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I'm Aaron Gasper - a fifth generation dairy farmer at Lew-Max Holsteins near Lowell. Taking care of our cows is the most important job I have as a Michigan dairy farmer and that occasionally includes turning on the sprinklers.

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It's all those little things that make up one big thing, which is giving our cows the highest quality care we can.

Caring for cows is my job and my passion. I love to do it, providing wholesome nutritious milk for my family and yours.

To learn more about the Gaspers and other Michigan dairy farm families, visit www.MilkMeansMore.org

Aaron Gasper
Michigan Dairy Farmer

How can I tell if my milk is local?

Every container of milk is identified by a 5-digit code.

This code includes a 2-digit state code followed by a 3-digit processing plant code.

Michigan’s state code is 26.
n November I attended the Business Leaders for Michigan CEO Summit held in the beautiful Westin Book Cadillac in downtown Detroit. As I registered at the Book Cadillac, I remembered the stories that my mother and father often told of going to Detroit from Port Austin for “honeymoons.” They always stayed at the Book Cadillac. It was Detroit’s hotel for presidents and movie stars. They were so disappointed to see the hotel close and fall into years of total disrepair.

But people with vision thought the Book Cadillac could be part of the changing Detroit. Now, it has become a gem of the downtown rebirth!

Change is happening—in Detroit and across Michigan. The change is coming at light speed, and educators must join the conversation; if we don’t, others will forge ahead without us.

At the Summit, I heard people like Jeff Fettig, Chairman and CEO of Whirlpool Corporation, talk about the lighting speed of change in the appliance industry—the first major change in washing machine design took over 25 years to make, while a design concept today can take as little as 18 months from thought to sales out the door. That is light speed. Or as Governor Snyder likes to say, “dog years.”

Change is coming to education as well—change that will happen with or without us. I choose to be part of the new voices for change. I choose to continue to explore new and innovative ways to reach and prepare each and every child in Michigan—even if those new ways make me uncomfortable.

Many of us in education leadership are too contented in the “old world” and afraid to explore the exciting world of change. We were successful in the old world and find it hard to embrace the transitions we face.

We talk about concerns about schools of choice; yet we know that horse is already out of the barn and running the race. Traditional public schools no longer have a monopoly, nor should they. If new models serve students better, we must be willing to tap our knowledge as leaders to adapt and succeed.

We should not be fighting each other; we should be fighting for each and every child in Michigan. We have to be the best at meeting the needs of the tech-savvy students who walk through our doors knowing computers and the power they offer to unlock possibilities Flash Gordon helped us only imagine.

We need to listen to the prophets that are crying out—prophets like Marc Tucker and Michael Fullen; like Peter Diamandis, Chairman and CEO of XPRIZE Foundation and Executive Chairman of Singularity University, who tell us that the only constant in today’s world is change.

We must create a mindset that is bold and user-focused. We need to be willing to explore ideas that arise from all different sources—inside education and out. We need to think big, and yet start small, making it right as we ramp up. We need to be moving forward not entrenching.

Let’s not be afraid of the changes on the horizon. Let’s be the new voices for that change. Together we can make a new education world.
Aristotle argued that the human mind was like a blank slate. Others such as John Locke reasoned that people were similar to empty vessels that had to be filled up.

While scholars argue whether these ideas are attributable as I have stated, the point is that educators often consider children as somehow less than whole, or even broken, waiting to be fixed or made whole by the education system. This faulty premise is one of the problems with our system and must be redressed if we are to reform public education in a way that meets the needs of all children.

We must begin with the notion that all children are whole and complete as they are, without the intervention of schools. Each person is a unique individual with inherent value and great potential to contribute to society.

In my career, I have had the privilege to know hundreds of students, some with Einstein-like intellect who could engage in amazing conversations and ask questions that I could not answer alone. I have also known students with significant disabilities for whom learning in the traditional sense is a daily struggle. For them, pressing a button on a communication device, a smile or laugh, or a squeeze of a caretaker’s hand brings immeasurable joy to this world and a contribution to society only that individual could create.

Each child’s inner genius is waiting within to be engaged and developed. It is the privilege and responsibility of teachers to bring out that inner genius. A balance between each student’s curriculum and learning plan, and a lot of caring and love help students grow into a unique individual.

Today’s kids are often referred to as digital natives because of their seemingly innate ability to use technology. But, we must be cautious about being distracted by what children can and cannot do. Rather, we must work to ensure all students truly find their inner genius and that school is a haven for all children to flourish and grow into individuals with immense potential to make great contributions to society.

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InspirED Michigan is a project designed to promote the value of public education in Michigan. Community public schools are a key component of our democracy that ensures all students have access to a quality education and a brighter future.

Dan Pappas, Associate Executive Director, MASA, and Executive Director of MIEM, sat down and had a conversation with Paul Schutt of Issues Media Group to discuss this project. Paul will present on January 22 during the MASA Midwinter Conference in Kalamazoo.

**Dan:** Paul, tell us about how Issue Media Group has developed this relationship with MASA and MAISA.

**Paul:** Issue Media Group is an online news organization and we publish news in twenty-some different regions throughout the country—about fifteen states. What we’re doing with MASA and MAISA is actually leveraging photographers, filmmakers, all the talent available, to help develop a new publication focused on innovations and programs that are having a significant impact on public education in the state of Michigan. We really want to take a kind of solutions-oriented look at what is happening in public education. I think the focus of the publication InspirED Michigan is all about really elevating the voice of those people doing that work and helping them to tell their story.

