

# Focused on Young Adolescents

In the  
**middle**





Fall 2014-2015 | Vol. 39 No. 1

*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 [jclark@vbschools.net](mailto:jclark@vbschools.net)



from the **cover**

**Beating the Heat at Main Street Intermediate School in Norwalk**  
*Learn more on page 15*

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in their **words**

Let's face it, like our students and their learning, not all of our lessons are out of this world. Some days it is harder to be on our "A-game" than other days. Some material is flat-out boring. And, everyone has bad days. All of these are our reality. And, thankfully, there are fewer of these days than our A+ days!

*From Passion in the Middle Grades, page 16*

# President's Message

"All teachers make a footprint on a student's life, some just make a deeper one than others. Thank you to all the teachers out there willing to go the extra mile to make a difference in a child's life. Mrs. L., thank you for making my 8th grade year one of the best of my life. You taught me more than history of our nation, you taught me history about life. Thank you!"

- Caitlin B., Age 14

As we move into the 2014-2015 school year Caitlin's words remind us of what a privilege it is to be an educator. She reminds us that our students look to us for content knowledge as well as lessons having to do with the person they are working to become.

We can never lose sight of the fact that for many of our students we represent the adults they spend the most time with in the course of a day. This brings with it an opportunity and responsibility to create an environment where optimal learning can take place and inspiration to be the best person they can be surrounds them.

During your quest for creating a school/classroom where your middle level students thrive, I invite you to become a member of the Ohio Middle Level Association to add to the tools in your educator toolbox.

Why join OMLA?

- Receive ***The Ohio Middle Level Journal & In the Middle Newsletter***
- Reduced State Conference Rate
- Access to Regional Conferences
- Networking Opportunities with Exemplary Schools
- Access to On-site In-service Programs
- Mini-grants/Awards Opportunities
- Timely Position Papers
- Access to Liaisons from other Professional Organizations
- Voting Privileges

One of the most convenient ways to network with other exemplary middle level educators is to attend the Ohio Middle Level Conference at Kalahari in Sandusky, February 12 & 13<sup>th</sup>. Mr. Ron Clark is our keynote speaker. As a Disney American Teacher of the Year, Ron promises to be a speaker who will provide inspiration and strategies to elevate your practice as an educator. In addition, Jack Berckemeyer will return to offer his expertise to pre-service and new teachers. See our website for more details.

Other professional development opportunities include the Association for Middle Level Education (AMLE) National Conference in Nashville, Tennessee in early November. Check their website for details. Also, if you are an administrator, I encourage you to attend the OASSA Fall Conference October 19-21. Both conferences provide invaluable information and resources.

Enjoy the start to this new school year and all of the possibilities it holds!

Lorrie Kubaszewski  
OMLA President

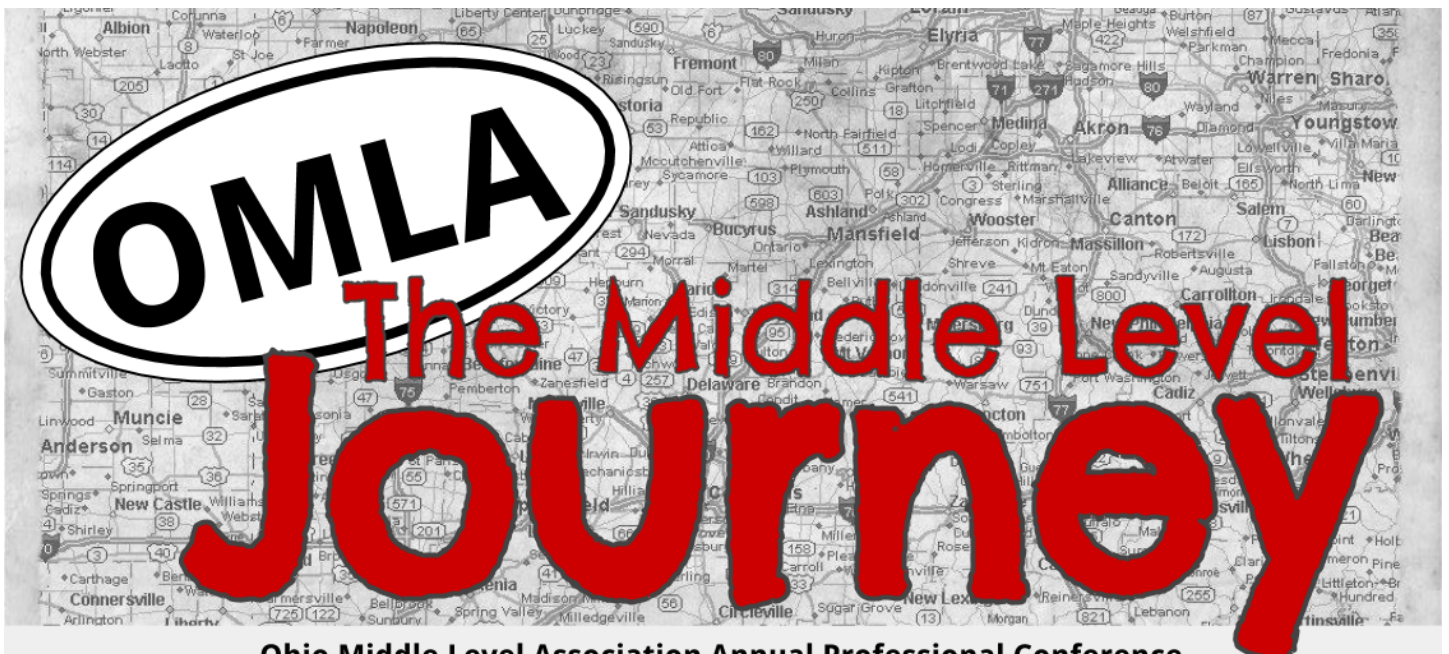


Lorrie Kubaszewski

President



A big **thank you** to our business partners for their support  
of middle level education!



