

IN THE MIDDLE

OHIO MIDDLE LEVEL ASSOCIATION

Reflections: The Sky is the Limit!
OMLA 2016 State Conference



Why OMLA?



Social Justice in the
Middle School Classroom





OHIO MIDDLE LEVEL
ASSOCIATION

IN THE MIDDLE

Winter 2016-2017

Volume XLI Number 2

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.

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



President's Message

Jay Clark

OMLA President

Principal, Van Buren Middle School



Throughout the months leading to the presidential election, many friendships were strained due to polarizing comments that either supported one candidate or discredited another, most of the time via social media. A benefit of social media is that we can follow others who have different perspectives, opinions, and ideas. The world is flattened through the technology and we are exposed to a much larger group of individuals. Unfortunately, some Facebook and Twitter users felt that their best course was to “unlike” others with whom they didn’t agree. If you were able to make it through the election cycle without severing a social media relationship, consider that a small victory for humankind.

If you were fortunate enough to attend OMLA’s annual conference in late October, I hope that you remember Rick Wormeli shared that the *real* learning happens after the conference. Beyond the stack of work on your desk, substitute teacher notes, or the heap of laundry at home, your discussion with colleagues is where the deep learning occurs. You will likely be met with disagreements, negative responses, and naysayers. Just like those election-time social media posts, these sometimes-heated conversations will truly be beneficial. You will be forced to question your own ideas and opinions and bring you back to your core philosophies and ethics. Your ideas will be solidified as a result of others’ questions and apprehension; this will be evident in the heart-felt accounts and words shared in this newsletter from members of our board, affiliates, members, and conference attendees.

I encourage you to find an ally in your school so that you can work collaboratively to influence change. Your district provided you the opportunity for you to attend the conference. How can you lead and make middle level education even better in your classroom, school, district, and across our state?

Ohio Middle Level Association is not a “one-conference” organization. The benefits to our members last all year with regional workshops and the networking that is a result of both face-to-face professional learning and our monthly Twitter chat. Join #OhioMLA on the second Tuesday of each month at 8:00pm on Twitter. I encourage you to watch your inbox and our social media for details on upcoming events including our next annual conference at the Hilton - Easton November 2nd and 3rd 2017.

Why OMLA?

Scott Burre

Principal, General Sherman Junior High

OMLA Central Region Representative

To answer the question “Why OMLA?” I need to first answer “Why Middle School?”. I was once a student at General Sherman Junior High in Lancaster, was hired as a teacher, and am now in my 7th year as the principal. I am almost forty-two years old and I have been at General Sherman as a student, teacher, coach, dean of students, and principal for twenty-one of those years. I have been in middle school half my life and it still feels like I am that thirteen year old trying to find my place in middle school and see what my future holds.

So, why have I been in a middle school for this long? When I tell people that I am a middle school principal, I usually get one of two responses. One is “Are you crazy?” The other is a story of either a teacher, coach, or principal they had in middle school that had a huge impact on their life. There are many things that I love about being in a middle school on a daily basis—the most important being students. Students at this age level are so much fun! They want to be independent but still need so much guidance. Sometimes they come into the building in 6th grade so scared and nervous but leave after 8th grade confident and ambitious. They get involved in sports and extra-curricular activities that begin teaching life lessons

learned outside the classroom. They can mess up and learn from their mistakes without really ruining their post-high-school goals. I always tell them that once their freshmen year starts, their adult life starts ticking. The decisions that they make in high school can impact what they want to be doing at twenty-five years old. Students at this age need to connect to staff and build positive relationships. We work on this daily because I want somebody on our staff to be the reason someone tells about and gives some credit for the successes in their life. The best part for me of being the principal at the school I went to is that I see myself in these students . . . walking down these same hallways, sitting in these same classrooms, and competing on these same fields and courts. Like me, I know some of the lessons and conversations our students hear will not set in initially, but the commitment we have as middle level educators pays off in the long run.

