

an affiliate of the National Middle School Association



Oregon Middle Level Association

June 2007

Schools to Watch Comes to Oregon



OMLA is pleased to announce that Oregon has been added to the list of states that will participate in the National Forum to Accelerate Middle-Grades Reform's "Schools to Watch" program. OMLA president Jill O'Neill, Brush Prairie Middle School principal

Lou Bailey, MaryAnne Smith from the Oregon Department of Education, and Colin Cameron, Confederation of Oregon School Administrators Director of Professional Development, recently attended the Schools to Watch training to become qualified to train the state team. The program will be a partnership between COSA, ODE, and OMLA. Since the inception of OMLA, COSA has been the organization that does our bookkeeping and assists with our operations. While OMLA is not under the COSA umbrella, we are fortunate to have the relationship and are excited at this expansion.

Lou Bailey will be the first director for Oregon Schools to Watch, overseeing the school visitation team, applications, screening and other tasks. Oregon will have its first Schools to Watch recognized in February 2008. Self-nominations will be made in the fall and will be due November 1. Applications will be on the OMLA website at www.omla.net. Visitations would be made to the schools that apply, and chosen schools would be asked to host future visits and have teams speak at the OMLA annual conference.

For consideration of Schools to Watch recognition, a school must be public with middle grades including a 7th grade. Academically, the school must have a rating of strong or exceptional on the state report card or be above the state average on the OSAT in reading, writing and math

(with science added when the ODE reinstates the science assessment). Additionally, the school must meet numerous criteria in these areas:

ACADEMIC EXCELLENCE

The school is academically excellent. It challenges all students to use their minds well.

DEVELOPMENTAL RESPONSIVENESS

The school is sensitive to the unique developmental challenges of early adolescence.

SOCIAL EQUITY

The school is socially equitable, democratic, and fair. It provides every student with high-quality teachers, resources, learning opportunities, and supports. It keeps positive options open for all students.

ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURES & PROCESSES

The school is a learning organization that establishes norms, structures, and organizational arrangements to support and sustain their trajectory toward excellence.

If you are attending the COSA annual conference for administrators at Seaside in June, be sure to catch the Friday session where Jill O'Neill and Colin Cameron will present information on Schools to Watch. OMLA would like to thank our president Jill O'Neill for this very exciting advancement in the recognition of great middle schools.

"Schools to Watch" is an initiative launched by the National Forum to Accelerate Middle-Grades Reform in 1999. The National Forum is an alliance of more than 60 educators, researchers, and officers of national associations and foundations dedicated to improving schools for young adolescents across the country.



Teaching from the Heart

We'd like to include a new feature in this newsletter. *Teaching From The Heart* will feature teachers who devote themselves to the growth and development of young adolescents. Everyone knows a teacher who does an outstanding job in the middle. Please give that person the recognition they deserve. Both the author and the recognized teacher will receive recognition in upcoming newsletters! E-mail this information to: jill_o'neill@beavton.k12.or.us



- * Teacher's Name:
- * Teaching Assignment:
- * Three words describing the teacher's personality:
- * A sentence or two describing the teacher's relationship with students, colleagues and community:
- * Anything else you would like mentioned . . .

Picture Perfect

by Kari Withers, 7th Grade Block Teacher, Leslie Middle School, Salem

It's amazing what happens when you put a camera in the hands of a student. A couple of years ago I was pregnant with my second child and getting ready to take my parental leave. My 7th and 8th grade students wanted to have a going away party, so we decided to go along with the baby theme and planned a game. Each student would bring in a baby picture and we would try to guess whose picture it was. Most of the kids were excited about it, but there was one who wasn't so sure.

She was a student in my ELL class and her family, including her twin brother, had recently emigrated from Russia. She told me that her baby picture was of both her and her brother, so everyone would already know whose photo it was. I asked her if she could bring in one of only her or else cut one apart so she was the only one showing in the picture. She looked at me, puzzled, and said that her mom would be really angry if she cut her baby picture. That was when it dawned on me that her family had only one photo of her as a baby. No duplicates or copies, just one photo.

