Plainwell District Leaders
Strengthen Connections for Students

Page 16

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ON THE COVER: By making an intentional effort to connect students with Plainwell Community Schools’ programs, Superintendent Susan Wakefield is making a difference in the lives and learning of students like Taylor Stansbury. See page 16.

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<td><strong>Get fewer</strong> tardy days and less disciplinary office referrals.</td>
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<td><strong>Have improved</strong> concentration, alertness, comprehension, memory, and learning.</td>
<td><strong>Perform better</strong> on math and reading achievement tests.</td>
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<td><strong>Show increased</strong> cognitive function, attention, and memory.</td>
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MASA Connections Enhance Service, Leadership, Collaboration, and Excellence

By Chris Wigent, MASA Executive Director

The theme for this issue of Leader magazine is Connections. Quality leaders are aware of the immense amount of connections necessary to ensure success in their daily work. Developing quality connections can be very time consuming, but it is time well spent and will appropriately position you and your school district to help guarantee support and success for your district’s mission.

As the Executive Director of MASA and an experienced superintendent, I have always put connections at the top of my list and focus on these daily. Here are a few examples of connections that your state association has developed:

- **Education Alliance** – This group consists of the executive directors of all the education-related state associations. Membership includes MAISA, MASB, MSBO, MASSP, MEMSPA, MEA, AFT, MDE/State Superintendent, and several other state associations as well as Michigan State University. Monthly meetings allow this group the opportunity to identify what we can do collectively so that we are as unified as possible when it comes to educational issues in Michigan. We also connect with many of these associations on an individual basis and work very hard to grow relationships with these and other partners.

- **AASA** – Connecting with our colleagues at a national level helps to inform us on what is happening with public education across the country. Periodically, I will meet with executive directors of other state superintendent associations to learn about what they are doing that might also benefit our membership. Recently, our lobbyist Brad Biladeau and I attended a meeting where lobbyists and executive directors from around the nation discussed what is happening in their states regarding legislative efforts related to public education. The information that we received was very valuable and will help as we continue to try to influence the development and implementation of quality educational policy in Michigan.

- **Membership** – It is imperative that we continue to connect with the membership of MASA. We do this in a number of ways, including holding regular meetings with our board, council, and three standing committees. The individuals involved with these groups provide us with feedback and vision to inform the future of the association. In addition, we recently connected with all of our members by conducting a statewide member survey. The results provide the data needed to continuously improve and grow as an association. We also send out periodic emails to ensure that members are up to speed on important association and statewide issues. Our website www.gomasa.org provides members with another opportunity to connect and receive important information in a number of different areas with only one or two clicks. Finally, we host two statewide conferences that offer excellent opportunities for us all to connect with each other.

There are many other connections that we continue to make to ensure that we represent our membership at the highest and most effective levels possible. Please do not hesitate to suggest a connection that you feel MASA should make by contacting me at cwigent@gomasa.org. As always, I welcome any other feedback related to our association or my leadership. It is my hope that all of our members continue to feel connected with MASA, and that we provide everyone with quality services, leadership, collaboration, and excellence on a daily basis.

Chris

GUIDE TO EDUCATION ASSOCIATION ACRONYMS:

**AASA**: American Association of School Administrators

**AFT**: American Federation of Teachers

**MAISA**: Michigan Association of Intermediate School Administrators

**MASB**: Michigan Association of School Boards

**MASSP**: Michigan Association of Secondary School Principals

**MEMSPA**: Michigan Elementary and Middle School Principals Association

**MSBO**: Michigan School Business Officials

**MEA**: Michigan Education Association

**MDE**: Michigan Department of Education

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As superintendents, we constantly hunt for solutions to address issues bombarding our schools. It is as if we are in a thick cedar swamp, with branches and bugs blocking our field of vision, complete with boot-sucking mud that tugs our feet downward, causing us to stumble. It can be daunting, and frequently you may pause and ask, “Is this working?”

When you landed your position, you exuded confidence, possessed a can-do attitude, and a passion to tackle all things getting in the way of student learning. Through the process of addressing so many things, you may wonder if you are heading in the right direction. Further, you might even question if your personal perspectives about the underlying issues are accurate. Back to the swamp: Do you need an aerial view to get your bearings? Who else is in there with you?

To collaborate means literally “to work together.” Despite myriad other things that might be distracting us, we need to keep our focus on the goals we wish to accomplish. For a collaboration to be successful, the parties partnering must be jointly positioned on solving a mutually agreed upon goal or goals, even though they may be coming in at different angles. The parties need to be honest and open, and show respect for each other’s viewpoints.

As more people become involved, the need for more communication and dialogue increases. Does everyone buy into the goal and the work to be done? Articulating the processes and procedures in writing and revisiting the goals and roles will help to ensure a strong, shared understanding. Teams can identify traditions and routines that may come up as barriers to progress in order to keep the initiative moving in the right direction.

In some districts, including my own, schools have formed collaborations with agencies, service organizations, and volunteers to make sure all of our students will not go hungry, even when schools are not in session. This kind of project not only helps students, it also feeds the souls of the contributors, who in turn learn more about what our schools are trying to achieve to benefit our children.

Whether it is student hunger, safety, academics, or an innovative program, with limited resources at our fingertips, the needs of our students demand we seek out willing participants to work together. We, as leaders, need to capitalize on these opportunities and foster the conditions for effective collaboration. Discover the hot topics within your community. What are other agencies, businesses, and citizens passionate about, working on, and excited to address? Believe that you are uniquely poised to contribute to a solution to help others and then act accordingly.

Collaborative efforts, focused on high priority items with high levels of support from participants, along with sustained and strategic communications, will help clear your path to greater student success. As you read the articles in this issue of the Leader, notice how others make deep connections with partners to foster effective collaborations. Let’s make efforts to learn and to navigate issues together. We can do this!

Michele B. Lemire is Superintendent of Escanaba Public Schools and currently serves as MASA President-Elect.
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The Southern Michigan Center for Science and Industry (SMCSI) is a true collaboration of public education, community, and industry. It is the result of a common vision of economic development that has brought these three bodies together. Through this relationship, regional leaders hope to create a pipeline of education and training that will benefit the entire region.