**Ohio Middle Level Association Annual Professional Conference**  
February 12-13, 2015 | Kalahari Resort & Conference Center  
[ohiomla.org](http://ohiomla.org) | Facebook | #omla2015



# Letting Go of the Berries

Tom Burton



Almost 20 years ago, I met one of the most extraordinary middle level students I have known as an educator. I knew Justin primarily from coaching him in football but I did have the pleasure of teaching him as well. By most ordinary measures, Justin was not remarkable. He was an average student with average athletic ability and a typical social life for a young adolescent.

Justin was the definition of a student in the middle. Some things about Justin made him stand out a bit from his peers. He never missed school, he had a very positive attitude, and he always had a smile. According to all of his teachers, he came to class prepared every single day. He always completed his homework and turned it in on time. On the football field, he practiced hard and worked to make himself better.

One day I learned what made Justin truly remarkable. For several weeks, Justin had been living by himself. We knew his mother was in jail, but we did not learn immediately that his father had been taken to a rehabilitation facility. This incredible student cared for himself and came to school on his own each day. To feed himself, he earned money by carrying grocery bags out to shoppers' cars. He even spoke to bill collectors to get additional time to pay the bills. I've often wondered how a student like Justin was able to overcome all of the obstacles placed in front of him and still succeed at school when so many other middle level students need a major push just to come to school each day prepared to learn.

At about the same time I had Justin as a student, I also had Chad. Chad was the complete opposite of Justin. Where Justin could make a day better because of his work ethic and attitude, Chad could make any day worse, sometimes without even trying. He rarely did any work and he was one of those students who seemed to bring out the worst in his classmates. Chad knew exactly where the line was and he crossed it every single day—and flaunted it.

As the year went on, he had bad days and worse days, but he was never absent. Like Justin, Chad had perfect attendance. Did you ever have a Chad? Think back to those students whose absences you longed for; the students who drove you absolutely crazy and made those around them miserable. You know, the student who had the unique ability to find your last nerve, then stomp on it. How often was that student absent? In my experience, that student is rarely absent from school, and I wondered why.

At first blush glance, Chad and Justin seem completely different. Closer examination reveals that Chad and Justin (and the students like them) have a core commonality. The reason students like Chad and Justin are always at school is that they need a place to belong. The student who is your most difficult disciplinary case is also the one who needs the structure provided by your high expectations. The student with the most difficult home life needs your consistency and compassion.

The toughest students in the classroom are the ones who most need to be there. We need to accept the challenges the Justins and Chads of the world bring to our schools. When we accept those challenges and strive to create an environment where each student belongs, we have made a difference in the world.

Students like Chad sometimes make us wonder why we chose to work with middle level students, yet we need to do the same things for him that we do naturally for the less-needy students. If we make learning relevant for them, if we challenge them, and

*Continued on page 6*

*"Letting Go of the Berries" continued from page 5...*

if we make learning exploratory in nature, we can make sure all of our Chads feel like they belong. Performing at a higher level and behaving appropriately are valid and attainable goals for this group of students.

### Monkeys and Coconuts

I recently heard a story about a way primitive hunters trap monkeys. Monkeys are very intelligent, yet they fall for this simple trap. The hunter takes a coconut and drills a hole through the top. The hole is just large enough for a monkey to reach his paw into the hole. The hunter then attaches the coconut to a tree and puts some nuts and berries inside the coconut. When the monkey smells the nuts and berries inside the coconut, it tries to get them out by reaching inside. The monkey gets the berries, but he is unable to get his fist back out of the hole. He's trapped.

Of course, all the monkey has to do to escape the trap is to let go of the nuts and berries. However, he wants to get the berries and nuts so much that the simple act of letting go does not occur to him and he remains trapped.

**"The man who can make hard things easy is an educator."**

-Ralph Waldo Emerson

Sometimes middle level educators are like the monkey. We know what we ought to do, but we refuse to let go of something that we desire or think will work, even if letting go would be beneficial. We

want to help all our students succeed, so sometimes we hold onto things that we have done in the past. Sometimes, even though we know what we should do to help students succeed, we cling to practices that were once successful, or that we think would be successful. When we cling to a way of doing something that doesn't work, we act just like the monkeys.

We know what can motivate kids and what works best. We need to make sure that we take into account our experience and research of what effective middle level practices are, such as making learning relevant and exciting while allowing students to feel part of a team, giving them a place to belong.

