MSU’s EPIC seeks to be a research partner with districts.

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BOLD, COMPASSIONATE, ATTENTIVE: 2018 Superintendent of the Year

DR. JEANICE KERR SWIFT

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Educator Shortage Workgroup exploring solutions

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Although the topics of school and student safety are getting much more attention these days than ever before, both have always been a high priority. Over the years, safety plans, policies and guidelines have been written, reviewed, and amended to make sure that they are proactive and reactive to the situations that might be faced in our school districts around the state.

However, it is very clear that the tragedy that took the lives of 17 students in Florida on February 14 has brought all of this to a new level. Protests, walkouts, debates about legislative “fixes,” and all of the reactions that come with these types of terrible events are well underway, and as always, all of that has a significant impact on how our time has to be focused on a daily basis.

As an executive director, I freely admit that I can only read and hear about what all of you are going through, as these times are definitely different than when I served in your position. At MASA, we have thought and talked a lot about what our role is for you during these difficult times. At the time of this writing, we have provided MASA members with written guidance about student walkouts, we sponsored a webinar with Thrun Law Firm, and we organized a drive-in conference on March 20 at Lansing Community College so that superintendents from all around the state could spend a day with each other and additional experts focused on issues related to school safety.

Please be assured that we will continue to listen, observe, garner feedback, and make sure that we are providing you with information that is relevant and useful, and will help to ensure that we are all dealing as effectively as possible with all these (and other) challenges. To that end, please do not hesitate to reach out and let us know if there is anything else we can do for you both now and in the future.

You might notice that in this issue of Leader magazine, we do not have any articles related to school safety other than my comments in this letter. We discussed this internally and decided, with our print deadline looming, to continue with the materials that were selected prior to the Florida event. Even though our attention continues to be focused on what is at hand, one thing remains in place no matter what is going on around us, and that is our universal goal of providing quality instruction to all students to appropriately prepare them for their future.

The vision of Leader is to provide you with resources that support the work that you are already doing, focus on best practices that are happening in districts around the state and keep you thinking about student instruction. Somehow and some way, that must be kept in the forefront of what we do every day of every month of every year.

Keep up the great work.
What Kind of Environment Do We Want for Ourselves and Our Children?

During the 2017-18 school year, our children, parents, and colleagues are watching the nightly news, or listening to the radio, or receiving updates via Facebook, Twitter, etc., and learning about the accounts and impact of women coming out and saying, “#MeToo.” They are sharing their personal stories of sexual harassment, intimidation, and misconduct. Heartfelt and emotional, the stories are like a tremendous wave, affecting society but assuredly causing us to reflect upon how we not only respond as school districts within local communities, but also to the children we serve.

No group is immune to controversy—whether it is the clergy, the legislature, school systems, neighbors, or the colleagues within and outside our district. From our individual districts, expanding to the board level, to our connections in and across our communities, and throughout our state/national organizations, we are a reflection of our upbringing, our traditions, and our societal norms, and so we need to take a long hard look at how we present ourselves and commit to do better.

I debated whether or not to write about this topic. It would be safer and less controversial to remain silent and circumvent to a more academic focus. Yet, upon much reflection, I decided that it is important to speak up. This is a “not in my backyard” kind of topic. It’s something that a person may assume happens somewhere else—anywhere else but in my district. Yet, here we are, all of us—imperfect human beings, with human flaws, subject to extra scrutiny because of our public presence, yet vested with the important role to protect our children, our staff, and our districts.

To ensure a safe and positive working and learning environment in our home districts, it is important that we make a commitment to look hard at ourselves and across our school systems to reflect upon our own behaviors and interactions with others.

Collectively, we need to resolve that sexual harassment, intimidation, and misconduct are not acceptable in our school districts, nor in our personal/professional lives. I could tell you that yes, I have personally experienced a “me too” moment like many women and individuals before me, but that is beside the point. The situations that fracture relationships, productive workflow, and career advancement are real, and fracture the most important work we are all here for—serving children to be the best they can be.

