



Michigan Schools in the Middle

A Middle Start Partner Organization

February, 2007 * Volume 9 * Number 7

Middle School Educators Have Great Advice for High School Reform

In the January FYI, MSIM invited you to respond to a three-question survey about the possible impact of high school reform on the middle-grades in Michigan schools. We received 23 responses from all over the state...from the upper peninsula to southeast Michigan. Thank you for your thoughts.

Here is what middle level educators had to say about the new high school reform (graduation requirements)....

1. What impact have the new high school graduation requirements had on your middle grades schools?

- Many educators indicated that Math is the subject most impacted by the new high school graduation requirements.
- “Our math department has already adjusted the 7th & 8th grade pacing guides.”
- “Students can gain algebra I high school credit by passing the final exam in 8th grad algebra I and ALL 8th grade student take algebra I.”
- “Algebra is a gateway subject.”
- Middle level educators also noted curriculum alignment and instruction as being impacted by high school reform.

- “It is causing us to work even more on the transition between middle school and high school.”
- “The district is in the process of realigning all of our goals so that students receive consistent instruction in all of our schools.”
- “We are revamping pacing guides and creating common assessments.”

2. What further impact do you anticipate in the next few years?

- “I see us making a bigger push for goal setting at younger grade levels.”
- “It is also encouraging us to take a better look at our data, not only from state assessments, but from our assessments as well.”
- “Eventually it is likely more requirements will be passed to middle schools. This will decrease student opportunities to explore at middle school.”
- “The impact will be more drop outs or more students in alternative education settings.”
- “Intervention needs to happen at MS.”
- “Adolescence is a time when the brain is still developing and making sound choices is still an area that has yet to be perfected.”

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Leadership Lifeline... Principal Leaders Operate in 3-D

Effective leaders, operate in three dimensions. As chief executive officers, they lead organizations. As chief learning officers, they learn as they do their work. As chief finance officers, they focus on an organization's finances.

When a principal operates in the first dimension as the chief executive officer, she is planning, leading, and organizing the school enterprise to achieve its intended outcomes and goals. To achieve the intended outcomes, a principal will be a systems thinker and consider diverse perspectives. These skills, when coupled with key knowledge and beliefs, enable a principal to act decisively on challenges of the organization to support a thriving teaching and learning enterprise. Finally, an effective CEO principal has the interpersonal skills to finesse his way through a political environment in order to strategically position and support diverse stakeholders so they are able to collaborate around a shared vision.

In the second dimension as the chief learning officer, a principal focuses on individual and organizational learning and growth. This principal has mastered the skills required to be both an effective teacher of others and an effective student engaged in her own personal professional learning. Because of this, she can model the behaviors she seeks in other in the organization. The principal as chief learning officer is an organizer of the learning design, a protector of collaborative learning time, and a supporter of innovation that aligns with the organization's desired outcomes. In essence, the principal has primary responsibility for designing a well-functioning learning environment and ensuring that such learning impacts the organization as intended.

A principal operating in the third dimension as chief financial officer knows the security and productivity of a thriving organization are closely tied to the management of its resources. An effective principal conducts an ongoing analysis of how resources—time, people, and money—are invested to achieve the organization's intended outcomes. With the establishment of shared goals and vision, principals can strategically focus their organizations' investments to ensure a productive yield. The profit margins that chief financial officer's seek are increased learning, leadership, and student achievement.

The enterprise of teaching and learning is complex and a principal's job is by no means one-dimensional. The principal's multidimensional skills and knowledge contribute to the organization's ability to prosper. The dimension of leadership gives the organization long life, the dimension of learning adds to the depth of the organization and the dimension of financial security widens the organization's opportunities. A principal who is skilled as a chief executive officer, a chief learning officer, and a chief financial officer holds himself or herself responsible for strategies that provide organizational productivity, continuous learning for adults and students, and the appropriate use of resources aligned to organizational goals.



