tend to forget important elements of our history over time, including connectivity among and between events.
- Over time, our minds tend to change our recollections to the point where even those who were present remember events in very different ways.
- Formal institutional memory provides insight into the culture of the school that sometimes isn't otherwise apparent. It also promotes a better understanding of current events.
- Having access to institutional memory and providing an abridged version to new employees and parents can help to increase the comfort level by quickly bringing individuals up to speed, increasing understanding, and garnering support.
- Not only does it help individuals to see progress, it also helps them to see needs and build consensus.
- Being kept aware of the past helps to prevent recycling through unsuccessful old ideas in new ways.
- A written institutional memory can provide the basis for innovation and creative methods, programs, and processes.
- A written institutional memory can be the catalyst for celebrating success. One should reasonably expect a school history to chronicle positive team efforts and school improvement.
- Certainly, the written institutional memory should highlight and memorialize the efforts and accomplishments of individuals who significantly contributed to the welfare and improvement of the school and its students in significant ways.

Over the years, I have visited innumerable schools, sometimes as a consultant and sometimes as a visitor seeking out innovations. Over time, one comes to see various schools

from a historical perspective. Some schools show consistent forward momentum while others show signs of stagnation or even regression. I have seen schools where educators spent years working hard to develop excellent middle-level components such as interdisciplinary instruction, effective advisory programs for all students, and teams that consistently deal with student and programmatic needs on a daily basis. I have also seen some of these same schools effectively dismantle these positive program components within a very short period of time once the building leadership changed.

When times become challenging, it can become much more difficult to remain focused on core values and to maintain a consistent progressive direction. During such times, it is beneficial to be able to refer to a well-organized chronology of the past that demonstrates core values, program continuity, and ongoing school improvement. This is especially true when it connects to a well-developed plan for the future.

I firmly believe that a written institutional memory of past events and decisions, along with a long-term plan for change, supports forward momentum and draws attention to potential regressions. I believe that this is especially true when a school experiences consequential personnel changes or is impacted by other significant external forces such as budget concerns, contract disputes, the hiring of a new superintendent, or a shift in board of education control.

How should a written institutional memory be developed and constructed? While I have to believe that some schools have already moved in this direction, I am unaware of any that have formally done so. Here are some thoughts on how I believe this can best be accomplished:

- Charge an inclusive school-based group that includes the principal, staff members, parents, and students with the responsibil-

ity for developing and maintaining a written institutional memory for the school. This responsibility can be assigned to the school's Building Planning Team or a similar group.

- Determine a format for developing the written institutional memory and rules for all aspects of this endeavor. For example, it is important that the written product be inclusive and positive. Even deficits should be presented as needs and opportunities for improvement so as to present them in a positive light. Also, nothing should be included that is directly embarrassing to anyone or directly presents individuals in a negative way.
- At a minimum, include a comprehensive annual written report compiled by the group; an index of pertinent documents including a mission statement, goals and objectives; building-level reports; samples of current pertinent school-based materials; news articles; pictures; etc.
- Include State testing reports and other relevant statistical summaries.
- Include a State of the School Report that is written by the principal. The principal is, by definition, the instructional leader and, as such, should have his/her perspective and plans for the future included as a component document.
- Annually prepare/update a summative document for parents and staff members new to the school that chronicles the school's history, recent accomplishments, mission statement, and goals and objectives. Consider sending a similar report to the superintendent and ask that it be distributed to school board members.
- Maintain a school portfolio each year that will be maintained into the future for review by other interested parties.
- Formally determine how these materials will be maintained in the school. (Consider securing a second copy in the

school's office.)

- Determine how these materials will be made available to others, and who will be responsible for administering the process so that components will not be lost to future parents and educators through neglect.
- Compare your school's process and resulting documentation for institutional memory with those of neighboring schools so as to see other ways of addressing this task.

Most schools already have much of what is needed at hand. Most principals are currently required to file an annual report and, one way or another, school-based initiatives are usually presented first in writing as concepts and then results are generally committed to writing, as well. Schools tend to have newsletters, handbooks, and other documents that are made available to staff and the public each year which could be included in an index. Also, educators are well known for taking pictures and saving samples of noteworthy student work and artifacts of their best lessons and activities.

