

Michigan

CES

Coalition of Essential Schools

www.michigances.org

# 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."*

## Collaborating For Students' Success Why is it important to Look at Student Work Collaboratively?

By Janett Bundy

"When teachers get together and apply their combined knowledge and experience to the challenges of teaching and learning, amazing things can happen!" (Allen & Blythe 2003)

Kate Nolan, Director of Re-Thinking Accountability for Annenberg Institute for School Reform captures a typical moment of a typical teacher working with a typical group of students:

"Suppose we could look into a teacher's brain and understand its swirling chemical language. We would witness a sophisticated procedure unfolding in the blink of an eye:

- Does Marie understand the connection between what she's saying and the lesson we just worked on?
- What does Jamal's brilliant grasp of these ideas mean given what I know his project will look like?
- How will we ever cover the whole textbook?
- Why is Kelly so blue today?
- Mikhail is working on an essay (it looks like it is going well). What will I challenge him with next?
- Is the public address system with its constant interruptions sidetracking anyone?
- Keira is ready for the next steps, but how can I help her?"

Sound familiar? As teachers we make difficult instructional decisions while we juggle informal data and questions with evidence about what students know and what must be taught. Think about the ways we are expected to navigate quickly and effectively through the changing tides of our classrooms. Since student work is the real window into our classrooms, let's think of collaboratively looking at student work as the anchor needed on a regular basis.

Undoubtedly most teachers identify with the above scenario. Historically teaching has been an isolated profession. School structures encouraged teachers to spend almost all of their time alone in their classrooms with their students. New practices in peer observation and teacher study groups are working to break down isolation, to build a professional learning community and to encourage collaboration.

The collaborative, public examination of student work by teachers, administrators, parents, and community members offers a useful tool for improving teacher practice, and thereby, student achievement. This process enables participants to share and reflect on ways to develop new, improved classroom practices and environments that support learning while encouraging common expectations for student achievement.

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## Featured ...

*Special reports from our  
continuing partner schools*

## School Affirmations

*Hunt Elementary School*

*McCulloch Elementary*

*Covert Middle and High School*

*Union City High School*

The MCES Collaborating for Students' Success (CSS) program aligns with the Critical Friends Group (CFG) program developed and researched by the National School Reform Faculty (NSRF). Formed in 1995 by the Annenberg Institute for School Reform at Brown University, NSRF has established twenty-eight Centers of Activity and trained more than 10,000 coaches in facilitative leadership to establish collaborative, reflective cultures in schools and districts. The protocols, trainings, coaching, and establishment of CSS (CFG) groups offers a systematic and sustainable approach to school reform. We feel strongly about the benefits of this program and "its ideas and practices that rely not on changing school structures or variables, but on drawing out the developing educators' unused talents and latent abilities." (Phi Lambda Theta, Educational Horizons 2005)

MCES is training its sixth cohort of principals and CSS Coaches (staff-selected teacher leaders who model facilitative leadership assisting teachers' study groups) to collaboratively and reflectively look at student work as a means of improving teaching and learning.

The research indicates that as a result of participating in teacher study groups such as Critical Friends Groups or Collaborating for Students' Success CSS (CFG) Groups, teachers are more thoughtful about connecting curriculum, assessment, and instruction. Classrooms move from being teacher-centered toward student-centered thus creating higher expectations for student learning!

Why Look at Student Work Collaboratively? Student work is at the center of what we do and shows us how students are thinking, the extent of their factual knowledge, and the connections they are making, while driving us to make data-driven decisions with built in accountability for our results.

Teachers learn more about best practices, standards of instruction, standards of assessment, and perhaps most importantly, making better sense in navigating through these changing tides and in answering the questions we have about the, Kellys, Maries, Mikhails, Keriras and Jamals in our own classrooms. Please contact MCES at 517-780-9814 or miller@michiganances.org for CSS professional development at your school site.

