



A MIDDLE LEVEL EDUCATION MONTHLY UPDATE

A MICHIGAN MIDDLE START PARTNER ORGANIZATION

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What Young Adolescents Want Adults to Know

In recognition of the Month of the Young Adolescent, Michigan Schools in the Middle sponsored a young writers contest. We invited students from member schools to write essays detailing what they wanted adults to know about being a young adolescent in 2005. We thank you, middle schoolers, for responding to our contest! We received dozens of entries from young adolescents across the state. Below are the entries from our four winners.

Congratulations to each of you and to your teachers.!

Between the Lines of Middle School

This year has started off on a different track than any other school year of my life. This year I started middle school, which changed how I'm looked at in status, age, and responsibility. From this day on I will always be looked at and look at myself as a middle-schooler, not an elementary student.

Middle school has its ups and downs. One of my favorite things about middle school is that more responsibility is given to me. My mom and dad gave me a key so they don't have to be home when I get off the bus. Also, now at school I have the responsibility to get to class on time.



Sometimes these responsibilities can build my confidence, but they are also stressful because too much is given to me.

Middle school also has some disadvantages. Now that I'm not in elementary, every class taught has a different teacher. This makes it hard to learn all of the teachers' styles, procedures, and rules. Before, I only had one teacher, only taking a little while to learn. Another dislike about middle school is the locker I have to cram all of my stuff into. In past years my supplies were put in my desk, which I found easier to organize. This is because I'm always in a rush to get to class, and I throw books all over the locker. Middle school has been an enjoyable and stressful challenge that has changed me in my thinking and actions.

Tyler Shubitowski, 6th grade
White Pine Middle School
Saginaw Township (continued on page 2)



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www.schoolsinthemiddle.cmich.edu

Sixth Grade Glory

I was ready. Ready for the challenges. Ready for the homework. But most of all, I was ready for Middle School.

I hoped I would get good grades and would make friends. I was also excited about being more independent and riding my bike to and from school and to swim practice. I'm on the Sea Serpents swim team in Howell, and my swimming is one of the things I'm proudest of.

My mom always told me that when she was pregnant with me other women would scare her about childbirth. They would tell her how painful it was, how long it lasted, and that she would be sent home after only one day. My elementary school teachers did the same thing. They told us we would always have to write in cursive, and that our papers would be thrown away if we forgot to add our name. It scared me (and my mom), but we decided to make our own way and see for ourselves.

I face fears, of course, like detentions and zeros (they always try to scare you with the zeros). Also there is the fear of being lost in the maze of Middle School. But I always look forward to my Encore classes and swim meets, and eventually swimming for the Varsity team.

I can tell I'm changing and becoming more responsible. There's nothing to be afraid of.

Gabrielle Montesanti, Grade 6

Highlander Way Middle School
Howell



What Adults Should Know...

Things are not always as easy as people think. This is how I see being a kid my age in 2005.

Adults should know that even though we are kids we still have opinions. People should respect our opinions the way they respect adults' opinions. We should be able to say what we believe and be able to help when we want to. Our opinions can mean the world to someone, just as adults' opinions can.

I think that adults should know that even though it seems easy to say no it can be hard. Kids are always giving in to peer pressure. Sometimes we want to fit in so badly that we will do anything, even things that may harm us such as drugs or cigarettes. All we want to do sometimes is to fit in. If we get in the middle of peer pressure and do something that we are going to regret, then that's when we need adults the most to help us back on our feet.

Adults should know that sometimes friends can be mean and can't always be trusted. If we get in fights with our friends, then adults should at least act as if they understand. It's hard to find a friend that you can trust and that you can tell things without them freaking out.

In conclusion, adults need to know what it's like to be a kid at this age in the year 2005. It is not always easy!

Faith Willis, 7th grade

Standish Sterling Middle School

Next essay on page 3

Middle School

"Do you think I'm fat?" "I'm going to fail the history test!" "Should I go out with Mike?" "I really want to break the 200 meter record!" Just by glancing at the first instant messages that pop up on my computer screen, you start to see what life is like for middle schoolers.

No longer is there just the pressure to pass every class. Now there are the expectations to get a 4.0 every marking period, be a sports star, look picture perfect-even on a Monday morning-and have a boyfriend that could rival Ken. These pressures all lead us to fear failure and the idea of not measuring up.

Don't be fooled, middle school is not all hard. It's also where we mature from flower-print jumpers to hip-huggers paired with American Eagle tops; from 1+1 to x-y; and where my dreams have gone from meeting Barbie to being a top journalist and breaking a track record.

