



ESSENTIAL NEWS

Our Mission

“To assist teachers, students, parents, and community members in their efforts to create true learner-centered schools, using the principles of the Coalition of Essential Schools.”

Michigan CES Provides Professional Learning that Improves MEAP and AYP Results

By Shug Brandell

Teacher collaboration impacts student achievement and, in particular, collaboratively looking at student work improves student achievement. That was part of the "what works" message delivered by Brian McNulty to Superintendents and Secondary School Principals at their respective state conferences. In talking with Brian after his keynote at the MASA conference, he acknowledged the strategies and protocols around collaboratively looking at student work developed by Ted Sizer and the Coalition of Essential Schools. He mentioned the development of specific protocols to guide discussion of student work that would change instruction. Many of those protocols are universally available but many are only available through CES centers and others that provide professional learning aligned with the National School Reform Faculty (NSRF). NSRF is the organization that continues to support the work of CES critical friends groups or what we now call Collaborating for Students' Success groups.

Training in the use of these protocols builds professional learning communities with a laser focus on student work and student performance. Michigan CES provides professional learning services to several schools wanting to use this approach to improve student achievement. In many cases these schools receive special Comprehensive School Reform or Title 1 funds targeting the improvement of MEAP scores to meet AYP requirements. In other cases, schools have chosen to use other Title 1 or general funds available for professional development.

Services, intended to build the capacity of school staff, are customized for each school but follow the MCES Roadmap for Student Achievement aligned with the new School Improvement Framework that focuses on standards-driven curriculum and instruction and data-driven decision making. Educators examine the data, including student work, to compare the current reality with their desired student outcomes using an inquiry-based approach to collaborate and reflect on improving instructional practice.

Many schools need support to develop professional learning communities that engage in the collection and analysis of student performance data. They need professional learning and coaching support to work together to align their instructional practices and student assessments with the state standards and contact expectations and to collaboratively look at student work. They may need support to examine their classroom and schoolwide practices compared to research-based "best" practice. Each school has a different entry point with some elements of the School Improvement Framework (and MCES Roadmap) in place but need to more consistently align and strengthen their practices. With ongoing and focused professional learning and support, the schools demonstrate improvement in teaching and learning and the capacity to sustain continuous improvement efforts.

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Featured ...

Special reports from our continuing partner schools

- Hope of Detroit Academy*
- Marquette Elementary*
- Washington Gardner Elementary*

MCES has a tradition of school improvement success as a Comprehensive School Reform model in more than 50 Michigan schools serving students PreK - 12. MEAP results for the most recent group of these schools provide evidence that within two years of adopting the Michigan Coalition of Essential Schools (MCES) reform model, the elementary schools increased proficiency levels an average of 40.6% in reading compared to the state increase of 23%; a 10% increase in writing compared to the state average decrease of 8%; and a 33% increase in math compared to the state increase of only 8%. The middle schools had an average increase of: 19% in reading compared to the state increase of 11%; and 13.2% in math compared to the state increase of 11% from 2003 to 2004. In one year, the high schools adopting MCES had an average increase of: 15% in reading compared to a decrease of 1% in the state; and 3% in math compared to a decrease of 1% in the state.

Schools previously not making AYP, made AYP with the professional learning support provided by MCES. While these schools celebrate improved student performance as measured by the MEAP, they also celebrate collaborating more effectively as a professional learning community to focus on student data and the best practices to improve teaching and learning. They are closing the achievement gap that frequently exists between high-poverty schools and the state average. Several principals and superintendents directly attribute the dramatic increase in MEAP scores to the professional learning and coaching support provided by MCES. For more information, please call Karen Miller at 517-780-9814 or Email, miller@michgances.org.

