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In early February, Brad Biladeau and I traveled to the snowy Upper Peninsula of our great state. Leaving at 4:30 a.m. for a 2 p.m. meeting in Houghton, we traveled through sleet, snow and complete whiteouts to arrive on time for a great meeting with Copper Country superintendents. This was the first time anyone could remember that a sitting executive director of MASA made it to Houghton-Hancock in the dead of winter.

The reception was warm and friendly. Our take-away: These strong superintendents exemplify what it is to collaborate to make good things happen for the children they serve.

They described the various ways they work together to provide service, save what little resources they have and help each other thrive. The discussion was rich; ideas flowed around topics ranging from school safety to road safety during heavy snow months.

From there we traveled to Marquette for a dinner meeting with the UP intermediate school superintendents. Again the take-away was that—to a person—they were committed to making the work of providing services to all children, all teachers, all administrators the work of the group.

From their administrative academy, to the joint business education conference in the fall, to the joint projects with Michigan Works that happen in a way that is good for children and the communities at large. In the morning we talked with a group comprising the majority of superintendents in the UP. Using technology, we were linked from Marquette RESA to four other ISD sites. This gave members in remote areas access to the meeting, minimizing the inconvenience of travel during difficult weather.

UP leaders were pioneers in making interactive television a critical component of their education delivery system. Sharing teachers, programs, college classes and the like are old hat to these survivors. Whether they are new to the superintendency or seasoned veterans they know that the sharing of resources is critical to the mission of educating their children for the world they will inherit.

From Marquette, we traveled to Negaunee and got a tour of school buildings and programs with cutting-edge technology and community commitment on display everywhere. The high school building originally served the mining operation in the city. The structure was sound, and the community saw great potential in working with existing structures to make a world-class facility. With additions and renovations, they are meeting the community's needs as it adapts to a changing world.

Partnerships abound in the district. By sharing facilities with community organizations, more is accomplished with less cost. Needs are met. Children are served.
This is my sixth and last President’s article for the MASA Leader magazine. If you have read my previous articles, you know that they all touch on my background in special education. Coming into education at the time of mandated services for students with disabilities, I have been part of the ever-changing practices and beliefs on what education should look like for those included in this designation. My experience as a classroom teacher was with students with autism and/or severe and moderate cognitive impairments. There was no curriculum, no perceived need for academics and, worst of all, no perceived need for socialization or being a part of the community.

Over the past several years, the COP ESD administrators and professional staff have been developing and refining our teacher evaluation process. We now look at the teacher’s skill in providing an environment of learning across students’ needs, directing paraprofessional and ancillary staff to achieve those needs, working with parents, helping students participate as part of the community, and documenting student growth in the common core as well as other emotional, social, self-care, and job-related skills.

This evaluation process now includes a data conference, classroom walk-through observations and a teacher evaluation rubric. Four areas—Planning and Preparation, Classroom Environment, Implementation and Professional Responsibilities—of the teacher evaluation rubric are looked at through the data conference. The full rubric is also a piece of the teacher evaluation.

I just sat in a data conference with supervisors and a teacher from the low-incidence classrooms we operate within our local school districts. Prior to the conference, the teacher was given a list of the items needed for this meeting. This included IEPs; progress reports; lesson plans; student schedules; current data collection system for IEP goal areas; other evidence of student performance in core areas of reading, math, and science; evidence of lessons with differentiated instruction; a weekly plan with directions for specific groups; and the next week’s lesson plans.

The documentation was used to discuss student growth. The conference started with the teacher answering the question, “Who is this child?” From this point, the teacher provided a review of the collected documentation with specific questions on the present levels of academic achievement and functional performance (PLAAFP), the use of the data, the student’s individual goals, progress reports and lesson plans/curriculum as to the impact on student achievement. These specific questions asked the teacher to present, show, provide, and produce the documentation of student achievement.

The supervisors and the teacher approached this data conference as a learning experience. Dialogue was open, collaborative, and real. The idea is not just to collect data nor use information to chastise teachers; rather, it is to provide assistance and direction to support our teachers in this extremely important role they play in children’s lives. Evaluation of teachers, if done the right way and for the right reason, will have a tremendous impact on the education, achievement and the lives of our students with special needs.

If we had just stayed silent, where would our children be today? Thank you to all educators who over time have changed their mindset from teaching subjects to guiding all children to achieve.