My house is no longer filled with dolls, dresses and the knowledge that I'll never call home late. Now, Seventeen, algebra homework and the non-arguable fact that I borrow my sister's clothes, fill my house. Luckily, my family and I have not grown further apart just because I have become a "moody teenager," but instead have stayed close through this emotional time in my life.

Middle School is not an easy joy ride nor is it a boat full of tears. It is a not-so-perfect mix of laughter, tears, friends, boyfriends, and bullies.

Olivia DeTroyer, 8th grade

Beech Middle School
Chelsea

Schools to Watch Update

The deadline for submitting your Schools to Watch application is November 1, 2005 at 5p.m. We encourage all schools to consider applying for this very special recognition. The application process is designed to help you reflect on your school and plan for continuous improvement.

Applications are available at:
www.waldenu.edu/mstw

If you have questions, please feel free to contact Pat Benson at palme1pj@cmich.edu or visit our website at www.schoolsinthemiddle.cmich.edu



Each of these winners will receive a gift certificate from Barnes and Noble.



Leadership Lifeline

Doing the Right Work

Each year, every school in the United States formally or informally identifies something it will work on to maintain or (ideally) to improve student achievement. Many of these decisions become evident as school improvement plans. Harvard scholar Richard Elmore contends that the selection a school makes within these improvement plans is a critical factor in the school's ability to improve student achievement. Specifically, in a study commissioned by the National Governors Association, Elmore (2003) concluded that

knowing the right thing to do is the central problem of school improvement. Holding schools accountable for their performance depends on having people in schools with the knowledge, skill and judgment to make the improvements that will increase student performance. (p.9)

Elmore points out that the school reform effort in the United States is plagued by falsehoods, one of which is that schools fail because teachers and administrators don't work hard enough. For Elmore, the downfall of low-performing schools is not their lack of effort and motivation; rather, it is poor decisions regarding what to work on. So the problem in low-performing schools is not getting people to work, it is getting people to do the "right work."

What, then, are the various types of work a school might engage in, and which work is the right work? Michigan Schools in the Middle, as a part of Michigan Middle Start urges school leaders to engage in three practices which we believe are the "right work."

First, it is crucial that principals, along with teacher leaders, help the staff to regularly Study Student Work. This research-based practice helps teachers reflect on their practice and collaboratively improve instruction. MSIM schools are encouraged to use various tools such as the tuning protocol, the standards and practice protocol, and the collaborative assessment protocol to improve practice.

A second effective research-based practice is Walk Throughs. Walk Throughs provide school leaders with data to assess implementation of specific strategies within the building. Walk Throughs are non-evaluative and are an excellent means of quickly identifying strengths in the building.

A third important strategy is Data Walls. Building Data Walls is an excellent way to build a professional learning community within the school. Data Walls encourage teachers to post evidence of goal attainment through student work for others to see and comment on. Reeves, in his book *Accountability for Learning*, describes schools using Data Walls and how this practice helps them have internal accountability for learning.

We believe that Studying Student Work, Walk Throughs, and Data Walls are the "right work" for school leaders because these practices are the very heart of school improvement in the Middle Grades. For more information on these practices, contact MSIM at 989-774-7678.



Teacher Topics

Literacy Strategies

Educators are flooding the professional learning community with requests for strategies that work to improve reading comprehension in the upper-elementary and secondary grades. In these achievement-driven times, we want to know what works best to raise test scores, improve comprehension, and motivate students to read. The answers are not simple for most students, particularly for older students still learning about literacy. The needs of adolescent readers are complex and varied (Ivey, 1999), even within specific cultural groups (Alvermann, 2001) and linguistic groups (Rubinstein-Avila, 2003-2004). To make blanket assertions about what works for *all* students is counter productive.

Getting to the bottom of older readers' comprehension and motivation difficulties requires careful, ongoing assessment of instructional practices and students' literacy needs. We believe, like Guthrie and Wigfield (1997), that real engagement in reading is not the product of strategies alone but a fusion of self-efficacy, interest, and strategic knowledge.

What we can report with more certainty are common practices that create barriers to engaged reading and comprehension development. We invite you to consider five ineffective strategies for developing reading comprehension in older students. Before asking "What works?", it might help to ask "What *doesn't* work?"

Ineffective Strategy 1: Don't let students read.

A new high school principal "put an end to reading" and gave back to teachers time formerly used for Sustained Silent Reading. He warned teachers that students should be "focused on the instruction at hand" rather than "sitting around reading" during class time. In a discussion about these policy changes, the principal explained, "Students

have to be taught. We need more time focused on direct instruction."

