

MICHIGAN COALITION OF ESSENTIAL SCHOOLS

2005 CALENDAR

DATE	EVENT	LOCATION
June 20, 2005	CSS Cohort 5	Traverse City Holiday Inn
June 21, 2005	CSS Cohort 5	Traverse City Holiday Inn
August 3, 2005	Leadership New Schools	Traverse City Holiday Inn
August 4, 2005	Leadership New Schools	Traverse City Holiday Inn
August 5, 2005	Leadership New Schools	Traverse City Holiday Inn

Michigan Coalition of Essential Schools
 Shug Brandell - Co-Director
 Nancy Fenton - Co-Director
 Janet Bundy - Associate Director
 Karen Miller - Program Administrator
 Teresa Walters - Accounting Manager
 Phone: 517-780-9814
 Fax: 517-780-4079
 miller@michigancess.org

PRESORTED
 STANDARD
 U.S. POSTAGE PAID
 BATTLE CREEK, MI
 PERMIT NO. 1521

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



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."

In This Issue...

"Rethinking High School"	Pages 1, 2 & 7
Hot Topic!	Page 3
A Look to the Future	Page 4 -5
2005 Affirmations	Page 6
ESR Training	Page 7
MCES Calendar	Page 8



Affirmations Awarded
 Page 6

Spring 2005

ESSENTIAL NEWS

Rethinking High School

By Jim Bodrie

We are, perhaps, at another crest of one of the continuing waves of education reform that impacts our schools across the country. The number of reports, conferences, articles, and proposals is sometimes overwhelming. Educators are addressing important issues. Many go well beyond being simply fundamental and suggest that extreme, even radical, changes need to take place.

We know that our society has changed and that the population has grown dramatically in the past 30 years. However, our high schools have changed relatively little except to grow in size and enrollment. Statistics indicate that in the last 50 years there are five times as many students, but not five times as many schools. This has created large, impersonal institutions that too often fall short of meeting the needs of too many students.

Furthermore, the expectation for "basic" skills does not have nearly the same meaning now as it did then. Too many students are not prepared to function successfully in the world beyond high school, whether that is a job or continuing education. Many employers are quick to point out the gap between their needs and graduates' skills. Also, colleges and universities report large numbers of incoming freshmen require some sort of remediation.

Educators become frustrated by the endless critiquing and criticizing of their hard work done each and everyday. However, even the most vocal critic of today's schools would have to admit that our students face far different challenges than students of the past. Issues such as dealing with parents divorcing, poverty, teen alcohol and drug use, greater instances of bullying from peers, gangs, violence and new standards for graduation, leave today's students with challenges well beyond just getting their homework done for the next day.

We cannot expect students to succeed without developing a philosophy and structure to support it that addresses these formidable issues with which these students must deal. An ever increasing number of students are carrying emotional baggage with them each day, and focusing on academic pursuits and excellence has become secondary for far too many young people. In response, there are some very exciting and promising initiatives taking place.

The recent release nationally of "Breaking Ranks II" heads the list of inspiring possibilities for our high schools. As described in the Executive Summary from Brown University, "Breaking Ranks II" outlines the need for current high schools to engage in the process of change that will ensure success for every high school student. Its first set of recommendations and tools focuses on the development of professional learning community, where leadership throughout the institution refocuses its work on what will support students in their high school experience.

continued - page 2

"HIGH SCHOOL" (continued from page 1)

The second set of recommendations and tools focuses on the need to provide every student with meaningful adult relationships. The third set of recommendations and tools focuses on the development of personalized learning, where students see their learning as meaningful and relevant, as well as rigorous and challenging, ensuring their success both within and beyond high school.

At our state level, a group of educators and state department staff have been meeting since October 2003 to discuss the reform of high school education in Michigan. They conducted studies and discussed their findings and recommendations with educators from K-12 and higher education, as well as business leaders. A clear message from this effort is that reform is urgently needed.

Four general areas of reform were uncovered and identified as essential. They are as follows:

- Rigor in the high school experience;
- Relevance of high school academic study with respect to students and the economically competitive world in which they live;
- Relationships necessary to foster academic success;
- Rethinking of the structures and functions of high school as currently designed.

Each of these areas includes more specific recommendations to achieve what this distinguished High School Reform Team calls the "4R's".

The Michigan Coalition of Essential Schools enthusiastically endorses the work of "Breaking Ranks II" and the Michigan Department of Education High School Reform Team. In response to these exciting and promising recommendations, MCES is prepared to support the efforts of high schools across the State of Michigan who are pursuing school improvement.

MCES staff and coaches have drafted a plan that incorporates the recommendations mentioned previously with the standards and benchmarks associated with the Ten Common Principles. In preparing this plan, it was apparent to all involved that both initiatives were very compatible with the Coalition Principles. In fact, in the majority of instances, the alignment is striking, especially concerning the following four "priority principles":

Principle 1 - The school should focus on helping students to use their minds well.

Create school-wide habits of mind with a culture of high expectations for all students and a standards-based curriculum framed around essential questions.

Principle 4 - Teaching and learning should be personalized to the maximum feasible extent.

