

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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President's Message

Jay Clark

OMLA President

Principal, Van Buren Middle School



For the first publication of the new school year, it's only natural that our first issue of *In the Middle* focus on relationships. Many of the articles on the pages focus on the relationships teachers build with students, which is essential as Rita Pierson reminds us that "kids don't learn from people they don't like!" Additionally, I urge you to consider building relationships with your colleagues.

Rick Wormeli has been a favorite presenter at OMLA conferences. Much of what Rick shares in both his presentations and writing resonates with me. At our 2016 annual state conference in Cincinnati, Rick finished a keynote acknowledging that the real learning wasn't going to happen in the ballrooms, meeting rooms, or hallways of that conference center. The real learning happens when we return to our schools and begin discussing ideas with our colleagues. Great teachers know that our students gain a deeper understanding when they discuss content - making personal connections with the ideas and hearing others' perspectives.

You have an amazing opportunity to put this to the test November 2 and 3 for Ohio Middle Level Association's state professional conference. #OMLA2017 will certainly put your "gears in motion" with amazing keynotes Eric Sheninger and Manny Scott. When you couple those two amazing speakers with featured presenter Jack Berckemeyer and nearly 90 sessions led by Ohio educators, we guarantee you will leave with ideas to discuss with your colleagues.

Better yet, bring a team so that you can start sharing ideas at the conference! For every four paid registrations from your district or college/university, the fifth is free!

In addition to the learning at #OMLA2017, we will also recognize amazing educators, students, and parents. Networking and socializing will cap off your experience all at the Columbus Hilton - Easton. Registration details are available at www.ohiomla.org.

Finally, please take a moment to fill the bucket of a colleague (and students, too). Thanking a co-teacher for her perspectives, encouraging a first-year teacher, or acknowledging a student's perseverance often means much more than we imagine.

Wishes for an amazing school year and thank you for your commitment to Ohio's young adolescent learners!

Title?

by Melissa Stanton
Northwest Region

STRESS...ANXIETY...NERVOUS...EXCITED...SCARED...Will I fit in? Who can I sit with at lunch? Where are my classes? Where is the bathroom? How much homework will I have? Will my teachers be nice? Will there be homework over the weekend? How does lunch work? OMG I have classes with him/her!

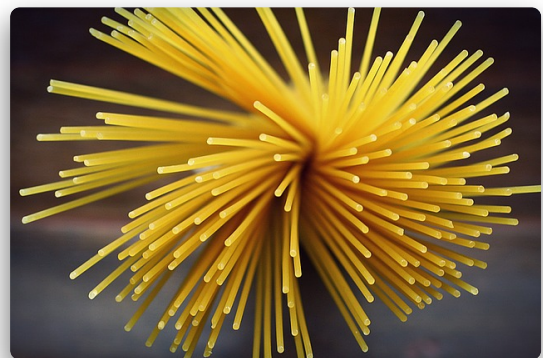
Often times the beginning of 6th grade signals the time to move buildings, have lockers, change classes and leaving the comfortable setting of elementary school. Students without special needs are faced with these fears, add to it anxiety of new routines, stress of additional homework, stress of not knowing if they will have support in their classes and you have the recipe for disaster.

I love the start of the school year. New clothes, new beginnings and new students. I have a unique schedule, I loop with my students with special needs, we just add in new 6th grade students to the mix. As a district we start school and then are off for fair break after only being in school about 10 days. This time gives me an amazing opportunity to get to know my students on a more personal level. This year I tried something new. There was no syllabus to go over, no seating chart, no academics to test on. I focused solely on team building and relationships. I can already see this paying off.

It was scary to walk into my first class with the 6th graders, after all there were 32 of them and only one of me (more than half the class is on an IEP or 504). I can see the nerves on their faces. After all they have awoken from their sleepiness and were now in 2nd period of the day thinking “How did I get here?” I greeted them at the door, when they entered the room on my board was a

note to sit where they were most comfortable. PANIC sets in. Once all 32 were in the room I started. “Congratulations, you have found your 2nd period class!” We talked about the important things...”Do you know where the bathroom is?... If you are buying lunch this is what the meal is....sit anywhere you want, but please don’t bounce on the yoga balls.” As I went through this, worry started to leave their faces.

