



A MIDDLE LEVEL EDUCATION MONTHLY UPDATE

A MICHIGAN MIDDLE START PARTNER ORGANIZATION

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Michigan Names Three Schools to Watch!!

Today Michigan named three outstanding middle-grades schools as "Schools to Watch." The three are Oakview Middle School in Lake Orion; Saline Middle School in Saline; and White Pine Middle School in Saginaw Township. These schools join seventy-nine other exemplary middle-grades schools across the nation that are models of excellence.

All schools serving middle-grades students in Michigan were eligible to apply for this honor. From among the applicants, five were selected to receive site visits from a team of middle-grades experts. Three of these five were named Schools to Watch. Michigan's Schools to Watch demonstrate excellence in academics, healthy environments for students, social equity, and organizational structures that support great educational experiences for all young adolescents. The Schools to Watch criteria are rigorous, including 39 areas which are examined by review team members who visit classrooms, interview parents, students, and teachers, and meet with district office personnel to get a "feel" for the school. Review team members also examine student work and records such as suspension data, grade reports, attendance, and other data that help support the school's application for this high honor.

These Michigan schools will provide an opportunity for all middle-grades schools in the state to observe excellence in education. Visitors can witness, firsthand, teacher teams that use their common planning time effectively to make a difference for kids; administrators who find creative, positive ways to connect

We are extremely proud of them as they consistently remain focused on "What's best for kids." To quote a CMU student who recently visited White Pine, "White Pine is flat out fantastic!" We think so, too!

with students every day; classrooms that have all students engaged in high levels of learning; and communities that support their schools and are extremely proud of their work. The three schools named are great examples of professional learning communities at work. They are reflective schools which use data and collaboration to constantly improve their practice. These schools face challenges and are not "perfect"--rather, they are on a trajectory of excellence, making steady

progress toward meeting their goals.

Michigan Schools in the Middle would like to take this opportunity to express our thanks to White Pine Middle School. MSIM has enjoyed a wonderful partnership with this middle school for the past ten years, as White Pine has made the transition to excellence in middle-grades education. White Pine has welcomed middle-level education students from CMU each year; administrators have taught middle-level courses for us; and they frequently speak at CMLACMU (student organization) meetings on campus. It has been MSIM's pleasure to provide ongoing professional development to this school. White Pine is a Middle Start school and has participated in self-assessment, leadership seminars, and other programming for the past decade.

We are extremely proud of the staff and administration at White Pine, as they consistently remain focused on "What's best for kids." To quote a CMU student who recently visited the school, "**White Pine is flat out fantastic!**" We think so, too!

To learn more about each of Michigan's Schools to Watch, visit our website at schoolsinthemiddle.cmich.edu



Leadership Lifeline

A Message From the President of the National Staff Development Council Regarding Professional Development

To achieve our goal, we must change the way we work.

We are doing many good things in professional development that are making a positive impact on student learning. However, there are still places where the sit-and-get model exists. Therefore, I am making three requests.

I am thinking about implementing our goal that all teachers in all schools will experience high-quality professional development as part of their daily work by 2007.

To accomplish this, we must change how we do business. The needs of our students are changing. What worked for us and the parents of our students will no longer be sufficient.

In his book *Radical Evolution* (Doubleday, 2005), Joel Garreau says the future will be driven by GRIN technologies: genetics, robotics, information, and nanotechnology. We need to consider how we are preparing our students for this future and how we are developing educators to be better learners and teachers.

Therefore, my first request is this:

Make professional learning happen for every staff member every day as part of his or her job. Ignite the power of learning for staff just as we do for kids.

I grow weary of hearing the tired indictment that educators won't change. In fact, we are changing all the time. We work in real schools with real kids, in complex and diverse communities. We have no option but to change. We are asked to do more with less and simultaneously deal with society's problems. To do this, one need that educators must have met is ongoing, job-embedded, results-driven professional learning. Without this, we will not be properly prepared. The challenge is to make

this professional learning happen in the real world of schools.

Therefore, my second request is this:

Become a catalyst. Catalysts make systems go and also have another quality—they do not get used up in the process.

We are working too hard in some cases and giving up our personal lives to help kids and staff. I don't know a better, more committed group of people than educators who are dedicated to their students. However, we seldom hear a thank you from our students or staff, and a lack of feedback can be debilitating.

That relates to my third request:

Appreciate teachers, mentors, or friends who have been instrumental in your development.

Within a week, contact three of them and thank them for what they have contributed to your learning and development. Let's honor those who helped us learn.