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High Schools Redesign with "Breaking Ranks II"

Michigan CES partnered with three high schools to investigate many of the recommendations outlined in the "Breaking Ranks II: Strategies for Leading High School Reform"; a report sponsored by NASSP and prepared by CES partner, Education Alliance, Brown University. Holland West Ottawa, Jackson Northwest, and Marquette High Schools partnered with MCES, Education Alliance, and the Jackson County ISD to apply for a federal Smaller Learning Communities grant. Breaking Ranks II will provide the framework for ongoing professional learning that builds collaboration and reflection as they examine student data, classroom practice, and schoolwide support for improving rigor, relationships, and relevance for each high school student.

The professional learning encompasses three core areas; Collaborative Leadership and Professional Learning Community, Personalizing the School Environment, and Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment. Each school will identify strategies from the core areas that they will implement to assist them in increasing student achievement for each student.

For more information about these services, please contact Karen Miller at 517-780-9814 or Email, miller@michgances.org.

The Coalition Gears Up for High School Literacy

By Nancy Fenton

This past June, two MCES colleagues, Pam Miller-Thompson and Nancy Fenton were trained in West Ed's Strategic Literacy Initiative, Reading Apprenticeship. Knowing that the major emphasis from No Child Left Behind was on high school, the Coalition had already invested a great deal of time and resources in developing its high school component. That, coupled with our already excellent middle school reading program, Real Reading in the Middle (RRIM), made the move to high school literacy the next logical step.

The major thrust of Reading Apprenticeship (RA) is to create communities of inquiry among teachers and students across all content areas. Each discipline has its own specific reading processes. When teachers become aware of their own mental processes used to make sense of text and can converse out loud, they can help their students do the same. Teachers then see themselves as valuable resources in the teaching of reading and overtime students begin to see themselves as independent problem solvers with text. This process has improved student attitude and comprehension for all readers, but has shown particular gains for those reading below grade level.

RA involves teaching at four dimensions: social, personal, cognitive, and knowledge building.

- ♦ **Social:** In this dimension students learn how to interact with other students in interpreting content, purpose, and perspective. Students also gain a sense of safety in this dimension, knowing that it's all right to be confused and not understand. They recognize that this is common among all readers and is a starting place for the questioning that unlocks the meaning in the text.
- ♦ **Personal:** In the personal dimension students are urged to see their own connection with the text. They evaluate their own reading processes and think about how they relate text to themselves.
- ♦ **Cognitive:** The cognitive dimension helps students to realize that they have a whole litany of comprehension and problem solving strategies at their disposal. They also develop skills at determining what skill is needed when.
- ♦ **Knowledge Building:** The knowledge-building dimension pushes students to acknowledge what they bring to the text in their understanding of text structure, content, the structure and meaning of words, and how ideas are expressed and organized in different disciplines.

There are no secrets in an RA classroom. Each dimension is discussed fully by teachers and students in "metacognitive conversations." Teachers begin by making their own thinking "visible" as they read. Gradually they turn this over to the students, so that soon students independently are verbalizing their own thinking as a natural process.

If you are interested in learning more about this model for high school literacy or would like to have your school receive training, please contact MCES.

RRIM *Real Reading in the Middle*

*A reading
program for
middle-level
students designed to
foster academic and
intellectual abilities
in the context of a
caring classroom
community.*

*Teachers are trained
to develop the
cognitive strategies
used by proficient
readers across
curriculum areas.*

SCHOOL UPDATES

Marquette Elementary CES Accomplishments

Marquette Elementary School, located in Muskegon, Michigan, has garnered a 100% staff commitment for the adoption of a Positive Behavioral Support model. Staff was introduced to the model in spring of 06 and has attended professional development, and prepared for implementation of the model throughout the summer. Funding was provided through the CSR Grant.

In an effort to promote family and community involvement, the staff at Marquette held four family celebrations throughout the year. The school's Cultural Night celebrated Native American, Italian, and African cultures. Students participated by providing art and music exhibitions. During the Literacy Night, staff modeled literacy strategies for families and provided games, story telling, and station activities. The Hero Party was planned for families of children from birth through 5 years. This celebration was hosted by Marquette School and presentations were made by a variety of community resource representatives. Finally, the year of celebrations culminated with a Family Fun Night. Children and families participated in easy, enjoyable activities that could be replicated at home.

