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This past winter, I flew to Sarasota, Florida, for a quick overnight stay to speak to the retired superintendents and first line administrators who have decided that warm weather was what they needed after working 30+ years in the cold of Michigan. They were a great group.

They still have their old fervor and concern for Michigan’s children. They still share fantastic stories of difficult times and doing the right thing for children. And they still inspire.

What I shared with them are the inspiring stories that are coming from the new generation of leaders who are taking on the challenges of today’s education world and making lemonade out of the many lemons we are given to work with.

Every era has its difficulties and every time period has its heroes that come to the forefront and rise above the turmoil that surrounds them.

At our Midwinter Conference, for example, we watched David Tebo and members of his staff show how Hamilton Community Schools are changing the way they work with students, using classroom technology to improve their effectiveness. They gave concrete examples of techniques that work. They shared tools—multiple tools—that work. They demonstrated applications that work at the three-foot level—not the thirty-thousand-foot level of “theory.”

Superintendents walked away with ideas that they could use the very next week to make a difference in their districts. This all is being done in the most difficult times educators have faced in recent history.

We watched an Emmy Award-winning documentary producer who shared a film that is being created about a very typical school district on Michigan’s west coast. In Ludington, teachers are using iPads to take kindergarten and first-grade students into the 21-Century at light speed. Again, they are using innovation and guile to leverage finances to make it happen. The story was truly exciting and inspirational.

Time after time, I have watched superintendents and districts accept the challenge of making something great out of nothing to help children succeed. Not unlike the challenge that NASA had with bringing back Apollo 13, we often use creativity, duct tape and binder backing to make it happen and in the process we become heroes and inspirational leaders.

We live in a time of transformation. We live in a time of challenge, and we continue to meet that challenge. MASA will continue to provide you with the tools, the coaching, and the political fight that will help you continue to be the heroes that you are. Do not give up the fight.

As I was leaving the retirees, one 80-plus-year-old said, “You know it is all worth it...all the heartache, the sleepless nights...the endless meetings, if you help just one child to make a difference. Someday you will be my age and be able to look back and say I did it and it was good.”

Thank you for being the heroes of today. You Rock!!
Change doesn’t always happen with the vision first. Sometimes change happens by taking advantage of the circumstances you are given and exploring the options of how to make it better. Oh yes, vision is the key so you know where you’re going, but get started any way you can.

As an ESD Superintendent, the majority of my district’s services revolve around special education. Parents and teachers advocated many years for educational services for their children. This was the era when parents were urged to place their children in an institutional setting or keep them out of the public eye by keeping them at home. When the rights for services kicked in, we addressed the student’s needs the best way we knew how. As time went on we talked seriously about how we could change the delivery of services for our students. We were teaching in isolated situations and knew our students needed to be with their peers to fully access essential social and educational skills. We as teachers needed to be able to work more closely with our fellow colleagues. Our classrooms extended into the community and local schools by design and determination. We took our students to the stores, library, restaurants, swimming pool, local and state parks, bowling alley, community gatherings, fairs and any other opportunity that allowed our students to be involved in their community.

We once had a former program substitute who was hired by a local district as a physical education teacher—a situation that opened a door for the students in our program. We made arrangements to take our students and staff to join in her physical education classes at the local school.

When the new high school was built we worked with the superintendent to get classrooms in their district’s buildings. Cooperatively, we placed the classrooms in age-appropriate buildings, which allowed for our students to be a part of the school assemblies, lunch program, and general education classes. We welcomed students in general and alternative education classes into our classrooms to work with our students. We held Winter Carnivals with the assistance of the Kiwanians and the local district honor students. We did anything we could think of to get our students involved with other children and their communities.

Our vision was to have our students with disabilities be a part of the communities and the schools in which they lived in order to make friends and be a friend. To be the most they could be. Time does change things, but you have to be an active and informed participant. Have that vision. Make those plans. Lead forward and at times get out of the way.

As educators, we are changing the world of learning and paving the way for future generations. Thank you for your involvement and efforts in developing the skills of today’s young minds in order for them to become tomorrow’s leaders.

“‘They always say time changes things, but you actually have to change them yourself.’”
– Andy Warhol

By Mary Vratanina, MASA President and Superintendent of Cheboygan/Otsego/Presque Isle (COP) ESD
Challenging Problems...
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Thinking back to college, I remember that pivotal day when I said to myself, “I want to be a teacher.” For many of us, the choice to become an educator was a calling—a desire to pour into the minds and hearts of kids and make an impact on the world in our own small way. I pictured myself surrounded by happy children, sitting in a bright and shiny classroom, exploring the world with wonder and awe.

