

WINTER 2015-2016 | VOLUME XL | NUMBER 2

# IN THE MIDDLE

OHIO MIDDLE LEVEL ASSOCIATION

THIS WE BELIEVE FOCUS AREA  
LEADERSHIP & ORGANIZATION



Mission: Possible



The Water Walk



Teams: Still the Heart of the Middle School



**Join OMLA at the Hyatt  
Regency in downtown  
Cincinnati October 27 and  
28, 2016 as our annual  
state conference moves to  
the fall!**



**Follow these links for details...**

**2016 Conference Registration**

*OMLA Conference Room Rate is \$162/night*

**2016 Conference Presenter  
Proposal**

**2016 Exhibitor Registration Form**

### Thursday Keynote



**Rick Wormeli** is a National Board Certified Teacher and a columnist for AMLE Magazine. The winner of Disney's American Teacher Award for English in 1996, Rick is an internationally known speaker on middle-level education, innovation, and teacher professionalism. Rick offers a wealth of experience having worked as a middle grades teacher, human growth and development teacher, and staff development educator. He is also an educational consultant to National Public Radio, USA Today, and the Smithsonian Institute. Rick has presented at the White House, has appeared on Good Morning America, and has worked with school districts all across the country.

### Friday Keynote



**Anthony Muhammad** is one of the most sought after educational consultants in North America. He served as a practitioner for nearly twenty years. Dr. Muhammad served as a middle school teacher, assistant principal, middle school principal, and high school principal. His tenure as a practitioner has earned him several awards as both a teacher and a principal. Dr. Muhammad is the author of the books *The Will to Lead and the Skill to Teach*; *Transforming Schools at Every Level* and *Transforming School Culture: How to Overcome Staff Division*.

### Featured Speaker



**Jack Berckemeyer** is a nationally recognized presenter, author, and humorist. He is the author of *Managing the Madness - A Practical Guide to Middle Grades Classrooms*, *Taming of the Team - How Great Teams Work Together* and most recently published, *Deliberate Optimism - Reclaiming the Joy in Education*, co-authored with Dr. Debbie Silver and Judith Baenen. As former middle level teacher and now expert in middle level education and adolescent development, Jack shares his passion, humor, and expertise that is guaranteed to re-energize the room.



OHIO MIDDLE LEVEL  
ASSOCIATION

**IN THE MIDDLE**

Winter 2015-2016  
Volume XL 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 editor Jay Clark at [jclark@vbschools.net](mailto:jclark@vbschools.net)

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**PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE**

## A YEAR IN TRANSITION



Usually, at this time of year, we are heading full steam ahead into our annual conference. However, this year our sights and energies are focused on the move of our conference from February to the month of October. Mark your calendars now and make plans to attend the 2016 Ohio Middle Level Conference on October 27th & 28th of 2016. The conference site is the Hyatt Regency in downtown Cincinnati.

Besides having much sought after speakers as Rick Wormeli & Anthony Muhammad, both are accomplished, award winning middle level educators, authors, and innovators. Their keynotes are sure to make you think and energize you with new ideas and perspectives. Jack Berckemeyer, another award winning middle level educator, humorist, author and innovator will provide breakout sessions for all and will headline our strand for pre-service teachers. His energetic, practical and humorous look at all that is middle level will keep you entertained while learning about how young adolescents learn best.

Our call for presenters is active right now. The breakout sessions conducted by practicing teachers continues to be the backbone of the conference. If you are interested in sharing a strategy or practice that is working for you in the classroom, please access a presenter proposal form on our website by clicking the annual conference tab.

Our Thursday night social will offer live music from the popular band Endless Summer. What an appropriate band to book for a bunch of teachers! Since it is around Halloween, there will be a costume theme for the social. More information to come!

Thank you for the important work you do each and every day!