Mary M. Vratanina, MASA President and Superintendent of Cheboygan/Otsego/Presque Isle (COP) ESD

“Our lives begin to end the day we become silent about things that matter.”
~ Martin Luther King, Jr.
And Then There Was One—
Two Districts in Southeast Michigan Consolidate

By Emma Jackson

There were naysayers. Those who said consolidating neighboring, rival districts Willow Run Community Schools (WRCS) and Ypsilanti Public Schools (YPS) couldn’t happen because personal gain, political allegiances and traditions would always stand in the way.

But someone forgot to tell the community. When the polls closed Nov. 6, 2012 the results came back with over 60 percent of voters in both districts approving the merger of the two districts. And so, in the eastern portion of Washtenaw County history was made and the roll-up-your sleeves, move-at-lightning-speed work began.

How did something that seemed impossible become reality?

It started with an informal conversation. The board presidents of the respective boards of education, David Bates and Don Garrett Jr., began to discuss how they could share services and leverage resources that would mutually benefit the students in both districts.

The board presidents invited Washtenaw Intermediate School District’s (WISD) Superintendent Scott Menzel and his staff to assist with facilitating the discussions. This led to a joint board meeting and then the creation of a Communications and Collaboration Task Force charged with identifying opportunities for shared services that would improve outcomes for students while saving the districts money.

“It was evident from the start that both districts were ready to work together because of their mutual challenges: decreasing enrollment, poor academic performance and deficit budgets,” Menzel said. “Yet, unifying two medium-sized school districts is a different order of magnitude. The task would be daunting.”

Menzel credits Superintendents Laura Lisiscki (Willow Run Community Schools) and Dedrick Martin (Ypsilanti Public Schools) with seeing the big picture for students, knowing it was putting their own position as superintendents on the line. Lisiscki said the consolidation question was always about the students. “I’ve worked in Willow Run for over 20 years and I know that we have the tenacity and capability to do what is best for our students,” Lisiscki said. “If it meant hitting the reset button and building a district from the ground up, then that is the right course of action.”

Martin has been at the helm of Ypsilanti Public Schools since 2009. The district was already in a deficit when he was hired as superintendent, and he recognized that a dire situation would require drastic measures. “First we talked about consolidation of services, pooling resources to keep quality programs in place for students,” Martin said. “But then it became clear that a full consolidation, which would mean a shared sacrifice, was the best option for our districts to not just survive, but thrive.”
Consolidating the bus garage operation and merging the Junior ROTC student program were the first test of this process. Once those tasks were successfully completed, talks turned to full consolidation. During a joint meeting held at Eastern Michigan University, a board majority voted to place the consolidation question on the November 2012 ballot.

While consolidation grassroots efforts were underway, the superintendents engaged in multiple conversations with state legislators and State Superintendent Michael Flanagan.

Mr. Flanagan pledged support of the consolidation and indicated if the election were successful, the districts would be strong candidates for a substantial slice of the $10 million grant that was earmarked for districts that consolidated services or fully merged. On the legislative front, State Representative David Rutledge, D-Superior Township and Rep. Bill Rogers, R-Brighton, introduced bipartisan legislation to establish a three-
year moratorium for new charter schools in communities where two public schools consolidate. That bill is under consideration. Rep. Rutledge has been a strong advocate of consolidation and remains supportive of the ongoing process.

The summer prior to the election, WISD staff organized over a dozen community forums. The public input sessions culminated in a two-day District Design workshop that included educators, parents, students, elected officials, local business and educational partners, clergy and community activists. Out of this session the five educational pillars for a unified district were identified: Early childhood education—prenatal through kindergarten entry; effective leadership at all levels; positive culture and climate focused on learning; high quality teachers and teaching and; college credit and/or career credential prior to high school graduation.

The two Ypsilanti districts were ripe for serving as role models for other school systems considering consolidation.

Currently seven advisory groups meet weekly to tackle the massive work. Some of the team assignments include: describing terms and conditions for employment; determining criteria for quality and effective staff; setting policy for the unified district; tracking timelines to ensure deadlines are met; conducting curriculum and facilities audits; and marketing and branding the new educational system.

The WISD application for the state grant did materialize in the amount of $6 million.

“The unified district will be a cradle-to-career educational system,” Menzel said. “We are confident that partnering with students, parents and the community, while implementing evidenced-based practices, will result in improved achievement and a vibrant public education which will anchor the revitalization of eastern Washtenaw County.”

Emma Jackson is Communication Specialist for Washtenaw Intermediate School District. Contact her at ejackson@wash.k12.mi.us.
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How do you make college attainable and successful to a population of young ladies and gentlemen of which most would be first generation attendees?

This was the question we seemed to ask ourselves over and over again when students who had graduated came back in the fall to visit. We would hear, “I’m waiting until next semester,” “I can only afford one class,” “I’m not sure what I want to do now,” or “I wasn’t ready so I quit.”