Now in its second year, the SMCSI was established to educate and train students and adults for careers in engineering and manufacturing. Although the program is operated through Hudson Area Schools, the regional program serves students in multiple counties and adults in a more than 90-mile radius. Local manufacturers had expressed the need for workforce development for a number of years, but it was through the collaboration of community leaders, industry leaders, and educational leaders that the idea became a reality.

The program uses blended learning to provide students the knowledge and experiences they will need to be successful. A typical week for students includes individualized instruction using highly interactive software in areas such as system automation, electronics, hydraulics, pneumatics, and computer numerical control (CNC). Students receive hands-on experience with trainers and apply their knowledge as they work together on major projects. These projects incorporate the skills they learned and allow them to learn other skills necessary for the real world, such as team work, time management, safety, and workplace effectiveness.

The success of the program can be attributed to many collaborative efforts.
The idea grew from a shared vision from regional business, civic, and political leaders. Hudson Area Schools developed the ideas further and worked with industry to bring the program to life. A critical step in the development of the program was to hire a program manager who understood the world of manufacturing. Dan Rogers, Program Manager for SMCSI, has more than 20 years of manufacturing experience. His experience in the industry ensures that SMCSI is meeting the needs of industry. His professional relationships have secured hundreds of thousands of dollars of donated equipment and expertise. SMCSI is working closely with all local school districts within its region, as well as the Lenawee Intermediate School District. Lenawee County Career and Technical Education funds are used to cover the cost of Lenawee County students attending the program. Students attending from outside Lenawee County are funded through their local districts or with funds from their intermediate school districts.

The first high school class to complete the program was extremely successful. Two of the first graduates were accepted into the engineering program at Kettering University. Some students have gone directly into the workforce. Several other students have begun entry-level positions and are pursuing further training, college education, or career opportunities.

Adult training is also a major component of the SMCSI program. SMCSI has developed partnerships with South Central Michigan Works! and a regional staffing agency. This partnership makes SMCSI a one-stop shop where adults can receive training, find financial assistance for their training, and obtain support in securing a position in their area of expertise.

SMCSI provides adults training in systems automation, including CNC operation and robotics. Many of the adult students are individuals who desire to improve their career opportunities. SMCSI also works directly with a number of companies in designing specific training programs for their employees. The blended learning in the adult program allows for continuous enrollment and for the program to better meet the different learning styles and circumstances of adult learners.

The Hudson SMCSI site is located in the former headquarters of a major manufacturer in the region. There is ample office space, open space, and space to grow. In the second year of SMCSI, the program has partnered with Tecumseh Public Schools to expand. Locating the program within two local school districts provides more students direct access. It also better covers the industry partners generously donate time, expertise, and equipment.
county and region in providing training in this critical area.

The Hudson and Tecumseh SMCSI programs have teamed up with Project Lead the Way (PLTW) and Michigan Virtual University. The connection between PLTW and SMCSI creates a very powerful learning experience for students, especially those who desire a four-year degree in a related field. Through PLTW and Michigan Virtual University, students have the opportunity to enroll in the SMCSI program and earn their physics credit, as well as additional elective credits.

SMCSI is about connections. It is connecting public education with industry, and individuals with career opportunities. These are the types of connections that must occur for individuals to develop careers, for industry to grow, and for communities to flourish. These are the relationships that lead to true economic development.

Dr. Michael J. Osborne is Superintendent of Hudson Area Schools and a graduate of Courageous Journey Tier 2 cohort 5 and Courageous Journey Tier 1. Contact him at 517.448.8912 or mosborne@hudson.k12.mi.us.

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Educati ng children is best accomplished as a partnership with others—many others. It is our job as leaders to ensure that students, parents, staff, and the broader community understand the important roles they play in the educational success of our children.

Wayne-Westland Community Schools embraces the importance of partnerships. We have purposefully sought out and created partnerships with our alumni, local businesses, community groups, and city officials. These partnerships are true two-way relationships with a focus on benefits for our students.

As superintendent, I believe our partnerships must align with our mission and values. We need to be selective to ensure that they support the educational success of our students. We must explore many partnerships in order to create those that will be of the most benefit.

Alumni matter

Wayne-Westland alumni who have partnered with the district have been instrumental in making improvements for our students and community.

The Champions of Wayne and the Champions of John Glenn High School programs provide examples of how alumni have partnered with the district. Participating students pair with an adult mentor, usually a teacher, and sign a contract that includes an academic goal for each semester in which the student participates. The mentor assists the student in achieving the goal. At the end of each semester, students who meet their goals attend a celebratory banquet and receive a check for $200. The program is funded entirely by alumni. The benefits of these programs include an increase in ACT scores, course grades, passing rates, and engagement in school. Approximately 1,000 students are enrolled in the programs. Champions would not be possible without the financial support of alumni.

An alumnus launched a fundraising effort to reopen the planetarium at John Glenn. The planetarium (originally opened in 1964) closed about 10 years ago. The district did not have money for renovations. The alumnus was planning a class reunion and wanted to arrange a “nostalgic” visit to the planetarium. When he learned the district couldn’t offer the visit, he decided that the planetarium was too valuable to stay closed and succeeded in partnering with community members to fundraise. On October 19, 2015, the partnership between alumni and the community resulted in $50,000 to renovate and reopen the planetarium.

Community and business partners

Wayne-Westland Community Schools serves approximately 12,000 students, of which nearly 67 percent qualify for free or reduced lunch.

The district operates a Family Resource Center (FRC) that provides assistance to families in need and largely operates on donations and the generosity of community members and district employees. It is a go-to place for families who need assistance, whether it is food, clothing, or help finding resources to improve their lives.
The William D. Ford Career-Technical Center is a high school option for students of Wayne-Westland and all of Wayne County; it offers 20 programs in a variety of career-technical fields. Students reap the benefits of a strong partnership with numerous businesses. One example is Woolf Aircraft, which provides students with job-related experiences, hosts competitions, and hires students who meet the requisite training requirements. The owner of Woolf Aircraft is also an alumnus of the district.

