President’s Message

Jay Clark
OMLA President
Principal, Van Buren Middle School

Were you fortunate enough to attend #OMLA2017? After a break-out session, did you run to find a private nook to start reworking lesson plans for the following week? Did you experience a rollercoaster of emotions as Manny Scott shared his story? Did you exchange contact information with another conference attendee after determining that she has a wealth of experience with an instructional strategy you’ve wanted to try? Did Eric Sheninger convince you to try a new initiative to increase your students’ engagement? I sincerely hope that you share all of that and more with your colleagues. As a principal, I would absolutely be thrilled to approve my entire staff to attend an OMLA state conference, however that’s just not feasible with limited guest teachers and even more limited funds. Having dedicated time during a staff meeting to share what we’ve learned at workshops or conferences is the best way to realize the investment of conference costs. Even more effective are the small group and individual discussions after-school or during collaboration time.

It’s my hope that you take advantage of the other learning, networking, and recognition programs OMLA has to offer to members. Every region hosts at least one regional event each year with many hosting multiple events. Each month, #OhioMLA Twitter chat tackles important questions and all of our members have valuable contributions.

We’ve begun planning #OMLA2018 and need rockstar middle level educators to present and be recognized as we get to the core of middle level education. Join us at Kalahari October 25-26, 2018 along with keynotes George Couros (@gcouros) and Kim Campbell (@KimCamp4Kids) and featured presenter Jack Berckemeyer (@jberckemeyer). Visit www.ohiomla.org, click on “Annual Conference”, then choose the 2018 conference for details and presenter proposal information. Check out the “Grants and Awards” tab on the website to nominate an outstanding colleague, parent, student, team, or practice for one of our awards or to apply for a mini-grant.

As we head into winter, this is the time of the year when your work at building relationships and becoming familiar with your students’ backgrounds and experiences earlier in the fall really pays off. A teacher’s decision to forego a few minutes of instruction in an effort to build community and give everyone a quick break is essential especially during the long stretch between winter and spring breaks. Putting aside your fear of not covering your material allows you to “be the salt” for your students - showing your human side. Those few moments attending to students’ needs and your relationships with them will continue to pay dividends academically.

Make the most of your time with our middle level learners this winter!
Fresh Ideas and Fresh Energy

by Katelyn Dendinger
Ayersville High School
Northwest Region

The OMLA state conference is something I look forward to every year due in large part to the fact that I leave feeling re-energized with loads of new things I want to try in my classroom and pass onto my colleagues. This year’s conference was no exception. I always have a hard time deciding which sessions I want to attend as they cover such a vast range of relevant topics. When narrowing down what I want to do, I always try to find at least one session that will push me out of my comfort zone to try something new.

The session this year that pushed me out of my comfort zone was entitled, “The Self-Paced Classroom.” It is not an easy thing for me to “relinquish control” and the thought of a self-paced classroom makes me squirm. However, I have heard many positive things about this topic and decided to attend— I’m so glad I did! The presenter and I had similar homework and grading philosophies, so I was hooked fairly quickly. She explained in detail how she organizes herself and her students to have them work their way through the math standards at their own learning pace with the teacher intervening if necessary to reteach. While I have only taken baby steps to implement this in my own classroom, I walked away from this session feeling confident that I could do it. Sure, there will be growing pains, but in the end if it will be beneficial for my students, then I’m up for the challenge.

The one session I couldn’t wait to share with my coworkers and administration was Jack Berckemeyer’s “Teaming to Increase Achievement.” I have heard Jack speak on several different occasions. I knew it would be an energetic and engaging session as he has such a knack for delivering important messages with humor. While his advice on how to hold productive team meetings was simple, it was delivered in a way we could connect to as teachers.

The speaker’s message also addressed the subject that every student needs an advocate. I am an Intervention Specialist, so being an advocate for students is in my nature, but this session really hit home with me to encourage our middle school staff and administration to try some of the things Jack was suggesting to not only improve student achievement, but also school morale.