*Lorrie Kubaszewski  
President*

*Ohio Middle Level Association*

# MISSION: POSSIBLE

**Are you looking for a way to engage your students beyond your everyday lesson plans?**

**Do you have trouble getting kids to master certain concepts in your curriculum?**

**Katie Weisenbarger**

Teacher

Coy Middle School

Beavercreek City Schools

West Region

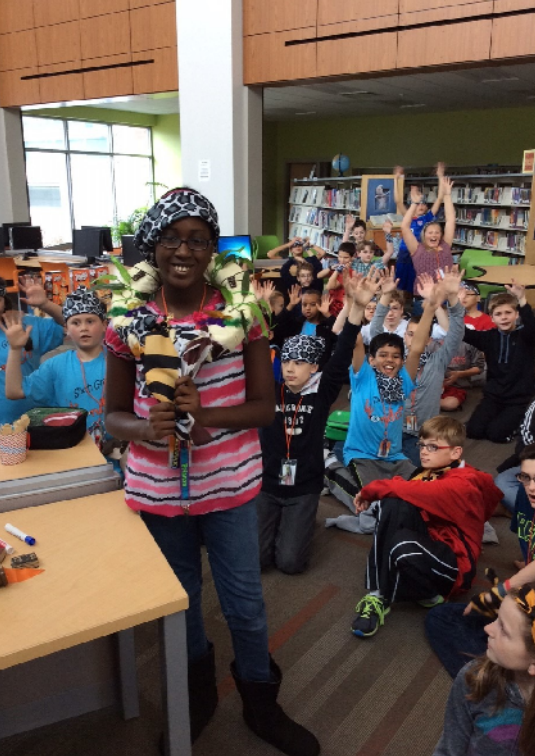
If so, you may want to consider collaborating with your fellow teachers to add an element of competition amongst teams of students. My team of sixth grade teachers and I work collaboratively each year to create this program which is designed to promote student engagement and increase student achievement. We call it Mission: Possible (cue the James Bond theme song)! I would like to share the concept and framework of this program in hopes that you may be inspired to adapt it to fit the needs of your middle school setting. Students enter the room adorned in their team colors. Someone in the back hoists a sign in the air doodled with their team's motto. The room is festively decorated to portray the theme of this year's Mission: Possible. On the teacher's cue, students echo their team chant. Kids excitedly interact with one another... Who

will be chosen to sit in the "hot seat?" Let me begin by summarizing the basic idea.

Students form teams that are each led by a teacher. The team builds unity by developing a team name, a mascot, a motto, and choosing a team color. Many times, the team names incorporate the teacher's name. For example, Mrs. Mack's classes became "The Mack Attacks," and Mrs. Lindeman's students were the "Linde-Minions" incorporating a mascot from the Pixar blockbuster, *Minions*. Students should be the driving force behind the creation of team names and themes with the teacher as a guide to steer the process. On Mission: Possible challenge days, students from several different classes gather together during the school day to compete against one another in academic and physical challenges.

Teachers plan these assemblies to occur on a regular schedule that fits well into the demands of the school year. These days are announced in advance so that students can prepare for them. On challenge days, everyone wears their team colors and brings along any signs or mascots they may have. At Mission: Possible challenge assemblies, the teachers kick off the program with an introduction to set expectations. Then, students are randomly chosen from each team to sit in the "hot seat" and answer content-specific questions, or they are chosen to participate in physical challenges that test hand-eye coordination, focus, teamwork, and problem-solving. The blend of both academic and physical challenges, plus the element of team competition creates an engaging environment that promotes student





achievement. At the end, the point totals are announced, and the winning team walks away with a trophy to keep in their classroom until the next challenge day.

This program begins in the fall and concludes in the spring. Depending on the configuration of your class schedule and team of teachers, you will need to decide how to structure your program. At our middle school, we have a block schedule for language arts; there are a total of four language arts (LA) teachers and one resource LA teacher in the sixth grade. Each language arts teacher and all of her students become a team, so during challenge days, we have separate assemblies during each of our language arts blocks. The program does not interfere with the class schedule of any other subject area because we keep it confined to language arts class time and have multiple assemblies.

During our time in Professional Learning Communities (PLC), our team of language arts teachers

works collaboratively to plan our challenge questions. We make decisions based on formative assessments and diagnostic data we have gathered. When we identify a skill needing reinforcement for our students, we plan to include that in our next Mission: Possible challenge. When our students know that a certain topic or skill will be addressed on the next challenge day, they are motivated by Mission: Possible to work harder on mastering that skill. There is a lot of good old fashioned fun related to Mission: Possible, too! The teachers spark curiosity for weeks leading up to the kickoff day. We hang bandanas in our team colors from our doorways and around our classrooms. Students ask, “What is that?” and we reply, “I’m afraid I can’t tell you until next week!” A couple of days before our first kickoff assembly, each teacher hangs a sealed envelope from her ceiling that says, “Do not open until October 9th at 10:09am.” At the specified time, the teachers open their letters and read them aloud to their classes. The letters cryptically invite students to become a team and arrive the following day ready for a challenge. Piquing students’ interest is a lot of fun, and it adds to the excitement of the first challenge day.