Great cities, great schools
Partnerships with the cities our district serves have strengthened the district and the communities.

We formed a partnership with the City of Westland to renovate blighted properties within the city. Students enrolled in the Construction Technology Program at the William D. Ford Career-Technical Center are at the center of this project. The city identifies properties that need renovation, and the students receive real-life, hands-on experience renovating or building new homes on these properties. The city sells the renovated properties, and proceeds are used to fund the next project. It is a win-win partnership for the community and our students.

The City of Wayne’s city hall building was in need of structural repairs requiring the building to be closed. The district and the city developed a lease agreement to provide housing in one of our closed schools. This eliminated district costs associated with a closed building while the city found an affordable temporary home for its city hall.

A similar lease agreement is in place with the City of Westland. It created the Jefferson-Barns Vitality Center at the former Jefferson-Barns Elementary to serve as a community service hub for the Nor-Wayne Community. Another example of win-win partnerships.

Summary
According to Helen Keller, “Alone we can do so little; together we can do so much.”

Partnerships are established through mutual interest, need and commitment. The development of partnerships is essential to our success and attaining our vision: Great Futures Start Right Here!

Michele A. Harmala, Ph.D., is the Superintendent of the Wayne-Westland Community Schools and a graduate of Courageous Journey Tier 1 Cohort 2. She is in her second year of leadership for the district of approximately 12,000 students. Wayne-Westland Community Schools is the fourth largest school district in Wayne County.

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Plainwell Leaders Provide a Positive Edge for Students

By Mitch Smith

What teacher, principal, or superintendent does not want to give their students a positive edge when learning inside the classroom, as well as in their lives after graduating from high school? Yet, despite educators’ best efforts, many students come to school facing a variety of negative factors that put them at risk of academic failure. Poverty, family instability, and substance abuse are just a few examples of risk factors that can lead to a student falling short of his or her potential.

How can educators assist students experiencing at-risk circumstances? Connecting those students with innovative programs and classes designed to address the unique needs of youths who are at risk is essential to providing that positive edge that will help them succeed.

Plainwell Community Schools, under the leadership of Superintendent Susan Wakefield, is working hard to deliver programs to assist students who may need extra support to succeed in their studies. Wakefield takes inspiration from some words of advice from an early mentor, who challenged her by asking: “Sue, you can’t get to second base unless you’re willing to leave first.” So it’s not surprising that when Plainwell High School English teacher Chase Mielke and Principal Jeremy Wright proposed developing a class called Positive Psychology, Wakefield quickly gave support. The Positive Psychology classes stemmed from the Quantum Learning system used throughout Plainwell Community Schools—a system that helps teachers achieve the district goal that students leave high school prepared for success in college and career, exhibiting strong character and citizenship traits.

“When we started the Positive Psychology program, we were really worried about kids that we thought had great potential, kids that could do really well in school that just repeatedly made the wrong choices, the wrong decisions setting them
up for failure after failure,” said Wakefield. “At the heart of it all, for a kid to succeed they have to believe that they can succeed.” That belief is where the Positive Psychology class pays off for students, especially in the case of recent graduate Taylor Stansbury.

“I was in a really bad place when I walked into Mr. Mielke’s classroom,” said Stansbury. “My self-esteem was low. I felt like I was good-for-nothing.”

She felt this way partially because she was struggling with her studies in school. She also suffered a difficult personal
situation—her mother had been tragically murdered, and her father was incarcerated—factors that potentially could negatively affect Stansbury’s success in school and life. The Positive Psychology class offered her an opportunity to develop strategies and techniques that would help her succeed academically. The class also taught Stansbury how to be committed to herself in order to use that personal commitment to help her flourish.

School changed for her from a place of struggle to a place where she could strengthen herself by learning new skills to face life’s adversities and challenges.

“If you’re not getting the appreciation at home and you see a teacher who cares, that means a lot,” said Stansbury. “You come to the realization that this teacher really cares,” continued Stansbury. “He will not let you fail; he asks complex questions; you learn to study, gain confidence in yourself and are challenged and pushed until you do it.”

Mr. Mielke’s Positive Psychology class helped influence a positive trajectory for Taylor Stansbury. “This is it, I want to do better for myself and I want to do well in school,” said Stansbury, reflecting on the greater understanding about herself she gained in the class. “The sky’s the limit, just like the message on a sign that hangs on the wall of Mr. Mielke’s Positive Psychology classroom.”

Plainwell Community Schools hasn’t stopped with a single program, and district leaders continue to look at other ways to help all students succeed. Every Plainwell teacher is trained in the Quantum Learning System so the learning environment is consistent through all grades. Additional classes

Continued on page 20

Connecting students with innovative programs and classes designed to address the unique needs of youths who are at risk is essential to providing the “positive edge” that will help them succeed.

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CONFERENCE SPEAKERS

MASA is pleased to welcome Lloyd Carr, former head football coach of the University of Michigan. Coach Carr will share his insights on Leadership during the opening keynote address on Wednesday, January 27.

Darnell Earley, Emergency Manager for Detroit Public Schools, will take the stage on Thursday morning and will share lessons learned throughout his career as a senior executive manager for a number of organizations in Michigan.

Wavelength is an award-winning, acting ensemble from Chicago that uses humor, laughter and improvisation to train, motivate, and inspire educational personalities. The group has been featured on TV and in newspaper articles. Their presentation, “Those Who Laugh Last,” will have you in stitches.

LEARNING SESSIONS

MASA will feature regular concurrent learning sessions, as well as concurrent “unconference” sessions, which were a popular feature at the Fall Conference in Traverse City.