While the conference sessions have continually provided me with multiple takeaways, I am always anxious to hear the keynote speakers. OMLA is able to recruit the best of the best when it comes to motivating speakers. This year lived up to the hype and then some. Manny Scott is an original Freedom Writer who shared the good, the bad, and the unimaginable of his life experiences. While parts of his speech had me laughing, I was moved to tears numerous times throughout his inspiring message regarding the challenging student. I think every teacher has had a student in his or her classroom he or she wants to help, but lacks the awareness, insight, or experiences required to find the proper key to opening their cognitive pathway into a positive direction.

I left the conference with a whole list of new ideas I wanted to try in my classroom. I felt refreshed and rejuvenated to walk into my classroom on Monday morning with Manny & Jack’s messages still ringing in my ear: Every student needs someone fighting for them. Every student needs an advocate to celebrate successes, hold them accountable for their missteps, and guide them to the path of excelling in their academic endeavors.

In the Middle
What the OMLA Conference Did for Us

by Scott Burre, Shauna Jarrett, Sherry Jones, Jason Parsons, Sara Rittmeyer, and Allyson Simons
General Sherman Junior High
Central Region

When I became part of the Ohio Middle Level Association and an associate representative on the board for the Central Region, it was the best professional decision that I had ever made. The networking that I have been able to do in two years has opened my eyes to so many outstanding educational practices throughout the state in middle level education. I truly have a passion for middle level education as I spent 19 years as a teacher, coach, assistant principal, and principal at General Sherman Junior High in Lancaster City Schools. As I continue through my career, the strong foundations that have been laid in my time in middle level education will carry me through. This was the reason that I wanted some of our teachers to experience this conference and this organization.

The following is a brief description of five of their experiences:

"Attending the OMLA 2017 Conference was a wonderful experience. I met many passionate middle level educators who were willing to share some excellent ideas, best practices, and interventions that I felt could easily be adapted and incorporated into my own classroom. With our building going 1:1 this year, I focused on attending sessions that were geared more towards technology. I came away from these sessions with some fantastic ideas and best practices that I can share with others in my building. The best part of the OMLA Conference was being part of a group of middle level educators that are as excited about teaching middle level students as I am." – Shauna Jarrett

"I truly enjoyed attending the 2017 OMLA conference, as I was re-energized by the sharing of new ideas and encouragement from other middle school educators. This year’s keynote speakers inspired and reminded me that, while we often become discouraged and worn down by the demands of our profession, we must be the ones who continue to believe in and encourage our students so they can believe in themselves. I attended Transforming MS with “Tradigital” Learning, and found a wealth of ideas to effectively mesh our tried-and-true pedagogy with new technology to create a more student-centered learning environment. A session, Face Your Fears—Autism and Anxiety, helped me see my classroom through the eyes of an autistic or highly anxious student, providing simple changes I can implement to help these students feel more secure at school. And as part of a presenting team, I was excited to hear the questions and comments from others who were eager to learn from our team’s practices and make them work within their own school settings. This level of enthusiasm was evident throughout the conference, as we gathered in the spirit of collaboration to rediscover and reimagine the middle school experience." – Sherry Jones

"It was a valuable experience being in the presence of such passionate educators like those who were giving presentations at the OMLA State Conference. As an added bonus, we were able to attend the performance of our 7th and 8th grade General Sherman Junior High band. The team of teachers at General Sherman were able to “divide and conquer” many of the great breakout sessions at the OMLA Conference, so we were able to hear from a variety of great educators and administrators around the state. One of the sessions I attended was called “Now THAT’S A Good Question” presented by Erik

In the Middle
Francis. Mr. Francis was a very dynamic presenter and made it worthwhile for teachers of all subject levels. In the presentation, he addressed how to use questioning to extend student learning. I took some of his history examples to my social studies class right away, and I could see the “aha!” moments being exhibited by my students. This really made me reexamine how I go about asking questions of my students to get them to critically think beyond a simple textbook answer." --Jason Parsons