Middle level education will always be about making connections with our students. When we are able to let go practices we should release, we will be able to develop true, authentic relationships with students, thus leading to an environment where students are motivated to come to school because they know they are part of something special. As Ralph Waldo Emerson so aptly put it more than 150 years ago, "The man who can make hard things easy is an educator." Let's do our best to take the hard out of life!

**Tom Burton**, Director of Administrative Services for Cuyahoga Heights Schools, was the Mark of Leadership columnist for Association for Middle Level Educators (AMLE) for five years. This article is republished with permission from both Tom and AMLE.

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## Have a story to share?

Contribute to



E-mail editor Jay Clark

[jclark@vbschools.net](mailto:jclark@vbschools.net)

# New Courses Meet the Needs of Young Adolescents

Matt Triplett

Middle level educators strive every day to meet the unique needs of young adolescents. It is important that schools understand that the whole child must be developed. The physical, psychological, intellectual and social-emotional needs of all students must be met. Unfortunately, adequately meeting those needs does not always come to fruition. Given today's economic landscape, it is very difficult for schools to find ample resources to meet these needs. When presented an opportunity, staff members must be willing to think outside of the box as they endeavor to empower their students.

Due to recent retirements and staff rearrangement, Fort Recovery Middle School (FRMS) was able to attempt to take advantage of a positive opportunity that they hope will be of great benefit to their students. Beginning this school year, FRMS will be offering two new courses: Transitions and Genius Hour.

Transitions is a quarterly class that all 6th graders will be required to take. Students will be exposed to units of study in organizational skills & methods, character education and study skill methods. The purpose of this course is to provide the necessary tools for students to be prepared for emotional, physical and intellectual success not only in middle school but hopefully in life as well.

The second course is called Genius Hour. The impetus for this course comes from the internet giant Google, which has a policy that provides their workers opportunities during the work week to work on creative projects that are separate from their normal daily tasks. While it is still in the developmental stages, Genius Hour has been designed to tap into students' creativity. Students will be required to work on an idea that will better their community and or society. Their projects must include examples of technology, writing, interviews and collaborative efforts. Students will be encouraged to work on a project that is of specific interest to them.

The goal with both of these new courses is to better meet the needs of the young adolescents at FRMS. As their principal, it is my hope that these courses will challenge students in ways that they have not been challenged in before. By doing so, they will become more confident in their abilities and in who they are as young adults.

**Matt Triplett** is the principal at Fort Recovery Middle School in the West region.

## Ohio Middle Level Association Board

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# Getting Back to What We Believe

Nick Discenza

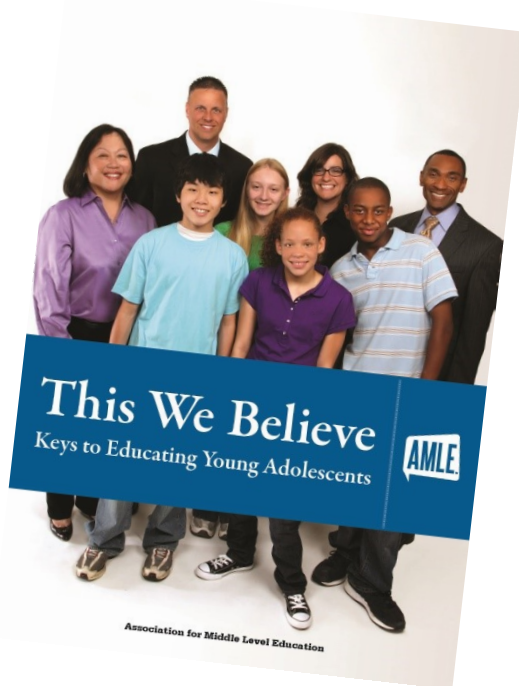
I recently had the opportunity to re-read *This We Believe: Keys to Educating Young Adolescents*. The book, published by AMLE, serves as the essential resource for those committed to helping young adolescents become successful and responsible global citizens. As a middle school building principal, I usually spend my summer reading and researching topics to tackle with my teachers for the upcoming school year. In the past, I have focused on differentiation, technology, intervention/enrichment, and data. After re-reading *This We Believe*, I quickly realized that the charge for this upcoming school year should be recalibrating our school beliefs in regard to educating and developing the middle level kid.

Middle school educators know the uniqueness of educating the early adolescent child. The middle level child is so very different from any other age group. As different as they are from other age levels, they are even more diverse and different from one another. *This We Believe* points out that 10-15 year olds undergo more rapid and profound personal changes than at any other time in their lives. The authors compare the developmental changes to that of an infant, with the major difference being that the early adolescent is a conscious witness to the change. The early adolescent is such a complex and perplexing group, that it requires a unique and targeted approach for educating them. *This We Believe* outlines and describes the attributes and characteristics that successful middle schools should strive toward. My favorite quote from the book reads: "A learning environment is very complex, and young adolescents' academic success is highly dependent upon physical, intellectual, moral, psychological, and social-emotional factors – all of which are inexorably intertwined." This quote outlines the complexity of educating the early adolescent and shines a light on the importance of creating developmentally responsive schools for this age level. Schools and school districts across the state are under a lot of pressure to keep up with the immense changes happening in education.

