



Virginia Middle School Association Newsletter

OCTOBER 2014

Liz Phillips, Editor

Email: ljphillips@wcs.k12.va.us

A Message From Our Association President—

Dear Middle Level Leaders,

Welcome to another great school year!

It is my pleasure to extend to you a warm welcome on behalf of the Virginia Middle School Association! If your school has not joined yet, please take the time to do so in the near future!

We hope to see you at the 2014 VMSA Conference, details enclosed!

Throughout the year, please contact your Region Director with news in your school! We would love to have that information posted on the website and in our newsletter!

Sincerely,

Gayle C. Sutton
President

The Virginia Middle School Association web page has a new look! Be sure to check out all the new features at www.vmsa.org

SEPTEMBER'S "ASK THE EXPERTS" QUESTION WINNER!

GETTING STUDENTS ORGANIZED

Middle school students seem to have a difficult time staying organized. How do you help your students keep up with classroom routines, personal belongings, homework assignments, and materials needed for your class? Do you have a helpful suggestion to share with others?

"Our three-ring notebook has dividers for assignments, classwork, homework, and returned papers. This was done at the beginning of the year. Students were given dividers if they did not have them. I constantly remind students where to put papers. We have notebook quizzes from homework during each chapter and at the end of the chapter, we clean out notebooks. They get a grade for the notebook and for the returned papers. I still have to organize some students, but this method works for me."

Pam Huskey, Teacher of Algebra and Pre-Algebra
Buckingham County Middle School (Region 8)

Pam has won a \$10 Starbucks card! Congratulations, Pam, and thanks for sharing!

VMSA ANNUAL CONFERENCE

Friday, October 24, 2013
Festival Conference & Student Center
James Madison University
Harrisonburg, Virginia

This We Believe...This We Do! Make sure you register for this year's VMSA annual conference. This theme is so important to middle level educators that we have invited to guests of honor. Break-out sessions are also aligned with the theme, so everyone ought to rediscover what makes middle schools so special. New ideas and re-freshed ones will be shared by presenters and keynote speakers, so make sure you set this day aside for inspiration and rejuvenation.



Patti Kinney

Past president of the Association of Middle Level Education (AMLE) Patti Kinney has long been an advocate for middle schools. She believes that strong middle schools have a positive learning environment and culture, and she comes to our conference with many ideas for sustainable professional development and motivation of students to become lifelong learners.



MONTE SELBY

Long known as education's songwriter, Monte Selby knows how to bring a strong message about middle school students. He tells it like it is and inspires educators with his humor and music. You will enjoy his message about professional effectiveness. You will believe in the message and be ready to do whatever it takes to facilitate the success of your students as learners and as young adults.

RECOGNITIONS

Schools to Watch designations and redesignations, Educator of the Year, and Master Teacher of the Year awards are among the special recognitions the VMSA will bring to everyone's attention during a special afternoon program. It is a time for teacher teams and individual educators to be celebrated for their hard work.

BREAKOUT SESSIONS AND ROUND TABLE DISCUSSIONS AND DOOR PRIZES!

The VMSA conference is well known for providing an action-packed day for all. Theme-related breakout sessions, candid roundtable discussions, and a bounty of door prizes will make the day a memorable experience.

To find the registration form for the annual conference, visit **www.VMSA.org**. You will find registration materials and information about hotel reservations close to JMU.

***ACT NOW! THERE IS LIMITED SPACE AVAILABLE, AND YOU DON'T WANT TO BE LEFT OUT!
VISIT THE VMSA WEBSITE OFTEN FOR UPDATES TO THE CONFERENCE PROGRAM!***

THIS WE BELIEVE...THIS WE DO

By Liz Phillips, Editor

ABINGDON--The climate of education has changed (several times) since I became a licensed Virginia educator in 2003. Even so, there are plenty of teachers and administrators who will tell me I should have been around before the Standards of Learning became the centerpiece of preparing students for the twenty-first century. At first folks thought those standards and No Child Left Behind would fall to the wayside when something new came along. After all, transformation and reform have been a part of the American education landscape since public education came into being.

Middle schools were born, and the idea of educating the whole child was a focus. Students received academic and social instruction through active models. The idea that students could explore the world in a safe and nurturing setting took a firm hold.

