



Michigan Middle School Journal

“Promoting Middle Level Education”

Spring 2024 – Volume 45, Number 1

THE MICHIGAN ASSOCIATION OF MIDDLE SCHOOL EDUCATORS
PRESENTS

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Publications Committee

Jeremy Hyler
Editor

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“Promoting Middle
Level Education”

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Michigan Association of Middle School Educators

Mission and Vision

MAMSE's purpose is to advocate for middle level education by promoting opportunities to ensure a supportive environment for young adolescent learners.

Categories for MAMSE's Vision

Advocacy: MAMSE will advocate for middle level education by promoting opportunities to ensure a supportive environment for young adolescent learners.

Professional Development: MAMSE will provide research based professional development to optimize teaching and learning.

Leadership: MAMSE will develop middle level leaders who capably anticipate and respond to the future needs of educators, students and community partners.

Communication: MAMSE will communicate with those who serve young adolescents to facilitate collaboration and networking.

ELA Tech Tools: Choose Two and Dive Deep

By Jeremy Hyler

The beginning of the school year brings numerous challenges for teachers – from preparing the classroom, to writing curriculum, to organizing supplies. And then – especially for the newest teachers among us – there’s just simply losing sleep from our increased anxiety over the students we will face on that first day.

If you’re just starting school this week, I hope it goes well for you. And if you’ve been teaching for a few weeks now, I hope the sailing has been relatively smooth. Regardless of what grade you teach, being prepared takes a lot of work and dedication.

How about your technology use? There are so many choices these days. It can cause us to rack our brains, for sure. My particular focus is English Language Arts because that’s what I teach these days. I know pairing ELA and technology can be down right difficult.

Maybe I can help make it easier with this advice: Just Do Two.

Keeping your tool choices manageable

Using technology “just for the sake of it” or just because it’s “cool” or “looks neat” is definitely not the route educators want to take. Given our busy lives and time constraints, we can’t afford to wander into blind alleys.

Yes, there are digital tools out there that catch our eye because they seem fun and attractive to students. However, the tools we use in an English class should be chosen with great care.

At workshops and conferences I always recommend teachers select no more than two new tools per year. As educators, we don’t often have enough time to play – much less thoroughly familiarize ourselves – with all the digital tools we find interesting. By choosing just two, we have a much better chance of using them effectively and so do our students.

If this method seems too timid or slow, consider that over the course of five

years, we’ll have 10 tools at our fingertips that we know pretty deeply. Some, of course, will expire or be superseded by better ones. But the good news is we’ll have others to fall back on and time to slip the new-and-improved tech into our lineup.

Finding tools worth our time

Before one even begins to choose any digital teaching tools, the ultimate question of Why? should be answered.

- Why am I looking for a tool like this?
- Why is it necessary for my students to use it?
- Why will it increase student success?

Questions like these are exactly what [University of Michigan Professor Liz Kolb](#) asks us to consider in [Learning First, Technology Second: The Educator’s Guide to Designing Authentic Lessons](#) (ISTE, 2017).

Oftentimes, the initial response to a new digital tool is that it looks awesome or really fun. Kolb asks us to think about what the learning goals are

before we even consider implementing a digital tool. After we've established our goals, we can then think about what tool we want our students to use.

She doesn't stop there. At this point, using her [Triple E Framework](#), Kolb wants us to think about how the tool will Engage, Enhance, and Extend student learning. I have been using this framework in my own teaching for the last three years and it definitely helps me when considering the digital tools I put in front of my students.

Each category focuses on key questions to consider when implementing technology. For instance:

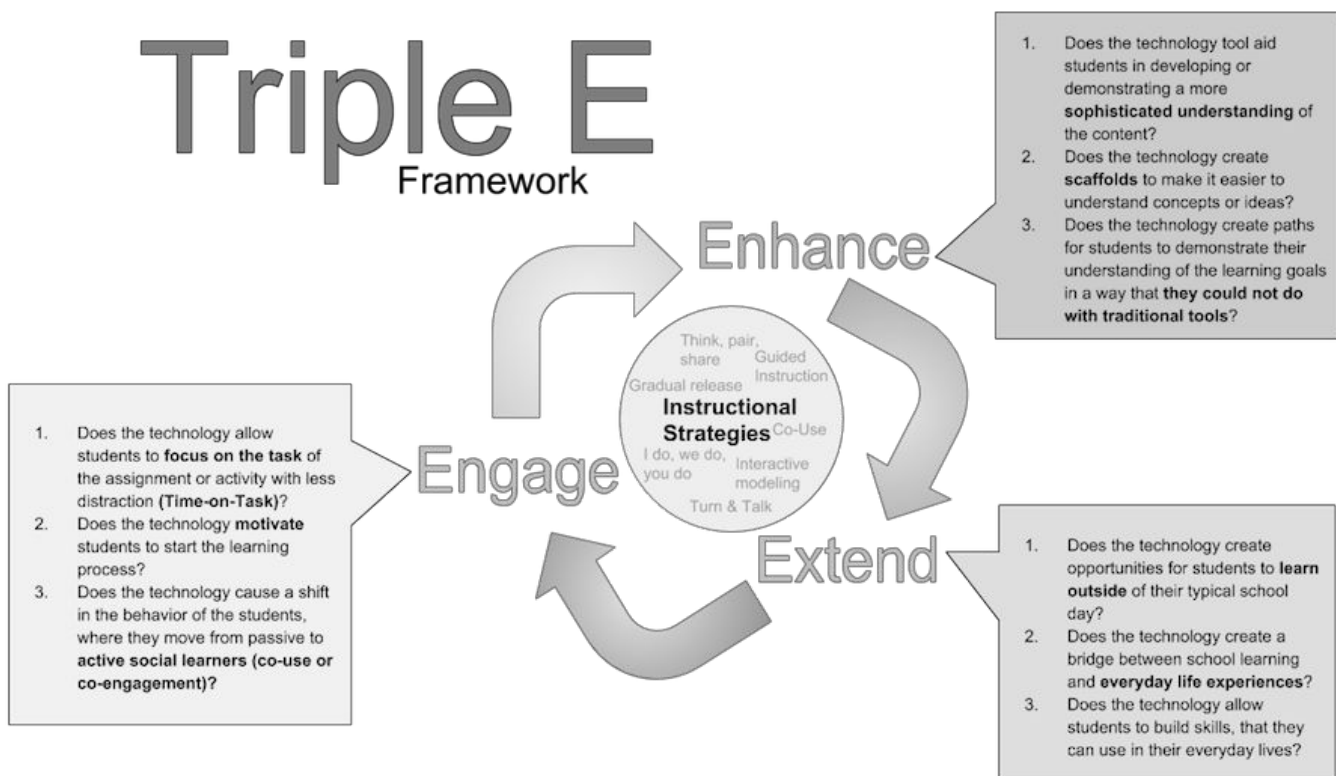
- Does the technology motivate students to start the learning process? (Engage)
- Does the technology tool aid students in developing or demonstrating a more sophisticated understanding of the content? Does it favor opportunities for creation/production over mere consumption? (Enhance)
- Does the technology create a bridge between school learning and everyday life experiences? (Extend)

