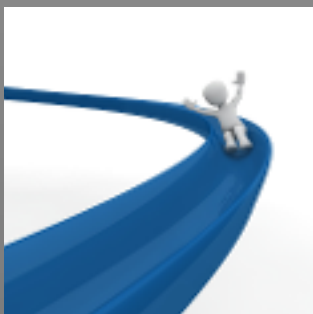


IN THE MIDDLE

OHIO MIDDLE LEVEL ASSOCIATION



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OHIO MIDDLE LEVEL
ASSOCIATION

IN THE MIDDLE

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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 co-editor kristen.lavric@gmail.com.

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



President's Message

Nicki Bertke
OMLA President



#OMLA2018 - Getting to the Core of Middle Level Education. The 800+ educators who had the opportunity to attend #OMLA2018 heard strategies, ideas, and practices that brought us back to the core of middle level education. George Couros (@gcouros) lit up the room as the keynote on Thursday pushing the attendees to a more innovative, experimental mindset. Kim Campbell (@KimCamp4Kids), a dynamic presenter, broke out into song and took us on a roller coaster of emotions from laughter to tears and back to laughter with her stories recognizing the importance of building relationships with students and colleagues. As a featured presenter, Jack Berckemeyer (@jberckemeyer) re-energized those in the room by sharing his passion, humor, and expertise for middle level education.

As a member of OMLA, your professional learning, networking, and recognition does not have to stop at the conclusion of the annual conference. Join us each month for an #OhioMLA Twitter chat. Each region also offers at least one regional event each year - visit www.ohiomla.org for a list of upcoming events. There is also "Professional Development" tab at the top of the webpage, there you will find links to videos and articles covering a variety of important topics.

We have already started planning #OMLA2019. Join us at the Hilton Columbus Easton November 7-8, 2019 along with keynotes Todd Whitaker (@ToddWhitaker) and Dave Burgess (@burgessdave) and featured presenter Jack Berckemeyer (@jberckemeyer). Presentation proposals are currently being accepted for break-out sessions. If you have presented in the past, I encourage you to again consider submitting a proposal. If you have not presented in the past, please consider submitting a proposal. There are so many awesome programs and practices occurring in middle level classrooms and schools across the state, that many times the knowledge and information shared in these sessions can be implemented in your classroom or school on the following Monday. To nominate a parent, student, colleague, team, support staff, or practice for one of our awards or apply for a mini-grant - visit www.ohiomla.org and click on the "Grants and Awards" tab for more information.

I look forward to seeing you all in Columbus November 7-8, 2019!

Writing: Not Just an ELA Responsibility

Kristen Lavric

Southeast Region

New Lexington Middle School

I am a math teacher. Okay, I'm certified in both math *and* social studies, but I've taught 7th grade math for 12 years now. I do not have a reading endorsement, nor have I taken many ELA courses (either in undergrad or at the graduate level). Yet, even I realize that as a math teacher, the ELA standards and expectations of students matter in my classroom. I cannot teach math in a bubble—that's just not how the world works. Over the last few years, I have tried to branch out of my comfort zone by incorporating more writing in my math classes. Besides giving me a new appreciation for ELA teachers everywhere, written responses have helped me gain a understanding of my students while serving as additional assessments.

I started having students create how-to articles about five years ago. My principal distributed a list of writing types that might be used on the state assessment; the list was so long my initial thought was that it would be impossible for any one teacher to address all of them in three years of middle school, let alone in one year. I picked one I thought I could reasonably use in math, the how-to article. Explaining the steps behind various math skills and concepts seemed like a natural fit to me. I drafted directions and met with both an ELA teacher and students to create the rubric. This collaborative process allowed me to establish expectations that were high but also realistic. Even with a few tweaks here and there, the articles have become a mainstay in my class. Every time I assign them, I gain valuable insight into what my students actually understand. This year, for instance, I learned a lot of my pre-algebra students shared the same misconception about how to find slope. Since they were getting correct answers and showing accurate work in class, I would not have recognized the error in thinking if I had not asked them to explain how to find slope. Thanks to the writing assignment I was able to adjust instruction and prevent future mistakes!

This year I have also started using math journals every other Friday. Students are given a prompt based on the 8 Math Practices (that apply across grade levels) and asked to respond as honestly and completely as possible. I do not take the journal entries for a grade; instead, I read them and respond to students before the next journal prompt is assigned. Already this year I have learned about how my students study for math, work through challenges, and how they feel about math in general. Again, this is important information to learn because it helps me understand their biases and past experiences with math. I can then tailor my instruction accordingly.

I am not an expert in using writing in content areas. I have much to learn and a great deal left to try. I am trying, bit by bit, though. Every year I get more and more comfortable adding written responses to my class. Anyone can add a little writing to her classroom; every little bit helps! I think it is important to remember that writing does not have to mean "write a research paper". A 10-minute journal entry helps students practice writing without taking a great deal of time. I call that a win-win!