Many of our students did not even get this far. Only 60 percent of our student body even tries college. For many the barrier to college entrance was not academic, but other factors. Our goal was to overcome these and eventually make college attainable and required for all our graduates, as part of their high school requirements. Our first step: Wyoming Middle College, a partnership with Grand Rapids Community College (GRCC).

Through the Wyoming Middle College partnership with GRCC, a student attends as a fifth-year senior, but leaves Wyoming Public Schools with both a high school diploma and an Associate’s Degree. The students attend as two cohorts of 25 beginning in fall of their sophomore year with a single college class (as well as remaining Michigan Merit Curriculum courses, plus). They end after a fifth year with a single high school class while they complete the remaining Associate Degree courses, all free of cost.

The gradual release and responsibility from high school to college life is purposefully intended to ease the transition that normally happens with such a huge change for the typical high school graduate over a single summer. Rather than a short whirlwind senior year, the intent is to help not only the students, but also parents in learning the process and making it far more successful. The hope is that all 50 students (two cohorts of 25) will go on to the college and program of their choice and complete a four-year degree.

Although several college partnerships are already underway or now in the works throughout Michigan, there was not one in the Grand Rapids area. This Wyoming Public Schools/GRCC partnership provides a macro degree that is transferrable to most public universities in Michigan. The initial two years of courses are intended to be offered right at the high school as part of the regular class schedule. As the students become seniors, the intent is to continue the transition at a nearby site, with an even greater college feel. This would include the second phase of the plan, opening the program up to the community who wish to take classes on our school site. The third phase is to have college and high school courses integrated within the curriculum guide to maximize dual enrollment opportunities.
Currently, GRCC faculty are instructors of record, but the intent is to work through a variety of steps, including articulation, certification, and more to allow qualifying WPS staff to become part of the GRCC adjunct faculty of record (courses in addition to their WPS instructional schedule) and/or allow courses taught at the high school to meet GRCC credit attainment. This option is currently available only through the successful testing in Advanced Placement (AP) classes. As students work from their sophomore year through their fifth year (a second senior year), some courses will earn only high school credit, some will earn only college credit, and some will qualify for both.

Students apply for the middle college during their freshmen year. Student qualifications to be eligible for the cohort include having a 2.5 GPA, reading at grade level, mathematics at grade level, on course credit obtainment to graduate, and passing a college entrance test. These criteria will be reviewed after year one, using the middle college class results and pre-college entrance-testing to determine growth for the year with an opportunity to adjust criteria.

Only through continuous dialogue, open minds, and flexibility with administrators and staff from both organizations has Wyoming Public Schools and GRCC been able to offer an opportunity to help more students begin college on an early path, with a greater chance for long-term success.

Dr. Thomas Reeder is superintendent of Wyoming Public Schools and a member of the Courageous Journey Tier 2, Cohort 7. Contact him at reedert@wyomingps.org.
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After presenting throughout Michigan on educator evaluation and listening carefully to what people in the field are saying, we have uncovered two schools of thought on this question: (1) Tread water as much as possible (i.e. don’t make any big changes) until the Michigan Council for Educator Effectiveness (MCEE) makes its final recommendations and the Legislature confirms what will be required and what will be left to local decisions, or (2) Move forward with local efforts to make substantive changes in district evaluation practices.

Some districts have adopted or developed new evaluation instruments; some are continuing to use or modify what they already have as a temporary solution. When it comes to handling the student achievement growth requirement, even the districts involved in the MCEE pilots are experiencing more questions than many anticipated. Meanwhile, some districts are trying to gather multiple measures for assessing student growth, while others are reluctant to get too far down the road for fear of using invalid data. Most districts lack awareness and resources to invest in sophisticated (and expensive) vendor systems for calculating student growth; they hope, instead, that the MCEE process results in a valid, fair, and manageable solution.

Beyond tools and growth measures: What to do while you’re waiting
We know educators have many concerns beyond what tools and growth measures to use. We think that some of these questions and issues can be addressed while we wait for the MCEE’s final recommendations and legislative reaction. We also see many districts forging forward on some of these questions and issues:

How are we going to ensure that our district’s educator evaluation system is fair, transparent, coherent and aligned?

Districts are tackling this question by:
• Aligning district and school level goals as the basis for teacher and administrator goals.
• Aligning teacher and administrator success measures with district and school success measures so that everyone stays focused on a unified set of targets.
• Prioritizing district and school level goals, so teachers and administrators have a reasonable set of targets to hit at any one time.
• Monitoring district and school improvement progress and regularly updating goals and priorities.