Taken from: *The Learning Principal*, Vol. 2, No. 5, February, 2007

Teacher Topics... A Cyber Threat & Bullying Off the Playground

A Cyber Threat

“Nation wide, one of every three teens was threatened or embarrassed online.” I-Safe, an organization concerned with Internet safety says that cyber bullying is not limited to e-mail. Other tools include instant messaging, cell phone text messages, websites such as MySpace.com faking messages—posing as someone else and posting private messages, embarrassing pictures, or videos online are all methods of intimidation. The statistics on cyber bullying are alarming. Teachers should raise the issue in class and make students aware of the consequences of such behavior. Parents and teachers should watch for such signs of cyber bullying as:

1. Sudden disinterest in computers, cell phones, and other technology
2. Desire to avoid school or after school activities
3. Withdrawn or depressed behavior
4. Nightmares

Cyber bullying is a rising threat to a culture of caring and belonging.

Taken from: *TeacherToday*, Volume 22, Number 11-January 9, 2007

Bullying Off the Playground

How Many?

- 1 of every 3 teens
- 1 of every 6 preteens

Technology used to bully teens

- Instant messages = 44%
- E-mail = 34%
- Website posting = 30%
- Text messages = 19%
- Chat room comments = 14%
- Embarrassing photo posted = 13%

Technology used to bully pre-teens

- E-mail = 23%
- Website posting = 19%
- Chat room comments = 18%
- Instant messages = 12%
- Embarrassing photo posted = 13%

Keeping quiet

- 70% of teens told no one
- 50% of pre-teens told no one

Taken from: *TeacherToday*, Volume 22, Number 11-January 9, 2007

Student Station....Old Ways, New Ways

When you were younger, did you read the *Little House* series, by Laura Ingalls Wilder? These classic books told the story of a pioneer family living on the Great Plains in the 1800's. There was no television, no telephones, no electricity, and no running water. Families traveled westward in wagons drawn by horses or oxen; often, they had no roads to travel on, so they simply kept going westward across the open fields. Each family built its own house, grew most of its own food, and made its own clothing. The pioneers, once they had settled on a piece of land, spent most of their time on these basic life tasks.

How do you think Laura Ingalls Wilder would feel if she were suddenly transported to modern-day New York City? Do you think she would be overwhelmed by all of the new technologies and different lifestyles? What would be her reaction to seeing cars? computers? airplanes? indoor plumbing? refrigerators? These things would be so far removed from her own life that she would probably experience "culture shock."

By the same token, many of us would experience culture shock if we suddenly found ourselves living in pioneer times. How many of us would know how to grow and preserve our own food? Could you build your own house, without power tools or a lumber yard to go to for supplies? How about travel – could you hitch up a team of horses and navigate ten miles to the nearest village? Could you shear sheep, clean and card the wool, then spin it into thread and make your own cloth to sew into a shirt?

It may surprise you to learn that there are many, many people who still live in much the same way that the Ingalls family did one hundred fifty years ago. In the book *Homeless Bird*, Koly and her family live very simply, although people in the large cities have electricity, running water, air-conditioned cars, and computers. In fact, many people in Africa, Latin America, India, China, and other countries live in similar circumstances. But it is not only people in other countries who live this way: in the Appalachian Mountain region of the United States, there are many communities which live without electricity or running water. There are also Native American tribes in the West, small communities in rural Alaska, and people in the Deep South states of Mississippi, Alabama, and Georgia who lack these modern conveniences.

While many groups of people live without such things as electricity, running water, telephones, and cars because they cannot afford to buy them, there are others who live a more self-sufficient lifestyle by choice. For example, the Amish lead simple lives as taught by their religion. There is also a growing number of people who adopt a lifestyle of "voluntary simplicity" – attempting to live more lightly on the earth – because of deeply held beliefs about protecting the environment, re-building community among people, or achieving economic justice. What about you? Which of our modern conveniences could you live without? What sorts of self-sufficiency skills would you like to learn?

Student Book Review...Homeless Bird, Author: Gloria Whelan

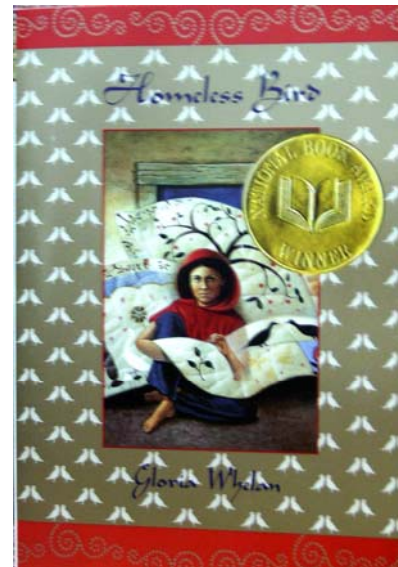
Koly, her parents, and her two brothers live in a small village in rural India. Her father is a scribe in the village market, and her brothers are learning to read and write, but Koly is not permitted to go to school. Her mother tells her that girls have no need of a formal education – the role of a woman, she says, is to keep house, cook, and raise children. Although Koly would very much like to learn to read, she applies herself to learning the traditional female skills of homemaking, quilting, and embroidery.

