

OMLA News



Oregon Middle Level Association January 2004

an affiliate of the National Middle School Association



If you have been to a big convention, you know about the energy it creates and the enormous amount of knowledge that is exchanged. Celebrating NMSA's 30th anniversary at the annual conference in Atlanta was wonderful. No surprise there! Over 7100 people attended, and the South was well represented, of course. We Oregonians were in short supply, but given our budget climate, that was expected. We showed up for our convention in Portland by the thousands, but traveling across the country is a different matter.

The various education conventions are structured similarly. There are big sessions with hotshot speakers, roll call of states, presentations of officers, awards, music, and other events. Significant time is dedicated to breakout sessions presented by practitioners. Receptions bring participants together for food and festivities. Exhibitors by the hundreds hawk their wares and give free samples. But NMSA's convention is like no other because you are in the company of thousands of other professionals

dedicated to the same, very special age group. It's like a big club and we are the members.

Middle school musicians from all over the state performed in various locations in the convention hall and drew crowds that were delighted by their variety and polish. This is a highlight of NMSA conferences. One of my favorites was a large string ensemble that was mostly cellos. I'd never heard anything quite like it. For the closing session, the featured band did a world beat tune with heavy percussion. That brought a standing ovation. In fact, there were many times during the conference where the audience was brought to its feet by fine performances.

Monte Selby, educator and songwriter, composed and performed a sing-along for the opening session of the conference called "This I Believe". Monte also was the keynote for the teachers' luncheon, an event worth attending to hear a keynote about life in middle schools get sung rather than spoken. He was very funny and very enjoyable.



My favorite part of the conference was talking to many people from all over the nation and world. It's easy to believe that things are the same everywhere, but they most surely are not. I was impressed by the remarks regarding how much they had learned and how they had some great ideas to take home.

To celebrate the 30th anniversary, NMSA asked each conference participant to donate \$3. They raised \$2877 from this request. OMLA donated a gift basket of Oregon products for the silent auction and it fetched \$45. All of this money goes to the NMSA Foundation.

NMSA hosts various events during the year, and you can find them on their website, www.nmsa.org. Next fall, you have the opportunity to attend their annual conference in Minneapolis. Start planning now and make it your reality. I hope to see Oregon there.

written by Beth Madison, editor

"NMSA is dedicated to improving the educational experiences of young adolescents by providing vision, knowledge, and resources to all who serve them in order to develop healthy, productive, and ethical citizens."

From Your OMLA President Beth Madison

It was a nice, sunny October day at our suburban middle school. I was doing lunch supervision outside the cafeteria, sitting in the lobby having a good time with some kids. Suddenly I heard a call over my walkie talkie, "I need immediate assistance in the back 40. This is real. Put down the gun." This, of course, is the beginning of every principal's worst fear. A gun at my darling, little school. "Put down the gun". Those words you never want to hear. Later the children would joke about what I looked like just then, flying from my chair, just about knocking over the recycle bin, my girlie shoes barely staying on as I ran down the hall. They tell me they never saw anyone move so fast in their lives.

This was real. A boy had decided to take his life during recess on the playing fields. Not just any kid, but a well-liked, high-profile child who has many friends. A great kid. Fortunately this story ended up a crisis and not a tragedy. Within a short time, the incident was over: the child gave up the gun, the police and district office staff came to our assistance, and school resumed. But our days would not be normal, not even close, for quite some time. The aftermath rendered many children in tears, staff and community traumatized, and buried emotions surging to the forefront.

The lessons we learned from the incident have helped us become a better school. You don't necessarily learn these things in teacher or administrator programs, and we were lucky to learn them without the cost being much higher. Here are some of our lessons:

Tell the truth and get the word out quickly: With help from the district office staff and police, I crafted a letter for students to take home to their parents. I also sent it as an attachment to our parent email list that has about 270 parents on-line. We did not try to hide the fact that a child had brought a gun. On the one hand we hated to say it, but on the other hand, trying to hide the truth just gets people mad.

Have a good emergency plan: While we did not expect this kind of emergency, we have a detailed and well-thought out emergency plan. We have practiced lockdown many times, so even though this happened during lunch, students and staff reacted efficiently. After the danger had passed, we still had the school in lockdown as there were many police on campus and we were not ready to have kids in the halls yet. However, we did not know that the Frito Lay chips delivery guy was locked up with the band students. A quick survey of areas after the danger had passed would have revealed minor problems. In addition, we have a well-trained

local crisis team that set up counseling services for days afterwards. They were fabulous and essential.