Here’s just a sample of this year’s featured topics:

- How to structure and run effective administrative team meetings
- Understanding and meeting the needs of transgender students
- Understanding and implementing competency based education
- The superintendent as an instructional leader: How to ensure the focus is on instruction
- Student learning objectives and role in student growth and evaluation

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Plainwell Leaders, Continued from page 18

like Positive Psychology are being added in different grades and school buildings throughout the district to develop students’ interpersonal skills. Wakefield also intentionally works to instill an attitude among her staff that they have to believe in the kids so that the kids have no option but to believe in themselves.

“I truly believe all our teachers want to connect with kids and make that special relationship,” said Wakefield. “We just needed to give teachers the tools to do it. I know that the teachers across this district are connecting with kids every day. The greatest gift we give every student at Plainwell is the gift of relationship with our staff, and from that relationship comes the courage it takes for students to try and succeed.”

District leaders are sharing the program’s success, by offering community members and parents the opportunity to attend evening sessions, where they also can learn some of the concepts of the Quantum Learning System.

“We want them to understand what Plainwell is teaching,” said Wakefield.

Mitch Smith is a communication specialist with MASA. Contact him at 517.327.5910 or mitchsmith@gomasa.org
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Berrien Regional Education Service Agency (Berrien RESA) understands that the services offered during school hours are only part of a child’s full educational experience. The experiences that occur outside the school building are also critical to his or her academic success. This includes being able to participate in community activities, having proper housing and healthy food, and living in a safe environment.

Unfortunately, it is difficult to connect many parents in Berrien County with multiple services that address all of their child’s needs (both in and out of school) in one convenient and centralized location. To respond to that need, Berrien RESA developed the Berrien RESA Festival of Families, a free, annual event where families could learn about and register for all of Berrien County’s resources. This year’s event took place on September 19, 2015, at the Berrien County Youth Fairgrounds. The Festival was an overwhelming success with hundreds of families participating in the day’s activities.

The 2015 Festival of Families featured 40 community resource booths highlighting area activities and programs. The booths offered information on legal advocacy, job skill training, supported and independent living, community athletics, financial education, medical/healthy living supports, and general services offered by area businesses. Additionally, Berrien RESA highlighted its own programs, including those for early identification and support of children with special needs.

The Festival hosted a college and career planning section where students could explore post-secondary options and volunteer-based initiatives. Entertainment was offered throughout the day with live stage acts that enticed audiences of all ages. A community arts activity called “Arts for All” provided guests with the opportunity to create collaborative murals where students in wheelchairs could use adaptive tools to “roll on” their personal touches to the community piece. Of course, carnival games, face painters, balloon artists, and bounce houses were onsite.

A section of the Festival appealed to the area’s youngest learners: the Early Childhood Zone, where children ages 0–5 were able to explore fire and police vehicles, sit on a school bus, and participate in early development activities with their favorite costumed characters. The Festival of Families truly offered something for everyone.

An inclusive experience
The planners of the event were careful to ensure that every family felt welcomed. No matter what the child’s or parent’s ability level, they were included and able to participate in every activity. All areas of the event were wheelchair accessible. Activities and games in the carnival area were designed so that children could participate regardless of impairment. In fact, for many children, this was one of the few public
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activities where they were able to identify with other students with similar impairments. This sense of camaraderie allowed guests to feel fully accepted and welcomed in their own community, an experience that does not often occur for many families.

“It was overwhelming to see my son have a good time,” one mom reacted. “He has been reluctant to join his peers at the playground or in community sports because he feels he looks different or may burst out with sounds other children are not used to hearing. The Festival of Families removes all those barriers. My son can just be a kid and have a good time.”

An event that gives back
The Festival also provided the community with a volunteer activity. Nearly 150 individuals from Berrien RESA’s staff and the community worked together to deliver the Festival. The volunteers committed hundreds of hours of personal time to organize the event from concept to implementation. Area students also took advantage of the day. They helped volunteer throughout the Festival itself, allowing them to earn service credit toward graduation.

An event that strengthened partnerships
The event’s premier sponsor, First Student, Inc., provided door-to-door shuttle service for many of the day’s guests. Families were able to call Berrien RESA in advance to schedule a free personalized pick-up by First Student, Inc. First Student even made accommodations for infants needing car seats and for individuals who needed wheelchair lift access. Thanks to this special partnership, families with limited resources were able to fully participate in the event.

“We had such a successful day!” said Berrien RESA Superintendent Dr. Kevin Ivers. “The Festival of Families truly provided a networking and resource opportunity for hundreds of families throughout Berrien County. We cannot thank our vendors, sponsors, and volunteers enough for making this such an informative and fun day for our community.”

Without a doubt, the Berrien RESA Festival of Families answered a need within the community. Berrien RESA was very proud to offer the 2015 event and looks forward to providing this valuable connection between the resources of the community and the services that are offered at many more Festivals in the years to come.

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Let’s face it; technology is not always what it’s cracked up to be.

It can create total dependence, then let you down at the most inopportune time. It helps you work more efficiently, but only so you can cram more into your busy schedule. It enables you to connect with students, but at the risk of alienating their parents. And, perhaps most troubling, technology can prepare kids for cutting-edge careers, but strip them of the soft skills needed to get them through an interview.

These are the harsh realities we found ourselves facing after becoming a 1:1 iPad district just two years ago. We jumped in with both feet, lavishing trust and freedom on our students, and we expected them to reciprocate with good judgment and laser-like focus on learning. What we found instead was a surprising level of immaturity and poor judgment more reflective of, well, young adolescents. Our tech crew was overrun with abused privileges and broken equipment, and our cafeteria was reduced to a virtual arcade during breakfast and lunch. Student grades began to suffer, while gyms and playgrounds went empty. Worst of all, the popular devices that were supposed to draw students to our school were actually driving families away.

This wasn’t the way the great technology revolution was supposed to work, was it? What had we done wrong?

Examining, rethinking, and refocusing

Fortunately, the answers to these questions were quite easily found. After analyzing our mistakes carefully, we emerged with some new direction and resolve. First, we concluded that technology itself had not caused our problems; we had, through lack of foresight and planning. Second, we admitted that kids will be kids, and they cannot be expected to exercise maturity that they do not yet possess. Finally, we determined that we needed to rethink things at a systems level to get where we wanted to go. In other words, we couldn’t just add technology to business as usual and expect everything to magically make sense. Technology and education should not live in isolation from one another. We needed to establish a clear vision of how technology could assist us in the development of well-rounded students.