We jumped right into the first project. Teams of 3 BUILD THE LARGEST FREE STANDING SPAGHETTI STRUCTURE with only the materials you have in front of you. Leaders emerged, plans were drawn with dry erase markers on the table, and the building started. After we measured, groups changed and discussions on what worked and what didn’t allow them to work through the process of both success and failure. As a teacher, I am able to see strengths, weaknesses, how they handle themselves in situations with peers and overall who will be the leaders in the classroom.



Relationships First

by Lisa Ontrop, Guidance Counselor
Parkway Middle School
West Region

Analyze test scores, prepare academic and behavior interventions, attend meetings, create lesson plansthere is a lot to do at the start of the school year. Unfortunately, all of the beginning of year chores often take precedent over what I consider the most important indicator of a successful classroom – establishing relationships. Through my many years as a middle school counselor, I have found that the most successful interventions are with those students with whom I have established a solid relationship.

Establishing relationships with my students doesn't mean I just play games with them or that we have pizza together (although that can be a part of it, if you choose). I am talking about getting to know my students and striving to meet their needs so that they can be successful both in the classroom and out. When a student knows that his/her teacher is aware of and cares about meeting his/her needs, the student is more likely to find success in your classroom. But how do we do this? Where do we begin? For me, this is basic. I go all the way back to my undergrad way back....to Mr. Abraham Maslow and his Hierarchy of Needs.

Establishing a relationship with your students is going to begin with meeting them where their needs are. Some of your students will be at the bottom of the pyramid, Need #1:

Physiological Needs. You will need to make sure they go to the cafeteria for breakfast every day or make sure they have a hat and gloves in the winter. Take a walk through the cafeteria to see if your students are eating lunch. When a student knows you care about his physiological needs, you are forming a relationship with that student.

Other students will be at Need #2: Safety Needs. Setting up clear rules, routines, and expectations will help your students feel safe in your classroom. Allowing the student to see the school nurse or counselor when needed will also help to meet Safety Needs. Once students who are at the bottom half of the hierarchy see that you care about their basic physiological and safety needs, a trust will begin to form. Now that your students' basic needs are being met, and they know that you care about them and that they can trust you, you can begin working on the Need #3: Belonging.

This stage in the hierarchy is where relationships happen. When your students are at this stage, they can make friendships, work with others, and see you as an adult role model. At this level, you will be able to talk to them about their school accomplishments and goals. You may choose to give your class or group a nick name, like "Room 7 Super Stars", as a means of creating a group for the students to identify themselves with. You may choose to pick a charity or service project to work on together as a team. You may decide to create a buddy



system for students to help each other meet goals. And, most importantly, you will want to celebrate accomplishments.

Celebration is one of the most important aspects of feeling that you belong to a group. Think about it.... you feel a sense of belonging to a group, whether it is a family group, friend group, neighborhood group.... any group. What do you do when something good happens? You celebrate! You celebrate weddings, christenings, graduations, birthdays, summer, holidays, etc. This needs to happen in your classroom group, too. The celebration doesn't need to be a party with hats, music, and food. It could be a quick classroom cheer, or a two-minute dance, or five extra minutes at recess, or early lunch dismissal, or no homework! Celebrations are important. They bring the group together for a common good and strengthen the bonds of the relationship.

So, as we start another school year, take some time to think about how you are going to strengthen the relationships you have with your students. Put a plan into place for making sure their physiological and safety needs are being met. Then consider how you are going to work on the need for belonging. This will take a few minutes out of your busy day, but once a positive relationship has been established between the teacher and his/her students, the amount of time spent on behavior issues will decrease and academic achievement will increase. It is time well spent. Guaranteed.

Ohio Middle Level Association

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Bridges

by Crystal Ezzo, Teacher
North Royalton Middle School
Northeast Region

North Royalton Middle School prides itself on inspiring and empowering learners. A key to inspiring and empowering any learner is building a positive relationship with him or her. The middle level educators of North Royalton know that there are many challenges and obstacles that face the emerging adolescent while at school, in the community, and even at home. The challenges that make the school day trying are different for each student, which is why it is important that middle level schools create structures that allow for all students to be in their least restrictive environment and exemplify *This We Believe*.