Educators have great heart, stamina, and courage. Join me on this journey. Honor those who taught us and those we teach.

Our staff and kids deserve it.

Taken from: **The Journal of the National Staff Development Council**, *On board/William Sommers*, Spring 2006, Vol 27, No2





Teacher Topics

Reflecting on Success

One of the elements of a professional learning community is reflection, which is critical to improving teacher practice.

In today's volatile world of high-stakes testing and teacher accountability, few practices hold more promise for continuous improvement of instruction than reflection on classroom data. While norm-referenced and standardized tests are useful, the best way of knowing whether or not students have truly acquired meaningful knowledge is to engage in classroom data collection and purposeful reflection. To accomplish meaningful results, a clear plan must be developed for translating information into action. Teachers aiming to use classroom performance data to develop action plans for improvement should:

- **Consider classroom data in the context of the school's overall strategic plan.**

In other words, reflect on the information you've gleaned from data with the framework of your school's improvement goals firmly in mind.

- **Clarify how the data will be applied in light of desired outcomes.** In order to use student performance data, specify the desired growth in a specific subject area or improvement in a particular skill, and articulate how instruction will be targeted to achieve that outcome.

Translating data and reflective practice into action that results in continuous improvement of instruction is a responsibility that must be shared by every member of the learning community. Ultimately, the primary goal of reflecting on data is to create an ongoing, collaborative conversation among teachers at every grade

level to maximize student achievement. It is crucial to remember that the success or failure of the dialog rests on the ability of every participant to recognize and practice three essential components of educational conversation:

- **Collaboration** is the process of cultivating relationships in which administrators and teachers work toward the same goals and depend upon each other to realize common objectives. Collaboration can include individual teachers working together to identify common strengths or areas for improvement based upon data. It can also be collaborating with administrators on school-wide committees to align classroom practices at every grade level with state-wide standards.

- **Focus** refers to the shared vision and expectations that provide the context for change and lead to new levels of performance. Here the emphasis might be upon exploring professional development opportunities that will strengthen skill levels or enable participants to approach old challenges from new directions.

- **Reflection** encompasses an ongoing determination to test assumptions, learn from relevant data, and periodically adjust the best practices of all concerned. In short, reflection encourages teachers to use their professional judgment - whether intuitive or data-driven - to keep the context of student learning firmly within a framework of continual improvement of instruction.

Taken from: **Teacher Today**, March 2006



Student Station

Great Summer Reading!

The sun is shining, the grass is growing, the flowers are blooming, and soon it will be time for summer vacation! How are you going to fill those long, lazy days? After mowing the lawn, playing a game of soccer, or swimming in the local pool, take a break with a cold glass of lemonade and a good book.

Do you like mysteries? Pick up a classic young adult mystery series, like *Nancy Drew*, *The Hardy Boys*, or *The Three Investigators*. Or you could read *Detectives in Togas*, by Henry Winterfield; *The House of Dies Drear*, by Virginia Hamilton; or the *Sherlock Holmes* stories by Arthur Conan Doyle.

Are you interested in history? There are a lot of great young adult historical novels out there. If you'd like to know what life was like for the earliest humans, read *Maroo of the Winter Caves*, by Wendy Turnbull, or *Life in the Great Ice Age*, by Michael J. Oard. If Ancient Egypt is your thing, check out *The Golden Goblet*, by Eloise Jarvis McGraw. You can read some great books about the history of the United States, too. *Beyond the Burning Time*, by Kathryn Lasky, is a compelling story about the Salem Witch Trials. Gary Paulsen's *Nightjohn* gives its reader a window on the world of slavery in the 19th century. The frontier life of the westward expansion is chronicled in *The Ballad of Lucy Whipple*, by Karen Cushman; Laura Ingalls Wilder's *Little House* series; and *I Heard the Owl Call My Name*, by Margaret Craven.

Want a historical novel that's a bit more current? Try *Glory Fields*, by Walter Dean Myers; *The Watsons Go to Birmingham - 1963*, by Christopher Paul Curtis; or *Dragonwings*, by Laurence Yep. *Grab Hands and Run*, by

Frances Temple, and *Journey of the Sparrows*, by Fran Leeper Ross, tell the story of families fleeing war-torn El Salvador in the 1980's. *When Legends Die*, by Hal Borland, relates the tale of a Native American youth trying to keep his people's traditions alive.