Now to my original question, “Why OMLA?” I took over a building as principal coming off having an interim principal for a year. I was a relatively young administrator only spending two years as the dean of students. I spent the first few

years as principal familiarizing myself with the job and also building back a culture that we wanted. Now in my 7th year, it was time to branch out and grow professionally. I had attended conferences and workshops with staff and we always felt that a lot did not pertain to middle level education. It was like middle level education was lost in the shuffle. Then I got a phone call from Mike Kauffeld, principal of a Teays Valley middle school recruiting me to join OMLA. Mike also recruited me to play football at Capital University about twenty years earlier. He must be pretty good because I signed onto both. Mike and I had bounced ideas off each other the past few years and the timing was right. I thought this might be what I was looking for . . . the ability to branch out professionally with middle level colleagues and the ability to network with other middle level schools to take General Sherman to another level. I can say without question, that I was right having attended the OMLA State Conference.

The OMLA State Conference held in Cincinnati was the absolute best experience of my professional life. It was done first class all the way.

Continued on page 4

The ability to mingle with almost 1000 educators in attendance was worth it alone. At the first general session before keynote speaker Rick Wormeli spoke, and wow what a speaker, I witnessed something truly amazing. The male student of the year was introduced and addressed the large crowd. Sometimes we get caught up in so much of the negative of the job, but hearing him speak reminded me of our purpose . . . to have a positive impact on students on a daily basis. What a lead in it was for Rick Wormeli. Rick is one of the most engaging and motivating people that I have ever heard speak. I have read some of his work, but my first experience in hearing him speak blew me away and rejuvenated me as to why I am doing what I am doing.

Rick Wormeli was so good, I had to hear more and attended his session on “Motivating Today’s Students.” He broke down the mental makeup of middle level students and how to maximize motivation for your students. I came away from hearing him speak with practical ideas for middle level students to succeed and also had the chance to hear Tom Burton from Princeton City Schools speak about “Making the Most of the Middle.” In talking about ways to benefit the most reluctant learner, this quote stuck with me “Love every student when

they are the most unlovable.” Hearing this from Tom, a colleague with vast knowledge and experience, drove the point home. This session also gave me two takeaways, the book “Originals-How Non-Conformists Move the World” and the movie “Freedom Writers”. These will be very beneficial for any educator.

Another session I attended and took the most notes on was “Building a Quality Advisory from the Ground Up,” presented by two colleagues from Trimble Middle School,



Stephanie Snyder and Sarah Keen. I have toyed around with the idea of an advisory period over the past couple of years and I kept running into obstacles—be it scheduling or resources. The ideas from their presentation gave me many options to explore and an avenue to seek help as we consider our school’s needs. These advisory program components are effective in their building, and I am a firm believer in an advisory program for middle level educators, but finding ways to implement one with fidelity has been tricky;

this session’s materials have proven a tremendous resource.

Day 1 ended with an awards ceremony for all the regional award winners, honoring the wonderful work of middle level educators in our state; the evening was then capped off with a social with the band, Endless Summer, playing. The first day absolutely blew me away while the second day of the conference began with a break out session I attended about using social media. I came away from it with many new ideas and ways to expand our current use of social media

platform. The keynote speaker of the day was Anthony Muhammad. Through his story, he shared about his path through life; he was truly inspiring. His commitment, feelings, and experiences in middle level education once again validated my purpose as a middle level educator. Sessions I attended on this day on behavior monitoring and coaching leaders finalized an amazing experience as I left with ideas to truly implement into my building. Joining the OMLA board and attending the State Conference, without question as been the highlight of my professional career. This is a must-do event for any middle level educator—my only regret being I did not attend this first-class organization’s conference do sooner.

Good luck to all on the remainder of the school year!

A Conference Perspective

Jason Sunkle

Teacher, Olmsted Falls Intermediate School
North Central Region

“The sky is the limit!” I have heard this message time and time again when it comes to education. This past October, I attended the OMLA conference in Cincinnati. I truly felt that this message was a focal point for the presenters and the conference in general. This was the third time that I have gone to this conference. With each passing year, I take more and more away from the conference.

Whether it’s the real-life, hysterical stories told by Jack Berckemeyer or the countless teacher groups presenting what works for them, everything is valuable. In my three conferences with OMLA, I have never left a session empty handed. From classroom strategies and techniques to new and bold educational philosophies, there is always a session for everyone. I always make sure that I look out for a session that may make me step

outside my comfort zone a little bit, and also enhances the learning experience for my students.

With all of that said, I think there is one aspect to the OMLA conference that seems to be overlooked. The networking opportunities at the conference are off the charts. The presenters are very welcoming of helping outside the conference. I have found that sometimes the best educational moments and learning can come of this. Through social media (Twitter) this has become even easier to discuss and gather ideas from the great presenters!

