

OMLA News



Oregon Middle Level Association March 2003

an affiliate of the National Middle School Association

Good Times, Bad Times, It's Still All about Kids

On February 21, members of the OMLA Board of Directors met with facilitator Nancy Golden to work on the vision and action plan for the Oregon Middle Level Association. We addressed many questions, finding that we had ideas for new action, a sense of urgency about the state of retaining middle school programs in the face of declining funding, and a commitment to remain organized as an affiliate of the National Middle School Association, THE voice for middle level education.

How do we act as a viable and important part of the educational community during the hard times and during the good times? These are truly the hard times. Joining and retaining membership in organizations declines as a priority for many people. Yet membership is the heart of any organization, and organizations are the way to have a voice in shaping the future. Currently, OMLA has 135 individual and 6 school members. Is this many? Not when you consider that there are thousands of middle level educators in the state. But it compares favorably to the average number of members for affiliates in states with a similar population and geographic make-up.

What will be the OMLA action

plan that will balance the time and energy we as board members have in relation to the optimal functions that we could perform?

OMLA can be seen as having five basic functions: housekeeping tasks, communication, professional development, advocacy and celebration. We are striving to figure out how to do these tasks and at the same time increase the impact of our actions to be an organization educators will want to join.

How can we make a difference for middle level education in Oregon? Middle level education is constantly in jeopardy of going back to the junior high school model as budgets are cut, teaming ends, simple schedules replace innovative approaches, and advisory time is eliminated. As a voice for middle level education, OMLA will continue to stand behind the principals set for by the National Middle School Association.

How can we reach out to and network with more people around the state? Communication with the membership through our newsletter and website is key. Using the COSA listserv, OMLA could send monthly email newsbytes across the state. The messages would be easy to read, include links to universities and organizations, and be of high interest.

The OMLA website could also be a valuable source of information about

areas of expertise schools and educators around the state have developed. OMLA has already collected information on 40 schools and these ideas could become a link of the website. A directory of people who present inservices and are consultants would be something to consider creating.

Why do people join organizations and is OMLA offering what people want and need? Some of the reasons we surmise people join organizations are to support the greater good, get reduced prices at conferences and on books, get publications such as the newsletter, add the line to their resumes, networking, relationships, and quick access to updated information. We are looking at how OMLA meets those ends to see what we are providing and consider what we should be.

Our motto: "Together celebrating the uniqueness of the middle level experience through advocacy and professional support." How about if we try these for 2003:

"Don't Forget — They Are Still Young
Adolescents and
They Are Still Middle Schools!"

or

"Middle Schools —
Where Kids Come First!"

We appreciate your support of OMLA and of middle schools. It is crucial.

From OMLA President Mike Scott:

Transitioning Elementary Students to the Middle

As spring approaches, it is time to start thinking about transitioning the new students into the middle school. This time of transition results in a wide range of hopes, fears and emotions for the families and students involved. For middle school staff members, this is an opportunity to have a fresh start with a group of students and to introduce them to the expectations of their new school environment. As middle schools across the state begin this transition process, it is important to remember that our incoming students are not concerned about budgets, legislative issues or economic shortfalls, they are simply excited about the prospect of coming to a new school.

As we involve students in the transition to middle school, we must strive to create a strong sense of belonging and an intentionally invitational environment. This sense of belonging will serve as a strong motivator to achieve academically. Students who are entering the middle grades often express concerns regarding the routine of the new school, finding their way to classes, getting to classes on time, dealing with lockers and combination locks, and interacting with older students. Involving students in activities that serve to familiarize

students with the routines can alleviate these concerns. Schools must reach out to parents as well, helping them to become familiar with the social, emotional and cognitive development of young adolescents.

Common transition activities include meeting with incoming students and parents and having students visit the middle school. As these activities take place during the spring months, remember that successful transition activities include the following:

- Parent involvement in the transition process
- Numerous events to assist students in becoming comfortable
- Sensitivity to the anxieties that young adolescents have regarding transitions
- Involvement of the elementary staff members

As middle school staff members, we must strive to become knowledgeable about the needs of children in transition. We must work to keep parents involved and to build in opportunities for success. Additionally, we must make certain that we employ transition activities that allow for peer interaction. As we begin to transition our new students into the middle school, we must remain focused on the

excitement, concerns and needs of our incoming children. A successful transition will pay huge dividends as we welcome our new students and begin to build a relationship that will result in students who grow both socially and academically.

