

SPRING 2015-2016 | VOLUME XL | NUMBER 3

IN THE MIDDLE

OHIO MIDDLE LEVEL ASSOCIATION

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OHIO MIDDLE LEVEL
ASSOCIATION

IN THE MIDDLE

Spring 2015-2016
Volume XL Number 3

In the Middle is the official newsletter of the Ohio Middle Level Association and is published three times per year. Submissions on topics relevant to middle level education are encouraged and should be submitted to newsletter editor Jay Clark at jclark@vbschools.net

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**Thank you to our Business
Partners for their support of
middle level education!**



REGION BY REGION

MIDDLE LEVEL TEACHERS QUENCH THEIR THIRST FOR NEW KNOWLEDGE!

“As education leaders, whether of individual classrooms or entire schools or districts, we must continuously seek opportunities for growth, even if it means looking beyond our schools and traditional work hours.”

Kristen Vanderlip Taylor



PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

To fill the void of not having a state conference this year due to the AMLE Conference held in Columbus this past November, regional workshops were made possible by each region's OMLA board members and affiliates. The OMLA board made the workshops available to members at no charge to remain connected to our membership during our non-conference year and to stay true to our commitment to offer quality professional development for middle level educators annually.

It's truly amazing what a committed group of individuals can make happen when doing what is best for students is at the center of all decision making. The regional teams volunteer their time far beyond their day jobs to make it possible for middle level educators to network and learn from one another at these well attended satellite workshops. I am proud and honored to work alongside such passionate, dedicated

and generous people who define the essence of service.

Our energies are now directed towards our 2016 *The Sky is the Limit!* State Conference in Cincinnati slated for October 27th and 28th at the Hyatt Regency Downtown. Moving our conference from February to October provides several benefits. The most impactful benefit is gaining new insights and strategies to implement early in the school year.

All conference information is posted on our website. Early bird registration lasts until September 23. If you have presented in the past I hope you will consider presenting again. If you have not presented before, please consider submitting a proposal. It is the knowledge and wisdom shared by middle level practitioners that creates the synergy felt at our state conference.

Hope to see you in Cinci!

**Join OMLA at the Hyatt
Regency in downtown
Cincinnati October 27 and
28, 2016 as our annual
state conference moves to
the fall!**



Follow these links for details...

2016 Conference Registration

OMLA Conference Room Rate is \$162/night

**2016 Conference Presenter
Proposal**

2016 Exhibitor Registration Form

Thursday Keynote



Rick Wormeli is a National Board Certified Teacher and a columnist for AMLE Magazine. The winner of Disney's American Teacher Award for English in 1996, Rick is an internationally known speaker on middle-level education, innovation, and teacher professionalism. Rick offers a wealth of experience having worked as a middle grades teacher, human growth and development teacher, and staff development educator. He is also an educational consultant to National Public Radio, USA Today, and the Smithsonian Institute. Rick has presented at the White House, has appeared on Good Morning America, and has worked with school districts all across the country.

Friday Keynote



Anthony Muhammad is one of the most sought after educational consultants in North America. He served as a practitioner for nearly twenty years. Dr. Muhammad served as a middle school teacher, assistant principal, middle school principal, and high school principal. His tenure as a practitioner has earned him several awards as both a teacher and a principal. Dr. Muhammad is the author of the books *The Will to Lead and the Skill to Teach*; *Transforming Schools at Every Level* and *Transforming School Culture: How to Overcome Staff Division*.

Featured Speaker



Jack Berckemeyer is a nationally recognized presenter, author, and humorist. He is the author of *Managing the Madness - A Practical Guide to Middle Grades Classrooms*, *Taming of the Team - How Great Teams Work Together* and most recently published, *Deliberate Optimism - Reclaiming the Joy in Education*, co-authored with Dr. Debbie Silver and Judith Baenen. As former middle level teacher and now expert in middle level education and adolescent development, Jack shares his passion, humor, and expertise that is guaranteed to re-energize the room.