What I didn’t fully picture were limited resources, increased pressure to meet testing standards, and influences from outside the classroom that affected so many classes. So many kids today are fighting personal battles; they struggle with tough situations that impact their ability to learn and grow, and also influence the culture within a school. I, like many others, quickly discovered that teaching is one of the toughest professions out there, but it’s one of the most rewarding as well.

I work with a number of districts, both private and public, and meet countless teachers who maintain a sincere desire to inspire and uplift kids, yet feel the pressure of working in a difficult environment. In our Reaching Higher classes, we mentor young adults on goal setting, managing stress, overcoming limiting beliefs, making positive life choices and more. We teach social and leadership skills to help prepare kids for a healthy future. But having a solid curriculum is just the “what;” equally important is the “how.”

The principles that we practice in the Reaching Higher classroom can be used in any school to help inspire staff and students and foster a more positive learning environment. GOOD NEWS! These principles are easy, applicable to all ages and subject matter, and they won’t cost you a cent!

7 simple steps to Creating a Positive Learning Environment

1) Start with a smile: It’s easy for teachers to become focused on preparing for class in the minutes before the bell rings. Encourage them to make a conscious effort to be at the door of the classroom, rather than at a desk, to greet kids with a warm smile.

2) Take a sincere interest: Ask, “What’s the best thing that’s happened to you since I’ve seen you last?” Some students will quickly
have great things to report, while others may simply say “nothing.” These are the kids that need us the most! Through gentle coaching, we can help them discover the everyday blessings that surround us all, even in what they perceive to be a tough circumstance. Get interested and listen! Showing sincere interest in another human being is the greatest gift we can give one another.

3) Use uplifting words: Program yourself to constantly look for what others are doing right, and tell them about it! Praise, like a shower, is something humans need every day – once in a while is not enough. No one can give or receive too much encouragement.

4) Make a “sunshine call”: Do something unexpected. Leave an encouraging note on a student’s desk, send an inspiring message, or call their home when they miss class. Do something they don’t expect to let them know how much you care.

5) Use stories to inspire. Every motivational speaker knows the value of a great story. Consider opening your class or

continued on page 12

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3. Purpose In Life-Setting Goals
Look at our unique gifts. Explore how to set and attain realistic goals in school, relationships, and other pursuits.

4. Managing Stress
Learn techniques for impulse intervention and healthy methods to relieve stress.

5. Changing Limiting Beliefs
Identify our negative self-beliefs and replace these falsities with positive and productive images.

6. Fear to Freedom
Explore the impact of fear in our lives & learn productive methods to release it.

7. Positive Life Choices
Hear personal testimony of poor life choices and learn the process and discipline of making good choices.

8. Happiness Through Giving and Loving
Learn, give to, and empower one another through kind action and communication.

9. Graduation
A community celebration of student accomplishments featuring stories of struggle, hope, and victory.

Be the Change, Continued from page 11

school meeting with a quick story (2 minutes or less). The right story touches our hearts and inspires us to learn more.

6) Offer help. Many people mistakenly believe that only the weak ask for help. Let students and staff know that it’s ok to ask for help; in fact reaching out to others shows strength. For students who are struggling academically, offer extra help or additional resources to help them thrive.

7) Continue to believe! Most of us can relate to a time in our career when we lost some of our faith. Never doubt yourself! Working in academia is the most noble profession. It takes true character, compassion, and courage to do this work, and your contributions will impact generations to come. As Margaret Mead once said, “Never believe that a few caring people can’t change the world. For, indeed, that’s all who ever have.”

Susie Dahlmann is Executive Director of Reaching Higher; a nonprofit organization based in Brighton that partners with schools to provide leadership training for youth. The 9-module curriculum models all principles above, while delivering a strong social skills development program. To find out more, please visit Reaching Higher at www.reachinghigherinc.com, or call (810) 220-8812.
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Recover what’s been lost
Plans for Getting Started with Blended Learning

By Anupum Chugh, Wayne RESA/REMC 20; Toula Jacobson, Washtenaw ISD/REMC16; Anne Thorp, PhD, Ottawa Area ISD/REMC7

Editor’s note: This is the third in a series of three articles by the REMC Association of Michigan exploring blended learning.

