



# Smaller Learning Communities

## Essential News

### HIGH SCHOOLS REDESIGN WITH SLC

In October 2007 the U. S. Department of Education awarded the Michigan Smaller Learning Communities Consortium over \$6 million for a Smaller Learning Communities implementation grant. The Michigan Smaller Learning Communities Consortium includes Grand Rapids Creston High School, Grand Rapids Union High School, Marquette High School, Muskegon High School, Traverse City Central High School and Traverse West High School. Each school received approximately \$1 million for the five years of the grant.

The Smaller Learning Communities (SLC) grant provides the resources to create school environments that support student growth and achievement by creating small learning communities and a more personalized environment within the six participating high schools.

The Michigan SLC Consortium was formed by The Michigan Coalition of Essential Schools (MCES) in an effort to bring significant financial resources to these large Michigan high schools to create school environments that are conducive to student growth and achievement; increase the achievement of all students; and sustain smaller learning communities through ongoing professional development and full stakeholder participation.

The first of its kind in Michigan, the Smaller Learning Communities Consortium represents a collective commitment by these high schools to create successful, personalized learning environments for each and every student, resulting in increased achievement and success following graduation for all.

The Consortium schools, representing four diverse geographic areas within Michigan, unanimously agree that a collective and collaborative effort dramatically enhances the likelihood of success as opposed to individual efforts to im-

prove and reform. These schools share a commitment to improve student achievement for all students by personalizing the learning environment through creating smaller learning communities. According to national research, smaller learning communities within large high schools will result in improved academic performance, fewer discipline problems and reduced dropout rates.

Educators from each Consortium school come together with a shared vision of all students being engaged in relevant, intellectually vibrant pursuits of learning that will positively impact their communities as well as their futures. They have designed smaller learning communities that personalize the high school experience and create an environment in which teachers and other adults within the school know the needs, interests, and aspirations of each student well, monitor each student's progress, and provide the academic and other support each student needs to succeed. Each school receives extensive support from the Michigan Coalition of Essential Schools, which provides project management, technical assistance, and professional development.

Michigan State University's Department of K-12 Outreach and Educational Administration in the College of Education is extensively involved in the project by evaluating the implementation of the Michigan Smaller Learning Communities Consortium program. They collect, analyze, and report data related to the implementation of the Michigan SLC Consortium program and the impact of this program on student achievement.

The Consortium schools, along with the Michigan Coalition of Essential Schools and Michigan State University have made significant progress towards the goals of the grant, and will be presenting updates on the project to the State Board of Education and at State and National conferences.

## SIX MICHIGAN SCHOOLS BENEFIT FROM SLC

The Michigan Smaller Learning Communities Consortium represents a collective commitment by six Michigan high schools to create successful, personalized learning environments for each and every student, resulting in increased achievement and success following graduation for all. The Consortium of schools, from different geographic areas within Michigan, unanimously agrees that a collective and collaborative effort would dramatically enhance the likelihood of success as opposed to individual efforts to improve and reform. The consortium schools include Grand Rapids Creston High School, Grand Rapids Union High School, Marquette High School, Muskegon High School, Traverse City Central High School and Traverse City West High School.

Grand Rapids and Muskegon represent inner city high schools within highly populated urban cities located in the central portion of Lower Michigan. The Grand Rapids and Muskegon communities are supported by a business and industry economic base. The Traverse City schools are located in northern Lower Michigan within

one of the largest geographic districts in Lower Michigan. The Traverse City community is a popular tourist area as well as one of Michigan's primary agricultural areas. A large portion of the families are supported by service and agriculturally related jobs. Marquette High School is positioned in the northern portion of Michigan's Upper Peninsula. The Upper Peninsula is a remote, sparsely populated area and the Marquette Public School District is one of the largest geographically in Michigan. Per capita income in Grand Rapids and Muskegon is substantially below the national average with only Traverse City barely reaching the national average. All of the consortium schools have a significant number of economically disadvantaged students as well as ethnically diverse students.

The six high schools are rising to the challenges to address issues of disengaged students and the achievement gaps related to gender, income, special needs or race. By wrapping the school community tightly around 9th and 10th graders, the Consortium schools expect to "unwrap" 11th

and 12th graders in ways that engage students in real-life learning experiences in their communities.

Interdisciplinary & data driven core teaching teams will be assigned smaller units of common students and have common planning time. Teams will align instruction with state standards and the MME (Michigan Merit Exam) and ACT, identify essential learnings, develop common assessments, integrate career pathways and interdisciplinary instruction, and look at student work and other data to make teaching and learning decisions. Teams will assist students in developing student exhibitions. By 2012, all students will be randomly placed and included in an academic SLC resulting in acceptable, equitable achievement and success following graduation for all students.

The members of the Consortium have set forth a plan to accomplish the SLC Grant Absolute Priority by implementing a coherent set of strategies and interventions aligned and driven by Breaking Ranks II and the NWREL Guide to Small Learning Communities.

The Michigan Coalition of Essential Schools (MCES) is part of the national network of Coalition of Essential (CES) schools and centers engaged in restructuring and redesigning school organization and curriculum to promote better student learning and achievement.

The CES mission is focused on classroom practice, the simple authenticity of its Principles, and its determination to measure the long-term impact of school reform on the lives of students.

The work of MCES is to help educators, parents, students, and other stakeholders in developing students' ability to use their minds well. Rigorous academic standards and high expectations for all students are at the core of this effort. MCES has served as the school change partner in over 50 schools across the state.



Shug Brandell, Director, MCES  
Jim Bodrie, SLC Project Director  
Michigan Coalition of Essential Schools  
400 Jackson Street, Suite #2  
Jackson, Michigan 49201 (269)-317-9664  
brandell@michiganaces.org