Consequently, it shouldn't be too difficult to cooperatively bring these reports, materials, and supportive evidence together in a meaningful way. Remember, there is real value in maintaining and updating these materials annually as a collective whole. Through synergy, the collective whole generates more long-term value than the sum of its parts. This is especially true when it is viewed as a cooperative venture involving all concerned. Additionally, this type of initiative tends to bring the school's educational community together to celebrate the year's successes as well as to bring focus to school needs in a positive way. As the process unfolds, the result can be a time of group reflection on what was, what is, and what should be.

Reflect on your school and consider whether or not all of the “boats” in the “fleet” are sailing in the same direction. Is each of their compasses set to the same point? When it comes to developing a successful school program, it is not sensible to expect that everyone involved will believe that every aspect of the school plan is the best that it can be, nor is it reasonable to anticipate that with enough effort, everyone will eventually view every school goal and objective as most important to the education of young people. However, for the school to be successful, everyone should be able to support the school’s chosen direction. While understanding how things came to be may not change a colleague’s belief as to what is the very best course to follow in the future, assimilation of this information can go a long way toward gaining acceptance and commitment to common goals and objectives from both the school’s staff and community alike.

In closing, I would point out that it is likely that ancient myths and legends originated from real life situations. These long-

repeated stories were probably viewed as so important that they were made more interesting and compelling over time to ensure that the lessons that they conveyed would be carried forward by word of mouth to guide future generations. With the advent of the written word and the printing press, we no longer have to embellish our history in order to ensure its availability in the future.

As educators, we continue to apply the collective memory of humankind in our classrooms on a daily basis, so we should readily see the necessity for maintaining institutional memory as professionals. The need to preserve the institutional memory of our local middle-level schools, including lessons learned, is important today for the same reasons that we began passing on information from one generation to the next millennia ago. After all, the past will always drive the future, and that leaves us with two distinct choices. We can either ignore the past or use it to our advantage to move our schools and our programs forward with cooperation and understanding.

Do you have a colleague who has promoted good middle-level practice in your school, area, or region?

Is there a business partner or non-educator who helps you create the best opportunities for students in the middle?

Honor that person with one of NYSMSA’s special awards:

- Connie Toepfer Award for Leadership
- Ross M. Burkhardt Educator Award
- Business & Community Partnership Award

Go to [www.nysmsa.org](http://www.nysmsa.org) and click on Awards Nomination on the home page menu for further information and nomination forms.

# NYSMSA's 2005-2006 Award Winners

For exemplary contributions in support of middle-level education

## Ross M. Burkhardt Educator Award



*Nancy Pregiato with NYSMSA  
President Jeannette Stern and Ross  
M. Burkhardt*

Elizabeth Day, Teacher  
Mechanicville Middle School  
Mechanicville NY

•

Richard McMahon, Principal  
Manhasset Middle School  
Manhasset NY

•

Janie Nusser, Superintendent  
South Seneca Central School District  
Ovid NY

•

Nancy Pregiato, Teacher  
Pleasantville Middle School  
Pleasantville NY



*Janie Nusser with NYSMSA  
President Jeannette Stern and Ross  
M. Burkhardt*

## Business / Organization Award

Corning Museum of Glass  
Corning NY



*Kristy Bartenstein of the Corning  
Museum of Glass with NYSMSA  
Executive Director Dennis Tosetto*

## President's Award

James A. Kadamus  
NYS Education Department  
Albany NY

•

Charles McCarthy  
NYS Education Department  
Albany NY

•

Elizabeth Sheffer  
NYSUT Educational Services  
Latham NY

•

Brian Sherman  
Indian River Middle School  
Philadelphia NY



*Elizabeth Sheffer*



*Brian Sherman*

## Submission of Articles

*In Transition* accepts 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 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 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; bolded items will be included as contact information.

Title

Author

Position

**School** and/or **Home Address** (please indicate which)

**School** and/or **Home Telephone Number** (please indicate which)

**E-Mail Address**

A brief synopsis of the content of the manuscript (optional)

SUBMIT TO: All documents must be submitted as e-mail attachments to:  
editor@nysmsa.org

***Please note: Only e-mail submissions will be considered; do not mail or fax paper copies of manuscripts.***

DEADLINES: To be considered for publication, manuscripts must be received by August 15 for the fall issue, December 15 for the winter issue, and March 15 for the spring issue.

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

# NYSMSA

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## Middle-Level Staff Development

- 4<sup>th</sup> Annual Middle-Level Institute  
Corning Museum of Glass, Corning NY  
June 26-28, 2006
- 26<sup>th</sup> Annual Conference  
The Conference Center, Niagara Falls NY  
October 19-21, 2006

**Information is available at**  
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