Blended learning offers flexibility through a variety of models. There is no one correct way to implement blended instruction and there is no one preferred model. This article outlines avenues for flexible program exploration and implementation.

Set clear goals and a vision
When considering a blended program, establish a vision along with a set of goals. Once these are established, strategically design the program and communicate this information to all stakeholders. Shaping your vision includes answering the questions, “What is the big picture? Who will be impacted by this program? What will be the outcome of the program?”

Keep in mind that the envisioned image upholds the organization’s standards of excellence, generates excitement, ignites inspiration, and increases motivation and pride. Creating a collaborative team of inspired stakeholders—from students to administrators—will benefit the organization in developing a comprehensive vision. Once the vision has been fully articulated, it is time to strategically design the program in order to convey the details to all stakeholders.

Evaluate
As schools plan for blended learning options, give careful consideration to technologies/resources that are currently in place and which are needed to roll out a successful program.

Elements to explore
- Learning management system (e.g. Moodle or Blackboard)
- Infrastructure support
- Ongoing professional development
- Content for the learning management system (purchased, teacher created, or combination)
- Time set aside for content creation/customization
- Learning population needs
- Participant selection criteria
- Traditional schedule alterations

Develop a clear plan
Once these elements have been addressed, they can be included in the implementation plan. The plan should include staff to be involved, ongoing professional development time, technology access, as well as support for students and staff. Your “Acceptable Use Policy” may need to be updated to accommodate the new options.

Plan effective, ongoing professional development for teacher training as well as continuing support for implementation
Providing sufficient training is critical for success. A teacher cannot just “start” blended learning. “In order to be successful ...it is necessary for instructors to take a fresh look at their teaching, adapt their course design, modify their teaching strategies, and rethink how they prioritize and manage their workload.” (Conceicao, S., & Lehman, R. (2011). Managing Online Instructor Workload (p. 2). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.)

It is imperative that those new to blended teaching are trained in the use of a learning management system, the use of technology, as well as pedagogical approaches for effective blended teaching, student learning, and engagement.

Training will guide teachers with key elements for success such as appropriate planning, providing feedback, managing time, support and teaching strategies, facilitation, evaluation, course conversion, course design, and organization. One cannot just put face-to-face elements online and call it blended learning; “conversion or development of a new program is not a simple task; it requires time, effort, and innovation.” (p. 8).
Explore other blended programs
Learning what other districts are accomplishing with blended instruction and collaborating with others will not only provide school leaders with the inspiration to begin a new initiative, but also offer opportunities for getting new ideas and sharing resources. Additionally, collaboration among teachers new to blended instruction can help ensure the success of the program. Working as a team provides teachers with motivation and support, and can help increase learning and knowledge.

Allow for a gradual process
Instead of overhauling the entire school environment and schedule, start with a few classes led by trained educators who can effectively teach in a blended environment. Another option is to try a blended learning pilot during summer school. This may allow educators to work out the nuances of content and technology, and may highlight student and teacher readiness necessary for a full-scale blended program.

Utilize local and statewide resources
The REMC Association of Michigan (REMCAM) has committed funding for a blended professional development course titled “Blended Learning in the Classroom,” which will be taught by experts in the field of blended learning and will be made available to all Michigan educators at no cost. The pilot will be launched in fall 2012.

REMCAm is committed to supporting all educators in Michigan, obtaining quality resources, and providing access to professional development with regards to implementing blended learning options for staff and students.

Our students are living online; let’s make it great for them!

Part one of this series, “Blended Learning: The wave of the future.”
Part two of this series, “Blended Learning: Roles for Successful Implementation.”
Read the entire series at www.gomasa.org.
Click on Communications, then choose MASA Leader to view the archives.
Stepping into a superintendency always presents opportunities; but at this point in time, it also brings more than a few sleepless nights. In the last year, we have all witnessed the impact of state and federal revenue cuts, numerous legislative actions creating the need for new policies, and a new teacher evaluation requiring implementation within 60 days. Within our district, labor contracts needed to be addressed, a new strategic plan was being implemented, and the decision not to fill the assistant superintendent position posed further challenges.

Preparing for the transition was made easier since I was already employed by the district when the board selected me as superintendent in March 2011. Over the next few months, I was able to meet individually with each of the district’s 310 employees to identify strengths and areas for growth. There was much to do before officially assuming my new position. I asked myself: Where do I begin?