## High Schools Redesign with Breaking Ranks II

Michigan CES is partnering with three high schools to investigate and implement 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. West Bloomfield Laker Academy and Ann Arbor Huron and Pioneer High Schools are engaged in 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. For more information about these services, please call Karen Miller at 517-780-9814 or email, miller@michiganances.org.

*The Michigan Coalition of Essential Schools, a regional center for the Coalition of Essential Schools, facilitates school change.*

*Our mission is 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. Our approach is constructive, collaborative, reflective, and driven by inquiry.*

# NATIONAL EXHIBITION MONTH

The month of May has been designated "National Exhibition Month" by the Coalition of Essential Schools. Throughout Michigan and across the country, schools are showcasing student work and school achievements and encouraging exhibitions as a preferred form of student assessment. For additional information, visit [www.essentialschools.org](http://www.essentialschools.org).

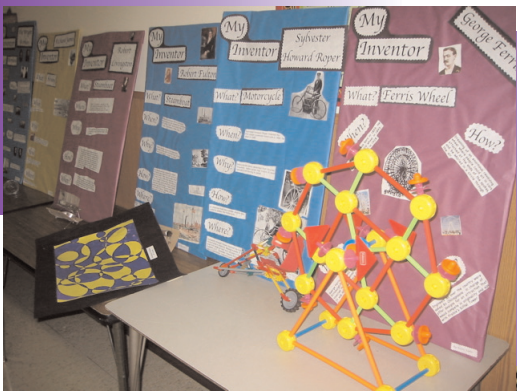


## STARS Exhibition of Student Work

Union City Middle School students and staff held their second annual exhibition of student work to celebrate and showcase the quality work and best practice of UCMS staff and "STARS" (Striving Together to Reach the Stars). The exhibit included a science fair by the 7th and 8th graders; 6th grade projects and activities based around a Central America theme; and a 5th grade Michigan theme exhibit.



As an affirmed Coalition of Essential Schools school, UCMS serves as a model site for other state and national schools participating in Comprehensive School Reform. The exhibit provided an opportunity for the school to demonstrate that it is committed to a shared set of beliefs and practices that focus on students using their minds well in a needs satisfying environment. The exhibit allowed students to present projects that demonstrate their personal learning styles to an audience beyond the school.



## Vanderbilt Area Schools Where All Students Can Shine!

Vanderbilt students and staff held their second annual exhibition of student work on April 19th. Students presented projects that demonstrated their personal learning styles. Vanderbilt is an affirmed Coalition of Essential Schools school.



*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.*

## MIDDLE START

### Emphasis on the Middle

By Nancy Fenton

It seems appropriate to take a look at the National Forum to Accelerate Middle Grades Reform since the Coalition is represented on the Board of this unique alliance. The Forum is composed of both organizations and individuals whose sole purpose is to improve the education of all young adolescents. Since 1997 the Forum has been committed to improving school and classroom practice; educating federal, state, and local policy makers; and building public support for middle-grades reform.

The Forum vision describes the criteria of high-performing middle schools. Such schools are first academically excellent. They promote a curriculum which stresses higher order thinking and is relevant and engaging to students. Second, the instruction in high-performing middle schools is varied and adaptive to the unique abilities and interests of middle level students. Third, these schools ensure that all students have access to quality information and support to achieve at high levels. Finally, effective middle schools have organizational structures and processes that support the growth of students and staff improvement. Using such criteria, parents and policy makers can more easily assess the quality of their middle schools and push a stance of advocacy.

The Forum has inaugurated the Schools to Watch (STW) Program which bases its selection on these rigorous criteria. Currently there are thirteen Schools to Watch states and over 60 schools which have earned the STW designation. These schools serve as models and willingly share their expertise. Michigan, in its first year, is in the process of visiting and selecting schools for this honor. These schools will be announced in late May.

Educators who share an interest in middle level education can support the Forum and its work by attending the Schools to Watch Annual Conference in Washington, DC from June 22-24. Middle school guru, Dr. Paul George, will be keynoting along with Joe Fab, an award winning producer and writer, whose most recent work was the feature documentary "Paper Clips." STW schools will share the programs that have made them successful.