Dan: You mentioned more of an issue (approach) around solutions. What I’m hearing you say is that we are not always just looking for the good news or the bad news, but dealing with the challenges and/or innovations happening in a community and in a school district.

**Paul:** Absolutely. David Bornstein of The New York Times coined the term “Solutions Journalism,” and we really like it. This approach allows us to look at the challenges that communities are facing—in this case public education—and then look at what are the responses to that problem? What are the innovative programs that superintendents are putting into place, or principals, or individual teachers? Then address the challenges that are out there, and take a real solutions approach to the story rather than just talking about the problems that exist. It’s also important that we understand the problems and recognize at the same time who’s doing something about them and how are these actions actually having an impact and moving public education forward.

Dan: About the audience—people who we hope will be taking part, reading these stories, giving feedback, making these things happen—who are we really trying to reach?

**Paul:** We’re trying to reach the community members closest to the schools, so we’re looking at parents, administrators, all of those people that intersect with the schools and with the families in a community. It could be social workers. I also think that it would be important that we get policy makers or elected officials to be able to see what is really happening in the schools. There are a lot of people that intersect with what’s happening in public education, and we want to help them better understand what’s really happening in the schools. Not just the quick data points that they’re hearing on the news, which makes it sound sort of doom and gloom in some cases.

Dan: MASA’s Theme this year is “Leading Change in a Time of Change.” How do you see the InspirED Michigan initiative relating to that theme?

**Paul:** Everything that we’re looking at with InspirED Michigan is, “What are the innovations that are in place,
right now, to address some of those challenges?” Every issue is packed around innovation and change and how are we adapting to that change, who are the people leading that change, what seems to be making a difference and having impact. Every single month, every single story, is really focused on that idea of innovation and change.

Dan: How can members contribute stories and ideas, and how will those manifest into becoming a part of InspirED Michigan?

Paul: Go to the InspirEDMichigan website, www.InspirEDMichigan.com, and you will see a place to submit your story ideas. Submissions can come in two forms. The first may be notifying us of something happening in your district or a specific school that you would really like to share. Something that you think is a remarkable story that just isn’t being told yet. That submission will go to a managing editor, to decide if it is a good fit. If it is, a journalist will be assigned to get out and dig into that story and to get it told, bringing out photographers and so forth to help capture it. The second way to get a story told is to help us find the ones that are already being really well done by the local and community newspapers. These are the stories that would be a really good fit and more people should know about. We would like to get links to those stories, so we can also pass those along through the publication. Both types of submissions can be run through the submit feature, and you can be sure we will dig into them and get journalists assigned.

Dan: What is the vision of the InspirED Michigan editorial board to grow this project to serve our state and beyond?

Paul: One of the ways that we’ll see growth happening is through social media. For example, let’s say that there is a really innovative practice happening in your school that is covered in InspirED Michigan. What we find is as soon as we write that story it gets shared with the school and the school families. The families are then posting it on Facebook, they’re posting it on Twitter, and this leads to a kind of growth happening through the publication of the article as well as through social media. Every single story we’re writing is a story that people want to share, and they want to be able to tell the story about what is going on and that it makes a difference. That’s an example of growth that we’ve seen consistently happen over the last decade. Once people get a sense of what we are trying to do, we can hopefully get more and more people signing up, and the social media presence will continue to grow. Our experience tells us that this growth is likely...
to just continue to go in just one direction, and that trajectory is just straight up.

Dan: What can our members do to help get InspiRED Michigan going?

Paul: One of the biggest things that can be done is that as the stories come out, members should share them. Members often have e-mail lists, they often have Facebook and twitter accounts, and they have the ability to reach a lot more people. That ability to get as many members to leverage the content as possible will help shape the conversation. Some of the conversations we’ve heard concern the fact that the media focuses on the problems. Here we have a chance to talk about the solutions and some of the change that’s actually happening. The more that we can get the members to leverage stories about solutions and to share them, the bigger the impact the program will have.

Dan: Is there a story you’ve covered that kind of intrigued you and would give us an example what we can expect in a story?

Paul: One story that came out of the first editorial advisory board came from the shared observation that when people are asked, “Is there someone beyond your parents who had a huge impact on your life and the way that you see the world,” people mention, “Oh, my teacher when I was in fourth grade, when I was in seventh grade, or when I was in ninth grade.” Whenever it was, teachers played a huge role and are often involved in that turning-point moment in a life. So we actually took that idea as one of the first stories we did. We featured a young man who is now at Kendall School of Art and Design in Grand Rapids, and we did a Q and A with him about how he ended up in this space, how did he end up on this trajectory. We were actually able to get photos from when he was in elementary school, his high school project, and the art teacher that helped him see himself as an artist doing art as a career. It was an interesting idea, and I would have to say that ever since I heard that story about “so who inspired you beyond your parents, you know, who had the biggest impact on you,” teachers come up an enormous amount of time. It’s just a really interesting idea and this just might be a series that we follow. I think we want to constantly reach back and identify what put this person on this course, and what made them think that they could do it.

Dan Pappas is Associate Executive Director of MASA. Contact him at dpappas@gomasa.org. You can view video clips of this interview at www.gomasa.org.

Tell Your Story… Be Part of the Change!