3 KEY OPPORTUNITIES

Creating Positive Culture and Community

Dr. Neil Gupta
Directory of Secondary
Education
Worthington City Schools
Central Region

In an era of increased academic accountability, I have observed many school leaders rush to find the silver bullet to increase test scores by putting all their eggs in the basket of academic supports. While these are worthy endeavors, focusing solely on academic supports does not provide significant results with respect to both academic and behavior needs for all students. Yet, when school leaders implement strategies that focus on the culture and community in addition to academic needs, significant results take place in both areas. The Principals and leaders at all four of the middle schools in Worthington City Schools understand this need, and they implemented Three Key Middle School Opportunities to create a positive learning environment for all students.

Key #1: Opportunities for Students to Connect with Adults

Educator Rita Pierson makes the

following bold statement: “Every child deserves a champion; an adult who will never give up on them, who understands the power of connection and insists they become the best they can possibly be.” Worthingway Principal, Mr. Nathan Kellenberger, understands this call to action and created opportunities through the Master Schedule to provide time for students to connect with adults. As part of their Homeroom block, the classes hold a “Family Meeting” each week to discuss concerns related to their building culture. The topics could include empathy, bullying, and making wise choices. The time is also used for the staff to build positive rapport in getting to know their students, helping them in goal setting with grades, connecting with families, and scheduling conferences if needed. The ultimate goal for this time is for the students to feel connected with an adult who cares about them.

Key #2: Opportunities to Celebrate Successes

Mr. Kellenberger also shared about the importance in celebrating student successes. Too often schools wait until the spring to conduct celebrations for the year. Instead, schools need to build regular opportunities to celebrate successes from students to encourage and inspire them throughout the school year. Worthingway Middle School calls them “Way Days”, and they are for students who completed a successful quarter academically. The day includes activities that continue to connect staff with students through basketball games, movies, ice cream socials, etc. Students in need of additional academic support use this time for intervention working with his/her teacher.

Key #3: Opportunities for Student Voice

Phoenix Middle School Principal

Mr. Adham Schirg explained the importance in creating a positive school culture and community through the opportunity for students to have a voice in their school. Phoenix Middle School holds weekly “Student Forums”, where time is built in the schedule for all the students in one grade level to come together to discuss school issues and highlight things happening in the school. During this time, students lead the meeting beginning with “Take a Risk”, followed by “No Brag, Just Truth”. This is a chance for students to showcase a talent or something they are working on. Students give positive affirmation after they share, and it builds a community of respect and opportunity to share “hidden” talents with others. Afterwards, announcements and student issues are shared in order to support student voice and ownership of the school culture among the students.

These three keys are critical opportunities with examples for the staff and students to create an inclusive environment to build a positive culture and community. With the proper leadership, time for these opportunities during the school day create chances for students to feel safe, welcome, and invited.

Project WET & Project Learning Tree Facilitator Combined Workshop

April 20 & 21, 2016

Shawnee Lodge

Registration fee is \$104.00 which includes meals and shared lodging (no early workshop departures or refunds after registration is received). Limited to 30 participants. Deadline to Register: April 13, 2016. Please register online at WMAO Registration Website.

Participants Will Receive:

- Certification as Projects Learning TREE and WET State-wide Facilitator along with networking with other state-wide EE professionals
- Copies of the both educator guides and secondary modules. This includes PLT's Early Childhood Guide.
- Optional 1 semester graduate credit availability is pending for an additional cost to qualifying individuals.
- Valuable training in the use of guide activities & materials and in how to get children/adults outside experiencing their natural world.

For more information, contact: Dennis Clement, Project WET State Coordinator [614-644-2048](tel:614-644-2048) or dennis.clement@epa.ohio.gov. Education guides are being provided free to each participant by the Ohio EPA, Office of EE and ODNR, Division of Forestry.

Join OMLA for a monthly middle level education Twitter chat!



#OhioMLA

Second Tuesday of each Month | 8PM EST

Co-Moderators: @mjsedlak & @mjanatovich

TWO COMMUNITIES JOIN TOGETHER TO TACKLE THE CHARITY CHALLENGE

Anna Walters

Teacher

Learwood Middle School

Avon Lake City Schools

North Central Region

Learwood Middle School in Avon Lake has a mission: To create a community of learners that not only strive to achieve their goals and do their best but to help others that may not be as fortunate; helping others and caring about the community is just as important as getting good grades or winning their team's championship game. To help students build a sense of community and caring Jamie Vanek, Assistant Principal at Learwood, came up with a charity event that would bring two communities together to raise money for local charities. From this small idea an annual event was born: The Avon Lake/Avon Charity Challenge.