We feel compelled to become common core experts as we prepare for the upcoming PARCC tests. We are focused on developing strong RTI protocols and learning about how to intervene with struggling students. We feel pressure to provide professional development on new teacher evaluation systems. We work with our teacher leaders to develop positive behavior support systems in our schools to reduce suspension and increase achievement. Schools and districts are also hustling to increase teacher and student literacy in technology. Don't get me wrong... all of these initiatives and directions are very important and good for kids. Many of these also match the characteristics presented in *This We Believe*. Because we have so many places that we need to focus our efforts and attention, we can easily lose sight of the areas that are most important and most impactful to our building culture and the needs of our students.

At Shiloh Middle School, educating young adolescents through strong middle level practices is paramount. As the building principal, I lose sight of this at times because of all the other "stuff" that seems so important. Taking the time to read *This We Believe* again has reminded me to slow down, refocus, and get back to the core beliefs of my building. Shiloh Middle School's twelve team leaders, the administrative team, and I will be delving into *This We Believe* through a book study this school year. It has been a couple years since we have looked at the book as a staff and we can certainly use a reminder our guiding principles as a middle school. The idea of committing to talking with building leaders about being a developmentally responsive, challenging, empowering, and equitable middle school excites me and reenergizes me for the new school year.

**Nick Discenza** is the principal at Shiloh Middle School in Parma, Northeast region.







## Conference

### 2015 Ohio Middle Level Association Annual State Conference Kalahari Resort - Sandusky, Ohio February 12 - 13, 2015

OHIO MIDDLE LEVEL  
ASSOCIATION

#### CONFERENCE REGISTRATION FORM — Please PRINT; One person per form

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ E-mail: \_\_\_\_\_

Title (circle one): Administrator Teacher Student University Professor Other \_\_\_\_\_

School: \_\_\_\_\_ Phone: (\_\_\_\_) \_\_\_\_\_

☐ Home ☐ Work ☐ Cell

School Address: \_\_\_\_\_

(If a student, provide your mailing address)

City/State/Zip: \_\_\_\_\_ County: \_\_\_\_\_

School District: \_\_\_\_\_ OMLA Region: \_\_\_\_\_

**Conference Fees:** For every four (4) Full Conference Fees paid from the same district or college/university, an additional person may be registered free. All five (5) registrations must be sent at the same time with full payment. Full conference (2-day) may not be split between 2 people. **NO REFUNDS** given but substitutions are encouraged.

☐ Check here if this form is for the free registration

#### EARLY REGISTRATION FEE

#### Fee After January 9, 2015 (Post-marked) & Onsite

Registration form and payment must be received or post-marked by 1/9/15.

	Member	Non-member *	Member	Non-member *	
Full Conference Fee:	\$180.00	\$210.00	\$220.00	\$250.00	\$ _____
* Price includes one-year OMLA membership					
Thursday only:	\$140.00	\$170.00	\$180.00	\$210.00	\$ _____
Friday only:	\$140.00	\$170.00	\$180.00	\$210.00	\$ _____

**Undergraduate/pre-service college/university students and parents (that are not teachers or administrators):**

Student membership in CMLA or AMLE does not qualify you for the member rate.

Both days:	\$45.00	\$60.00	\$45.00	\$60.00	\$ _____
Thursday only:	\$35.00	\$50.00	\$35.00	\$50.00	\$ _____
Friday only:	\$35.00	\$50.00	\$35.00	\$50.00	\$ _____

☐ PURCHASE ORDER #: \_\_\_\_\_ (Enclose a valid hard copy PO) ☐ CHECK NUMBER: \_\_\_\_\_ (Check payable to: OASSA/OMLA)

CREDIT CARD ☐ Visa ☐ MasterCard ☐ Discover

Card number: \_\_\_\_\_ Expiration Date (MM/YY): \_\_\_\_\_

Name on Card (Please Print): \_\_\_\_\_

Home Address (if personal card): \_\_\_\_\_

Mail check and registration form to: OMLA c/o OASSA, 8050 N. High St., Suite 180, Columbus, OH 43235 or FAX to: 614-430-8315

For more information, visit [www.ohiomla.org](http://www.ohiomla.org) Registration Questions? Call Barb Benson 614-430-8311

On-site registrants will be accepted with payment or hard copy of purchase order. Meals for on-site registrants are NOT guaranteed.  
Participation Certificate for CEU credit will be offered.

**Hotel (Registrant is responsible for making reservation) Ask for OMLA Conference Block by 1/11/2015**

**Phone: 877-525-2427**

Kalahari Resort, Sandusky OH

\$144/night Wednesday-Friday

\$194/night Saturday

1-4 people in room



Conference



## 2015 Ohio Middle Level Association State Conference Conference Presentation Proposal Form

Please type or print clearly all information.

Presenters for the OMLA State Conference are not paid an honorarium. *Each presenter must register for the conference and pay the appropriate member / non-member fee – no exceptions!*

For a Conference Registration Form go to [www.ohiomla.org](http://www.ohiomla.org).

Mini-sessions last for 60 minutes. If you do not hear a response regarding your presenter application by Friday, December 19, 2014, please contact Nicki Bertke at [bertkecomla@gmail.com](mailto:bertkecomla@gmail.com).