Make your recess supervisors highly visible: Middle school kids are pretty big and many are of adult stature. Some of us, on the other hand, are pretty short (that would be me) and resemble kids. The police noted that they could not tell from afar who were staff. We are now wearing bright orange vests during recess, lightweight for inside and nice weatherproof, fleece-lined vests for outside. We rather like them...they make us feel kind of important.

Someone needs to go greet the police: We are lucky to have a great relationship with the Albany Police Department. They spend time in our schools responding to our needs and being visible and friendly. When the first officer arrived on the scene, the school was locked down. No one went to greet him, so he was left having to figure out what in the world was going on. As the principal, I was at the scene of the problem. I was of no use there, but what did I know? My best approach would have been to meet the officers as they arrived.

We hope that this will be our one and only big event ever. Each day I feel thankful that it ended as it did and that we can reflect on it and share our findings with others.



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My Dream for America

by Jordan Mittelsdorf, 8th grader, Columbia Middle School

My dream for America is that some day all people will be treated equally. I am an eighth grade student in middle school, where other students judge students in very many different ways. I wish students would like other students based on what is inside not what is on the outside. This dream has been the dream of many who worked for civil rights and freedom.

In 1963, Martin Luther King, Jr., gave his now famous speech. He said, "I have a dream my four children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin, but by the content of their character". He gave his speech to over 200,000 people who came to demonstrate at the nation's capitol. They were demanding voting rights and equal opportunity, to end segregation and discrimination.

Other students, because of what they wear, how smart they are, how popular they are, and the color of their skin often judge students at middle school. I wish that everyone

were treated equally and people would accept others the way they are. I wish that people were not judged by how they looked, but by the character they contain inside.

The nation has made significant progress since Martin Luther King, Jr., gave his speech forty years ago. But today there is still evidence of needs to improve equal opportunities and end segregation and discrimination.

On January 8th, 2002, President Bush signed into law the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001. This was designed to make sure that every child receives a quality education. Students with less advantage have the same rights to a quality education as others. I hope that some day all people will be treated equally. It is my desire to live in a society where people are not judged by how they look, but by their character inside. Many throughout our history have dreamed this desire. Martin Luther King, Jr., and President Bush have taken steps to accomplish this dream.

No Child Left Behind

A found poem - Gathered from Columbia Middle School 8th grader responses to No Child Left Behind with only the information that it is a government phrase and has to do with education.

When you're walking on a path
the child trips
(this is all in the code language for
school)
and it's hard for him
he sees people passing him

You might not be able
to pick yourself up on your own

I may not know how it feels
to get left behind,
but I know

There should be no child or children
having to say
wait for me

Kids don't forget
who left them behind
when you left

If a child doesn't learn things
he will be suffering for
the rest of his life

Children have big opportunities
full potential of their minds
a chance to learn
make the right choices
so they would have understandful
memories

There is no child more important
than anybody else
Everyone in this school is a person
that's why nobody should be left behind
They will not be ignored

I think no child left behind means
caring for a child and
giving her a future.

The children are important because
they could be the best thing
this world has

I mean what else could it mean
Please don't leave me behind

No Name-Calling Week

March 1-5, 2004

www.nonamecallingweek.org

Verbal bullying is a serious problem in schools. Taking action to prevent and address bullying is crucial. You can help stop name calling and create safer schools for all students by participating in No Name-Calling Week, a special week for students in the middle grades. Register your school by visiting www.nonamecallingweek.org and receive educational materials. They are also having two contests--a lesson plan contest for teachers and a creative expression contest for students. Submissions must be received by December 31, 2003.



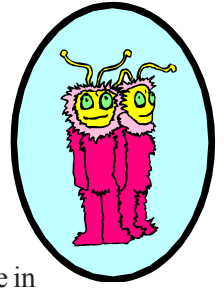
Movie Review: Thirteen

By Pete Lorain, OMLA Member-at-Large

Director: Catherine Hardwicke

Starring: Evan Rachel Wood, Nikki Reed, Holly Hunter

Rated R. Reprinted with permission from www.owl.org, the website for the National Education Association



Thirteen is an in-depth tour of the Planet Adolescence. And if you are a parent of a young adolescent, you are no doubt concerned about drugs and have probably heard or read about “the warning signs”. If you are a middle school educator, you’ve undoubtedly told parents about these warning signs. They include:

- A sudden change of friends
- A radical shift in dress and behavior
- An overly secretive demeanor
- Lower grades
- Skipping school

Thirteen demonstrates these warnings in vivid, living color. It’s a movie that takes us on a journey with Rachel, a thirteen-year-old middle school student who is about to begin school’s fall session. Over the next few months she lives the life of a newly minted teen, complete with all the uncertainly, doubt, temptation, and desire that come with the territory.