I mentioned that Mission: Possible challenges include academic and physical challenges. When students are chosen from each team to sit in the “hot seat,” each student sits in their team’s designated chair facing the

audience with a small white board and a dry erase marker. The teachers take turns asking content-related questions for several rounds, and students write their answers on their white boards. The moment students reveal their answers to the audience, teachers have an opportunity to explain and reinforce the correct response. A new student comes to the “hot seat” for each new question. After four to five questions, we throw in a physical challenge. We have found ideas for these challenges online by searching for Survivor, Minute-to-Win-It, or team building challenges. Students may hold craft sticks in their mouths and stack ten dice on the end of it, or they may have to putt a golf ball through an obstacle course. Often, these challenges are set up as relays or team tasks in order to involve as many students as possible. For all academic and physical challenges, a teacher needs to keep track of the points earned by each team. One more way we have made Mission: Possible work for us is by including random preparedness checks during the weeks prior to a challenge day. Each teacher might randomly select a student to show that he or she has the necessary materials in class, or perhaps that his/her agenda planner is filled out. We let students know to expect these mini-challenges, and it helps us motivate them to be organized and prepared. Points earned for mini-challenges are added to the totals on the next challenge day.

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# Beware the Pseudo-Community

## 3 Tips to Build True Community

Dr. Neil Gupta

Director of Secondary  
Education

Worthington City Schools

Central Region

In one of my favorite movies *The Truman Show*, Jim Carrey nails the lead role as Truman - a person who is unaware his life is being captured on a hidden TV show. An interesting exchange occurs between two characters who know about this deception:

Mike Michaelson: *Christof, let me ask you, why do you think that Truman has never come close to discovering the true nature of his world until now?*

Christof: *We accept the reality of the world with which we're presented. It's as simple as that.*

Can you imagine growing up like Truman did in a community where all the people were more concerned about TV ratings than him as a person? Can you believe the deceit and masterful trickery involved by those closest to him who were not really concerned about his growth or the true building of that community? Can you imagine the creators of the show creating a community that was self-serving and building on lies and pretenses? While this story may be a far-stretch from reality, there is a reality of leaders creating the same type of fake community that needs to be avoided or corrected immediately.

In his book *A World Waiting to be Born*, Scott Peck outlines four stages of community building: Pseudo-Community, Chaos, Emptiness, and True. At the central core of any organization, the leadership in building community is vital. While many leaders pride themselves in building practices to create a sense of community, they miss the mark in three critical areas which halt them from moving away from a Pseudo-Community. The Pseudo-Community is a stage of pretense. The group may pretend or act as though they have built a True Community, but relationships are artificial and the real needs have not been addressed. Leaders in a Pseudo-Community tend to mask or avoid the critical areas of need. In an effort not to make waves, hurt feelings, or break friendships, leaders may cover up, defend, or create factions. While strategies or actions are implemented in an effort to bolster the development of community, the true needs of the community are not addressed or avoided altogether. In order for leaders to move to a True Community, three essential tips are provided for reflection:

### **Leaders create an equitable environment.**

In a Pseudo-Community, leaders have "favorites". Rather than create an equitable environment for all members of the community, leaders have and promote cliques - which are evident in the community. While it is human to build deeper relationships with some over others, leaders need to check themselves in how these relationships may negatively influence decisions on behalf of the community, may appear to others in the community, and may make others feel. When leaders create an equitable environment, all members feel comfortable to approach the leader with ideas and true relationships can begin to occur. In addition, decisions are made based on what's best for the community rather than a few individuals.

### **Leaders develop systems for open and honest communication.**

In fake communities, leaders may pride themselves on their communication skills. While hundreds of emails,

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# Teaming in Rural Schools

Sarah Luthy

Teacher, Trimble Middle  
School

Trimble Local Schools

Southeast Region

Teaming is an essential component of an effective middle school as it is described in *This We Believe*. For teaming practices to be effective, there must be “flexible organizational structures [that] provide the opportunity for high performance to occur; but, the structure must be matched with high doses of vision, will, and creativity” (AMLE, 2010, p. 123). Although there are a variety of challenges for implementing teaming in any setting, rural middle schools face their own unique obstacles. The greatest obstacle faced stems from the necessity of rural districts to share resources between grade levels and even across schools.

One resource that rural districts often must share is their personnel. The sharing of personnel comes in a variety of forms, which includes splitting teachers across grade levels and across schools within the district. From this one practice, a variety of challenges ripple out when trying to implement two of the three key aspects of teaming. Those two areas are common planning time and stable team composition (p. 122).

