



A MIDDLE LEVEL EDUCATION MONTHLY UPDATE

A MICHIGAN MIDDLE START PARTNER ORGANIZATION

AUGUST, 2006 * VOLUME 9 * NUMBER 1

Helping All To Succeed (H.A.T.S.)

The theme for this year's work in Middle Start schools is "Helping All To Succeed," and **HATS** helped kick off the work that began in Traverse City on July 31 and August 1. Leadership Teams from sixteen schools worked together to plan for a successful year for their young adolescents.

Seminar participants were reminded of the unique characteristics of 10- to 14-year-olds and planned ways to begin the school year keeping their students' needs in mind. Teacher-leaders planned ways to involve students in establishing norms, or group agreements for classroom procedures; they also discussed ways to build community and create caring environments for students. (Visit our website * to see a list of resources related to the needs and characteristics of young adolescents.)

Teachers also identified instructional strategies aligned with the needs of young adolescents, and connected them with Cooperative Learning strategies picked up at a week-long Kagan Cooperative Learning Workshop



Carolyn McKanders hears the slogan from a team of Surline "Ship Captains."

that MSIM offered in June. (If you would like support in implementing

Cooperative Learning in your school, call MSIM and schedule a CL expert to come to your school and model strategies in all subject areas.)



Pat Benson directs coaches wearing top hats in a kick-line.

Carolyn McKanders also helped leadership teams organize meetings for success, fostering effective and efficient use of meeting time by establishing outcomes, agendas, and norms. Participants also gained skills in communication to allow teams to engage in cognitive conflict, rather than affective conflict. (To learn more about these powerful tools for interaction, see the information and registration form later in this newsletter and join us in either Marquette or Flint for Carolyn's series "Improving Instruction Through Collegial Dialogue.")

While in Traverse City, teams also framed their work for the year around the Middle Start (and National Forum's) vision. This year's work to build professional learning communities will focus on Strong Academics, Respect for Students' Needs and Interests, Equal Access to a High Quality Education, and Support for School Improvement. To learn more about

these four areas and the middle-grades standards for each, visit the Schools to Watch website **. The Michigan application can be found on our MSIM website*.

So, our HATS are off to all of you who help all students succeed. Please give MSIM a call at 989-774-7678 if we can help you with resources, programming, coaching, and/or professional development.



Standish Sterling "Sailors" ready themselves for a HATS year.

* MSIM website is www.schoolsinthemiddle.cmich.edu

**STW website is www.schoolstowatch.org



A team from South Middle School in Saginaw look like graduates & they're sharing a connection to helping all to succeed.



Leadership Lifeline

Effective Middle-Grades Principals

While recent research has focused primarily on district-level leadership, there is a long and detailed history of research identifying the importance of principal leadership. Highlights of effective schools research conducted through 1984 were summarized in an ERS report *Effective Schools Research: A Guide to School Improvement*. Researchers found that, when specific elements were present to an appreciable degree in a school, student achievement rose above expected levels. Conversely, when these elements were absent to a substantial degree, student achievement fell below expected levels.

Among these elements, a building-wide effort that depends on the exercise of leadership---most often identified in the research as the building principal---was found to be key to promoting higher levels of student learning. Effective schools had principals who:

- were assertive in their instructional role;
- were goal and task oriented (while principals in less effective schools often appeared overburdened by administrative tasks);
- were well-organized and demonstrated skill in delegating responsibility to others, achieving a balance between a strong leadership role and maximum autonomy for teachers;
- conveyed high expectations for students and staff;
- had policies that were well-defined and well-communicated;
- made frequent classroom visits;
- were highly visible and available to students and staff;
- were adept at parent and community relations (Robinson 1985).

"An effective principal is not all that is required for an effective school, but it is very difficult to have a good school without a good principal"
(Musick in Fry et al. 2004, online).

MSIM Schools 2006-2007

AuGres Middle School
Bendle Middle School
Central Elementary, Mt. Morris
Central Middle School, Midland
Central Middle School, Saginaw
Hancock Middle School
Jefferson Middle School, Pontiac
Lincoln Middle School, Pontiac
Madison Middle School, Pontiac
Marion Middle/High School
Rose City Middle School
South Middle School, Saginaw
Standish Sterling Middle School
Surline Middle School, West Branch
Webber Middle School, Saginaw
White Pine Middle School, Saginaw Twp

These schools are currently receiving on-going professional development from MSIM.



