There are many ways to make our state and our world a better place, and I like to start from the ground up. I’ve witnessed quite a few successes in my 30+ years working with students and teachers, and that has taught me quite a lot. But if there’s one thing I know for sure, it’s that there always is room to improve.

Michigan has joined with 46 other states in an effort to continue moving forward and make education better together. Michigan’s State Board of Education adopted the Common Core State Standards in 2010 on a bipartisan unanimous vote. It was a fairly easy decision that came with significant benefits for the state.

Michigan already had some of the most rigorous standards in the nation, developed to ensure that students graduate from high school career-and college-ready. So Michigan teachers and students were well prepared to transition to the Common Core.

When it comes down to it, these standards are a common-sense step toward a better education system. They will help teachers plan better lessons; parents will have clearer expectations about what their children will accomplish in a given year; and students will have a clear roadmap for success.

The core standards are built to provide students with what they need to know and do to be successful in college and careers, making the Standards not only rigorous, but relevant to the real world. These internationally benchmarked standards for K-12 math and English language arts were developed by education experts in states, for states, and provide a consistent, clear understanding of what students are expected to learn at each grade level to be ready for a career or college when they graduate from high school.

This bipartisan initiative developed by the states, through the National Governors Association and Council of Chief State School Officers, also will be implemented by the states, allowing local districts and classroom teachers to decide how the standards can be implemented most successfully for the students in our schools. The federal government did not initiate, nor dictate, the development of these standards.

The quality of our education system will continue to impact everything from each individual student’s success to the economic future of our nation. The Common Core State Standards will prepare Michigan students for good, high-paying jobs in the years ahead; and position Michigan for greater economic global competitiveness.

Teachers, experts, parents, and students in states across America have come together around a set of core standards that have the potential to empower our nation to regain the title of world’s best education system. We will continue to engage the core standards in our state too, and in doing so, move our next generation forward — together.
Upper Peninsula District Flourishes Utilizing Technology

Story and Photos By Marta Thompson

Part of the charge of the Education Connection, partnering with the Michigan Network of Educators, is to highlight an innovative teaching and learning approach by a great Michigan educator. The following article was submitted by Marta Thompson, CLK Special Education Teacher, Public Schools of Calumet, Laurium and Keweenaw.

The Public Schools of Calumet, Laurium and Keweenaw are located in the pristine Keweenaw Peninsula in Michigan’s Upper Peninsula. Our school, originally established in 1867, is rich in history and steeped in tradition. We are the most northern K-12 school district in the State of Michigan and are committed to excellence. Sixty-eight percent of our student population has free or reduced lunch. Not only is our district proud of its educational programs and exceptional staff, we are also very proud of our technological gains in the past four years. We are fortunate to have interactive white boards in every classroom and each of our students, fourth through twelfth grade, has their own iPad as well as every staff member.

It started in 2007 when seven teachers from our district went to the MACUL conference in Grand Rapids. Here they saw examples of Smart boards in use and brought back to our administrators the many practical uses in the classroom. The next year, our middle school computer teacher, Sean Jaques, wrote an “HP Technology for Teaching” grant. Soon after, all eighth grade teachers had Smart boards in their classroom.

The next year four of our elementary teachers piloted a Smart board in their classrooms. Due to their success, a decision was made to try to procure a Smart Board, or the equivalent, to every classroom in the district.

Our next challenge was to find a way to fund the White Board system for 95 classrooms. Our Superintendent, Darryl Pierce, then submitted and was successfully awarded a generous technology stimulus grant that secured the money needed to put an interactive white board in every classroom K-12.

Teachers took it upon themselves from there to learn as much as they could about this new technology and how to apply it in a classroom setting.

Part of this professional development included the teachers who originally attended the MACUL conferences sharing the aspects of the interactive white board such as Smart board Exchange and using the SMART software tools.

