Developing leadership and unity within our membership to achieve continuous improvement in public education.

Student Engagement
Building a Bridge to the Future
Real retirement solutions begin here

Rediscover the definition of personal service with a dedicated client service team from VALIC.

- The service and attention you deserve, regardless of plan size
- Compliance solutions to fit any institution and any budget
- VALIC at your side as your business partner

SAVING : INVESTING : PLANNING

Committed to educators

Securities and investment advisory services are offered by VALIC Financial Advisors, Inc., member FINRA, SIPC and an SEC-registered investment advisor.

VALIC represents The Variable Annuity Life Insurance Company and its subsidiaries, VALIC Financial Advisors, Inc. and VALIC Retirement Services Company.

Copyright © The Variable Annuity Life Insurance Company. All rights reserved.
VC 23071 (03/2010) .77407 ER

CALL
1.877.754.1113

CLICK
VALIC.com
There’s a reason Michigan schools choose

Financial Stability
Specialized Coverage
Superior Customer Service
Published For
Michigan Association of School Administrators
1001 Centennial Way, Suite 300
Lansing, MI 48917-9279
Ph. (517) 327-5910
www.gomasa.org

Editors
Linda Wacyk
Philip Marrah
Mitch Smith

Coming next print issue:
Systemic Reform

Contribute to the MASA Leader
Do you have news or information to share with members that’s interesting, useful, or just plain fun? The staff of the MASA Leader invites you to contribute. Please contact Linda Wacyk at (517) 327-9268.

Published By
Apogee Publications
6528 Greenleaf Avenue, Suite 219
Whittier, CA 90601
(562) 698-3424

Sales Manager
Kathleen Pishotta
(888) 371-4933
Sales Representatives
Kristin Craig
Joan Patterson
Dejah Reno
Art Director
Traci Graber

DISCLAIMER: The author(s) listed for each article is solely responsible for the content of items submitted. The information and opinions do not necessarily represent the views or opinions of the directors, officers, editors or staff members of MASA. Further, the directors, officers, editors or staff members of MASA assume no responsibility nor accept liability for the content of any article printed in the MASA Leader magazine or in the MASA Leader posted on the MASA website (except for those they author) nor any errors or omissions in submitted materials that may apply. All rights reserved. Please contact MASA for permission to reprint or distribute information in this issue.
PUBLISHED December 2013

Features
10 The Real Truth About Motivating Excellence
12 From the Mouths of Babes: Using Student Voice to Improve Instruction
14 Getting Serious About Drug and Alcohol Use by Teens…SRSLY
17 Empowering Perceptions: Engaging Student Voice
19 Student Voice Rises in Consolidation of Districts
22 Engaging Students in Meaningful Roles to Support School Reform
24 Leaving Our Legacy
25 Engage Students and Watch Them THRIVE!
27 Building a Culture of Student Engagement

Departments
7 Say Hey, Let’s Talk
8 Thinking Together
30 Index to Advertisers
You asked and we listened...

Experience, knowledge and savings brought to you by PESG affiliate companies.

EDUCATIONAL SERVICE SOLUTIONS, LLC

Full time custodial, skilled trades and security employees.

COACHEZ by PESG

Independent contractor coaches provided based upon MHSAA guidelines.

StaffEZ

Short term contracts for specialized classifications such as Schedule B, i.e.: drama, play, debate, year book and class sponsors.

ESR

EDUCATIONAL STAFFING RESOURCES

Full time clerical, administrative support, non-instructional classroom aides and child care employees.

For more information please contact us at 866-782-7277

PESG

EDUCATIONAL STAFFING SOLUTIONS

EAST MICHIGAN
6451 E Atherton Road
Burton, MI 48519

WEST MICHIGAN
6397 84th Street
Caledonia, MI 49316

TENNESSEE
402 I-24 Drive, Suite 202
Nashville, TN 37217
855-74-STAFF
Today's Lesson: Healthy Students are Better Students

Healthy Eating + Physical Activity = Improved Academic Performance

Students who eat breakfast have better attention and memory.

Good job!

Only 38% of all teens eat breakfast every day.

Needs improvement

After just 20 minutes of physical activity, brain activity improves.

Only 25% of high school students are active for the recommended 60 minutes each day.

What is the right answer?

Schools: Kids spend 2000 hours every year in school, which makes that the smart place to encourage kids to eat right and get moving.

Wellness Programs: Programs like Fuel Up to Play 60 empower students to take actions like starting breakfast programs and walking clubs. Community leaders, businesspeople and health professionals can also assist schools in providing opportunities.

Extra credit:

Read The Wellness Impact: Enhancing Academic Success Through Healthy School Environments at NationalDairyCouncil.org

Learn more about how Fuel Up To Play 60 is helping schools to take action at FuelUpToPlay60.com

Brought to you by: United Dairy Industry of Michigan
Students Want a Say in Their Education: Are We Listening?

By William Mayes, MASA Executive Director

Since April 2013, the MASA staff and Executive Board have engaged 25 superintendents in a very challenging process planning for systemic school reform. The Systemic School Reform Committee (SSRC) comprises superintendents from every demographic in the state: rural, urban, suburban, rich, poor, black, white, upper peninsula, lower peninsula, male, female, young, and seasoned.

The discussions have been rich and in-depth. Every aspect of education has been explored, dissected and challenged. I have never seen more fervor or passion for a work than I have during this project. It has been amazing.

The committee knows that it will be necessary to bring other educational groups in on the discussion to create the necessary mass of support to promote the changes recommended. That part of the process has started. Discussions have taken place with other educational leaders and the Michigan Department of Education.

But one night, at 3:30 a.m., a question hit me with a vengeance: What will Michigan’s children think of our ideas?

Have we considered their thoughts, wants, and needs? Should we talk with them? Should they be part of any reform discussions?

Just as older, more seasoned superintendents can learn from the new generation of leaders just coming on the scene, we can all learn from the new generation of “technology natives” that are attending our many schools. These young men and women are our clients and deserve to be heard. Are we listening?

How often do we engage in discussions with students about what they feel they need from the schools they attend? What about asking our graduates about whether or not their K-12 experience was helpful in college, or the work place. What did we do that was exceptional? What did we do that wasted their time?

We can learn a great deal from our clients. When we stay at a hotel we are surveyed on the quality of the facility and our stay. When we fly we are surveyed on the quality of the plane and courtesy of the flight attendants. Restaurants inquire about the food and the service. Why don’t we do the same?

Today’s students are far more sophisticated and up on things than I was as a high school student. Their world forces them to be. We need to tap into their feelings and knowledge. We need to know what they think of this educational world we put them through.

I’ll bet if we ask, they will share a wealth of information. We are never too old to learn…even from the ones we are teaching.

Be sure to visit www.gomas.org for more content related to this issue’s theme of Student Engagement. Point to “Communications” and choose “Leader Magazine” from the drop-down menu.
Engaging learners is the very core of what we must do as educators. At times, engaging learners involves the important component of creating interesting and engaging lessons for our students. But there is more. Engaging learners also means that we as educators are fully engaged and interacting with all of our constituents with whom we come in contact.