Ineffective Strategy 2: Make students read what they don't know about and don't care about.

Ineffective Strategy 3: Make students read difficult books.

Ineffective Strategy 4: Interrogate students about what they read.

Ineffective Strategy 5: Buy a computer program and let it do all the work.

What it Will Take

Improving reading comprehension and instruction in the upper elementary and secondary grades will require a great deal of time and effort. There is no magical set of strategies you can get from an inservice workshop. Real changes in literacy learning and teaching will most likely result from a schoolwide literacy plan and strong leadership (Ivey & Fisher, in press).

Bringing about such change means devoting resources to literacy-related personnel and to large volumes of high-quality, diverse, multileveled reading materials in all subject areas. It requires a commitment to providing literacy assessments of all students for the purpose of designing purposeful and appropriate instruction. It means creating a culture of collaboration and peer coaching. Finally, it requires that professional development focus on building teacher knowledge and expertise.

Is this a tall order for schools when the immediate need is to improve their current students' comprehension? Absolutely. But we are doing struggling students no favor when we perpetuate strategies that do not work.

Taken from **Learning From What Doesn't Work, Educational Leadership**, October 2005



Student Station

What's a Hero, Anyway?

Have you ever wondered if you have the makings of a hero inside you? Just what is a hero, anyway? In different times and different cultures, the concept of heroism has had many meanings. Four thousand years ago, the ancient Babylonians told the story of the hero-king Gilgamesh, who built the great city of Uruk, waged war on savage beasts, and embarked on a quest for immortality. The classical Greek culture also celebrated warrior-heroes, such as Achilles, Odysseus, and Hercules; medieval France had Joan of Arc; modern Latin Americans remember rebels like Augusto Sandino and Simon Bolivar; and our own culture considers military figures like George Washington, Ulysses S. Grant, and Dwight D. Eisenhower to be national heroes.

But military leaders and powerful rulers are not the only people remembered for their heroism. The Judaic King Solomon was revered for his wisdom. The Ancient Greek philosopher Socrates is considered heroic by many people, for his willingness to die rather than renounce his principles. Many religions, including Christianity, Buddhism, Confucianism, and Islam, follow the teachings of prophets and lead-

ers who endured great hardships in the service of their faiths. And, in our own time, people look up to heroes as diverse as sports figures like Michael Jordan and Mia Hamm, explorers like Christa McAuliffe, peace activists such as Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and Mahatma Gandhi, and humanitarians like Mother Teresa.

Most of us dream, at one time or another, of being heroes. We visualize ourselves performing great deeds, or giving our lives to some worthy cause; and deep inside we long to prove that we are made of the same "stuff" that our heroes are. Many heroic qualities are often expressed by characters in folk tales, myths, and legends. You can learn a lot about a culture by studying its stories and seeing what qualities its heroes have.

Read some of the folk tales suggested in the Student Book Review, and then take a few minutes to think about what these tales tell you about the values and customs of the cultures from which they emerged. Then, think about our own culture -- what are some of our myths, legends, and folk tales, and what might they tell other people about us?



Student Book Review

The Rainbow People

Author: Laurence Yep

Imagine a land where animals talk, ghosts marry, and the rocks and streams possess magical powers. This is the land of ancient China, as described in *The Rainbow People*, a delightful collection of Chinese legends and folktales.

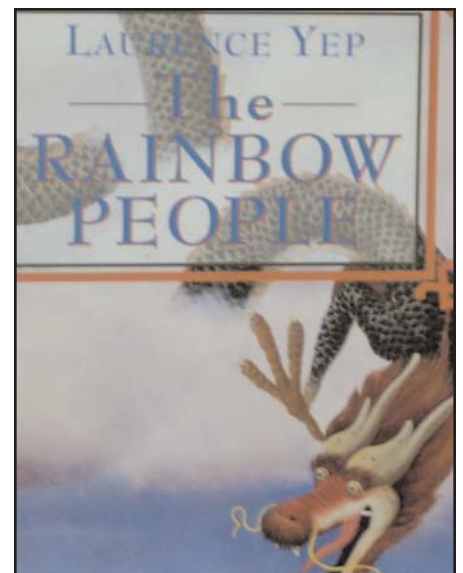
The author, Laurence Yep, grew up in San Francisco, California, as the only Asian-American in his neighborhood. He says that he felt alone and alien, with no one around him who shared his culture. But his father, who had grown up in China before emigrating to the United States, taught him about his rich cultural heritage by telling him stories, legends, and folktales from China. In *The Rainbow People*, Dr. Yep has collected and re-told his favorite Chinese tales.