OMLA is a one-of-a-kind conference. There is something for everyone! Each year that I leave OMLA, I am and ready to teach my students using new strategies and ideas for engagement.



Join OMLA for a monthly middle level education Twitter chat!



#OhioMLA

Second Tuesday of each Month | 8PM EST

Co-Moderators: @mjsedlak & @mjnatovich

Your School Rocks... So Tell People!

Jeremy Evans

Teacher, Dover Middle School

Northeast Region

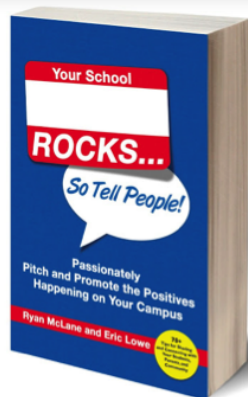
What is the first thing you do in the morning, and then the second thing? The answer for most people would be; check your phone and check your phone. Social Media is ever-present in our society. Why should this matter for educators? Because the people checking their phones are the parents and students in our schools.

Ryan McLane, a principal at Big Walnut Intermediate School and Eric Lowe, Superintendent of Beaver Local Schools are co-authors of the book *Your School Rocks...So Tell People* and Lowe presented at the 2016 OMLA State Conference. Attendees were able to watch videos that Lowe himself uses in his district. He began using video newsletters when he was a principal in the district and continues this practice as Superintendent.

McLane uses the video newsletter as a quick way to inform parents and students about what is happening in his building on a weekly basis. He began creating them because he realized paper newsletters were going unread. With the videos being posted to YouTube, McLane and Lowe are able to monitor the number of views with precision.

McLane and Lowe also utilize Instagram and Facebook. During his presentation, Lowe admitted that Instagram is targeted toward students, while Facebook is more for parents. One attendee in the presentation asked about negative posts to Facebook and Lowe explained that he does not remove negative posts from school pages. He believes that the response to the negative post is important. How you respond to the post tells a story about your school. If a negative comment arises, he advises making a phone call directly to the parent to address the issue rather than starting a “comment war.”

This presentation was a highlight of the 2016 State Conference for me and many attendees. McLane and Lowe advise that Social Media is constantly changing and evolving, so we should not be afraid to go where the people are. If your parents are there, post it so they can see that your school rocks.



If you missed the conference or the presentation, the book is on sale at Amazon and Barnes and Noble. You can connect with them on Twitter @McLane_Ryan @EricLowe21 and @yourschoolrocks.

A New Teacher's Perspective

Tabitha Mosley

Teacher, Green Elementary

SE Region Affiliate Representative

When reading the itinerary for this year's OMLA conference I could tell the main problem I would have was deciding which of the sessions to attend. The selection provided was vast and covered a multitude of relevant topics including standards based grading, student engagement, and content specific sessions. After making my decisions and attending the sessions I chose it was up to me to figure out how all of the information I gained would be implemented in my 5th Grade Language Arts classroom.

Early in my time pursuing my education career I was told to borrow and steal all I could from other educators. The OMLA Conference makes it easy to gain ideas from other educators and get relevant ideas for how to use it my classroom. As an ELA teacher, I have found that writing in particular can be challenging to teach. This is why I, along with the other ELA teacher that attended with me, chose to attend two different sessions on writing.

One of the two writing sessions was "Engaging Reluctant Writers- Top 10 Countdown" with Hannah Chai and Lori McDonough. From this session I gained great ideas, such as using pen pals and picture writing, to use with my students. Rebecca Wood, the 6th grade ELA teacher, and I used circle writing the week following conferences and students had a fun time producing stories together, incorporating vocabulary words and working together.

Another session that gave me information that I have already put to use in my classroom was around teaching writing. This session revamped the way I plan to teach essays to my students! I am currently working on an informative essay and am taking the advice given and breaking the essay standard into mini lessons so the students are better able to grasp each individual concept and so I can help them focus on one section of the larger writing standards at a time. Although I chose to focus on writing for part of the sessions I attended this year, there were many other sessions that were helpful as well!