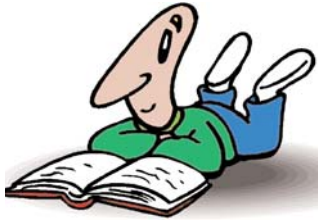
Maybe you want to get out of this world altogether! Try a fantasy novel, like the *Harry Potter* series, by J.K. Rowling; *Westmark*, by Lloyd Alexander; or *Dealing with Dragons*, by Patricia Wrede. Or pick up some futuristic fiction: Lois Lowry's *The Giver*; *The Green Book*, by Jill Paton Walsh; or *The House of the Scorpion*, by Nancy Farmer.

Adventure fiction is also a good choice for summer reading. If you haven't read *Sasquatch*, by Roland Smith, give it a try -- it's a great story! *Hatchet*, by Gary Paulsen, is another good read, and so are *The Girl Who Owned the City*, by O.T. Nelson and *The Goats*, by Brock Cole.

Don't forget the classics! *Treasure Island*, by Robert Louis Stevenson, is still a great read; so is *Robinson Crusoe*, by Daniel Defoe. The *Anne of Green Gables* series will captivate your imagination, as will *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*.

When you're ready to really stretch your brain, pick up *The Outsiders*, by S.E. Hinton; *Fallen Angels*, by Walter Dean Myers; *The Miracle Worker*, by William Gibson; or *The Red Pony*, by John Steinbeck. These books will pull you into their interesting plots, and challenge your reading and thinking skills at the same time!

You've got a whole summer's worth of reading ahead of you -- so, grab a book and get started!



Student Book Review

Tales of Ancient Egypt Author: Roger Lancelyn Green

Ancient Egypt has always been a land of mystery and magic -- the land of pyramids and pharaohs and hieroglyphs and bizarre animal gods. Of all the countries of the ancient world, Egypt was the most isolated and self-contained: for three thousand years it lived its own life, practiced its own religion, and made up its own stories, with hardly any outside influence from other civilizations.

By the time Egypt was "discovered" by the Greeks (in about 500 BCE), the great civilization was in decline. Only the priests could still read the ancient language, and the fabled riches of Egyptian civilization were a thing of the past. Yet the people were still telling myths and stories that had been handed down, unchanged, through thirty centuries or more. In order to truly understand the culture of Ancient Egypt, it is necessary to understand these stories.

In *Tales of Ancient Egypt*, Roger Lancelyn Green has gathered together twenty classic stories and myths from the culture of the pharaohs, and has retold them in a language and style suited to today's readers. These are not dry, dusty pages from some ancient library; they are real stories -- sometimes funny, sometimes incredible, often exciting, and always interesting and entertaining!

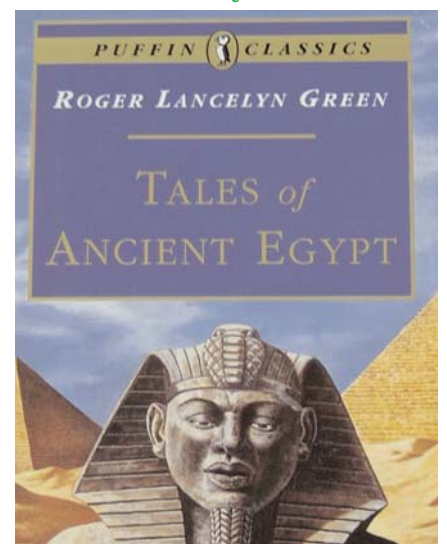
The book is divided into four sections. The Prologue provides some interesting background information about Ancient Egypt, which is helpful to readers who want to get the most out of the stories which follow. The next three sections contain the myths themselves, divided into "Tales of the Gods," "Tales of Magic," and "Tales of Adventure."

In "Tales of the Gods," you can meet all of the most important deities of the Egyptian religion, including Ra, the all-powerful first god; Shu, the wind; Tefnut, the rain; Geb, the earth; and Nut, the sky. You will learn about how the Egyptians believed the world was created, and how evil came into being. And you will laugh and cry with the gods as you read about their all-too-human attempts to gain love, power, and riches.

"Tales of Magic" includes the story of Nefrekeptah, a scholar and magician of the highest order, who brought ruin on himself and his family in his quest for knowledge and power. It also tells the hilarious story of a contest between a magician from Ethiopia and the twelve-year-old Egyptian seer Se-Osiris.