Engaging is about listening, responding, inquiring, and validating as appropriate. I have always valued the old adage that “God gave us two ears and one mouth for a reason, as he wants us to listen twice as much as we talk.”

This issue of the MASA Leader relates to student engagement on many levels. As we are in the midst of our Systemic School Reform Committee (SSRC) process, I hope to help tie the Committee’s work to discussions about the ways we might enhance student engagement with their learning.

Several years ago, the Lead Forward plan developed by the MASA Council described our vision for public education. It also drew attention to some of the barriers to educational excellence. Those thoughts have guided and supported many important improvements in schools, both locally and as a state.

Building on Lead Forward, the SSRC has reaffirmed many of the core ideas. Two recommendations presented during the Fall Conference by Committee facilitator, Karen McPhee, outlined our aim to define a high-quality Michigan education that would be the right of all students, regardless of where they live. While we recognize that district programming will vary, depending on many factors, the Committee believes that without a base standard, some students are deprived of what they need to excel.

A second recommendation is to assure all students access to engaging learning models and college coursework. Again this will look somewhat different around the state; but there will be more similarities than differences, because there are far more similarities in kids than there are differences.

The SSRC is looking at the deeper structures that sustain public education to determine if they are in the best interest of students in the 21st century. These structures served the needs of students in the industrial economy rather well, helping make Michigan the envy of the world. Now deep into a global, knowledge-based economy, we have to ask if our current systems create the types of learning opportunities that Michigan’s 1.6 million students need.

The Committee is looking at barriers that complicate the job of ensuring that all students have the knowledge, skills, and character to be good citizens, effective employees, and positive contributors to society. Some of the barriers involve funding—particularly, inadequate funding for students who struggle with learning due to the effects of poverty. Other barriers relate to limited opportunities for students in some counties based on whether or not ISD-based millages are adequate.

Our conversations are as complicated as is our system. We are learning from each other and seeing the great things to be preserved as well as the areas that need to improve. I am proud of the work we have done so far and am optimistic that MASA is positioning itself well to lead the conversation about education in our state for many years to come.
You can feel good about choosing PHP as your health plan. We're locally based with an extensive physician network. In fact, mid-Michigan physicians prefer PHP over other plans. PHP members are more likely to recommend us to friends and family too. So make the educated choice.

Choose PHP.
Go to PHPMichigan.org to learn more.
Having worked in planning educational conferences for decades, I have come to know that a session title that mentions “motivating” or “engaging” students will guarantee attendance. Educators crave ideas and insights on how to fully vest students in the educational process as active participants. While strategies and tools are useful, I would advance that what we really need to address is how to create school cultures based on deep, foundational beliefs about what motivates and engages learners. We often talk of creating “lifelong learners,” and the only way this can be achieved is by creating a lifetime of motivational force. How can this be done? Certainly not by a tip, trick, or simple strategy. Our efforts to motivate students are inextricably linked to our beliefs about what constitutes talent. Daniel Coyle, author of *The Talent Code*, advances that to help students achieve excellence we must thoughtfully explore “that space—the gap that separates regular performance people and ‘talented’ people.” He notes that “we are told stories about that space, by parents, movies and books. We are told that [some] babies are born with gifts [of greatness] in them.” But only a few receive such gifts. Similarly, in his book *Outliers*, Malcolm Gladwell notes that “there is a story usually told about extremely successful people, a story that focuses on intelligence and ambition” but “the true story of success is very different.”

Geoff Colvin picks up the theme in *Talent is Overrated* when he notes that popular belief holds that Mozart was a musical prodigy, uniquely gifted from a young age. Was he? Tiger Woods was “destined” from birth to be great in golf. Or did he simply have many unique experiences? The reality is that their success had much more to do with hard work and hours of practice than it did with pure talent, fate, or destiny. However, we are often held back by myths and stories of “giftedness” and “greatness” that prevent us from leading our students, or even ourselves, to higher levels of achievement. Pushed on the concept of natural ability, Dan Coyle admits that raw talent is a factor in success, but he points out that it is far less of a factor than most imagine.

So, what is the truth about greatness? And how might we motivate our student to strive towards excellence? Guided by recent cognitive research, many authors have been exploring this field. Most notable are two. First, Daniel Coyle posits three elements of “The Talent Code” in his book of the same title. After exploring “hotbeds of talent”—schools, camps, and even entire countries around the world teaching all sorts of skills and producing an unusually high number of talented individuals—Coyle advances that “greatness isn’t born, it’s grown” through “deep practice” (practicing skills in a specific way), “ignition” (motivation), and “master coaching.” Following and expanding on Coyle’s ideas, Doug Lemov explores the concept of practice in depth and detail is his work, *Practice Perfect*, where he offers over 40 specific suggestions on making the practice that we require of learners as effective as possible.

The good news about their findings is that high levels of achievement are within the potential grasp of many more people than we may ever have believed. The bad news is that this new, more truthful story of success doesn’t mesh with the myths and stories we’ve been told for so long of “God-given talent,” and that requires some substantial reprogramming. The essential idea to consider is that learners will only be motivated to engage in an activity when they have a realistic hope of being successful. If your belief about talent and, ultimately, much of success is that it is something cosmetically doled out to a lucky few, then how motivated can you be if you feel you’re one of the unlucky many? If, however, your parents, your teachers, and your entire school community commit to giving you a more truthful and beneficial view that success is much more a manifestation of specific actions and supports you taking those actions, motivation and engagement are fundamentally shifted. Truly changing our students’ motivation starts with our deeply held beliefs.

As noted leadership author Jim Collins observes, “greatness, it turns out, is largely a matter of conscious choice and discipline.” True success is a matter of us coming to understand this deeply ourselves, and then learning to “walk the walk and talk the talk” for our students to believe it as well.

Gene M. Kerns, Ed.D., is Chief Academic Officer for Renaissance Learning, Inc. Dr. Kerns will deliver the opening keynote address during MASA’s 2014 Midwinter Conference.
MIDWINTER CONFERENCE
January 22 - 24, 2014
Amway Grand Plaza Hotel and Conference Center
Grand Rapids, Michigan

Join hundreds of your peers and business partners who will gather in beautiful Western Michigan for three days of highly engaging, relevant professional learning opportunities for MASA members of all types.

KEYNOTE SPEAKERS

Adora Svitak, a 16 year old who has presented around the U.S. and has been deemed, “A tiny literary giant,” by Diane Sawyer will present. Adora will do an adaptation of her TED Talk, What Adults Can Learn from Students. She will be joined by a panel of Michigan students for a discussion led by Larry Thomas of Oakland Schools and President of Michigan ASCD.

Dr. Gene Kerns, Vice President and Chief Academic Officer, Renaissance Learning, Inc., will address participants on Thursday morning. His topic—More than the Core: Reflections on Ideas Deeper than Any Standard Set—will cover advice for educators about academic trends and opportunities nationwide.

