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MEMORANDUM

TO: State Board of Education

FROM: Ms. Jennifer Haberling, 2008-2009 Michigan Teacher of the Year

SUBJECT: Teacher of the Year Report

In Hudsonville
At Baldwin Street Middle School, room 135

In the world of the seventh graders, we have traveled across time and space to land in ancient Greece. We are studying the stories told by the Greeks to explain their world. To begin, we took a SMART Board journey, spanning from present day back across the major events and marking points in our world's history, ending almost 5,000 years ago. We watched the population of the world decrease and technology disappear. We learned about the exciting discoveries of each era that we now take for granted. We removed from our collective knowledge some facts we use to judge our world: that the world is round, that the earth orbits the sun, and that the highest point we know of is around 29,000 feet above sea level. As we have read several explanatory myths, like the *Theogony* (The Birth of the Gods), *Demeter and Persephone*, *Arachne, Echo and Narcissus,* and others, we are noticing a pattern to how the Greeks explained the world around them and we are comparing it to our own beliefs and the stories we use to explain the world in which we live. As we explore Greek mythology, we are focusing on the question: To whom do we owe our allegiance? Students have begun to brainstorm their own explanatory myth topics, like why do mosquitoes bite, why does our skin burn in the sun, why does the sky change colors and why do people get freckles, which they will soon turn into a children's book myth that they will share with local elementary students.

Each student also completed a research project on a specific Greek character. They presented their information in the form of a baseball card after becoming an expert on the experiences and attributes of the character they chose. In order to learn about all of the other characters represented across a class, they traded cards and interviewed one another. They then chose which characters would best fit into their myths.

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Eighth graders are finishing up *To Kill a Mockingbird* by Harper Lee. We have had a southern tea with Aunt Alexandra, complete with sweet tea and cakes, where each student arrives as a character from the book, creates a profile and conversation talking points of that person based on the reading, and interacts with the others in character. This helped students with character analysis and gave us the chance to discuss relationships between the different characters in the book. In addition, students have selected a tidbit of wisdom from the book and are working to prove how it is truth in the novel and in our world today, after seeing clips of *A Few Good Men* and *A Time to Kill*, as well as reading a *Washington Post* article called "The Truth: Can You Handle It?" While they are writing, we have been working on a few grammar rules and some stylistic tips in their writing. As we head toward the end of the novel, we are looking at our essential question about how people gain control and applying it to the things for which we are willing to stand up.

Across the school

This month, we learned that Baldwin Street Middle School is a *School to Watch*! The competitive criteria state: (1) They are academically excellent—these schools challenge all students to use their minds well. (2) They are developmentally responsive—these schools are sensitive to the unique developmental challenges of early adolescence. (3) They are socially equitable—these schools are democratic and fair, providing every student with high-quality teachers, resources, and supports. Before the end of the school year, we will be celebrating in a big way!

To keep things lively before spring break, students and staff participated in a March Madness spirit week, complete with crazy dress-up themes each day and the Wacky Olympics at the end of the week.

We have started to plan for staff assignments and possible cuts for fall. Because of limited funds, we will be more compressed at each grade level, requiring most teachers to prepare for and teach classes in multiple core content areas and multiple grade levels. This will also move us further away from a middle school concept, so we are starting to examine ways to keep the focus on students and achievement without stretching ourselves too thin.

As MTOY

One of the highlights of this year was giving a University of Phoenix *Teaching It Forward* full-ride scholarship to Emily Zondlak, a senior at Hudsonville High School. After consulting with our transition coordinator and several teachers at the high school, we selected Emily, a wonderfully talented young lady who is wheelchair bound with cerebral palsy. Emily has trouble communicating with her peers and teachers in a traditional school setting, so she was already seeking on-line learning opportunities for college. This scholarship will give Emily the chance to fulfill her dreams of being a writer. Her voice will be heard through this opportunity in the on-line environment.

I was given the opportunity to attend the Michigan Association for Computer Users in Learning (MACUL) conference in Detroit with a team of four other teachers and many technology specialists from my district. There, we had time to brainstorm how we could better use technology to teach our students, who are already so plugged in. I attended sessions on how to use my SMART Board, how to use digital story telling to capture the writing students do, how to use blogs and wikis to publish book reviews, and Universal Design for Learning, among other sessions.

I spoke to a group of pre-service teachers at Western Michigan University's Kappa Delta Pi's conference. I emphasized the importance of relationships in education, framing my speech with the quote: “Being told is the opposite of finding out” (Jimmy Britton) and the poem “Builders and Wreckers.” It is always exciting to work with the energetic spirit of new teachers!

I spoke to an ENG 311, Teaching Writing class, at Grand Valley State University. While there, I talked about creative approaches to teaching research writing. I was asked many questions about the job market and the outlook for teachers-to-be.

I learned that an article I co-authored with Dr. Brian White will be published in the Language Arts Journal of Michigan (“*Black Like Me*, Just Like Me: Enhancing Response to Literature through Student-Generated Cases”). In the article, we highlight a teaching strategy we used with John Howard Griffin's *Black Like Me*. In the midst of teaching the novel, we realized that many students had the idea that this was ancient history and that we, in our modern world, no longer dealt with issues of discrimination. In order to help them connect in a real-world way, we engaged them in a case-study-writing activity, pairing scenarios from the novel with situations from their own lives that they brainstormed. Our article describes the results of this methodology and the reverberations this activity had on our class' culture.

I spoke with Bob Harris from the Michigan Education Association (MEA) about how the Michigan Department of Education (MDE) and the MEA could partner together to support the Michigan Teacher of the Year program. Mr. Harris shared with me several on-line resources MEA has, including a school improvement program called Keys 2.0.

I met with Kate Kennedy from the One-to-One Institute and learned about the free professional development about technology they offer for schools and teachers. I wrote an article for their newsletter about the first day I used my SMART Board, and explained how enthused the students were with the very simple lesson I crafted on participial phrases (usually not one of the lessons students most remember!). In addition to their enthusiasm, I anecdotally noted that the lesson seemed to stick with them better than in years past, as I have noted much higher use of participial phrases in their writing since that lesson.