"The OMLA Conference was a breath of fresh air in renewing my passion for helping middle level students. It’s easy to get overwhelmed in the daily tasks that consume our minds as educators, so it was great to take a step back and be reminded why we chose this profession. I attended sessions that were focused on supporting students’ social/emotional well-being as well as other sessions that focused more on academics and technology. Two sessions that I definitely appreciated were about the Anti-Bullying Program Ideas using the book Wonder and the session on Autism and Anxiety. With both, I was able to walk away with applicable interventions and ideas to try with my students. I can’t help feeling that we can always be doing more to support our students, so it was great to be surrounded by like-minded individuals with the same passions and focus on helping our students become the best they can be." --Allyson Simons

"The OMLA Conference was the perfect way to get new ideas, tweak current ideas, and to hear powerful reminders about the important role we play in our students’ lives. I especially appreciated the presentations on ways to incorporate technology and differentiate in the classroom. I was able to see how various apps and websites can help me get more out of my students while making my job easier! I was also encouraged to keep trying my self-paced learning as a means to differentiate and heard some new ways of keeping students on-task and accountable. Overall, it was refreshing to hear how other educators are working through similar struggles and to be able to bounce ideas around to come up with solutions that will work for my classroom." --Sara Rittmeyer

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**Ohio Middle Level Association**

**Executive Board**

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| Lisa Harrison   | Journal Editor             |
State Conference Highlights

by Brenda Svec
North Central Region

The first thought that comes to mind when I reflect on the 2017 OMLA conference is WOW! I can’t say enough about how proud I am to be affiliated with such a smart, dynamic, and passionate group of people. The experience was like none other; what excited me most was the opportunity to introduce this conference to my co-workers who have never experienced the knowledge and passion of OMLA. When reflecting on this first time experience for my co-workers, I wanted to share with you their initial impressions:

“I could listen to him (Jack Berckemeyer) ALL DAY LONG!”

“Jack Berckemeyer and Trina Niznik were by far the best speakers that I encountered over the 2 days. Berckemeyer’s strategies for “Top 10 Middle Level Issues and 10 Solutions” and “Teaching Strategies that Motivate Young Adolescents” were two powerful sessions where he used humor, knowledge and common sense tools to overcome common topics/concerns when teaching at the middle grades age groups. Niznik’s “Gear Up Butter” session was eye opening as she relayed her past educational experiences, as a teacher, in some very tough districts (Ohio and Florida). I personally had a connection with her, because I feel many of our students had/have similar issues as hers. All in all, I really enjoyed the OMLA conference, in Columbus, and I would definitely attend another one in the future. Thank you for allowing me this opportunity to collaborate and take part in this experience.”—Anne Rosso, 7th grade Language Arts teacher

“This was the first time I attended an OMLA conference. I can honestly say that throughout my time at the conference I was pleasantly surprised at how many people were in attendance and how well it ran. I thought it was very helpful to talk with other teachers from my area (OHIO) that I had never met before. While attending the different sessions, it was great to know that everyone there had a similar background or at least came from similar districts. I particularly liked the 1:1 session that I attended towards the end of the day on Thursday. This session was well put together, but also allowed time for those that were in the audience to discuss pros/cons that they were having in their own district, and we were able to help solve some of the issues others were having. Overall, I believe the conference was very well put together and I had a BLAST at the social (the band was amazing). Great job!”—Brittany Rosso, 8th grade Algebra teacher

“The 2017 OMLA Conference was extremely beneficial to me as an educator. I was able to bring back plenty of ideas back to my classroom, and Building Leadership Committee. I enjoyed Jack Berckemeyer’s sessions; his fun personality brings comedy to learning. I also had a great time at the social Thursday evening. I felt extremely appreciated that this was provided, and it was nice to be with fellow Ohio educators and administrators. Thanks so much for the valuable learning that took place, I hope to attend it again next year.”—Emily Carl, Intervention Specialist

It was obvious that my co-workers loved the conference as much as I did. The 2017 OMLA conference will be a hard one to top!
Keynote Takeaways

by Katie Weisenbarger
West Region

The Ohio Middle Level Conference was an experience that shifted my thinking in a way that is best described by a quote from Eric Sheninger’s keynote presentation: The things I learned made me “literally reconfigure my mental models of the world to assimilate it.” (If you missed it, you need to look up “Awe” by Shots of Awe on YouTube.) He presented such a powerful concept to his audience: We need to inspire a sense of awe, wonder, amazement, excitement, and inspiration in our students. We cannot sit back and make excuses for why we aren’t incorporating the best and most impactful technology and tools available to us. Our students are living on the edge of what is “out there;” educators must be there too. We can’t let the unknown and the vastness of it all overwhelm us. We need to take steps at an assertive pace toward the latest and greatest ways to inspire a sense of wonder in our students. “We have a responsibility to awe.”