We know that young adolescents experience more change in their lives than at any other period of their development. As they experience these transformations, they are questioning their identity and trying to figure out where they fit in. They can have a deep need to belong and to be accepted. As their changes and needs surface and evolve, young people in this age group often engage in risky and destructive behaviors. This story of adolescent experimentation is at the heart of *Thirteen*.

Rachel (Wood) returns to middle school much the same as she left it last spring. She is just beginning to experience the changes of adolescence, but her essential dress, mannerisms, and friends remain those of her childhood. In contrast, her peers have returned to school greatly changed. They are now interested in the opposite sex and are dressing in ways to communicate that interest. Their school and social behaviors are changing and becoming more “adult-like”.

Most notable among the girls who are returning more as teenagers and less as children is Evie (Reed). She is a beautiful and popular young woman, who has matured over the summer. Rachel is clearly curious and envious of Evie, particularly of her confidence and uninhibited behavior. By copying some of Evie’s out-of-control behaviors — especially those around spending and clothes shopping, Rachel works her way into Evie’s social circle and soon the two are fast friends.

Rachel continues following her new friend’s lead as Evie gradually becomes a fixture in Rachel’s home. Rachel’s mother is not quite sure what to make of this new friend, particularly when Evie suggests that she be permitted to move in permanently.

Sooner or later, Rachel’s “cool mom”, Melanie (Hunter), begins to feel sympathy for the tale of personal trauma and history that Evie has woven. And mom’s gullibility leads to the two friends spending more and more time together pursuing risk-oriented adventures. Watching his sister change so dramatically even alarms Rachel’s brother who tells her she needs help.

Melanie is a single mom who loves her children and tries hard to be attentive, provide supervision, and communicate a sense of caring. However, she herself has a boatload of issues. She is a recovering chemical dependent, trying to make ends meet as a cosmetologist with an at-home business. She’s got friend and man problems — and all of this is percolating as she tries to participate meaningfully in her children’s lives.

Melanie is aware of Rachel’s behavior changes and observes these warning signs unfolding. She’s disbelieving, in denial, and afraid of the potentially unpleasant consequences. When she finally admits that Rachel is in trouble, she goes about

recruiting her ex-husband to play a more significant role in Rachel’s life. True to character, he is too busy with his career and disappoints Rachel again and again. This continual rejection exacerbates Rachel’s desperate search for acceptance, belonging, and love.

This movie tells a credible story that refuses to revert to sensationalism or exhibitionism. I found myself totally attentive and often cringing in discomfort as Rachel convincingly struggles through her increasingly unhealthy adolescence. I know these struggles and demons having worked with them for a whole career.

And even with all my experience dealing with middle schoolers, like Melanie I became taken in by Evie’s life circumstances—finding myself feeling compassionate one moment and utterly victimized and manipulated the next. With it all, I admired Melanie’s determination to parent her daughter, even in the face of her own personal challenges and needs.

Most of all, I appreciate the attention that the film industry is giving to the issue of single parenting, a theme that deftly wound its way through this film. It’s an issue that has been featured in at least three other recently released movies, including *Blue Car*, *Sweet Sixteen*, and *Freaky Friday*. In all four movies, the children are at the center of the story, enveloping the audience with their individual dramas, obsessions, fears, and triumphs. Each of these films underscores the critical importance of paying attention to children, to their behaviors, to their need for love and understanding.

Thirteen is an excellent movie, maybe even an important film. It’s a powerful story of adolescent development. A former colleague and friend suggested that it be required viewing for all middle school educators. I might not go quite that far, but I certainly and definitely recommend it.

20 Ways Parents Can Get Involved in School

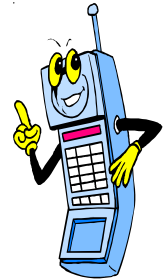
1. Help build resources and equipment (bird houses, collecting nets, shelves, learning centers).
2. Act as monitor for halls, cafeteria, or playground.
3. Prepare and bring food items.
4. Assist with special tutoring.
5. Make a presentation or performance.
6. Read to students.
7. Job sharing.
8. Help make classroom decorations and design learning walls, etc.
9. File, sort, hole punch, copy etc. Help with secretarial chores.
10. Make learning games.
11. Contact and/or organize other parents.
12. Chaperone a field trip (even if it is just to the grove of trees at the end of the campus.)
13. Help prepare materials for labs and projects.
14. Donate materials.
15. Help with special classroom or school events and projects.
16. Assist with pet or plant care.
17. Contact businesses about possible donations or sponsorships.
18. Help with class newsletter.
19. Help with web site.
20. Help students with computers and other technological aids.