Inspiriting relationships, connections, and communication

With a multitude of possible directions in which to move, I chose to focus on developing stronger relationships among the staff and students in our district. I believed this would provide the fundamental building block for our future.

Enlisting the help of three other district employees, we collaborated on a plan for the first year that used our strategic plan as the basis to engage all employees in intradepartmental “Power Teams.” Our district Mission Statement, “to inspire all students to embrace a lifelong love of learning, to achieve their goals, and to be compassionate citizens who contribute to the global community” served as the core of our activities for opening day.

Opening day for staff

Our learning targets for opening day were to meet new people, understand our mission, recognize the talents that all employees offer, and have fun. School offices were closed to allow all employees to participate in the experience. As staff arrived in our cafeteria, our student council members greeted each employee and distributed different colored t-shirts holding a puzzle piece name tag, based on the premise that everyone is a piece of the puzzle, along with an envelope. Our theme was “...working together to provide a world of opportunities.”
After a few minutes of typical opening day activities in the auditorium, our staff was directed to open their envelope for further directions. As the air horn sounded, people moved into the main hall to find their “teams.” Each of the 16 teams was composed of 19-20 members who represented an interdepartmental mix of people: bus drivers, custodians, administrators, food service employees, secretaries, teachers, paraprofessionals, and even school board members.

Loaded on buses, the teams moved throughout the campus and community to each of 16 stations. The teams spent about five minutes at each station, engaging in 16 different activities focused on collaboration and appreciation of each other in the roles they have in our district. Some activities connected to the strategic plan and mission, some were team building activities, while others highlighted various district departments and their employees.

For example, one station required the team to apply math skills to determine how many square feet each custodian cleaned every night. Another station showed elementary students who were recorded highlighting the mission and action plans. The next had high school student groups describing their community service projects over the last year. For fun, another station required the team to identify their team name, create a team sign and pose for a team picture.

Following the last station, the teams had time to reflect and brainstorm on a possible continued on page 18
service project that would model our mission “to be compassionate citizens who contribute to the global community.” Each team ate lunch together and then gathered in the auditorium to watch a short video clip from “Pay it Forward.” With all the uncertainty and change in education, our staff was encouraged to serve and give back to others. They were also asked to focus on three things for the year:
1. What we have—each other, our staff
2. What we can control—our attitude
3. What we do—our mission

One might ask, does a one-day activity or a service project change the culture? We can’t say that, but a sustained focus on people and placing others ahead of ourselves can change our perspective, which in turn, can change the culture. When the educational changes around us seem daunting, re-focusing on why we are educators, why it’s important to inspire others, and why we need to lead will help us to significantly advance our children’s education.

**Moving forward**
As a result of our opening day activities, our “power teams” have chosen a variety of service projects, including Toys for Tots, making sandwiches for weekend meals for kids, painting a social services office, working at a Habitat for Humanity house, etc. In addition, we scheduled another professional development day in January where we again brought all of our teams together for a Building Champions workshop with the Flippen Group.

It’s been said that people motivate people, but leaders inspire people. Like every other school, our staff will continue to be bombarded
with difficult educational issues shifting the paradigm. Without being inspired to focus on children, why would people stay engaged in the work? Especially when the work is hard and the distractions are many.

In my first few months as superintendent, I have learned three important things:

• **Be bold**—Extraordinary times take extraordinary leadership and action.

• **Focus**—With so much happening in the world of education, it is imperative to bring focus to your staff.

• **Show purpose**—Frame your work with purpose.

Our future will be more challenging than our past. As we move into unprecedented times in public education, our purpose should never change. There is little in the world that is more important than the opportunity to educate and prepare our students for their future.

Ron Veldman is finishing his first year as superintendent of Coopersville Area Schools in Ottawa County. Contact him at RVeldman@coopersville.k12.mi.us.
A key to understanding leadership in any situation—corporate, educational, political, family or religious—and the key reason why we often fall short of our ambitions is the confusion we have created around the two words “motivation” and “inspiration.”

Motivation is something we do to people. It comes from a combination of two sources: fear and material rewards or punishments. Motivation is seldom about the other person, but more often about me. I need to meet my budget, so I am going to motivate all my sales team with incentives, so that they will achieve their sales goals, and if they do so, then I will meet my targets. I need all my students to achieve high grades because then I will be recognized and promoted.