We set out to right our many wrongs and help staff and students make the following tech connections:

1. Those cool new devices are for learning. To drive this home, we promptly removed the App Store from all iPads and installed what we called “The Super Seven,” a collection of must-have apps that all teachers were expected to use in their classrooms. Students no longer had to rely on their own maturity to make good decisions, because the temptations had been removed and the emphasis on teaching and learning had been restored.

2. School was going to change—for the better. We all needed to accept the fact that technology is not going away. We assured our teachers that we would respect them wherever they were on their personal tech journey as long as they were
moving forward. We also held weekly “tech share” sessions, where our more ambitious users were propped up for their efforts. We launched training initiatives with students and parents to demonstrate how technology was supposed to work and what it was supposed to accomplish. And we brought members of the business community into classrooms and assemblies to show the many practical applications for technology in the workplace.

3. Success in life is still about interpersonal skills and relationships. Technology may have a growing presence in our schools and businesses, but it will never replace common sense and courtesy. Unfortunately, many of our students had already entered the zombie zone, so we had to be very intentional in recovering the soft skills that we wanted them to possess. To accomplish this, we reduced our seldom-used library to a single day of weekly operation, and we replaced our retiring librarian with a well-connected businesswoman, giving her the title of Student Support Specialist. Her assignment was to meet with kids to equip them with soft skills—making eye contact, performing a proper handshake, initiating small talk, understanding appropriate attire, knowing when to leave a cell phone unanswered—and to connect them with community employers through job shadows and internship opportunities. She has also been able to bring important insights from employers back to the school so we can tailor our teaching and technology to meet actual workplace needs.

We certainly have not mastered the use of technology in education, but we have learned some valuable lessons from our mistakes. Most importantly, we are helping our students make lasting connections between technology, learning, and real life.

Brian Keim is Superintendent of Laker Schools in Pigeon, Michigan, and is a member of Courageous Journey Tier 2 Cohort 11. He has held various administrative roles over the past 15 years, including principal, guidance counselor, and special education director. Contact him at 989.551.9245 or bkeim@lakerschools.org.
From Skyping with Iceland to local field trips and internships, Otsego students are gaining experiences in STEM fields thanks to connections with businesses and community supporters.

Otsego Public Schools, a rural district of 2,280 students, is in year two of a five-year STEM integration plan, and already the connections are exceeding expectations.

“It’s far more than I would have imagined, yes; but, it is just the tip of the iceberg at the same time,” says Otsego Director of Instruction Heather Kortlandt.

The power of partnerships strengthened in the fall of 2013. When Governor Rick Snyder increased grant dollars available for FIRST Robotics teams, Otsego started a high school team and began securing business ties needed for success. “Immediately, engineers and companies jumped on board and were excited to be a part of this experience,” Kortlandt says.

A local engineer served as our lead mentor, and local companies like Peloton, Inc.; Parker; FEMA; Safari; and the Otsego Public Schools Foundation offered their time, talents, equipment, and donations. As the sponsor list grew, the education students were gleaning grew invaluable.

“When this started, there were students who had never picked up a tool before,” Kortlandt explains, “Now, they can program, design, problem-solve and trouble-shoot issues on a robot.” Through engineers’ guidance, students understand the process from concept to completion, lessons that trickled down quickly.

Students gained internships from these connections and this public-private partnership opened the door for more grant dollars. Otsego received a $7,500 Michigan STEM Partnership grant in 2014; then, with the nomination and support of our local farmers, we received a $25,000 grant through the Monsanto
Masa’s America’s Farmers Grow Rural Education program, putting the STEM plan into motion.

“It gave us just what we were looking for: the perfect balance of in- and out-of-school opportunities,” Kortlandt explains.

The district created a Lego® Lab at its Alamo Elementary School outfitted with Lego Education kits tailored for Pre-K through fifth-grade students. It also purchased Lego EV3 kits for eighth-grade science. In addition, new after-school Lego and Robotics teams formed for students in first through eighth grade. Student engagement soared as they tackled engineering lessons and learned how to design a vehicle, program it to complete a task or obstacle course, and trouble-shoot problems as they arose. More than 150 students participated in some type of after-school Lego or robotics team.

With this foundation, Elementary Technology teacher Michael Miller took it to the next level, introducing students to Autodesk design software TinkerCAD and TinkerPlay. In class, students tapped their higher-level thinking skills to create 3D bookmarks and keychains. To make this type of project tangible, Miller applied for a grant for 3D printers. The Otsego Public Schools Foundation funded three 3D printers, one for each of the elementary schools, and the sky became the limit.

Miller also started a summer Tech Camp for students to explore these technology tools.

“TinkerPlay is something that brings what’s in their imagination into reality,” Miller says.

It’s a program he became more familiar with over the summer when he joined Autodesk in San Francisco to be a part of the Teacher Advisory Committee. When Miller tweeted out pictures of his campers’ robots, the company asked to Skype with the kids. Their design teams in San Francisco and Iceland asked students what they liked and what they’d like to see next.

“They want the input, and it’s great because the students feel like they have a voice in the design,” Miller says. From those Skype sessions, the students are now future testers of TinkerPlay’s products.

Simultaneously, middle school students started using Autodesk in a new Design & Modeling class made possible through a donation from Tengam, a global company specializing in magnet technology, located in Otsego.

“I wanted to give kids more opportunities to learn about high-tech skills,” says Tengam General Manager and Otsego graduate Mark McPherson. Tengam pledged a five-year, $30,000 investment. McPherson says the engineering industry is in need of creative minds, “To have kids learning that skill early on is incredibly important.”