PRECONFERENCE EVENTS

Come early for one of two preconference options

The first is the Success Start Academy III for Newer Superintendents. This activity will begin early evening Tuesday, January 21 and continue on Wednesday morning. Participants will engage in “Crucial Conversations for today’s superintendents” and hear from experts on two hot topics: “Negotiations: Beyond the Basics” and “Insurance & Health Care reform.”

The second option will take place on Wednesday morning, January 22. The Council of School Attorneys will provide this half-day workshop on “Current Hot Topics in School Law” led by Brad Banasik of the Michigan Association of School Boards.

FEATURING

We will also have more information and updates on MASA’s Systemic School Reform Committee (SSRC) work, an address from State Superintendent Mike Flanagan, a legislative update from Brad Biladeau, and Peer-to-Peer focused clinic sessions.

Preconference:

- Success Start Academy III 1/21-1/22 $125
- Success Start Member FREE
- Current Hot Topics in School Law 1/22 $100

Conference:

- Conference Registration 1/22-1/24 $275
- Success Start Rate $220

Please choose a payment type:

- Check
- Purchase Order
- Credit Card

Fax this form to 517.327.0779 or mail to:
Michigan Association of School Administrators
Attn: Susan White
1001 Centennial Way, Suite 300
Lansing, MI 48917-9279

Register Online

Member Name ________________________________
District ________________________________
Title ________________________________
Phone ________________________________
E-mail ________________________________

Agendas and registration at gomasa.org/event/midwinter14

REGISTRATION SHORT FORM

Superintendents and administrators can use this short form to register for conference. Other members should visit gomasa.org/event/midwinter14 for full event registration.
In 2005, Bill Gates changed the lexicon of education reform with his oft-repeated assertion that “the new three R’s in education are rigor, relevance and relationships.”

It was second nature for Gates, whose billions were made through the development and sale of proprietary software, to impose his vision on the masses. Unfortunately, the consumers of this prescription for higher achievement did not agree.

Students, like the open-source insurgents who threaten Microsoft, believe the model should be reversed. It’s the relationships between students, between students and teachers, and the relevance of their work that inspires them to greater academic attainment, similar to programmers achieving ever more facile software through collaboration.

All across the nation, educators are challenged with the daunting task of eliminating the achievement gaps between disparate groups of students while at the same time increasing the achievement of all. While there are few examples of statistically significant leaps in test scores across large numbers of students, most would agree there is no substitute for the magic that occurs between a skilled teacher and a motivated student.

Measuring student engagement through research and using results as leverage points in changing instructional practices are strategies used by school leaders to improve achievement for the more than 100,000 students served by the 20 public school districts in Kent ISD.

For more than two years, local superintendents studied instructional strategies employed worldwide to help students achieve higher standards. Through this work, they were introduced to iNet, the International Network for Educational Transformation. Most striking about the work of iNet was the focus on students’ engagement and involvement strategies employed by its members, which at the time were largely schools in the United Kingdom, Australia and New Zealand.

Their first student engagement research among Kent ISD school districts, reflecting the responses of more than 17,000 high school students, found 60 percent of the class of 2011 had little appreciation for their mandated courses, nor did they understand how the courses would benefit them in college or careers.

The initial research was conducted under the auspices of Kent ISD through a grant from the Mott Foundation to study the reasons students drop out of school, and possible preventive measures. K12 Insight, a national education research firm based in Herndon, VA, conducted the study.

While the superintendents’ study identified individualized education, student voice, and making content more relevant for students as strategies, the Mott grant was applied to making content more relevant for students, between students, between students and teachers, work of iNet was the focus on students’ engagement and involvement strategies employed by its members, which at the time were largely schools in the United Kingdom, Australia and New Zealand.

The initial Kent survey focused on student engagement and involvement strategies to increase engagement, relationships with adults and other students, and students’ general sense of wellbeing.

The 2010 Kent survey reached 17,355 high school students in 20 public school districts—approximately 60 percent of the total high school population among the districts served by Kent ISD. The good news found in the first Kent student engagement study were the levels of satisfaction with school—85 percent reported being satisfied or extremely satisfied—and the relatively high levels of parental support.

Encouraging as well, was the high percentage of students—74 and 77 percent respectively—who said they had a positive relationship with their teachers and with one or more adults in their schools. On the flip side were the responses to student interest in core content areas. Just 28 percent expressed interest in English, required in all four years under the MMC; 32 percent in world languages, a two-year requirement; 34 percent in math, a four-year requirement; and 40 and 44 percent in social studies and science, both three-year requirements.

The 2012 Kent survey was quite different. Working with K12 Insight, a new engagement matrix was developed that more closely models the Gallup Student Poll conducted annually since 2009. While these tools are somewhat similar in their construct, the K12 Insight student engagement tool has two distinct advantages: The matrix is designed to clearly identify high-leverage areas where staff can adjust instructional strategies to increase engagement, and the K12 Insight tool affords districts the opportunity to adjust the survey or add questions that meet specific needs.
The 2012 survey results were revealing in several ways. Participating Kent districts found that while some had taken significant steps toward creating greater engagement, others had not, or were forced to make staff and service reductions that blunted efforts to better engage students. Thus, 48 percent of students still questioned the relevance of their course content, 25 percent of students said just half of their classes were relevant to their current or future needs and 21 percent said few of the courses they took would be of future benefit.

One stark contrast stood out among the individual building results. In 2011, acting on the research done through student voice and secondary redesign models by its superintendents’ association, Kent ISD opened Innovation High, which deployed the New Tech Network project-based learning model to increase student engagement. Innovation High was designed as a laboratory school to provide the region’s building administrators and their teachers a new instructional methodology and learning environment to study and adapt in their schools.

Across the region, responses from all students found just 20 percent attending traditional comprehensive high schools were “highly engaged” in their education. At Innovation High, where students work on real-life projects provided and/or presented with the involvement of the business community, 41 percent of students were “highly engaged.” At Innovation High, 94 percent of students are satisfied or extremely satisfied in the school, and their responses to engagement in individual content areas are higher as well.

Building principals are using the engagement matrix to examine instructional practice and help teachers improve performance with new strategies to inform students of the scope and value of the content they’re delivering. Teachers are also re-evaluating the “stand-and-deliver” instructional styles of the past and are putting new energy into video lectures that can be accessed at any time, allowing classroom time to be more of a hands-on lab experience.

Kent ISD will continue to push the envelope. Our instructional leaders have found the responses of nearly 30,000 students in two engagement research projects extraordinarily valuable to stimulate dialogue among high school teachers about teaching and learning. It has also given building administrators new ammunition in their efforts to encourage teachers to move from their “sage on the stage” instructional style to that of a facilitator, mentor and learning coach.

Ron Koehler is Assistant Superintendent for Organizational and Community Initiatives for Kent ISD. Contact him at ronkoehler@kentisd.org.
The Chelsea Community Youth Collaborative (CCYC), organized in 2007, brought together parents, teachers, school administrators, and healthcare providers to address the growing problem of young people using drugs and alcohol. With a multi-year donation from the local Coghlan Family Foundation, this small group was able to grow and formalize into what is now known as the SRSLY Coalition. SRSLY is not an acronym; it is the word “seriously” spelled without vowels, as it is commonly used in text messages and social media. Kids generally get it; adults generally don’t. That was the point. Early on, coalition leaders knew that if we wanted to make a difference in youth substance abuse, we would need youth to get involved. We created a space for kids to have a say, where their voices would be heard, and where they could see their ideas become reality.