The final section, "Tales of Adventure," includes an Egyptian version of the legend of Helen of Troy, as well as stories of shipwrecked sailors, hunters for treasure, and brothers torn apart by greed and re-united by their love for one another. This section also features a very unusual Cinderella story, with a distinctly Ancient Egyptian flair!

Pick up *Tales of Ancient Egypt* today, and lose yourself in these fascinating and entertaining stories from another time and place!





Family Focus

Preventing the "Summer Blahs"

You've seen it happen before -- school lets out for the summer, and for the first couple of weeks, your kids are full of energy and excitement. They go to the park, play basketball with their friends, maybe spend some time at a summer camp. But the routine quickly gets old, and before you know it, your kids are complaining of being bored and having nothing to do. They start spending more time indoors, watching TV, playing video games, or just sitting around doing nothing. They get cranky and restless, and they can't seem to snap themselves out of it -- so they watch more TV, play more video games, eat more junk food snacks, and get crankier and more restless. It's a vicious cycle.

So, what can you, as a parent or caregiver, do to help your kids make constructive use of their free time in the summer? Here are a few simple suggestions:

- Spend a little time each evening helping your kids decide what they'll do the next day. Remember, your young adolescents may find it hard to go from the rigid structure of the school day to the freedom of summer vacation. Help them plan ahead so that they have interesting and productive things to do at specific times each day. Kids with lots of unstructured, unsupervised time on their hands often make choices that end up harming them later.
- Make sure your kids spend time outdoors and get some exercise every day. Young adolescents are growing and developing, and they need regular outlets for physical activity. They also need fresh air and sunshine, as we all do. Even if they just take a short walk every day, you will notice that their moods improve and they are less restless.
- Set specific limits on TV watching and video game playing, and stick to your limits. We all know by now that spending too much time watching television and playing video games is bad for kids and adults alike. Set some limits for your kids, and stick with them. It helps if you set a good example for your young adolescents by limiting your own TV and computer time, as well.
- Provide options for your kids. Try to have other things around your home for your kids to do. It certainly doesn't hurt to assign them some household chores. Also, if you can, keep a basket of art supplies -- paper, crayons, markers, scissors, glue, and the like -- around for kids to use. Books of crossword puzzles, word searches, or maze

games can be lots of fun, too, and they're cheap. You don't have to spend a lot of money or time to provide some things for your kids to do on rainy days. Perhaps you could take a trip to the local library once a week or so, and let your young adolescents check out books to read.

□ Limit junk food snacks. It's tempting to have a lot of sugary or salty snacks around, especially during the summer; but remember that your kids will tend to snack more when they are around the house all day. Young adolescents particularly need good nutrition, since their bodies and brains are growing and changing so rapidly. If you allow your kids to snack between meals, try to replace junk food snacks with healthful choices such as carrots, celery, cheese, and fruits. Get them to drink water or milk instead of soda.

□ Monitor, monitor, monitor! Although it's often hard to keep track of where your kids are and who they're hanging out with, especially if you're a single parent or a working couple, remember that young adolescents still need guidance in making choices that are positive and healthy. If, like many parents, you can't be home with your kids during the day, make sure that they are in the care of someone you know and trust. Get to know your kids' friends, and the families of those friends. Insist on knowing where your kids are, and with whom, at all times. It is your right as a parent to know these things -- and it is also your responsibility!

□ Schedule some time for fun. Set aside some time at least once a week to just relax with your kids and do something that all of you enjoy. It doesn't have to cost money; it doesn't have to take lots of time, energy, or other resources; it can be as simple as sitting down to a meal together, reading a book together, playing catch in the back yard, or just sitting and talking. When your kids see that you care enough to spend time with them, their self-esteem will soar.



MSIM Staff Attends ASCD Conference

Four Michigan Schools in the Middle staff members boarded the train in Grand Rapids to attend the national meeting of the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development in Chicago April 1-3. MSIM staff members joined 13,000 other participants to learn from speakers including Douglas Reeves, Robert Marzano, Jay McTighe, and Carol Tomlinson who shared their research, passion, and experiences with participants in crowded auditoriums. Other sessions were presented by "those in the field" who shared success stories and strategies for school improvement. The following are some highlights from sessions attended:

No Excuses: From Theory to Reality. Brookhaven Middle School in Decatur, Alabama went from high poverty and very low student achievement to high academic achievement. The multi-year process began with a book study of *No Excuses*, by Samuel Casey Carter. Staff and administrators worked together to adopt "No Excuses" practices: Power Pause (double dose of math and reading), master schedule changes, collaboration, leadership teams, student support teams, progress monitoring, common planning time, and peer coaching. Key to the reform was extensive communication between school groups, administration, teachers, staff and students.
www.ptc.dcs.edu/schools/ms/bhms/bms.html