MCES is Helping to Build Hope

Hope of Detroit Academy has embraced the MCES model this past year. The leadership team has brought back what they have learned from the MCES leadership institutes and has worked together to create professional development for the staff throughout the year. As a result, throughout the building there is evidence of teachers working to put CES principles to work in their classrooms.

There is an increase in collaborative work among teachers and students. Every professional development includes reflections that the leadership team uses in planning future professional development. Several teachers are collaborating with project based learning combined with differentiation.

This year the CSS coaches are prepared to conduct tuning protocols with staff to look at student work and tune lesson plans for more effective results. This work will accomplish several things. First, it will provide increased staff communication around best practices. Second, it will provide further support for the Leadership Team as they continue their work. Third, it will help coordinate the MCES work with the Success for All and Step up to Writing work that the staff is already engaged in. The staff believes that this work will help Hope of Detroit implement its mission to provide a safe and nurturing environment for increased student achievement.

Change Matters!

The staff and students at Washington Gardner Elementary School are used to change. In the past few years they have seen change in the form of school closings, administration, teaching assignments, curriculum, and school improvement models. But through it all, one thing has not changed: the commitment to focus on doing what is best for students.

The implementation of the MCES School Reform Model has brought additional changes to WGES. Through the work of the leadership team, staff meetings have become a time for professional development. The Leadership Team plans the agendas and uses MCES strategies to inform the staff about the 10 Common Principles, protocols, and best practices. The Leadership Team has also planned agendas for three of the four full professional development days required by the district. This fall, the CSS Coaches will implement one more change. Cross grade teams that will look at student work with the goals of improving classroom practice and, as a result, student achievement.

Change does matter. Through the hard work and efforts of the staff at WGES changes will continue to focus on what is best for students.

Comprehensive School Reform

MCES facilitates the development and implementation of school improvement plans driven by clear, ambitious goals with indicators of results as coherent education standards and sound measures of student achievement.

SCHOOLS TO WATCH

Michigan Honors Schools to Watch Recipients

By Nancy Fenton

Not only was the weather warm last May, but so were the smiles and words of members of the three Michigan middle schools as they accepted the congratulations and the banners that designated them as Michigan Schools to Watch (STW). The first time in Michigan award winners were Oakview Middle School in Lake Orion, Saline Middle School in Saline, and White Pine Middle School in Saginaw Township. The award ceremonies at each school exemplified the pride that each person felt in achieving this honor. As students, teachers, board members, district administrators, parents and community members flooded the respective gymnasiums, the school bands played and various government representatives offered congratulations. Parents, board members, administrators, and students spoke, all relating the special place that each school had become to them.

At a time when middle schools often seem neglected in the social and political arenas, it is wonderful to see schools who are doing the right things with middle level students to make them successful achievers and learners. These schools join 82 other middle schools nationally in receiving the STW designation which originated with the National Forum to Accelerate Middle Grades Reform. In order to be selected, the schools all had to show excellence in academics, programs appropriate for all middle level students, equitable opportunities for all, and have structures and an organizational framework that support the building of strong professional and student learning communities. Thirty-nine criteria were used in reviewing the school's application and on the site visit to determine the final recipients. Schools wishing to keep the STW designation must reapply every three years.