Do you have particularly successful and innovative transition programs? If so, please email the newsletter editor at beth_madison@albany.k12.or.us with your story (preferably in Word) and we will put together an article in the future on how various schools deal with transition.

For more details, go online to www.nmsa.org and look under the Research category to read "Transition from Middle School High School" by Nancy B. Mizelle & Judith L. Irvin.



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OMLA

“Together celebrating the uniqueness of the middle level experience through advocacy and professional support.”

Start the Year Right

Sixth graders can get a great start with a program called **Welcome Every Body** “WEB” Mentor. WEB Mentor is a program that welcomed over 65,000 new middle and junior high school students to campuses across the country last year. This program uses your 8th graders as mentors and buddies for new 6th/7th grade students and creates a web of support within your school community. All too often, the new 6th or 7th graders enter the big, unfamiliar middle level experience and suffer from transition trauma. This program provides a great way to ease the anxiety.

Here’s how it works. In the spring, 7th grade or 8th grade students are nominated to be next year’s WEB Mentors and go to an introductory meeting. Then right before school begins, they are trained to become the welcoming party for the new students. Only the new students and mentors attend school on the first day. The new students are split into groups of eight to ten with two to four mentors assigned to them.

The roles of the mentors include helping the new students to:

1. Get breakfast and lunch, deposit lunch money
2. Get class schedules
3. Find classrooms, restrooms, the gym, cafeteria and other common spaces
4. Learn to open the combination on lockers
5. Administer entry surveys
6. Meet the teachers, counselors and administrators
7. Learn school conduct and expectations

The actual schedule for the first day depends on what the school wants to do. Students may go to classes for a short period, have time to learn how to access lockers, attend sessions to learn how to use the cafeteria and get around their day, eat lunch together, and celebrate the end of the day with ice cream bars or popsicles.

In order to break the barriers between the older kids and the new kids, the heart of the WEB Mentor program lies in doing small- and large-group activities. In the morning, the mentor groups get

together in the gym and do silly, “ice breaker” activities. To end the day, all students and staff join in an assembly formatted to be a pep rally with activities like a balloon pop relay that includes teachers, cheers and chants, tag games and other fun and physical and verbal actions.



The benefits of this program to the older students include pride, community service and leadership development. The beauty of it comes in the expectation that these 8th graders will not bully the younger kids because they have taken on the role of mentor, thus it would be totally inappropriate.

Mentors can be used throughout the year in various capacities. They can be invited to help with spring transition activities, have small group meetings with their groups to teach character and conduct, and administer career development activities.

If you would like to find out more about the WEB Mentor program, or their high school LINK Crew, the website is www.philboyte.com. It’s time to start planning for next year!



Institute on Middle Level Leadership
Breckenridge, Colorado
July 13-16, 2003

NMSA



www.nmsa.org

Future Annual Conferences
November 5-7, 2003 Atlanta, Georgia
November 4-6, 2004 Minneapolis, MN

Working with Students in Poverty

By Beth Madison, OMLA President-Elect

In August, 2002, administrators from Corvallis, Lebanon, Albany, Mill City and Santiam Canyon had an inservice sponsored by the Ford Family Foundation called Breaking Barriers: Concrete Tools for Working with People in Poverty. Dr. Donna Beegle, relayed her experiences of the challenges she faced as a person who came from generational poverty and moved into a middle class lifestyle. She now works as an independent consultant out of Portland speaking to groups to create a consciousness of what it means to be poor and how schools can help students succeed.

There are two types of poverty: situational and generational. Almost anyone can end up in situational poverty, and in fact, many of us were there as soon as we left our parents' homes. We then sought education or training that would bring us back up to the standard of living in which we had been raised. Temporary unemployment can cast people into situational poverty, but again, the consciousness, characteristics and mannerisms of higher class remain.

Contrary to situational poverty, people from generational poverty have a family history of living a lifestyle that has specific qualities. They see life as something that happens to you, doesn't allow you to be good, makes you feel deficient and they have little hope of ever being like those who are making it. The children want to look like everyone else and often the family will spend disproportionately large amounts of money on expensive clothing and other items so the children will fit in. You may see this as you observe the clothing of the impoverished children in your schools. You know how much those Nikes cost, and they are not cheap.