NRMS serves close to 1,300 students in grades five through eight with varying needs and abilities. Consequently, three different resource classrooms have been created to best meet the needs of all students. An instructional, supportive model was developed to meet the social and emotional needs of certain students while also teaching them appropriate behaviors. This classroom is called Bridges.

It is our belief that all students can learn and be taught appropriate behavior. Some students can learn behavior faster than others, and some might need more help. Many factors can impact a student's emotional well-being as well as displaying appropriate behavior. In order for students to be successful in their academic life, they need to have a healthy mental and emotional state of mind. Bridges is able to provide that to students with first hand experiences. Our room is the safe place for students to display their emotions in raw form without feeling intimidated by others. We are one team, and we work together to make sure our students are on the right path to be successful once they step out of our classroom door^[1].

Bridges provides specially designed instruction that consistently supports the emotional and mental health and social learning needs of students. It supports the skills of self-awareness, self-management, social skills, responsible decision making, self-regulation, and more. Appropriate behaviors, strategies, and skills are taught in the classroom environment by utilizing the Zones of Regulation curriculum for character education class as well as using authentic and real life opportunities and/or examples as they occur. If

students are struggling with behavioral or emotional issues, academics become paused until the student is at the appropriate level to learn. The Zones of Regulation curriculum helps our students identify what [emotional] color they are in (red, yellow, green, or blue) and verbalize to us what emotion they are feeling in the midst of their problem. With that information, we



are able to assist them in choosing appropriate coping strategies so that they are able to return back to their normal school day as soon as possible.

Our goal for our students is to maintain and be successful in their school life as well as their everyday life. One of the most effective things that take place in our room is the communication piece that happens after an emotional or behavioral episode. Within these conversations, we can dig deep and figure out what the real problem is that lies within that student.

Being in the general education setting with students who are in Bridges looks a little different than what it would look like in the Bridges room alone. These students are trying to maintain their emotions and keep their behaviors in check all while trying to learn and focus on the instruction as well as not having attention drawn to them. The students want to do anything they can to fit in and be like everyone else. Since I know these students at a deeper level, I can tell when their emotions start getting overwhelming for them. If I can, I get down at their level and we work through coping strategies within that room. If needed, I pull the students in the hall so we can go through Zones and identify what is going on in their minds at that moment and what we can do to get back to that green level. Letting the students know that they have support in all school environments, and not just in the Bridges room, is huge for them. It allows them to feel that if they start to fall someone will always be there to catch them.

Bridges provides lessons that the students can take with them for the rest of their lives. I can testify from first-hand experience how beneficial the Bridges classroom is to the students I serve. My classroom is their rock, their safe place that they know they will always feel welcomed and accepted no matter what is taking place in their lives, past or present. The students in Bridges can conquer a school day because of the emotional support they receive in the Bridges classroom.^[2] They no longer feel alone, but instead accepted for who they truly are: students in middle school making it through everyday life as best as they can.

Crystal Ezzo has served both as the Bridges intervention specialist and as an 8th grade team intervention specialist. It is important to note that regardless of role or title, her ability to build relationships with students is one of the many characteristics that have made her successful at NRMS.

Jeffrey Cicerchi, Principal

^[1] Please feel free to contact Crystal Ezzo, intervention specialist or David Guciardo, assistant principal regarding the Bridges Classroom.

^[2] It is important to note that all efforts are made for the students to receive their instruction in the general education setting. The Bridges classroom provides that safe place for a student, and certainly is not viewed as the primary location of learning for the students focused on learning behavior.

Starting Off Strong

by Amy Peck, Principal
North Ridgeville Academic Center Middle School
North Central Region

Whenever I am asked what makes my school work, I begin to rattle off endless evidence of relationships. From the beginning of the year team building with staff and students, to emotional investments in our school family, relationships are always at the forefront of all decisions.

Empowering relationships are only successful if they are embedded in your district culture. My administrative team can finish each other's thoughts and sentences; we anticipate the needs of our district, and we rely on our collective strengths for the betterment of our school community.

Applying that same philosophy to our staff begins with team building each and every school year. From challenging ropes courses, to escape rooms and scavenger hunts, we gain insight into the minds of our colleagues that we would not through business only meetings. We laugh together, cry together, and embrace each other as the family we often spend more time with than those that live in our homes.