Students must be known well by the adults that teach them.

Principle 7 - The tone of the school should stress values of trust, decency and high expectations coupled with support.

Unanxious expectation (I won't threaten you, but I expect much of you), trust (until abused) and decency (the values of fairness, generosity and tolerance) pervade the school structure and culture.

Principle 10 - The school should model democratic practices, honor diversity, build upon the strengths of its community and explicitly challenge inequity.

The school should demonstrate non-discriminatory and inclusive policies, practices and pedagogies. It should practice democracy with regard to all who are directly affected by the school. The school should honor diversity and build upon the strengths of its communities.

continued - page 7

MCES TRAINING

MCES Partners With From Educators For Social Responsibility

by Janett Bundy

MCES sponsored a two day institute on March 21 & 22, 2005 hosting facilitators from Educators for Social Responsibility. ESR is a non profit school reform organization out of Cambridge, MA. The elementary session titled "Achieving Tone of Decency and Honoring Diversity," facilitated by ESR consultants, Jane Harrison and Ken Breeding, explored ideas, tools, and strategies for school-wide and classroom practices that support social emotional learning and conflict resolution education. As one participant reflected: "After these two days we have more great ideas to help us strengthen our Bully Proof program at our school."

The secondary session titled "Partners in Learning: Personalizing Classroom Practice," was presented by Carol Miller Lieber, senior consultant with ESR. The sessions stressed the importance of strengthening relationships, implementing practices, routines, and rituals in the classroom that personalize teaching and learning, and building high performing and supportive community of learners. Participants developed a toolbox and plans for co-creating classrooms that promote health development and academic achievement.

MCES is honored to be associated with ESR as the work aligns and compliments the CES 10 Common Principles and strengthens the reform efforts for our network schools in creating learning environments that every student deserves!

"HIGH SCHOOL" (continued from page 2)

By using these four principles and the benchmarks for each, a school can effectively address the significant issues of "rigor", "relationships" and "relevance" as it pertains to school improvement.

In order to realize the full potential of these principles, MCES recognizes that an efficient, effective process must be in place along with a supportive climate and culture. This is accomplished by establishing a "professional learning community" to promote collaboration and reflection, as well as instilling procedures within the school - a "data-driven decision making process called the "Cycle of Inquiry".

The goal for schools is to continually study and improve their systems and structures, their climate and culture, their curriculum, instruction and assessment, and their family, business, and community connections to meet the diverse needs of all students. "Breaking Ranks II," the Michigan High School Reform Team and the Coalition of Essential Schools provides an exciting vision and a means for us to achieve lasting school improvement.

"MCES is prepared to support the efforts of high schools across the State of Michigan who are pursuing school improvement."

"MCES is honored to be associated with ESR as the work aligns and compliments the CES 10 Common Principles and strengthens the reform efforts for our network schools in creating learning environments that every student deserves!"

2005 AFFIRMATIONS

Affirmations Awarded

By Shug Brandell

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

- Covert Elementary (Covert Public Schools)
- Elbridge Elementary (Hart Public Schools)
- Grayling High School (Crawford AuSable Schools)
- Gull Road Elementary (Comstock Public Schools)
- Hesperia High School (Hesperia Community Schools)
- Northeast Elementary (Jackson Public Schools)
- Spittler Elementary (Hart Public Schools)
- Union City Elementary (Union City Community Schools)
- Union City Middle School (Union City Community Schools)
- Vanderbilt Area School

This award culminated 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).

To earn the CES Affirmed School Award, these 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. 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.

They began the process of affirmation through a three-year Comprehensive School Reform Demonstration grant awarded in 2002 that provided school staff with professional development and other opportunities to learn from other schools involved in improving student learning. 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!



Union City Middle School Affirmation Team



Union City Elementary School Affirmation Team

“The Michigan Coalition of Essential Schools recently honored ten schools as officially ‘Affirmed Schools’”

HOT TOPIC

Creating Student-Centered Schools

By Jim Bodrie



The underlying problem in the schools is that many students are disengaged from learning, in large part, because of what they're taught and how they are taught. The essential ingredient in good schools is teachers who are sensitive to students' needs and differences, and able to inspire intellectual curiosity.

Successful teachers and schools "teach the child, not the subject." Instead of trying to agree on a one-size-fits-all curriculum, schools should teach what students will not soon forget: problem-solving skills and critical thinking -- in other words, how to think.

- Teachers should use innovative methods to teach analytic skills and encourage creativity. History, for example, is best taught by examining the different ways in which events can be viewed and interpreted. English is best taught by stressing creative writing and personal expression first, and then later teaching kids correct spelling and grammar;
- Students working at different levels should be grouped together to teach social skills and an appreciation for personal differences;
- Student progress should be assessed through teacher observations and portfolios of student work rather than simply by traditional tests, letter grades and report cards;
- Students are more likely to learn when lessons are taught thematically, rather than approaching learning through traditional subject areas;
- Teaching should be based primarily on discussion, not lectures, and on learning by discovery rather than rote memorization and repetition.