"The Engagement Party" sessions hosted by Nicole Ward was literally overflowing with educators looking for ways to engage their students. There were many great ideas, ranging from low tech to high tech. One of my favorites was SCOOT, an activity in which students "scoot" around the room to answer questions that are positioned in various locations around the class. I recently did this with my students to review a novel we are reading together and the kids loved it! Their level of engagement was high and they were excited by an activity that allowed me to assess their comprehension in a more exciting way than a normal quiz or test.

One of the most useful parts of the OMLA Conference is always just being around other middle level educators and getting excited together about middle level education! The speakers and sessions are always phenomenal, but the atmosphere plays a large part of the motivation that the conference always provides for me! I left this year's conference reading, and I was inspired to get back to my students; now, I'm already looking forward to the next conference!





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

November 2 & 3 ★ The Columbus Hilton at Easton

Registration Form & Information at: www.ohiomla.org 

OMLA: Not Just for Classroom Teachers!

Shannon Goss

School Psychologist, Olmsted Falls Middle School
North Central Region

My experience as a first-time presenter and attendee at OMLA Fall conference was most enriching! As a School Psychologist in a 6-8 building, I had an opportunity to attend with my Principal, School Counselors, Intervention Teacher and several General Education Teachers. As an attendee, I was able to find a multitude of sessions that were applicable to my direct work with students, parents and teachers. The sessions were relevant to working in a middle level school - ranging from technology-based instruction and intervention; collaboration with teams; increasing student engagement in and out of the classroom and how to maximize student achievement, to name a few. The diverse range of sessions provided a strong foundation for how we could emulate best practices upon returning to our district. Further, the Keynote speakers were notable, thought-provoking and forward thinking. Their engaging and powerful messages validated and enriched the sessions that were offered throughout the entire conference

As a presenter, I appreciated the warm, welcoming and collaborative environment. From the OMLA Board and Staff to the many OMLA volunteers, every need was supported so our presentation could go as smoothly as possible. The process was very organized from the time of presentation proposal submission to the actual day of presentation. If middle level educators, administrators and related service providers want to expand their knowledge on how to promote the ideal teaching and learning environment for middle level students, this is the conference to attend!

Social Justice in the Middle School Classroom:

Structuring Your School for Success for ALL Students

Brian Woods

Principal, Parkway Middle School

West Region

Parkway Middle School – Where ALL Students Are Successful. This simple phrase sets the tone for all we do at Parkway Middle School. It provides the backdrop for our morning announcements and is clear for staff, students, and parents to see as we host IAT, 504, and IEP meetings.

As professionals who have chosen to devote our lives to educating children, we would like to think we act in the best interest of our students. Of course we want all children to be successful, but do our policies, routines, structures, and pedagogy truly serve the best interest of ALL students? Even with the best of intentions, are we inadvertently marginalizing certain groups of students? Are all individuals getting the high-quality education they deserve?

In 2011-12, Parkway Middle School reached “Excellent with Distinction” status on the state report card, but behind the scenes, our value-added scores were poor. We were slowly increasing our OAA passage rates, but our highest and lowest performing students were demonstrating negative growth. Over the past five years, we have been on a journey to discover how to meet the needs of all students. This article will chronicle our journey to ensure that all learners are successful. By sharing our experiences, I hope to challenge your thinking, and to inspire you to ensure that ALL students have the opportunity to be successful in your school.

Phase I of Our Journey– “Response to Red”

In the fall of 2012, we were invited to attend a “Response to Red” workshop sponsored by Battelle for Kids. The workshop featured five middle school principals who had helped improve their schools' overall value-added scores from F's to A's in just a few years. We found that these schools had five common factors:

1) the implementation of Formative Instruction Practices

2) the creation of double periods of math and ELA

3) the creation of common planning/collaboration time for staff

4) the creation of an Intervention/Enrichment period and

5) benchmarking and progress monitoring of students.

Everything we heard made sense, so we made this our blueprint. We had already begun training on formative instruction practices, and we used the remainder of the 2012-13 school year preparing a schedule that allowed us to implement the rest in 2013-14.

The End of Ability Grouping

In addition to our schedule changes, we ended ability grouping in our math and ELA classrooms, including the elimination of our “Advanced Math” section in sixth and seventh grades. This decision was based on my personal experiences and beliefs on ability grouping and on John Hattie's *Visible Learning* research analysis (ability grouping has just a .12 effect size). Despite thorough research and our own data to support this change, it was not a popular decision with some parents, but we were believers that this was the right thing to do.