These are just a few of the questions to consider in the different categories Kolb has created. In addition, she has rubrics available on the Triple E website. She also aligns her framework with [ISTE standards](#) for using technology in the classroom.

Using the Triple E Framework, let's consider just two tools that could be used in an English Language Arts classroom.

Google Keep is a keeper

In my last column, [What Students Gain by Writing Together](#), I mentioned the

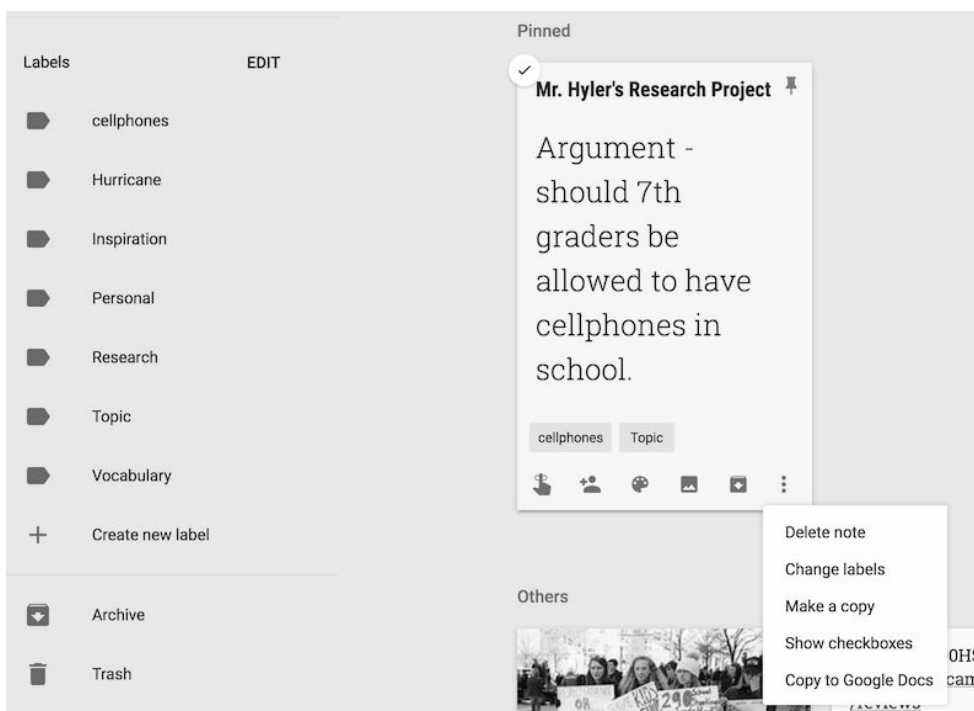


use of Google Documents. There are many other Google Tools out there that can be beneficial to students.

One particular digital tool that can be paired with Google Docs is called [Google Keep](#). Keep is a great tool that helps my seventh graders to stay organized in a number of different ways. Students can use it to create a to-do list, to keep track of vocabulary words, to archive resources they find on the internet or notes taken from class. In essence, you might compare it to interactive sticky notes.

One of the most beneficial uses I have found for my students is having them use Google Keep to track the resources they find on the internet for research or argument papers. I have students create a common label (like a tag) first for the topic of the paper (like “cellphones” in my editor’s example below). Notes can have multiple labels, so “research” or “vocabulary” or others like “images” can be added to sort.

Students can then click on the label and create notes for their individual resources. Students can



Google Keep

color code the notes, collaborate with other students, use check boxes, and add images or pictures to the notes. There is nothing more frustrating than when a student finds a resource and doesn’t write it down appropriately and can’t find it later.

Since all the notes are in the cloud, the students can extend their learning outside of school by accessing Keep from home or any device and continuing their research and writing. In addition, any notes that students take can easily be transferred into a Google Document. This particular feature can make it easy for students to compile their sources for a

bibliography or works-cited page. Overall, Google Keep is a beneficial organizational tool for students to use in and out of school. Try it out – it’s really intuitive.

Pinning in Padlet

Staying with the theme of note taking and organization, another great tool that teachers and students love to use is [Padlet](#). Much like Google Keep, Padlet is a bulletin board where you can pin notes, images, and links. Padlet has now added a feature where you can pin videos too. Also, in August Padlet [added a feature](#) that lets you record action on your entire screen for up to five minutes (including

narration) and place the recording into a pad.

In the Carnegie Foundation's 2007 [Writing Next Report](#) by Steve Graham and Dolores Perin, the authors argue that students in middle and high school can improve writing skills by doing sentence combining activities. In my classroom, I use a Padlet to help students play with sentences and sentence structure.

I like to have students create a Padlet account, and then I give them a list of mentor sentences from content we are reading at the time. Then I have the students enter two different sentences onto their Padlet bulletin board word by word (so each word/phrase is a separate item). From there, they can

move the parts of the sentence around. I tell my students that sentences are like puzzle pieces that can be manipulated and oftentimes can fit into multiple places and create more than one type of sentence.

An example of a similar Padlet activity that my [co-author Troy Hicks](#) and I use when we present at conferences can be seen above (click to make it bigger). The purpose of this activity is for students to better understand the parts of sentences and realize they truly can create different sentences by putting different pieces together. Ultimately they gain a better understanding of sentence components, the different types of sentences, and the value of sentence variety. Afterwards, students can

apply the skills they have been practicing with Padlet to the formal writing they turn in to me.