How are we going to make performance assessment an integral part of everything we do?

Districts are tackling this question by:
• Adopting a flexible, robust and adaptable online management system that will work with multiple evaluation instruments and tools.
• Making it easy for teachers and administrators to participate in their own evaluation process and/or manage the evaluation process for others.
• Holding ongoing performance-based conversations informed by work examples, self-assessments, personal growth plans, targeted observations, feedback, and data.
• Developing evaluation cycles that operate in a continuous loop of formative and summative feedback.

How are we going to respond to teachers or administrators who receive summative evaluations that are less than effective?

Districts are tackling this question by:
• Using rubrics with detailed and clear descriptors of different performance levels, and what it takes to achieve higher performance ratings.
• Providing a tiered system of supports and evaluation procedures for people at different levels of effectiveness, so as to increase autonomy for high performers and free up supervisor attention to lower performers.
• Establishing transparent consequences for persistent low performance.

How are we going to respond to teachers or administrators who receive summative evaluations that are consistently effective or highly effective?

Districts are tackling this question by:
• Establishing a personal growth process that motivates teachers and administrators for continuous learning, growth, and innovation
• Using evaluation rubrics that offer clear descriptors of effective and highly effective performance.
• Establishing a compensation system that rewards continuous growth and high levels of performance.

How can we forge a strong link between performance evaluation and professional development?

• Using self-assessment and demonstration practices to increase professionalism and personal ownership.
• Use Personal Growth Plans and IDPs to shape district, building, and individual professional learning.

Continued on page 16
Evaluation = focus on continuous improvement and growth

It’s been exciting to see districts moving forward and taking ownership for addressing educator evaluation in a comprehensive way. These districts see the new educator evaluation requirements as a way to focus on continuous improvement and growth for all parts of the system and the people who make up the system.

We salute the amazing evaluation work our members are doing in the field and will continue to work with the other professional associations in Michigan to highlight and support that work.

We take our hats off to the MCEE Council, advisory committee, pilot districts, focus groups, and researchers who are working to build a strong framework for educator evaluation in Michigan. We are delighted that our own Michigan-developed School Advance™ system is among those selected by the MCEE for serious consideration. It is our sincere hope that School ADvance will be part of the final Michigan-based educator evaluation system and look forward to working across our state to ensure that we meet the needs of the field. (See Part II below)

Dr. Patricia Reeves is MASA Associate Executive Director, Courageous Journey, and a professor for Education Leadership at Western Michigan University. Contact her at preeves@gomasa.org. Pat McNeill is Executive Director of the Michigan ASCD. Contact her at pmcnell@michiganascd.org.

Michigan Districts Taking the Lead

Visit www.gomasa.org/educator-evaluation to read more about some innovative ways MASA and Michigan ASCD members are re-shaping their educator evaluation systems to improve performance and learning. Plus, keep reading to discover how MASA and Michigan ASCD are supporting members.

Part II: Administrator Evaluation

MASA and Michigan ASCD Did Not Just Wait

Michigan’s education leaders are making great strides in meeting Michigan’s new educator evaluation requirements, and improving performance in the process. We at MASA and Michigan ASCD have encountered their stories through constant sharing of information and ideas with our colleagues at the Michigan Association of School Boards, Michigan Association of Secondary School Principals, and Michigan Elementary and Middle School Principals Association.

We have been actively engaged, from the beginning, in venues where educator evaluation is being discussed, investigated, and designed. Well before the formation of the Michigan Council on Educator Effectiveness (MCEE), MASA and MI-ASCD were working with school leaders and groups (like the Education Alliance of Michigan and the Michigan Association of School Personnel Administrators), researchers, and practitioners to frame the essential elements of a high-quality educator evaluation system.

We put together a team to develop a Michigan-based and member-owned Administrator Evaluation System and an Educator Evaluation Design and Support System. We organized the work into tools, guides, forms, training, manuals and support, and named it School ADvance™. We shared this work and collected feedback to guide further refinement and development. We made so much progress in this work, that School ADvance is now one of the administrator evaluation systems being seriously considered by the MCEE as a Michigan-based option for administrator evaluations. We were also approved for use by schools in New Jersey. This is good news for the school community. Why? Because, unlike private vendor products, School ADvance is owned by MASA and MI-ASCD on behalf of all Michigan’s schools and districts and, thus, is available to Michigan at a very low cost. All the components of School ADvance have a solid basis in research; yet, because of constant interaction with the field, they are also developed and adapted with great attention to both “do-ability” and alignment with other district and school improvement processes.