### Presentation Description:

Your Name: \_\_\_\_\_

(The name listed here will be the person who receives all information regarding your application.)

Your school or organization: \_\_\_\_\_

Creative title of presentation: \_\_\_\_\_

Goal of presentation: (List the goal of your session in a brief statement.) \_\_\_\_\_

**Abstract:** Provide a short 3-5 sentence description of your presentation. This will be printed in the program.

### Presentation Topic:

What is your target audience?

☐ Teachers ☐ Administrators ☐ Pre-Service Teachers ☐ University Staff ☐ Resident Educator

Please check the category which is most closely related to your presentation. Choose one category only.

☐ Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment

☐ Leadership and Organization

☐ Culture and Community

### Audiovisual Aids:

**Only a screen will be provided.**

Additional equipment may be contracted directly from our conference supplier at your expense.

☐ Please send me AV ordering information. I understand I will pay for the equipment rental.



Conference



## 2015 Ohio Middle Level Association State Conference Conference Presentation Proposal Form

### Session Information

We would like to know your preference for the following. We will try to honor as many of your requests as time and facilities allow.

Indicate your preference of day(s) to present. ☐ Thursday ☐ Friday ☐ Either

Do you require or would you like a double session? ☐ Yes ☐ No

Would you like to offer your presentation a second time? ☐ Yes ☐ No

### Primary Speaker Information

(This will be the only person who received information regarding your presentation.)

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Position: \_\_\_\_\_

School District: \_\_\_\_\_ School Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

School Building: \_\_\_\_\_ Home Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

School Address: \_\_\_\_\_ E-Mail Address: \_\_\_\_\_

City, State, Zip: \_\_\_\_\_ Region: \_\_\_\_\_

### Additional Speaker Information (For program use and secondary contact only)

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ E-Mail: \_\_\_\_\_ List in program? ☐ Yes ☐ No

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ E-Mail: \_\_\_\_\_ List in program? ☐ Yes ☐ No

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ E-Mail: \_\_\_\_\_ List in program? ☐ Yes ☐ No

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ E-Mail: \_\_\_\_\_ List in program? ☐ Yes ☐ No

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ E-Mail: \_\_\_\_\_ List in program? ☐ Yes ☐ No

### Mail Conference Proposal form by Friday, November 21, 2014

Mail form to: Nicki Bertke  
4730 Fort Loramie Swanders Road  
Minster, OH 45865  
e-mail: bertkeomla@gmail.com

Please keep a copy of Nicki's information and direct all presentation related questions to her.

# College Connections

Kristen Lavric & Sarah Luthy

Instilling the beliefs of the middle school concept presented by *This We Believe* begins by engaging prospective middle level educators during the development of their teaching philosophy. During these formative years, an impact can be made on the hearts and minds of our future middle level educators.



There are three ways to impact the beliefs and practices of prospective middle level teachers:

**College Courses** It is vital that our colleges and universities take an active role in teaching the middle school concept. One way to do this is through using resources like *This We Believe*, *Turning Points 2000* and/or The National Forum for Middle School Reform. These sources provide the foundational tenets for what makes effective middle level classrooms and schools. Learning the philosophy of the middle school concept is important. However, education of our future middle level educators must not stop with theory, but most move towards the participation in the implementation of these theories in their field placements.

**Field Placements** As educators, we sometimes have the opportunity to host prospective educators in our classrooms for field placements or student-teaching experiences. By opening up our classrooms, we are able to show philosophy in action. The tenets of middle level education will come alive in a manner that cannot be achieved by solely reading and listening to lectures.

**College Roundtables** In addition to inviting pre-service middle level teachers into our classrooms, it is equally important to bring active teachers to college campuses for roundtable discussions. This will bring the discussion about young adolescent development directly to pre-service teachers. Not only does this reinforce theory and practice, roundtable discussions will provide networking opportunities for these prospective teachers.

By reaching educators early on, we will be able to build a stronger system of advocates for the middle level concept. As these new educators enter the field, they will help energize those already grounded in the middle school concept while helping to “convert” others to the cause. This growing system of advocates will positively impact young adolescents on emotional, social, and academic levels.

**Kristen Lavric** teaches seventh grade math at New Lexington Middle School and  
**Sarah Luthy** teaches eighth grade math at Trimble Middle School, **both** in the Southeast region.



# GO!: Ask! Act! Achieve!

## Step-by-Step Help for Teaching Information Literacy with the Ohio Learning Standards

Jennifer Schwelik & Melissa Higgs-Horwell

The new standards have changed how research skills are taught in Ohio. With a strong focus on information literacy skill development in the middle years leading to information fluency for those entering college or the workforce, no longer can information literacy be a “nice-to-have” extra in middle school. It is fundamental to students’ future success.

The standards move assignments from students “reporting” (summarizing a topic using original words) to students “researching” to answer questions (incorporating multiple pieces such as reviews and reports to develop a new piece of information that addresses the research question). In short, a report provides background information and summarizes information on a topic. Research generates new ideas.