People in poverty think differently, and Dr. Beegle characterizes this by talking about the differences between oral culture and print culture. In print culture, thinking is linear, you get most

of your information by reading and linear discourse is the norm, thus interruption may not be appreciated. It is analytic and abstract, you have the ability to delay gratification and to separate and disconnect before reacting. It is goal oriented, future focused, with the ability to strategize and plan ahead. On the other hand, people of oral culture may be able to read, but culturally, they are conditioned to get most information verbally. They will ask to gain information out loud, rather than read, tell stories over and over, and focus on self. Connectedness and relationship are the focus because otherwise there's no one to ask. It's more physical, such as the touch on the shoulder, hugs, or hitting. People of poverty tend to be oral culture. Schools tend to be print-culture centered.

The immediacy of happiness rules over the long-term value of education, thus students often have poor attendance, lack of homework, and may be transient. Often their basic needs are not being met, making school a potential haven. Things students in poverty want to know include:

- Can I get help if needed or will I just get disciplined?
- Will the teachers know me, are they fair and do they care?
- Are students involved in the discipline process?
- Can I get help with assignments?
- Will I understand what goes on in class and can I participate?
- Will the teacher talk to the whole class?
- Will my assignments have comments I can understand?

Taking an interest and understanding the plight of our children in poverty can make a difference. There are many things that can be done.

- When a principal or teacher talks in a positive way to a student of poverty, they child will not forget it. Say things that are nice and that share meaning.
- Create and foster mentor programs. Mentoring students with advice and attention can create a lasting impression. If possible, put money there too. Make a commitment to help a child move out of poverty by helping them through college. Every child that is brought up from poverty to become an adult earning a living wage stands a much greater chance of being a positive asset to society and passing that on to their children.
- Talk and be real with people of poverty. Tell stories. Be spontaneous. Be genuine. The qualities of oral culture depend on conversation.
- Allow for interruption in conversation and class. Of course, teachers must set boundaries and enforce them to keep classroom control, but this can be done without being punitive and with including room for individual styles.
- Connect families and schools to community resources. Do not assume that they know what is out there.
- Level the playing field when possible. Validate and include all types of children.
- Explain why and describe motives to increase understanding. Be specific.

No matter what school or district you are in, there are children of poverty. Oregon sports one of the highest unemployment and hunger rates in the country. By understanding aspects of poverty and educating your staff, you will be more able to take steps to work with all children.

Dr. Donna Beegle can be reached at Communication Across Barriers, 503-289-2926.





Run for Office Last Call

OMLA is seeking candidates for the offices listed below. Anyone with an interest in middle level education may run for office, and all officers are OMLA members. Please contact the Election Committee Chair, Beth Madison, at beth_madison@albany.k12.or.us by April 15 if you are interested in running. Ballots will be in the next newsletter and the new year begins in August 2003. Full descriptions of the positions are available in the OMLA bylaws. All elected officials are responsible for attending board meetings and submitting newsletter articles. These positions do not require a significant time contribution, but they do result in a significant sense of contribution.

President-Elect: Term of office is 2003-2005, followed by the presidency from 2005-2007. Duties include acting in absence of the president, chairing the elections committee, making recommendations for revisions to the bylaws, and other duties as appropriate.

Secretary: Term of office is 2003-2005. The secretary records and distributes the minutes of meeting and oversees the membership recording process done by COSA.

Directors for Regions 2 (Eastern Oregon) and Region 7 (Portland metro area): Term of office is from 2003-2006. Directors work to increase membership through contact with their constituents, and assist with conferences and other Association business.



How Do You Raise Money for Kids?

The OMLA News would love to hear from you on ways that your school raises money outside your operating budget. This would make a fun article for a future newsletter, so please take a minute to either fill this out and send your information to the editor, or email me at beth_madison@albany.k12.or.us by mid-April, if possible. We are always looking for good things to share with other educators.

Name: _____ School: _____

Email Address (in case we need more info): _____

Program description:

Who is in charge?

Amount of profit generated:

Frequency of program:

What does the money get spent on?

Who decides how to spend the money (check all that apply):

Administration Teachers/Staff Students Parents



Legislators' Behavior and Funding Education in Oregon; Two Problems with One Solution that Is Really Good for Me

by Charlie Wilshire, OMLA Region 5 Director

No surprise here that voters did not pass Measure 28. Collectively, we as voters have little idea how the intricacies of government actually work let alone how much money is necessary to keep the programs functioning. Most of us are compelled to vote by a hunch or by pocketbook when asked to make monumental decisions on how to address the funding and spending requirements of all agencies in the state. The legislature whom we, as I once thought, were paid to investigate, analyze and act on policies and issues that are too complex for the average person to understand, has redefined its job description to free up more time for planning reelection campaigns, fundraising for reelection campaigns, campaigning and bickering (creating a smokescreen for buying time to work on their reelection campaigns).