Full disclosure: I presented on this topic at the 2018 Annual OMLA Conference.

Relationships, Relationships, Relationships

Jeremy Evans

East Region

Dover Middle School

In real estate it's location, location, location but in education it's all about relationships. Our conference keynote speakers, George Couros and Kim Campbell both emphasized the importance of building meaningful relationships with students. Think about your teachers in the past, there has to be at least one that built a positive connection with you and that is a big reason why you are in a school building today. I am by no means an expert in building relationships but here are some things that we do at our school to build positive relationships with students.

1. Listen to them - We talk to kids for many hours a day. We would probably be surprised at how much talking we actually do. But we have to listen too. Ask what they are doing on the weekends, who they hang out with. A few minutes of this each day can really go a long way.
2. Laugh with them - Tell jokes. Let them know that you do have a sense of humor (even if it isn't exactly like theirs). I love to share crazy stories and listen to theirs, sure we may get to all of the content that day, but we have fun and I think school should be fun. I feel much more comfortable talking to people that make me laugh
3. Jam with them - Our 8th grade Language Arts teachers survey the kids each year about the music they listen to and then make a playlist. When students are working quietly and independently they listen to the playlist. Students love to hear the music they requested and you can really learn about them and have good conversations about their musical tastes. (I suggest previewing the songs before playing them)
4. Learn with them - We recently started "club time" during the school day once a month. Students can choose a teacher-lead club. It is not a class. No grades and no pressure. The teachers can learn so much about the kids in such a laid back environment that can lead to great connections.

Sure this isn't a huge list but sometimes we need to start small and make those connections meaningful before we really make that lasting connection. If you are really genuine and authentic in your efforts to build a relationship, it will go a long way.

OMLA State Conference: A Shot of Adrenaline!

Brittany Cioffoletti

North Central

North Ridgeville Academic Center

This was my fourth OMLA State Conference, and I can honestly say that it gets better every year! I attended many amazing breakout sessions, several led by presenters who were so fantastic in the past that I just had to see what they had up their sleeves this year! While all of the breakout sessions that I attended were wonderful, the keynote speakers were by far the best part.

The conference opened with the innovative and inspirational George Courous. His candidness and sense of humor were refreshing, and he forced me to ask myself some hard questions. Am I focusing on the positives or am I letting the few negatives dictate how I teach my class? Am I afraid to try something new for fear that something might go wrong instead of focusing on what might go right? Am I preparing my students for the social-media based world that they are already in? These questions and more really left me reflecting on my decisions as a teacher. I know others around me felt the same way. (Plus, he made 700 people cry by showing a Scotch commercial! I don't know if it gets any better than that!)

Kim Campbell opened our second day by making us all laugh and reminding us that kids need to play. I've seen her speak before, and she never fails to teach me something new or remind me of something that I had forgotten along the way. We teach middle school, and, my gosh, IT...IS... FUNNY! She reminded us that we need to find the laughter every day. We need to have fun, and we need to help our kids do the same. She also reminded us that relationships are the most important part of what we do. You cannot teach a child until he or she knows you care. The piece of advice that stuck with me is that we have to make an effort to talk to every child every day because we could be the only person who speaks to that child that day. That really hit me, and it's been something I've been trying to consciously do every day, even if it's just a simple hello. What I love about Kim is that she isn't just a speaker. She walks the walk! She is doing everything she preaches, which is not something every presenter can say. She is on the front lines with us, so her words mean that much more.

Ohio Middle Level Association

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Putting it into Practice

Katelyn Dendinger, Nancy Miller, and Brian Wehri

Northwest Region

We have been fortunate enough in our district to have been able to attend the OMLA state conference for the past several years. The keynote speakers make you laugh and cry when reflecting on their middle school experiences with students and staff. The wide range of breakout session topics allow us to attend professional development of personal interest. OMLA 2018 provided us with a welcomed spark to motivate, inspire and remind us why we are in education.