When we are trying to motivate someone, we are typically seeking to alter or control behavior, raise performance standards, or exploit potential. When we come from this position, we are working principally on the personality of the individual we are trying to motivate, and we are relying on shaming, bribing, rewarding, threatening, or pressuring—all of which appeal to the primal instincts of fear. Often, too, we use the prospect of being in or out of favor as a motivational weapon. When we use fear in this way to coach or manage, the person being coached experiences anxiety and stress.

Most of our modern theory of marketing is based on motivation: “Buy my lotion or you will be ugly.” Our religions are often based on fear: “Join my faith or you will go to hell.” Politics run this way, too: “Vote for me or the other guy will raise your taxes.” So does education: “Pass this exam or I will fail you.” The way we run organizations often falls into this same pattern: “Do what I say, or we’ll fire you.” And, of course, performance management has long followed this path: “Reach these goals and we will reward you; miss them, and we will punish you.”

Motivation is extrinsic, relies on fear and material rewards or punishments, and is targeted at the ego or the personality. Motivation often gets things done—but at a price. And that price is often resentment, anger, lack of trust, and reprisal.

Inspiration is intrinsic. It does not come from fear, but from love. It is not about me—it is almost always exclusively about you. Great leaders and coaches want to inspire others to grow, to accomplish their objectives, to shine, to reach their potential and splendor. Any rewards for these inspiring coaches and leaders come from the joy they experience when helping others to reach their own goals or become larger as persons.

If you think about the leaders, teachers, and coaches who made a difference in your life, they were all people who loved you. They would not have devoted the time and resources they did to you if they had not felt that way, and to this day, their loving legacy warms your heart. Inspiration is aimed at the soul of another, and is very often self-generated. As Galileo said, “You cannot teach a man anything. You can only help him discover it within himself.” Indeed, this book (see bio) describes how to ignite the spark of inspiration from within, and how that spark of inspiration can be fanned into a flame.

Michelle Rhee, founder of StudentsFirst, ran a contest inviting six-word essays describing teachers. The winning entry was, “I remember her 50 years later.” Inspiration is like that—we remember being inspired with great fondness—even 50 years later.

Whereas motivation is based on a need for each other, inspiration is based on love for each other. Motivation is based on fear, whereas inspiration is based on love. Motivation is ego- and personality-centered, while inspiration is soul-centered. Motivation is based on me, on serving my needs; inspiration is based on you, on serving your needs.

Although we often use the words “motivation” and “inspiration” interchangeably,
it can be seen from these arguments that they are nearly opposite in their meaning and intent. That we use them interchangeably also suggests that our understanding of the difference is weak, and because of this, we are not clear about when to use the one or the other. There is a place for motivation—if the building we are both in catches fire, I am going to motivate you to get out of here! Motivation is lighting a fire under someone; inspiration is lighting a fire within someone.

We have become experts at motivation—stick-and-carrot systems. We now need to become just as effective at inspiring ourselves, inspiring others, and inspiring the world. Coaching, mentoring, teaching and performance management—in fact, any means by which we enhance the spirit of another—will become more effective when we develop inspiring processes and focus on and grow our expertise in inspiring others.

Although we often use the words “motivation” and “inspiration” interchangeably, … they are nearly opposite in their meaning and intent. …Motivation is lighting a fire under someone; inspiration is lighting a fire within someone.

Lance H.K. Secretan, Ph.D. is a former keynote speaker for MASA (Fall 2006) and the author of 15 books on leadership, including his latest, The Spark, the Flame, and the Torch: Inspire Self, Inspire Others, Inspire the World (The Secretan Center Inc., 2010). This article is adapted from that book.
How can we motivate and inspire the people in our districts and communities to drive transformation? Ask inspiring questions.

Throughout my life, I have been motivated to achieve personal and professional goals. In 1997, a key question inspired me. That inspiration now motivates me to achieve goals, not only for my own satisfaction, but for helping the greater good by making a positive difference.

In 1981, I earned my undergraduate degree in Elementary Education. Not able to find a full time teaching position, I decided to start a family. By the time my two boys were school age, I had owned and operated a printing and publishing business for nine years. In 1995, I sold both businesses to join the start-up team for one of the first Internet Service Providers in Michigan. But in 1997 after several years consulting with Fortune 500 companies, developing corporate technical training, and continuing to accomplish my professional goals, my life turned upside down. I was facing divorce and the challenge of raising two pre-teen boys. While I tried to figure out my plan of action, my twelve-year-old son cried, “I know I’ll end up being a loser like every other kid in divorce.”