Take a few deep breaths and dive in

Choose one of these tools and explore all the English Language Arts possibilities. Or you may want to try them both out and discover the strengths of each. But remember – set your goals and limit yourself to “deep diving” into only a couple of tools each year. Spend a few minutes doing an internet search for Google Keep or Padlet ideas for ELA classrooms – you’ll be amazed. I’ve truly only rippled the surface here. Technology does not have to be difficult to implement; it just needs to have purpose and help enhance what our students are doing.



Padlet

Jeremy Hyler is Manager of Educational Partnerships for the Center for the Collaborative Classroom. He also serves on the MAMSE Board of Directors



2023 MAMSE Awards of Excellence

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Springport Middle School

Promising Young Educator of the Year:

Madelyn McKenzie

E.F. Rittmueller Middle School

Parent of the Year:

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White Pine Middle School

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Mathematics Discourse Is So Important In Secondary Classrooms

By Dr. Patricia Baltzley, Ed.D.

How do you get your students talking with one another about mathematics? Do your instructional routines include routines that provide vehicles for student conversations around the mathematics of your lesson? One of the most critical moves we make in our classrooms is the one that facilitates mathematical discourse.

Focusing on the Effective Mathematics Teaching Practices

In 2014, the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics (NCTM) published *Principles to Actions* which outlines eight Mathematics Teaching Practices that “represent a core set of high-leverage practices and essential teaching skills to promote deep learning of mathematics” (p. 9). These eight Mathematics Teaching Practices are:

1. Establish mathematics goals to focus learning.

2. Implement tasks that promote reasoning and problem solving.
3. Use and connect mathematical representations.
4. Facilitate meaningful mathematical discourse.
5. Pose purposeful questions.
6. Building procedural fluency from conceptual understanding.
7. Support productive struggle in learning mathematics.
8. Elicit and use evidence of student thinking.

These practices provide the framework from which all mathematics teachers should hone their teaching craft.



Notice Teaching Practice #4: Facilitate meaningful mathematical discourse. The formal statement of this teaching practice is: “Effective teaching of mathematics facilitates discourse among students to build shared understanding of mathematical ideas by analyzing and comparing student approaches and arguments” (*Principles to Actions*, p. 29). This is a very challenging practice to integrate into our classrooms as we navigate our scopes and sequences; as we agonize over pacing and “getting everything in”, and as we strive to engage all students and often feel like we are pulling every word out of our students’ mouths.

Integrating Mathematical Discourse into Classroom Routines

So how do we go about providing our students with that opportunity to voice their understanding of math concepts, talk

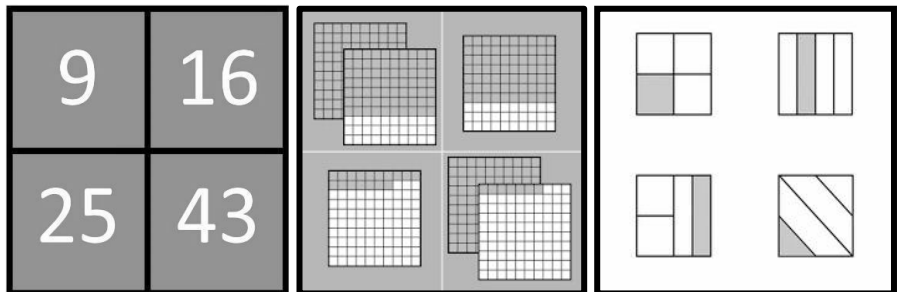
math with one another, and carry the conversations themselves? One of the easiest routines to integrate into our repertoire of mathematical discourse opportunities is to use Number Talks. I am talking capital “N” for Number and capital “T” for Talks. This is a very specific instructional strategy that has a routine of eliciting students’ thinking from a mental math activity. This 10- to 15-minute routine has students finding an answer to a posed problem in their heads, then sharing their answers and, more particularly, their strategies for finding these answers with the whole class. Using this strategy changes the teacher’s role from being front and center as the main conversant to one of facilitator and recorder for their student responses. By asking questions to help students make meaning of their answers and

strategies, teachers provide a great vehicle for students to solidify their number sense, learn new ways of thinking about numbers from their peers, and verbalize their thinking in an environment of trust.

Number Talks are accessible for grades K-12. Although a Number Talk has traditionally been viewed as an elementary instructional strategy, in recent years it has been growing as a viable opportunity at the secondary level to address skill gaps, illuminate conceptual misconceptions, uncover multiple strategies for approaching a solution, or formatively assess students growing

understanding of a new concept.

Number Talks can be as easy as identifying a pattern from dots viewed for 3 seconds with students sharing strategies for how they saw the total number of dots. Or, they can be operational expressions such as $114 + 517$, 12×18 , $3 \frac{1}{2} \times 4$, or 45% of 120. They can be opportunities such as finding three numbers with three different operations that equal -12. Or, they can be pictorial images that have students deciding, for example, which one doesn’t belong. Explore the website [Which One Doesn’t Belong](#) for problems like the ones below to create powerful Number Talks.



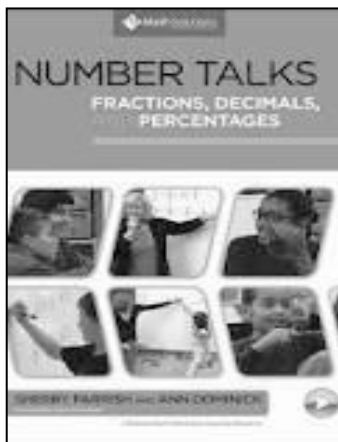
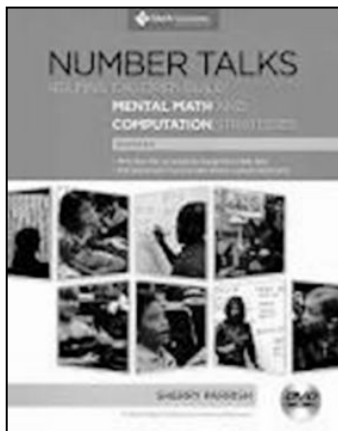
Seeking Candidates for the MAMSE Board of Directors

Are you interested in serving on the MAMSE Board? We would love for you to reach out to us! Please contact Jennifer Nicholson at mamseoffice@mamse.org for more information.