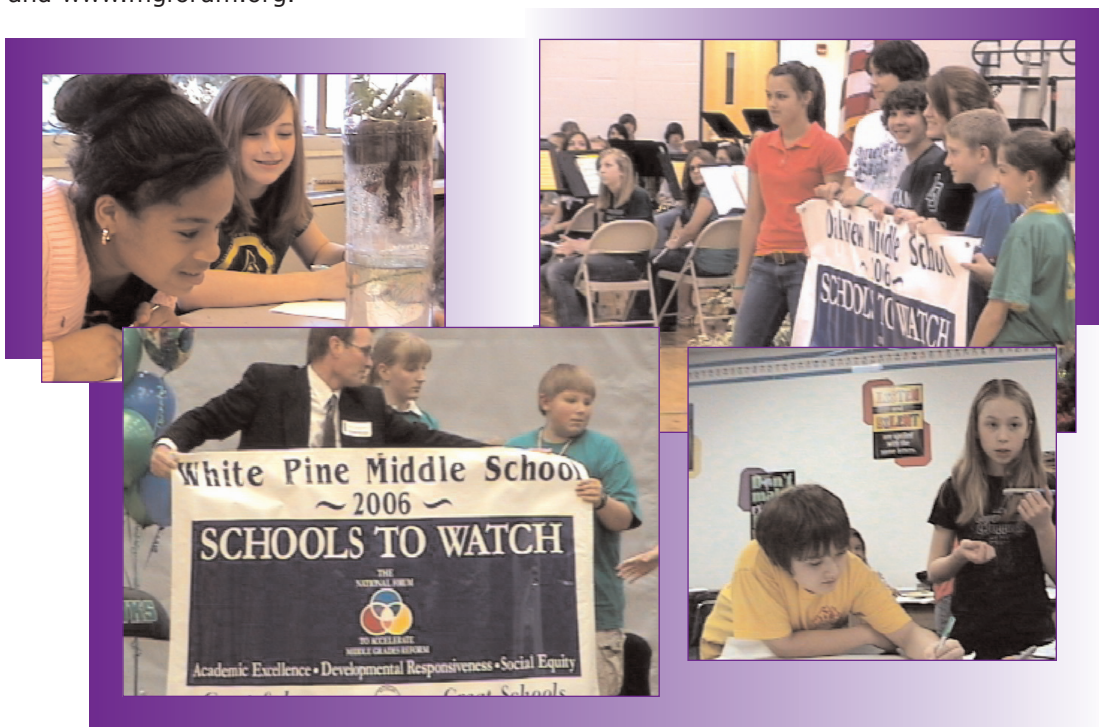
After being honored at the National Schools to Watch Conference in Washington, DC in June and again receiving a state award from MASSP in Traverse City in September, these three schools will be busy. Not only are these middle schools serving on the state STW Committee and reviewing this year's applicants, but they are also forming a network so that they can learn from each other, because good schools never stop trying to improve. They will also be hosting other schools in Michigan who would like to schedule visits to witness exemplary programs and talk about the process that the staff went through in their development.

To learn more about the Schools to Watch Program, access an application, or find out more about each of the three Michigan STW designees, please visit the website at www.waldenu.edu/mstw. For national information use sites: www.schoolstowatch.org and www.mgforum.org.

Standards of Instruction and Assessment

Educators learn how to align instruction, curriculum, and assessment with the Michigan Curriculum Framework and Grade Level Content Expectations.

Educators develop instructional strategies to increase higher order thinking skills and to meet the Michigan Curriculum Framework standards and benchmarks.



LEADERSHIP INSTITUTE

CES/CSR Leadership Institute

By Janett Bundy

Once again CES/CSR leadership teams representing 10 Michigan schools in Albion, Benton Harbor, Muskegon, Standish, Comstock, Detroit, and Inkster came together in Traverse City the first week of August. All schools are currently starting their second year as CES/CSR recipients. The institute focused on understanding professional learning community and its role in student achievement, aligning school action plans with MEAP data, building facilitation skills for leadership team members and their role in the change process, and using best practice strategies as an intervention to improve student achievement. The work was challenging, intense, and focused but as participants reflections noted: "This was worth our time and effort for tackling our second year," and "We are stronger as a team and ready for fall!"

The MCES staff felt honored to be working with such highly professional and dedicated educators as they renewed their commitment to school reform for the purpose of increasing student achievement. This group will reconvene on December 5, 2006 in East Lansing.

Cycle of Inquiry

Educators are trained in the continuous improvement model of plan-do-study-act as they engage in action research driven by essential questions.

Educators learn how to collect and analyze data to determine the goals, strategies, and indicators of success they have established for their students.