When I first started teaching, my principal, Belinda Mullins, registered me for the 2004 VMSA Annual Conference. That conference blew my mind because there were lots of attendees who brought their best lessons and ideas to share with other educators. People from all over the Commonwealth gathered in one place for several days, and in the evenings, some of the best motivational speakers inspired me to do more, be more, to believe in the middle school message and my students.

Through the years I have collaborated with educators from every corner of Virginia, listened to Monte Selby, Debbie Silver, Harry Wong, Rick Wormeli, Jerry Berkemeyer, and Adolph Brown; I got to present ideas to peers and poach ideas of others when they gave me flashbulb moments for my own classroom.

For quite some time, my focus has been split between what my students need, summative assessment data mining, and documentation for employee evaluation status.

It is so fitting that this year's annual conference brings focus back to our middle school roots. When we come together later this month at James Madison University, we will revisit the founding precepts and come to realize that we need to be advocates for the concepts that set us apart from other educational philosophies; we need to be advocates for a well-rounded education for our students—regardless of where they are on the learning continuum.

Being a middle level educator gives me an opportunity to work with students who are at an awkward, often difficult time in their lives. Who among us has forgotten how hard it was to be that age? Our intuition about how young people feel and our expertise in content areas makes us strong advocates and allies for the youth we serve.

Being a member of the VMSA has made it possible for me to fine-tune my understanding of early adolescents. What is more, I am able to take what I learn from my peers and transform lessons so they are more effective for my students. There is a camaraderie I cannot derive from any other organization. This VMSA is focused on middle school. It's dialed-in or drilled down to the very essence of what makes our students so important to the future of this nation, this world. There is a great list of reasons to become a member of the organization, but for me it is mostly about the rejuvenating qualities—that inspiration, that breath of fresh air when you realize you are gathered together with others who love teaching in a middle school. We are a special group filling a very special need. We embrace the challenge of taking every child, right where they are in in life, and moving them forward to better, brighter future. We know that after the dust settles, and the next trend comes and goes, our students will remember and realize that we have and do believe in them.

Virginia Middle School Association Award Winners Announced

2014 Master in the Middle Teacher of the Year Award

The Virginia Middle School Association is pleased to announce that **Ms. Bridget Raburn** has been selected as the recipient of **2014 Master in the Middle Teacher of the Year Award**. Ms. Raburn is a science teacher at Belmont Ridge Middle School in Loudoun County. As the selection committee deliberated through a difficult screening process, it became clear that Ms. Raburn's nomination credentials rose to the top of the list and she was most deserving of the award.



Ms. Raburn with several of science students.

In reading the supporting letters for Ms. Raburn's nomination, the selection committee was most impressed with the enthusiastic endorsement given by one of Ms. Raburn's former students who said: "she is without a doubt the best teacher I ever had." Ms. Raburn was nominated by her principal Ryan Hitchman who wrote that she is a role model for middle school teachers across the Commonwealth. In letters of support, Ms. Raburn's colleagues emphasized her dedication to making learning interesting for students, relying heavily on an inquiry-based approach in her science lessons. In addition to teaching sixth and eighth grade science, Ms. Raburn volunteers as a mentor for the Kids Living Fit Striders running group and coaches the Belmont Ridge science and math Olympiad teams.

The purpose of the Master in the Middle Teacher of the Year Award is to recognize teachers who have demonstrated a devotion to teaching young adolescents and a commitment to best middle level practices. Award recipients will be recognized at the annual VMSA Conference, scheduled to be held October 24, 2014 at James Madison University.

OCTOBER'S "ASK THE EXPERTS" QUESTION

Teachers are great innovators and problem-solvers. Each month the editor of this publication will pose a question and ask members to submit their solutions. The person who submits the solution that a group of panelists likes best will receive a lovely gift card in the mail. The winning solution will be published in the next edition of the VMSA newsletter.

WRITING ACROSS THE CURRICULUM

Writing across the curriculum has become a hot topic in many school systems. Writing is no longer done primarily in English classes. What strategies do you use to get your students writing in your content area? How do you motivate students to write about their learning?