Manny Scott: keynote speech turned into poetry, song, and a soul-stirring testament of the power of a teacher. The impact of his presentation made me reconfigure my heart in order to assimilate it. His words pulled me briskly and acutely out of my day-to-day view of my challenges as a teacher: missing assignments, behavior issues, lack of time, pressing demands. He pulled me right out of that self-absorbed bubble to a place where I can see the bigger picture. Our job is not to coerce kids into turning in our assignments. Our job, our mission, is to inspire young people who come to us every day from places we have never seen. From lives we don’t know. I have a particularly challenging class of 7th graders this year. The week after having the privilege of hearing Manny Scott share his life story with us, my hands-down most challenging student shared in a quick write about how excited he is to see his father for the first time since he was 8 years old. He misses him so much, and Thanksgiving is going to be so amazing because he will spend a few days with his dad. I can’t explain how important it is to me that I was able to refocus on the human aspect of this profession. Our calling as educators goes beyond producing better test scores. I am one person with an opportunity to make a positive impact in my students’ lives. What I choose to do with that opportunity is completely up to me.

Finally, I want to congratulate all of the award winners from this year’s OMLA 2017 conference. It was inspiring and humbling to witness the receipt of so many worthy awards to students, teachers, parents, and support staff. I hope that the recognition fuels the spirit and passion of those who were awarded. I know that as an OMLA member, I have the opportunity to nominate my fellow educators each year for these awards. In teaching, there are countless moments and victories that race through our busy lives without enough time to relish in them. I believe that we should all pause and take inventory of the great things happening around us. If you know that person at your school who you feel is deserving, take some time to nominate them for an OMLA 2018 award for next year— in Sandusky!
Tips and Tricks for New Teachers

by Michelle Kousa
Northeast Region

We all know that when entering the classroom on our 1st day of teaching it can be a scary thing! All of those ideas and philosophies we read about in textbooks either work or get thrown out the window within seconds. One thing I have learned over the years is that relationships are key to a successful classroom. This means relationships with students, parents, co-workers and the community. The environment you create and the relationships you form are crucial to a positive learning environment for everyone at stake. Here are a few tips and tricks to help things run smoothly in your classroom, while focusing on a positive environment and positive relationships. There are also tips that will help you maximize your time so that you spend less time on management and more time teaching.

*Establish clear and POSITIVE expectations. Model, practice them, and be CONSISTENT!

*Assign seats. Middle school kids want to know they have a safe place where they belong. Although they like sitting by friends, they dislike being left out even more!

*Always be at your door greeting students before and after class.

*Make a community board or space in your room to post pictures, team events, and activities the students are involved in...AND, attend! Show them you care about them in and out of school.

*Get student info on the first day for important contact info, learning styles, and their expectations. Know what they expect from you and what will help them be successful.

*Have a special “signal” or “attention getter.” Set this up early on and be consistent. This will save you from getting frustrated or raising your voice.

*Placing a mirror in your classroom will drastically cut down bathroom trips!

*Use popsicle sticks as a quick way to pick groups or partners.

*Put a materials board on your door so students know what to bring to class.

*Give students class jobs and pay them...fake money of course! At the end of a month or quarter let students buy prizes or have an auction. Do this individually or on a team level.
*Fun in 5*: Have activities ready in case you have a few minutes left at the end of class.