School ADvance offers:

- Full (detailed) administrator evaluation rubrics to help administrators continually improve through explicit descriptors of administrator practice
- Condensed (streamlined) rubrics and scoring guides to use for summative evaluations that comply with all the provisions of Michigan law.
- Training and support: School ADvance offers a full complement of components to train, support and provide districts with tools for effective evaluation processes and practices (See page 6 for dates).
It’s About How: Transforming the Path to Student Achievement Through Collaboration and Teacher Leadership

By Michele Harmala, David Ruhland, David Workman, and Sue Zurvalec

“Reflect back to the day when I stood in front of 900 of my colleagues and thought to myself, ‘We are going on a huge adventure,’ and we proceeded to talk about the law and what the State of Michigan was putting forth for us,” said Melissa McDermid, Kenbrook Elementary School teacher. Melissa’s reflections were about the collaborative work Farmington Public Schools (FPS) would accomplish during the 2011-2012 school year to ensure its teacher evaluation system complied with Michigan’s new evaluation law and, more importantly, promoted student learning and professional growth.

The adventure in FPS is rooted in a value of collaboration and teamwork that has been a part of the district’s culture for more than fifteen years. Collaboration includes teachers and administrators, and dependent on the nature of the work, students and the broader community of stakeholders. The work has progressed from being inclusive of teachers and administrators to being led by teachers and administrators, and it has resulted in a renewed belief that all staff can contribute to the development and implementation of district initiatives, such as our Teacher Professional Growth and Evaluation system.

The collaborative approach is about “how” transformation takes place. It ensures those closest to the initiative are involved in the design and implementation of the initiative and is as much about changing or enhancing the culture as it is about producing a growth and evaluation system.

“We understand that if we are to truly improve learning for all students, we must work together and teachers are critically important in leading this process,” says Sue Zurvalec, superintendent.

Task Teams: Collaboration Evolves

As the needs of FPS changed, FPS expanded its focus on collaboration to ensure those closest to district issues were involved in determining solutions. Using a five-meeting process, carried out by a task team comprising teachers, administrators, and other relevant team members, ensures that the work of district staff is focused on a clear charge and designed to meet that charge within five carefully facilitated meetings. The meeting design focuses on “what,” “so what,” and “now what.”

The “what” is a clear understanding of the charge by all team members. A common language and understanding of the work is developed by the task team. The “so what” requires the task team to determine the relevance of the charge by studying its current and desired state along with best practices, and the “now what” requires the task team to determine recommendations that address the charge.

Task team facilitators are trained to facilitate the work of the group. Facilitators are not presenters, nor are they content experts. The role of the facilitator is to ensure the task team meets its charge and that all team members are active participants.

FPS has used the five-meeting process to develop such things as its response to intervention system, study instructional initiatives, and develop its teacher and administrator evaluation systems.

Teacher Professional Growth and Evaluation: Collaboration Yields Results

Seven task teams were convened to design the teacher evaluation model. They covered everything from creating guidelines for student growth measures and developing rubrics for best instructional practices, to inclusion of student, parent and teacher feedback.

Continued on page 18
The Putting It All Together Task Team reviewed all teams’ recommendations and organized components into a comprehensive evaluation model. They also specified the evaluation components to be incorporated into the administrator evaluation model so that there was systemic alignment and implementation across the district.

In total, 97 teachers and 26 administrators participated on these task teams. Team members expressed satisfaction with the task team process and the inclusive design of the evaluation model. The recommendations of the Putting It All Together Task Team were presented and approved by the Board of Education in June 2012.

An additional team of staff developed the implementation plan for the first three years of implementation, and two teachers have volunteered to ensure implementation achieves intended purposes.

Collaboration and Outcomes

Now that we’ve begun to implement the Teacher Professional Growth and Evaluation model, there is some excitement, according to Mark Prieur, second grade teacher at Beechview Elementary school.

“We feel excited that we’re involved. This is something that we’re not used to,” Prieur said. “Typically, we’re given something and we’re told jump through these hoops and you’ll be good. We’re uncomfortable…. but it’s exciting at the same time.”

The excitement about being a part of large scale change is creating the needed investment in practices leading to enhanced staff and student growth within FPS.

What About the Superintendent?

The School ADvance system includes rubrics for district level administrators—including the superintendent. We believe it offers a solution for board-superintendent teams who want to:

- Comply with Michigan laws
- Align evaluation with personal and district goals
- Motivate and reward growth
- Hold meaningful and productive conversations

We are working with the Michigan Association of School Boards to refine the system and support districts in the superintendent evaluation process.

Districts who would like to pilot the new system—with assistance from MASA and MASB—are invited to contact Linda Wacyk at (517) 327-9268 or lwacyk@gomasa.org.