To submit your story ideas or to share a local story, go to the InspiRED Michigan Story Submission Form: http://www.inspiredmichigan.com/about/Submissions.aspx

You can submit story ideas or links to pre-published stories. Following are some examples of types of stories InspiRED Michigan is looking to feature in upcoming issues:

- College Prep
- Enriching our World
- Preparing Students for Work
- Schools in the Community
- Technology in Education
- The Future of Education
Community Takes Action to Change Culture to One that Reads Early and Often
Muskegon Area ISD Offers FREE Resources Statewide

by Kristin Tank

Last spring, when Muskegon Area Intermediate School District (ISD) and Muskegon County’s local superintendents met to examine third-grade proficiency levels, the discussion took an interesting turn. Rather than talking about traditional curriculum topics, interventions, or professional development, the group instead focused on impacting the lives of children birth to five. Data shows significant deficits in early literacy skills starting at age three in Muskegon County. The conversation sparked a new movement to change the culture to one that reads to infants and toddlers “every day, everything, everywhere.”

Launched in August with the distribution and display of 1,300 yard signs, the campaign has been embraced like no other. Multiple editorials on MLive, TV news features, food pantry items bearing Read early. Read often. stickers, cable TV commercials, banners standing seven feet tall in health clinic waiting rooms, little libraries sprouting up in neighborhoods, and babies wearing bibs that say “Read to Me Every Day,” are clear signs this community is all in!

Print materials and social media posts feature messages urging everyone (parents, siblings, grandparents, and community members) to read everything (cereal boxes, advertisements, comics, instructions, coupons, cards, websites and newspapers), everywhere (at home, at restaurants, in waiting rooms, at the homes of friends and family, and at the grocery store) every day.

To get started, the Muskegon Area Intermediate School District met with community leaders, educators, news editors, medical personnel, faith leaders, business people, librarians, government leaders, and agency representatives. These champions invited others to “strategic doing” sessions. During these sessions, participants learned why reading early and often is important. They reviewed relevant research findings and pre- and post-enrollment data for four-year-olds entering the local Head Start program.

They formed action committees and were asked to do at least one thing to promote Read early. Read often. Promotional tools were developed based on the needs identified by action committees and were posted on the www.readearly.org website. Logos, videos, posters, quick reference cards, and bookmarks can be downloaded from the website; Muskegon County residents can order print materials, yard signs and buttons—in most cases free of charge. They can post their photos to the “readearly” Facebook site, and even reserve giant indoor banners for display.

Muskegon Area Career Tech Center students printed t-shirts that say “I read to my baby brother” and “I read to my baby sister” along with onesies and bibs displaying the “Read to Me” messages. Over 700 of these clothing items will be given away in the next few weeks through food pantries, hospitals, and health and human service agencies. Donated books stickered with Read early. Read often. and stuffed with bookmarks will also be given away, while grocery shoppers will be reminded to read early and often by the bags they carry.

The movement—and associated campaign to read early and often every day, everything, everywhere—is a three-year countywide effort. Pre-assessments of four-year-old children in the areas of letter sound recognition, and upper- and lower-case letter recognition will be used to measure its effectiveness. Ultimately, third grade reading scores will serve as an indicator as well.

The Muskegon Area Intermediate School District and its community leaders would like to see the positive energy generated by this campaign spread across our entire state. For this reason, we are making all logos, artwork and electronic documents available to everyone. To learn more visit www.readearly.org or contact MAISD Public Information Officer Kristin Tank at ktank@muskegonisd.org or 231-767-7263.

Kristin Tank is Public Information Officer for Muskegon Area Intermediate School District. Contact Kristin at 231-767-7263 or ktank@muskegonisd.org.
Six years ago, Michigan enacted a new energy law that has changed the landscape of our state and increased employment opportunities for our students. The new law required that 10 percent of Michigan’s power come from renewable sources by the end of 2015. Other states have enacted similar laws. The result has been an explosion of new jobs in the alternative energy industry. Over 40,000 alternative energy jobs were created in the second quarter of 2013 alone.

Alternative energy will be a part of our student’s lives either as consumers or employees. Many may already have a hybrid car in their family. All of them use a cell phone that gets its signal from a solar powered satellite. And soon, 10 percent of the power they use in their home or at school will be generated by renewable energy sources.

In response to this change in energy production, New Haven Community Schools implemented a K-12 alternative energy curriculum. The goals were two-fold. The district wanted to 1) create conscientious consumers of energy who understood the basics of alternative energy sources, and 2) give students hands-on experiences producing energy through alternative means. As an added bonus, New Haven Community Schools also planned to save money on utilities and diesel fuel by using alternative energy sources embedded in the curriculum.

The curriculum was set up to focus on different energy sources at the three different levels of school.

At New Haven High School, students concentrate on bio-fuels, specifically bio-diesel fuel. Students use vegetable oil and methane to make bio-diesel fuel. The formulas are tested in diesel engines within our Auto Shop classrooms. During the warmer months, the fuel is used in the school district buses. New Haven High School has just completed building a greenhouse so students can experiment with biodegradable plants to create other formulas for bio-diesel. Many of our high school students are also dual-enrolled in college courses at Macomb Community College and are earning their Alternative Energy Certification.

Our alternative energy focus at the middle school level is wind power. New Haven has a 60-foot wind turbine at Endeavour Middle School and students can study its power output daily. Students work with the data to understand kilowatt hours and what wind can power. Students can also examine our historical power output graphs to determine the reliability of wind as a source of energy in northern Macomb County. We also have...
access to wind turbine data in other locations and can compare and contrast our data to the data of others. Middle school students study the science and mathematics behind using wind for power.

At the elementary level, our alternative energy focus is solar power. From basic concepts—such as the sun’s warmth—to the complex—such as understanding photovoltaic cells, New Haven students learn about how solar power impacts their lives. Students learn how our personal communication devices get their signals from satellites powered by solar cells. One of the favorite solar experiences is making Smores with a solar oven.

In New Haven, we teach and live alternative energy.