Would you like to know why cats and dogs don't get along? Read "Natural Enemies," a legend about a cat, a dog, and a magic wand. For a Little Red Riding Hood story with a different twist, read "Bedtime Snacks." And to learn how a losing gambler turned his luck around, dive into "The Professor of Smells."

If you like the stories in *The Rainbow People*, you might also enjoy reading some of the legends, myths, and folktales of other cultures. You can find a wonderful collection of forty stories from different cultures and times in *An Illustrated Treasury of Read-Aloud Myths and*

Legends, edited by Joan Verniero and Robin Fitzsimmons. If you're into Greek mythology, check out *D'Aulaire's Book of Greek Myths*; *The Children's Homer*, by Padraic Colum; or *Black Ships Before Troy*, by Rosemary Sutcliff. You can learn about the ancient Icelandic and Viking culture by reading *The Norse Myths*, by Kevin Crossley-Holland, or *The Sea of Trolls*, by Nancy Farmer. If Native American myths and legends are your thing, try *In the Valley of the Ancients*, by Lou Cuevas, or *Native American Stories*, by Joseph Bruchac. Virginia Hamilton (remember last month's featured book, *The House of Dies Drear*??) has compiled several wonderful books of African American folktales, including *Her Stories* and *The People Could Fly*. Roger Abrahams' book *African American Folktales* is another great read.

This is just a small sampling of the many interesting and enjoyable myths, legends, and folktales out there. Why don't you give one of them a try?





Family Focus

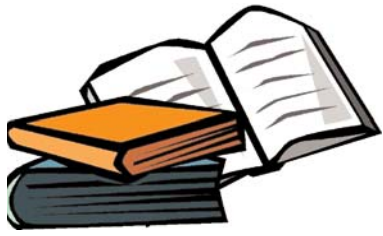
It's MEAP Time... Already?

October in Michigan is a time for enjoying the crisp fall air, tossing a football around in the park, drinking warm cider on the porch, and... taking MEAP tests?!? Yes, the MEAPs are now at the beginning of the school year, instead of in the middle; and, as parents, you can help your kids to do their best on the big test. Here are some things you can do:

- Help your kids to understand why these tests are important. Tests like the MEAP are designed to help schools see patterns of learning among their students. When your school's administrators can see what kids know and where kids are struggling, they can plan ways to improve instruction to better meet students' needs.
- Be positive, supportive, and confident. Tell your child, "This test is important. I know you will try hard and do your best." This is a great way to encourage your child without putting additional pressure on him/her.
- Have your child dress in layers. Worrying about being too hot or too cold makes it hard to concentrate on learning or on testing.
- Be sure your child gets a full night's sleep and a good breakfast. A well-rested, well-fed child is more alert and can con

centrate better. Of course, plenty of sleep and good nutrition are important all year -- not just at MEAP time! If you make sure your child eats and sleeps well before EVERY school day, he/she will go to school ready to learn every day, and this will translate into better grades and higher MEAP scores.

- Encourage your child to read, read, read! Again, it's important to do this every day, not just during MEAP time. The more your child reads, the more he/she will learn. One of the best ways to encourage your kids to read is to let them see you reading. Kids who grow up seeing reading as an everyday activity in their homes become kids who choose to read on their own.
- Stay involved in your child's education. Ask your child questions about school; help him/her with homework, or find someone who can; talk with teachers and with other parents; set aside some time each day to shut off the TV and the radio and spend time talking about what your child is learning in school. Working hard all year long will pay off, not only at report card time, but also in October when your child sits down to take the MEAP!



Resource Review

Educating Gifted Students in Middle School: A Practical Guide

Author: Susan Rakow, Ph.D.

The education of gifted kids has historically been sadly neglected at the middle-grades level. Accelerated learning opportunities are widely available for bright elementary-school students, and advanced courses for gifted high schoolers are flourishing; but, for the brightest students, the middle grades are often a period during which they languish intellectually. This book draws upon Dr. Rakow's more than twenty years of research and personal experience as an educator of gifted young adolescents to provide a deep and thorough look at the needs of gifted middle-grades students and at programs designed to meet those needs.

Initially, Rakow argues that gifted middle school students have unique educational needs, different from those of advanced students at earlier or later ages. Even the brightest young adolescent, she argues, is still a young adolescent -- experiencing all the physical, emotional, and social growth typical of this life stage, while wrestling with the additional challenge of being "different" by being bright. She describes the characteristics which set gifted students apart from their peers -- among others, early development of deductive and inductive reasoning abilities, heightened sensitivity to a variety of stimuli, unusual abilities to concentrate and focus for long periods of time, and precociously mature understandings of human problems and values -- and she contends that these differences can lead to a variety of difficulties for young adolescents, ranging from perfectionism and performance anxiety to ostracism and isolation from peers.