The Youth Steering Committee (YSC) comprises 6th- through 12th-grade students who represent student athletics, drama, music, student government, service clubs, peer leadership, and religious youth groups. Students are nominated by school staff or other adults in the community to participate on the YSC, or they self-nominate and apply directly. The YSC works to ensure that youth leaders represent the diversity of the school population, and seek appropriate nominations when necessary. The YSC provides feedback and guidance on coalition activities, helping ensure SRSLY is responding to emerging trends and engaging youth effectively.

Students engaged in the YSC have many responsibilities, including:
• Help conduct needs assessment
• Learn about prevention and community planning
• Serve as ambassadors/recruiters for the coalition
• Attend prevention/coalition conferences
• Vote to approve strategic plan and yearly action plans
• Conduct team building exercises for all committees
• Attend YSC and coalition meetings
• Coordinate activities between sub-committees
• Maintain the SRSLY blog and Facebook page
• Present SRSLY results to stakeholders.

Members of the Adult Steering Committee (ASC) represent their organizations on the coalition’s leadership group and work to ensure broad-based community support for SRSLY. The coalition has had great success formalizing access to leaders and decision makers. With youth at the table, sitting right next to the Chief of Police, the president of the Chamber of Commerce, the superintendent of schools, middle and high school principals, the director of the Chelsea District Library, the director of Behavioral Health Services at Chelsea Community Hospital, and leaders from scouts, the arts center, the senior center, local media, public health, local government, and parents, SRSLY is truly a community coalition. These leaders have worked together to implement multiple behavior change
strategies across community sectors, and their hard work has paid off.

Local families, businesses, and civic clubs have dedicated not only their time (more than 13,000 volunteer hours since we started counting in 2008), but also their money. SRSLY has raised $90,000 in cash, and another $80,000 of in-kind resources, on top of the value of all that volunteer time. In 2010, SRSLY was awarded a Drug Free Communities grant that provides $625,000 in funding over five years.

SRSLY regularly gathers and monitors available data from local and state community health agencies, and the school district regularly participates in the Michigan Profile for Healthy Youth (MI-PHY). Our community has seen significant gains in many areas across the board, and we continue to identify areas that need attention and explore new strategies.

Future SRSLY leadership for both youth and adults is ensured through participation in training sessions such as the Community Anti-Drug Coalitions of America (CADCA) mid-year training institute, Michigan Substance Abuse Conference, and other training sessions offered by the Livingston–Washtenaw Substance Abuse Coordinating Agency.

In addition, SRSLY leaders use skills and information from these conferences to train volunteers. Adults who are interested are encouraged to volunteer to be trained as Guiding Good Choices program facilitators. Leadership and teamwork skill-development, such as public speaking, setting an agenda, and small group facilitation, is incorporated into all SRSLY youth meetings.

The SRSLY coalition has grown from a small group of concerned adults to a community-wide force with more than 900 volunteers, and nearly universal brand recognition. People see bright green and they automatically think SRSLY. Banners hang on Main Street. The middle school uses green SRSLY lanyards for hall passes. One Friday a month is “SRSLY t-shirt day” across the school district (although youth are seen wearing their SRSLY shirts on any given day). Every licensed alcohol retailer in Chelsea participates in Project Sticker Shock, a semi-annual public awareness campaign.

SRSLY has gotten to where it is today by putting youth in charge, with adults from across the community supporting them, and helping turn their ideas into reality. This approach has paved the way for the SRSLY Coalition’s many successes and achievements.

Visit www.srslychelsea.org to learn more.

Andrew Ingall is Superintendent of the Chelsea School District, Chair of the SRSLY Coalition, and a member of Cohort 8 of the Courageous Journey. Reiley Curran is Director of the SRSLY Coalition Director and Director of Community Health for Chelsea Community Hospital.
Innovative Learning

For 30 years Sehi Computer Products has supported education by providing MASA members with innovative solutions that engage students and inspire learning.

Experts agree that using technology in the classroom is essential in preparing students for their future. They also say students thrive in digital learning environments because technology makes learning interesting and relevant to their actual lives.

Sehi understands this too. That’s why we partner with industry leaders to deliver innovative classroom solutions to all Michigan educators. We know it’s never too early to prepare students for their futures and that technology helps to lead the way.

And now you can buy all our solutions online! We have Hundreds of Brands & Thousands of Products just a click away. It’s one more way Sehi Computer Products delivers value.

Buy Online Today!
www.BuySehiEdu.com

Sehi Computer Products, Inc.
2930 Bond Street
Rochester Hills, MI 48309
1-800-233-7344
www.sehi.com
Empowering Perceptions: Engaging Student Voice

By Kristine Gullen, Ph.D. & Larry Thomas

The Schools of Oakland County, in partnership with Oakland Schools, Oakland University, and University of Michigan, are working on a regional collaboration called the Learning Achievement Coalition-Oakland (LAC-O). Its purpose is to raise achievement for all students while working to close gaps for students of color, from poverty, and who are non-traditional learners.

As part of this regional collaboration, one goal focuses on student engagement. For the past five years a supporting strategy was to collect perception data on engagement from students and teachers. Unpacking this data has been a catalyst for conversation—one that has transformed local districts’ practices and regional programing. Central to these initiatives is giving voice to our students.

LAC-O Student Engagement Survey
The LAC-O Student Engagement Survey is actually two surveys—one for teachers and one for students—which have evolved over the past five years. Secondary schools who use the survey receive results based on their individual building. Yet countywide, there is also a representative demographic sample of 13 selected high schools who agreed to administer the survey for three consecutive years. This valid and reliable sampling provides schools with an excellent data source in a very cost effective way. This past year, the scientific sample of 657 high school teachers and 3,196 tenth-grade students provides a data set that can be used in any building in the county to create dialogue.

Survey items were organized into six strands:
1. Fair and Clear Practices
2. Caring Environment and Expectations
3. Cultural Relevance
4. Respectful Interaction and Pride
5. Engagement and Encouragement
6. Behavior Standards

Each strand contained 7-14 questions; across the teacher and student surveys, each strand begins with a set of connected items, followed by additional prompts specific to the audience.

Each question was rated on a 5-point scale from 5 (strongly agree) to 1 (strongly disagree). Reports were generated from the data as to the percentage of frequency each response was selected, the overall mean of each question, a mean comparison of different student groups, and a mean comparison between students and teachers.

Unpacking student and teacher perception comparisons
Overall, teachers were more positive in their responses than students in every strand area. Digging deeper into the items, there were only five questions where students rated themselves more positive than their teachers.

• I have pride in my work.
• I complete work assigned.
• I have a desire to learn in school.
• I behave appropriately in my classroom.
• I come to class with all my supplies.