With an advanced math track beginning in sixth grade, we were essentially determining who would take Calculus at the end of fifth grade. Once a student was left out of the advanced track, it was nearly impossible to get back in. With block scheduling (80 minutes of math instead of 40 plus an I/E period), we were confident that we would not only have our top students prepared for Algebra, but we could also prepare many more.

Instead of looking at this as “Eliminating Advanced Math,” I view it much differently. I am proud that we now offer “Advanced Math” to all students through the seventh grade.

Continued on page 10

With block scheduling, we are able to cover all of the sixth-grade standards before state testing and then begin the seventh-grade standards after state testing. Our seventh-graders cover all of the seventh-grade standards as well as the additional eighth-grade standards necessary to prepare students for Algebra I.

Our Data

With these changes, our overall value-added scores improved from -10.81 in 2011-12 to -3.96 in 2012-13 to -.80 in 2013-14 to +5.01 in 2014-15. We felt that our 2014-15 score was a little over-inflated due to taking the pencil/paper version of the PARCC test. We took computer-based AIR tests in 2016 and, as expected, our overall value-added score dropped significantly, but we know we will rebound quickly and continue to improve.

Despite the initial parent concerns, our math scores have been our strength. In 2016, 80% of our eighth-graders scored proficient or higher on the eighth-grade math test compared to the state average of 52%. This was the first group of students to not have the "advanced math" track in sixth and seventh grade. We also scored very well on the Algebra I end of course exam with all of our eighth-grade students scoring proficient or higher, including 92% scoring advanced (50%) or accelerated (42%). Across the state, only 25% of students scored advanced (8%) or accelerated (17%).

Phase II – The Social Justice Institute: Closing the Achievement Gap

While we were progressing nicely, we knew we had more work to do. In June of 2015, we attended a three-day workshop in Columbus titled, “The Social Justice Institute: Closing the Achievement Gap” with Dr. Elise Frattura, author of *Leading for Social Justice*. The Social Justice Institute was outstanding. It verified what we thought we knew, it gave us

assurance that we were on the right track, and it provided clarity on how to continue forward.

History

The institute started by reviewing the history of education and how "those who can't" were “pulled out” of the regular classroom (includes ability grouping low-achievers). As those struggling students were pulled out, they continued falling further and further behind their peers. We realized that the system we have used for years has actually expanded the achievement gap instead of closing it.

Equity Data

After reviewing the history of education, we started an equity data analysis. We evaluated data such as attendance rates, discipline and suspension rates, graduation rates, ACT scores, the number of students in advanced courses, and, of course, achievement and progress data. We evaluated this data by race, gender, socio-economic status, and disability status.

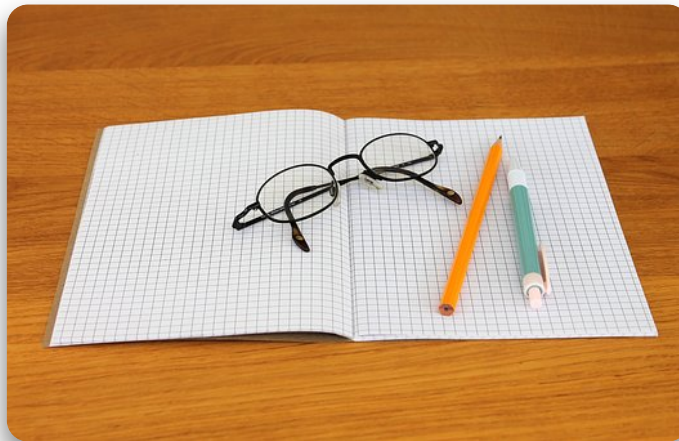
We knew we were struggling to close the achievement gap with our students with disabilities, but we never saw what was happening to our male students. The data showed the following: our ratio of boys to girls on IEPs was 2:1

(22% of all Parkway boys were on an IEP), 30% of the boys on IEPs were for ADHD, we had a much higher ratio of boys’ discipline incidents and suspensions, we had many more boys being retained, and we had a 2:1 ratio of girls to boys in our advanced math track.

Evaluating Systems

We were challenged to evaluate our systems, structures, and routines to find root causes of the achievement gaps. We felt good knowing that we had already addressed many of our problems, particularly ability grouping. Ability grouping is used based on the idea that students’ needs can be more easily met, but there are many problems with this theory. When we ability group students,

Continued on page 11



expectations tend to be lower, instruction not as good, and there is a lack of positive role models in the classroom. Worst of all, it sends a powerful subliminal message to the lower achieving group—you are not as smart or capable as other students.