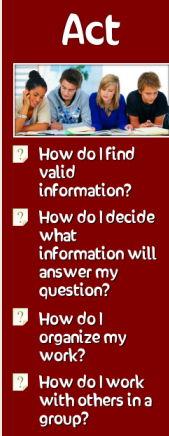
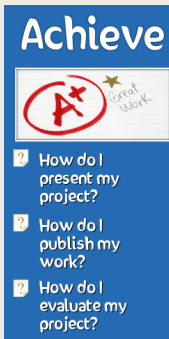
This new focus on information literacy with an emphasis on research presents new challenges. First, classroom teachers, who are held responsible for teaching information literacy, look to their school librarians for help. At the same time, budget cuts in many schools have reduced or even eliminated library staffing so that teachers are functioning with limited library instruction services. As a result, teachers are presenting information literacy, which is complex under the best of circumstances, without traditional library service support.

To help teachers and librarians help students, INFOhio launched *GO!* ([go.infohio.org](http://go.infohio.org)). *Go!* is a free online service that helps students work through a research project step-by-step by bringing together the best sites on the web and the INFOhio resources.

The site is organized to overcome the deer-in-the-headlights look you get from students when they are faced with a major assignment. After all, big research projects can be daunting; especially for middle school students who are just learning the skills they need to work through a long-term project. Confronted with a large research project, students often become overwhelmed and procrastinate. To counteract that tendency, *GO!* is organized into three smaller sections: *Ask!*, *Act!*, and *Achieve!*



Each section includes links to a variety of INFOhio databases and products along with other websites featuring mind-mapping tools, note-taking strategies, and presentation ideas to make a student’s work shine. In addition, students find tips on citing sources and other information to help them develop good digital citizenship, a key component of information literacy.

 <p><b>Ask!</b> takes the student through the initial phases of research—choosing a topic and asking good questions.</p>	 <p><b>Act!</b> takes the student through the second phase of research—finding reliable resources, deciding which ones meet the need the best, taking notes, and working with a group.</p>	 <p><b>Achieve!</b> takes the student through the final phase of research—presenting the project, either as a paper, presentation, or online publication.</p>
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*"GO!: Ask! Act! Achieve!" continued from page 13...*

The team that designed the site worked hard to make it interactive and mobile friendly. Students are so used to video games and YouTube and Facebook, the team knew they couldn't just provide students with a dry list of links. They



wanted to create a colorful, inviting site to guide them through every stage of research. Therefore, you will find videos, interactive PDFs, and online questionnaires to keep students engaged. Go! includes teenage Vokis, who feature the voices of real Ohio students. The Vokis sympathize with students' hard work, and encourage them to keep going.

While the site is organized so that students can use it independently, it also gives educators the tools they need to introduce information literacy skills. For example, when students are working on a project and the teacher realizes some of the students need help in finding appropriate information, the teacher can turn to Go! Act: *How do I find valid information?* Here students will find links to valid information sources that are grade-level appropriate. Or, if students are having trouble determining if the information they are finding is valid, the teacher can direct the students to Go! Act: *How do I*

***The thing I like best about the "Ask, Act, Achieve" is that it has so many tools that are flexible to any type of project, learner, or research model.***

*- Jessica, Media Specialist*

Teachers Guide contains several additional copyright sites that, while excellent, are written at too high a reading level for a middle school student. These sites provide background information for teachers and may be appropriate for accelerated students.

Funded by a grant from the Ohio Department of Education, GO! Ask, Act, Achieve has continual usage increases since its launch in 2012. While the site is targeted to middle (grades 5-8) and early high school students (grades 9-10), it is open to all Ohio students. All materials – both INFOhio databases and web sites—are available for Ohio students and teachers to use at no cost.

We invite you to examine GO! <[go.infohio.org](http://go.infohio.org)> and tell us what you think. A website is never really finished, and we welcome ideas for making it an even more helpful tool for Ohio students. Send comments to [webmaster@infohio.org](mailto:webmaster@infohio.org).

***I LOVE that site! I've been thinking about a project for my 8th graders to do, and I think we're just going to use that to help us organize it.***

*...about the GO! INFOhio site, [go.infohio.org](http://go.infohio.org)*

*decide what information will answer my question?* Here they will find information on evaluating sources for fact vs opinion or if the source is a primary or secondary.

GO! also includes a comprehensive Teachers Guide with background information on each of the featured links along with links to additional sites to provide background information and extend the learning. For example, the

***Looking through Go! Ask Act Achieve, I noticed that it is a step-by-step instruction manual for not only papers but projects and research projects too. As I was looking through this, I started to notice how awesome this would be for my health class. I usually ask my students to do an interactive report on a health-related issue. This will walk them through step-by-step and give them resources to create very thoughtful and well planned out projects.***

*- Andrew, Health Teacher*

**Jennifer Schwelik** is an INFOhio eLearning Specialist in the North East region and **Melissa Higgs-Horwell** is an INFOhio eLearning Specialist in the South East region.

# Beating the Heat!

Kerri Steffani

**I**t was a fairly pleasant summer in Northern Ohio, but that was not the case on the first day of school this year. It was a stifling 90+ degrees in our century old building as our students came pouring in that first day of school. They were eager to get their locker assignment and see their friends that they hadn't seen all summer. What they did not realize is how sweltering their school would be as they progressed through their day. In order for teachers and students to "beat the heat", our team at Main Street School came up with many different ideas to keep the students engaged for the day.