At CLK Elementary School each classroom shares iPads, and in fourth and fifth grades, each student is issued their own iPad. Our teachers are using these iPads for skills practice, research, reading logs, communicating with students, and video and video editing assignments. We are also utilizing online family access programs and using the iPads to give tests that are automatically scored. Students love the fact that they can now, at some grades, email assignments to their teachers and love educational apps like “Math Rocket”; “Chicken Coop Fractions” and iBooks.

At Washington Middle School and Calumet High School, some of the teachers have organized a teaching technique where they have blended “flipped classroom” and “digital learning” to incorporate face to face teaching and the use of online material.

Seventh grade teacher Michelle Bosscher, is excited by the immediate and real time date this technology has introduced to her classroom. “I have an interactive clicker system that runs through my Smart Board that my students use to click in answers to math equations/problems. This gives me instant feedback to see how they are doing on a daily basis.”

She was equally impressed with the results from having iPads in the classroom. “Students use the Math Pentagon and Math PRO apps to do re- view assignments before a test. They get instant feedback on each problem they complete with their stylus. That way, they can ask for help immediately if they realize they are getting a certain type of problem incorrect. I can then see from my teacher console how they are doing as well if I look at individual student scores. It’s allowing me to see each student’s work in real time on the screen if I so desire.”

MDE would like to thank Marta Thompson, and the Public Schools of Calumet, Laurium and Keweenaw for sharing their experiences and success with integrating technology in the classroom.
Early Learning Opportunities and the Achievement Gap

African American students were 16 percent of all six-through eighth-graders, but were 42 percent of students in those grades who were held back a year. (US-DOE, 2012, OCR). A longitudinal study of Michigan’s Great Start Readiness Program conducted between 1995-2011 suggested that fewer GSRP children of color were retained for two or more grades than their non-GSRP counterparts by the 12th grade (14.3% versus 28.1% in 12th grade) (High Scope, 2011).

A Discussion of the Problem

Only 13% of low-income 11th graders in Michigan meet standards in math on the Michigan Merit Exam compared to 39% of all students. While this is a drastic difference, similar gaps in scores between income groups exist for all subjects, including English, reading, social studies, and science. Young children from low-income families often enter kindergarten already behind their peers who come from more affluent families, as shown in measures of school readiness. Without support or intervention, children from economically disadvantaged homes will continue to fall behind, often repeating grades through high school, and often eventually dropping out.

The Alternative

Michigan’s publicly funded preschool programs offer necessary supports to prepare students for kindergarten entry, closing the gaps that exist prior to school entry. Federally-funded Head Start and state-funded Great Start Readiness Programs (GSRP) provide necessary programming for children from socio-economically diverse settings. Independent evaluation of the state’s GSRP program demonstrates the difference in achievement for children who participate, results which sustain the GSRP participants through high school. Teachers of kindergarten through grade 3 rank GSRP students significantly higher than comparable peers in retaining learning, readiness to learn, initiative, attendance, and interest in school work. Grade 4 teachers rate GSRP students significantly higher than comparable peers on literacy skills, thinking skills, and making good progress to next grade. At grades 11 or 12, GSRP students had a higher level of proficiency than their counterparts on the Michigan Merit Examination in mathematics (27% vs. 22%) and in math and language arts combined (35% vs. 28%). Additionally, more GSRP students graduated on time from high school than non-GSRP participants (58.3% versus 43.0%) and more GSRP students of color graduated on time from high school than non-GSRP participants (59.7% vs. 36.5%).

(Continued on Page 6)
The Kentwood Public Schools were facing many of the same issues challenging districts across our state; an increasing poverty rate, more English Language Learners than ever before, and higher proficiency standards on the MEAP. All of this during a time of reduced school funding leading to larger class sizes. Talk about the perfect storm!

We knew that our current teaching methodologies were not going to solve the learning issues our children faced. It would take dramatic changes to our teaching and learning model. So we asked, “What would it take to improve the learning in our classrooms?” The responses from our staff were fairly predictable. Smaller class sizes, more technology, interventions for the neediest students, and more planning time. All of these would be challenges, especially during a time of declining revenue. We also knew that old models were not going to work with a student population that faced increasing socioeconomic challenges. No going back, only forward.