These structures can be challenging

in the best of conditions; however, they are often amplified in rural settings. With this structure of shared personnel, how does one effectively implement teaming as discussed in *This We Believe*? Implementation really becomes a give and take in the rural setting.

One clear reality of having a stable team composition is that a person can only be present at one meeting at a time, and that same person can only implement so many common team practices with fidelity. One suggestion for handling shared staff is placing the teacher on one team. Let that staff member concentrate their efforts towards that one grade level. With focused attention on common practices, expectations and integrated curriculum, a greater depth of implementation will occur than when that person is trying to implement those items across two or more grade levels. With that said, it is still essential that other grade levels keep the shared personnel apprised of what is occurring in order to offer consistency of expectations, whether academic or behavior, for students in those grade levels.

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## OMLA 2016 Awards and Grant Deadline is January 10

The below award nominations and grant applications are due January 10, 2016 and will be awarded at our [annual conference](#) October 27 & 28, 2016 in Cincinnati. Click on the award title below to access information.

[Team of the Year](#)

[Educator of the Year](#)

[Parent of the Year](#)

[Student of the Year](#)

[Mini-Grants](#)

[Regional Awards](#)

[Component Awards](#)

(Advisor/ Advisee, Interdisciplinary Curriculum, Parent Involvement, Scheduling, Service Learning, Staff Development, Student/Staff Recognition, or Teaming)



In the area of common planning, we must come to terms with the fact that this is not always possible. Dwelling on what cannot occur is not beneficial, so our mindset must change to making the current structures work. The biggest tool that can be utilized to assist teams in functioning as a true team is technology. Whether it is a Google tool or another Web 2.0 system, on-going conversations can occur during individual planning periods. These conversations may at first be focused around common behavior expectations, concerns over specific students, and even being more conscientious of not over-scheduling assessments. As time progresses, conversations will naturally deepen focusing more on curriculum integration and the use of data to make instructional decisions. Another means to working around the lack of common planning time is having quarterly workdays for each grade level. If professional development money is available, substitute teachers could be brought in to allow each team to have a day of planning curriculum integration and team activities for each quarter. This would give teachers a solid foundation and set tasks that can be more easily accomplished individually and Web 2.0 tools could support their final implementation.

Teaming is possible in all settings even in rural districts where personnel and other resources are shared amongst grade levels and schools. With a little creativity and being flexible, a structure can be put in place that allows for teaming in its truest sense. Just as instruction is not one size fits all, school structures and organization are not one size fits all.

## RESOURCES

Association for Middle Level Education. (2010). *We Believe: Keys to educating young adolescents*. Westerville, Ohio: Association for Middle Level Education.

Middle school is all about student motivation. As the old adage goes, “Education is not the filling of a pail but the lighting of a fire.” Mission: Possible helps to light that fire within our students. It builds community. It adds to a sense of belonging. It brings students and teachers together.

I asked my colleagues who have been involved with Mission: Possible to provide testimonies of how the program has impacted their teaching and their students.

*“Mission:Possible has sparked excitement among the students and teachers. In a time where testing is a key focus, Mission Possible has created an interesting challenge in which all students are able to participate. It is fun to reinforce skills in an interactive and positive way.” –Mrs. Mack*

*“When I taught LA, Mission Possible created a team atmosphere that spanned not only the class they were in but all of my classes. This environment boosted their confidence and made students want to learn. Because they were team, they were more concerned about each other and willing to help one another to understand and to grow academically. I still have students that wear their team shirts and refer to themselves as a Linde-minion.” –Mrs. Lindeman*

For five years, my team of teachers has tweaked and changed and gradually built this program. Each year is different from the previous year. We do what works for us and what seems fitting for the current group of students. We recycle, reuse, and revise our material from year to year and as we go. It has been a wonderful way for us to professionally collaborate and share ideas with one another.

It amazes me how many extra opportunities teachers create to meet the demands of middle level students’ growing minds. We have guest speakers, seminars, character education, bullying prevention, tutorials about staying organized, study sessions, after-school clubs, intramurals, spelling bees, geography bees, debate clubs, reward systems, school dances, socials, and days where everyone is supposed to sit with a new friend at lunch. The list goes on and on! Teachers today understand that providing great lessons in the classroom every day is just the starting point to providing a well-rounded education. Creating an opportunity like Mission: Possible might add that extra challenge your students need to succeed.