My message for you today is that no matter where you were in regard to this issue, you must consider where you are now, and what you aspire to be, so that we can achieve the kind of school and working environment our children and personnel deserve. It is time for honest conversations, locally and statewide, to lead our districts and state to a strong, supportive, and safe future. Let’s do this.

Michele B. Lemire is superintendent of Menominee County Intermediate School District. She can be reached at 906.863.5665 or mlemire@mc-isd.org.
STEM “ZIPS” FORWARD WITH INNOVATIVE THINKING

Creative partnerships, collaborations, and funding provide unique opportunity to surround students in an environment supporting thinking the “STEM” way.

BY MITCH SMITH

In fact, it was the creative thinking and vision of students, teachers, staff, community members, and district leadership that made possible every aspect of this elementary school designed to teach science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) principles. The adventure of riding a zip line is just one of many opportunities to teach scientific principles such as calculating speed, velocity, acceleration, mass, force, friction, gravitational acceleration, and weight to the students of Central Park Elementary.

Three years ago, Midland Public Schools (MPS) needed to replace two elementary schools that had aged out and would be costly to update. This is where the idea of combining the student populations from those two buildings into one new, innovative building took root. Michael Sharrow, superintendent of MPS, along with his leadership team, asked themselves if it would be possible to deliver a fully STEM-based curriculum for elementary students, and to design the new building to support and augment STEM learning. After all, fully STEM-themed buildings at the middle and high school levels were quite common, but to Sharrow’s knowledge STEM had never been implemented building-wide for all students at the elementary level. Additionally, he wondered if first introducing STEM at the middle/high level might be backward.

“We did research, looked nationally, and only found two districts that were using some of our concepts of
STEM in their building,” Sharrow said. “Those schools were thinking along similar designs, but our thoughts on what we were trying to accomplish were already far exceeding their efforts.”

The STEM concepts of hands-on, inquiry-based learning were moving from being catchy buzz words to a loud, persistent buzz, nationally and locally. Sharrow was listening to this buzz and concluded that when it came to financing, the leadership needed to get creative about delivering STEM. Knowing that the region’s future employee pipeline would include the talent that was being born today, or entering as MPS students in the near future, they looked for ways to collaborate with corporate and company partners who would support a STEM-focused initiative.

“We felt that we should start children younger to think in the STEM way,” said Sharrow. “We dreamed about a STEM-themed elementary and began exploring what was out there that would get children thinking in the engineering process way, using math and science skills the STEM way.”

After a successful bond initiative, MPS had the funding for building construction, but it also would require community buy-in to turn that brick and mortar into a unique learning space where students would be surrounded by STEM. Securing targeted funding would be necessary to develop curriculum and train staff, while also supporting

The SCIENCE of ZIP LINES

Riding a zip line at Central Park Elementary can be a way to demonstrate to students, through play, how the STEM principles that students learn in the classroom apply to a real-world situation. The adventure of riding a zip line is an opportunity to teach scientific principles such as calculating speed, velocity, acceleration, mass, force, friction, gravitational acceleration, and weight.

For example, when a student mounts the zip line seat and then steps off the platform to begin their zip ride, the force of gravity pulls the student’s mass downward, causing acceleration. However, air resistance, along with the opposing force created by friction, counters acceleration. It’s difficult to argue that this would not be an innovative way to teach STEM concepts.

Check out the Science of Riding a Zip Line website provided by West Virginia University at http://zipline.wvu.edu.
the complex and innovative vision for the actual building. On top of these considerations, this new building would be taking in the district’s most at-risk learners as the Title 1 school, delivering the International Baccalaureate Primary Years Programme (IBPYP), asking veteran teachers to learn a different curriculum, and ultimately inspiring elementary age students to start thinking in the new STEM way. Understanding that careers in STEM are opportunities for exciting, financially rewarding, high-satisfaction jobs for district graduates, Sharrow and his team began talking to corporate, community and family foundations, advocating the STEM concept for the proposed new elementary building.