Once the sense of team is established among adults, it quickly filters down to our students.

As teachers work tirelessly to plan curriculum, they are also dedicated to building a family within their teams of students. Routines and procedures are discussed alongside the expectations of positive relationships.

This year, we have tied all of those expectations into our district wide PBIS program. Started as a small vision, Ranger STRONG has grown to lead all that we do. STRONG is a powerful acronym meaning Service, Teamwork, Respect, Ownership, Necessity and Goals. In order to make all of those components work, relationships must be a top priority.

Each component is embedded in everything we do. As situations arise, whether academic, personal or professional, STRONG can be applied to provide resolution and growth. While we empower our youth with the academic skills they need to be successful, we realize that all of the book sense in the world will not lead to success without the ability to have positive relationships. As Franklin D. Roosevelt once said, "If civilization is to survive, we must cultivate the science of human relationship."

Join OMLA for a monthly middle level education Twitter chat!



#OhioMLA

Second Tuesday of each Month | 8PM EST

Co-Moderators: @mjsedlak & @mjnatovich

More Than Just Students

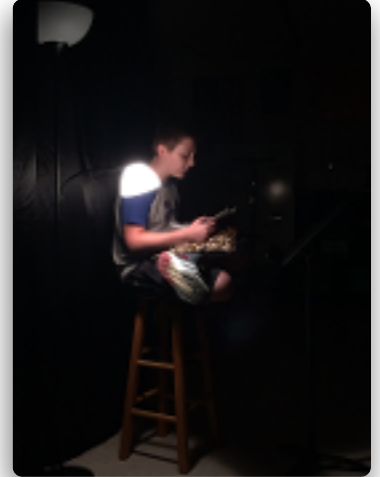
by Kathleen Cunningham, Teacher
New Lexington Middle School
Southeast Region

As educators, it is easy to view our students as just that, only students. We see them at school, assign them homework, give them notes, and grade their tests. However, the foundation of true learning and engagement in the classroom lies in relationships. In order to establish positive and strong relationships with our students, we must see them as more.

For me, teaching was a calling. I often wonder how different my life would be now if I'd had a teacher with whom I'd connected. I don't just mean a teacher who praised my math abilities or my French conversational skills; I had plenty of those. I mean a teacher to whom I could confide my personal fears and struggles. Someone who could objectively help me navigate my middle school years. My aim as a teacher is to be that person to my students. If I can connect on any level, if they know they can come to me with their tears, and if they share with me their heartbreak, then I know that I've achieved my goals. I can't reach every student, but I work to reach all that I can.

A few years ago, I started a first-day-of-school tradition that reminds students that they are young people with dreams, goals, and a whole future ahead of them. They start by writing all the bad from the past year: all the negative that pulled them down, the failure, the conflict they had with friends or teachers, and the problems they struggled to overcome. Once they've been able to put those thoughts on paper, I instruct them to destroy it. They smash it, rip it, punch it, stomp it... whatever they need to do in order to see the year as a clean slate. Then, they create bucket lists. They pick a colored bucket and write three goals for the year and two goals for their lifetime. I use this activity to remind them that they are students for seven hours a day, but they play so many other roles, too. They're musicians, readers, artists, athletes, siblings, and travelers. I show them my bucket first so they can get ideas and also get to know me as more than a teacher. Then, they work on theirs. To learn what all they want to accomplish in the coming year and in life gives me insight that I might not otherwise gain. It also brings to light the fact that school can help them learn the skills that they need to realize their dreams.

One of my favorite projects is one that I've been doing for nine years and I call it an "Autobiographical Moment". The students choose an object that is important and precious to them and write about it. They describe it in great detail, tell the story of how they got it, and explain all the moments that have made that object so special. To start the unit, I share my personal Autobiographical Moment about an old, special stuffed animal of mine. It sparks conversation where I can open up and help the students feel that they can open up, too. Many students choose something that a relative or



close friend gave them before passing away. Some of them bring blankets that they wrap around themselves while they write. Some bring a stuffed animal that they hold or a necklace that they wear. I've seen everything from war medals to 100-year old jewelry to a horse saddle. When the students complete their writing, we have a couple days set aside for presentations. The lights turn off, a black curtain is put behind the students, and they present using a stool and the light from a lamp. They hold their objects, stars in the spotlight, and share their moments with the class. It is a special way for students to express just how unique they are and what is precious to them.

