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MEMORANDUM

TO: State Board of Education
FROM: Bobbi Jo Kenyon, 2012-2013 Michigan Teacher of the Year
SUBJECT: Teacher of the Year Report

In Grand Rapids - Ottawa Hills High School

Our Instructional Leadership Team held School Improvement Grant (SIG) professional development twice a month on Thursdays after school. This month, the focus was on using academic vocabulary building strategies in the classroom. We shared several strategies from the book *Subjects Matter: Every Teacher's Guide to Content Area Reading* by Daniels and Zemelman, which we received and reviewed at the Michigan Fellowship of Instructional Leaders Institute this summer. The teachers were asked to choose and commit to using one strategy for the next couple of weeks and then do a reflection and discussion about its effectiveness in their departments' Professional Learning Community meeting. Our goal is to help students build vocabulary skills that support the content expectations, a school improvement plan goal. Another focus of our professional development was on technology. Our school purchased student response system "clickers" for each teacher to use to assess understanding in the classroom. Training was given on how to use this system during instruction and for weekly quizzes. Teachers are excited to have this technology for their use and know that it will increase engagement as well as give teachers a chance to gauge how well students understand the material, which corresponds with our school improvement plan of using formative assessment to drive instruction.

I am the facilitator of new teacher support at our school, and this month I decided to start a book study with *How the Best Teachers Avoid the 20 Most Common Teaching Mistakes* by Elizabeth Breaux. My goal is to help beginning teachers feel more in control of their classrooms, have a sense of empowerment, and have the tools to make decisions that will positively impact their students. Each month we will focus on three common mistakes that this book addresses and talk about examples we have seen in the classroom, while brainstorming ideas on how to correct or avoid each mistake. I think this will be very

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beneficial to them as many teachers face the same challenges and new teachers often do not have the tools or support required to address these issues.

I attended a meeting at Grand Valley State University (GVSU) as a Woodrow Wilson Fellowship mentor teacher. This is my second year as a mentor and I have two Fellows placed with me this year. The program focuses on giving high quality teacher training in Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) areas with a commitment from the Fellows to teach in high needs schools. As a biology teacher in an inner city school, I see the need to hire and retain great teachers in these fields and I find this program invaluable. Our meeting addressed how to mentor through questioning, how to better support the needs of the Fellows, trainings and topics the Fellows are addressing in their classes, and suggestions to GVSU about how to improve on areas of the program. I am excited to see growth in my two Fellows as they begin co-teaching with me in the classroom.

Our District

Our district presented its new Academic Plan to all staff, students, parents, and community. The plan is designed to align all efforts around a common vision, goal, and belief for teaching, learning, and student success. A message from our Superintendent, Teresa Neal states:

"As outlined in the Five-Year Strategic Plan that was developed with input from more than 1,000 stakeholders, our vision for Grand Rapids Public Schools is to become a world-class performing school district, and the choice of Grand Rapids and West Michigan residents. Coupled with this vision is our overall belief that all children can achieve their academic potential through effort, high expectations, and teaching. We know that our core business is around quality, quality teaching, and student learning. All of our talent, energy, and focus must be aligned to ensure every student is academically smart, and socially ready for college, their career, and the global economy.

Our district split schools into "families" which consist of different high schools and middle schools. Each family is supported by a lead teacher from their school in each subject area to help develop professional development for district wide meetings, and to plan the agenda for Professional Learning Communities that takes place at their school's department. As lead teacher for science at our school, I will be helping to imbed the Next Generation Science Standards, as well as the Principles of Learning from the Institute for Learning at the University of Pittsburg into our content, and aligning all work to our districts new academic plan.

From the SIG monies awarded to our district, each classroom was equipped with a whiteboard, projector, and technology cabinet which included a document camera, DVD player, computer slate, and sound system. We had initial training this week and all teachers are excited about incorporating these technologies into their lessons.

In My Classroom

This past month we have been studying evolution and students have been reviewing evidence, as well as doing jobs that a biologist would do. A few of the activities they have done thus far are to work in groups to compare skeletons of a human, ape, and hominid (Lucy) to find similarities and differences, compare DNA to show relatedness, and work with pictures of vertebrate embryos to show similar development among species. They have done several internet explorations looking at the history of life on earth, hominids found and their importance in understanding human evolution, and fossil explorations. They also learned about Charles Darwin and natural selection by playing an online simulation game where they had to choose traits that would allow their creature to survive a million years. At the end of the unit, I required students to write an essay where they made a claim about evolution, supported it with evidence, and then explained the reasoning behind their evidence. Before they began their paper, they learned how to use a "tree" Thinking Map to organize their thoughts so they could write a logical and coherent argument. This style of writing, comparative effectiveness research (CER), supports the Next Generation Science Standards.

Students also studied evolution happening today by looking at bacterial resistance to antibiotics. They used the internet to learn about the discovery of antibiotics and why it is considered one of the top 100 medical discoveries. They also conducted a simulation that showed how bacterial resistance works. They studied graphs on the usage of antibiotics over the past 70 years and the increase in bacterial resistance over the same time frame to formulate their own conclusions. Students also watched video clips of antibiotic use on animals and all the controversies surrounding this issue. They surveyed adults about antibiotic use and had an opportunity to teach them what they learned. Students were surprised at how many adults did not fully understand the concept of bacterial resistance and how society was doing things that contributed to this problem. Topics like these are extremely important for students to connect what they are learning to their everyday lives and to enable them to make informed decisions as they become productive members of society.

As Michigan Teacher of the Year

This month I was invited to my alma mater, Central Michigan University, to speak to students in the College of Education. I presented for a few hours in the evening speaking about five things successful teachers do. I also emphasized the importance of continued professional growth throughout their career as well as the need for great teachers in high needs schools. I also showed an inspirational video I created for students entering into the teaching profession. My presentation ended with a question and answer session. I also had a chance to talk one on one with several excited students who I invited to visit my classroom. I absolutely love to talk to new teachers and those going into the education field. I whole-heartedly encourage any person with a passion for educating young people to pursue a career in teaching. I discuss the hard work and challenges of teaching, yet emphasize the personal rewards they will feel along with the significant differences they can make in the lives of students.

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I have turned in my National Teacher of the Year portfolio after spending much time tweaking and rewriting. It is hard to believe just a year ago I was doing the same for the Michigan Teacher of the Year!

I continue to add content to the Michigan Teacher of the Year website I created this summer. I have been receiving some wonderful feedback and many teachers have found the resources very useful. I have actually received email and questions from teachers across the state as well as many in other countries. I believe that it is important for professionals to share their knowledge, resources, and to collaborate with one another. Together we can build a stronger profession as well as become more effective educators. The internet enables us to do this in ways that the past has never allowed. I will continue to share my experiences as MTOY, my instructional tips, resources, and the successes of other schools and teachers on my website.