Our middle school building has LED lighting, classroom lighting controlled by motion detectors, water controlled by infrared sensors, and a waste-water treatment plant instead of a connection to the sewer system. Our high school building has LED lighting, two solar and wind powered parking lot lights, a solar powered sprinkler system, and a solar powered electric car charging station. Half our bus fleet is powered by propane, not diesel. Throughout the district, the heating and cooling systems are controlled by computer and conserve energy during off-peak usage times. We also place an emphasis on Green Schools concepts, including earth-friendly activities like recycling, not using Styrofoam trays at lunch, and creating bird-friendly habitats.

The curriculum has been a success. New Haven students beat the 2013 mathematics target proficiencies set by the state at every grade level. Our high school students doubled the target proficiency. Our middle school beat the target proficiency by 16 percent. Our elementary students beat the target by 25 percent.

In science, one 5th grade Grade Level Content Expectation specifically deals with solar power and 100 percent of our students got it right. Eighth grade 2013 science scores in the advanced performance level tripled and performance at all levels increased by 25 percent over 2011 levels.

New Haven High School was named a Reward School in 2014 by the state for its sustained improvement. The school ranks 4th on the Michigan Department of Education top to bottom list of county high schools.

Alternative energy is relevant, interesting, and compelling content through which we teach our standards and benchmarks. Alternative energy reflects new laws and new expectations for consumers and companies. As the world surrounding our students changes, New Haven Community Schools has embraced that change, connected it to our standards and benchmarks, taught it and lived it, increased student achievement, and have even saved money on utilities and diesel fuel while doing it.

Keith D. Wunderlich, Ed.D. is Superintendent of New Haven Community Schools. Contact him at kwunderlich@nhav.misd.net.

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We live in a racialized society that includes many different levels of implicit bias and privilege that are contributing to the attitude and achievement gaps in our schools. Recent census data suggests that it is only a matter of time before every district in our state will be responding to these unique challenges and opportunities in our learning communities.

As public school leaders we must be at the forefront studying and learning what we can do to positively engage and inform all of our stakeholders with respect to equity.

Racial equity involves the creation and proactive reinforcement of policies, practices, attitudes and actions that produce equitable power, access, treatment, opportunities, and outcomes for all.

Dorinda Carter Andrews, Associate Professor of Teacher Education at MSU, talks about the “Consciousness Gap in Education.” She shares that “society has socialized us not to raise critical conversations around race and equity. Racism, along with other forms of oppression is still an impediment to the achievement of all of our students creating gaps in their learning.” Therefore, we need to examine power and privilege as part of the culture of schools to close the achievement gap in our schools.

In an era of increased transparency and accountability, Holland Public Schools developed a plan of action to better understand system attitudes and beliefs around race and equity. Racism, along with other forms of oppression is still an impediment to the achievement of all of our students creating gaps in their learning.” Therefore, we need to examine power and privilege as part of the culture of schools to close the achievement gap in our schools.

In collaboration with the Lakeshore Ethnic Diversity Alliance and faculty from the Teacher Education department at Michigan State University, we launched our own system learning and the completion of an equity audit as part of our “Achievement without the Gap” initiative.

The focus has been to identify what institutional and structural barriers may be contributing to the achievement gap in our school system. This has included participation in seminars, state/national conferences, book studies, and a comprehensive study of student achievement data, discipline records, and program participation.

We began by better understanding our own implicit bias.

Why start with implicit bias?

- We’re living in a racialized society and human nature predisposes us to be biased (attitudes/stereotypes).
- Implicit bias is unintentional and unconscious.
- Much of human judgment and behavior is guided with little conscious thought, involuntarily and/or without one’s awareness or intentional control.
- We are hardwired to form bias, and in a racialized society with mindless cognitive scripts impacting behavior, this leads to unconscious racial biases and unconscious racialized behavior.
- Everyone is susceptible, including children.

With this new learning we wanted to shift the focus and change the conversation from blame, shame, and guilt to empowered responsibility.

The next step in this system analysis was the completion of an equity audit. This audit used a mixed study approach surveying over 1,400 students and 200 professional staff, student focus groups, parent focus groups, and over 100 one-to-one interviews with board members, administrators and professional staff.

Assessment Purposes

1. To understand the factors that contribute to achievement in Holland Public Schools and identify areas of significant differences (e.g. race, socioeconomic status, gender etc.). This included identifying home, school, classroom, and individual-level barriers to high academic performance.
2. To assist the district in identifying professional development and educational interventions to reduce achievement gaps and enhance school success for all students.

Assessment Questions

1. What does current district data reveal about achievement inequities in Holland Public Schools?
2. What factors do staff, students, and parents identify as contributing to
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“It seems like everyone has their area and everybody knows their place. And there is peace within the city but it’s because everybody is staying where they belong. And that’s kind of how, what I see in my students. The same thing: peaceful kids, nice to each other, but everybody, you know your area your comfort zone, your place and that’s just where you stay. Listen, you don’t have to give up who you are; that’s not the point to change. The point is to appreciate something that is not your identity.”

As we unpack the results of this audit, the next level of work includes professional staff development to create culturally responsive school leadership and culturally responsive instructional practices.

As school leaders, this begins with looking at a governance model and accountability system to improve equity and excellence in your school system. Principal Baruti K. Kafele offers three simple questions to guide that work: Who am I? What’s my purpose? and What’s my most recent level of evidence? As you reflect on these three questions, addressing this from a systemic perspective is the next step.