Make it Happen: Leadership for Student Achievement

Denise Hexom and Bonnie Plummer, of the comprehensive reform organization Nascent Group, Inc., specialize in working with high-poverty, low-achieving schools in urban California. Hexom and Plummer argue that administrators in these schools are often under-trained and over-taxed; thus, Nascent's work begins with building-level administrators and then spreads to the entire school staff and other stakeholders. Reform focuses on collecting and analyzing data; changing the thinking and attitudes of administrators, teachers, students, and members of the community; and holding everyone accountable for success. "Don't do piecemeal reform just to say that you've made changes," say Hexom and Plummer. "If you're not making an improvement, then you're not really doing reform."

Interdisciplinary Professional Development in High Schools: Teachers Talking to Teachers

Hillcrest High School, with its 12 administrators, 170 teachers, and 3,400 students, was a huge and overcrowded school whose staff generally worked in isolation from each other. Poverty was high; student achievement and staff satisfaction were low. Over the course of several years, Hillcrest transformed itself into an award-winning school in which students and teachers are achieving great things. The Hillcrest staff is now organized into nineteen small groups which meet bi-weekly; the school has developed a "common language" for success; all staff have been trained in Cooperative Learning and in understanding different ways of learning and of knowing; and a culture of openness and transparency has been adopted. Hillcrest is now a Bill and Melinda Gates Small Learning Community Demonstration Site, a Recognized New York State Blue Ribbon School of Excellence, a National School Change Award Winner, and an Educational Partner with New Visions for Public Schools.

Middle Start stresses many of the changes that these schools made to increase student achievement: collaboration, studying data and student work, teacher leaders, and commitment to students. These three sessions reinforced in my mind that Middle Start is doing the "right things" for increased student achievement.

Strengthen Students' Strengths

One of the most important goals of education is to recognize individual diversity in how students learn, celebrate that diversity, and "strengthen students' strength" in learning, said Mel Levine, M.D., in ASCD's opening General Session address. "We have the opportunity to acknowledge, exploit, and celebrate the unquestionable diversity of student minds in the way we offer educational pathways and in the processes we employ for evaluating accomplishments," said Levine.

Different children learn in different ways and have different strengths and weaknesses. According to Levine, each child needs to be encouraged and rewarded for his or her strengths in learning and not humiliated for weaknesses.

Educators need to track the way children's brains function in learning. For example, in developing language perception, children in kindergarten through second grade learn how to process language sounds. From second grade through sixth grade, they learn how to construct sentences and think rationally. In middle school, they learn discourse, which is how to read and comprehend large chunks of language, such as paragraphs and stories.

Levine called the process of strengthening a child's strengths "asset management" and "humiliation prevention." Levine suggests that one of the most important things we can do for kids is to keep strengthening their strengths and, more than anything else, hold them accountable for becoming better and better in those areas.

"We also have an opportunity to prevent the tragic and needless humiliation and lowering of aspiration that takes place when a young mind is misunderstood and perhaps falsely accused or unjustly put down or written off," he added. "We have a wonderful opportunity to understand the wiring of kids and to be able to forgive weak areas and decide what areas need strengthening."

To learn more about this topic, log onto
allkindsofminds.org

Engaging all Learners in Critical Thinking- Debra Williams

Students come to school to learn, and often under-achieving students are really undertrained. Teachers need to ask positive questions, not ones like , "What grade are you in, anyway?"

To be sure that your questions will be helpful, share one of your questions with a fellow teacher and explain how and why you believe this is an important question for the teaching and learning of this concept or topic.

Types of question include: Direct questions- those intended for an individual, and Open-ended questions- addressed to the class.

Questioning Makes all the Difference - Kathy Kennedy

The teaching/learning process breaks down if the teacher and learner do not apply questioning techniques. In order for students to improve their critical thinking skills, teachers need to learn how to teach them to ask questions that encourage higher-level thinking while enabling them to take an active role in the learning process.

Passive questions are those answered by the student. Active questions are those asked by the student. Questions can be aimed at knowing, organizing, applying, analyzing, generating, integrating, and evaluating.