Koly's family follows the Hindu religion, which teaches that people's souls are "reincarnated" – reborn into new lives after they die -- over and over again. They also believe in the "caste" system, which divides people into social ranks based on how devout they are. People who live a good and wholesome life can expect to be reborn into one of the higher castes during their next lives; those who are less devout are reborn into a lower caste. The worst people are reborn into the caste of "Untouchables," who are scorned and rejected by everyone else.

Koly's family is part of the Brahman caste, the highest Hindu caste. Their religion is very important to them, and they follow Hindu tradition in every aspect of their lives. When Koly reaches her thirteenth birthday, her mother informs her that it is time for her to follow the tradition of being married to a man selected for her by her father. Koly's father begins the process of looking for a husband for her. This is not an easy task, because her family must also come up with a "dowry" – a sum of money

paid to the parents of her bridegroom – and her family's poverty means that Koly's dowry will be quite small. Eventually, her father finds a husband for her, and the wedding date is set.

Koly is nervous and a bit fearful about her marriage. She has never met her future husband or his family, but she will live with them for the rest of her life, as tradition dictates. As she boards the bus that will take her to her future husband's village for her wedding, she realizes that she may never see her own family again. It soon becomes clear that something is very wrong – her husband is not the person she was told he would be, and his parents seem more interested in the dowry she brings than in welcoming their new daughter-in-law. Koly yearns to flee back to her parents, but tradition dictates that she must stay with her husband's family, no matter how cruelly they treat her. Ultimately, she finds herself cast out, lost in a strange and cruel world. She must summon all her courage, take her fate into her own hands, and rebuild her life on her own.



Family Focus... Constructive Use of Time

One of the major sources of conflict and friction between parents and young adolescents centers on the ways in which young people use their free time. As children mature, they begin to spend less time playing at home and more time out of the home with their peers. While this increasing tendency to “leave the nest” is appropriate and healthy for middle-schoolers, it is important for parents to ensure that their kids have constructive things to do during most of their free time.

Research has shown that teens who spend a substantial proportion of their free time just “hanging out” with friends, with nothing in particular to do, are at much higher risk for engaging in such harmful behaviors as drinking, using drugs, having sex, and committing petty crimes. They are also more likely to join gangs, less likely to graduate from high school, and much less likely to attend college.

On the other hand, middle- and high-school students who engage in constructive, supervised activities during most of their free time enjoy many advantages: they have fewer opportunities to engage in risky behaviors, they learn a variety of new skills and garner new knowledge, and they develop strong networks of social support.

Some of the most beneficial activities for young adolescents include structured creative endeavors, such as playing a musical instrument, engaging in art lessons, or participating in a local theater group; youth programs, including playing on organized sports teams or joining school clubs; civic or religious engagement; and home time which includes meaningful interactions with

family members. Many studies have demonstrated that young people who spend most of their free time in activities like these, and who hang out with their friends with nothing special to do two or fewer times a week, have greatly increased chances for success in school and in life.

One note of caution: it can be tempting for parents to schedule structured activities for every minute of their kids’ free time, in an attempt to keep them out of trouble and expose them to a full array of opportunities to learn and grow. However, children of all ages need time to themselves, to reflect and think and engage in unstructured creative activity. Kids who don’t have ample time to themselves often end up over-stressed, over-scheduled, and unhappy. Particularly as teens, they also need to spend some time with their peers, exploring their independence and building their social skills. One of the biggest challenges for parents is to help their kids strike a healthy balance between structured activities, alone time, and time spent just hanging out – and, when that challenge is met with courage and compassion, kids have a great chance to grow into healthy, successful young adults!