Looking at the pairing of questions across the two surveys, the items with the closest agreement of student and teacher perceptions and can be seen in Table 2 (page 18).

Items that had the largest gap in perceptions all had means where teacher responses were more positive than student perceptions (see Table 3).

Table 1: Student and Teacher prompts from Section 4 – Respectful Interaction and Pride.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student Questions</th>
<th>Teacher Questions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4.1 Teachers treat me with respect.</td>
<td>4.1 I treat all of my students with respect.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.2 Teachers encourage me to consider different points of view.</td>
<td>4.2 I encourage multiple perspectives in my classes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.3 I have pride in my work.</td>
<td>4.3 My students take pride in their work.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.4 I respect my teachers.</td>
<td>4.4 My students show me respect.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.5 I put forth effort in my classes.</td>
<td>4.5 My students put forth effort in my classes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.6 Teachers tell me when they are proud of my performance.</td>
<td>4.6 I express pride to students when their achievements are commendable.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.7 I have pride in myself.</td>
<td>4.7 I would send my children to this school.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.8 I respect myself.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Continued on page 18
Bringing meaning to the survey comes from the important conversations this data creates. It begins with county superintendents, assistant superintendents of instruction, and the county LAC-O Student Engagement Committee each reviewing and analyzing yearly results and trend information. As often happens, this dialogue prompts more questions than answers. Reflecting on this information, educators will ask, “I wonder how students define ‘showing personal concern?’” “How do teachers express pride?” And “What do students need to hear from us to know we are proud of them and they are cared for?”

Wanting to better understand what students meant when answering some of the survey questions and why teachers and students might have different perceptions, a student dialogue protocol was developed. With a facilitator from Oakland Schools, buildings and districts bring together groups of students to dig deeper into perceptions and perspectives. These conversations have offered clarity as to how to engage, care for, and relate to today’s students. Often there has been a gap between the behavior teachers describe as showing they care for and what student describe as being cared for. When initiating these conversations, it is important to have outside support. Collecting student voices can be uncomfortable and insightful; for many schools it provides a pivotal piece in their school improvement planning cycle.

### Conclusion

The LAC-O Student Engagement Surveys, data reports, and resulting dialogues have been a productive set of strategies in our county to help give voice to our students. The Student Engagement goal within our LAC-O collaboration is just one piece in our mission to raise achievement for all students while working intentionally and tirelessly to close gaps for students of color, from poverty and non-traditional learners. If interested in learning more about the LAC-O initiative, go to [www.LAC-O.org](http://www.LAC-O.org).

**Table 2: Questions with closest agreement between students and teachers.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Student Question</th>
<th>Teacher Question</th>
<th>Mean Difference</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>5.7</td>
<td>I have a desire to learn at school.</td>
<td>My students care about doing well on class assignments.</td>
<td>0.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.4</td>
<td>I respect my teachers.</td>
<td>My students show me respect.</td>
<td>0.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.3</td>
<td>I have pride in my work.</td>
<td>My students take pride in their work.</td>
<td>0.16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.5</td>
<td>I put forth effort in my classes.</td>
<td>My students put forth effort in my classes.</td>
<td>0.16</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 3: Questions showing largest perception gaps between students and teachers.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Student Question</th>
<th>Teacher Question</th>
<th>Mean Difference</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2.7</td>
<td>Teachers ask me about my personal goals and plans for life.</td>
<td>I discuss with my students their future aspirations.</td>
<td>1.51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.4</td>
<td>Teachers show a personal concern for me as an individual.</td>
<td>I show personal concern for each of my students as individuals.</td>
<td>1.36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.6</td>
<td>Teachers tell me when they are proud of my performance.</td>
<td>I express pride to students when their achievements are commendable.</td>
<td>1.33</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

---

**K-12 Evaluation Solutions**

- Automate your staff evaluations using STAGES software
- Preferred provider of the MCEE Recommended
- Thoughtful Classroom Framework
- School ADVANCE Administrator Framework
- A Michigan-Based Company

Contact us for a demonstration of any of our evaluation solutions: info@stagessoftware.com

www.k12evaluationsolutions.com

---

Kristine Gullen, Ph.D. is the High School Consultant in the School Quality/Learning Services Department at Oakland Schools. Contact her at kristine.gullen@oakland.k12.mi.us

Larry Thomas is the Executive Director for School Quality at Oakland Schools in Waterford, Michigan. Contact him at larry.thomas@oakland.k12.mi.us
The students get it. While adults grapple and sometimes grumble over change, students shift and soar. This contrast was often evident when two neighboring school districts—Willow Run Community Schools and Ypsilanti Public Schools—consolidated July 1, 2013. In the midst of the logistics and bureaucracy of the merger, groups of students from both districts were bridging the gap.

During the transition from the former districts to the new Ypsilanti Community Schools, three groups played a key role in stemming fears and giving rise to student voice. Eastern Michigan University’s Bright Futures program, the Neutral Zone, and the Safe and Supportive Schools program coordinated a number of student forums, exchanges, and activities to provide opportunities for students from the former Willow Run and Ypsilanti high schools to engage. Students from the former rival districts learned they were more similar than different and that adults were listening to them (see related story on p. 22).

“We had a lot of unanswered questions and concerns. By the time we finished with the exchanges, our stereotypes of each other were exposed and we realized we’re the same,” said Christian Cannon, a senior at Ypsilanti Community High School.

John Weiss, Executive Director of the Neutral Zone—a youth-driven teen center that promotes social, cultural, educational, leadership, and creative outlets for teens—said the students had the most to gain or lose with the unification of the two districts.

“Students had the most at stake, whether the district succeeds or not, and it made total sense for them to be part of the process,” Weiss said. “We have gotten a really good start through touching small groups of students, and we now plan to grow that.”

The three groups involved in the student engagement work agreed to follow the same youth program models (Youth Program Quality Intervention and Youth Driven Spaces) to be in sync. Lynn Malinoff, Director of 21st Century Community Learning Centers, part of the Bright Futures work at EMU, said being on the same page accelerated the effort.

“The strength of everyone’s united

Continued on page 20
effort, using a common language and strategy to become more engaged, helped move student voice along more rapidly,” Malinoff said.

Weiss said the first step in the process was creating cohesion.

“We start with community building, making it fun and sometimes cheesy to loosen kids up. Our staff is very gifted with introducing activities that quickly open students up to dialogue, brainstorming misconceptions, raising questions and leading them in rich conversations,” Weiss said. “You really have to give so much credit to students. They bought into it (the merger) and embraced it. Their attitude was, ‘I’m going to get a whole new group of friends.’”

The Bright Futures and Safe and Supportive Schools staff work throughout the school year with students and were instrumental in much of the behind the scenes work that made the student gatherings look seamless. They orchestrated a variety of topics for discussion, including the selection of a new school mascot, how to develop a unified voice, and what they’d heard about one another.

“I thought the students from Willow Run would be rude, ghetto. But I learned they were nice, kind, really good people,” said senior Sarha Chatman.