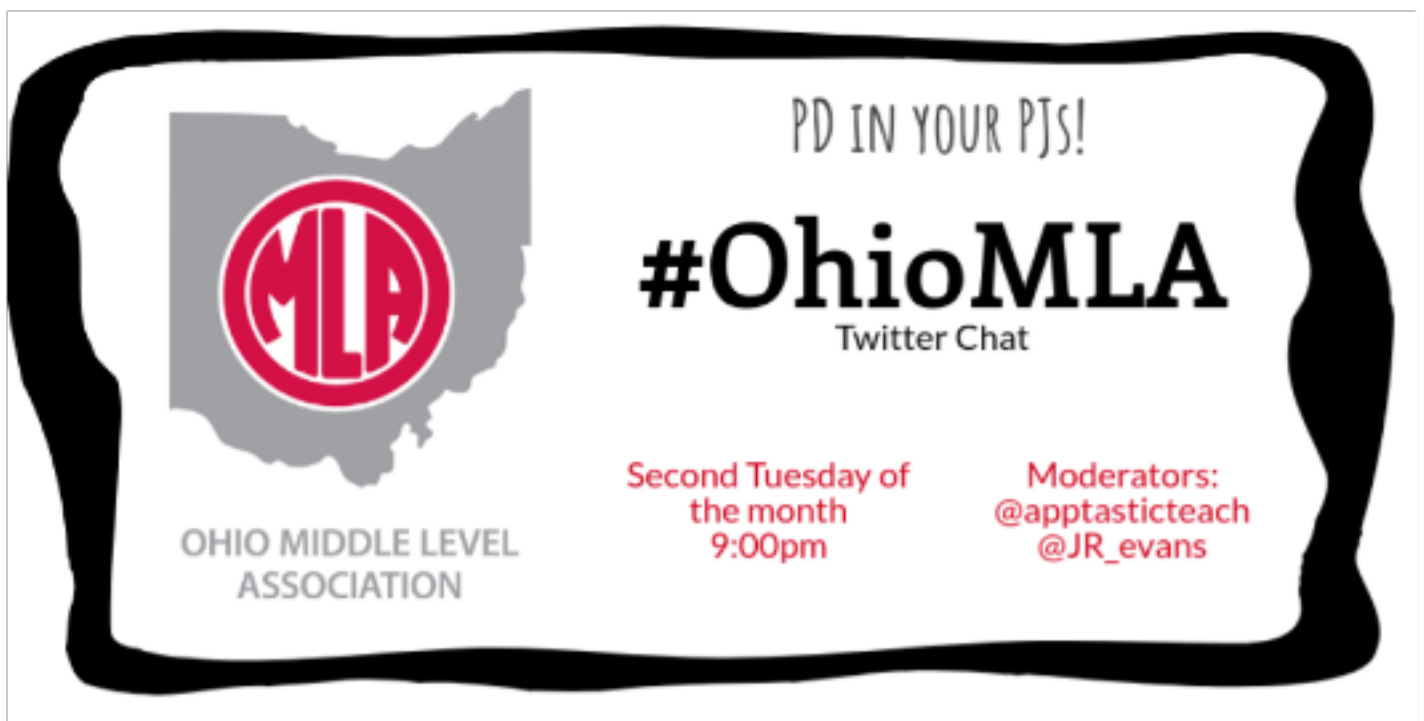
Our district has implemented the 7 Mindsets throughout the grade levels. The breakout session titled “Inspiring Student Leadership Through Service” aligned well with mindsets we’ve been implementing. Mrs. Miller attended to get ideas to serve the community through our mindsets and learned about the leadership that happens at Big Walnut Middle School. Their principal has a leadership team consisting of middle school students. They are trained to be leaders in the school and they truly are. The leadership team plans many events, including a service project, and goes out into the community to speak with leaders and find places where there is a need. They then organize teams and set a date for the entire middle school to go into the community. This service helps to foster the relationship between community members and students. It provides opportunity to nurture leaders and allows the community to show support for their local school. Students are practicing the true meaning of public service; not to mention this changes the views some adults have of today’s teens. We are eager to speak with our staff and community members to implement a similar model at our own district. We’ve moved into a new school building this year and would like to show our appreciation to the public for their support in this endeavor.

As a district, we have not adopted standards-based grading, but there are a few teachers within the district that do grade this way and have spoken highly of it. Mr. Wehri attended a session to learn more about this topic and in turn, has implemented the ideas of grading on how well students demonstrate knowledge of a standard. In his class, if students present basic knowledge, they earn a 70%. If students present advanced knowledge of the standard, they earn an 80%. To earn a 90% or higher, students need to present accelerated knowledge of the standard. Since changing his grading, Mr. Wehri’s classroom has become more focused on reaching a greater depth of knowledge for each of the social studies standards and less on presenting facts. He has observed students of all ability levels increase their mastery of the standards and is actively seeking additional professional development opportunities related to standards-based grading.

When listening to keynote speakers or attending breakout sessions, there is typically at least one, if not more, “ah-ha” moments we have. That moment happened for Mr. Wehri while he was attending a session about blogging. He thought it was something he was doing efficiently, but realized he was not even close after experiencing the session. The presenters emphasized how beneficial blogging is to share professional experiences and ideas, but also how it can be therapeutic on stressful days. He has since discussed the possibility of starting a blog with a colleague with professional and personal topics. The presenters also noted that if blogging was not the avenue of social media you felt comfortable using, to try using Twitter or Facebook instead to show what is happening in your classroom. He is currently working on tweeting every day either to show the parents and community members what happened in class or something exceptional he has seen from his students. The daily tweet has helped him focus on doing his best in the classroom because he wants to share with others what he is doing.