Teacher Topics

Starting Out Right

There is little question that good classroom management is a critical element of teacher and student success. A teacher, no matter how knowledgeable, who cannot develop positive learning conditions in the classroom, will never be effective.

What is Classroom Management? Anyone who has heard Harry Wong speak might imagine him standing and proclaiming, “Effective teachers manage their classrooms with procedures and routines; ineffective teachers discipline their classrooms with threats and punishments.” He makes the point that good classroom management has to do with organization and structure rather than with controlling students. A good management plan helps students develop responsibility because they learn to do what is expected of them. In other words, it provides them with an action plan for being successful in your classroom.

Develop a Plan

A teacher can write, post, and explain the procedures students are expected to follow. ***However, it is more effective to structure a process that provides an opportunity for students to feel ownership of the procedures and routines that are established.*** Here’s how:

- Hold a class meeting the first or second day of class, with the purpose of determining the procedures that will be followed in the classroom.
- Tell students you want their ideas about how to conduct a smoothly running classroom. Ask, “What are some things we can do and how can we do them to help our class run smoothly?”
- Stress to students that the procedures need to be adequate and effective in developing a safe, comfortable, fair environment that is conducive to learning.
- Write students’ suggestions on the board. Be sure to add your own input to the list as well.
- Allow ten minutes or so for input, and then examine the suggestions with the students. This can be done in a large group or by breaking the class into small discussion groups. Each group then reports its choices. The entire class may discuss the possibilities before final selections.
- Start the list with a statement worded in positive terms so students have a model to follow.

Adapted from *Teacher Today*, Volume 22, Number 1, August 15, 2006



Student Station

To Conform or Not to Conform: That is the Question!

The Tale of Despereaux is the story of a very unusual mouse. The author calls Despereaux a "nonconformist." Do you know what that means? The Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary defines a nonconformist as "a person who does not conform to a generally accepted pattern of thought or action." This is definitely true of Despereaux - he almost never does what his family and friends think he ought to do. Because of this, he gets into some big trouble... and he also gets into an exciting adventure.

As members of the human society, we are called upon dozens of times each day to decide whether or not to conform. Most of us choose, most of the time, to do and say what we are expected to; and each of us chooses, occasionally, not to conform.

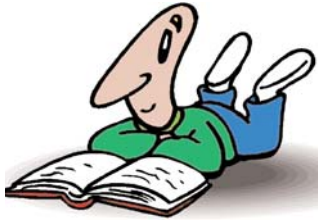
Let's use school as an example. You know that your parents, teachers, and peers expect you to go to school every day; and you know, in your heart of hearts, that going to school is good for you. So, most days, you go. Occasionally, you may take a day off because you're sick; and perhaps, once in a while, you stay home from school "just because." (You may think that skipping school once or twice a year makes you a nonconformist, but it really doesn't, because nearly everyone does it, and nearly everyone thinks it's okay to do it once in a while.) If you really wanted to be a nonconformist, you'd need to do something that most people find unacceptable, like walking into your

classes late every day, or leaving early.

Is it good to be a nonconformist? Is it bad? Does it really matter whether you conform or not? That depends on the situation. In middle school, you will be faced with many situations which force you to decide whether or not to conform. These decisions range from things as simple as deciding which clothes to wear or which sports teams to join, to bigger issues such as whether to drink alcohol, how much to focus on grades, or whether to join in bullying a classmate.

Here are a few questions which might help you clarify your thinking about conformity. Ponder each of them for a few minutes, then share your thoughts with classmates. (It might be interesting to pose these questions to your parents at home tonight, too. You may be surprised at what they tell you!)

- What are some ways in which you conform to other people's expectations every day?
- Are there any situations in which you choose not to conform? Why?
- What are some situations you expect to encounter over the next few years of your life, in which you'll have to decide whether or not to conform to the expectations of your peers, of your parents, and/or of your teachers?
- Is it always good to conform? Is it ever good to NOT conform?