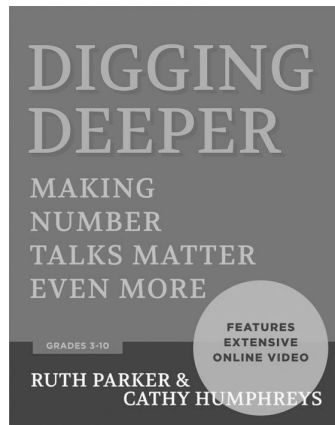
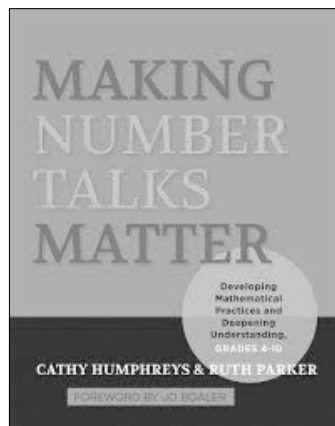


There are excellent resources available for learning more about Number Talks. The following resources provide guidance and suggestions for implementing Number Talks into both elementary and secondary mathematics classroom.

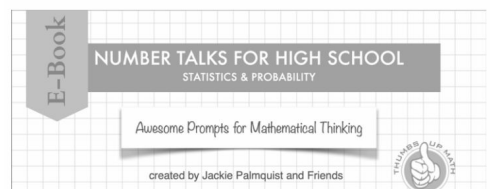
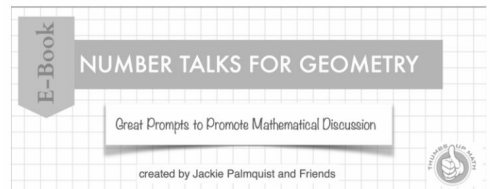
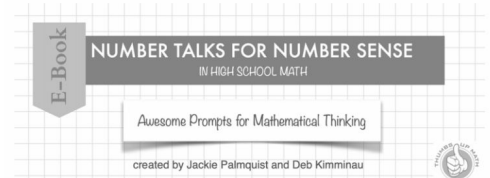
Sherry Parrish has been guiding the implementation of Number Talks into the elementary grades with her Number Talks book from 2010 and then in collaboration with Ann Dominick in 2016.



Ruth Parker and Cathy Humphreys provide thoughtful resources for teachers in grades 3-10 to consider as they look to integrating a Number Talk into their regular routines.



For secondary classrooms, the resources below, available at www.thumbsupmath.com, were developed in high school classrooms and can easily be integrated into middle school as well as high school classrooms.



Exploring Other Vehicles for Mathematical Discourse

What other vehicles can we use to increase the opportunity for mathematical discourse in our classrooms? I am sure that somewhere in your teaching experience you have used a Think-Pair-Share. This seasoned instructional strategy is used as a collaborative learning strategy to first think about a response/answer to a question/problem, then pair with another student to share their responses and engage in mathematical conversation about their responses, and finally share responses with the whole class.

Maybe you have forgotten about this strategy and need to bring it forward in your routines again. Maybe you USED to use this strategy and you became bored with it. I did a quick search for alternatives to Think Pair Share and came up with a plethora of alternatives. Here are several websites that I found that rejuvenated T-P-S for me:

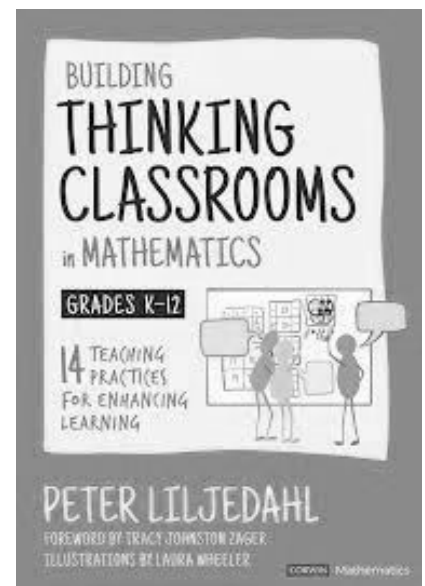
- [10 Fun Alternatives to Think-Pair-Share](#)

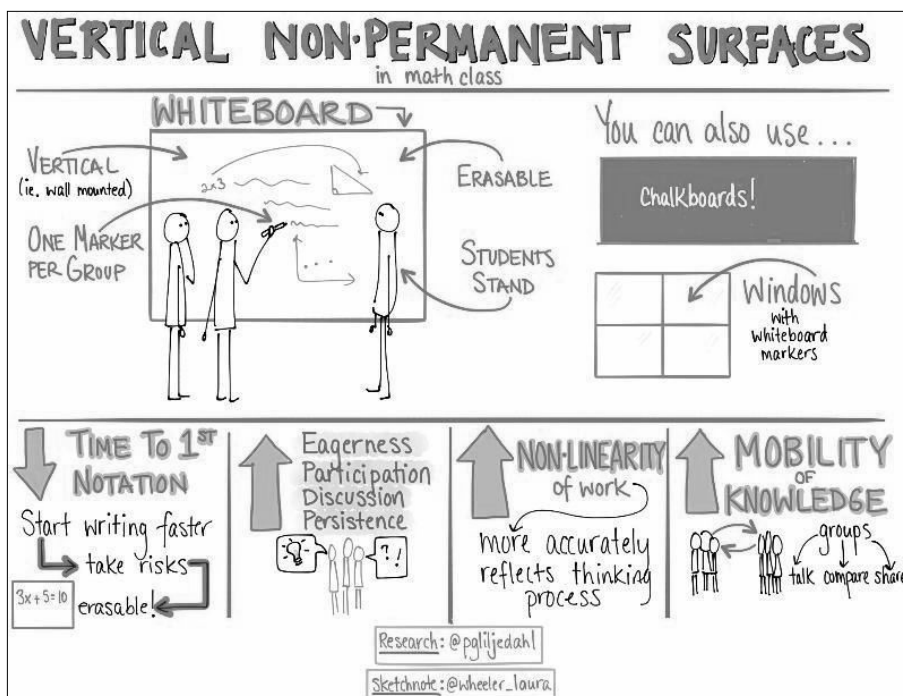
- [How To Use Variations on Think-Pair-Share in the Secondary Classroom](#)
- [Think-Pair-Share Variations](#)

One of my favorite variation of Think-Pair-Share was shared by Sara Van Der Werf in her mathematics blog. It is an instructional move called Stand and Talk and gets the students up out of their seats to find a partner after their individual think time. The partners share their thinking in a focused way to notice and describe about something that is provided by the teacher. Read her description of this instructional move on [her blog](#) for implementation strategies and more details on this refreshing variation of T-P-S.