# SECO Ohio Science Institute

January 25-26, 2016

Hilton - Easton in Columbus

The Science Education Council of Ohio (SECO) is presenting their Ohio Science Institute at the Hilton - Easton in Columbus January 25 and 26. The institute features over 110 sessions on various science, STEM, and engineering topics with 70 specific to grades 5-9. The institute is focused on three specific strands: Hybrid Learning and Technology-Infused Instruction; Literacy Across the Curriculum; and Engineering Design Integration.

*Click here for details and registration information.*

Continued from page 6

meetings, and interactions may occur, leaders in a Pseudo-Community avoid the real issues or people which may be hindering the progress to True Community. Adaptive practices and strategies for dialogue may even be used to promote open and honest communication in some forums, but if not practiced at all times, and against the hard issues, honest conversation may be halted. When this occurs, members of the organization sense honest feedback isn't warranted and stop giving it. As a result, members say what others want to hear to avoid the trouble or hassle. In this case, leaders obtain invalid feedback. Leaders striving for a True Community need to create systems and check their beliefs and assumptions from critical members on the validity and reliability of communication they are receiving. In addition, leaders need to identify and reflect on the core, root needs rather than the symptoms. Finally, leaders need to make decision and provide feedback to the community transparently to encourage continued dialogue in the future.

## **Leaders promote the community.**

Leaders tend to be self-promoters or only care about certain individuals in a Pseudo-Community. In addition, although the community may have a mission statement or vision, if it is not real and evident among all members, starting with the leader, the Pseudo-Community will continue to exist. When this occurs, members only care about themselves or others around them; not the community as a whole. As a result, fractures in the communities split in cliques making it impossible to create one community. The ultimate destruction are members who lack empathy for one another. In building True Community, leaders needs to ensure there is a

clearly communicated and owned mission and vision among the members. Then, with this articulated, the leader can promote community-building as a whole.

In a True Community, problems and disagreements still occur. But it is how the members treat each other and focus on the right work which separates this community from a Pseudo-Community.

Finally, as Jim Carrey's character Truman once said, "Good morning, and in case I don't see ya, good afternoon, good evening, and good night!"

*"In genuine community there are no sides. It is not always easy, but by the time they reach community the members have learned how to give up cliques and factions. They have learned how to listen to each other and how not to reject each other. Sometimes consensus in community is reached with miraculous rapidity. But at other times it is arrived at only after lengthy struggle. Just because it is a safe place does not mean community is a place without conflict. It is, however, a place where conflict can be resolved without physical or emotional bloodshed and with wisdom as well as grace. A community is a group that can fight gracefully."*

M. Scott Peck

# THE WATER WALK



Tracy Kleis

Holly Mueller

Teachers, Columbia  
Intermediate School

Kings Local Schools

Southwest Region

It was a chilly fall day in November, and if you happened to pass by the front of Columbia Intermediate School, you would have seen a couple hundred sixth graders walking the perimeter in a line, each carrying a gallon of water. They would have been laughing, maybe complaining at the length of the walk and weight of the water, and holding up "Honk For Water!" signs. You might have asked, *What's happening?*

It all began with the book, *A Long Walk to Water* by Linda Sue Park and our building's motto two years ago, "If not you, then who?" When we read this book, we knew this was the perfect way to inspire our sixth graders to connect literature to social action. We immediately started making plans to read the book aloud to all our sixth graders and begin a project to raise money for Water for South Sudan, Inc. We structure our sixth grade curriculum around theme topics. First quarter is Social Injustice. In this unit, we build background knowledge through short texts and other media sources. For example, the nonfiction article, "One Day I Had to Run" by John Deng Langbany, describes a real life account of a Sudanese refugee. Another resource is the video segment of "Our Amazing 12-Year Journey With the Lost Boys" from *60 Minutes*. Students also read other fictional books in small groups or independently around the Social Injustice theme, such as *A Diamond in the Desert* by Kathryn Fitzmaurice, *Words in the Dust* by Trent Reedy, and *Bamboo People* by Mitali Perkins. We build concept maps around the theme topic, expanding on vocabulary, background knowledge, and new understanding. Students help compile a list of essential questions that will drive their discussions, annotations, and writing around Social Injustice.

We also incorporate writing, research, and technology projects. Common Core standards such as writing a claim essay and writing from research are covered in this portion of the unit. Teachers use various ideas to help their sixth graders understand social injustice. Some students generate a list of lingering questions as they read *A Long Walk to Water* and research topics related to Sudan in order to create



a presentation. Others put together brochures that outline their plan of action for the walk. Still other students research modern social injustices and make Public Service Announcements. All students write claim essays about social injustice and use evidence from various sources to support their claims.