Student Book Review

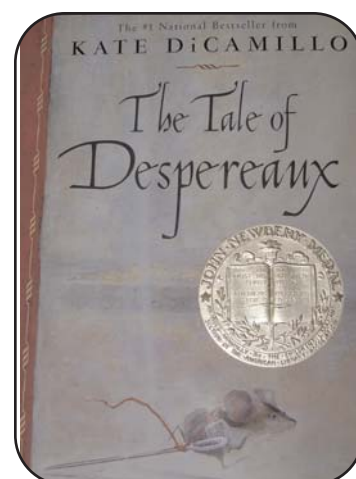
The Tale of Despereaux Author: Kate DiCamillo

From the moment of his birth, it is obvious that Despereaux Tilling is not like other mice. His body is much too small; his ears are much too large; and he was born with his eyes open. To make matters worse, Despereaux doesn't do the same things that other mice do. He is more interested in reading fairy tales and listening to guitar music than in finding crumbs and chewing the corners off papers. He refuses to scurry around and hide in shadowed corners. He is, in short, a nonconformist mouse.

The other mice don't have a clue how to deal with Despereaux's oddness, so they leave him alone... until the day when he breaks one of the cardinal rules of the mouse world: he allows a human to touch him. And this isn't just any human - it is Pea, the beautiful and radiant Princess of the castle, with whom Despereaux has fallen utterly and hopelessly in love. Shocked and horrified, the other mice in his community decide to exile him to the castle's dungeon, to be eaten by the rats.

In the dungeons, Despereaux encounters Gregory, an old human jailer whose gruff exterior conceals a soft heart. He also meets Roscuro, a rat on a mission of revenge; and Miggery Sow, a servant girl who longs to be a princess... and he uncovers a nefarious plot to harm the Princess Pea.

Can a lone, tiny mouse - even a mouse made brave by love - foil a plot to kidnap a princess? Can Despereaux become the "knight in shining armor" who always appears in the nick of time in the fairy tales the little mouse loves so much? Dive into this delightful book and find out! Despereaux is likely to become one of your favorite literary characters ever!





Family Focus

It's Back-to-School Time!

Welcome, parents and caregivers, to another school year! We know that you have high hopes for your children's success in school this year, and that you are looking forward to watching them continue to grow and learn.

At Michigan Schools in the Middle, our main goal is to help kids be successful - as students, as people, and as members of a community. We work with teachers, school administrators, and family members to build networks of loving support for kids. This FYI newsletter is one way in which we communicate with you and your school, and each month the FYI includes a "Family Focus" article just for parents and caregivers.

This year, each "Family Focus" article is going to talk in plain language about one or more things that you can do to help your child succeed in school and in life. We are basing these articles on the book entitled *Developmental Assets*, by Peter C. Scales and Nancy Lefferts. Dr. Scales and Dr. Lefferts have spent many years researching and studying what young people need to grow up strong, healthy, and self-confident. Beginning in next month's issue of FYI, we will share their findings with you and provide tips which can help you build your children's developmental assets.

For right now, we know that you're hurrying around, trying to get all the school supplies bought, after-school plans made, and bus schedules worked out. So, this month, we'll provide some tips on how to get your child started out on the right foot this school year.

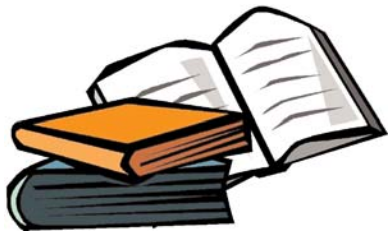
- Your child will need a few basic supplies, such as paper, pencil or pen, and eraser. It will also be helpful to her if she has a notebook or binder for storing these supplies and for putting homework and class notes in. If you can afford to buy a separate notebook for each class, that's fantastic - if not, it's simple enough to keep everything organized in a single notebook.
- Get in the habit of asking your child, every

day after school, what homework he has. Then make a rule - and stick to it! - that the television doesn't go on until the homework is done. If the whole family can stick to this rule every day, it will be the single most important thing you can do to help your child succeed.