Vertical Non-Permanent Surfaces (VNPS) has become my new favorite vehicle for mathematical discourse by students. Developed and researched by Peter Liljedahl, this instructional routine is part of his Building Thinking Classrooms framework. VNPS use provides the opportunity for students to get up out of their desks and work with others to creatively

solve problems, brainstorm solutions, argue mathematics, and come to consensus. Students are not afraid to make mistakes (erasable and reusable surfaces) and start over after discussing possibilities with their fellow groupmates. Using either non-curriculum mathematics tasks or curriculum tasks helps students find their voice within a smaller group rather than within the whole classroom environment. Finding voice is an important part of mathematical discourse. It provides students with a way of verbalizing their developing understanding of mathematical concepts and feeling comfortable sharing their ideas, mistakes, and creative thinking.





There are many other ways to purposefully facilitate discourse in your mathematics classroom. What is important is that we create environments in our classrooms where students are active members of the discourse community. They are willing to put forth their mathematical explanations and strategies because an environment of trust and collaboration has been built by you, the teacher.

Your students consider the responses of others in the classroom, listen carefully to each other, and critique the reasoning of their classmates with respect and genuine interest.

I challenge you to try some of the vehicles for mathematical discourse described in this blog – a Number Talk or a variation on Think-Pair-Share, such as Stand and Talk, or Vertical Non-Permanent Surfaces. Get those kids talking with one another and sharing their mathematical ideas!

Resources:

- Liljedahl, Peter. (2021). Building Thinking Classrooms in Mathematics Grades K-12: 14 Teaching Practices for Enhancing Learning. California: Corwin Mathematics.

- NCTM. (2014). Principles to Actions: Ensuring Mathematical Success for All. Reston, VA: The National Council of Teachers of Mathematics.
- Parrish, Sherry. (2010). Number Talks: Helping Children Build Mental Math and Computation, Grades K-5. California: Math Solutions.
- Parrish, Sherry and Dominick, Ann. (2016). Number Talks: Fractions, Decimals, Percentages. California: Math Solutions.
- Humphreys, Cathy and Parker, Ruth. (2015). Making Number Talks Matter: Developing Mathematical Practices and Deepening Understanding, Grades 4-10. Portland, ME: Stenhouse Publishers.
- Parker, Ruth and Humphreys, Cathy. (2018). Digging Deeper: Making Number Talks Matter More, Grades 3-10. Portland, ME: Stenhouse Publishers.

Dr. Patricia Baltzley, Ed.D. is an independent mathematics consultant working with Strategic Intervention Solutions (SIS) with Michigan secondary schools. Her career in education has spanned over forty-five years.

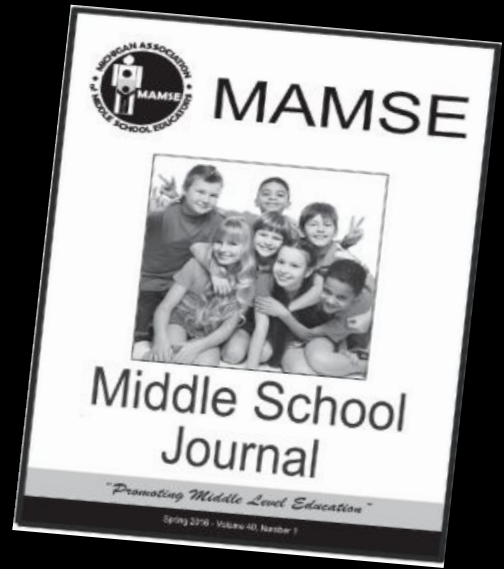
Interested in writing for MAMSE?

The MAMSE Middle School Journal is the only journal focused on middle level education in the state of Michigan.

If you have an article you have been hoping to have published or insight you want to share with educators from across the state, country, and world, please submit an article for consideration.

Publication guidelines are available at <https://mamse.org/mmsj>.

We have begun accepting Journal entries for our 2024 Spring Journal. The Board of Directors have decided to publish the journal later in the Spring to provide you with the best articles and ideas for the next school year. If you have any questions or would like to submit an article, please email: mamseoffice@mamse.org.



The 2023 MAMSE Conference at White Pine Middle School would not have been possible without the help of the following donors and sponsors:

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Thank you for all of your support!

Learning Vocabulary with Metaphors

By Todd Bloch

Today, I used the following assignment in my science classroom:

The Learning target for today is to demonstrate an understanding of vocabulary through Metaphorical representation.

Part 1: Required- Vocab Metaphors

- Pick 4 of our vocabulary words from our vocab list
- Find a “non-scientific” picture that represents the word – Like we did yesterday in class
- Explain why the image means the word

Click here to go to [Quizlet](#) to review vocabulary.

Go here to write your Vocabulary Metaphors in your Kidblog.org.



Mentor Text for a 4

An ocean current is a continuous, directed movement of ocean water generated by the forces acting.

When I read that definition, I began thinking about my advisory students preparing for the NWEA test. I am bringing them to the computer lab to review to help them improve their math scores. This test is like an ocean current because it directs the education path. The direction of education is currently moving to align more and more with the tests. Teachers and students are under great “forces” to be successful. Ocean currents control the flow of water, and tests manage education.

Mentor Text for a 3

Title: Vocab Metaphors

Title: Vocab Metaphors
Vocabulary word: Front – the atmospheric phenomenon created at the boundary between two different air masses



This image represents the front because the Mickey Mouse character is a boundary between the two different masses of people. Also, Mickey Mouse looks like he is in the atmosphere. This connects to the vocabulary word because “Front” is a boundary between two air masses.

The mentor texts are presented to model for the students the writing quality expected in their blog posts. The use of Metaphors to connect to vocabulary was modeled in my classroom yesterday with the help of our wonderful special education teacher, Mrs Hogan.