Send your solution to Liz Phillips, Editor. Email address: ljphillips@wcs.k12.va.us by October 31, 2014. Please make the subject line state: **VMSA OCTOBER QUESTION** so your response is easily recognized. Also include the subject(s) you teach, name of your school, city/county.

2014 Master in the Middle Educator of the Year Awards

The Virginia Middle School Association is pleased to announce that **Ms. Ashley Harper** and **Ms. Kimberly Crandall** have been selected as the co-recipients of **2014 Master in the Middle Educator of the Year Award**.

Ms. Harper is a school counselor at J. Michael Lunsford Middle School in Loudoun County and Ms. Crandall is principal at Locust Grove Middle School in Orange County. As the selection committee deliberated through a difficult screening process, it became clear that Ms. Harper's and Ms. Crandall's nomination credentials rose to the top of the list and they were both equally deserving of the award.



Ashley Harper

In reading the supporting letters for Ms. Harper's nomination, the selection committee was most impressed with the enthusiastic endorsement given by one of her former students who said, "Mrs. Harper, unlike most adults in middle school, guided you to make your own decisions before she told you what to do." The student continued to say that Ms. Harper's door is always open to the kids around her and she inspired the student to even consider a career in counseling herself. What a caring and inspiring counselor she must be! Ms. Harper's colleague and principal also described her as an innovative leader with a passionate commitment to student mental health and achievement. "Mrs. Harper can best be described as a fearless advocate," wrote one colleague. "This passion has led to a variety of programs that support student achievement and emotional health." Ms. Harper has over twelve years of experience in school counseling and has been instrumental in the establishing the 20X Club, a parent-driven organization

that encourages minority students to pursue rigorous course work and college planning, as well as programs such as Lion's Leap, Early Back, and Day at Work.

With over 17 years experience as a teacher and administrator, Ms. Kimberly Crandall currently leads the staff and students of Locust Grove Middle School as principal. Nominated by one of her teachers, Ms. Crandall is described as "innovative, forward-thinking, and dedicated." Ms. Crandall's students agree, writing, "Mrs. Crandall isn't only a great principal because she listens but also she takes the feedback



Kimberly Crandall

and makes the school a more enjoyable place." Teachers at Locust Grove describe her as an "indefatigable force for her students and staff at Locust Grove Middle School." Teachers go on to write, "it was immediately clear that we had a leader with a vision for how to encourage and enable students to be successful learners and contributing members of their school and community." Ms. Crandall is credited with starting a summer reading program for students as well as a transition program to acclimate new sixth grade students to the school.

The purpose of the Master in the Middle Educator of the Year Award is to recognize educators who serve in roles other than classroom teachers, who have demonstrated a devotion to working with young adolescents and have demonstrated a commitment to best middle level practices. Award recipients will be recognized at the annual VMSA Conference, scheduled to be held October 24, 2014 at James Madison University.

UPCOMING AMLE WEBINARS FOR EDUCATORS AND ADMINISTRATORS

October 22: Teaching Like a Pirate (with Dave Burgess)

October 29: Helping Boys Learn in the Middle Level (with Dr. Ed Dixon)

November 6-8: 41st Annual Conference for Middle Level Educators (Nashville, Tennessee)

Go to the AMLE website for more information: www.amle.org

Conference Break-Out Sessions Sneak Peek



Barbara Nichols

Get excited! This year's VMSA Annual Conference has some fantastic break-out sessions in the program. This is not a complete list because we want to save some surprises for the week leading up to the conference! Take a look and start thinking about what you want to see.

This We Believe through Film Clips
Transition from Elementary to Middle
Using Data to Guide Instruction
Formative Assessments
Early Warnings System to Identify and Meet Needs of MS Deeper Learning Lessons
Engaging Families
PTA Partnership
Interventions for Student Success

SCHOOLS TO WATCH Roundtable Sessions
Many of our Schools to Watch teachers have volunteered to share middle level strategies that help students succeed, Build strong teaching teams, and engage with community stakeholders.
(Unlike regular sessions, you will rotate in small groups and visit each STW presentation.)

