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MEMORANDUM

TO: State Board of Education

FROM: Bobbi Jo Kenyon, 2012-2013 Michigan Teacher of the Year

SUBJECT: October Teacher of the Year Report

In Grand Rapids

Ottawa Hills High School

- Our Instructional Leadership Team (ILT) planned the professional development (PD) for teachers for the week before school started. We focused on our school improvement plan and also brought back the work from our summer at the Michigan Fellowship of Instructional Leaders (MIFil). Each member of the ILT led different sessions during these four days prior to school opening. I presented on lesson planning, learning targets, and formative assessment. Last year our team led a staff professional development with rotations for mini-workshops on a variety of topics based on our School Improvement Plan (SIP). The staff loved it! One benefit we saw was that staff "buy in" increased because they knew the presenters (their colleagues) were using these strategies; it was not coming from someone who doesn't understand their situation or isn't in the classroom daily (as you often hear complaints when external presenters come in). This year we want to get even more teachers involved and share their strengths with the staff. It is so important for a community of educators to work together and share resources and expertise to increase student achievement, and a great place to start is in your own school.
- The students at Ottawa Hills were welcomed the first day of school with a variety of parents and community members who wished them a great start. They greeted students in the halls, helped them find classes, and held signs about success. What a great message to send to students that the community is there to support their learning and wants them to succeed. Every school year should start this way and continue to have everyone work

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together to show support to our children. This was part of our district's initiative – "It Takes a Village" - and took place in all schools throughout Grand Rapids Public Schools.

In My Classroom

- I just completed my first week back at school and had a great start getting to know my new students. This week we spent some time getting to know one another, building a community, working collaboratively, and developing procedures and routines before delving into content. I think it is especially important for teachers to set the tone for their class and start developing positive relationships right away.
- One team activity I did with my students that got them excited was a "Can you survive?" scenario. Students were put into teams (after talking about the importance of teamwork and team norms) and told they just survived a plane crash in January in Northern Canada. They salvaged 12 items from the plane wreck and had to first decide if they were going to stay at the crash site or walk to the nearest city 20 miles away in sub-zero weather. Their next task was to rank the 12 items in order of importance and find a use for each. It promoted some great dialogue between students as they debated what to do, how to rank items, and to keep in mind biological survival needs. When they were finished, they couldn't wait to find out if their team survived or not! At the end of the hour, students filled out a survey on how well their team worked together and the importance of groups in this process.
- A second activity I did with the students involved having them work in pairs to find a way they could always win a strategic game I taught them. I wanted them to continue to develop hypotheses and test them. As they kept playing, several kids started to see a pattern. Their ultimate goal was to find the way to always win and then try to beat me. My students couldn't wait to play me when they thought they had the answer and it was great for building those relationships as well as promoting critical thinking. They loved this game and many told me they went home and played it with their family; for high school students to say this is exciting!

Our District

- Our district, led by Superintendent Teresa Neal, continues to make positive changes and has begun a focus on customer service. She emailed all employees a PowerPoint and explained the purpose of the district's customer service initiative was "to support the Academic Plan with clear, consistent, and uniform customer service expectations and standards for all internal and external stakeholders that support a positive culture." She called for all employees to maintain high expectations of each other as professionals and that everything from answering phones and doors to school appearances, give important impressions and that those impressions must be restored

along with pride in each other as well as our schools, students, and neighborhoods.

- The campaign to promote Grand Rapids Public Schools through billboards, bus ads, and commercials has been successful and gained national attention by being featured in the August edition of Education Week magazine. The article focused on how school districts market themselves as they face declining enrollments and increased educational choices.

As Michigan Teacher of the Year (MTOY)

- Back to school is an exciting time as teachers get ready for a new year, and I was so excited to have an opportunity to present at some schools during their professional development. On Monday, August 27th, I presented to the Carson City – Crystal District staff to kick off their PD. They had great energy and I received a lot of positive feedback. David Pringle, the high school principal, stated in an email to me, “Your presentation sparked a lot of great conversation throughout the day. Keep spreading the word on what great teaching looks like.”
- I presented to our staff at Ottawa Hills on Tuesday, August 28th, about my background and beginning the MTOY journey, as well as shared an inspirational message that I wrote about the work we are doing with inner city students. I reminded them how important our work is as inner city teachers, how we need to always persevere in spite of obstacles, and how we can be a successful school by working together on our priorities with fidelity and believing in our students. Staff response was wonderful and we are all ready to begin our year with our focus to increase student achievement!
- I also presented to Alger Middle School in Grand Rapids, which is actually our feeder school. Their new principal, Mr. Rodney Brown, who was an assistant principal at our school for the past several years, asked me to talk with his staff about the importance of data driven instruction as well as routines and relationships in the classroom. I am very passionate about both, so it was great to have an opportunity to present on these topics. I received great feedback here as well and was invited to present again in the future.
- On Thursday, August 30th, I had a wonderful opportunity to present at my former elementary school, St. Ann, in Cadillac. I attribute so much of my work ethic and strong educational background to this school and wanted to share that with them as well as my message of what I believe successful teachers do. I was overwhelmed with the positive feedback from the teachers there and want to share one email I received:

"The entire staff at St. Ann school (especially me!) were very impressed with the PD presentation you shared with us this week! ... I am very impressed, inspired, and motivated by your words and accomplishments! You have an incredible gift of being able to share your talents...I see why you have been

chosen for such incredible awards! Bobbi Jo, the ideas you gave me will not be forgotten; they actually 'haunt' me- but in a VERY VERY VERY inspirational way! Thank you!"

As teachers, we all need to continue to work together, inspire one another, and grow as professionals. I am so proud of all the hard work I see teachers do and their willingness to listen, to share ideas, and to become more effective in the classroom.