- Middle schoolers are old enough to be responsible for remembering to bring home the books, notes, and assignments they need for their homework every night. Set up a contract with your kids which includes consequences if they forget things that they need, or if they "forget" about certain homework assignments. Most schools now have Homework Hotlines that you can call to see which assignments your child has on any given night. Make use of this tool - call every day to see what your child should be bringing home to work on that evening.
- Have high expectations for your child's success. Tell her that you are confident that she can succeed in school, and that you expect her to put forth her best effort on every assignment. Remind her how important it is to her future to do well in school now.
- Meet your child's teachers. They want to work with you to help your child succeed. Stay in touch with them throughout the school year, and they can keep you up-to-date on his progress, his successes, and his struggles. Together, all of you - parent, teacher, and student - can work out ways to help your child be successful.
- Talk with your kids about school, every day. Ask them what they learned that was really interesting, what they're curious about, what they like about their teachers, and what they'd like to learn more about. When they know you're interested, they'll be happy to talk!

These are some simple ways to get your kids off to a great start this school year. Remember, success in school is a family affair - the more you can encourage and support your kids, the better they'll do.

Have a great year!



Resource Review

A Reason to Teach: Creating Classrooms of Dignity and Hope

Author: James A. Beane

James Beane has long been one of the pre-eminent voices for progressive reform in American education. He is perhaps best known for his pioneering work in integrative curriculum, which affords students a major voice in deciding what to learn and how to learn it. Hand-in-hand with the concepts of integrative curriculum go other revolutionary ideas about teaching, learning, collaboration, and community. In *A Reason to Teach*, Beane pulls together his vast experience and wisdom into a unified call to make deep learning happen in the classroom and to enact our nation's noblest ideals in our work with young people.

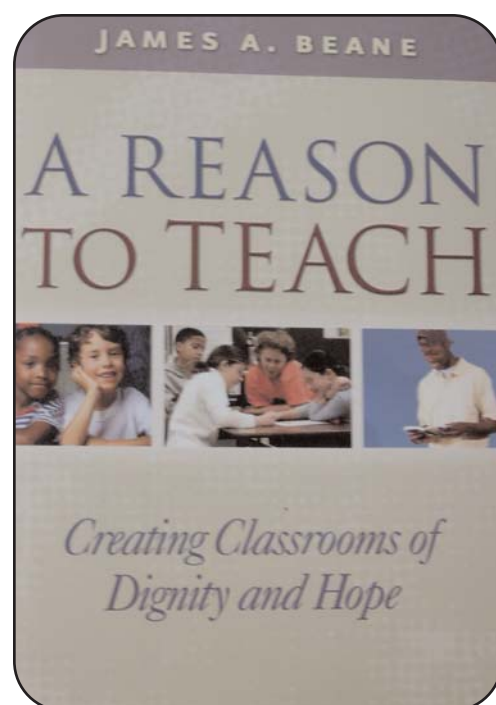
A Reason to Teach is intended for teachers who want to bring truly democratic teaching to their classrooms and schools. The book provides a fine balance of theory and practical example, including an extended case study of how one teacher and his students in a large city organized their curriculum around the goal of getting a new school for their neighborhood. Beane explains not only why democratic teaching works, but also how it works, with careful and pragmatic explanations of such issues as:

- Involving students in planning

and assessing their work

- Embedding social issues in classroom content
- Arranging projects and collaborative activities
- Organizing integrative curriculum units
- Building classroom communities
- Selecting instructional strategies that emphasize student choice, participation, and critical inquiry.

This extraordinary book offers an exciting new perspective on teaching and learning, and it should be a "must-read" for all educators. To see for yourself, call MSIM at (989) 774-7678, and ask to borrow Resource # C-46.



IITCD Is Offered Again

Michigan Schools in the Middle is delighted to offer two workshops of Improving Instruction Through Collegial Dialogue (IITCD) with Carolyn McKanders, beginning this fall. Don't miss out on this wonderful training. Each day builds on the prior day, so it is very important to attend all 5 days.

The cost for each five-day workshop (Marquette or Flint) is \$495 per person. CSR grant discretionary money may be used to pay for this training. Three hours of CMU graduate credit will be available for each workshop. Registration and tuition information will be available at the first day.