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Many things make Plainwell Community Schools an outstanding school district—caring and committed teachers, excellent programs, great facilities, and supportive parents, to name just a few. But there is an additional contributor to our excellence that is mostly invisible to the community: our teacher coaching. In teacher coaching, a master teacher observes another teacher during a lesson and afterward provides feedback, advice, and the opportunity to talk professionally about the teacher’s lesson, students, and craft.

Every great athlete has a coach. Have you ever wondered why that is? Especially when you consider that the coach is never better at the sport than the professional athlete he or she is coaching! The reason the best athletes have coaches is because performing a sport is a highly complex activity. As human beings, we are simply not able to stand outside ourselves and objectively analyze our performance while in the middle of performing a highly complex activity. So the only way you can objectively analyze and make dramatic improvements in your performance is for someone who really knows the game well to watch you perform, give you feedback, and talk with you about your performance.

Like a sport, teaching is a complex human activity. In fact, teaching – when done at a very high level – is one of the most difficult, complex activities there is. So to reach the highest level of effectiveness in teaching, it only makes sense that you would benefit from having someone who knows a lot about effective teaching watch you deliver a lesson and then talk with you about it.

A successful teacher coach must have a deep and comprehensive knowledge of effective teaching and be skilled at observing and recording teacher and student activity. But even more importantly, the coach and teacher must have a respectful and collaborative relationship. Teachers must know that the coach truly has their best interest and the best interest of the students at heart. They must be open-minded, fair, and honest. And a warm, caring demeanor and a sense of humor certainly help. The relationship between the teacher and the coach is so critical because the most effective coaching is on-going over many years. Athletes have coaches their entire careers.

We began teacher coaching in Plainwell six years ago with new teachers. We developed a curriculum based on Harry Wong’s beliefs about effective teachers. Effective teachers are excellent classroom managers, they design and implement creative lessons consistently with high levels of student engagement, and they build positive relationships with their students while holding high expectations for their success.

The content of the two-year summer workshops we designed come from many sources, from Doug Lemov and Teach Like a Champion, going all the way back to Madeline Hunter. A summary of the workshop content is available at www.plainwellschools.org. Another major source for the workshops is incorporation of things we learn from classroom visits. We have revised our workshops every year based on what areas of need we find in each cohort of teachers.

But the key is the coaching. After the workshops, we schedule visits to observe the teachers for a full class period and take notes on how well the practices and techniques from the Effective Teaching workshops are being implemented. Following the visit, we meet with each teacher to share the feedback and discuss the lesson based
on what was observed and recorded. Teacher needs dictate the conversation; some require more direction while others collaborate with the coach on goals. When the coach returns for the next visit, additional data will be collected and shared and the process continues.

Teachers report that they benefit greatly from coaching – they feel supported and appreciate that we are committed to their growth and that our expectations are clear. Many report that they especially value the time to talk about their classroom, their students, and their goals. There is great satisfaction in putting effective practices in place and seeing the benefits they produce in one’s students. All teachers want to take pride in their work and know they are doing the best for their students, and coaching helps teachers do that.

The only way you can objectively analyze and make dramatic improvements in your performance is for someone who really knows the game well to watch you perform, give you feedback, and talk with you about your performance.

We have some evidence that coaching works. In 2012, all Michigan teachers were given an effectiveness rating. Of Plainwell’s teachers in year six and beyond who had not been through coaching, 24 percent were rated Highly Effective by their principal (similar to the 22 percent of teachers statewide). Of the teachers in years 1 to 5 who had coaching, 44 percent were rated Highly Effective.

We look forward to gathering further data, but we truly believe that the supportive and collaborative nature of teacher coaching bears much positive fruit for our staffs’ efficacy and our students’ success.

Bob Van Dis is Director of Curriculum and Instruction and Dean Pennala is Instructional Coach at Plainwell Community Schools. Contact them at bvandis@plainwellschools.org and dpennala@plainwellschools.org.
By Tom Page

MASA has given me 800 words (thank you!) to cover this topic, so let’s start right in. After 30-plus years of political and school election campaigning, I know two things. First, I’d rather win than lose. Second, I’ve learned a lot from my losses! So much of what follows comes from my mistakes and misreads, not my victory laps.

The stakes are high at election time. On top of everything else you are responsible for, you and your district leaders have decided to ask voters to approve a millage, a building bond, or some other kind of proposal. This is never easy to do. Even in the most ideal of circumstances, most people would rather not ask others for money.