Once we finish reading *A Long Walk to Water* aloud, we start our fundraising for Water for South Sudan, Inc. We generate ideas for social action and responsibility in order to help improve lives by providing clean water. We make this as student-led as possible. We want students to feel invested and passionate about how they can make a difference. One of the ways we do this is to contact the Water for South Sudan, Inc. office in New York City to Skype with our sixth graders. We gather all 300+ students in our cafe where we have a screen and projector, and the office staff from Water for South Sudan, Inc. explains what they do in South Sudan to bring clean water to remote villages. Students compile questions they have about the drilling process and the results of bringing a well to a village. This Skype session builds excitement and motivates students to help make a difference in a faraway country. Next, students start coming up with ideas of how to raise money. It costs \$15,000 to drill a well in South Sudan.

The first year we did this unit, loom bracelets were very popular. Many of our students got excited about making and selling loom bracelets. We paired those handmade bracelets with rubber wristbands that read #ReadWalkWater, the official name of our fundraising walk, that we ordered from an online company. Students and parents staffed a table in the cafe and sold the bracelets during lunch. We also sold them during football games and before band and choir concerts. They were a big hit. Last year we ordered and sold water bottles with the Water for South Sudan logo during lunch which also helped us raise money and create excitement for the cause. About two weeks before the walk, we sent out letters to the parents and

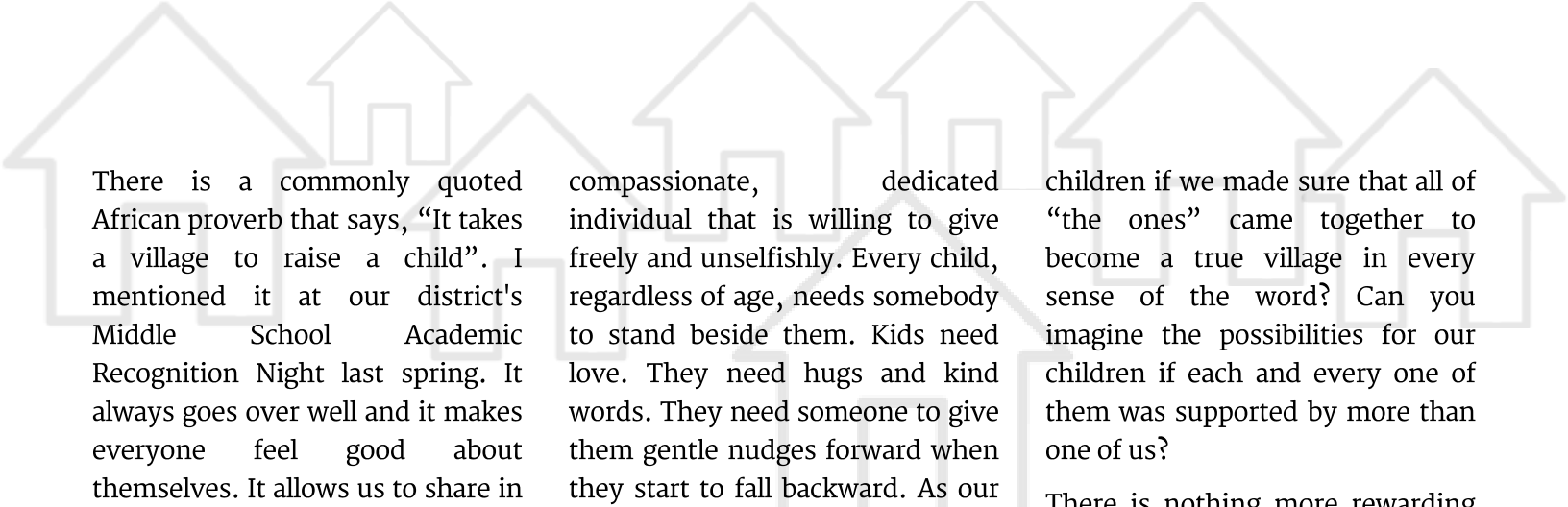
wrote articles for the newspaper and school newsletters, explaining the fundraising campaign. Students took home pledge sheets and raised money for the big event, the walk. After the walk, we sponsored an H2O campaign that involves students drinking nothing but water for 10 days in order to donate the money saved from buying soda, coffee, juice, and milk to Water for South Sudan.