Having an idea and actually putting it in fruition can stop any great idea from becoming a successful reality. However, Mr. Vanek has a powerful arsenal at his disposal and he is not afraid to tap into these resources – his student council advisors, Ashley Pease and Anna Walters. What principal does not love having two teachers that don't know how to say "no" and are insanely talented at multitasking and organizing events? After securing their commitment he knew this event would not only happen but be a success. Now

PROMOTIONAL VIDEO

[HTTPS://YOUTU.BE/APBLZWAPZWM](https://youtu.be/APBLZWAPZWM)

they just needed Avon to jump on board.

"I got this idea at an OMLA conference when a school in Columbus talked about doing something similar to this. So, I thought this would be great for Avon Lake and Avon. Avon is new to our conference and a friendly rivalry has been brewing between the two districts," said Mr. Vanek. This is the first year that Avon Local Schools has become part of the Southwestern

Conference and, since they are just across the tracks from Avon Lake, it was a perfect school to reach out and invite to take part in this inaugural event. Dr. Koehler, the

principal at Avon Middle School, did not hesitate to jump on board and get his staff's support.

The event was held on Thursday, February 4, 2016 at Avon Lake High School. One of the best parts of the charity event was both Avon and Learwood 7th grade and 8th grade boys' conference teams were playing against each other prior to the main event. Which

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Sound Practices for Sound Schools



Marrying Mentoring & Advisory Jones Middle School

Upper Arlington City Schools

At Jones Middle School, we have a strong mentor program coupled with small group advisories that meet daily for five minutes and for an extended thirty minutes on Fridays. Our mentors are trained to welcome our incoming sixth grade students to the building each fall and they continue to meet with their sixth grade advisory groups throughout the school year, completing activities such as cookie decorating near the holidays and service learning projects as well. Seventh and eighth grade students are also placed into advisories no larger than 17-18 students (usually more like 12-13) and begin each day together in this intimate setting. Every student knows that he or she can turn to their advisory teacher for guidance and support and advisory teachers, in turn, know to look out for their advisees and report anything "off" to the grade level counselor right away. In this way, our students each have an adult in the building looking out for them academically, socially, and otherwise, right from the start of each day. It really does contribute to the "family" feel of life at Jones.

Contributed by Becky Searls, Teacher at Jones M.S.



Data Through a Different Lens Bunsold Middle School

Marysville Exempted Village Schools

The movement toward data driven schools is often held up as the foil toward whole child education. The feeling seems to be that the deeper a school gets into the numbers, the farther it gets from the student. The recent experience at Bunsold Middle School challenges that view and shows how data can serve to reframe familiar issues in a new way and provide a clearer path towards addressing them. Through a deeper look into the numbers, a sense of greater awareness of the struggles facing some adolescent learners is gained.

About two years ago, BMS began its journey toward using curriculum-based measures to get a more comprehensive and standardized picture of student academic success. At the beginning of this school year we began collecting that kind of information on every student enrolled in the school. By using these measures, along with school and national norms, we were able to reframe who our struggling learners were and begin to dedicate resources to helping address their needs. As is common in many schools, our first answer was to meet academic problems with academic answers.

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We were able to track the progress of students receiving these new academic interventions over the course of the year. When the second round of school-wide assessments were completed, a stark contrast emerged between groups of students responding to intervention and those who weren't. Upon reading the list of students in the latter group the common thread left out at the group. Most of the students on this list were kids who were noted by teachers to have social and emotional concerns or suspected issues at home. It made sense that these students weren't responding to academic intervention since their issues were non-academic.