Our first issue was class size. We knew that less revenue generally meant fewer teachers and increased class size. However, the recession in Michigan and across our country also meant fewer teaching jobs were available leading to a glut in the teaching market. So many recent graduates who dreamed of a career in education would end up substituting until this market recovered. What if we could put these folks to work at a rate better than substitute pay, provide them with all of our professional development and assign them to work with a veteran lead teacher? These recent grads would have an apprenticeship of sorts while working as part of a team of teaching professionals. What an opportunity for personal growth and a chance to establish themselves in a school district as opposed to the option of substitute teaching. Maybe we were on to something. The math would look something like this: instead of two sections of fifth grade at a ratio of 27:1, we would have one lead teacher with two interns for a ratio of three adults to fifty-four students or 18:1. Directed by an experienced lead teacher, the three would plan together and would have the option to place students in flexible groups in three separate learning spaces, according to the student’s skill set. The lead teacher could take the most needy students (maybe 8-12) while the other students would be ability grouped between the other two teachers. Regular assessments during their team planning time would resolve the concerns often associated with tracking. The groups would be flexible, changing with every new set of assessment results.

Going from two sections of fifth grade to one large section of fifth grade taught by three adults, also reduced the number of sections in art, music and physical education. This reduction allowed for an hour of team planning time each day for the fifth grade team.

Technology needs and interventions for students below grade level were next on the list. Our district chose to direct ARRA funds into improving wireless capabilities and adding interactive white boards in all the core content classrooms.

(Continued on Page 9)
The MDE would like to ask educators and administrators to remind your teenagers at the end of this month, it will be illegal for them to use cell phones while operating a motor vehicle. Gov. Rick Snyder signed Kelsey’s Law earlier this year to help protect Michigan’s young, inexperienced drivers and other motorists.

**Senate Bill 756** bans cellphone use for anyone driving on a level 1 or level 2 graduated driver license in Michigan.

The new law is named in honor of Kelsey Raffaele, 17, of Sault Ste. Marie, who died tragically in a cellphone-related automobile crash in 2010.

The new law allows for primary enforcement by police, though in most cases it will be enforced after the detection of another moving violation. A violation of the law will result in a civil infraction to be determined by the local jurisdiction. No points will be assigned to the driver’s record and drivers will not be punished for using a vehicle’s integrated hands-free phone system or for using cell phones to report an emergency.

Cell phones and other distractions exacerbate a young driver’s inexperience and lead to more traffic crashes, which are the No. 1 killer of teens.

Michigan adopted a statewide ban on texting-while-driving in 2010.

SB 756 is now Public Act 592 of 2012 and will take effect in late March.


---

**Welcome New State Board of Education Members**

The MDE is excited to welcome two new members to the State Board of Education. We look forward to the great ideas and enthusiasm they will be bringing to help the students of Michigan succeed.

**Michelle Fecteau**, D-Detroit, Term Expires 1/1/2021

Ms. Fecteau was elected in 2012. She is currently the Executive Director of the Wayne State University Chapter of the American Association of University Professors, which is jointly affiliated with the American Federation of Teachers. Ms. Fecteau and her husband Edward Hejka, a special education teacher, live in Detroit and have two children by birth, their oldest with autism. They have also been foster parents to 9 children, 5 they adopted. They were awarded Foster Parents of the Year by Michigan Lutheran Child and Family Services. Ms. Fecteau and her husband have been active in numerous programs supporting special needs children including the Autism Society of Michigan and Wayne County.

**Lupe Ramos-Montigny**, D-Grand Rapids, Term Expires 1/1/2021

Ms. Ramos-Montigny was elected in 2012. She worked in Michigan public schools for thirty-six years. Most of her professional career was dedicated to the Grand Rapids Public Schools. She has served on the Committee to Honor Cesar E. Chavez, The Cesar E. Chavez Unity Committee, Student Advancement Foundation Board, and the Kent County Citizens Friend of the Court Advisory Board. Ms. Ramos-Montigny has also served on the Michigan Democratic Hispanic/Latino Caucus, Kent County Democratic Party, and Michigan Democratic Party.