The most vital component of building relationship with students, in my opinion, requires us as teachers to be vulnerable. Many of our students face horrors at home and in their past that make them feel utterly alone, and knowing they are not alone can sometimes make all the difference in the world. Three years ago, I had a set of twins with an exceptionally heartbreaking past. They were writing their Autobiographical Moment essays about bracelets that had been given to them by a nurse. When they explained the story, it came out that the nurse worked in the hospital where their mom passed away from a very sudden medical condition. As they were telling me, my heart nearly stopped. Just a few months prior, I had lost my mom in a quick and tragic accident. I originally had no intention of telling my students, but in that moment, I made the decision to tell them that I, too, knew the pain of my losing my mom. That vulnerable moment, while brief and spontaneous, created a bond that has stayed in place to this day. They are very near and dear to my heart and I communicate with the girl regularly, even though she is no longer in my building.



Every year, students leave our classrooms to move on to the next phase in their lives. We hope that they've learned to write a little better, analyze an experiment more thoroughly, and calculate the statistical probability of an event. Above all, however, we should hope that they've connected to an adult and teacher in a way that has shown them they matter. For some students, we are the only adults they have. They should leave us knowing that they're valuable, cared for, and will be remembered. Ultimately, if we've accomplished that, we've done our jobs.



Putting Your Gears in Motion **OMLA 2017 State Conference**

November 2 & 3 ★ The Columbus Hilton at Easton
Registration Form & Information at: www.ohiomla.org 

Give, Serve, Build, Contribute

by Tiffany Shaw
East Region

Educating and preparing our young people for academic, athletic, and fine arts success is only PART of our work. Unless students possess the character traits of kindness, respect, responsibility, hard work, and positive attitude, nothing else matters much. Employers continually emphasize the importance of “soft skills” in the workplace. In most cases, technical skills can be taught. At a recent educator in-service day, Mr. Mike Lauber of Tusco Display expressed three primary characteristics of desired employees:

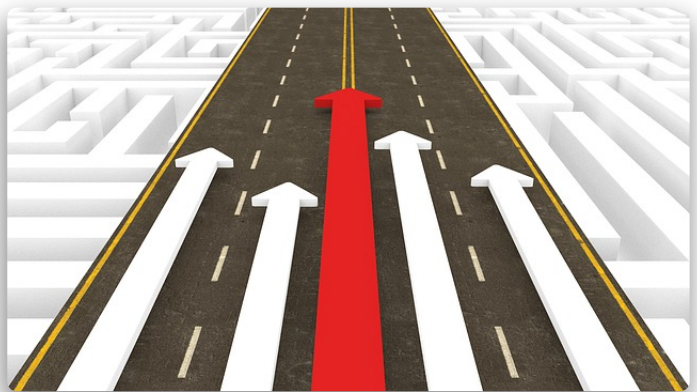
1. Positive Producers- giving, contributing, adding value—not just “What can I GET?”
2. Resilient Problem Solvers- willing to work hard, overcome obstacles, explore options— “What can I DO?”
3. Great Teammates- positive attitude, cooperative spirit, ability to communicate— “How can I HELP?”

At Tusky Valley Local Schools, students are expected to work hard, show kindness and respect, and demonstrate responsibility and dependability. Even in an imperfect environment with imperfect people, school discipline, suspensions, and expulsions are down. Why? Expectations are clear, discipline is consistent, and standards are high. Ask any Tusky Valley Intermediate Student, and they will be able to explain what it means to: 1) Be Safe, 2) Be Respectful, and 3) Be Responsible. Manners are stressed at all

levels and in all environments. Students are expected to come to school “ready to learn,” and always have the opportunity to become “role models” or show exemplary “WOW” behavior.

At Tusky Valley Middle School, students go through a 10-week “Anti-Virus” character development course provided through Global Priorities Solutions, LLC. Anti-Virus is designed to reinforce healthy living and decision-making for all students by teaching such character traits as ambition, responsibility, hard work, restraint, common sense, and generosity. School assemblies are scheduled to reinforce these concepts, including anti-bullying, internet and social media safety, and living a drug-free lifestyle.