Although almost any teacher could have told you that non-academic concerns were the barriers for any one of the students on this list, seeing the names joined together on a spreadsheet cast the familiar problem in a new light. Since that realization, the amount of time and energy dedicated to finding supports for students with social and emotional needs has increased dramatically. Our school counselors instituted a "BMS Pride Wall" where students are nominated for showing good citizenship in the school day. They are recognized by adding a paw with their name on it to the main hallway. Conversations have begun to expand our partnership with local mental health provider Maryhaven. We are piloting a behavior tracking system to help mark our progress with non-academic supports and to isolate patterns in behavior that could develop into more deeply seeded issues for the child. Momentum is gaining for behavioral intervention strategies and the toolbag for addressing these kind of non-academic issues is rapidly expanding thanks to the numbers.

Contributed by Michael Robertson, Assistant Principal at Bunsold M.S.

"I will talk about these trips all year in my classes. For so many of my students, my description of my travels will be the only exposure they will have to other countries and other ways of life."

Social studies teacher Michael Baldwin, whose first time traveling abroad was with GEEEO

Travel the world, earn professional development credit, and bring global understanding into your classroom!

Founded in 2007, [Global Exploration for Educators Organization \(GEEEO\)](#) is a 501c3 non-profit organization that has sent over 1300 teachers abroad on adventurous travel programs. With GEEEO educators can earn professional development credits while seeing the world. GEEEO's trips are 7 to 21 days in length and are designed and discounted to be interesting and affordable for teachers. In addition to amazing tour leaders, many of the programs are accompanied by university faculty that are experts on the destination. GEEEO also provides teachers educational materials and the structure to help them bring their experiences into the classroom. The trips are open to all nationalities of K-12 and university educators, administrators, retired educators, as well as educators' guests.

GEEEO is offering the following travel programs for 2016:

Bali/Lombok, Bangkok to Hanoi, China, Costa Rica, Eastern Europe, The Galapagos Islands, Greece, Iceland, India/Nepal, Southern India, Ireland, Israel, Italy, Jamaica, Morocco, Ethiopia, Myanmar (Burma), Peruvian Amazon, Peruvian Andes, Portugal/Spain, Heart of the Silk Road, Southern Africa, Sri Lanka, Turkey, Vietnam/Cambodia, Western Balkans, Moorish Spain (Spring Break), Morocco (Spring Break), Morocco (Winter Break), The Philippines (Winter Break) and Mt. Kilimanjaro (Winter Break). The registration deadline is June 1st, but space is limited and many programs will be full well before the deadline.

Detailed information about each trip, including itineraries, costs, travel dates, and more can be found at www.geeo.org. GEEEO can be reached 7 days a week, toll-free at [1-877-600-0105](tel:1-877-600-0105) between 9 AM-9 PM EST.

Ohio Middle Level Association

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helped boost ticket sales and make Learwood's student section, The Boatyard, explode in size and spirit. To help promote the event even more, videos were created to draw in the numbers. The first promotional video showcased the skills of the staff members playing in the game. Don't worry about the lack of talent the video displays. And, a spoiler alert... the Learwood/Troy Staff did win the game!

The day of the event both the communities of Avon and Avon Lake came out in droves to help support this event. Over \$3,000 was collected from ticket sales, 50/50 raffle ticket sales, and a 3-point half time competition. The school that won the game got to donate 75% to their charity of choice and the school that was not the winner donated 25% to their charity. Learwood's charity was Make-a-Wish and Avon's charity was Youth Challenge Foundation. With this being just the first year, everyone felt it was an amazing success. Next year, Avon Middle School will be hosting the event and hopefully it will continue to grow in size and popularity. We look forward to traveling across the tracks to Avon next year to bring home another "DUB" to Avon Lake.

CHARITY CHALLENGE VIDEO

[HTTPS://YOUTU.BE/LEKIOSXXL4W](https://youtu.be/LEKIOSXXL4W)

Stay connected to OMLA!



Four Pillars

The Marion City School District focuses its work around the mission of inspiring a community of achievement. That focus includes four pillars of reform, Leader in Me, Next Generational Learning Environments, Literacy Collaborative, and

Diploma+Acceptance. Grant Middle School also works with a multitude of programs, initiatives and collaborations with community partners to meet our students' academic, social and emotional needs. Grant's staff is striving to become a professional learning community so that we can implement these pillars with fidelity and strengthen our culture. The staff has created norms for the building and set high expectations for students and staff that correlate with these goals.