Ms. Ramos-Montigny earned her Bachelor of Science Degree at Pan American University in Edinburg, Texas, and her Master of Science Degree in bilingual education from Grand Valley State University in Allendale, Michigan.

The Department would like to thank the departing board members Ms. Nancy Danhof and Ms. Marianne Yared McGuire for their dedication and efforts to better education for the students and teachers of Michigan.
Early Learning Opportunities and the Achievement Gap Cont...

Call to Action
Evidence regarding the influence of quality early learning programs and especially the Great Start Readiness Program (GSRP) in supporting outstanding academic performance in all students is compelling. We encourage you to find out more about early learning programs in your district and neighborhood and to connect your families to these vital programs for their young children. Consider visiting a childhood services center and getting to know more about their work. Additional information about early childhood programs may be found at websites for the Michigan Head Start Association (http://michheadstart.org), the Michigan Department of Education Office of Great Start (http://www.michigan.gov/ece), and the Early Childhood Investment Corporation (http://greatstartforkids.org).

W-A-Y Academy presents to MDE

As part of MDE’s internal effort to develop strategies to improve academic achievement as it relates to young men of color, a panel of students from the Widening Advancements for Youth (W-A-Y) Academy were invited to speak to MDE leaders, including State Superintendent Mike Flanagan. The session was the third in a four-part program called The Closer Series. The series is designed to inform MDE’s long-term strategic plan for shrinking the achievement gap with an initial focus on African American males.

Attendees heard from W-A-Y Academy researchers Joseph and Michael Futrell, Jose Maya, Davante Lawson and their mentor Maggie Gistinger. They had prepared a powerpoint presentation and each researcher spoke of his experiences visiting U of M, MSU, and the Michigan Department of Education.

While Superintendent Flanagan was there, he took time to meet and talk with Academy students. The W-A-Y administrators and Board members are thrilled that W-A-Y Academy researchers (students) were exposed not only to policy makers and state-level education administrators, but also meeting with university students and officials from fraternity members to financial aid officials.

These visits fueled the aspirations of the young men and they told the Board of the value of these varied experiences and their hopes for the future.

WAY Program is a personalized learning experience for students who struggle with traditional high school. WAY offers an alternative approach to education; one that encourages self-esteem, independence, and the development of 21st century skills that will facilitate a college education and subsequent career paths.

For more information, please visit http://www.wayprogram.net/index.php
Governor Snyder named Honorary Chair of ACES Day 2013

Governor Rick Snyder has been named Honorary Chair of ACES (All Children Exercise Simultaneously) Day 2013. ACES is coordinated by the Michigan Fitness Foundation in effort to combat childhood obesity by encouraging children to adopt healthy physical activity habits as well as promote unity through fitness.

This international program takes place in more than 50 countries and was created by physical education teacher Len Saunders to motivate children to exercise. ACES will celebrate its 25th anniversary this year.

Officially, ACES Day is the first Wednesday of May each year, but events may be held any day in May in concurrence with National Physical Fitness and Sports month.

Schools participating in ACES Day 2013 will coordinate an exercise activity for students to participate in. These events could be as simple as leading the students in a walk around the school, or as elaborate as different physical activity stations and relay races. Last year, the Michigan Fitness Foundation registered more than 1,000 schools in all 83 counties of Michigan as participants. Michigan schools can register at www.michiganfitness.org/ACES.

In Michigan, ACES is sponsored by Farm Bureau Insurance. In its 15th year, their generous sponsorship allows MFF to provide online idea kits to schools, an educational newsletter and stickers for ACES participants.

The Governor’s Council on Physical Fitness, Health and Sports and the Michigan Fitness Foundation envision a physically educated population with the knowledge and skills to enjoy a healthy, vigorous and safe lifestyle in communities designed to support physical activity. For more information, visit www.michiganfitness.org.