*Buy a large supply of Band-Aids and place in a common location. Band-Aids are like duct tape...they somehow are the cure for everything!*

*Have a timer in the classroom. Set limits for openers, activities, group work, discussion, etc...*

*“Vent” box*: Have a place where students can secretly ask for advice or let you know good or bad things that may be going on in their lives. Respond promptly.

*Stress balls* and play dough work great for kids with attention issues. Allowing them to eat a crunchy snack also helps reduce stress.

*Play GAMES to review, introduce, or assess content! Kids love competition, and the standards tell us WHAT to teach but not HOW!*

*Plan a lesson that has some type of service learning involved to help your students develop empathy. Model how to be a good citizen and give them opportunities to change the world.*

*Parents can be great partners! Invite them in for class projects, or have them speak about careers during free periods. Build their support outside your room!*

*Be proactive* with communication. Call home or email before a situation escalates.

*Send POSITIVE notes home!*

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**PD IN YOUR PJs!**

#OhioMLA

Twitter Chat

Ohio Middle Level Association

Second Tuesday of the month
9:00pm

Moderators: @apptasticteach
@JR_evans
Five Reasons to Use Social Media

by Jeremy Evans
East Region

This year’s conference saw more traffic on social media than ever before. More and more educators are harnessing the power of Twitter, Instagram and Facebook as learning tools. Here are a few reasons to join in the conversation.

Reach out to Speakers and Authors
The keynote and breakout session speakers are just a tweet or comment away. Sure you can follow them and keep up on the great things they are doing, but Social Media is about interaction, so don’t be afraid to reach out to them.

Build a Network
You hang out with people you like, you probably eat lunch with the colleagues that you have the most in common with as well. Follow cool people that have things in common with you and build a network that will make you stronger and challenge you to be better. #OhioMLA chat on the 2nd Tuesday of each month is a great place to start.

Win Cool Stuff
This year’s conference was the year of giveaways. We have some amazing business partners that donated books, memberships and gear. All you had to do was ReTweet to enter yourself in a drawing for the prizes. Winning stuff can’t get much easier than that.

Learn and Grow
Again, social media is all about interaction. When you interact with other educators through social media, you put yourself out there and let others know that you are open to learning. We are in the business of learning. Celebrities and athletes are tweeting about their business all the time, shouldn’t educators share about their business as well?

We can’t wait to see what the future holds for social media and the conference in the future. Join in and follow Ohio Middle Level Association on Facebook, Instagram and Twitter.

Jeremy Evans is a Sixth Grade Language Arts teacher at Dover Middle School in Dover, Ohio. He is an Associate Member from the East Region.

Enhance Face to Face Connections
It is hard for me to go to a conference in this state without finding one person that I have interacted with on Twitter. It can be awkward when you reach out to that person for the first time, but you already know a little bit about that person, so your conversation can go deeper from the beginning. Social media is great for connecting with people online, but it can also make your face to face connections more meaningful.
The Magic that is OMLA's State Conference

by Stephanie Paul
Trimble Middle School
Southeast Region

This year’s annual conference once again exceeded all expectations. I remember the first time that I attended OMLA’s state conference; several things struck a chord with me right away, and now, years later I have come to look forward to them, eagerly anticipating that special time of year when the “magic” so-to-speak of OMLA’s Conference comes to life as we all gather together and feel that feeling we can’t quite put into words...

This “magic” is only possible because of the incredible work happening across the state of Ohio as each and every one of us, advocates daily for the needs of our students and the importance and value of middle-level practices in this ever-changing, uncertain time in education.

And so, I challenge each of you, in the coming New Year, to continue to inspire others through your work daily and unwavering commitment to the importance of the young adolescent’s needs. Create this sense of “magic” that we feel when we gather together annually in your classroom each day with your students and colleagues drawing upon what you personally took away from this year’s conference; share your work, share your enthusiasm, collaborate, and invite others to see what you are doing because it is the daily work that ultimately we share out at the conference and inspires our colleagues. Celebrate one another. Celebrate the little things, and create that sense of “magic” in your building.

One of the high points each year for me at the conference comes in learning about the incredible work being recognized through OMLA’s various awards. Listening to the regional representatives present to those who have been nominated and receive recognition for their outstanding work in middle level buildings has come to be my most favorite part of the conference; I love learning about others’ work which is deserving of honors each year.