On the day of the walk, both years, we invited a Miami University student who was integral in bringing a Living Water International, Inc. chapter to the university, to teach students about the water crisis and share her personal experiences in traveling to various countries to help build wells. She brought jerry cans, large receptacles used for carrying water in South Sudan. When filled with water, they weigh 40-50 pounds, so kids get a good appreciation for what it would be like to walk hours daily in order to gather water for families. All sixth graders, any parents or community members, and teachers and administrators walked about a mile around our school carrying new gallons of store-bought water to represent the children and women around the world who must embark upon a walk much harder than this every day, just to survive.

The results of the walks have been exciting. We raised over \$5,000 the first year, enough to sponsor part of a well in a village in South Sudan. We were excited to receive photographs of a banner with our school's name on it. The second year, we were awarded a grant from Ethicon, a division of Johnson & Johnson, for \$10,000, which, added to the students' fundraising, resulted in over \$16,000 total, enough to fully cover a well in South Sudan and also contribute to a new drill. We look forward to what 2015 brings!



<http://www.waterforsouthsudan.org/>



There is a commonly quoted African proverb that says, “It takes a village to raise a child”. I mentioned it at our district's Middle School Academic Recognition Night last spring. It always goes over well and it makes everyone feel good about themselves. It allows us to share in the success of others while still being able to pass the buck when things don't go well. Truthfully though, I felt a bit guilty using that old proverb.

Throughout 16 years in education, I have been blessed to work with many amazing students that had incredible support structures around them. It was easy to see how they could be successful. They were too supported to fail. Those lucky students had people offering support in every part of their lives. As the years rolled by, I began to think more and more about the many outstanding students that didn't have an entire village. How were those children so successful? They are out there. There are more than many people realize or want to admit. How did they do it?

The answer was simple, but it took me 16 years to realize it. It starts with one. Not one village; one person. The proverb is correct, but the words are misleading. A village does not necessarily have to mean everyone, but it must mean one. Behind every successful student there must be at least one

compassionate, dedicated individual that is willing to give freely and unselfishly. Every child, regardless of age, needs somebody to stand beside them. Kids need love. They need hugs and kind words. They need someone to give them gentle nudges forward when they start to fall backward. As our

children if we made sure that all of “the ones” came together to become a true village in every sense of the word? Can you imagine the possibilities for our children if each and every one of them was supported by more than one of us?

There is nothing more rewarding

# It Takes a Village

children age, they hold onto the same needs. Our teenagers and adolescents might not willingly admit it, but they still need our support, our hugs and our understanding as much as ever. Raising a child does require some magically contrived number of individuals. It can be, and often is, successfully done with one parent, one guardian or one role model. Never underestimate the power of one.

The bottom line is that children can succeed with a village of one; but they shouldn't have to. We live in an outstanding city that is full of outstanding people. What would happen if everyone in Norwalk was willing to become “the one” for a child? What could the future hold for both our community and our

than being part of a child's village. Many of you reading this article are already “the one” for a child. If you are that person, thank you! If you are giving your time, energy and love to help a child succeed, thank you! If you have room in your life to become part of a child's village, I encourage you to do so. No gift is greater.

As we begin the school year, we are reminded just how precious our children are. We are reminded of their limitless potential and of their boundless love. Our children are a reflection of the values that we, as a society, hold most dear. They deserve our best. They deserve all we have to give. They deserve a village.

Corey Ream

Director of Operations

Norwalk City Schools

North Central Region



# ARE YOU A 21ST CENTURY EDUCATOR?

## Are you a 21st century teacher?

Do you share what your students are doing with the world?

Do you bring in experts to talk with your students via Skype or Google Hangout?

Do you seek out and participate in professional learning via twitter and other online communities?

Do you take your students on virtual field trips?

Do you focus on having your students to create instead of them only consuming?

Do you connect your classroom with other classrooms across the globe?

Do you use backchannels in your classroom to give even the quietest students a voice?

Do you give assignments where students collaborate via online platforms, such as Google Docs?

Do you teach your students about digital citizenship and anti-cyberbullying?

Do you share your lesson plans and collaborate with teachers across the globe?

Do you leave a video tutorial or podcast for your substitute to play when you are not at school so that students don't miss a day of learning and/or doing?

Do you allow your students to guide their instruction and do they own their learning?

Does the culture of your room speak to the values and beliefs of the learning?

## Are you a 21st century school leader?

Do you flip your faculty meetings?

Do you seek out and participate in professional learning via twitter and other online communities?

Do you share what your teachers and students are doing with the world?

Do you model risk-taking?