Tengam’s donation purchased computers and software to implement Project Lead the Way, a program that engages students’ natural curiosity and imagination through real-world topics. As the class got underway, Denso Manufacturing, an automotive company with a facility in Battle Creek, came on board as well. Two Denso engineers spoke to the class and demonstrated through a hands-on activity what a design, process, and quality engineer means in business. Two weeks later, students took a field trip to Denso and saw everything from 3D computer modeling to 6-axis robots in action, all complex systems students could now relate to.

“They’ve had enough of a taste of it that they were familiar with the technology and understood what Denso engineers were talking about,” Kortlandt explains.

This train isn’t slowing down; you could say it’s gaining “steam.” Otsego’s STEM plan is transitioning into STEAM with a new initiative.

“We’re taking our partnerships further by developing a joint STEAM committee comprised of school personnel and business leaders,” Kortlandt says.

This came from a strategic planning subcommittee that was one of two committees focused on growing community partnerships, mentorships, and internships as a district goal.

“It would be my hope and desire that within the next three to five years, we’ll be increasing student opportunities for internships,” says Otsego Superintendent Jeffery Haase.

Otsego also earned another $10,000 Michigan STEM Partnership grant for upper elementary programs, and the district will keep chipping away at the iceberg to uncover new possibilities.

“I can’t wait to see what’s next for our students,” Kortlandt adds.

Holly McCaw is Director of Communications for Otsego Public Schools. Contact her at 269.692.6073 or hmcaw@otsegops.org.
Preparing for a successful bond proposal is one of the most important events in a superintendent’s career. It requires a keen sense of purpose and a comprehensive strategy to connect with both the voter and the school community. Many proposals outline the improvements that will be made to buildings; others create a vision for new construction. Rarely is the connection made between a comprehensive educational plan and a bond campaign. In Lansing, we are positioning both concepts within an educational framework that aligns structural changes in tandem with creating a 21st century learning plan. It’s called The Lansing Pathway Promise.

The average age of our 30 buildings is 55 years and eligible for AARP! The amount of funding that would actually be needed to upgrade every educational facility in use would be prohibitive. We have to make the connection between capital outlay and a positive return on investment for an already over-burdened taxpayer. Knowing that we should begin with the end in mind, we asked ourselves three questions:

1. How can we align our core mission of providing students with career-and college-ready programming with much-needed facility improvements?

2. In the face of declining enrollment, in what ways do we need to right size in order to assure the community that a long-term bond proposal is looking towards the future, not the past?

3. How can we highlight the benefit of the Promise scholarship program within the outcomes of a successful bond proposal so that all roads lead
to graduation and post-secondary engagement?

Tackling all three questions, the Lansing Bond Committee, comprising a variety of stakeholders, co-created and endorsed The Lansing Pathway Promise. This educational framework positions all of our schools within three broad career-and-college-ready pathways: International Baccalaureate (IB) and Bio-Technologies; Visual and Performing Arts (VPA); and STEM/STEAM, Skilled Trades, and Manufacturing. Each of our three high schools will have as its focus one of these pathways. Students in elementary and middle years can begin to choose their pathway as early as kindergarten, where we already have schools that are theme-based in STEM/STEAM, VPA, IB, and language immersion programs. Parents can choose the pathway for their child at any age since all schools will also offer traditional programming.

Having a portfolio of options for parents connects the mandate of choice without having to leave our district. Graduation from any of our high schools guarantees eligibility for every Lansing School District student with a last-dollar scholarship to Lansing Community College or Michigan State University. Currently, the Promise Board is working towards expanding those post-secondary opportunities to other colleges and universities, as well as career and technical training. Connecting the benefit of a Promise scholarship with a bond proposal uniquely highlights a long-term positive return on investment by the taxpayer.

The Bond Committee looked at the construction required to house and/or enhance each of the pathways. Instead of an ad hoc approach to bricks and mortar upgrades or investing all of the bond revenues into a single facility, the committee recommended to the Board of Education a comprehensive proposal that connected the facility improvements needed for the Lansing Pathway Promise, as well as those needed to provide all of our schools with upgrades in security, technology, and furnishings. After 10 long months of work, the Board of Education unanimously approved the Bond Committee’s proposal. On May 3, 2016, the voters in Lansing will decide which pathway they will promise to the students of the Lansing School District.

For more information about the Lansing Pathway Promise, visit www.lansingpathwaypromise.net.

Yvonne Caamal-Canul is Superintendent of the Lansing School District and 2015 Michigan Superintendent of the Year. Contact her at 517.755.1010 or yvonne.caamal-canul@lansingschools.net.

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I recently heard of an ambitious project being undertaken by a superintendent to fully equip students and teachers with one-to-one tablet devices. He stated that he was not sure how to get teachers to widely use the new resource. He also was ready to accept that maybe the devices would just add efficiency to what teachers are already doing and was frustrated by not knowing where to go next with the initiative.

When asked what district leaders expected to see in improved student outcomes because of the new one-to-one technology or how it connected to the mission and strategic goals of his district, he froze. He acknowledged that they have not even begun to define that. Then, when asked how he planned to track the impact of this huge new investment, again he acknowledged that the district had not gone beyond a vague idea for tracking how many teachers are using the devices (not even how they are using them or what students are doing with them).

Define the end-goal for students
Pat Reeves, Associate Professor of Educational Research and Leadership at WMU and developer of MASA’s Courageous Journey™ program, notes that schools can ill afford to make such investments (money, time, human capacity) or adopt improvement strategies if they do not know specifically what they want to produce in changed student outcomes and how those changes link to the mission and high level goals of the district. Moreover, she contends districts cannot make wise decisions about where to prioritize improvement strategies if they are not working from an explicit set of student success indicators.

Creating a clearly aligned district with timely and accurate measures greatly improves the chances of the school system’s success, and provides districts with the foundation to maintain that success far into the future.

“What even if the district has established student success indicators, they are flying blind if they are not systematically tracking those indicators and monitoring how those indicators are interacting with student background and school process indicators,” Reeves says.