Every Election Day is a date set in time and the final results are typically known within an hour or two after the polls close. Your election campaign is public. It was either successful or it wasn’t. Voters tell us “yes” or “no” and then it’s over. This stands in stark contrast to our everyday tasks as educators. Much of what we do involves nurturing and supporting the mini-miracles taking place in classrooms over a long period of time.

Why am I stating the obvious? I believe you cannot create an effective election campaign team and plan by relying on your inner educator’s heart and instincts. You’re going to have to lead and collaborate a little differently.

Perhaps you anticipate that your next election campaign will be a slam-dunk, a cake-walk. And if this is the case, you can’t lose, right? Forget this whole campaign thing.

But if you think your upcoming election could go either way, it’s worth putting together a team that allows you to discuss your campaign’s strengths and weaknesses, and act accordingly. It’s true: the tougher the campaign you foresee, the more risks you must be prepared to take.

And everything begins by first being open and honest within your own internal team.

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**Step one: agree on your ask**

Your campaign collaboration begins with the initial group you’ve pulled together to discuss the overall feasibility of your election proposal. You won’t want to enlist your actual campaign team (Step two) until your internal team has finalized a request to voters that:

- is really necessary
- is reasonable
- is affordable
- offers a value-based, long-term solution

Once you’ve collaborated around these four points— with maximum candor and minimal “bows to authority”— you can be confident that your campaign is on the right path.

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**Step two: assemble a campaign team**

With a “campaign-ready” request in hand and an election date on the calendar, you’re ready to pull together your campaign team. Bring people together whom you trust and value, keeping several areas in mind:
Include a person on the team who can say, “We will lose this election unless…” You don’t want a complainer type, just one who will nip complacency in the bud and keep everyone honest.

Frame your proposal into a simple, clearly defined CHOICE. Your team should be able to discuss and carry out ways to help voters understand and embrace the direction you’d like to take the district. Promote a clear CHOICE and a clear direction. If you find yourself having to explain lots of details, you’re playing defense. Not good.

You want a written plan that clearly spells out where all of the needed votes will come from. Too many campaigns start chugging along without a written plan or set goal for the number of votes needed to win. These kinds of campaigns lose.

Your campaign team will benefit from folks (internal and external) who know your community well. Your district’s proposal must ring true within your community as well as within your school district’s culture. It’s an advantage for your campaign team to have an internal sub-team operating apart from your general community voter outreach team.

**Step three: plan the work, work the plan**

With these campaign team cornerstones in place, you’re ready for you and your team to discuss the changes you need to make in your written proposal, your tactical timelines, financial resources, activities you will do, activities you won’t do, voter identification, your all-important absentee voter strategy, and much more.

**Step four: get out the vote**

Collaboration in our world of education takes many different shapes. Rarely does it involve a race to a pre-determined finish line. So in the week leading up to election day, make sure that the voters you’ve identified as necessary for victory will actually cast their ballots. Assemble a dedicated “Get Out Your Vote” team solely charged with this task. Collaborate and build your team with the end date in mind. And thank goodness there is one.

Since 1996, Tom Page has been the Communications Coordinator for Holland Public Schools. He came to Holland after servicing on the State House Communications staff in Lansing for three years. He is a long-time member of the Michigan School Public Relations Association, and has managed nearly 100 political or school election campaigns. Sign up for his free daily email tip and think point by contacting him at www.scnencourager.com.
In October, Brandywine High School hosted a ribbon cutting ceremony unveiling the newest addition to the Berrien County PA 56 Consortium; a consolidated program between Lake Michigan College and Brandywine, which is on track to become a state recognized 1+1 Machine Tool Manufacturing Program next year. The Program is an answer to a call by Governor Rick Snyder to prepare students to meet college and career readiness goals by increasing program occupational skills and rigor through Career & Technical Education.

Berrien RESA’s PA 56 Consortium (the governing body overseeing Berrien County’s Career & Technical Education or CTE programs) has been working with Lake Michigan College and Brandywine High School over the past several months to develop this unique partnership. The 1+1 Program, once fully implemented, will allow students to complete 50 percent of their associate’s degree during their junior and senior years of high school before going on to college to finish their degree. In the high school, students participate in college-level math and English language arts classes. By doing this, students will feel like they are participating in what the average freshman would experience at a traditional college or university. When entering college and having already completed two years of coursework, the 1+1 program students are able to continue focusing on their manufacturing classes, meaning that there is a seamless transition between high school and college, and—most importantly—no momentum is lost.