REGION ONE NEWS UPDATE

Dr.. Michael Gill, Regional Director



Several Region 1 Superintendents continue to make middle school advancement a top priority. Through Bridging RVA, an organization based out of Virginia Commonwealth University to assist multiple sectors in connecting education to the workforce and economic security in the region, these superintendents will be looking at ways to increase regional participation in Schools to Watch, as well as studying the pros and cons of the "Algebra for All" concept in the 8th grade. More information will be shared as it is studied this year.

REGION SEVEN NEWS UPDATE

Scott Allen, Regional Director



I hope everyone's 2014-2015 school year has gotten off to a great start. Virginia Middle School Association is the leading voice and resource in Virginia for educators committed to the learning and well-being of young adolescents. VMSA is the Virginia affiliate of the Association for Middle Level Education (AMLE; formerly NMSA) and is the leading sponsor in Virginia for the Schools to Watch Program. As the Region 7 representative to the VMSA Board of Directors, one of my responsibilities is to serve as a communication link between you and the rest of the member schools.

Region 7 news and photos needed... Please send me brief articles about current and upcoming events and learning activities happening in your schools for inclusion in newsletters and the website to be shared with other middle grades educators across Virginia.



VMSA ON SOCIAL MEDIA!
For information, contact Betsy Wilcox.
Email: wilcox.bj@augusta.k12.va.us

Join us on Facebook!
Virginia Middle School Association

Follow us on Twitter!
@MiddleVMSA

This We Believe... This We Do in Region 6



Dr. Ken Nicely, VMSA Region 6 Director
Director of Secondary Instruction, Roanoke County Public Schools

BENJAMIN FRANKLIN MS AFFIRMING MIDDLE GRADES BEST PRACTICE

Benjamin Franklin MS serves the nearly 1500 middle school students in Franklin County with pride and distinction. The school offers many innovative programs, including the opportunity for eighth graders to spend part of their day learning at the nearby Gereau Center for Applied Technology and Career Exploration. Like any great school with a continuous improvement mindset, teachers and administrators at Benjamin Franklin MS have decided to evaluate their programs and direction and are looking to foundational middle grades frameworks like *This We Believe* for guidance. Over 30 teachers and administrators gathered during their summer break to get re-acquainted with *This We Believe* characteristics and check for alignment between those and current BFMS practices. Under the leadership of award-winning principal Brenda Muse, educators wrestled with ideas, positively affirmed many of the great things happening at BFMS, and challenged themselves to build on areas of strength while filling in some of the gaps. A planning committee has identified short-term and long-term goals and plans to visit other middle schools to continue gathering ideas. The work being done at BFMS is a great example of teachers and leaders “committed to and knowledgeable about this age group, educational research, and best practices”, one of the 16 *This We Believe* characteristics.



GLENVAR MS STUDENTS ENGAGED IN CHALLENGING, PURPOSEFUL LEARNING



Glenvar Middle School in Roanoke County has embraced the school division’s philosophy of creating an educational balance. Although everyone in the school community recognizes the importance of doing well on SOLs, we also understand the importance of providing our children with much deeper learning experiences: learning experiences that require our children to collaborate, communicate and think critically in order to design, create and solve problems. The staff, students, and parents understand that these 21st century skills are the tools that will be needed for our students to be employable in the future. Glenvar Middle School

has embraced several new instructional techniques geared at giving our students more opportunities for deeper learning. Two instructional strategies that both students and staff have become very excited about are Project-Based Learning and Design Challenges. The students and the staff agree that these deeper learning strategies have led to better student and teacher engagement, renewed enthusiasm for both learning and teaching, and a better overall educational experience. Brian Crockett, a seventh-grade life science teacher and member of the school’s professional development team, has developed a renewed enthusiasm for teaching. He states, “Project-Based Learning has drastically changed the manner in which I deliver instruction in the life science classroom. I am more excited about teaching, and students are definitely more excited about learning! In the end, it really does come down to simply providing students with better lessons, lessons that no longer leave the students with the lingering question of why do I have to know this?”

NEWS FROM VIRGINIA PTA



Debbie Kirkpatrick

Virginia PTA

Virginia's Fire Up Your Feet Fall Activity Challenge – Kicks off today!

