



STATE OF MICHIGAN  
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION  
LANSING



JENNIFER M. GRANHOLM  
GOVERNOR

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MICHAEL P. FLANAGAN  
SUPERINTENDENT OF  
PUBLIC INSTRUCTION

**MEMORANDUM**

TO: State Board of Education

FROM: Mr. Robert Stephenson, 2009-2010 Michigan Teacher of the Year

SUBJECT: Teacher of the Year Report

**In Okemos**

Throughout our reconfiguration process, we continue to discover the “ripple effect” of each decision. Not only has our administrative team been entrenched in staffing changes for the 2010-2011 issues, but also have had to consider start and end times of schools, two-tiered bus routes or partial elimination, the programming for a 5<sup>th</sup>/6<sup>th</sup> grade building, trimesters vs. semesters, and so on. Because the shortfall for next year is so much more significant than previously anticipated, we have drafted an additional list of Potential Budget Reductions totaling \$2.8 – 3.4 million for the School Board to consider. They have numerous challenging decisions to make, all of which are unpopular, yet Okemos is by no means in a unique situation in the state.

**At Wardcliff**

We have just concluded our spring conferences. In 1995, one of my colleagues and I began to conduct Student-Led Conferences, and in time, the school chose to adopt the practice. Each Kindergarten student is given a 3-ring binder to house the collected works from each year the student attends Wardcliff. As a result, students are required to routinely reflect upon completed work and analyze their growth. Throughout the school year they routinely select work to save in a student work folder within the classroom. By early March, the students make their final selection of work samples that they would like to present to their parents to demonstrate their learning and growth over the course of the year. There is a high degree of accountability with this approach to conferences, and the students respond to questions from both the parents and teacher during the conference itself. The students have clear academic goals that they strive to achieve during the remainder of the school year, as well as long-term goals that they carry forward into the next year. The students run the entire conference, which is a very empowering experience, and I marvel each year how the students leave their conference at least an inch taller.

Our staff has recently been given our reassignments for next year. Although it was an anxiety-provoking process, the staff is relieved to set this uncertainty to rest.

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### **Within Room 110's Door to Discovery**

My students have been investigating Space and the Solar System. One aspect of this unit is that we pattern some of our discoveries after Galileo Galilee's observations in 1609. My third graders "discover" the four large moons of Jupiter and use the Jovian system as a model of our own Solar System to analyze revolutions. The favorite lesson, however, is when the students return from lunch only to discover that they are about to board the Jupiter Express to visit Jupiter and its largest moons. Entering the room with their boarding passes in hand is a bit of a shock as the walls of the classroom are entirely gone and the students are surrounded by nine foot space walls and face a viewing portal. The room is lit by black lights and chaser lights along the floor, and a strobe light during the liftoff until we make it to orbit around the earth. I have a complete control panel at the back of the room to wirelessly control the lights, sound, and my interactive computer generated launch and trip. It is a memorable experience that is filled with factual information about Callisto, Ganymede, Europa, and Io. Their next challenge will be to build moon settlements on each of the moons with permanent settlement objectives. The depth of learning and level of innovative thinking is highly rewarding to witness.

### **As MTOY**

I continue to thoroughly enjoy every speaking opportunity, as each experience introduces me to wonderfully motivated educators. In Okemos I presented "The Practical Inclusion of Project Wild and Project Wet in Science Curriculum," and an Instructional Technology Presentation on the Inclusion of SMART Response Data Collection in an Elementary Classroom. I served as a Keynote Presenter at the Tri-County SMART User Group Training Conference in Auburn Hills, and discussed "Successful Uses of Technology to Maximize Student Learning." I was asked to present at the Michigan Science Teachers Association conference in Lansing, and presented "Have No Fear, an Engineer is Here." In addition, I attended the two day MACUL conference in Grand Rapids. I am in the midst of preparing a couple of additional school programs, one for preschoolers and their parents and one for Grand Rapids Public Schools. It looks as though Magneto Man and Johnny B. Good will be in attendance.

Within the community, I videotaped a television Education Pilot on Early Literacy entitled "Take Care TV" for Detroit Public Television. I presented Engineering Hands-on Interactive Challenges at Okemos Science Fun Day, as well as coordinated the Science Convention for the Wardcliff Elementary School community and was so pleased to have three State Board of Education members in attendance.

I have joined the ARRA Core Team at the Michigan Department of Education and have attended both of the meetings thus far to share the information with the Network of Michigan Educators.

The National Teacher of the Year process has been a wonderful experience. It led to additional interviews with Chris Andrews, a reporter for the Center for Michigan, and the Lansing State Journal who sent a reporter, videographer, and photographer to spend two days in my classroom for an April 4<sup>th</sup> edition. I also participated in a conference call with Education Secretary Duncan on the Reauthorization of ESEA.

The interviews in Washington D.C. went exceedingly well, and I thoroughly enjoyed meeting the National Panel and advocating for students at that level. The interview process consisted of a videotaped interview, a dinner/dessert interview, a short keynote presentation, a formal panel interview, and a press conference interview. It was a thrill to be able to represent Michigan. While in DC, I took the time to advocate for students and teachers on Capitol Hill. I met with Senator Carl Levin; Trevor Clark, legislative correspondent to Senator Stabenow; the legislative correspondent to Congressman Mike Rogers; Lilian Pace, Policy Advisor to Congressman Kildee, Chairman of the Subcommittee on Early Childhood, Elementary and Secondary Education Committee on Education and Labor to discuss the reauthorization of ESEA.

This is such an exciting time in the education profession and it is such an honor to be a part of it.