Many of my students need help to meet the criteria for success on this assignment. It is not that they can't define the words or use pictures to connect to the words, but because the students are concrete thinkers. My students need help with the idea of a metaphor. When they want to be literal in the representation with a picture. Look at the following example for the word "Climate."

CLIMATE: the climate in the desert stays the same all the time.



A picture of a desert climate to be a metaphor for the environment? The picture does represent a climate, but not metaphorically. I need to figure out how to engage the students at a higher level of thinking to create metaphors instead of literal representations.

As I continued to see literal representation after literal representation, I asked the class to reexamine the "mentor" texts. Ask themselves if they were following the model laid out before them. Many were upset. They acknowledge that the model needed to be followed accurately. I stated, "It is okay to make a mistake. It is not okay to leave the mistake uncorrected after realizing it is a mistake." The student went back to work and created samples that looked more like this:

Ocean Current: The steady flow of surface ocean water in a prevailing direction.



Atmosphere – is a mix of gasses that surround the Earth. When I think of the atmosphere, I think of salad because salads are always mixed with something, whether it's salad dressing, fruits, and vegetables, etc.



Students need constant reminders of expectations. When expectations are not met, teachers need to guide students back to the goal of the learning activity. Teachers need to point the students towards high-quality examples of work. Allow the students to assess their work and give them time to make the necessary changes. Students rush into assignments with the desire for completion. Monitoring needs to occur to make sure learning targets are achieved.

Todd Bloch serves on the Board of Directors for the Michigan Association of Middle School Educators, currently holding the position of Past President.



Michigan Association of Middle School Educators Awards of Excellence Nomination Form

Nomination form and letter must be received by the
MAMSE Office before: January 31, 2024
Notification of Award Winners will be by February 11, 2024

Type of Award: Parent Educator Promising Young Educator (< 4 years' experience)
 Teaching Team Administrator College Educator

Name of Nominee(s):

Email Address of Nominee (only one needed for team):

School Information: Name: _____

Address: _____

City: _____ State: _____ Zip: _____

School District _____

Name of Award Nominator: _____

School Information: Name: _____

Address: _____

City: _____ State: _____ Zip: _____

School District _____

Nominator Signature: _____

Nominator Email: _____

***IMPORTANT:** In a separate document, please identify reasons for your nomination. Please address the following criteria concisely in the listed order (typewritten please):

- Advocacy for and service to middle level education and young adolescents;
- Leadership in furthering middle school philosophy/principles;
- Other significant accomplishments in the middle school field.

NOTE: Please limit your nomination letter to one page and send both the nomination form and letter to: mamseoffice@mamse.org by January 31, 2024.

Those selected as state winners will be recognized at the MAMSE Annual Conference, receive a complimentary registration to the Annual Conference, be given a one-year individual MAMSE membership and will be recognized in the MAMSE Journal and on our website.



Michigan Association of Middle School Educators Building Partnership Application

The Michigan Association of Middle School Educators would like to invite you to become a Building Partner. MAMSE has many wonderful building partnership benefits to offer, including:

- 3 Copies of all MAMSE publications
- Significantly reduced conference rates for all attendees
- Monthly emails with teacher tips, AMLE/MAMSE updates, articles and legislative news
- Eligibility for MAMSE Grants
- Ability to nominate for MAMSE Awards of Excellence
- Building recognition at our annual MAMSE Conference

If you are interested in the MAMSE Building Partnership, please return the form below along with your dues of \$199.00 to the MAMSE Office. We accept check or money order. Please visit the MAMSE website for more information: <https://www.mamse.org>.

We hope you will take advantage of this opportunity to help us make a difference in middle schools in Michigan!

MAMSE Building Partnership Application

Building Name: _____

School District: _____

Address: (Please list the address where you would like to receive correspondence and publications)

City: _____ State: _____ Zip: _____

Please designate a staff member to receive publications:

Name: _____ Position: _____

Email: _____

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Student Voice Through Student-Led Conferences

By Ryan Lisek

Providing students with opportunities to use their own voice for reflection on their academic progress is essential to the development of a healthy school environment. When given a voice during the school day, students feel empowered and school becomes more of a team effort than a what the teacher says - goes atmosphere. Students also need the opportunity to continue that reflection with those in their home as well. A great way for this to happen is through student-led conferences.

What Should a Student-Led Conference Look Like?

Traditional conferences have the parent on one side and the teacher on the other. The teacher provides perspective to the parent about the progress of the student and the parent ask questions of the teacher about their student's progress. The student does not get a voice in the conversation

until the parent gets home, and usually that is when the conversation is negative. Why is the student not involved from the beginning?

Student-led conferences provide students that opportunity. In a student-led conference, the learner is the one guiding the conversation with their parent or guardian. Preparation for the conference starts at the beginning of the year when the student sets a goal for him/herself. Having students think about their strengths and opportunities at the beginning of the year helps to build an understanding of where he/she has had trouble in the past. The

student can then build a SMART goal to help guide them through their educational journey leading up to conference time. Students also need to be mindful of the growth they are making academically as well. Tracking their pre- and post assessment data against the learning targets is also important. Students need to fully understand why they are receiving the marks they are.

For students to understand their progress through the school year, teachers and other educators need to provide time for reflection on the progress students are making toward their SMART goal. Providing



effective feedback to students throughout the year and allowing them the opportunity to keep track of their progress in school give students ownership of learning and allow for them to be aware of their growth from the beginning of the year. Then, when it comes time for conferences, students have the opportunity to be the leaders of the conversation, instead of a bystander in discussion. Parents and teachers still play a role in the exchange, but the student is given a stronger voice in the process.

Why Student-Led Conferences?

When making a transition from the traditional to more progressive educational strategies,

many people will ask "Why?" Aren't conferences meant to be for teachers to inform parents of what their student is doing (or in some cases is not doing) in their class? The answer: Yes, in theory. Conferences provide time for teachers to bring parents in to be a greater part of their student's education. They give teachers a chance to provide clarity to the parent about the progress their student is making and how their student can improve. But, student-led conferences do not take this opportunity away.