Align goals and connect strategies to the district mission
Student success indicators must, then, “connect” with a district’s high-level goals and the even higher-level mission and vision as identified by the board. Having this type of alignment assures that the lower-level strategy of adding tablet devices is implemented only when there is clarity of how the initiative connects to the district’s strategic goals.
mission. In other words, what high-level measurement needle is expected to move by adding the new tablets? Additionally, what mid-level measures (i.e., leading indicators) will the district monitor to insure both high-fidelity implementation and observable change in student outcomes from week-to-week and month-to-month?

In *Improving Performance*, a widely acclaimed book for organizational and process improvement, Geary Rummler writes that “everything in an organization’s internal and external ecosystem (customers, products and services, rewards systems, technology, organizational structure, etc.) is connected.” His book goes on to clarify how to improve organizational and individual performance by understanding these connections and by strategically engineering the organization to maximize its potential for success in meeting its mission.

For schools, this connection of the parts of the system is vitally important, and is the only way to assure that they maximize their limited resources in ways that have a measurable effect on the schools’ high-level success indicators.

“It is rare to see this type of top-to-bottom alignment,” Reeves notes. “First, because districts rarely identify or work from a complete student success model, and second, because districts often commit to strategic initiatives without defining what will be different or better in measurable student outcomes as a result of those initiatives.”

**Connecting mission to the classroom: One district’s story**

The process of connecting the district starts at the highest mission/vision level and ends at the student level. An example of this can be seen in the following school, whose mission is to: “inspire and develop literate, creative problem solvers, ready for continued learning and career success, while becoming respectful productive members of society.” Based on this mission, the board is tasked to identify the pertinent outputs in the mission, and monitor that they are successfully implemented.

In this example, the superintendent and board identified five clear outputs:

- Literate students
- Creative problem solvers
- Ready for continued learning
- Prepared for career success
- Respectful, productive members of society

Using creative problem solvers as an example, the superintendent worked with his team to identify both how to implement a strategy to produce “creative problem solvers” and how the district could measure success in this area. From this discussion, a high level strategic goal was created, as follows:

The district structured its curriculum to provide all students with a strong problem-solving strategy, which will include the following processes:

- Analyze a problem
- Design and develop a solution
- Implement the solution
- Evaluate the results

By clearly articulating the four processes that students will demonstrate as indicators of success, the district has created mid-level measures that teachers can teach to, students can set goals to, and the district can track to insure that both the implementation and impact of the problem-solving strategy is being monitored in real-time.

Next, the superintendent implemented the following into the 12th-grade curriculum: All 12th-grade students will complete a senior project that selects and analyzes a problem, designs and develops a solution, implements the solution, and evaluates the results.

The board (with advice from the superintendent) then decided upon a set of agreeable measures and standards to provide evidence of the success of this implementation. One measure included student participation, and
the standard decided upon was that 90 percent of all 12th-grade students must complete this process.

Later, when reviewing the June monitoring report related to this goal, the board will receive data-based evidence from the superintendent that supports the accomplishment of this goal, one of which is that the standard of 90 percent was met. With sufficient time and monitoring of the mid-level indicators of how students are performing on each of the four parts of the problem-solving strategy, the district will have powerful data to determine where and how they need to adjust instruction on this important student competency in order to see growth in student proficiency with the problem-solving model.

Summary
Using this connected approach, work was first done at the highest level in the organization in the creation of the overall mission of the district. Goals were then connected to the mission, and one of them—regarding creative problem solvers—was identified. Then, success indicators were identified and standards of success were created. The superintendent was then able to work with a team to identify an intervention that fits into the curriculum and meets this desired goal and the success indicators.

These steps connected the highest mission level of the organization to the classroom/student level, assuring that the needs of the community (as identified by the board) are being met through the district’s successful completion of its mission.

Connections in schools are vitally important—from the students to the teacher, the teachers to department, departments to buildings, and then from buildings to the district and strategic board level. Creating a clearly aligned district with timely and accurate measures greatly improves the chances of the school system’s success, and provides districts with the foundation to maintain that success far into the future.

Having a system in place with aligned goals, and data to assess progress towards those goals, creates an environment of continuous process improvement. An aligned and connected system also assures the district of a maximum return on its community’s investment in education.

Doug LaFleur is President of the Northview Public Schools Board of Education and President of Eidex, a Leadership Sponsor of MASA and the Courageous Journey.

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At Livingston Educational Service Agency (LESA), collaboration is one of three grounding tenets in our mission, which is to provide highly valued service through leadership, innovation, and collaboration. In our guiding principles, we define collaboration as “working together to achieve a common goal through positive and professional partnerships.” While all of this sounds great on the surface, we can actually point to specific endeavors that showcase the spirit of collaboration that exists in Livingston County across multiple agencies that support our children and families.

Twenty-six years ago, six county agencies—Community Mental Health (CMH), Public Health Department, Family Independence Agency, Substance Abuse Coordinating Agency, LESA, and Juvenile Court—began meeting to identify gaps and barriers in services. This partnership evolved into the Human Services Collaborative Body (HSCB), now a 26-member coalition of appointed members who coordinate services across our systems. Since its inception, the HSCB has established a variety of workgroups to tackle community-wide issues that include mental health, homelessness, substance use, transportation, hunger, and more.

In 2009, HSCB approved a new workgroup—Trauma Informed System of Care—to focus on creating a system that recognizes trauma and its impact on students while also establishing the Livingston County Trauma Informed Steering Committee to oversee this initiative. This collaborative team comprised representatives from LACASA (a county agency for victims and survivors of abuse, violence, and sexual assault), Community Mental Health, Department of Health & Human Services, LESA, Livingston County Juvenile Courts, and foster care. At the systems level, this team plans ongoing trauma training and awareness activities in Livingston County. At the child/family level, this committee approves Trauma Informed Assessment referrals and ensures staff members are trained to conduct them.

In June 2009, our Trauma Informed Assessment teams first received specialized training and coaching from Western Michigan University’s Children’s Trauma Assessment Clinic, completing their first evaluation the following November. Trauma Informed Assessments aim to gather critical information from the multiple domains of a child’s life—cognitive, affective, behavioral, and physiological. Evaluators synthesize the data and make recommendations to support the child’s daily functioning, with the ultimate goal of maintaining the child safely in our community.