Resource Review...Getting to Know City Kids, Author: Sally Middlebrooks

In this study of six urban children between the ages of eight and twelve, the author challenges the prevailing misconception that poor city kids are “troubled,” “passive,” and “dumb.” Middlebrooks, an educational sociologist, undertakes an extensive investigation of these children’s play in order to better understand their lives and minds; and her study reveals the breadth and depth of their curiosity, industry, and imagination. Far from being passive victims of their environments, these children – all of whom live in poverty in East Harlem -- bravely bring to life new worlds with their imaginative play.

The book introduces us to Brenda, a third-grader who constructs imaginary worlds in which she is a homeowner, a camper in a tent, or a 19th-century Native American in a teepee (her pink bedspread placed atop two chairs). We also meet Isaac, a nine-year-old, who spends much of his time engaged in highly imaginative play with his GI Joes or hanging out with a good book in his “little house” – blankets draped around his bunk bed to provide him with a completely private space.

Michael, an 11-year-old, also lives in an apartment on a busy street. He and his younger brother, Allen, are required to spend essentially all of their free time indoors in their 12’ x 13’ bedroom, and they occupy themselves with creative play centered on two themes – cops and robbers, and imaginary casino play. They imagine extraordinarily detailed scenarios and play them out, scene by scene, over and over again.

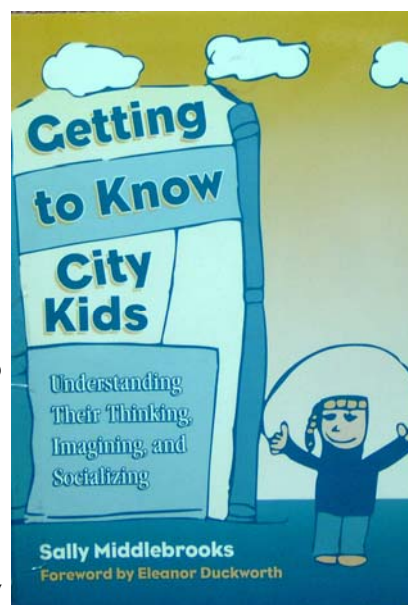
Michelle, 11, and Ayisha, 12, live in adjoining apartment buildings and are best friends. With a small group of older girls, they have transformed the vacant lot next to Michelle’s building into an imaginary town where they are mothers, own their own home (a little clubhouse in the lower branches of a crabapple tree), and perform an astonishing

variety of jobs, ranging from babysitters to bank tellers to monster-hunters to detectives.

Rex, also age twelve, lives in an apartment building on a side street, and he is able to spend quite a bit of time outside. When he is not outside playing football or hide-and-seek with friends, he is often home alone. He drapes a sheet over two chairs and sits underneath, “like an Eskimo.” He says that he feels warm and “isolated from the rest of the world” when he is in his little “igloo.”

In addition to examining the play and the inner lives of these city kids, Middlebrooks discusses the implications of what she has observed for the formal education of urban children. She urges teachers to build on, and extend the capacity of, children’s play as it relates to the intellectual work of the classroom. This book is important not only in helping teachers to better understand the unique needs and strengths of

their poor, inner-city students, but also in informing instructional strategies tailored to those needs and strengths. To examine this book, call MSIM at (989) 774-7678, and ask to borrow resource number G-45.



Survey Continued from page 1

- “8th grade becoming more like high school.”
 - “I wish that the reforms were less text-book driven and more applicable to real life.”
- 3. Any advice you would give your high school colleagues as they engage in reform?**
- “Be extremely demanding and raise expectations.”
 - “Push alignment.”
 - “Get on board and go with the go with the flow.”
 - “Become much more open and flexible.”
 - “Learn what a professional learning community is and model your ‘behavior’ after that. Collect data, talk about student work, map the curriculum, look at best practice and research, support each other, don’t allow students to fail.”
 - “Dialogue is necessary.”
 - “Become educated about literacy strategies.”
 - “Engage in Cooperative Learning.”
 - “Keep working toward the goal of achievement for every student.”
 - “Communicate with middle school people.”
 - “Keep focused on what’s best for students.”

If you would like to see all of the responses, please email Pattie DuVall at duvallp@cmich.edu for a copy.

Craft Lessons and the Multigenre Research Project

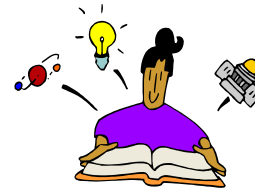
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