1. Do you really understand the changing demographics in your school community and what the projections are for change? What national/state data are you using to make these projections?
2. Does your professional/support staff reflect the demographics of your student body?
3. How prepared is your staff to work with the changing demographics in your schools to provide culturally relevant school leadership and instructional pedagogy?
4. Are there differences between student demographics in your AP/Honors classes vs. your classes of remediation and special education? How significant is the achievement gap?
5. What does your discipline data show in regard to objective/subjective discipline across different ethnicities and learning abilities?
6. How engaged and informed are all of your parents with regard to learning expectations?
7. Is there a disconnection between board, administration, professional staff, parents, and students around the high-quality education and opportunities for equity and excellence in your school district?

As you collect the data around these questions, you will likely learn, as I did, that attention to this work should have occurred much sooner before real issues began to emerge. The demographics can change in what seems like overnight without you ever realizing it. The good news is that there are many local, state, and national entities that can assist in this process of self and organizational reflection. The journey can be challenging, but courageous conversations are necessary to bring about the true equity that needs to be afforded to all of our learners. This African-Proverb guides me in my journey: “Start where you are, but don’t stay there.”

It is imperative today, that we discuss equity in our schools. Then, and only then, can we truly close the achievement gaps for all students. Watch for additional opportunities to learn about equity and excellence in upcoming MASA publications as well as learning sessions at the 2015 Mid-Winter Conference.

Brian Davis is Superintendent of Holland Public Schools. Contact him at bdavis@hollandpublic-schools.org.
The Beecher Community School District’s athletic reputation in the state of Michigan is second to none. The community’s moniker is, “District of Champions!” In contrast, the academic legacy of the district has been less than flattering.

Upon my being named superintendent in August 2010, the district’s high school was identified as a Bottom 5 percent school and was forced by the Michigan Department of Education to complete a Transformational Plan. That same year, Tucker Elementary School was identified as a Persistently Low Performing School and also had to create and implement a Transformational Plan. The district’s other elementary school, Dailey, was not far behind in their rankings with the state. The fear of district takeover by MDE was real, and the forecast for the district’s academic success was bleak.

An analysis of the district’s instructional systems revealed a lack of focused curriculum alignment, infrequent assessments of learning and a lack of remedial services to ensure student comprehension. To address these needs, the leadership team began with the implementation of Understanding by Design to help create a spiraling, current K-12 curriculum. Administration and staff met prior to the school year and throughout the year to write and align curriculum.

The district’s leadership team, along with teachers, also created a common assessment calendar with the focus on teachers assessing for learning. The district began monitoring student learning by using STAR and NWEA assessments multiple times throughout the year.

To address the need of transformation at the high school level, the Beecher 9th Grade Academy was created. This innovative program provided an intimate learning environment for incoming freshman as well as specific structures for their ongoing success. In addition, ACT/MME prep courses and after-school programming began to be offered to high school students to provide academic enrichment/support.

The next step was the implementation of best practice instructional strategies. These strategies promoted higher levels of student engagement and learning. At the elementary levels, Reader’s and Writer’s Workshop trainings and instruction were instituted. At the 6th-12th grade levels, the Springboard math and English Language Arts (ELA) curricula were implemented.

We addressed K-12 culture by implementing the Center for Transformative Teacher Trainings’ “No Nonsense Nurturing” program. This program focused on enhancing the culture and systems within the school district. The district also began to implement a Balanced School Culture.
Distinguished, Continued from page 19

Calendar to address summer learning loss. A complete district overhaul and analysis of systems had to occur.

The results of these changes four years later have been miraculous. In 2013, the Beecher 9th Grade Academy received a MASB/SET-SEG Award for Innovative Programs. Academic performance at both elementary schools soared on the Michigan Educational Assessment Program in the areas of reading and writing. Both Tucker Elementary and Beecher High School improved 15 points on last school year’s state rankings and are no longer labeled as Priority Schools and are no longer in the Bottom 5 Percent rankings. In addition, Dailey Elementary School was named as a 2014 Reward School. Dailey was also recently named by the Michigan Department of Education as one of the state’s National Title I Distinguished Schools and will receive national recognition at the National Title I Conference in Salt Lake City, Utah.

Implementing academic change and efficient systems in a school district is not easy; however, it is necessary in order to sustain student achievement. Credit should be given to the dedication of the Beecher Board of Education, staff, students, parents, and community for participating in this transformation. The Beecher Community School District is a model of successful urban education and we are beating the odds daily. We are now officially the District of Champions academically as well.

Dr. Josha L. Talison is Superintendent of Beecher Community School District. Contact him at jtalison@beecherschools.org.

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Student interacts with Promethean Board.

School District is a model of successful urban education and we are beating the odds daily. We are now officially the District of Champions academically as well.
Melody Arabo knows where she loves to be, knows where her heart is. That place is her third grade classroom at Keith Elementary School in the Walled Lake Consolidated Schools.

Last May, Arabo’s passion for the classroom was rewarded when she received some surprising news at a special school assembly. Arabo found out that she was being honored for her teaching knowledge, expertise, and skills in the classroom, by being named the 2014-15 Michigan Teacher of the Year.

“That was just a phenomenal day,” said Arabo. “From there it was just a whirlwind of experience. You’re given this title and recognized for being a strong teacher and then you’re told that maybe you shouldn’t be in the classroom next year.”

That was a conversation that Arabo was not quite prepared to have with Walled Lake Consolidated Schools Superintendent Kenneth Gutman.

“My Superintendent met with me and offered me an instructional coach position so that I could step out of the classroom, simply because he knew this was an once-in-a-lifetime experience and he wanted me to be able to take full advantage of the opportunities that were going to come my way. He didn’t want me to have to say ‘No’ because of classroom responsibilities.”