This year, I had the privilege to celebrate alongside a colleague, who received an award for the Southeast region. It was her first time attending the state conference, having spent much of her career at other levels; however she has committed to serving students with disabilities and other diverse learners while learning herself about the history and best practices associated with This We Believe. As a result, she has come to be an outstanding, effective practitioner and advocate for this level.

I was curious to see what her reaction would be to being surrounded my so many-like minded educators, so I asked her for her impressions and take always having listened to dozens of awards be presented during the conference awards reception on Thursday evening:

Ashley Ecklund, Trimble Middle School intervention specialist, stated, “I would like to thank the Ohio Middle Level Association for awarding me the Regional award for Adapting Middle Level Practices for Diverse Students. I appreciate the thought and mention to working with diverse students. I am so thankful for the people I am surrounded by and get to work with on a daily basis, to make these things possible. This was such a wonderful opportunity to hear about the amazing things educators and staff members have done to impact the daily life of their students and the community.”

She felt the “magic” too. Wouldn’t you agree? The conference affirmed the work she does with students and once again for me re-invigorated and you, I hope, reaffirmed my love for this special age-group and the service we engage in daily—all for our students. I can’t wait to see you next year, OMLA!
Building a Future Beyond Expectations: 
Talking Apprenticeships

by Chris Zimmer
CAE, ACT Ohio Communications Specialist

As you begin preparing your students for life after high school earlier and earlier, challenging and empowering these adolescents to make better decisions, you have a responsibility to provide them with the best information to help guide those decisions.

Somewhere, decades ago, this mantra began: “If you want to be successful, you need to go to college.” A Bachelor’s degree was sold as the path to living out the middle-class dream; a fulfilling career with good pay and benefits.

Fast-forward to 2017. The average student loan debt has jumped from $18,650 to $38,000 (www.debt.org). Most entry-level jobs require a Bachelor’s degree, and many don’t pay enough to begin repaying that student debt immediately, adding years of interest to the total.

During the integral middle school years, expectations are set and many students are already thinking about college. But educators, guidance counselors, and administrators understand that not every child
in your district can, should, or wants to pursue a four-year degree after high school. These students may be shuffled to the local career-tech center, or sit sullenly in the back of class, unengaged.

But their future is no less bright simply because a Bachelor’s degree is not in their future. Certainly, the military will be an option for some of these students. But an option that is rarely discussed is a Building Trades apprenticeship.

Ohio is home to more than 80 Building Trades training facilities where registered apprentices earn competitive pay and benefits while training with skilled journeymen to learn their craft. Working on actual construction sites during the day, Building Trades apprentices are building their futures as they help build the community.

Ohio’s registered Building Trades apprentices also earn college credit. Working with local community colleges, apprentices earn credit toward their Associate’s degree.

Building Trades apprenticeship is often referred to as “The Other Four Year Degree.” Most apprenticeship programs require four years to complete, working with skilled craftspeople during the day, and attending classes twice per week in the evenings. After four years in most crafts, apprentices “top out,” graduating from the apprenticeship program and earning full journey person wages.

It’s not uncommon for a skilled journey person to out-earn peers from high school, who – after four years – will just now be entering the workforce. An electrician, for example, could easily earn $60,000 per year after training is complete. Compare that to an accountant with a Bachelor’s degree at a starting salary of about $45,000, and the difference becomes clear.

A Building Trades apprenticeship is also ideal for kinetic learners – those fidgety students who can’t sit still and learn better by doing. The Building Trades specialize in “doing,” offering students who like working with their hands and who are willing to work hard excellent career opportunities.

As you talk about the future with your students and their parents, make sure that all opportunities are on the table. Everyone’s goal should be what is best for the student, and often times, that is looking beyond the typical or expected answers in order to build a better future.

For more information on Building Trades apprenticeships, or to arrange for a classroom speaker on the topic, contact Chris Zimmer at czimmer@actohio.org or 614.228.5446.

Stay connected to OMLA!