2004-2005 (continued from page 4)

MCES is continuing to research high school design elements that support the MCES principles and mission and vision. A team of MCES staff and consultants has been meeting regularly to explore various aspects of high school reform and what constitutes a successful high school. The team attended the MDE and MSU state level conference in March and made a presentation to one of the sub-committees reporting to the MDE High School Redesign Task Force.

Recent trainings for CSR schools have gone well with more than 160 educators from our 15 schools participating. Goal-oriented Parent Involvement was the theme for the CSR Leadership Team Institute on December 8 in Grand Rapids. Two key members of Joyce Epstein's staff from Johns Hopkins' National Network for Partnership Schools trained school leaders and parents in the research-based strategies developed to engage parents in ways to improve academic outcomes.

MCES provided four days of training on Looking at Student Work through Wayne RESA. Participants were from the Detroit Public Schools CEO Initiative and included school improvement coaches, administrators and teachers from the CEO schools. These schools were identified by DPS CEO, Ken Burnley, as high-priority schools and were assigned school reform coaches to work with them to improve student performance.

Spring Forum was May 9 at the McCamly Hotel in Battle Creek. This was a great opportunity for schools to share lessons learned and to "tune" works in progress. A panel of educators and students provided additional insights as to changes in their schools that resulted from MCES partnerships.

“Successful teachers and schools "teach the child, not the subject."...schools should teach what students will not soon forget: problem-solving skills and critical thinking.”

MCES UPDATE

MCES 2004-2005

By Shug Brandell

MCES partnered with 13 schools to submit CSR grants for funding for 2005-2006. These schools represent a wide range of diverse populations and grade levels: all four schools in Albion, Inkster High School, Standish-Sterling High School, Comstock Alternative High School, charter schools - Hope of Detroit Academy (Detroit) and George Washington Carver Academy (Highland Park), and elementary schools - Sturgis Wenzel, Benton Harbor Morton., Muskegon Marquette, and Comstock Green Meadow. More than \$6 million will be awarded to about 60 schools. 83% of the funds will be allocated to schools with high poverty populations not making AYP, and the remaining funds will go to high poverty schools that are performing satisfactorily. We were pleased that four high schools and two charter schools applied. Our increased visibility through the success of our CSR partner schools and through a variety of networking opportunities increased the number of schools that sought MCES assistance.

The current work is going well in four Title 1 schools: Lincoln Consolidated Brick and Redner, Kalamazoo Parkwood-Upjohn, and Albion Washington Gardner Middle School, and we will be able to use them as positive examples.

A Hurst Foundation Grant for \$10,000 was a nice Christmas gift to fund expansion and extension of Real Reading in the Middle to include grades 4-12 and to develop a stronger writing component.

New executive director for CES National, Lewis Cohen, visited MCES with stops in Union City and Covert. He was very impressed with the quality of the teaching and learning he observed. His purpose for visiting MCES and other centers across the country was to find out what educators need from CES National. His leadership style is very inclusive and responsive to the needs of centers and schools. The Center Directors' meeting took place in early February, and a plan for action with clearly defined roles and responsibilities was accomplished. All of the directors there realize that any goals we have as a collective will only be accomplished by our mutual effort as equal partners with one another and CES National.



Lewis Cohen's visit to Covert Public Schools



continued - page 5

JACKSON NORTHEAST

Northeast Students, Staff, and Parents Show "Wave" of Compassion

By Sandy Wheaton and Amy Hoaglin

In the month of January 2005, the students, parents, and staff at Northeast Elementary in Jackson, Michigan began a school wide fundraiser to help aid the victims of the Tsunami disaster in Southeast Asia. A discussion was generated by the fifth grade students, concerning the events that occurred on December 26, 2004 in Southeast Asia.

The students brainstormed ideas for aiding the victims of the tragedy. They decided to start a fundraiser that would involve the entire school community. The goal established by the students was two hundred and fifty dollars.

The students constructed posters and canisters to place in each classroom where students could contribute change. The effort was named "Give Change to Help Change". Nathan Benn submitted the name. The fifth grade students also made presentations to the younger students in the school. This project was beneficial for the fifth graders to give oral presentations as well as educational to the younger grades. The posters were displayed throughout the building to encourage the students. All the money collected was to be counted in the first week of February. During this week, another important fund raising effort took place.

On the evening of February 4, 2005, the Northeast community gathered for an evening of giving. A spaghetti dinner/dance was held in the cafeteria and gymnasium at Northeast. Families gathered to have a good time and help a worthy cause. Staff, parents, and students volunteered in this effort and many area businesses helped with generous donations of prizes and certificates.

The final amount collected to donate to the American Red Cross in their relief efforts for the Tsunami Victims was \$3005.45. An assembly was held to give the American Red Cross a check and to also celebrate the hard work and generous spirit of students, families and staff at Northeast.

In addition to serving a worthy cause, a valuable lesson was learned. The students' efforts worked to promote the common good, which is on target with Jackson Public School's Core Democratic Values. The community of Northeast learners has gained a lesson in respecting others and reaching out to aid the world's needs.



"A team of staff and consultants has been meeting regularly to explore various aspects of high school reform and what constitutes a successful high school, including public and Alternative schools."