With student-led conferences, the conversation is shifted from just the adults in the room and includes the person with the greatest impact on their learning:

the student. According to Donald G. Hackmann, assistant professor of educational leadership and policy studies at Iowa State University in an ERIC Digest, "Student-Led Conferences at the Middle Level," student-led conferences give students greater control of their academics and allow for a stronger personal responsibility of their academic performance. With students involved, the conversation becomes more honest between all parties and provides students with the opportunity to grow their communication skills.

Student-led conferences also have other benefits. Getting parents into the school building is often a struggle because of the schedules many families have. Hackmann states that parents are more likely to attend student-led conferences versus the traditional form where it is just teacher and parent. Students are also more likely to develop stronger organizational skills because they are responsible for taking ownership of their learning. They must provide evidence to support their learning during the conference, so



students are more inclined to maintain a system to keep track of their documentation. This may need to be heavily modeled at the beginning of the year, but giving students this tool will pay dividends at the end of the year.

Providing students with the opportunity to advocate for themselves in their academic journey is a powerful tool. Student-led conferences are a great way to give them that power. With student-led conferences, students are

afforded the opportunity to build themselves up and provide insight into their progress that parents and teachers cannot provide. That is what holding conferences should truly be about.

Resources:

- Hackmann, D. G. (1997). Student-Led Conferences at the Middle Level. Illinois: ERIC Clearinghouse on Elementary and Early Childhood Education.

Ryan Lisek serves on the Board of Directors for the Michigan Association of Middle School Educators, currently holding the position of President. He has 14 years of middle school teaching experience.

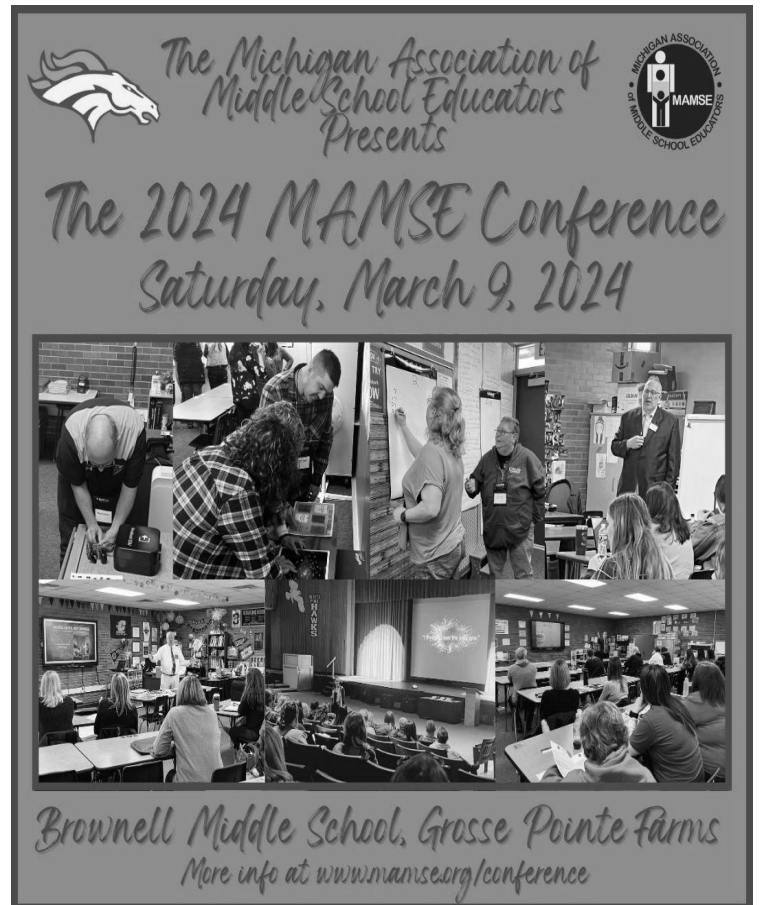


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Supporting Students and the Profession: A Grow Your Own Teachers Program

By Dr. Vikki Wandmacher

Throughout the years, I have read any number of articles, heard many discussions of, and participated in numerous interview committees where the concern that the demographics of our teaching force do not match that of our student body was raised. Since the gap has not disappeared over the years, it seems we have yet to find the answer to this dilemma (Richardson and Ralston).

As middle school educators concerned about the development of the whole young adolescent, we are aware of the need to have a wide variety of positive role models for students so each may find support, a trusted adult, and a vision of future possibilities within their own school environment. The lack of minority teachers and the continued dominance of women in education means that a large number of our students do not have the opportunity to ‘see’ themselves in those roles. This lack of vision may be one reason the field of

education has struggled to diversify.

Young adolescents need teachers who have been prepared to teach specifically in a middle school. Unfortunately, many people ascribe to a deficit narrative regarding middle schools which may deter candidates from pursuing education degrees with a middle level focus (Lunnsman et al.). Working to overturn these negative assertions through positive experiences in middle schools can help to dispel these myths. Michigan now has a 5-9 grade band certificate, but there must be people choosing that band in order to fill middle school vacancies.

Throughout my own experience within two districts, I found that a large number of the teachers in both were products of the same district in which they were teaching. They had returned to their own districts, where they had a positive educational

experience, to spend their careers with the next generation of students. This is an excellent reason to look to a ‘grow your own’ program to address both the current teacher shortage and the need to diversify the teaching staff.

Several years ago, the Michigan Department of Education (MDE), announced their multifaceted [Future Proud Michigan Teachers](#) initiative, which focused on addressing the growing teacher shortage within the state. One focus of the program was to establish and grow [Explore programs](#) at secondary schools. At that time, White Pine Middle School in the Saginaw Township Community Schools brought together a committee to create ideas and apply for the grant. The plan was to first create a Club for middle schoolers, to involve staff in positively promoting the profession, to create hands-on engaging age appropriate activities, and

to reach out to the district elementary schools, the local Intermediate School District program and the nearby university education program. Once the grant was secured, the plans were implemented. As of today, at the end of nearly 3 years and two grant cycles, we are pleased to report that the program has continuously grown and been incredibly successful in fulfilling our initial goals. It is of course too soon to see results within the teaching staff as our first student participants are just in 10th grade!

The following is a timeline of the program development:

2020-21

- Committee formed and ideas generated
- Grant written, once grant is awarded the initial activities are further defined
- Club sponsor participates in True Colors training during the summer
- Club sponsor and other staff involved in the program participate in multiple trainings on Equity through the [Equity Literacy Institute](#).
- Materials ordered for hands-on activities: Picture books, Math games, Lego sets etc.