First Fuel For School

State Superintendent Mike Flanagan announced the "First Fuel For School" challenge recently to celebrate National School Breakfast week. The goal is for at least 60 percent of students in every Michigan school who get a federally reimbursable school lunch to also receive a school breakfast.

Flanagan says last year only about half of the students who qualified for free and reduced priced lunches also received a school breakfast.

Children who eat breakfast in school do better in math and miss fewer class days, according to a recent national study. The study analyzed national demographic data to learn that children who eat school breakfast score an average of 17.5 percent higher on math tests.

Also, students who eat school breakfast attend class an average of 1.5 days more per year. The report found that the combination of higher attendance and increased math scores means kids who eat school breakfast are 20 percent more likely to graduate high school.

You can watch the podcast where the Superintendent extended the invitation to join the Challenge and then sign your school up today: http://mi.gov/mde/0,4615,7-140-37818_45256-296277--.00.html
MI School Data has a fresh new look, enhanced navigation features, and lots more data about how Michigan’s schools are performing.

The website was first launched in summer of 2011, as a one-stop-shop for data to help parents, educators, and policymakers make informed education decisions. Test results, student counts, school report cards, and the Annual Education Report (AAER) were among the first “reports” provided. Since the initial launch, the portal’s features and data reports have continued to expand.

New navigation controls let you set your own parameters for the reports you select:

- Choose an “entity” -- school, district, ISD, or statewide level data.
- Compare one entity to another.
- Filter using demographic breakdowns such as gender, race/ethnicity, and program participation like English language learners and economically disadvantaged.

Once a report and its parameters are selected, a graph is displayed along with a data table. You can then view counts or percentages, trend lines over time, and download and print the data. Members of the education community with secure access permissions can gain even more valuable, student-level data.

Recent reports and updates include:
- Several new college preparedness and enrollment reports.
- Updated MEAP scores.
- Graduation rates.

Some of the additional reports in the works include:
- Student count data including nonresident and mobility reports.
- School finance and staffing information.
- Special education data.
- Tools that track student pathways from K-12 through college.

Eventually, the data will connect student pathways from preschool into the workforce, providing even more powerful data that can help evaluate the factors of student success.

MI School Data is a service of the state’s Center for Educational Performance and Information (CEPI). CEPI partners with Department of Education program staff, schools, and other stakeholders to develop the data collection, evaluation, and delivery plans that provide the most value toward improving student outcomes in our state.

Bookmark MI School Data and visit often—new reports are appearing every month!
Improving our Instructional Approach in the Face of Economic Realities Cont...

At the same time, we were planning to conduct several 1:1 technology pilots in our elementary classrooms. It made great sense to leverage the 1:1 technology pilots with our new flexible group classrooms. We would be able to meet the needs of students who were ready to accelerate or in need of remediation through these additional learning modalities.

The final piece to improving our instructional approach involved providing services to those students who required Tier 2 and 3 interventions. Our district was already quite successful using Lindamood Bell strategies for improving phonemic awareness and each building had trained staff available to push in or pull out. The strategies we had previously used during our two hour literacy block blended perfectly with our flexible group model. Our efforts led to plenty of smiles from happy staff and successful, engaged students.

There is no question we have tipped the teaching and learning model over in our district. It is not always a panacea, nor is it perfect for everyone. Yet, with three “Beating the Odds” schools in each of the past three years, we believe that we have overcome the funding challenges on our way to providing the very best instruction for the students of our district.

At the same time, we were planning to conduct several 1:1 technology pilots in our elementary classrooms. It made great sense to leverage the 1:1 technology pilots with our new flexible group classrooms. We would be able to meet the needs of students who were ready to accelerate or in need of remediation through these additional learning modalities.

The final piece to improving our instructional approach involved providing services to those students who required Tier 2 and 3 interventions. Our district was already quite successful using Lindamood Bell strategies for improving phonemic awareness and each building had trained staff available to push in or pull out. The strategies we had previously used during our two hour literacy block blended perfectly with our flexible group model. Our efforts led to plenty of smiles from happy staff and successful, engaged students.