High Quality Instruction

From an instructional standpoint, meeting the needs of all students in a heterogeneous classroom is a definite challenge. We cannot "teach to the middle" and expect all students to be successful.

Implementing Formative Instructional Practices was a good start toward differentiating our instruction. At the institute, we were also introduced to Universal Design for Learning (UDL). After the institute, our teachers participated in a book study and webinar series on the book, *UDL Now!* with the author, Katie Novak.

Adjustments for 2016–17

For the 2016-17 school year, we have taken what we have learned from the social justice institute and have adjusted our master schedule and revised our student groupings. We have divided our students with disabilities equally among our three sections instead of having one "IEP section." Our service model has changed from "co-teaching" to "co-planning to co-serve." Our intervention specialists are spending less time in the classroom and more time planning and providing interventions. We are also serving gifted students for the first time by using a model in which these students are "cluster grouped" within the regular classroom with support and enrichment from a gifted intervention specialist.

We have converted our "Panther Time" period (previously our I/E time) to an "Exploratory" period, during which all students have the opportunity to explore STEM activities, robotics, and future careers. We also work on developing organization, study, and social skills.

Our intervention and enrichment has been moved into the math and ELA blocks. We now dedicate twenty minutes of the eighty-minute block to I/E, allowing for students with IEPs to work with our intervention specialists in groups of two or three, while our gifted population work together with the

gifted intervention specialist to extend topics being taught in the regular classroom. The rest of the class works on individual needs through computer-based intervention tools such as Moby Max.

Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports

Having a quality behavior system that rewards proper behavior is crucial for student success. We use Class DoJo, a free web-based app, as part of our school-wide PBIS. In addition to providing student motivation, our system provides data that allows us to pinpoint and correct specific behavior issues. We use that data to help students grow through the use of interventions. Class DoJo is also great for parent communication as parents can access the same data and also communicate with teachers through the messaging feature.

Growth Mindset

We are believers and promoters of growth mindset. We teach our students that intelligence is not fixed and that the brain can grow stronger by taking on new challenges. We promote growth mindset through classroom lessons and weekly videos. Our students also see a "Growth Mindset" sign in every classroom window as they enter.

Lessons Learned

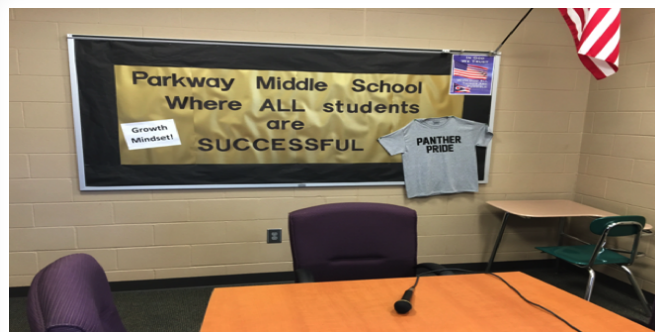
Creating an environment in which the needs of all students are met has been a daunting task. It has taken hard work, grit, and outside-the-box thinking. We have had to adopt a growth mindset and have had to be willing to leave our comfort zone in order to try new ideas. While we still have a long way to go, we believe in the mission. We know what is best for our students, and we know we can meet the needs of all students in heterogeneous classrooms.

As with any new initiative, there are growing pains, but so far we are doing well. I love the feel of our classrooms. I sense a more positive energy and spirit amongst our students. I think we have ended most of the subliminal messages that our prior practices sent.

Not all is perfect; we still have a long way to go, but we have proven that it is possible to mix ability levels and still provide all students with a high-quality

education. I am fortunate to have an amazing staff who is committed to our mission and to have a supportive superintendent and school board who have provided the resources we need to pursue our journey. The road is long and winding and can be stressful, but our students deserve what we now know to be best.

Feel free to contact me at woods@parkwayschools.org, if I can help you in any way, including providing a copy of our master schedule or copies of our Power Point presentations from the OMLA State Conference: “Structuring Your School for Success for ALL Students” and “Using Class DoJo as Part of Your PBIS.”