I began thinking of the hundreds of pictures I had of my first daughter, who was only two years old. Standing in front of me was a thirteen-year-old girl who had only a handful of pictures from her whole life.

She was not the only one. Many

English Language Learners have a difficult task of connecting with a new country without sacrificing connections to their country of origin. Low-income students also have difficulty maintaining a connection to their past. Many of these students have very few photos from their past, due to the difficult choices their families had to make just to satisfy basic needs.

What could I do about it? I wrote and received a grant from the Meyer Memorial Trust for \$6000. Using the funding from this grant, I purchased digital cameras, scanners and other equipment for students to use to create an iPhoto book detailing their own family history. A professional photographer came into the classroom and taught my students the basics of using and caring for the digital cameras.

The students then worked with a different partner each session, taking portraits of each other using their newly learned techniques for making their subject comfortable, lighting, positive feedback, but most important was the lesson in trust and respect. After they completed these lessons, students were allowed to check out the cameras to take pictures of their families and activities.

Students also wrote essays about different aspects of their families, including why their family came to Salem, how their parents or grandpar-

ents met, and a biography of an older family member. Many students wrote in their reflections that they were surprised by many of the experiences of their family members, and without this project, they wouldn't have known much of this information. These essays required them to *talk* to their parents about the past, something that isn't always a top priority for students in middle school.

Something else happened that was pretty interesting; kids turned in their work! In classes where only 60% of students turned in a given assignment, suddenly the percentage was closer to 95%. The quality of their writing improved also, with many students meeting or exceeding the state writing standards on their family essays.

Through this experience, students have created a family heirloom to share with other generations, past, present and future, as well as some real life skills in interpersonal communication, writing and photography. More important is the connection they have developed with their own past, present and future, finding a new sense of pride in their family's heritage and their life here.

It's amazing what happens when you put a camera in the hands of a student.



Have a great summer!

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Turning Reading Around With A New Program

by Elke Werner, Teacher Clear Creek Middle School, Gresham

Six months and a few days into it, I am a Scholastic READ 180 believer! This program is a series of interesting activities and approaches that appeal to my 6th grade students. At my school we run this structured program as a two-period class with a specially selected group of students who need to improve reading skills. We begin with a brief whole group lesson and then move into rotations. Students spend about twenty (20) minutes each at the computers, then reading novels, and in a small group session with the teacher. We close class with a read aloud.

The “there’s more to it” is what makes this program worthy. The text takes up current topics and launches them with an exciting DVD. In both whole and small group sessions, because the class is limited to about 15 students, each student is “heard” every day. For some this is a first. One student barely whispered hello to me and did not speak to classmates at all. He now participates, asks questions and even makes jokes with his peers. His confidence level has gone through the roof!

The computer software engages the students with its variety. Students work

through the segments at their own pace and I am able to monitor the progress daily. Yet, the best moments come when a student pauses, looks over their shoulder to see if I’ve noticed a sign of success on their computer screen. The smile and the nod of acknowledgment we share at that moment is awesome.

Then there is the novel reading. Students know and understand how to use their Lexile scores in choosing books to read. One English-language learner selected a book that was much too difficult. I walked him through the steps of making a better selection. When it came time to move to the next activity, he asked me if he could continue his reading time with this “new” book instead. Instantly I said that was fine. I had to turn my head the other way to hide my astonishment. Students also taken ownership of their Lexile score and are committed to seeing that number go up. No more shoulder shrugs that discount their effort. It’s truly amazing.

Other READ 180 teachers have given me great ideas for how to organize this class. One tip was for points. My students actively want to

read novels and take quizzes that earn points for themselves and the class. One student read five different books before she passed a novel quiz. Her pride in contributing to the class points was greater than the idea of earning some kind of reward.

Class wraps up with a read aloud. I chose a classic because of the demographic of my assigned group. These are needy students—IEPs, ELLs, children in poverty, even beginning readers, ... who would probably never chose a classic on their own. It is a challenge, but I know that whatever they absorb from the read aloud gives them background for future reference.