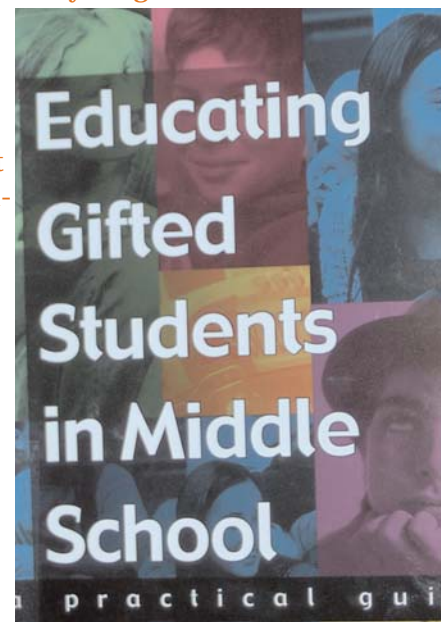
In order to effectively serve ALL students, Rakow asserts, middle-grades schools must perform a balancing act by providing curriculum and instruction which are challenging to gifted kids, while simultaneously striving to reduce the learning gaps between low-achieving students and their peers. This book seeks to lay out a practical approach to meeting the educational, social, and emotional needs of academically gifted young adolescents, without detracting from the opportunities for

learning and equity available to other students. Rakow advocates the development of a continuum of services aimed at meeting the special needs of each individual student, and she lays out a detailed description of how this continuum might be developed and what it might look like. She devotes an entire chapter to the roles of the intervention specialist and the teacher of gifted students.

Rakow deals head-on with the question of whether, and to what extent, differentiated instruction should be utilized with gifted middle-schoolers. She argues that differentiation can be an excellent supplement to, but should not be used as a substitute for, programming for gifted students. The book lays out a detailed rationale for this stance, and then provides a thorough description of what a middle-grades program for gifted students might look like, including both curricular and extracurricular opportunities for learning and growth.

While its topic may be controversial, this book provides a sorely needed examination of the failure of our middle-grades schools to meet the needs of intellectually precocious young adolescents, the human cost of this failure, and the prospects for rectifying the situation without losing sight of the need for equity and support for other students.

If you'd like to check out this important and thought-provoking book, call the Center and ask for resource number SPE-26.





Coaches Corner

Featuring Leadership Coaches

Mary Mantei has served as a Leadership Coach for Rudyard for the past three years. She is now sharing her skills in co-coaching the Hancock Middle School, a new CSR school. Mary has a rich background of Middle Level experience, having taught in grades 6,7 and 8 for eighteen years. She was an active member of a district transition team that restructured two traditional junior high schools to true middle schools. In 1994, she was recognized in *Who's Who Among America's Teachers*.

Mary earned her Bachelor's degree from Oakland University and completed a Master of Arts in Teaching degree from Saginaw Valley State. She developed the Real Reading in the Middle Program and has served as a Middle Level Specialist consultant since 2002. We are pleased to have Mary on board!



Bill Ostwald joins our team as the other co-coach at Hancock Middle School. His experience is in the area of administration, having served as principal in Graveraet Middle School and at Marquette Senior High School. He has also served as a guidance counselor at Northern Michigan University and at Marquette High School. Bill has recently served as an adjunct professor for the Department of Education, Northern Michigan University. Bill has a B.S. and an M.A. from Northern Michigan University. He has an Ed.S. in Ed. Administration from Northern and a Ph.D. in Ed. Administration from Michigan State University. The Michigan Association for Middle School Administrators honored Bill as the Upper Peninsula Administrator of the Year for 1997. Bill has made many professional presentations during his educational career and we are pleased to welcome him to the MSIM team!

Powerful Quote

"I need to become a well-educated person, as opposed to a well-trained person. This means reflecting upon and deepening my own ideas, and giving greater value to my own thinking...We each have our own theories and models about the world and what it means to be human. We need to deepen our understanding of what we believe."
-Peter Block

"Freebie"



The first two people to contact us will receive a set of three videos, each entitled "*The Middle Years.*" The teacher video includes stress management, self esteem, communication, and conflict resolution. The parent video addresses parental involvement, the key to success, understanding the preadolescent, conflict resolution, home/school communication, and career awareness. The student video includes today's challenges, preadolescent development, and responsibility.

Contact Us:



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