### **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.*

## LEADERSHIP INSTITUTE

Michigan CES Leadership Institute was held March 6, 2006 at the Kellogg Center in East Lansing. 15 schools attended the all-day session with a two-fold focus: Continuing MCES partner schools prepared for the affirmation process and new schools assessed the progress of CSR within their schools through the Cycle of Inquiry.



# SCHOOL HIGHLIGHTS

## Albion High School

Challenging, intimidating, scary, hopeful, meaningful, different, good stuff, too much work-too little time; "You mean I can GO to an offsite PD this year!" "Why didn't we get to pick our PD's at school?" "Wow, I'm beginning to see changes toward a learning community." "Haven't we done this before?"

Emotions, comments and perceptions have been high, and very low, then high again. Opinions and optimism have swung like a pendulum. Albion High School is closing in on the end of our first year in CES and one thing is abundantly clear to staff and leadership team...we have a LONG way to go, but we've done a LOT of good things to pave the way for reform. Some of the ideas we've discussed are "old," but presented in a new framework, they make so much sense. And maybe they always did, but we just forgot to implement them.

We've identified what we want our graduates to be, we've developed norms for our meetings, we've discussed what we, as staff, need to be doing to move our students toward success. Really good professional discussion is occurring. We share techniques, ideas, plans and are helping each other as we move in a common direction. We have a LONG way to go, but we've taken the first steps and we are using a map to get where we want to go! Reform isn't easy and it isn't always fun, but the results are worth the struggle.

## Green Meadow Elementary

The Parents and Teachers for Students (PATS) group at Comstock Green Meadow Elementary was at a crossroads. The same small core group of people were attending the meetings and helping at the sponsored events. At their December meeting there was talk of spending all of their remaining money and disbanding. As soon as the teachers heard of this, the buzz started in the teacher's lounge. How can we help? What can we do to get more parents interested? We decided to sponsor a free dinner at the next PATS meeting. We all signed up to bring food and serve on various committees. The student government even pitched in to help. What a fabulous night it was! Over a hundred families came to eat together and stay for the meeting.

PATS is now using a classroom attendance challenge to boost membership. The class with the highest attendance over the next 4 months will win a family night at Borgess Fitness Center for pizza and pool party. Both the teachers and PATS are excited about the interest now being shown for the Parent Group. Hopefully the interest and commitment will carry over to next year.

## Comstock Alternative Ed High School

Comstock Alternative High School is working diligently through the CSR/CES process. Our Action Plan is complete, and we have begun the task of putting things in place. Our staff feels a need for Differentiated Instruction PD, and we are considering options for that over the summer.

Both the leadership team and the CSS team are comprised of the same members in our building because we have only nine staff members. Everyone has a lot to do, but we are fortunate to have been together for more than five years. This has allowed us to move along at a nice pace.

We hope to move toward a teacher-to-teacher feedback model, not unlike those discussed in recent Horace articles, yet this year. We think that a system of feedback, coupled with Differentiated Instruction PD, will significantly improve building-wide instruction and encourage more collaboration, Integrated Instruction and ultimately, Team Teaching.

### *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.*

## SCHOOL HIGHLIGHTS

### Inkster High School

Jim Bodrie and Patricia MacArthur have been very instrumental in the implementation of CES here at Inkster High School. Both have taught us a great deal about CES - through text based discussions and by providing different protocols and strategies for getting this information to our colleagues.

Collaborating for Student Success (CSS) is a great program to enhance student achievement. The concept of collaborating to examine students' work is a great way for teachers to be on the same page, as well as for all teachers to recognize their students' strengths and weaknesses.

This has been wonderful, but intense so far. It's been a growing experience. The kick-off session, which was held in Lansing, was just the beginning. It was nice to see all of the schools coming together for a common purpose - student achievement.

### Union City Elementary School

Did you say, year four and separation anxiety? You bet! Early in year one, our reform coach, Patricia MacArthur, kept saying, "My job is to work myself out of a job!" We wondered, what was that all about? Soon enough year three was in progress, and year four was a topic of discussion well before the culminating affirmation visit took place. We are pleased to report that "sustainability of the work beyond the grant" is apparent. Three key factors contributed to our sustainability.