Literacy in the Secondary School - Douglas Fisher and Gay Ivey

Many middle level and high school students have never made inferences because they are given texts that are too hard for them. Fisher uses visual aids to help students learn to infer and asks questions to prompt their thinking. The core set of literacy strategies have to be transportable and transparent to keep down confusion and start forming habits. English classes should be grounded in: use of a range of readable texts, texts that deal with topics and issues that are relevant and interesting to adolescents, instruction that builds reading and writing competence, and teaching of a literary device within meaningful contexts.

Robert Marzano: Building Academic Background Knowledge: An Idea Whose Time Has Come

Marzano shared his research and strategies for increasing academic background knowledge through direct vocabulary instruction. Marzano believes, and research confirms, that a rather simple process to increase vocabulary is key to closing the achievement gap. The process described includes teachers selecting thirty terms per subject area, per grade on which the students focus. These are terms that are district-wide and repeated multiple times throughout a student's school experience. The primary requirement is that EVERY-ONE must teach these terms. This, Marzano states, requires second-order change. This total process, involving six steps, requires very little professional development, and can be accomplished within the existing curriculum. Check with MSIM staff for more information regarding this work.

Douglas Reeves: Leadership and Learning Maps: A New Tool for Transforming Research into Action

Reeves shared with his audience a matrix for leadership which is designed specifically for a given school, as opposed to the one-size-fits-all model commonly used. Reeves' Matrix involves four quadrants labeled: "Lucky," "Leading," "Losing," and "Learning." The national author described how this model could help leaders engage in school reform efforts more effectively. Reeves also noted that he believes four aspects are critical for successful school improvement/achievement: Time (three hours/day on literacy); Power Standards; Writing Across the Curriculum; and Assessment. To learn more about this presentation visit: DREEVES@MAKINGSTANDARDWORK.com

Jay McTighe and Carol Ann Tomlinson: Understanding by Design and Differentiated Instruction: What's the Connection and Why Should We Care?

McTighe and Tomlinson are both familiar educators and authors in middle-grades education, and their recent work is an exciting combination of the Understanding By Design (UbD) with backwards planning and Differentiating Curriculum for all students. UbD is a model to help teachers develop meaning-rich, high-level curriculum, and when it is combined with creating pathways for every student to engage in the curriculum, academic learning increases for all students. The session included graphic organizers to help participants make connections between the two models. For more information, call 989-774-7678.



Summer is almost here, and it's time to renew your MSIM membership. Don't miss out on the FYI for next year and all of the great "Young Adolescent" information.

**MEMBERS
ONLY**

Use the attached form or go to www.schoolsinthemiddle.cmich.edu to download a membership form now so that you will not miss a single issue. Send it with your \$160 payment to MSIM, CMU, 678 Ronan Hall, Mt. Pleasant, MI 48859.

This is the last issue of the FYI for this school year.

Everyone here at Michigan Schools in the Middle wishes you a *safe and relaxing summer.*



The MSIM offices will be closed the first two weeks of July.

Big Freebies for May Worth \$500 each



The first three people to contact us at 989-774-1198 or duval1p@cmich.edu will receive free registration to a Kagan Cooperative Learning workshop to be held June 19 to 23 in Lansing. The presenter is nationally trained Kagan presenter and middle grades teacher, Tom Finegan.

Good Luck, Amy!

We are very sad that Amy Voege will soon be leaving her MSIM family.



However, we are also happy for her.



Amy is planning to devote full time to writing her fantasy novel. This is something that she has wanted to do for many years. We wish her much success and know that she will still remember us when she writes the "Great American Novel."



Thank you, Amy, for all that you have done to help young adolescents. Your work with schools to help develop grant proposals has benefited thousands of kids! We also appreciate your monthly reviews and articles in the FYI.

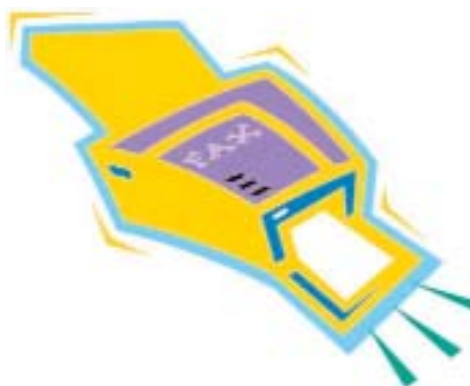
Please wish her well. You can email her at amy.j.voege@cmich.edu, phone at 989-774-7678, send a card to MSIM, 678 Ronan Hall, Mt. Pleasant, MI 48859 or stop in and see her.

Powerful Quote

What the best and wisest parents want for their own child must be what the educational community wants for all its children.

--John Dewey

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