Students are placed in teams so that the staff can focus on all student needs. Academically, we've increased our ELA and Mathematics classes to 83 minutes to meet literacy and

numeracy needs of our students. Also all seventh and eighth graders have an option to choose their encore classes. They select encores that match their interest and, next school year, will choose from encores that correspond to career clusters being developed at the high school. These encores will expose students to the vocabulary they will need to know and expose them to these career clusters.

Grant offers support services and other opportunities to meet our students' social and emotional needs. A social worker runs groups to meet certain emotional needs. Counselors from community agencies meet regularly with students. The local magistrate spends every Thursday afternoon at the school to work on mediation with students who have truancy issues. Local churches and mentors meet with students biweekly to provide mentorship and/or tutoring.



Adam Kunkle

Assistant Principal

Grant Middle School

Marion City Schools

Central Region



Teams of staff meet to work with students' behavior, attendance and social needs. Each team has a homeroom teacher who works with at-risk students using several different programs. Our after-school program, which has about forty students who attend daily, works with students who struggle in reading and math and who are economically disadvantaged. Leadership is a big focus as Grant implements LEAD, a Leader in Me middle school program. Staff spent five days studying *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People* and reflected on how these habits affect their own lives. Homeroom teachers led students in a book study focusing on *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective Teens*. Students now participate in weekly leadership activities during a "no new instruction" period and a student lighthouse team takes ownership by making sure the LEAD program remains active.

Our district remains committed to Literacy Collaborative through The Ohio State University in order to build our literacy instruction. The framework is designed around best practices through balanced literacy instruction. Students receive whole group, small group and individual instruction through mini-lessons and daily independent reading and writing time. Each teacher has created highly engaging classroom libraries. In addition, a book room with extensive titles has been created for teacher access to use in literature circles and guided reading groups. Our literacy team has put together a literacy night and invited students and parents into our school to promote the importance of reading daily. Our English Language Arts teachers will have attended forty hours of professional development after school on implementing Literacy Collaborative in their classrooms. Students in grades K-8 are receiving similar literacy instruction and this consistency supports our students both academically and behaviorally.

In addition, a third of our math classes have implemented Next Generation Learning Environments (NGLE). These learning environments use adaptive software to meet identify students' strengths and weaknesses. From there teachers use a variety of instructional strategies (mini-lessons, conferencing, independent learning, inquiry learning) and student groupings (whole class, small groups, individual learning) to create personalized learning for students. Students work at their own pace and through their own personal pathways to maximize their learning opportunities and growth. Teachers using NGLE's are able to meet individual students' needs on daily basis.

The last pillar, Diploma Plus, is being developed this year and will go into effect next year. Community members and educators collaborated to form a design team to discuss what skills students need to be successful after graduation. Members of the design team, which includes local business owners and community leaders, are also expressing their opinions of what skills are needed by area employers. This team has created three career clusters (Arts, Business and Communication, Health and Public Service and Automation, Manufacturing and Engineering). Students in high school will be able to take classes in these different clusters to earn certificates, credentials or college credit, which can lead to an associate's degree upon graduation. At the middle school students will be exposed to these clusters through career inventories through our GEAR UP Program and through multiple activities in their encore classes.

At Grant our staff works relentlessly to continuously strengthen our culture, so we can inspire a community of achievement one student at a time.

Building Community & Changing Culture through Advisory

Amy Elston

Wright State University

Shannon Wright

Morton Middle School

Vandalia Butler City Schools

West Region

With the implementation of PBIS in the state of Ohio since 2013, Morton Middle School staff and administration has made a concerted effort to establish programs to create a sense of community among and with its students. Morton Middle School was in a unique situation three years ago. The Vandalia Butler City School district once housed two fifth through eighth grade buildings with somewhat different environments and cultures. With the passage of a levy to build a new middle school and renovate the high school, the decision was made to redistribute the students throughout the buildings in the district. This change closed one of the elementary buildings in the district, created a fourth and fifth grade building at one of the previous fifth through eighth grade buildings, and turned Morton Middle School into a sixth through eighth grade building that accommodated all of the students from the district.