The professionals who conduct these assessments include counselors and social workers from CMH, an advocate from LACASA, occupational therapists and speech language pathologists from LESA, and a private therapist. CMH and LESA both provide their staff as in-kind contributions, a clear statement about their agencies’ commitment to this work.

“This has been a true collaboration at multiple levels, from the directors who find the funding, to the staff who volunteer to do the assessments in addition to their normal duties,” said Matt Vergith, Program Director for Child & Adolescent Services at CMH.

To date, our team has received 105 referrals for Trauma Informed Assessments. Once completed, the evaluation team shares the results and recommendations with individuals who are critical in supporting the child—family, caregivers, school personnel, outside therapists, and others—so they can support the unique needs of a trauma survivor.

“These meetings have been essential in helping families and professionals understand the child’s behaviors and the impact of the trauma,” said Libby Stahl, LACASA Program Director.

On our continuing journey to become a trauma informed system, we have
taken to heart what Denise Juneau, Montana State Superintendent stated: “Children are coming to school with trauma, everyday trauma that they live under: violence in their homes, alcoholism, unemployment . . . We need to help treat that before they can go sit in a class and learn about math.”

“The trauma evaluation team process is so valuable,” said Crystal McKelvey, LESA occupational therapist, when asked why she continues as a trauma assessment team member after nearly seven years. “Looking at a child through a trauma lens provides a lot of insight into emotional, developmental, and behavioral concerns. It’s important to know that trauma is real, and it happens more often than we think. It also helps me ask questions about what is happening in a child’s life and to support teachers and staff in understanding how traumatic events shape responses and behavior.”

Other evaluation team members are quick to share how much they have learned about the services and supports available in Livingston County by working shoulder to shoulder with professionals across agencies.

In 2011, Livingston County’s community child approach to Trauma Informed Assessments was highlighted in National Council Magazine, and in May 2015, the steering committee was invited to present our collaborative work at a statewide trauma summit at Western Michigan University. No single agency or organization can effectively address the myriad needs of a traumatized child, and the Trauma Informed System of Care is just one example of what we can accomplish when community organizations collaborate to achieve a common goal. In Livingston County, collaborating across community agencies is the only way we know to support children and their families.

Dawn G. Bentley, Ed.D., is Executive Director of Special Education for the Livingston Educational Service Agency and recently earned her doctorate in educational leadership from Michigan State University. She is proud to collaborate with multiple community agencies in Livingston County and serves on a variety of workgroups that include Hunger Council, Funding Partners, Trauma-Informed System of Care, and Abilities Alliance. Contact Dawn at 517.540.6804 or dawnbentley@livingstonesa.org.

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*Source: Ipreo, June 2015
The often-used phrase “It takes a village to raise a child” is sample lexicon for the concept that schools cannot and should not do it alone anymore. Building bridges between the two worlds of education and community is central to quality of life issues in a school community. A school leader’s primary role, therefore, must be to create the conversation and to connect the dots between the district and the community.

Quality of life in 21st century America isn’t easy or simple. Families know that their children need effective schools and safe, family-friendly community resources—no matter where they live or what their income. Generally, school reform and community-building include parallel efforts to strengthen these essential sources of support. Specifically, school reform seeks to strengthen schools so that every child succeeds academically, while community-building encompasses a variety of approaches that mobilize residents and organize coalitions among local groups to build the community’s social, physical, economic, and political infrastructure.

Ideally, these ideas and improvements build upon and maximize each other so that schools and the community work in unison to benefit children and families. When they do, they can make all the difference. Usually, however, educators and community-builders work in isolation from one another. Disconnection, rather than communication, is the norm.

School leaders can exercise leadership in both the internal and external community by leveraging existing resources and connecting traditional silos of expertise to improve district and school performance while achieving community progress.

I proffer three uncommon leadership initiatives and school community engagement ideas to address this dynamic.

1. **Team [Insert District/Town]:**
   We are Team [Insert District/Town] is a campaign to build pride and encourage engagement in the school community. It engages students, parents, staff, board
of education, mayor/city council, business, faith and community leaders, volunteers, partners, graduates, and alumni. Team [Insert District/Town] is all of us who are committed to quality education and equity in opportunities. Team [Insert District/Town] is all of us who know that the future is our children and that the future is worth our time and attention.

The initial components of Team [Insert District/Town] include signage in buildings and on vehicles, public service announcements on district television, and alumni roundup. Annual components of Team [Insert District/Town] include the designing of “the shirt” by the senior class and distribution of “the shirt” to Team [Insert District/Town] members, cultural transformation, monthly shirt/activity days, and use of social media by everyone in the school community to share the positive Team [Insert District/Town] stories throughout the year.

2. The Table Marketplace:
The Table Marketplace is an online 24/7 space just for the school community to locate each other with names, faces, and profiles for the purposes of engagement with one another. There is a place at “the table” for everyone. The table is a hub for connecting with others, serving, and sharing.

3. Ambassador Program:
The Ambassador Program involves parents and community members in a year-long dialogue with the school district. The purpose of the Ambassador Program is to promote the vision of the district, develop community leadership to support the District’s success, and provide a resource for community input and involvement.

The Ambassador Program allows participants to go behind the scenes for an in-depth look at the district. Monthly sessions focus on specific areas of the district such as operations, curriculum and instruction, support services, school finance, extracurriculars, and much more. The Ambassador Program participants who complete a majority of the monthly sessions will be recognized with a special pin and certificate at a graduation program as part of a Board of Education meeting.

Ambassador Program graduates will be encouraged to be future members of district committees and teams who make a difference in the school community as key communicators, opinion leaders, participants on semester or year-long issue campaigns, and potential future board of education members.

Jeff Rehlander is Superintendent of Schools with the Gobles Public Schools in Gobles, Michigan; he is one of four Michigan representatives on the AASA Governing Board. Contact him at 269.628.5618 or jrehlander@gobles.org.
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