Handling Upset Parents

1. Keep your voice calm; lower your tone and slow your speech.
2. If meeting in person, treat parents as guests. Offer them a cold drink or a cup of coffee. Try to make the parent(s) feel as comfortable as possible.
3. Remain in control. Be sympathetic and empathetic, but NOT defensive.
4. Really listen to the other person. Practice active listening skills. Let them “get it all out” without interrupting or commenting. Take notes if you need to. Acknowledge the other person’s frustration, anger, and/or pain.
5. Address each point that is brought up that is relevant to the subject of the conference. Stick to the issues.
6. Be open, but be specific and firm about your educational philosophy and your reasons for your actions.
7. Give positive suggestions. Compliment the parent(s) for caring.
8. Provide closure and a plan of action.

Top 10 Ways to Keep in Touch With Parents

- Phone
- E-mail
- Voice mail
- Fax
- Web site (school or class)
- Personal contacts
- Newsletters
- Academic calendar
- News bulletins/community bulletin boards
- Notes and cards (if all else fails, send them a registered letter.)



These parent tips are brought to you by Dr. Debbie Silver and Dr. Monte Selby. Debbie will be the keynote speaker for the Idaho Middle Level Association conference in March (described in this newsletter).

Research shows that LAUGHTER:
*** promotes bonding between people**
*** sets up the brain for learning**
*** improves health!**



Have You Written Yet?

by Charlie Wilshire, Region 5 Director

In my previous ranting I implored concerned Oregonians to write, en masse, to their legislators, senators, governor and president about the needs of our schools and students. In all that bluster I did little to suggest *what* specifically to write about, *what* to wear at galas held in your honor for writing the one letter that elicited the repeal of NCLB, *how* to prepare for meeting your local legislator and *whom* to thank when the State education budget is increased by 150%. I say, let's take it one step at a time. First, let's look at *what* to write about in your epistle to your congressperson.

The almost innumerable educational topics that deserve attention should be prioritized to reflect the burgeoning urgent issues your particular school or school district is facing. Find out from the staff and students what they think are the most pressing needs. The written *needs* lists of the students and staff will no doubt have similarities and differences. Among some of the similar grievances, there will most likely be those which have to do with overcrowded classrooms, outdated materials, loss of diverse curricula, minimization of after-school activities, misguided test-based learning goals and the missing of the teacher as mentor as well as instructor. These are all great themes from which to choose when writing your letter.

Now, the students may have some of their own grievances that are particular to their own situation. Some of their letter topics might include arguments as to why they should be:

- paid to go to school,
- allotted a daily ration of a six pack of Mountain Dew to drink in their classes,
- granted field trips every Friday,
- allowed to chew gum,
- allowed to run in the halls, and
- each given a set of keys to their school

Some of the appeals from just the teachers might be to have the legislature:

- disregard the previously mentioned arguments of the students
- increase their prep time
- pass a law mandating twice weekly that their lunches in the lounge be fully catered, and
- correct their tests and papers

Most kidding aside, your letter should be about the real needs of the students, teachers and schools. It is helpful for the lawmaking reader to see how the current picture of our statewide education woes are impacting education at your local level. In detail, describe your community's school situations and settings in terms that are measurable and observable so that reason for your writing takes on a real and pressing meaning. When this is done and done effectively, there may be a chance that legislation could be passed in your name.

This brings us to what you should wear when you attend posh galas held in your honor for writing the one letter that elicited the repeal of NCLB. I personally think that a purple hat with an ensemble consisting of a peach-colored top and gray pants would do to make you appear unique yet regally connected. It goes without saying that accessorizing is a must. Perhaps it would be aptly wise to go with a conspicuous red watch and a "power belt" that says "Listen up, I'm holding up these pants." These sartorial words of advice will keep you politically within fashionable legislative circles where being popular is more important than being civically responsible. They will discover that this style of business is about to go through a metamorphosis. This paradigm of "looking good is better than being good" will shift due to a) your knowledge of working in the trenches alongside fellow teachers and administrators and b) your preternatural sense of the outfits that look sporty



and sassy, but not too sassy. Your suggestions in your letter about fixing NCLB will be embraced, as will your choice of shoes to finish that "mover and shaker" look.