Parkway Middle School received a 2016 Regional Award for their work with PBIS. This school was also recognized with an OMLA Component Award in 2014. for Scheduling.

Ohio Middle Level Association

Executive Board

Jay Clark	<i>President</i>	Tina Norris	<i>NE Associate Rep</i>	Sarah Keen	<i>SE Associate Rep</i>
Robert Selhorst	<i>Vice President</i>	Rebecca Reese	<i>NE Associate Rep</i>	Stephanie Snyder	<i>SE Associate Rep</i>
Paul Destino	<i>Treasurer</i>	Leo Spagnola	<i>NE Associate Rep</i>	John Paydo	<i>Website</i>
Nicki Bertke	<i>Secretary</i>	Tracey Kramer	<i>W Regional Rep</i>	Dru Tomlin	<i>AMLE Liason</i>
Tom Burton	<i>Past President</i>	Katie Weisenbarger	<i>W Associate Rep</i>	Kiersten Long	<i>CMLA Liaison</i>
Lorrie Kubaszewski	<i>Past President</i>	Scott Burre	<i>C Associate Rep</i>	Amanda Monschein	<i>CMLA Liason</i>
Dona Klein	<i>Exec Secretary</i>	Michael Kauffeld	<i>C Associate Rep</i>	Karen Jones	<i>OMLP Liaison</i>
Lee Stockhaus	<i>NW Regional Rep</i>	Lisa Nemeth	<i>C Associate Rep</i>	Ken Baker	<i>OASSA Liaison</i>
Melissa Stanton	<i>NW Associate Rep</i>	Jeremy Evans	<i>E Associate Rep</i>	Mark Jones	<i>OAESA Liaison</i>
Kelli Cogan	<i>NC Regional Rep</i>	Tiffany Shaw	<i>E Associate Rep</i>	Stacy Ludwig	<i>ODE Liaison</i>
Amy Peck	<i>NC Associate Rep</i>	Timothy Spinner	<i>SW Regional Rep</i>	Polly Dexter	<i>Connections</i>
Michelle Koussa	<i>NE Regional Rep</i>	Adam Taylor	<i>SW Associate Rep</i>	Theda Gibbs	<i>Journal Editor</i>
Jeffrey Cicerehi	<i>NE Associate Rep</i>	Kristen Lavric	<i>SE Regional Rep</i>	Lisa Harrison	<i>Journal Editor</i>
Nick Discenza	<i>NE Associate Rep</i>				

The Sky is the Limit

Melissa Stanton

Teacher, Liberty Benton Middle School

Northwest Region

The Sky is the Limit! was the ultimate theme for the 2016 OMLA Annual State Conference. Leaving the conference left me invigorated for the school year and wishing others from my school had been able to attend.

Having been to a few other conferences, I tend to go along and prepare for the worst, but this was different. I started with the app, which allowed me to plan out my schedule before leaving— what a nice resource for the planner in me. There were many sessions that I wanted to get to that conflicted with others because OMLA offered so much. Once I got to the hotel (beautiful) and registered, I was given a bag of information. At first glance I thought the spiral bound book was a sample planner, but I was wrong; it was all of information I needed for the duration of the conference. Between listing people to go to for help, all of the notes I took in sessions and feedback information my biggest issue was the need for more blank pages (for those that take paper notes you understand).

Now for the sessions— each of the various key note sessions were full of insight and information. After teaching at the middle school level for eighteen years, there is always still so much to learn and

many of the sessions validated what I am doing in my classroom. Listening to Jack Berckemeyer in a standing-room-only session was probably my favorite. His energy was contagious and unlike some sessions, people are not only sitting in the seats because in many of his sessions you participate in a hands-on setting. Another session I attended, “Building a Quality Advisory from the Ground Up,” made me want to change how I use my academic assist time for the betterment of the students. It brought me back to how my high school was run in NYC. Not only did I sit in on a session by Pam Millikan later during the conference, but I was able to chat with her for a few minutes. This was a great session for someone like me who is fairly new to *This We Believe*. Again, this was another session I wanted to share with everyone in my building. It helped me validate why I do certain things in my classroom, such as celebrating student birthdays.

My biggest regret is not taking the time to process information and come back to school with a plan. There was so much going on all the time that I was overwhelmed. If you plan to go, take time to come up with a plan, participate in the activities and above all, bring a group of people with you!

**Stay
connected to
OMLA!**