Many students expressed concerns about cliques and not having a say in their new school district. Annie Hampel, the Safe and Supportive Schools Liaison at Ypsilanti New Tech, said their goal was to coordinate different activities to provide space for students to share and get acquainted and to build unity. From barbecues to a two-day Student Engagement Summit (where students created a rap and art work related to their new district), students were given several options to weigh in on their hopes and expectations for Ypsilanti Community Schools.

“Their ideas, thoughts and conversations were brought into the process immediately,” Hampel said. “Some of the students couldn’t believe how quickly we pulled the activities together and that they were successful. We now have a successful model to move forward with.”

Christian Cannon said the activities did build unity among students.

“Neutral Zone taught us how to be one, to collaborate and be on the same team,” Cannon said. “I felt like I was heard. The meetings were excellent, they really broke the ice.”

Malinoff said the students were vocal about the advantages they saw in the consolidation of resources.

“The kids envisioned that a new district would be better, there would be a more serious school culture where learning was valued and expected. They saw the consolidation as a huge opportunity without any prompting,” Malinoff said. “The strategies and principles we used in youth engagement are important. If we can help youth develop their voice and passions and teach them to persevere, we will release great citizens into our community.”

Emma Jackson is the Communication Specialist for Washtenaw Intermediate School District. Contact her at ejackson@wash.k12.mi.us.

“From barbecues to a two-day Student Engagement Summit (where students created a rap and art work related to their new district), students were given several options to weigh in on their hopes and expectations for Ypsilanti Community Schools.”

“Student voice means everything. One of my biggest fears was not having a voice, because the students make the schools. But Neutral Zone and the other groups were a gateway for us. Their support ignited the start of our new school district.”

~Brett Smith, senior, Ypsilanti New Tech

“Some adults were reinforcing the idea that there were going to be a lot of fights, but I said, ‘that’s not going to happen.’ The first day of school was good, everyone was friendly.”

~Antonio Allen, junior, Ypsilanti Community High School

“If we felt something wasn’t fair, we had input. I learned having a say can change stuff.”

~Rosemarie Harrell, junior, Ypsilanti New Tech

“Speaking my mind helped to clear up misunderstandings. We learned what was reality, the truth, rather than stereotypes.”

~Sarha Chatman, senior, Ypsilanti New Tech
ComSource INCORPORATED

PROVIDING WIRELESS COMMUNICATION SOLUTIONS IN THE GREATER DETROIT AREA SINCE 1995

ComSource is an Authorized Motorola two-way radio dealer and a Premier Motorola Service Partner. We are dedicated to high quality, professional work with the goal of total customer satisfaction. Our wireless solutions include:

Two-Way Radios | Wide Area Coverage Solutions | Emergency Vehicle Equipment
911 Dispatch | EMS Applications | GPS Solutions | Mobile Computing
Barcode Scanners | RFID | SCADA | WLAN | Service

877-5RADIOS | WWW.COMSOURCEMI.COM

MOTOROLA, and the Stylized M Logo are registered in the US Patent & Trademark Office. All other product and service names are the property of their respective owners. © Motorola, Inc. 2012.
High School is a place where many teens feel like their voices are not heard. Because of the vast academic requirements placed on schools, and teachers in particular, many feel like they simply don’t have the time to involve students deeply in their own learning, let alone in the broader issues of their school—issues like climate, governance or policy.

The research, however, is clear. Education and educational reform, to be as effective as possible, must have the direct involvement of students. Effective implementation of school change requires participation by and buy-in from all those involved, students no less than teachers. As one high schooler articulated in a recent study on student voice: “We have the most to lose when our schools aren’t working right, and the most to gain when they are.”

The Neutral Zone is a teen center located in Ann Arbor in which youth decision-making and involvement successfully permeates multiple levels of organizational governance and functioning. This “youth-driven” engagement is determined by youth interests, ideas, and roles and is supported by genuine adult-youth partnerships. The roles and experiences of teens at the Neutral Zone help to authentically build the development of 21st century skills and provide positive development across social competencies and leadership.

Two years ago the Michigan Department of Education (MDE) received a federal grant for a Safe and Supportive Schools (S3) initiative. MDE is targeting the 23 lowest performing high schools in Michigan to raise levels of academic achievement through new school reform programs. One of the primary goals of the initiative is to implement interventions to increase levels of school safety and student engagement. The MDE committed, in the S3 project, to have “student voice” help lead these changes.

Coming off the successful sharing of Neutral Zone’s “youth-driven” practice with eight other youth programs throughout the state (with collaborative partners the Weikart Center for Program Quality in Ypsilanti and MSU’s Community Evaluation and Research Collaborative), MDE approached Neutral Zone about helping on the S3 project. Broadly the project included a year of training and coaching to support teams of both staff and students from six pilot high schools. The goals were to have each team research school issues related to their school reform efforts, plan and implement a project that addresses one of the issues, and create an Advisory that could support on-going student involvement.

The project began in August 2012 with an intensive two-day institute where students and adult staff/faculty from the cohort of 6 high schools came together to understand the principles of meaningful student engagement, learn about school improvement efforts, and engage students in creating projects to impact meaningful change in their schools. Neutral Zone followed up with these schools and provided coaching visits multiple times throughout the year to help support the school reform projects and to help schools create a sustainable advisory model.

Each school crafted student-led projects and established “advisory” groups where students could continue to be involved in school change. One of the schools that received support was Eastern High School in Lansing. Eastern’s students organized into the “Quaker Crew” (their mascot is a Quaker) and chose “hallway safety” as the issue where they wanted to impact change. The school had recently added 7th and 8th graders into the high school building. As a result the halls...
were packed, especially during passing time, making them unsafe and inhibiting students from getting to class on time. The Quaker Crew developed a multi-tiered media campaign to raise awareness of the hallway issues. They created posters and a twitter feed whose messages were to get students to act safely and responsibly during passing time. Furthermore, they created “buttons” with the Quaker mascot and started a “get-to-class-on-time” campaign. The Crew would choose classes at random and when the bell rang give every student who came to class on time a button. The buttons became a symbol of pride, and though a small token, actually made a difference in encouraging students to get to class on time.

As a result of the S3 pilot initiative, students across the six pilot high schools reported a greater sense of community, stronger student-staff partnerships, and less social exclusion.

Additionally, based on pre/post surveys, students demonstrated statistically significant gains in a host of areas, featured in the table on page 22.

This pilot year was so successful that MDE invited Neutral Zone to work with a second cohort of schools during the 2013-14 year. That work began with five new high schools in the summer of 2013.

“The school-based work has been very exciting, especially seeing students take genuine leadership roles in schools that they have not had the opportunity to undertake before,” said Lori Roddy, Neutral Zone’s Associate Executive Director. “This project has allowed students to make decisions that affect things they care about, and experience the responsibility of seeing the impacts of their decisions.”