Principal, Lori Vaccaro, continues to promote existing "best practices" while helping us move forward with new initiatives. Recently, we were awarded a Reading First Grant. The literacy coach has been able to build on the goals of CES by incorporating much of the work done previously by our staff. The focus around the Priority Principles helped us down a path for continuous growth.

Secondly, our school climate has genuinely prospered through the efforts of our Leadership Team and staff to establish a professional learning community. We maintain outcomes, and create action plans that function within the 10 Common Principles.

A third factor is the role that data now plays in decisions we are making around instruction. Our CSS teams continue to meet monthly. Valuable information is gained by looking at student work using appropriate protocols to frame our discussions. Grade levels meet regularly to establish SMART goals based on data being collected. The Cycle of Inquiry is our lens. We use it to see where we've been, where we are, and where we plan to arrive. Our reform coach remains as our "guide," helping us make sure to ask the hard questions and reflect upon them. We regularly collaborate to smoothly transition our CES knowledge into the federally funded Reading First Grant and all it encompasses.

### *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.*

## 2006 AFFIRMATIONS

### Affirmations Awarded

By Shug Brandell

The Michigan Coalition of Essential Schools recently honored the following schools as officially "Affirmed Schools":

- ♦ Hunt Elementary (Jackson Public Schools)
- ♦ McCulloch Elementary (Jackson Public Schools)
- ♦ Covert Middle and High School (Covert Public Schools)
- ♦ Union City High School (Union City Community Schools)

This award culminates a three-year school improvement process facilitated by the Michigan Coalition of Essential Schools, the regional center for the national Coalition of Essential Schools (CES).

Schools demonstrated significant progress toward their goal of increasing student academic performance. A team of educators from across the state visited the school, observed the students' academic activities and projects, and interviewed staff, students, parents, and community members. Displays of student work provided the cornerstone of community celebrations of students exhibiting mastery of academic content. Classrooms were visited to observe the increase of instructional "best practice" and improved student performance. Each of these schools joins a growing network of schools in Michigan who have met the criteria for the Affirmation Award as evidenced by raised student achievement by personalizing teaching and learning, emphasizing intellectual rigor, and promoting equity in achievement across student populations.

These schools will now serve as a model site for other state and national schools participating in Comprehensive School Reform efforts. Congratulations and continued success to all!

## MEAP and AYP UPDATE

### School-based PD Improves MEAP and AYP Results

Michigan CES provides professional development services to several schools that need to improve their AYP status. In many cases these schools receive special 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.

The services are customized for each school but follow the MCES Roadmap for Student Achievement that focuses on standards-driven curriculum and instruction and data-driven decision making. Educators deliberate on the vision of their school's graduate then examine the data to compare the current reality with the vision or desired outcome. This is the first step in the Cycle of Inquiry that relies on an inquiry-based approach for collaborative and reflective practice to improve instructional practice.

Schools develop professional learning communities that engage in the collection and analysis of student performance data, align their instructional practices and student assessments with the state standards and GLCEs, and examine their classroom practices or schoolwide practices. Each school has a different entry point and may have some elements of the Roadmap in place but need to strengthen and/or make more consistent their practices. With ongoing and focused professional learning and support, the schools demonstrate improvement in teaching and learning. For more information about these services, please call Karen Miller at 517-780-9814 or Email, [miller@michigances.org](mailto:miller@michigances.org).

### *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.*

# MICHIGAN COALITION OF ESSENTIAL SCHOOLS

## 2006-2007 CALENDAR

DATE	EVENT	LOCATION
June 19-21	CSS Cohort 6	Traverse City Holiday Inn
August 2-4, 2006	Leadership Institute	Traverse City Holiday Inn
October 24-25, 2006	CSS Cohort 6	Kellogg Center, East Lansing
November 2-4, 2006	CES National Fall Forum	Chicago Marriott
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

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