Now that Arabo is in the instructional coach position, she has valued Gutman’s foresight in freeing her from classroom responsibilities for the year. She describes her work schedule now as an adventure where every day, week, and month is different from the one before, and this has offered her exciting opportunities to work with teachers, the Michigan Department of Education, and other educational groups.

“We are in a time of great change right now, and there is a lot that makes people—and teachers—anxious and nervous,” Arabo said. “Maybe it is just a lack of information, but in my role as Michigan Teacher of the Year, I have really had a chance to learn about the system, about education as a whole, from the state level down to the district level and ultimately down to my own classroom. My participation has led to a better understanding of the changes that are happening and my hope is to be able to have the opportunity to communicate...
what I have learned about those changes to teachers across the state.”

Arabo was part of the panel that selected the MASA Superintendent of the Year for Michigan, and she enjoyed working through the process with a diverse group.

“I really liked being a part of the selection committee and having a chance to use my teacher perspective when reviewing the nominee’s applications. All the judges looked at candidate packets through a different lens. I had on my teacher lens and was trying to feel that connection with the applicants. I learned through the judging process and the conversation involved what’s important in the role of superintendent."

Arabo also hopes that district leaders and other education decision makers will be receptive to learn and grow from Michigan’s teachers. She believes that a teacher’s first-hand knowledge is valuable when considering changes that need to be made in order for our educational system to become stronger.

“Teachers want to be seen as the skilled professionals that they are, and [we know] that the best professional development comes from teachers. Some of the most effective resources that I use in my classroom I have learned from my colleagues and from what I learned from being in other teacher’s classrooms,” shared Arabo. “This year I have had the opportunity to go beyond my district and observe in classrooms across the state, and have learned more and more, growing more and more.”

The Michigan Teacher of the Year role has led Arabo to hope for more opportunities for collaboration with school leaders. As an instructional coach, she is part of a district
instructional team that has offered her the opportunity to learn from the curriculum developers, the technology department, and other personnel so that she can see all of the district systems.

Understanding how these systems are necessary to a smooth-running classroom was a recent topic of conversation with her superintendent.

“I feel that district leaders and administrators could really tap into their teachers as leaders and provide them more opportunities to be in leadership roles in schools,” Arabo said. “No matter their particular skill level, they are all doing something in their classroom that’s working well and could be shared with the rest of a school’s staff. Instead of reaching outside for experts and gurus, use the teachers that are already working in their schools to make them better.

“Teachers often feel that they have to leave the classroom in order to have an impact on education and I hope it doesn’t have to be that way. I would love to see more opportunities for teachers to participate in school board meetings. I would love for teachers to be able to collaborate across districts and to be able to see each other in action in their classrooms. Really, just working to change the structure of the traditional school setting that is now in place so teachers can really become leaders and the agents of change.”

The Michigan Teacher of the Year position has offered Arabo new insight on what happens at a district level in education, but she confesses that she also really misses her classroom.

“It’s hard to go out and learn all the great things happening in education and not have a classroom to apply them in,” she said. Perhaps I could see more education positions created that are the best of both teacher and educational coach roles. Being able to be half-time in a classroom and half-time working with adult educators—for personal growth and the growth of their own students, and then for what they can offer fellow teachers and their students—wouldn’t that be the best of both worlds?”

“These are the types of conversations Arabo has already had and hopes to continue having with Guttman. She asks a question that’s worth a dialogue among us all:

“What are the next steps as we go through these changes, about how can we transform the way that we do school so that everybody has these opportunities and everyone can make an impact?”

Mitch Smith is a communications specialist with MASA. Contact him at mitchsmith@gomasa.org.
In a reading support class at Saginaw High School, the air hangs a little heavy. The students take turns reading aloud about marijuana’s effects on the brain. Their hands cup their chins, their voices unsure. A few sigh and nearly give up after struggling with a difficult word.

Then it’s Royce Peters’s turn.

The words start coming out of his mouth softly but eagerly. Occasionally, he hesitates. This is when fellow students JoeDel Lowe and Lakia Hamilton step in. If it’s a word they’re sure he knows, Lowe and Hamilton prod him. “Royce, you know this,” they say. Or, simply, “Say it.” And he does.

When he finishes reading his section, Peters smiles and Lowe matter-of-factly says, “Good job.” The three students pack up their belongings and leave early, heading to Peters’s next class.

Peters is 15 and a sophomore at Saginaw High. He also has autism spectrum disorder (ASD) and is one of six students with disabilities who participate in the school’s LINK program. This peer to peer program provides students who have ASD with the opportunity to interact with general education students throughout the day. At Saginaw High, students with other disabilities also participate.

Thirty-two students participate in Saginaw High’s LINK program, which is now in its second year. The other two public high schools in the city, Arthur Hill High School and Saginaw Arts and Sciences Academy, have also implemented the program, says Margie Mayberry, a START consultant. Mayberry helped implement the LINK program in all three schools.

Saginaw High was primed for the program, says Mayberry, because the school was already running a peer-mentoring program that paired incoming freshmen with seniors.

Being a LINK goes beyond helping a student in class. Peters’s LINKs find creative ways to address his needs, making astute observations on how he prefers to communicate along the way. They have also become his friends and behavior role models.

Program shows measurable benefits for students with disabilities

Peters, who has been mostly non-verbal, has a unique form of ASD, different from any other student who has gone through general education at Saginaw High School, says Lieber.

Before, Peters didn’t initiate conversations and walked between classes silently. One of the few people he interacted with regularly was his para-educator, Irene Gomez. He didn’t interact much with other students.