For questions please call or email Pattie DuVall at 989-774-1198 or duval1p@cmich.edu.

Workshop 1 - Marquette

This session will be held at the Ramada Inn, 412 West Washington St, Marquette. **The registration deadline is September 1, 2006**

The dates are:

- September 11 & 12, 2006
- October 20, 2006
- November 2 & 3, 2006

Workshop 2 - Flint

This session will be held at the Flint Gateway Holiday Inn, 5353 Gateway Center, Flint. **The registration deadline is September 15, 2006.**

The dates are:

- September 27 & 28, 2006
- October 24, 2006
- November 16, 2006
- December 13, 2006



IITCD Registration

Marquette or Flint

Please circle the workshop that you will be attending.

Name: _____

School: _____

Address: _____

Home Phone: _____

E-Mail ** _____

** All contact for the workshop will be made via email....please include a valid email address.

A light breakfast, lunch, and an IITCD notebook will be provided.

Please return this form with a check to:

Michigan Schools in the Middle

CMU, 678 Ronan Hall

Mt. Pleasant, MI 48859

989-774-7678, Fax 989-774-7684



August "Freebie"

This month we have the book *Managing to Teach*
by Carol Cummmings.

The first ten readers who contact us at 989-774-1198 or
duval1p@cmich.edu will receive this book.

Did you attend the Kagan Cooperative Learning
workshop this summer?

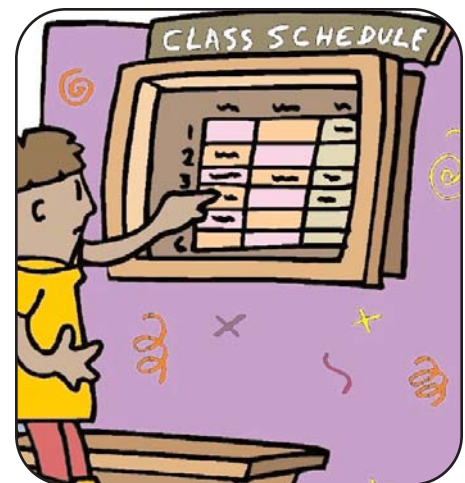
Would you like help implementing it in your classroom?

Contact us about having Andrea Abke come into
your classroom.



Need help with your school
schedule?

Contact us to schedule a time for
Bea Ullrich to meet with your school
and go over your schedule.



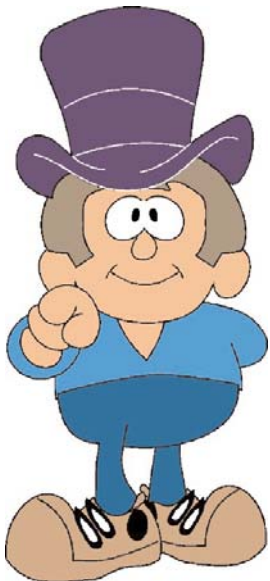
Members Only

Remember that the FYI is for *MSIM* members only. Don't miss out on any of the useful information contained in the upcoming issues; be sure that your membership is up-to-date.

If you are not sure if you are current, call 989-774-1198. We will be glad to look it up for you.

If not, go to our website to download a membership form.
www.schoolsinthemiddle.cmich.edu

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- Social Equity
- Developmental Responsiveness
- Organizational Structures

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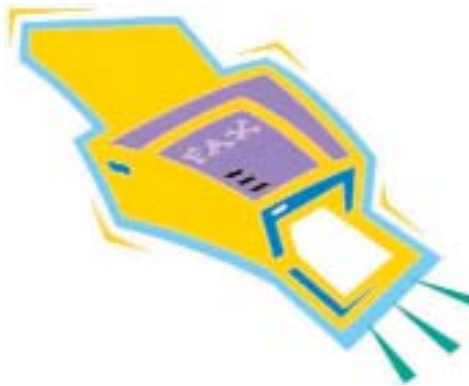
www.schoolsinthemiddle.cmich.edu

Powerful Quote

"A shared vision is not an idea...it is rather, a force in people's hearts...at its simplest level, a shared vision is the answer to the question 'What do we want to create?'"

---Peter Senge

Contact us:



989-774-7684



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