The administration had concerns regarding the climate and culture of the new, massive Morton Middle School. Student discipline issues were beginning to escalate, and teacher morale had shifted from what was previously experienced at the individual grade 5 through 8 buildings. Previously, both middle schools had a perceptible sense of community. Even though



they were very different, they were still both schools that had established camaraderie and supported the middle school philosophy. The new, large Morton Middle School was lacking some of the sense of belonging and community that is typically emphasized in a true middle school setting. The push to establish PBIS in the state of Ohio came at a great time. The training for PBIS gave the administration and staff the opportunity to look at what programs and strategies were in place throughout the building for encouraging positive student behavior and decisions.

In the third year together at Morton as one sixth through eighth grade building, a PBIS Committee was established and worked to develop a sound, practical advisory program that would allow teachers to easily

implement the lessons and would make students feel more support and companionship among their peers and teachers and reinforce the middle school philosophy. To create a program that was widely accepted and had buy-in among the staff, the PBIS Committee included the principal, assistant principal, the school counselor, a teacher on special assignment, and two teachers per grade level. The PBIS committee met before the school year began and continued to meet every two weeks at the beginning of the school year. More recently, they have met once a month to create lessons for the advisory program. Lessons were provided to the teachers on a weekly basis, but it was up to each advisory teacher if they would like to use the lesson provided. The lessons focused on character education or areas in which the students struggled emotionally, socially, or potentially, academically. The teachers were encouraged to move at their own pace and address other issues as necessary.

Every teacher and staff member (aside from office staff and custodians) at Morton Middle School teaches an advisory group once a week on Friday afternoons. Dividing the students among all of the teachers in the building enabled the teachers to work with a much smaller number of students versus the number that are typically included in their regular classes. Also, this created a more comfortable setting for the students in which they could share their feelings and discuss more difficult content.

The advisory program supports the ideals of PBIS and the middle school philosophy. In addition, it has created positive changes in the school. Incidents of school discipline dropped 30% during the first semester the advisory program and school changes supporting PBIS were in place. In a recent survey administered to the teachers in the building, one teacher stated that the experience has been “valuable” because “I’ve seen students that would normally not speak to each other having a nice conversation.” Another teacher expressed that advisory period is “positive and useful” because he/she “find(s) it is a home base and safe place for a lot of our kids. When someone mentioned having a bad day, most of the group went over and gave hugs to encourage that person – priceless!” One teacher stated that the

program was worthwhile because “builds community, allows students the opportunity to build relationships that (they) may not otherwise have and addressed content that may be not academic but important nonetheless.” The teachers have expressed their perspectives and the differences they have seen after implementing the advisory program.

In addition, students have been asked to comment on the advisory program as well. When asked to list 3-5 things they liked about advisory, one student said, “I get to have a group of people to talk to, We always have fun together, I met new friends and old friends, Teaches me about I how I should treat others.” Another student commented that advisory allows the students the opportunity to, “Be ourself, have fun, original learning ways.” The same group of students were asked to list 3-5 things they did not like about advisory also. The students’ responses spoke volumes about their desire to be in advisory. Several students’ responses included:

- *“I like everything about advisory.”*
- *“That a lot of our days have been tookin (taken – meaning they are not in advisory as consistently as he/she would like).”*
- *“Only once a week.”*
- *“It’s really short and only on Fridays.”*
- *“We don’t have it more than once a week.”*
- *“Nothing.”*

The advisory program and the work the PBIS Committee has done has initiated a shift in the culture among the staff and students. While it is nearly impossible to have every staff member and every student invest in the importance of a program, overall, the effects of the advisory program have been positive. Students and staff are building a sense of community among themselves. The ideals of PBIS and the emphasis on the importance of character education through the advisory program have made great strides in the culture at Morton Middle School. As the relationships among students and between students and teachers shift to reveal the respect established through advisory, the hope is to continue seeing changes that positively affect everyone at Morton Middle School.