John Weiss has served as the Executive Director of the Neutral Zone, Ann Arbor’s Teen Center for the past eight years. Contact him at weiss@neutral-zone.org. The Neutral Zone is committed to diverse, “youth-driven” programs for high school teens in the arts and leadership. Learn more at www.neutral-zone.org.
Leaving Our Legacy

By Chase Moore (with a few thoughts from Majerle Marshall)

Our Legacy Club is a group of fifth graders selected by our previous K-5 teachers at Lakeville Elementary School in Oxford. Our purpose is to leave a legacy for Lakeville Students. We knew that we achieved our goal when:

• We became role models that set positive examples for others
• We encouraged others to participate
• We made others feel accepted
• Others are successful because of our influence

Our principal, Ms. Gibson-Marshall, started this program with the idea that our fifth-grade students could make a big difference in our school. She asked the teachers to nominate students that have a lot of different leadership qualities. She wanted us to be different from each other but good leaders. When the team was selected, Ms. G-M helped us build our purpose and vision. From that point, we (the Legacy Team) took over.

Each year, the Legacy Team chooses an important topic to make a difference in our school. The first Legacy Team chose to impact student behaviors. They created the “Wildcat Way,” a positive behavior video, and a book about having good character. Our second team chose to focus on solving bullying in our school. We worked together in three teams (teach team, motivate team, and money team).

• The teaching team was responsible for sharing an anti-bullying message through comic strips, Educreations about the bully circle, anti-bullying books, morning announcements, and class speeches.
• The motivation team made bulletin boards and helped the teachers give the Learner Profile awards
• The money team wrote three grants to earn money for the program. While we were in the process of writing another grant, we earned the Education Excellence award. That was really awesome.

We worked together to solve the problem that we thought needed to be solved. Each team met to create a “to do” list for the group. Then we gave each team member several tasks to accomplish. Ms. Gibson-Marshall guided us but did not tell us what to do. We had to solve our own problems and find ways to make our ideas work.

For example, some of our team members had to help younger students understand how to stand up against bullies. When we worked with the younger students, we used easier language, used jokes that would make them laugh, and shared stories that would stick with them for their whole lives.

The best part of being a Legacy leader was being a role model for the whole school. Our job was hard, but very fun. We learned that we have to do things a certain way to make them work. We learned to work together and make compromises. We all had great ideas but we couldn’t use everyone’s ideas for every task.

We did not always have to be serious about our work, some of our best ideas came when we were just goofing around. For example, sometimes when we were just hanging out, someone would say something funny and another teammate would blurt out, “That gives me an idea.” We would grab our notebooks and that would be the beginning of a great idea. We definitely got our hands dirty and had a blast doing it.

If we could change one thing about the program, we really needed more time to get all of our jobs done. The year came to an end too soon.

Chase Moore and Majerle Marshall are former Legacy Team participants and current sixth-graders at Oxford Public Schools.
Student Engagement is where 21st Century Learners thrive. Superintendent of Cadillac Area Public Schools, Jo Spry, is a strong advocate of learning through student engagement. As a former classroom teacher Spry has experienced first-hand that engaging her students brought personal importance to the lessons she taught and “brought the lessons to life.” Spry understands that student engagement provides an opportunity for students to learn through tangible examples. Engaged learners create something that they can touch, feel and manipulate in the world around them. They have a sense of empowerment and involvement in their own learning. Lessons that engage students apply to every discipline and at every age level to create excitement and passion about learning. Cadillac Area Public School teachers are encouraged to introduce lessons that are engaging for students and have experienced some exciting and successful outcomes from these lessons. Here are some stories from the classroom.

High school students master the Common Core through blogging

Cadillac High School English Teacher Janet Neyer has incorporated Blogging in lessons for both her senior Advanced Placement English class and her junior English class. Neyer incorporated blogging to offer students a chance to connect globally and reach an audience larger than just their teacher. Students have been encouraged to create a blog with a topic of personal interest; most seniors have made their blogs public. They post regularly and spend time in class blogging and commenting on other student’s posts. Students are encouraged to respond to something they have read.

Neyer said the writing assignment—which is aligned with the Common Core English Language Writing State Standards—has proven to provide a better connection and a more meaningful writing opportunity by giving students a voice in a larger audience.

“It has offered students a chance to experience varied perspectives and has improved their writing,” Neyer said. “Blogging has helped my students find their passion as writers.”

Student response has been overwhelmingly positive and student feedback supports Neyer’s goals for the project. Students also express eagerness to share their topics and their experiences as bloggers. Their enthusiasm when discussing their blogs demonstrates a growing passion and functional understanding of the written word.

continued on page 26
They describe their classmates’ writing as “intriguing and often thought-provoking.” There was clearly anticipation of new material in future blogs.

First-graders find their voice
Elementary teacher Keri Powell has partnered with Janet Neyer to introduce blogging as a form of expression and creative writing to her young students. “My first grade class loves blogging!” Powell said. “They find the use of technology so engaging, so they are eager for any opportunity to use it.”

Powell finds that partnering her students’ love of technology with digital writing makes the process a relevant and purposeful venue for students to write to an audience beyond their parents and teacher. They are reaching a larger audience including the principal, relatives, and other classrooms within the building. Blog visitors respond to the students’ posts. Feedback comes in the form of praise, questions, and even friendly critiques that motivate and inspire the young writers to respond to their own writing, extend their writing, and edit. They eagerly anticipate the next digital writing opportunity.

“I love that we don’t have to teach keyboarding as an isolated class; we are combining keyboarding needs in real-world applications for our 21st century students. It’s a very fun and powerful thing!” Powell said.

Spanish class brings students together
Cadillac Area Public School students experience opportunities for expression in English, but the opportunities do not stop there. Erin Guesno’s Cadillac High School Spanish lessons have much more to offer than memorization. Spanish students are making extraordinary gains through some out-of-the-ordinary lessons.

Guesno teaches with the goal of 100 percent student engagement 100 percent of the time—a lesson she took from a professional development day speaker that has turned into her personal goal as a teacher. Guesno believes wholeheartedly that a student’s active participation in learning improves his or her experience and success. She introduces her Spanish students to key phrases on the very first day. She incorporates games, music and action that she says is Spanish noteworthy and “in context” as a student begins the process of mastering the language. She incorporates music from Mexico and Spain and uses improvisation and role playing so that students immediately realize a depth of experience with the foreign language. Guesno advocates for a method called Total Physical Response which puts actions with words as students explore the Spanish vocabulary.

In Spanish 2, Guesno has introduced a lesson that incorporates teaching others. Students learned hand clapping games from Peru along with rhyming songs in Spanish. She then introduced a small group activity to a neighboring classroom of special needs students. The Spanish students broke into small groups and each group practiced the songs together. Fifteen minutes later, each small group performed one of the hand clapping songs in Spanish for everyone assembled.

“My students really enjoyed sharing what they learned, and helping others,” Guesno said. “I’m not sure if they realized how much Spanish they were using the entire time.”

The student collaboration also provided some lessons in kindness through full participation and students helping other students in a fun learning environment.

Conclusion
The overwhelming response from teachers and students supports the expanded commitment by schools to incorporate lessons that are engaging…students conveyed the desire to know more, learn more and experience more.