My heart sunk with his hopeless attitude. “Other than the death of a loved one,” I told my sons, “This will be one of the most difficult things we will ever go through, but we cannot let this divorce, or any other challenge in life become an excuse to fail in any aspect of life.” I spoke with great confidence, but really didn’t know what to do. I wanted to find hope and happiness for all three of us.

Questions whirled in my head. Why do some people, who seem to have everything, find ways to be miserable? Why do other people, who have very little and face extreme tragedy, find a way to enjoy every minute of life? Why does one person give up in the face of adversity and another persist? These questions kept me up at night. I wanted to know the answers. Whatever it was, I wanted it and I wanted my children to have it. “What do we need to be to not only survive but thrive in this crazy world?” I was inspired.

With no real answers – only inspiration – I founded Need2Be, Inc. I was no longer motivated to just achieve goals for myself for my own wants, interests and needs. I was inspired to make a positive difference in my life, in the lives of my children and in the lives of others.

Over the next decade, I studied, earned an advanced degree, and returned to Chrysler and DaimlerChrysler to head-up their leadership development efforts. Here, I continued to research, explore best practices, and design and deliver benchmarked programs to develop leaders at all levels. I believed the mystery and complexity could be taken out of leadership and shared not only with corporate executives, but also with all types of people, especially our children.

All this has shaped my work in inspiring and developing the leaders of today and tomorrow. Through continuous collaboration and inspiration, I believe teachers, administrators, board members, staff, parents, community leaders and students will continue to redefine, redesign and transform education to be what we need it to be to develop strong leaders of today and tomorrow.

Following are four steps you can use immediately to motivate and inspire people within your district.

1. Understand the difference between motivation and inspiration. Motivation is personal. We are motivated when a negative or positive consequence pushes us to achieve specific goals.
When we are inspired, personal fulfillment is not enough. Inspiration satisfies our global human need to contribute to the greater good.

2. Know what motivates and inspires you. There are plenty of exercises and assessments to help you find your personal motivators. Finding inspiration is a bit more challenging. To find inspiration, explore the possibilities. Ask yourself and others “why, what, how and what if” questions. Once you are inspired, you will be motivated to do the work!

3. Help motivate and inspire others. The Need2Be acronym/model for Inspirational Leadership is FIRE-UP. Fire-up the spirit in yourself and others to make a positive difference:

   • Focus on Future possibilities;
   • Influence others by tapping their personal motivation;
   • Be Resilient to constant challenges;
   • Empower others to do what they do best;
   • Build an Understanding culture that values, rewards and supports individual and collective strengths, diversity of ideas and inspiration and;
   • Spread Passion and enthusiasm by helping others tap into the powerful forces that shape and inspire them – their beliefs, emotions, actions and thoughts.

4. Create and maintain a culture that values, rewards and supports inspired people. Lack of money, people, technology or other resources may stifle a person’s motivation to achieve a specific goal, but lack of resources will never stop an inspired individual. Inspired people are resourceful and determined to find a way. Once people are inspired, the best thing you can do to keep them inspired and moving toward transformation is to stay out of their way!

Katy Caschera is a former MASA Keynote speaker (Midwinter 2012) and Founder and CEO of Need2Be, Inc. and Leaders of Today and Tomorrow. She has a master’s degree in business and leadership, with a thesis on leadership development for children. To learn more about motivating and inspiring people, contact Katy Caschera, Founder and CEO of Need2Be, Inc. at 248-225-6652 or info@need2be.com.
Science and engineering readiness are building blocks for scientific and technical achievements that contribute to a better society. When one looks at the global economic landscape, it appears some countries are winning—and some losing—the race to better education. Unfortunately, the United States and the state of Michigan in particular are on the losing side of the equation.

According to the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), the United States ranks 25th in the world in math and science among industrial nations. Similarly, according to the Science and Engineering Readiness Index (SERI), Michigan ranks in the bottom third among the 50 states in the country.

For some administrators, the goal is to meet state standards in math and science without overspending. For others, the goal is to pacify parents and students by having students do science projects for homework that require minimal work, such as going on the Internet and printing off a current event about a science topic. Some administrators expect that students will develop their math and science skills by watching educational videos in the classroom or logging onto a website and playing a video game. True leadership that serves our kids requires risk taking, significant investment, hard work and innovation.