Empowering Teacher Candidates through

This We Believe

Often overlooked is the importance of *This We Believe* and its place within the professional, mentor-mentee relationship and experience as it relates to immersing oneself in the culture and climate of a middle level placement during the last year of study before entering the profession. The role of the mentor should be two-fold in that when hosting a pre-service educator in any capacity we as seasoned professionals continue to be strong advocates for the middle level movement in best-practice but must also empower teacher candidates through *This We Believe*— teacher candidates *who often are not* studying for a middle level license but enter our classrooms as total outsiders. It is the mentor's responsibility regardless of license area and university coursework to immerse the mentee in *This We Believe* both in theory and in practice—for some teacher candidates who enter my grade eight language arts classroom this may mean experiencing it perhaps for the first time having gone through a licensure program aligned to a content specific standard base such as NCTE while for others it means revisiting it in depth/in practice after studying middle childhood principles as guided by the standards set forth by AMLE (Ohio Department of Higher Education, 2016).

Working in a small, rural middle school nestled in foothills of Appalachia, professional interns select our school because of its proximity to Ohio University regardless of the organization of grade levels in our district's two buildings— quite often arriving having spent no time in the small community or a middle school such as ours which shares faculty, resources, and facilities with the attached elementary (and high school up the street). Through my own mentorship of a teacher-candidate obtaining a AYA (7-12) integrated language arts license this semester, we have spent much time in reflection discussing the culture of the students I teach and what sets a middle school apart from the elementary and the high school because the individual switched placements to my middle level classroom given unforeseen circumstances at semester break. As a mentor I've conveyed to my mentee that what I find most fulfilling about my profession is rooted in my pursuit of meeting my students where they are and tailoring instruction which values who they are culturally as young adolescents.

It would be foolish to discount the interdependent nature of all essential attributes of *This We Believe* but in my experience the last several months I found it particularly important to start by discussing Culture and Community Characteristics first and foremost with my mentee as means to help him feel like less of an outsider and truly be able to understand and meet students where they are through instruction and practice which honor the young adolescents I teach from rural Appalachia: their

Stephanie A. Snyder

Teacher

Trimble Middle School

Trimble Local Schools

Southeast Region

values, traditions, and ways of life (AMLE, 2010). I started by sharing with him how I make efforts to build trust and relationships from day one of the school year with all students and families and build upon those the entire year; we then continued the conversation over the next few weeks in all of my duties from planning, to attending TBT meetings, seeking help from social workers and outside agencies, to advocating for students during advisory, rooted of course in *This We Believe*'s sixteen characteristics; I chose to zero in with my mentee on Culture and Community— moreover the following areas: School Environment, “ The school environment is inviting safe, inclusive, and supportive of all,” Community and Business, “the school includes community and business partners,” and Family Involvement stating: “the school actively involves families in the education of their children” (AMLE, 2010). While these were areas where I found it natural to ease into *This We Believe* amidst all of the other university requirements to complete, with other mentees these conversations should too emerge organically and be mindful and purposeful so as to lead to reflection upon each characteristic and Essential Attribute more in depth (AMLE, 2010). This authentic exchange was the basis upon which the mentee then delved into the position of AMLE in depth.

I've worked with teacher candidates pursuing both licenses which would lead to a seventh through ninth grade placement; the most noticeable differences lay in their familiarity with the grass roots nature of the middle school movement and its values, underscored by *This We Believe* which has weathered the storm which has been education the past decade and the numerous policy and paradigm shifts since its inception close to forty years ago (AMLE, 2010). In many instances, unless we as mentors *insist* upon its presence in the work the pre-service teacher does in our room, it will go un-touched given all of the other responsibilities during such a crucial, busy time in one's journey from student onlooker to teacher. I was originally licensed in a state which did not offer a middle level license but knew early on in my journey that my place was in the middle with young adolescents. I sought out *This We Believe* on my own; unfortunately, this is not typical for many of the college students at various levels who have entered my classroom, some having never heard of it during their coursework. These very students regardless of certification to teach grades seven through twelve, could like me teach middle level students in the future and must be effective in their placements too before entering the field!

If we are to cultivate a learning environment as mentors for pre-service educators which will empower them to become advocates for the middle level, then without question we must bring *This We Believe* to college students who may have no exposure to it and go even further by making it ever-present as we model our own pursuit of its tenants and reflect with teacher candidates, engaging in any number of avenues of discourse around evaluation and best-practices. In doing so, we will be better supporting all teacher candidates to enter positions in the middle level grades in our ever-changing educational climate today. If we do not empower all teacher candidates through *This We Believe*'s purposeful presence throughout the process then we will have undoubtedly missed an opportunity to impact the lives of our mentee's future students. If we do not advocate that all of our pre-service educators we work with take time individually or better yet with our guidance to study *This We Believe* and put in place its essential attributes, then we are not living up to what it means to be a quality mentor and middle level advocate.