Do you provide professional development experiences that allow for teacher choice in delivery format, skill level, and flexible time of delivery?

Do you lead technology training sessions?

Do you use Remind to notify your staff of important events and news?

Do you collaborate with other school leaders across the globe via social media and other online communities?

Do you have a school hashtag?

Constantly striving to embed best practices, teachers are embracing the notion of the 21st Century academic experience more now than ever before. And, as leaders in our field either in the classroom or within our building or district, it is the modeling that we do, the efforts that we make, and the implementation of these concepts that sets us aside from our peers.

Teachers and administrators today are defining themselves by the experiences they offer. The art of education is taking on a form of its own. The traditional side of education is evaporating from our experiences. The strides being made in this generation of learners has evolved beyond all the previous generations combined. There is a growing separation.

With that, we have heard time and time again about shifting from the scope of being “good” at what we offer as educators to taking what we do to the level of “great”. Today, however, we are hearing and believing that being “great” isn’t good enough. The charge given to those that truly seek to be innovative and be a leader amongst leaders and a visionary amongst their colleagues is to take the craft of teaching and learning and strive to be “exceptional”. It is educators taking their passion of teaching and learning to a level achieved only by a handful. Many of us work to aim toward this level of instruction, not all can reach this peak.

Being exceptional requires many attributes, most notably, the belief in being a 21st Century teacher and leader. Do you have the attributes of being a 21st Century educator? Read the lists to the left to see how you measure up to your colleagues near and far. Becoming exceptional is a goal well worth achieving.

Whether you are a teacher within a classroom of students or a leader within a building full of learners, your charge is to ensure that each person within your community is receiving a 21st Century academic experience. This list of questions is a great starting place for you to recognize what is, or is not, happening in your workplace. Take inventory in your teaching and leading and strive to becoming an exceptional educator in the 21st Century.

Craig Vroom

Principal, Weaver Middle  
School

Hillard City Schools

Central Region

# Teams



*Still The **Heart** of the Middle School*

Lee Stockhaus

Data Coach

Lima City Schools

Northwest Region

**T**eacher teams are still an essential part of Middle Level Education. *This We Believe in Action* lists three conditions to make teaming effective: Common Planning time in excess of four times per week for an equivalent of 40 or more minutes per day, Team sizes of fewer than 120 students with smaller teacher-to-student ratios, and the length of time a team has been together. (AMLE, 2012)

Principals and teachers have been battling superintendents and school boards over the first two conditions for decades. However, schools in Ohio have been forced to face the third condition head-on with the retirements of many educators the past few years. The middle schools in my district have had significant changes in team memberships in the past three years. Also, many educators that I met or talked to at the October AMLE conference in Columbus mentioned they had new members on their teacher teams. Depending on the experience levels of team members left on a team, a team has to keep new members in mind. A new teacher needs to learn what makes a good team and why it is important for their student's growth and success.

So what makes a teacher team effective? Teams at a minimum should be focused on coordinating classwork, tests, student behaviors, parent contacts, and special team activities (that was always my favorite part of being on the team). As a team's experience grows, they can expand their focus. Using flexible blocks of time, developing service learning projects, sharing and discussion of student and teacher work and integrating and connecting curriculum are some of the ways for teams to grow and push their student even further.

A newly constituted team will find it worthwhile to go back to its roots and start building from the bottom up. Team members need to take time to get to know each other. The next steps should center on a team vision, mission and norms. Team agreements on expectations, team calendars, and schedules of assignments and tests should also be agreed upon. Team discipline agreements must also be determined.

If you are looking for a resource to help a team get restarted, I suggest *Taming of the Team: How Great Teams Work Together* by Jack Berckemeyer. It has valuable tips for teams working on any of the ideas mentioned above. There are reproducible documents to help new teams or already working teams. There are tools for getting new teams working together and evaluation tools to help experienced teams see where they are and find ways to even grow together to an even better team.

Teams are one of the most important organizational structures that foster purposeful learning and meaningful relationships. Most important though is that **good** teams can touch a part of each of the 16 characteristics of successful schools for young adolescents.

## RESOURCES

Association for Middle Level Education. (2012). *This We Believe in Action*. Westerville, OH: AMLE.

Berckemeyer, J. (2012). *Taming of the Team*. Grapevine, TX: Incentive Publications, Inc.

## OMLA welcomed #AMLE2015 to Columbus – October 2015



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# #OhioMLA

**Second Tuesday of each Month | 8PM EST**  
**Co-Moderators: @mjsedlak & @mjanatovich**

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