The ECOTEK Lab story
My experience in the world teaches me that great leaders are risk takers and courageous. I started ECOTEK Lab in 2005 for my kids, Keith Jr, Briana, Amber and Kayla. The goal was to provide them with the skills needed to compete in a global economy. This included introducing them to world leaders to learn about global politics, doing challenging hands-on science research, and showing them how to turn their scientific knowledge into economic assets and connecting them with like-minded students and working professionals.

Today, seven years later, there are over 25 students working in ECOTEK on research projects with UN member countries and agencies. Their innovations are being integrated into STEM curriculums at schools throughout the country, thus impacting thousands of future scientists. ECOTEK students excel academically and are recruited by universities across the country for undergraduate admissions and research internships. They speak at conferences around the world about their innovations and compete in major science competitions.

More importantly, they have the confidence to dream, discover, and innovate. Students at ECOTEK Lab do research in four areas: material science, alternative energy, environmental science and biotechnology. They are assigned to research projects based on their interest, academic record, work ethic and maturity level. The curriculum is process centric and result oriented. Student scientists are responsible for the project planning, resourcing, execution, risk management, and completion. Parents are heavily involved in the program (e.g. volunteer, travel, fund raising, and helping out with project work).

Think like an investor not like a manager
Investing in STEM education is a very risky venture. Many things can go wrong, ranging from failed projects to
underperforming student scientists. School leaders need to reevaluate their return on investment (ROI) models for STEM. This includes measuring the outputs and the inputs. It is just not about grades, it is about what type of person is being developed. I have a non-traditional background in education. I earned a technical degree from a small university in Michigan, and have participated in leadership development programs at Harvard Business School. I gained my leadership experience in science and math by working with research scientists and inventors around the world.

My background gives me a different perspective on the definition of the term “success.” I have seen too many school leaders who lack vision and courage. They complete the easy stuff (e.g. buying text books) but they avoid doing the difficult work that will make a real difference in the long term competitiveness of their students (e.g. establishing a math and science program that teaches innovation).

Many school leaders allocate funds to STEM programs without looking at the ROI. ECOTEK Lab was founded using risk capital (i.e. I invested my own money). It uses a portfolio based model to fund STEM activities. Project funding is based on the long term benefits of the project output to the student, the program and the global community.

Today’s education leaders must view success using an evaluation model that extends beyond the classroom. Success at ECOTEK is based on student academic achievement at school and on standardized tests. It also relies on the number of copyrighted articles published, the number of patentable innovations/inventions produced, and the number of internships/scholarships awarded to our student scientists. Under the current model, our average annual ROI is approximately 120 percent.

Lead by example. Set the pace. Accept uncertainty.

In traditional schools, students hear talk about topics such as green science and combating global warming, but they never see adults do anything to back up what they say. Think about it. Do your teachers know how to make biofuel, identify toxins in drinking water, make bioplastic or grow stem cells? As a real-world scientist, I know how to do all of these tasks and more.
I have worked with my students to build an electric bike; make biofuel, make biodegradable plastic, grow stem cells, conduct ecological surveys in Africa, help with the clean-up of the BP oil spill, conduct research on barrier islands, canoe down streams and rivers, hike through national forests and wetlands, visit national research labs, present at international conferences, create commercial products and meet with world leaders at the United Nations.

To lead a 21st Century STEM program, school administrators must be committed and willing to set measurable goals that require exceptional commitment from you, your staff, the student scientists, and their parents. That is, you must set the standard, rather than just meet standards. Do not spend time worrying about what you do not have, focus on what you want to deliver and the young minds you want to influence.

**Conclusion**

The world is becoming more competitive every day. From a global perspective, the war is not being waged on the battlefield with guns and bullets, but in the classroom using books and beakers. For complex reasons, the United States and the state of Michigan at present lag behind countries like China and India in STEM. In order for the region to move forward, we need better leadership from school leaders. ECOTEK Lab is a math and science program that has excelled by leveraging best practices in project management, capital investment and human resource development to produce award winning student scientists that travel the world innovating and creating.

Implementing change is difficult work. Improving student achievement in STEM will require a major shift in how school leaders manage and respond to challenge. Some ideas for improving your STEM programs include setting a vision of success that can adapt to changes in the global economy; funding program activities using a venture capital based perspective that focuses on the student; and being a leader that is comfortable with uncertainty. Using these and other performance-based strategies, coupled with an unrelenting “can do” attitude, will not only help you develop more scientists in your school, but also help you be a better leader.