Implementing this program has had its rough patches. What new program doesn’t? In my school we are working through developing processes for selecting the students who would benefit the most, making mid-year changes and special schedule days (especially field trips and Outdoor School). Even though I won’t be teaching this program next year, what I will be able to pass along to the next teacher should make things run more smoothly. Most of all I hope to share many more anecdotes of success.

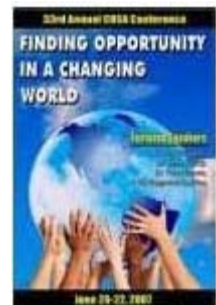
33rd Annual COSA Seaside Conference



The 33rd Annual Seaside Conference theme is “Finding Opportunity in a Changing World”. Participants will hear the messages of nationally recognized speakers Jennifer James, Pedro Noguera, and Robin Fogarty, in the areas of Cultural Change, Diversity, and Change in Classroom Practices. We welcome our featured speakers and we anticipate nearly seventy breakout sessions presented by Oregon educational leaders from throughout the state. They will share best practices in the areas of Leadership, Instructional Practices, Assessment, Technology, Special Education, ELL, Academic

Acmevement, High School Reform, and other innovative programs. All sessions will emphasize successful practices, handouts, and opportunities to discuss the topics with the experts in the field. We are also excited about offering a full-day Pre-Conference focusing on topics related to Special Education and a three-day College Board Conference focusing on building a successful AP (Advanced Placement) program. Come to the conference, enjoy Seaside, bring your family, network with your colleagues from throughout the state, celebrate, and learn. It does not get any better than this! See you at the beach. Keynote speakers include: Dr. Jennifer James, Dr. Robin Fogarty, and Dr. Pedro Noguera

June 20-22, 2007
Seaside, Oregon



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“Paper Clips”—A tool to teach tolerance and diversity

by Glen Martz, Cascade Middle School

In October 2006, I happened to watch an HBO Documentary entitled “Paper Clips.” It is the story of an 8th grade class project in a small middle school in rural Tennessee. The project involved collecting enough paper clips to represent the 6 million Jews who lost their lives in the Holocaust. This film documents a five year period in which each successive 8th grade class takes the project to the next level.

The school and community benefited from visits with Holocaust Survivors, a lead story on NBC Nightly News with Tom Brokaw, and two journalists who helped bring a closure to this journey. Without giving away too much of the story, I believe all educators and students at the middle level should view this movie and its message. It is the story of pain and suffering, but it is also a story about love and hope.

In November 2006, I attended the NMSA National Conference in Nashville, and noticed that the Principal of this school, Linda Hooper, was presenting in a breakout session. I had an opportunity to meet her and listen to

the four 8th grade students from her school who read their reflection papers after being involved in the project. It was really a moving experience since I had just seen the movie a few weeks earlier.

In December 2006, I ordered the Educational DVD Version of “Paper Clips” which comes with five lessons, vocabulary lists, and discussion questions. It is intended for grades 6 through 12.

In January 2007, I distributed these curriculum materials to our staff members, and we took time each day for one week to pre-teach the concepts and the background surrounding the Holocaust. We targeted Friday, January 12th, as the day we would show the film to our students. Of course, we had a late start due to icy road conditions, but we still have enough time for two showings. The teachers passed out multicolored vinyl coated paper clips to each student in class, and the students wore the clips during the showing of the movie. We attempted to use this film as the major

piece of our Martin Luther King, Jr., celebration. The linkage was made by tying together the 1936 Berlin Olympics and the Jessie Owens-Adolph Hitler story, the Holocaust during WW II, and the “I have a dream” speech. Students and staff were able to discuss the messages of “Paper Clips” in class after the movie, and we also used Lesson 5 of the educator materials during our character education time to build links of caring thoughts.

These links were stapled together and are now displayed around the ceiling of our cafeteria.

The Producer of this movie is scheduled to visit Willamette High School and will be showing the film to selected high school and middle school students in the Bethel School District.

Certainly, this story has impacted many students and staff members, and I hope all OMLA members have an opportunity to see film. I believe you can rent this movie at your neighborhood Blockbuster or Hollywood video store.