“When a student has an adult that accompanies him everywhere, he’s not approachable to other students,” says Mayberry. “The opportunities for natural engagement with peers are significantly limited.”

Now, if Peters notices something new in the hallway while walking to class, he asks his LINK what it is and won’t stop until he receives an answer.

Peters’s LINKs are beginning to understand him better. They often share what they’ve learned with Lieber and each other.

During a recent conversation with several other LINKs, Tey’Ariana Marshall, 17, says that Peters sometimes starts singing
a cartoon theme song but won’t give an answer when she asks what he’s singing.

Another LINK, Kalifah Sharper, also 17, cuts in. “He will if you ask him,” she says. “Like, have you ever heard him say, ‘Hey, what’s that?’ If you talk to him like he talks to you and if you won’t look at him directly, he’ll tell you exactly what he’s doing.”

Another student murmurs understanding, filing away this nugget of information for future use.

Link Participants Find Their Voices, Impact Growth
Prior to Saginaw High, Peters was exposed to limited academic learning opportunities. He transferred between several schools and briefly attended Millet Learning Center, which serves students with low-incidence disabilities. When he reached high school age, his mother, Felicia Peters, wanted him to go to school alongside typically-developing students. Peters started at Saginaw High as a ninth-grader.

During one of Mayberry’s first meetings with Felicia Peters, school administrators, and the initial group of LINKs, she was surprised by several questions the students asked. From the get-go, she says, their questions cut right to the heart of the matter. They called out and scrutinized every perceived obstacle: What will Peters do after high school? Will he get a job? What does he do after school? He loves to run, so who can get him on the track team? And, most importantly, who’s going to be in charge of helping him get a girlfriend?

“They don’t see the obstacle. They don’t see any barrier,” Mayberry says. “So they candidly bring up the questions that need to be addressed—that few people, few educators, ask.”

Felicia Peters says she’s seen more maturity and growth in her son. He now sometimes greets people he knows with no prompting, and he even talked about the LINK program in front of hundreds of attendees at a START state conference. “A couple years ago, I wouldn’t have been able to get him in a room with that many people,” she says.

Kaitlin Shawgo is a multimedia writer and editor at the Center for Educational Networking.

NOTE: MASA members can read additional information about Saginaw High School’s LINK program outcomes in the extended web version of this article, found at http://www.gomasa.org/leader-magazine.

Left to right: JoeDel Lowe, Royce Peters, and Lakia Hamilton.

About LINK
In 1990, the LINK program was created at Clarkston Community Schools under the direction of Maureen Ziegler, who was a teacher consultant for the district. At the time, peer-to-peer programs presented an innovative way of approaching special education, particularly when peers were embedded in programs that supported students with ASD.

Years later, when Ziegler joined Statewide Autism Resources and Training (START), she brought a blueprint for starting peer-to-peer programs across the state. Following Clarkston’s success, START began implementing the LINK program in other schools and now provides training for staff and administrators in more than 400 schools across Michigan.

Additional resources:
START Peer-to-Peer Project Overview: http://www.gvsu.edu/autismcenter/peer-to-peer-support-2-140.htm
VIDEO: Year One With Royce: http://www.gvsu.edu/cms3/assets/2Cf6CA25-D6C6-F19E-339DC5CD2EB1B543/rcn/2013-14/nov_4_2013/animoto_-_saginaw_high_schools_links.mp4
As I head into the home stretch approaching my 21st major Michigan Association of School Administrators (MASA) conference and being involved with too-many-to-count Michigan Institute for Educational Management (MIEM) supported events, I say the “C’s” represent the glue that helps us to stick together. Over the past ten years many of you have helped me to learn and continue to grow to help better serve.

Our MASA and MIEM staff members, past and present, have been more than colleagues and friends; they are family. So many educators from across our great state and nation have stepped up to leadership, which has inspired me. As I see it, the common theme continues to be that educating our children—as well as the adults who serve them—in our school communities is essential, noble and worthwhile.

Some things I’ve learned and feel worth sharing are:

• To be effective educational leaders, we must first always be good teachers.
• Our network is large and strong. We should always continue to add to it.
• We learn best from each other.
• School leaders care, are very smart, capable, and willing to take on that which needs to be done.
• Servant Leadership is not about position, but rather helping others to develop and lead.
• 100 percent satisfaction is a worthy goal, but not easy when working with a large and diverse group.
• Systemic approaches are not easy to implement, but the best way to achieve success for all.
• All we do needs to be done through the lens of what is good for children.

As I consider what lies ahead for me and look back at the many memories and themes that have overarched our conferences, our present theme, Leading Change In a Time for Change is what all of you are living. Thank you for taking up this call with your energy, skills, commitment and passion. Many of you have become good friends. I hope to stay connected as we all take our next life steps. In retirement, I look forward to slowing down a bit, spending more time with family, traveling, writing, playing golf, staying involved with theatre, and working on being as healthy as possible.

I want to thank my wife, Lisa who helped me to make the right decision in 2005 to take this position. Both of us will miss being on the express train that MASA and MIEM have traveled. The past decade has presented many challenges that have allowed me to use my experiences and creativity to help shape a stronger and healthier culture of collaboration and learning. Being at MASA/MIEM has been the best part of my 44 year career. Thank you is not enough. I wish you all the best. Your success is our passion!

With respect and love,

Dan

Daniel G. Pappas has served as Associate Executive Director for Michigan Association of School Administrators (MASA) and Executive Director of the Michigan Institute for Educational Management (MIEM) since February 2005. Dan plans to retire from MASA/MIEM March 2015.
Michigan’s educators inspire others every day through leadership, innovation, and vision. Michigan’s citizens need to know what that looks like for you.