Keith Young is Founder and Executive Advisor, of ECOTek Lab, the only independent lab for young innovators and inventors in the U.S. Mr. Young is a graduate of Central Michigan University and the Harvard Business School’s Leadership Best Practices Program. He has 17 years of experience working with Fortune 100 companies to develop and launch emerging market technologies and products. Contact him at keiyoung@ecotek-us.com.

At present, Mr. Young is working with schools across the country to open up ECOTek Lab affiliate sites and expose students to inventive science. Young is interested in setting up research labs/partnerships in the following locations: Flint/Grand Blanc, Grand Rapids, Sault Ste Marie, Lansing, and Port Huron. You can contact him at keiyoung@ecotek-us.com to learn more.
We often recommend that our communication planning needs to be more strategic, more symbolic and, yes, much more proactive. Too often those recommendations fall into the “blah, blah, blah” category of Charlie Brown’s teacher chastising his latest failure in the classroom or playground.

So here is one example for superintendents of what we mean when we say that your communication effort needs to be more strategic, more symbolic and more proactive.

First, you need to decide what you want your superintendency, your school district, or your latest initiative to be known for. What do you stand for?

Here’s an easy example: Improving reading results in your school system. (You could adapt it to fit any major change or initiative.)

Some steps to take to strategically and symbolically communicate about reading achievement:

- First, make sure you have the “buy-in” of your instructional leaders to help build the concentrated reading effort. Tap their insight, build a program based on your district’s research as well as what is working in reading instruction nationally. Seek input from teaching and instructional teams so that when the effort or initiative is finally announced, it too is their program.

- Make a visible splash as you announce the launch of your program. Announce your district’s goals and the reason behind the initiative, and set timelines for measurement. Students and staff at all levels need to be part of the announcement.

Catch This Example of Strategic and Symbolic Public Relations

By Rich Bagin, APR

Are You Ready to Take Your Leadership to the Next Level?

The MASA Executive Coaching program provides targeted support to superintendents throughout their careers. MASA coaches are experienced superintendents who received training in the best practices of coaching for executive level leaders. Borrowing coaching principals from the programs available to top leaders in the private sector, MASA Executive Coaching is for any administrator who wants to take their leadership to the next level.

Contact Jerry Jennings at jjennings@gomasa.org or 517-449-0518 to learn more.
Symbolically, arrange a number of events within your schools and community to keep building the momentum of the program. Some to consider are:

- Challenge your parent groups to become involved in the program by sponsoring special awards for their students and their schools for reading achievement.
- Encourage parent groups to establish book clubs on topics related to improving student achievement.
- Hold a session on helping parents learn how to help their children become better readers. As an example of a useful resource, take a look at this “Raising Readers” video series for parents from the Northern Illinois University Literacy Clinic. The videos in the series are short (2 - 4 minutes each), easy to understand, and demonstrated with real families. (Access them at http://www.cedu.niu.edu/ltcy/literacyclinic/raisingReaders/)

- Set objectives and challenges, not only for number of books read, but more importantly for measures of reading achievement. Prepare a public “District Report Card” on your Reading First program.
- Develop a logo and slogan to use throughout your initiative to remind everyone of the priority of your Reading First program.
- Use social media devices from you, the superintendent, talking about books you are now reading or those books that have helped shape your
life. Celebrate staff and students on their reading accomplishments.

- Make sure every communication vehicle (at both the district and school building levels) carries success stories and tips on reading. Use your logo and slogan in all these vehicles.

- Hit the community service club circuit (Rotary Club and the other usual suspects) talking about the initiative. Then ask those at these meetings to offer insight on books they have read. Start building a list of the top books that people in your community are reading, and publish the list on your website and Twitter feed.

- Seek community partnerships to help defray the expense of the program, as you may want to give away books at every school and community meeting. Write an encouraging short note in each book or insert a sticker with your logo and slogan and a list of sponsors for the program.

- Seek media coverage of events along with feature stories from teachers who can talk about the real-life transformations of their students who have become motivated readers.

- Implement a workable plan and make it visible to your entire school community. Keep reading accomplishments visible throughout the year and you will begin building a great reputation for your staff, your schools and your leadership.

Rich Bagin, APR, is the Executive Director of the National School Public Relations Association (NSPRA). This article was used with permission. It first appeared in the January 2012 issue of Communication Matters for Leading Superintendents, published by NSPRA.

Communication Matters for Leading Superintendents is distributed to all NSPRA members. For superintendents wishing to subscribe, please send your name, title, mailing address, and e-mail address to communicationmatters@nspra.org

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