Without *This We Believe* we are not creating an environment by which teacher candidates will come to know the culture and community in which we teach and the unique needs of young adolescents who function within it— often times culture which is a shock be it rural, urban, or suburban— nor will mentees understand how to best tailor instruction to meet the needs of young adolescents and more specifically young adolescents within that specific community.

It is a privilege for me to serve any student be he or she a teen or an adult who spends time in my classroom

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Prepare the Game Plan

Each spring brings with it another baseball season and the hope that our hometown team will make an unforgettable championship run. For a brief moment in time, everyone is in first place. Unfortunately, along the way, our boys of summer must confront nagging injuries, rain delays and long road trips. The team that perseveres will play well into October while those who give in to the occasional slump or losing streak can only think about what might have been. There is, after all, always next year. This scene is not unlike the one educators face with the dawn of every school year. At its outset, we have a clear vision of what we want to accomplish: data driven instruction resulting in not only student growth, but also a love for lifelong learning. Inevitably, we too will end up having to work through challenges such as budget constraints, calamity days and scheduling conflicts. Fortunately, setting aside time to adequately prepare a game plan will assist us in overcoming these obstacles as we strive to achieve our objectives.

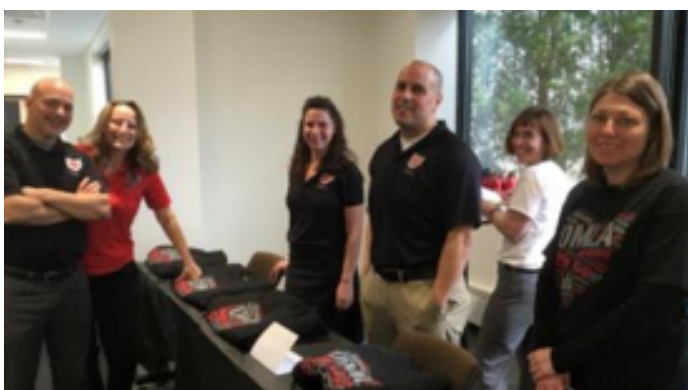
The amount of data available along with the number of data collection programs to choose from is overwhelming. Be sure to invite all of the appropriate stakeholders to the table when considering which ones to select. A vertical articulation team will ensure data collected is not reviewed in isolation, but rather shared district wide so as to allow for smooth transitions between schools. Contemplate when universal screenings will be administered? How the data, once gathered, will be utilized? And, which students, if any, are going to receive enrichment, intervention and/or additional progress monitoring? Also, avoid analyzing data in seclusion by creating a professional development calendar; carving out time to discuss results in grade-level departments and/or teams. Doing so will provide staff the opportunity to make comparisons, share best practices, design specifically targeted instruction and sustain the overall mission.

At the conclusion of each school year, draft a list of all implemented programs designed for continuous improvement. Carefully evaluate those in need of cultivation while discontinuing others in the way. Educator, Tom Burton (@tomtalksmiddle) calls this record a “stop-doing list” intended to make room for new growth. In the end, however, a school year’s success should be measured by the total sum of difference making relationships built between staff and students. Rigor and relevance are vital, but it is the relationship piece for which we should find ourselves the most proud.

Tom Burton
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Princeton City Schools
Southwest Region



Networking & Learning at Regional Workshops



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regardless of license area; we will know as middle level mentors that we’ve fulfilled our duties as advocates of our movement if when leaving, our mentees are ready to serve young adolescents and to affirm the empowering words of *I Believe: An Educator’s Affirmation* which ring true among our most-respected colleagues who affirm daily in their actions serving middle level students, “I have chosen to be a middle grades educator, for I recognize that the years of early adolescence are pivotal and abound with individual potential and opportunity. Therefore, I will care for these students personally, listen to their voices, respect their concerns, and engage them in meaningful educational experiences that will prepare them for a promising future” (AMLE, 2010).

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