Main Street School in Norwalk, Ohio is a 5th/6th grade Intermediate school. We have approximately 440 students and a staff who was eager to return to school, but not eager to deal with the heat. We decided as a staff to come up with ways to "beat the heat." I always spend my first week or two getting to know my students. One of the first activities we did was outside. Using a ball of yarn and having my students stand in a circle, we discussed the word unique. Most students reply when asked what unique means with "special or different." I ask them to think of something that makes them unique. After the students say their name and what makes them unique, then they hold onto the end of the string and throw the ball of string to someone else. It eventually forms a web. We discuss the theme for the year as "Even though we are unique, we are connected." Our school wide theme is "Building Bridges...Making Connections" so the exercise is also consistent with the theme.

After that, the students were extremely hot even after forming the web in the shade. I decided a great way to cool down was to begin the water balloon name game. In the past I have used one tennis ball and students would throw the ball to someone else saying their name. As their performance progressed, I would add additional tennis balls. To "beat the heat" I decided to use small water balloons instead and the students loved it. We finally ended our day with ice cold popsicles. As you can see, students came back the next day ready to "beat the heat" and with smiles on their faces. The lesson here is no matter what we are faced with, it is our job to ensure that our students feel like their school is a safe and fun place to learn even when conditions are not favorable.



**Kerry Steffanni** is a teacher at Main Street School in Norwalk in the North Central region.

# Passion in the Middle Grades

Craig Vroom

All of us in the past month have opened our doors to middle schools students for the beginning of a new school year. With a new year we welcome in new opportunities for learning. Kids are back, and they are excited to be there. We are excited to have them.

Regardless if this was your first year of teaching (congratulations!) or your final year before retirement (congratulations too!), you have an incredible opportunity to leave a lasting impression within the mind of a middle school student. You will be the link to their success. Will you make each one purposeful? Will your students be engaged in your room? Will each day be a day that your students will not forget?

Late this summer I brought my staff together for a conversation about “passion”. My guide to this time together, the book *Teach Like a Pirate* by Dave Burgess. When working with middle school students we know that in order to have a year that we can rate “successful” we better bring the passion to our teaching. The reality though is that passion of any kind by itself will not get us to where we need to be.

For example:

- We teach because we love the concept of molding minds however we don’t always like the material that we have to teach.
- We collaborate with colleagues because that is within the mindset of educators but we don’t always agree with the direction of the profession.
- We each have unique interests, “passions”, in our own lives but as educators we put these on hold because we dedicate so much time to our students and our classrooms.

Burgess shares these three types of passions; Content, Professional and Personal. As teachers, especially as teachers of middle school students, we need to be constantly aware of each, and ensure that we have each. And, whether a teacher or an administrator we need to accept that we don’t have to have passion for everything within our day. It’s not possible and therefore understood.

## So where do we go from here?

During our upcoming school year, and with the intent to stay connected with our students; we are going to intertwine this theme of passion with our students and our community. We as teachers will commit to not only knowing what these passions are, but also acknowledging them and living them. In turn, we will ask our students to identify their passions. They will share what they like to learn, what they like to do and who they want to be all under the passion umbrella. And just like educators who don’t always like everything about their jobs, we too will give students the opportunity to share where they are not passionate.

But knowing passion doesn’t stop there. To help our teachers get to a place of embracing passion, recognizing where it exists in their day and in their student’s day and for it to be a part of the teaching and learning, we got some help from Burgess. He asks two essential questions of your teaching. They are:

- If your students didn’t have to be in your classroom, would you be teaching to an empty room?
- Are there any lessons that you could sell tickets for?

*Continued on page 18...*



# An Iceberg and Five Dysfunctions

Jay Clark

**W**e are fortunate enough to have a board of education that sees the value in the middle level concept. Teaming is alive and well at Van Buren Middle School and just this year, we added a staff member to better accommodate grade level teams throughout our school. However, this model is expensive, which is why other districts have moved back to a less-expensive, less-developmentally appropriate junior high school model. As the building administrator, the task of building and maintaining effective and efficient teams lies on my shoulders.

Having worked in middle level buildings with teaming for twelve years, I have come to realize two understandings about teaching teams in schools:

- Most adults are not programmed to work together. We must work facilitate the building of trust, communication, and sharing of ideas.
- Just like different classes, different teams have unique strengths and weaknesses. We must differentiate development opportunities based on teams' characteristics.

With those two beliefs in focus, each grade level team completed a self-assessment as we ended the 2013-2014 school year. This was used to facilitate differentiated team development. Our staff recognized the importance of this effort and each team devoted two hours on our year-end work day to begin planning and building commonalities for the following school year. Work day is usually a day filled with packing up classrooms, cleaning out files, and touching base with retirees. The commitment of the staff to recognize the need for team development usurped their own classroom time—an incredible gesture. There were some tough discussions, but a synergy was starting and we couldn't let it die over the next three months.

In late June, as staff members trekked to their home mailboxes, they found a copy of *The Five Dysfunctions of a Team* with a short note about a team retreat in mid-August. Written by Patrick Lencioni, this fable shares the ups and downs of a corporate leadership team after a new CEO comes aboard. It's a quick read and it has a powerful message applicable to any team. With new staff members, it was essential to begin speaking the same language.