For Brandywine, the 1+1 concept came to fruition when they learned that Lake Michigan College was interested in consolidating their Bertrand Campus manufacturing lab. In an effort to share costs and meet LMC’s goal of consolidating, Brandywine (through the PA 56 Consortium) was able to seize the opportunity to grow their Manufacturing Program. The new program will offer greater opportunities to students partici-
participating in Career & Technical Education across Berrien County. Students will have a head-start on their careers and be exposed to college expectations through Lake Michigan College’s articulated offerings. The program will also meet the Governor’s expectations for students to be college and career ready.

Under the new collaboration, the College has moved 19 mills, lathes, and surface grinders from its Bertrand Crossing campus in Niles to Brandywine High School. Brandywine will teach manufacturing and machine skills to high school students from several districts in southwest Michigan. LMC will use the lab to conduct Early College credit courses for juniors and seniors from Brandywine and other high schools. The College will also offer college level classes that lead to certificates and degrees for traditional aged and adult students.

College officials noted that the space made available by the transfer of equipment to Brandywine will be converted to general classroom space to accommodate growing enrollments at the Bertrand Crossing campus.

“Dr. Brian Pyles, Regional Director of Career & Technical Education at Berrien RESA, facilitated the partnership between Lake Michigan College and

Continued on page 26
Brandywine High School to locate the Machine Tool Manufacturing program for both high school and college students on Brandywine’s campus,” said Dr. John Jarpe, Superintendent of Brandywine Community Schools and Chair of the PA 56 Consortium. “This is a win-win for both the College and the District, since it allows us to share facilities, equipment, and instructors. Most of all, the winners are today’s students, who will go on to successful careers in a high demand field.”

“This will be an enormous opportunity for our students,” said Dr. Pyles. “This program will be a catalyst for growth in our manufacturing industry. Currently, there are open positions at a number of local machine and tool shops; however, these positions are remaining unfilled due to a lack of skilled employees. The 1+1 Machine Tool Manufacturing Program will answer that call by training students early to become skilled professionals with college degrees. As an industry leader, I would be knocking down the door at Brandywine looking for my future employees!”

The concept of 1+1 programs is a national trend, however for the south-west region of Michigan, Brandywine will be one of the first. It is the goal of the PA 56 Consortium to have the Machine Tool Manufacturing Program serve as the model for other local districts, potentially expanding into additional Career Pathways.

Karen Heath is Supervisor of Communications for Berrien RESA. This article was published in the Winter 2013 issue of Berrien RESA’s Reaching OUT, available at www.berrienresa.org.
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Building Collaboration Through Social Media

By Dr. Vickie Markavitch

Collaboration isn’t just another buzz word. Collaboration can make a difference. Current social media tools make collaborative efforts between counties, school districts and superintendents affordable and feasible, with the added potential to yield powerful results.

How can a “friend” on Facebook or a follower on Twitter make a positive impact on your district goals? Simply, social media platforms are about establishing, building and maintaining relationships. Your Facebook “friends” and your Twitter “followers” are interested in who you are and what you stand for; they want to know your thoughts on education in Michigan, and they want to know what you are doing to ensure a bright school future for their children.

Frequent, honest communication creates trust, which is an important relational building block. When you use social media to share your views, based on research, statistics and years of experience as an educator and administrator, on education trends and current legislative issues, you begin to influence the tone...
of the conversations happening in your community. Social Media tools have an enormous reach; and we can use this reach to give our parents and educators the valid information they are looking for. They want to understand the decisions being made at the board table, in the classroom and in Lansing that affect their families and their local schools, and they will come to trust what you have to say through repeated online visibility.

Communication is enhanced by social media’s immediacy and by the collaborative efforts of fans who re-tweet or re-post your mission or message. Building a team of friends and followers through social media networking is like assembling a supportive, invisible army. It’s not entirely maintenance-free, but it’s a strong communications defense and can even give you an opportunity to empower your districts with proactive information.

Social media in the hands of Michigan superintendents gives us all the ability to connect and communicate with each other, and to effectively organize our local and state-wide projects and policy efforts.

Social media in the hands of Michigan superintendents gives us all the ability to connect and communicate with each other, and to effectively organize our local and state-wide projects and policy efforts. Sharing expertise and resources makes sense; with budget and personnel cuts our future socio-political influence will need to be based on the strength of our collaboration.

I know we are all working to preserve and improve our comprehensive K-12 public schools while facing down proposed education policies and practices that could actually do harm to those schools and their students. We can collaborate even more by connecting with one another on social media and then using those same tools to share our thoughts, and each other’s thoughts, with our communities.

Dr. Vickie Markavitch is Superintendent of Oakland Schools. Contact her by email at vickie.markavitch@oakland.k12.mi.us or via twitter: @VMarkavitch (https://twitter.com/VMarkavitch)
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