At TVIS and TVMS, students are given ample opportunities to learn and grow in their leadership abilities. Students learn and understand how potential is developed by giving, serving, building relationships and contributing to our community.



Helping Students Self-Advocate

by Joyce Duchak and Allison Swanger
Teays Valley West Middle School
Central Region

An advocate is a person who empowers their students. Daily teachers are giving advice, being a listening ear, offering support, and giving encouragement. Middle school is a time in which we must also be teaching students the skills of self-advocacy. Self advocacy is a lifelong skill that supports success. It is important that we teach students how to understand their needs and communicate those needs to others.

It is important as adults that we help guide middle school students to be self-advocates, meaning to recognize and address the needs specific to their own learning abilities. We must do this without compromising their dignity or that of others. It is important because others cannot read their minds nor without such important feedback, do teachers know what would make a better school environment or learning experience for each specific student. It is equally important that both educators and parents teach children how to effectively communicate, negotiate, or assert their own interests, desires, needs, and rights.

As a middle level educator, daily there are opportunities to coach our students toward self-advocacy. We must help students identify his/her needs and also what help or support will address those needs. Lastly, we must ensure we provide an environment and the coaching that helps a student feel comfortable communicating his/her needs to teachers and others.

Marcia Brown Rubinstien's article "Strategies to Help Student Acquire the Skills to Self-Advocate" identifies the following strategies for introducing self-advocacy to middle school students:

- Start early. Remind students that teachers like active learners.
- Encourage self-awareness. Help students practice asking for help in a positive, polite way.
- Support critical thinking. Encourage students to begin to sort out strengths and weaknesses. This helps to develop confidence and awareness they need to speak for themselves.
- Require involvement. Ask for student input at conferences and IEP meetings. Make sure students are an active participant in all aspects of their education.
- Reinforce students when they advocate for themselves. Recognizing and acknowledging when students self advocate is empowering and also builds self esteem.

As students transition to middle school, their role as a student is changing. With their increased independence comes more challenges. Self-advocacy helps students navigate these challenges in a positive and assertive way. As we continue to support students' self-advocacy we must assure them that we will continue to advocate for him/her.

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Teaching Strategies to Build Self-Advocacy. (n.d.). Retrieved September 05, 2017, from <http://www.teachhub.com/teaching-strategies-build-self-advocacy>



Creating a Culture of Support for Teacher Leaders

by Rosemary Gornik, PhD
Kent State University

Teacher Leadership is trending nationally. The Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) believes that teachers and school leaders are key to implementing needed changes in public education if students are to be engaged in learning at high levels. At long last, many across the U.S. are recognizing the need to support differentiated and shared roles of authority with what is arguably the largest segment of human resource potential in any school district: its teachers. In the spring of 2015, CCSSO's National and State Collaboration on Educator Effectiveness (NSCEE) Conference was held in Atlanta, GA. The goal of this national collaborative is to "support the differentiated responsibilities and authority that our education leaders play in the 21st century learning context and to improve the system that supports this new and collaborative type of work" (<http://ccsso.org/>) In doing so, CCSSO intends that states will have the needed assistance to create and implement aligned, coherent, and comprehensive systems of educator effectiveness that are based on high standards of performance, accountable for results, and support, develop and reward educators across the career continuum. The National Education Association has also launched a huge initiative to prepare the next generation of teaching professional leaders. They assert that teachers who serve in leadership roles may do so formally or informally, rather than having positional

authority:

Teachers become leaders in their schools by being respected by their peers, being continuous learners, being approachable, and using group skills and influence to improve the educational practice of their peers. They model effective practices, exercise their influence in formal and informal contexts, and support collaborative team structures within their schools. www.nea.org

Kent State University (KSU) faculty accompanied the Ohio Team at the 2015 conference, and a 3-year, KSU/ODE partnership was forged to embrace educator effectiveness. Despite a sustained effort to incentivize teacher leadership, the Ohio Department of Education (ODE) observed that teacher leadership is not expanding in schools. Of the 190,000 licensed teachers in Ohio's public schools (<http://education.ohio.gov/>) a very small percentage hold Ohio's *Lead License*, a credential added to an educator's teaching license, arguably the highest level of teacher educator professionalism available. In the past several years, KSU has made a concerted effort to increase the number of teachers earning the Lead License through the implementation of teacher leader cohorts offered off site, and within the local school district. Between 2013 and 2016, interested teachers attending recruitment sessions at local school districts report that the primary reasons they do not pursue courses to obtain Ohio's highest teaching/leading credential are two-fold: 1.) "This credential is not recognized in my collective bargaining agreement, and therefore no financial incentive exists" 2.) "I would not pursue an endorsement in teacher leadership because of a lack of administrative support."