The focus was to use our team retreat day to build a foundation for the year. Lencioni recognized five dysfunctions, graphically represented as a pyramid. The foundation of the pyramid was "lack of trust". As team members, a deep level of trust is necessary before any meaningful conversations and decisions can be made. Oftentimes, this is what makes or breaks the most well-intentioned groups—I refuse to be vulnerable in front of my teammates because I cannot trust them.

The next dysfunction is naturally a fear of conflict. Many times, we experience a group of people blindly agreeing during the meeting, then picking everything apart in the parking lot later that afternoon. Or, simply refusing to do what was agreed-upon



*Continued on page 18...*

*“Passion in the Middle Grades” continued from page 16...*

Great questions with answers that at times, we may not be ready to hear. Let’s face it, like our students and their learning, not all of our lessons are out of this world. Some days it is harder to be on our “A-game” than other days. Some material is flat-out boring. And, everyone has bad days. All of these are our reality. And, thankfully, there are fewer of these days than our A+ days!

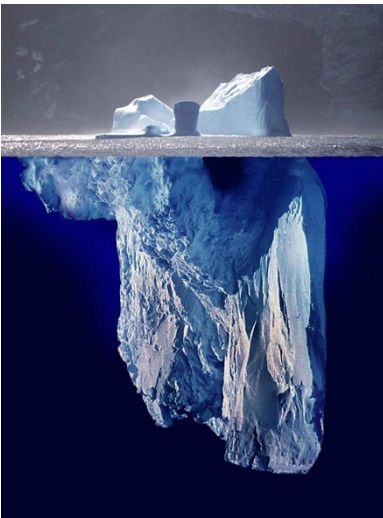
So, how do we ensure that our middle level students are getting our best 183 days out of the year? Suggestion – find not only your passion, but also the passions of your middle school students. That way on those less than stellar days or when the content is not in your wheelhouse, rely on the passion within your room to get you through. Encourage students to express themselves, respectfully, and learn from their feedback. And, allow yourself to do the same.

Have tickets ready to sell, have seats ready for students. Rely on your passion; you have it, as do your students!

**Craig Vroom** is the principal at Weaver Middle School in the Hilliard City Schools, Central region.

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*“An Iceberg and Five Dysfunctions” continued from page 17...*



earlier. A lack of commitment is the third dysfunction—being ambiguous about expectations, norms, and goals makes it easy for us to accomplish little. Thus, avoidance of accountability is the fourth dysfunction. Just like our classrooms, when we maintain low standards, then students will rise to that low expectation. The same holds true for adults. Finally, the top of the pyramid and fifth dysfunction is inattention to results. When I let my ego get in the way, my team will not be productive. You may have heard this before: “The kids on IEPs aren’t my problem. The intervention specialist can meet their goals.” As a team, we **all** own the product and **every** process.

The day of the retreat, we traveled to a nearby camp where we brought together ideas on avoiding the five dysfunctions, made decisions about day-to-day team norms, and participated in team-building exercises. One of the most critical parts of the day were the times when staff members uncovered the bottom of the iceberg: Those details about each-others’ lives that built understanding, tolerance, and trust. This happened both as a structured activity, but also in casual conversations and team decision-making. As we revealed our preferences and anxieties, we were reminded that the students and parents walking through our classroom doors the next evening during our open house would leave much of their own icebergs unexposed. How do we use the first weeks of school to help us expose some of our students’ fears, talents, and strengths? What about the parent who’s angry and upset over a grade—what part of this iceberg isn’t visible to us?

As always, we start a new school year with enthusiasm and excitement for what the fresh start brings. New faces will fill our student desks, and for us, some new faces also filled the teachers’ desks. We know that when staff works together in a team, students win. Remain committed to and build upon the practices that make school better for all—students, staff, and communities.

**Jay Clark** is the principal at Van Buren Middle School in the Northwest region.

## Awards Information

*There are amazing things happening in middle level schools across the state! Recognize a student, your colleagues, a parent, your school, or a neighboring school.*

*All awards forms are available at the links below as both online and printable PDF forms.*

Award	Deadline	Link
Educator of the Year	November 14, 2014	<a href="http://ohiomla.org/educator-of-the-year/">http://ohiomla.org/educator-of-the-year/</a>
Parent of the Year	November 15, 2014	<a href="http://ohiomla.org/parent-of-the-year/">http://ohiomla.org/parent-of-the-year/</a>
Student of the Year	November 15, 2014	<a href="http://ohiomla.org/student-of-the-year/">http://ohiomla.org/student-of-the-year/</a>
Team of the Year	October 30, 2014	<a href="http://ohiomla.org/2014-team-of-the-year-nomination-form/">http://ohiomla.org/2014-team-of-the-year-nomination-form/</a>
Component Awards	October 30, 2014	<a href="http://ohiomla.org/online-forms/">http://ohiomla.org/online-forms/</a>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Advisor/Advisee</li> <li>• Interdisciplinary Curriculum</li> <li>• Parent Involvement</li> <li>• Scheduling</li> <li>• Service Learning</li> <li>• Staff Development</li> <li>• Student/Staff Recognition</li> </ul>		

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