Attention MASA members of all types (business affiliates, too!): MASA invites you to tell your story of what inspires you. In three minutes or less, share your answer to one (or more!) of the following:

- What—or who—inspires you?
- How are you (or your staff) inspiring others?
- How are you Leading Change in a Time of Change?

Three ways to share:

1. Send a 300-500 word essay to lwacyk@gomasa.org
2. Set up a time to record a video with Mitch Smith at the MASA office. Email Mitch at mitchsmith@gomasa.org to set up a recording time.
3. Record yourself and send the video file to Mitch Smith at mitchsmith@gomasa.org.

MASA will share your story with readers of the new InspirEDMichigan.com online magazine, a collaborative initiative of Michigan’s school community. Let’s share the stories of innovation and hope that happen every day in public education.

**Inspire Others in Education with What Inspires You**

By Mitch Smith, MASA Communication Specialist

MASA asked President John Searles, What Inspires You?

“I’m inspired by some of the thought leaders in our organization (MASA) and our state who are thinking about how to push the envelope for kids, how to reform what’s not working in our state, and make it better for all children,” said John Searles, MASA President and superintendent of Midland County Educational Service Agency. “We’re thinking about how we can be more effective in individualizing student instruction for every child to help bring out the genius in every child.”

Having MASA members step up to tell their stories is a great way to inspire Michigan’s citizens and provide meaningful support to educators. Searles feels that superintendents, as leaders, have the ability to bring people together to have conversations that are difficult and possibly would not happen otherwise.

“One of the things that I speak about a lot is our great responsibility in bringing people together as conveners,” continued Searles. “Today and every day is an opportunity for us to help conversations happen where we can bring educators and business folks and other community groups together to do what is right for children. And that is powerful.”

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Ten Tips for Dealing with the Media

By Ron Koehler, APR

Here are some practical insights to make your public communications count!

1. An interview is like a business meeting. Know what you want to accomplish before it begins. Develop three or four talking points and be sure you make them during the interview.

2. Learn the nature of the story before the interview. Ask the reporter what he or she hopes to learn from your interview, and others the reporter plans to interview in the course of collecting information.

3. Always tell the truth—good or bad.

4. Never hide facts. You don’t have to volunteer information, but always be honest and forthcoming when you have the information requested.

5. If you don’t know something, say so. Then find the answer and get back to the reporter as soon as possible. If you don’t, the story is almost certain to be published or aired without that information or, worse, without your explanation.

6. Be aware of reporters’ deadlines and schedules.

7. If you are seeking to place a story, familiarize yourself with the media outlet you wish to influence.

8. Learn to talk in brief sound bites, usually 25 to 40 words.

9. When on television, talk to the reporter and not the camera.

10. There is no such thing as a dumb question. Don’t talk down to reporters, don’t demean their questions and don’t act as though you are too busy to accommodate them.

Ron Koehler, APR, is Assistant Superintendent for Organizational and Community Initiatives and Legislative Affairs for Kent ISD. Contact him at RonKoehler@kentisd.org.
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LEADERSHIP 2015
In a Time of Change

CONFERENCE SPEAKERS

MASA is pleased to welcome Marc Tucker, 2014 recipient of the James Bryant Conant Award, as the featured keynote speaker. Mr. Tucker’s presentation “The Emerging Global Model of High Performance Education and the Challenge of School Leadership” will kick off the conference at the opening general session on Wednesday afternoon.

Traditional clinic, ‘Hot Topics’ and Flip Professional Development breakout sessions are being offered to enhance your learning and help you make stronger colleague connections. There are four Hot Topics opportunities, each with a facilitator who’ll lead a discussion where ideas and resources will be collected and posted later for all members. These sessions are:

- How Does the Attitude Gap Around Culture, Class and Community Contribute to the Achievement Gap in our Michigan Classrooms? Led by Brian Davis, Superintendent, Holland Public Schools.
- Implementing Post-Secondary Options: Concurrent Enrollment, Dual Enrollment and Early College Programs. Led by John R. VanWagoner, Associate Superintendent, Shiawassee RESD
- Your School Culture – Balls, Band-Aids, and Bullying? Led by Jason Mellema, Superintendent Pewamo-Westphalia Community Schools.

There are three Flip PD options. Each will have a video presentation posted on the MASA website in advance of the conference. All members will have access to each video presentation. At the conference, a facilitator will go deeper on the topic, answer questions, and have an open discussion. These sessions are:

- All You Need to Know to Prepare for Your District’s Technology Plan. Led by Tim Hall, TRIG Project Director.
- Creating A Community of Culture and Change. Led by Kevin Quinlan, Education Manager, Discovery Education.

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 with an early evening discussion on Tuesday, January 20th and continue on Wednesday morning, where participants will engage in “Leadership for Learning: Balancing Accountability and Support” with Nancy A. Colflesh, Ph.D.

The second option will take place on Wednesday morning, January 21st. 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

Comments from State Superintendent, Mike Flanagan, updates from MASA Executive Director, William Mayes, and MSBO Executive Director, David Martell.

Paul Schutt, co-Chief Executive Officer of Issue Media Group will help us to connect and contribute to the Michigan Public School Partnership’s InspiRED Michigan initiative.

Psychologist and Humorist Dane Wysocki will give an upbeat closing message.

LEARN MORE ONLINE

Please visit http://gomasa.org/2015-masa-midwinter-conference or scan the code to the right for full event details and registration.
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