Cori Lindell Denman provides Marketing and Media Relations for Cadillac Area Public Schools. Contact her at cori.lindell_denman@cadillac.k12.mi.us.

Jo Spry, is superintendent of Cadillac Area Public Schools and a member of Cohort 8 of the Courageous Journey. Contact her at jo.spry@cadillac.k12.mi.us.

Teachers Janet Neyer, Keri Powell, and Erin Guesno have created excitement in the classroom. They take basic concepts and provide an unanticipated depth of knowledge and a lifetime of rewards through their students’ experiences. Cadillac Area Public Schools is fortunate to have a commitment from our teaching staff that provides students with dynamic learning experiences.
This summer, I had the opportunity to attend three graduation ceremonies for about 2,500 Plymouth-Canton students. As I sat there, I was reminded of how each graduation is not an end, but the celebration of a new beginning. As one team, our staff, families, and community are united in the shared work and purpose of preparing our students for success as they embark on a new beginning. Having spent more than 30 years in the field of education, I value and respect the important role that student engagement plays in building our leaders of tomorrow, and in shaping the culture of a school district.

As educators, we often have the privilege of witnessing those first signs of true leadership in our youngest students. We also have the obligation to nurture the qualities that will propel all students toward high achievement, and the opportunity to encourage and engage the love of learning that feeds our spirit as educators. By building upon and harnessing the strength of student leaders, student talent, and the student voice, we can and will continue to strengthen our profession and a student-centered culture of education.

Engaging Leaders
At all levels of learning, we strive to provide opportunities for student leaders to flourish and have found that the energy and commitment of
student leaders will always impress when given the opportunity.

The most visual representation of student mobilization and leadership in action was the successful orchestration of a 6,200 person aerial photo shoot on what is known locally as the Plymouth-Canton Educational Park (P-CEP). Led by student congress, the show of unity among three separate high schools who share one campus was truly amazing to witness. From the calculus class that determined just how many students were needed to create the letters, to the logistical feat of moving more than 6,000 students from three high schools into one location, it was a true team effort.

Not only has the district benefitted from this level of engagement and leadership, but the community has as well. Just recently I had the opportunity to meet with our National Honors Program, now one of the largest and most impactful in the country with nearly 600 members. This group of student leaders has created and grown an award-winning community tutoring program in collaboration with our local libraries. Seniors in the program will also tackle individual service projects in the community promoting leadership through service, with more than 5,000 hours invested in the development and execution of these projects.

Engaging Talent
In a district of this size, the range and breadth of talent among students is a true asset. By engaging student talent, we are able to bridge the high school educational experience with “real world” opportunities that strengthen college and career readiness.

Student support is integral to several communication initiatives across the district. We leverage the talent of our advanced production students in filming events, creating district cable and podcast shows, and packaging news and information for community viewing.

The district’s top-40 radio station, known as 88.1 The Park, is another example of student-driven programming with hands-on, real world applications. Each month, I’m able to leverage a radio conversation series to share topical updates, spotlight student and staff success, and engage members of the community to build greater awareness. We create true partnerships with students when we aim to collaborate and seek opportunities to grow together by engaging their talents and interests.

Engaging the Student Voice
Probably the most significant opportunity to create a culture of engagement is listening to and leveraging the student voice to help shape culture and growth opportunities. I am committed to informing all that we do with a student-centered approach, and engaging the thoughts and ideas of our students whenever possible—from formal survey groups to student spotlight interviews.
I strongly believe that this approach requires an ongoing conversation with our kids at all levels. I have the opportunity to share lunch with students during weekly PLC visits in all 25 of our school buildings. Aside from being a great opportunity to get to know our students, these visits help to keep our work centered on what really matters most and provides a platform for students to contribute to that vision informally.

We are currently building upon this work with the formation of a superintendent’s student advisory committee which will provide a more formal opportunity to create and continue an ongoing dialogue with students on the things that impact them the most. Solidifying this plan will further strengthen our engagement of students across the district and is important to the work we will tackle collectively.

Today’s student must stay actively involved in learning, remain nimble, and be able to adapt to changing forces in our society. By cultivating their leadership, talents and passion, we encourage lifelong learning and are building strong bridges that will carry them well into their futures.

Michael J. Meissen, Ph.D., has served as superintendent of Plymouth-Canton Community Schools since July 2013. Contact him at michael.meissen@pccsmail.net.
Index to Advertisers

Barton Malow ................................................................. www.bartonmalow.com/new-way .................... OBC
ComSource, Inc. .................................................................. www.consourcemi.com ........................................................... 21
Dean Transportation ......................................................... www.deanschoolbus.com & www.deantrailways.com ......................................................... IBC
GCA Services Group ....................................................... www.gcaservices.com ........................................................... 29
K-12 Evaluation Solutions ................................................ www.k12evaluationsolutions.com ......................... 18
Physicians Health Plan .................................................... www.phpmm.org ....................................................... Opp. President’s Message
Professional Educational Services Group (PESG) .............. www.subpass.com ....................................................... Opp. TOC
SchoolSpring, Inc. ............................................................. www.schoolspring.com ........................................................... 7
Sehi Computer Products, Inc. .......................................... www.sehi.com ........................................................... 16
SET SEG School Insurance Specialists ............................. www.setseg.org ....................................................... Opp. IFC
Skyward ................................................................. www.skyward.com ........................................................... 30
Stifel, Nicolaus & Company, Incorporated ......................... www.stifel.com ........................................................... 15
United Dairy Industry of Michigan ..................................... www.udim.org ........................................................... 6
Valic Retirement Services Company .................................. www.valic.com ........................................................... IFC
Western Michigan University ........................................... www.wmich.edu/offcampus ........................................................... 23

Empowering SCHOOLS
by managing tasks more efficiently.

Skyward’s Workflow Tools
transitions paper-intensive tasks within your district to easy electronic processes.

- Define individual processes and steps needed within your district.
- Electronically notify a chain of people when action is needed or there is a task completed.
- Reduce costs and time by creating an electronic process for the procedures currently done on paper.

visit www.skyward.com | call 877.764.7237 | email info@skyward.com
Getting them there safely

For over 50 years, Dean Transportation has been a proud partner to schools across Michigan, safely transporting nearly 20,000 students daily.

DeanSchoolBus.com | DeanTrailways.com

Michigan. The Great Lakes State. The Mitten. Michigander or Michiganian. By any term of endearment, Barton Malow, Michigan’s largest K-12 builder, is passionate about The State of Michigan. Coast to Great Lake coast - from Lake Erie to Lake Huron to Lake Michigan to Lake Superior - with hundreds of K-12 programs in between, Barton Malow has built and renovated millions of square feet of educational facilities in this great state. Contact one of our K-12 experts to discuss higher accountability, reduced administrative responsibilities, reduced project redundancies, and enhanced overall project success.

CONTACT A BARTON MALOW K-12 EXPERT
248.436.5000 | 616.540.9071

FACILITY EVALUATIONS | PLANNING SERVICES | CONSTRUCTION
BOND CAMPAIGN SUPPORT | TECHNOLOGY DESIGN

www.bartonmalow.com