Testing: One Measure Among Many?

By Jim Bodrie

According to the "Public Agenda", a nonpartisan opinion research organization, Americans broadly favor testing to measure academic performance, as long as it's not the only benchmark. For instance, most Americans (84 percent) say standardized tests should be used to identify students who need extra help, but far fewer (55 percent) say the scores should decide whether a student gets promoted or graduates.

In Public Agenda's Reality Check 2002, most teachers and parents said it's wrong to rely on the results of a single test to decide whether a student advances. And majorities of both groups, teachers in particular, believe there is too much emphasis on standardized test scores. Other polls show the majority of Americans oppose using test results as the sole factor in determining whether a school should get federal funds. And half of Americans say class work and homework, rather than test scores, are the best measures of academic achievement.

Among the nation's educators, the majority of teachers and principals have some concerns about standardized testing, but they say the schools ultimately need some kind of standard assessment. Other findings include evidence to support claims such as:

- 🚩 Americans broadly favor standardized tests to assess students and teachers and ensure academic standards;
- 🚩 Most teachers and parents say it's wrong to use the results of just one test to decide if a student advances and majorities say there is too much emphasis on standardized test scores;
- 🚩 Three-quarters of Americans oppose using test results to determine whether a school should get federal funds;
- 🚩 Half of Americans say class work and homework are the best measures of academic achievement;
- 🚩 Six in 10 teachers and principals say standardized tests are a "necessary evil" for schools to have some kind of standard assessment.

CSS UPDATE

Sixth CSS Institute Completed in June 2006

By Janett Bundy

Principals and coaches representing 11 districts from around the state, came together for a three day CSS (Collaborating for Student Success) Institute June 19-21, 2006 in Traverse City. The goal of the summer institute was to prepare participants for kicking off the CSS program in their schools in the fall. The institute activities focused on goal setting, practicing facilitation of protocols for looking at student work, leadership and team building, along with school planning time. The culminating activity of final exhibitions captured the positive energy and commitment to implementing CSS for the sake of improving student achievement. As one participant reflected, "I feel confident to lead the CSS groups at my school in the fall."

The June Institute completes the first of a two year focused professional development program provided by MCES. The unwavering focus of the CSS program centers on the development of professional learning community in schools for the purpose of improving academic achievement as evidence supports the link between academic gains and school culture which supports teaching collaboration. We look forward to year two of training with CSS Cohort 6. Our next sessions are scheduled for October 24 & 25, 2006, in Lansing.

Collaborating for Students' Success

Educators learn and use community-building strategies for their collaborative work and for implementation in their classrooms.

Educators learn how to use the protocols for looking at student work developed by CES, the Annenberg Institute, and the National School Reform Faculty.

MICHIGAN COALITION OF ESSENTIAL SCHOOLS

2006-2007 CALENDAR

DATE	EVENT	LOCATION
October 24-25, 2006	CSS Cohort 6	Kellogg Center, East Lansing
November 2-4, 2006	CES National Fall Forum	Marriott, Chicago
December 5, 2006	Leadership Institute	Kellogg Center, East Lansing
February 6-7, 2007	CSS Cohort 6	Kellogg Center, East Lansing
March 6, 2007	Leadership Institute	Kellogg Center, East Lansing
May 1, 2007	Spring Forum	Kellogg Center, East Lansing
May 15, 2007	CSS Cohort 6	Kellogg Center, East Lansing
June 25-26, 2007	Leadership Institute	Holiday Inn, Traverse City

Michigan Coalition of Essential Schools
Shug Brandell, Co-Director
Nancy Fenton, Co-Director
Janett Bundy, Associate Director
Jim Bodrie, H.S. Redesign Coordinator
Karen Miller, Program Administrator
Teresa Walters, Accounting Manager
Phone: 517-780-9814
Fax: 517-780-4079
miller@michigannces.org

Michigan Coalition of Essential Schools
Regional Center
2545 Spring Arbor Road
Suite 104
Jackson, MI 49203

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