Learning centers are a teaching strategy our elementary teachers use daily, but it tends to fizzle out at the middle level. Mrs. Dendinger attended a session about middle school learning centers and walked away with a whole new perspective for using them with her classes. The idea of centers just sounds overwhelming with the amount of organization and pre-planning they could require, but the presenters in this session demonstrated how they used each other's strengths to implement them. The way they passionately spoke about how much self-guided learning happens and how excited students are to do centers made us excited to try it ourselves. Our district uses the co-teaching model for our Language Arts, Math and STEM courses. We've chosen those classes to start with as we have two teachers pooling their ideas and materials to create centers. The presenters encouraged us to have students help to create learning expectations which went much better than we had expected. We're still experiencing the typical growing pains when trying something new in the classroom, but we are confident this is something we are going to continue pursuing and reflecting on to provide our students with more engaging learning opportunities.

The OMLA conference is always a great way for us to refresh ourselves, make connections with other educators across Ohio and return to our students as motivated teachers armed with new ideas they'll be sure to enjoy. We look forward to next year's conference and the fresh ideas we will be able to share with our students and staff!



The OMLA Experience

Brian Woods

West Region

Parkway Middle School

The 2018 OMLA state conference was, once again, truly outstanding. This year's OMLA conference was extra special for me as my wife, Julie, was able to attend with her colleagues from Spencerville Middle School. Seeing them live the OMLA experience for the first time caused me to reflect on my first OMLA conference, my journey as a middle school principal, and what the OMLA has done for me and my school.

Seven years ago, I began my first year as a principal at Parkway Middle School. I took over as we were starting to implement the Common Core State Standards and the new teacher evaluation system. It was a stressful and challenging time for my staff and me.

During that year, I attended my first OMLA state conference. Not knowing what to expect from the conference, I did not take any of my staff. As I sat through the amazing breakout sessions and keynote speakers, all I could think was, "I wish my staff was here."

The following year, I returned with half of my staff members and the real transformation of my school began. My teachers were motivated and inspired in a way that I could never achieve on my own. They came back excited to teach and even more excited to share what they had learned. At our next staff meeting, each one presented to the full staff on one or two sessions they had attended. As they presented, their passion, enthusiasm, and knowledge spread to their peers. The next year, I took the other half of the staff and the cycle repeated.

The Ohio Middle Level Association has helped provide the motivation and knowledge to build an outstanding middle school that meets the academic and social-emotional needs of our students. During these first three years, our overall value-added grade improved from an "F" to an "A." There is no doubt that the OMLA was the primary factor in our growth.

Spending time with my wife and her colleagues, I saw a repeat of the OMLA experience my staff had. Their comments about the conference echoed the feelings of my teachers:

"I am so happy I had the opportunity to attend another OMLA conference. When I went a few years ago, I was the only teacher from our school who participated. The conference was amazing, but going with three of my colleagues made the experience even better. We all shared what we learned from the breakout sessions, and we came back to school with new ideas and strategies to try. I would love to attend every year!"—Julie Woods, 5th and 6th Grade Intervention Specialist, Spencerville Middle School



“Going to this conference was absolutely inspirational. I expected to hear at least one great keynote speech, but both keynote speakers were amazing. George Couros and Kim Campbell made you laugh about the funny things we experience almost every day teaching kids. The number and variety of sessions made it very easy to find a session that would fit with something I wanted to hear about. Providing evening socials for all of us teachers was very much appreciated. It is not just about gaining knowledge, it is about having fun together. Both the dueling pianos and the live band were awesome. Thank you so much, #OMLA 2018.”–Jennifer Pugh, 6th Grade ELA teacher, Spencerville Middle School

“I would strongly recommend all middle level teachers attend the OMLA conference as often as their school allows. Once there, I kept thinking, ‘I wish more of our teachers were here to hear these inspiring and entertaining keynote speakers.’ The break-out session topics were varied and I was able to take away ideas from each of them. The collaboration with teachers from other schools is always invaluable. Finally, just seeing a bunch of teachers who all share a common passion let their hair down for a couple of days was refreshing.”–Pam Shumate, 7th and 8th Grade Math Teacher, Spencerville Middle School.

“I thoroughly enjoyed every session I attended. In each session I walked out with a plethora of ideas to easily implement. Monday morning upon returning I started the week with two new ideas. I have two more built in for next week. I cannot even begin to give enough praise to the two keynote speakers. The conference also offers a good deal of social activities for teachers to mingle and de-stress, which is a big added bonus.”–Barbie Mabry, 6th Grade Math Teacher, Spencerville Middle School

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