- Club name (Educators of Tomorrow) determined, Logo designed, shirts, lanyards, folders with logo/name ordered. As a career focused club we wanted the students to feel professional on field trips and when working with younger students.
- Grant covers: Club sponsors stipends, curriculum & PD hours spent creating the program, materials for activities, professional attire, transportation for field trips and cost of training for sponsors.

2021-22

- In collaboration with the Saginaw ISD a promotional video was produced and used to advertise the new club.
 - Club meetings were started. Good turnout, student demographics within the club match school demographics with the exceptions of boys.
 - Students learned about True Colors and how it relates to their own schooling and to the experiences of others in a classroom
 - Literacy expert within the school, shares introductory information about Picture books.
- Students pick two picture books, these are ordered with doubles to be shared with SVSU students. Part of our establishing both the middle schoolers and the college students' 'teacher library'
 - Students visit local university, Saginaw Valley State University (SVSU), and join a Children's Lit. class, the college students teach the middle school students about drawing out information and how to engage students when reading aloud. The middle school students give the college students copies of their books.
 - Club members visit the Saginaw Career Center and work with the education students. The high school students had used the middle schoolers book choices to design a related activity for a preschooler. The high school and middle school students pair up and work with a preschooler for a read aloud and to do the activity.
 - Using the knowledge gained the Club members take their books to both the nearby K-2 and 3-5 school to read to students.

- Club members also learn to play a math game or design a Lego activity which they take on a different day to the local elementary schools and work with small groups of students.
- 8th grade elective class, Educators of Tomorrow, is included in the elective choices for the 2022-23 school year. It fills up!

Second Grant Proposal Written:

- The Future Proud Michigan Explore Grant is available for another year. The middle school decided to write another proposal to support continued growth of the program.
- A high school teacher is interested in starting a club at the high school, which will allow the program to be continuous from the middle school (6-8) to the high school (9-12), onto the Career Complex (11-12).
- This creates a continuous program that supports student interest and development all the way to post secondary options.

- The second grant proposal covers similar costs for training, sponsor stipends, collaboration hours, hands-on materials, professional attire and transportation.

2022-23

- 8th grade elective class is held in the Fall semester. Students meet every other day with the teachers to dig deeper than the Club was able into True Colors, literacy and math skills, plus begin to look at the important aspects of SEL, classroom management, and being a positive role model.
- The class has drawn students from the previous year's club but also other 8th graders who had not been club members. The class is full and again matches the school's demographics with the exception of boys. Though there are more boys, it is still not close to fifty percent.
- The class walks to the nearby K-2 school to work with second graders throughout the semester.
- The Club for 6th-8th graders begins to meet during the second semester. The 8th graders from the class take on a leadership role.

- The Club members learn skills, design activities and travel to the K-2 school to continue to work with second grade students.
- The high school Club begins at Heritage High School also within the Saginaw Township Community Schools. The club members recruit others, elect officers and begin to work with both second and fifth graders at district elementary schools.

2023-24

- The grant ends on September 30, 2023. The MS class is full again for the Fall semester. The HS Club doubles its membership.
- The MS takes two field trips, one to the Career Complex and another to SVSU, both are focused on literacy with the use of Picture Books.
- The HS takes a field trip to MSU and interacts with their education school, including joining a class, a tour of campus and spending time with education students.

The enthusiasm the students have for the club and the class has been beyond our expectations. We know that not all of the students who have joined will eventually become educators and even those who do, may or may not return to the district, but some just might!

Even if they do not enter the field of education, we believe that the experiences the students are having through the clubs and the class are providing many great opportunities. One, they are learning about themselves as learners and how this impacts a classroom - useful information for any student. Two, they have opportunities for leadership, collaboration, and building skills to positively work with others. Three, they are getting to explore other programs, visit multiple college campuses and see themselves as future college students.

We hope that the grant is available again and that our program can be awarded additional funds to continue growing the program. We envision stronger ties between the 8th grade EOT class and

the HS Club. Bridging that gap through a mentoring program at the HS, would be a great experience for the high schoolers and assist the 9th graders with their transition. This could begin by getting the 8th grade EOT class members to spend time with the HS EOT club members. This connection may assist in keeping students in the HS club, if they find it a source of support. We have lower numbers of participants at the high school level, with previous middle school participants citing the tough transition as taking their time away from club participation. Eventually, a high school EOT class for 9th and 10th graders would be an excellent way to embed program continuity within the district.

Another area we would like to address is middle school specific. With the new grade bands in Michigan teacher certification, there is one for 5th through 9th grade. It is a positive move for middle school educators as it focuses on the special needs of young adolescents and how to address them. But there is a concern that if education students at the universities do not pick that band as their focus, we may face additional teacher

shortages at the middle school level. By getting current university education students involved with our middle school club, they will experience middle school as an adult educator, enabling them to discover the joys of this age, which in turn will build the pool of educators with 5th-9th grade certification for the future. Additionally, the students who begin their journey into education through positive experiences at the middle school level, may look to return to their own starting point as the next generation of middle level teachers.

Resources:

- Lunnsman, Christina, et al. "Middle Level Teacher Recruitment: Challenging Deficit Narratives." *Middle School Journal*, vol. Volume 52, no. 5, 2021, pp. 14-24. AMLE, <https://www.amle.org/middle-level-teacher-recruitment-challenging-deficit-narratives/>. Accessed 10 October 2023.

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- Richardson, L. Song, and Ben Ralston. "It's time for us to fix America's shortage of Black teachers." District Administration, 20 September 2021, <https://districtadministration.com/its-time-for-us-to-fix-americas-shortage-of-black-teachers/>. Accessed 10 October 2023.

Dr. Vikki Wandmacher currently serves on the MAMSE Board of Directors. She recently retired as principal of White Pine Middle School in Saginaw Township.



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East Middle School, Plymouth
Marshall Greene Middle School, Birch Run
Richfield Public School Academy, Flint
White Hall Middle School, White Hall

Through 2024:

Tappan Middle School, Ann Arbor
Mt. Morris Middle School, Mt. Morris

Through 2025:

Oakview Middle School, Lake Orion
Slauson Middle School, Ann Arbor
White Pine Middle School, Saginaw Township

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