There is no question we have tipped the teaching and learning model over in our district. It is not always a panacea, nor is it perfect for everyone. Yet, with three “Beating the Odds” schools in each of the past three years, we believe that we have overcome the funding challenges on our way to providing the very best instruction for the students of our district.

Improving our Instructional Approach in the Face of Economic Realities Cont...

Schools and districts are often interested in networking across the state to find educational strategies that have been found to be successful or are viewed as promising practices. There is now a publicly available method that can be used to facilitate and streamline this endeavor. As many of you know, the Michigan Department of Education (MDE) identifies ‘Reward Schools’ as part of the United States Department of Education (USDOE) accountability requirements. A subset of these Reward Schools are deemed ‘Beating-the-Odds’ (BTO) schools by utilizing particular demographic information such as grade configuration, state foundation allowance, and subgroup percentages. There are actually two statistical methods used:

1. A building that outperforms their predicted Top-to-Bottom school ranking

2. A building that outperforms the most demographically similar schools

As a result of these metrics, a ‘look-up tool’ was created that allows users to find the school buildings that are the most similar to themselves based upon the BTO metrics. The ‘Beating the Odds Look-up Tool’ can be found here: Reward School in the Data and Tools section. It is an excel spreadsheet that will need to be downloaded to your device. Once it is saved, you can search any building that is on the Top to Bottom (TTB) list – remember, not all schools get ranked. Just like all of MDE’s other look-up tools, you can search for a building by name to determine the building code. Once you know the building code, enter it in the designated cell (make sure it has 5 digits). Scrolling down allows you to view designations, grade configuration, and other demographic data. You can also view a graphic and a table that illustrate the school’s TTB ranking in comparison to its group of ‘similar’ buildings – this includes rankings and designations. Scrolling further down allows you to view a list of the schools that were identified as the most demographically similar and any of their designations or labels. Generally, there should be a Reward School within this list of schools. If you wanted to find out more information directly from any Reward School, you could go the Educational Entity Master (EEM), enter these building names (or codes) in the search box in the upper right corner, gather contact information, and reach out to these buildings.

www.mi.gov/ttb
www.mi.gov/priorityschools
www.mi.gov/focusschools
www.mi.gov/rewardschools
WHAT’S NEXT

MiAEYC Conference .................. April 4-6, 2013
State Board of Education Meeting ........ April 9, 2013
MDE/AdvancED School Improve Conf ...... April 17-18
Michigan PTA 95th Annual Conf ...... April 19-21, 2013
Governor’s Education Summit ............ April 23, 2013
MSBO Annual Conference .............. April 23-25, 2013
MI Division for Early Childhood (MiDEC) Conf . April 26
2013 Great Lakes Homeland Sec Conf .... April 3-May 2

ON THE HORIZON

Implement the Common Core State Stands .... May 2-3
MI AfterSchool Assoc Summer Summit ........ May 10
State Board of Education Meeting .......... May 14, 2013
MI Assoc Infant Mental Health (MI-AIMH) Conf . May 19
MAASE Summer Institute ............... Aug 11-14, 2013
MASA Fall Conference ............... September 24-25, 2013
MASB Fall Conference ................. October 24-27

Michigan State Board of Education

John Austin . . . President
Ann Arbor

Casandra Ulbrich . . . Vice President
Rochester Hills

Daniel Varner . . . Secretary
Detroit

Richard Zeile . . . Treasurer
Dearborn

Michelle Fecteau . . . NASBE Delegate
Detroit

Kathleen N. Straus . . . Member
Detroit

Lupe Ramos-Montigny . . . Member
Grand Rapids

Eileen Lappin Weiser . . . Member
Ann Arbor

Governor
Rick Snyder . . . Ex Officio

Michael P. Flanagan . . . Chairman
State Superintendent
Ex Officio

Newsletter Contacts:

David Head
headd@michigan.gov

Martin Ackley
Director, Office of Public and Governmental Affairs
www.michigan.gov/mdenewsletter