From a purely pragmatic point of view, The ODE seeks to more fully utilize the otherwise latent leadership potential untapped in our teacher ranks. Additionally, according to the state department, empirical and anecdotal evidence indicates teacher morale is at an all-time low. Therefore, one important component of Ohio's improvement efforts is to find effective ways to grow teacher leadership in Ohio schools, and support this change through a collaborative school and district culture among teachers and administrators. To that end, the ODE is partnering with a team of researchers, led by Rosemary Gornik and Wendy Samford at KSU. Building upon the KSU, Teacher Leader Endorsement Program (TLEP), a four-course, graduate level sequence that adds the *Lead License* to a teacher's credentials, we seek to provide substantial guidance to the dedicated administrative and teacher leaders who are striving to reach new levels of professional excellence in their daily practices. The purpose of the KSU/ODE/TLEP research initiative is three-fold:

- To build capacity for teacher leadership in two Ohio School Districts, Maple Heights City Schools and Aurora City Schools
- To gain an understanding and provide a detailed description of the process of cultivating *teacher leaders for democratic ways of living*, and the culture needed to support it.
- To partner with the Ohio Department of Education and other local and state-wide stakeholders on policy development and implementation that brings this research to scale in districts, state-wide, growing this kind of teacher leadership in Ohio's schools

There are three very important research concepts that form the foundation of this work: Defining leadership; problem-solving orientation; and changing the culture. The KSU definition of leadership is organized around the recursive inquiry logic of how to *enact lead-learning for democratic education* (Henderson, 2017, in press). This *lead-learning*

requires a particular problem-solving orientation that serves as an organizer for policy, curriculum, and leadership decision making; decision making that is focused on the cultivation of enduring values that stand the test of time (Henderson & Gornik, 2007). Finally, research about cultural-transforming efforts that practice democratic collegiality, and the honoring of all stakeholder voices (Henderson, 2017, in press).

Adding to this research is the assertion by the NEA that teacher leadership can enhance the capacity of the principal:

Teachers in leadership roles work in collaboration with principals and other school administrators by facilitating improvements in instruction and promoting practices among their peers that can lead to improved student learning outcomes. By doing so, they support school leaders in encouraging innovation and creating cultures of success in school.

Teacher leadership can neither be effective nor successful without principal support, but neither can the principal maximize his or her effectiveness without harnessing the talents and expertise of teachers in leadership roles www.nea.org

Among educational leaders there are not agreed upon conceptual and operational definitions of teacher leadership. The Kent State University Teacher Leader Endorsement Program (TLEP) defines teacher leaders as *lead learners and professionals for democratic ways of living*. (Henderson, et al, in press). This definition represents an aspirational vision of professional excellence, rather than a predetermined set of criteria of instrumental competency. Conceptualized with some of the greatest teachers in human history in mind, this vision for professional excellence is not a fixed objective sought after much less attained by all educators. This definition of teacher leadership maps an ongoing process for dedicated, thinking professionals with a deep sense of vocational calling. The conceptual map provides guidance for an ongoing and life-long journey of professional growth and learning.

To that end the Ohio Department of Education, in partnership with Kent State University is studying teacher leadership. Ambiguities regarding what teacher leadership is and what teacher leaders do along with the pressures of high-stakes accountability systems, frequently results in more technical forms of professional learning for teacher development that narrow the view learning and leadership. This often results in short term, fragmented changes in daily practice focused on student success on standardized assessments alone, prohibiting opportunities for classroom teachers to assume a leadership role as *lead learners for democratic ways of living*, as a conceptual and operational definition of teacher leadership. The KSU TLEP encourages teachers and administrators to reframe their school improvement efforts as interdependent parts of the same whole, a teaching-curriculum-leadership gestalt.

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