So, you're dressed for success and you have written the golden letter that will ultimately save our underfunded school budgets, but what to do when meeting your senator or legislator? For this bit of advice I defer to NMSA's recommendations found on their website (www.nmsa.org). They have had their own ambassadors successfully share time with legislators and their experience speaks volumes to the effective ways to establish relationships with politicians. Furthermore, more advice from me on meeting your legislator will result in my running out of column space.

At this point you might be flush with your achievements, yet you may still wonder whom to thank for the hoped-for 150% increase in all middle school budgets. Among those to be thanked would be the OMLA, an organization committed to making middle school a place of learning where inspiration and education perpetually complement each other and the student is given hope that as long as he or she is in school the words impossible and student success will not be used in the same sentence (except this one). OMLA is a manifest endeavor that is championed by those who walk the talk and who realize that being in the middle is being a link between wonder and discovery, and possibilities and directions. Of course, you will want to include those in middle school that dedicate their victories to the spectrum of development of the student.

The time is now. As we continue to face almost ridiculous uncertainties in our school budgets, those in power need to hear from us--all of us!



IDAHO MIDDLE LEVEL ASSOCIATION

2004 CONFERENCE

**March 18-20
Boise, Idaho**

Making Connections— Through Accountability!!

Like Oregon, Idaho has a small, but active affiliate. We are not able to offer a state conference this year, but you might consider attending the IMLA conference in Boise.

This year's keynote speaker will be Dr. Debbie Silver. Dr. Silver is an award-winning educator with 30 years' experience as a classroom teacher, staff development instructor, and university professor.

Check out the IMLA website for information, to register to be a presenter, or to print out the conference forms (<http://www.idahomiddlelevel.org>).

Oregon's Very Own Collegiate Middle Level Association

by Micki Caskey, OMLA Higher Education Representative

The Collegiate Middle Level Association (CMLA) at Portland State University is up and running with 20-plus members, a full slate of officers, and a new constitution and bylaws. This graduate level chapter is under the guidance of Micki M. Caskey, Faculty Advisor, and the leadership of Katherine Owen, President. Other officers include Ramon de la Cruz, President-elect; Bonnie Wooden, Secretary; David Hernquist, Treasurer; Kate Moore, Historian; Committee Coordinators, Gena Fields and Jean Marshall; Bryan Guerts, Sergeant at Arms; and Christy Hernquist, Liaison Coordinator.

Katherine wasted no time getting the ball rolling by articulating the chapter's purposes, setting priorities, and establishing committees. The

purposes are to promote middle level education at Portland State University and at other colleges and universities in Oregon, provide connections among future teachers of young adolescents, and encourage participation in professional organizations. One priority is to raise funds to send officers to the CMLA Spring Retreat at the National Middle School Association's headquarters in Ohio. Other priorities include establishing a chapter newsletter, creating an electronic scrapbook, and developing an informational website. In addition, the group's first social function is planned for December.

Prior to the chapter's October 22nd meeting, a new constitution and set of bylaws were drafted. (A special

thanks to Norma Bailey and the CMLA chapter at Central Michigan University for sharing a model of a chapter constitution!) These organizational documents were ratified by the membership at the November 12th general meeting.

Developing membership is also high on the list of priorities for the organization. Katherine proposed that a brochure be developed to be used as a recruitment tool. Clearly, she is already thinking about ways that CMLA at PSU can reach out to community colleges and higher education institutions in the Portland metropolitan area to recruit undergraduate and graduate students. The goal is to expand and sustain CMLA in Oregon!

Middle Schools Conferences

February 6-8, 2004

National Middle School Association
Middle Level Essentials
Chicago, Illinois
www.nmsa.org

March 11-14, 2004

California League of Middle Schools
Annual Conference
San Jose, California
www.clms.net

July 22-26, 2004

Nuts & Bolts Symposium
for Middle Level Educators
Broomfield, Colorado
www.nutsandboltssymposiums.com

**Oregon Middle
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Look us up!



**Targeting Success for Middle Level Educators
Summer Institute
June 28-July 1, 2004**



The Middle Level Summer Institute is a team-based, hands-on, graduate credit institute for educators who work with grades 5-9. It is specifically designed for teams who identify a school improvement project and want guidance, networking and resources. Your team will benefit from the Institute's emphasis on providing time for teams to work together to complete projects with guidance from consultants.

Fee: \$200 includes morning break, lunch, sessions, and institute materials

Quarter Credits: Three Seattle Pacific University credits for \$120

Semester Credits: Two University of Idaho Continuing Education credits for \$112

Information: www.spu.edu/spiral

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