Of course you may think that this is a bit of irreversibly bad news. But au contraire! Think of the legislature, who has demoralized those who are in education, as a giant class of off-task students needing some behavior modification. They are creating a disturbance (enough to impede the opportunity for achievement) for those in Oregon (our classroom) who are here to learn.

Now, what to do with these recalcitrant rogues? Several ideas for remedial action come to mind that have been successful in middle school teachers' classrooms across the state. Here are some possible modified consequences for those lawmakers who continue to be off-task and disruptive:

- Give them a referral and send them to the Governor's office.
- Make them stay after daily sessions and clean the floor.
- Have them substitute for two weeks for an overfilled eighth grade class in late May.
- Suspend them from doing anything having to do with reelection campaigning for one month (might be too severe, their parents might complain).
- Have them submit to the Congressional Record a hand-written mea culpa (in cursive, of course) that repeats one hundred times, "I promise not to argue with opposing party members just to get attention."
- Have the governor call their constitu-

ents and have them come to Salem to talk about what to do with their Representative.

While this still doesn't fix the problem of funding for our schools, it will help to address the behavior of those who got us into this situation. Furthermore, if the behavior is corrected then there is a real chance that something good will happen at the Capitol and that might lead us to believe the legislators' necessary classwork will be done more purposefully and regularly. To ensure that this happens, I suggest that lessons on empathy from the Second Step program be implemented and used during the first fifteen minutes of each day the Legislature is in session. By doing this, Republicans and Democrats might begin to realize what is actually meant by the word "bipartisan", and would thus begin to, perhaps, make positive educational policy for the state. Also, each legislator would have to check in with his or her constituents and have them sign off on work completed, risking lunch detention for failure to comply.

In the meantime, we are stuck with difficult times ahead if we do not think of an equitable plan that will work for us all. For now we must come to terms that the Legislature has given us the power to run the government. As a voter who probably speaks for other voters, I guess it is now our responsibility to come up with solutions for our spending woes, and because I have a lot of other stuff to do that is not related to government, the first thing that I would suggest has to happen would be that government be instantly simplified. Voters do not have enough time to pore over details for every budgetary need in the state. Those who heed the call to lead must step forward. To do my part, I'll be in charge of education spending.

OK, here we go. Charlie Wilshire's Educational Money Saving Plan. Cost reduction: Bussing, health benefits, retirement benefits, PE, lunch, library, school newspapers, spirit events, field trips, plays, after-school stuff, photocopies, new textbooks, janitorial services, educational assistants, vice principals, secretaries, counselors and office assistants: Waste of money.

Think of all the money that could be saved if we eliminated these items. We just need to make sure, every day, all kids in Oregon: have an enormous breakfast, get

up early enough to walk to school, behave well, do their homework, be fastidious, don't get hurt or sick, learn what they are supposed to, never be late, speak only when a teacher speaks to them, bring a laptop with Ethernet card to school, type 60 words per minute, read at or above grade level, only say pleasant things, do not have fun (difficult to control), dress in a school uniform, do not bother the teachers and do well on all the tests. Those who do not meet all of these standards will be put on an IEP and sent to a special education classroom (See 'Special Education' below).

Here, the specifics of the plan speak to what may possibly be remaining concerns with how it will all come together: *Spending:* All of the money that is left for education will be equally divided among every school in the state for the principals to decide on how it is spent. The principal, by him or herself, will determine, with impunity, the expenditures and payroll of the school.

In-school curriculum: Simply depend on the Internet for instruction and assessment, as at least one forward thinker has proposed in the not-so-distant past (See last OMLA newsletter).

After-school activities: Stickball- it's free.

Special Education: Put all the special education kids in several giant classrooms per district. Parents would have to drive the kids to these central classrooms that would each would hold up to 500 students. Perhaps the classes could be held at university lecture halls, grange halls, in a park, city hall courtyards, and/or legislators' homes (they might possibly be out of work, so they could volunteer their homes and act as teachers' assistants). Have a textbook by which to assign lessons and tell the class that they need to be quiet if they start to make noise.

Lastly, if the law makers, after going through the Second Step program, still are ineffectual, we could save even more money by completely doing away with the legislative branch altogether. Part of that money could then be earmarked for my special six-digit salary at the school of my choice.

Coming up with this plan wasn't so hard after all, but for now I had better get to working on more important stuff like getting that teaching license.