For the entire month of October, your middle school has an opportunity to receive funding to support any health or wellness activity at your school. Get Fired Up today and get rewarded for your commitment to a healthy and active school community. [Fire Up Your Feet](http://www.va.fireupyourfeet.org) will award \$8,000 to K-8 schools in Virginia during the Oct 1- 31, 2014 Fire Up Your Feet Fall Activity Challenge!

Winning is as easy as 1-2-3!

1. *Click it!* Register today at: www.va.fireupyourfeet.org
2. *Track it!* Track your physical activity using our easy online Activity Tracker.

Bicycling, walking, recess - all activity counts!

3. *Earn It!* The more participants, the better your school's chances of winning awards that can be used for physical activity, wellness and Safe Routes to School programs! [Register Today!](#)

#ShareAwesome is a Public Awareness Campaign for Youth Ages 13-17!

National PTA is excited to announce the official launch of #ShareAwesome campaign! #ShareAwesome is a public awareness campaign to address issues of online safety and digital citizenship in a fun and positive way. With the support of sponsor LifeLock, we will help families create an open, evolving conversation about digital technology's role in our everyday lives, and empower them to make more positive, safer decisions.

[#ShareAwesome and Win Contest:](#) The

#ShareAwesome contest encourages youth ages 13-17 to capture the awesome moments they experience and share them using #ShareAwesome. There will be prompts throughout the contest to inspire participants to share snap shots of the awesome people, decisions, and moments in their lives. Ten finalists receive Microsoft Surface Pro2, and the grand prize winner receives a Microsoft Surface Pro 3, a \$2,500 scholarship, plus technology for their school. The contest runs **September 15-November 30.**

ShareAwesomeNow.org: Is a hub of expert information compiled from National PTA partners, including activation tools for students, parents and PTAs. The site includes online safety and digital citizenship quizzes for parents and students, a composite of #ShareAwesome contest submissions and a #ShareAwesome pledge where visitors pledge to inspire family and friends to be safer, smarter, more positive digital citizens.

CALL FOR SUBMISSIONS

The VMSA is accepting submissions for articles and lesson ideas for the following topics. While we do have themes planned, a strong submission will still be considered. If you would like to submit work for publication consideration, please send questions or your article to the editor the this newsletter.

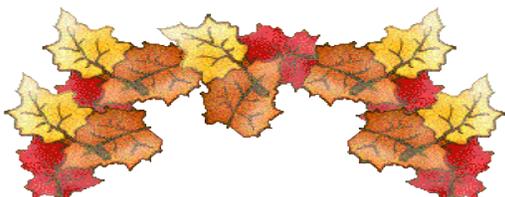
November — Writing Across the Curriculum
December — Data-Driven Research & Instruction that Works
January — Active Learning



INTERESTING CALENDAR OBSERVATIONS

- 3 World Smile Day
- 9 Fire Prevention Day
Moldy Cheese Day
- 10 World Egg Day
- 11 Take Your Teddy Bear to Work
Day
- 12 Moment of Frustration Day
- 13 Columbus Day (observed)
International Skeptics Day
- 14 National Dessert Day
- 16 Dictionary Day
- 21 Babbling Day
National Count Your Buttons Day
- 22 National Nut Day
- 24 National Bologna Day
- 25 United Nations Day
- 28 Plush Animal Lovers Day
- 29 National Frankenstein Day
- 30 National Candy Corn Day

*Most of these days have website resources
for your planning convenience. Time to
Google!*



Special Weeks in October
Get Organized Week (Week 1)
Fire Prevention Week (Week 2)
Pet Peeve Week (Week 2)

October
Computer Learning Month
Cookie Month
Eat Country Ham Month
National Pizza Month
National Vegetarian Month
National Popcorn Popping Month
Sarcastic Month
Seafood Month

A Way to Use This Resource

October 16 is Dictionary Day. Students can brush up on their reference book skills . Visit this website for some good ideas: <http://jimmielanley.hubpages.com/hub/dictionary-day>

October 25 is United Nations Day. Students can have a quick lesson on the history of the UN and then explore how the United Nations has diversified since the end of World War II.

Do you subscribe to the VDOE e-News that is delivered to teacher mailboxes each week? Do you need the latest and newest resources sent directly to you so you never have to hunt for them?



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