**Oregon Middle
Level Association**

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**Membership Year
July 1-June 31
Renewals coming
next issue**



Call to Writers

Do you like to write and have thoughts to share with other middle school educators? The *OMLA News*, published quarterly, welcomes contributions. Of course, the *OMLA News* reserves all publication and editorial rights, but we really would like to have entries from you. Of special interest are in articles on how cutting instructional days for the sake of the budget affected your building and district, programs that are unique to your school, and other items that are unique and make good reading.

Articles for consideration can be emailed as attachments to:

beth_madison@albany.k12.or.us



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Seven Oak Middle School's Signature

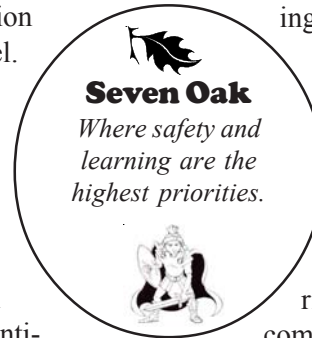
By Rob Slauson, Seven Oak Middle School Principal

This year brought about a lot of exciting changes to Seven Oak Middle School in Lebanon. We started the year in our "new" school that consisted of an added 50,000 square feet to a building that was about 48,000 square feet originally. We welcomed 670 students compared to 315 last year and our staff bulged to almost eighty people. The challenges of becoming a new school were many. However, we have a resilient staff that is committed to making it work.

The Lebanon Community School District has a Student Achievement System (S.A.S.) that is aimed at changing the way we teach children. We are committed to purging the system of the practices of social promotion and retention. Our task is to place students within the system so that they will make continuous progress. Achievement is the continuum on which we view students as opposed to using time as the variable. The vehicle that we use to accomplish this is *Signature Schools*. We are charged to develop our "signature" that has the following components: our school must be innovative or unique, high achieving, and invitational. We believe that these are critical components to bring about student achievement.

Our "signature" at Seven Oak

meets the test of innovation to an extremely high level. We decided that we did not want to get bigger so we got smaller instead. We turned our middle school into a community-learning center that houses seven schools which we call continents. Our highest priority centered on creating an environment that builds and nurtures long-term relationships among students, teachers, and families. In addition, we wanted to build a professional environment that enhanced collegial partnerships and support. A typical continent contains four core-area teachers: language arts, social studies, math, and science. Each continent has about 120 students that span across the entire Benchmark III in both age and ability. We have dropped grade designations for our students (with the exception of testing purposes) so that we might focus on the continuum of learning rather than arbitrary age designations for the purpose of grouping students. The students and staff will remain in the configuration the entire time those students attend our school. This arrangement should bring about an extremely high level of knowledge of students' abilities and effective teach-



ing strategies. In addition, the relationships developed among students, staff, and families should be at a very high level. The professional staff makes decisions regarding student placements, schedule, and curriculum. The teachers have a common prep period each day

facilitated by the students going to P.E., health, music, or other elective areas. We believe that teacher empowerment is one of the major keys to success in our community.

Launching this project has been very difficult for teachers. Developing new curricular approaches to instruction, gathering materials, differentiating instruction, and building long-term relationships have been tiresome tasks. It is our belief that it will be time well spent in the long run. In this era of shrinking resources and dwindling support services, relationships and knowledge of students will pay huge dividends. We are very proud of the efforts that our faculty and staff make to achieve better student achievement. We have always had good results. However, with two-thirds of our students and staff being new to our school, it was an opportune time to create a new paradigm. Our efforts will pay huge dividends in the future.

Sensible Way to Help the Earth and Teach Character



by Beth Madison, OMLA President-Elect

Do you recycle your school's waste? If not, get on it! It is easy to do and a ready-made source of teaching character through social responsibility. And if you do, here are a few tricks you might want to know:

- * Reuse paper that has been copied on one side and discarded. Save it up and make it available for use in the work room. Train teachers and staff to use it on any noncritical papers and you will save a considerable amount of money on your paper bill as well as do the second step of the process: reduce, *reuse*, recycle.
- * Put containers in your cafeteria for students to deposit their cans and bottles. Rubbermaid makes "Slim Jim" containers that maximize efficiency and convenience. You can get them through Consolidated Plastics, 800-362-1000. Redeeming cans may be a great source of revenue, and cleaning and returning them to the store can be excellent work experience for basic skills students. And, of course, you will keep trash out of the landfill.
- * Save ream wrap and use it for posters and book covers.
- * Collect compostable scraps and make a worm farm, or just compost them. Kids love to garden if you have the space and inclination.