“We are blessed in our region to have a constituent base that has high expectations and are willing to philanthropically fund innovative programs,” said Brian Brutyn, MPS’s associate superintendent of curriculum, instruction, and assessment. “We needed their support so we could create and sustain our vision of this innovative space and STEM-focused curriculum.”

One example where MPS found financial support was through the Midland Area Community Foundation (MACF). This local foundation had a specific area of focus identified with the express purpose of developing the area’s talent.

“The innovative thinking at MPS enabled our community to construct a world-class learning facility,” said Sharon Mortensen, MACF president and CEO. “Our specific role was to assist with raising funds for the STEM-based outdoor learning area. Not only were we enthusiastic about this effort, but over 300 individuals joined us in supporting the future of STEM learning in Midland.”

The community support allowed

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the Central Park Elementary ribbon-cutting ceremony to be more than the unveiling of a new facility.

“Central Park Elementary became the ‘kick-off’ for our 10-year plan which will embed STEM concepts in kindergarten through grade 12, based on Project Lead The Way curriculum,” Brutyn said.

If this school was going to be successful, buy-in by the building principals and the teachers was also key. Moving away from the four-wall classroom model and moving to a totally new type of curriculum that allowed for noisy and exuberant learning spaces required teachers that were committed to obtaining 30-60 hours of specialized training, teaching in a totally new environment, and working with 72 percent at-risk students that would be occupying the new building.

“When we started thinking about staffing the new building, we had about 60 percent buy-in from the current teachers at that time, which was almost remarkable because we kind of used a scare tactic approach,” Sharrow said. “We then hired additional teachers with the vision of Central Park Elementary in mind and placed them in the old buildings so they could begin their work with the current staff and students who would be moving to the new building upon completion. This was important because I believe that everything centers around the teacher, and if we are going to make progress it would take teachers teaching differently than they were taught at the university level, different than they ever dreamed of teaching.”

The ultimate goal of Central

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Park Elementary is to truly contribute to the success of students, as well as offer a path as they move out of the elementary environment and into the secondary schools. MPS has a 10-year STEM strategic plan that includes a brand new series of secondary school electives aligned to the STEM pathway, allowing students to continue pursuing passions inspired during the elementary experience. These pathways will be elective-driven and subject specific, focusing on engineering, computer programming and biomedical science.

Will a STEM elementary be a success? Time will tell. Saginaw Valley State University is currently conducting a large-scale research study to determine the impact this model has on student achievement.

“We are trying to create a learning environment where experimentation is a big part of learning, where we provide opportunity for kids to be ‘making,’” Sharrow said. “Not just using books, but hands-on learning through the flexible, collaborative and open spaces of the building. To do this, we did not just break out of the box with our thinking, we started thinking like there was no box at all.”

Knowing the work this project would entail going forward, Sharrow recognized and understood the impact this type of transformation could have on his staff. He made sure that during the work of development, he devoted time to reassuring the staff that he understood the potential problems, as well as the very real anxiety they might experience while undertaking a project of this magnitude.

“I told the staff that we are going to fail at times, there will be bumps along the road and mistakes are going to be made,” Sharrow said. At the same time, he reminded them of what was at stake for his students: “We had not been moving the bar upward for these learners anyway, so we are going to experiment.”

It is impossible to ignore this innovative public education experiment in school building design, curriculum delivery and community collaboration. According to Sharrow, all the pieces of this project represent what may be needed in education today, with the ultimate goal to help students succeed in the greater world.

Mitch Smith is a communications specialist for MASA. Contact him at 517.327.9244 or mitchsmith@gomasa.org.
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At a time when only 46% of Michigan third graders are proficient at reading and writing—as evidenced by the 2016 English Language Arts M-STEP Assessment—a collaborative effort between the Michigan Department of Education, the Michigan Association of Intermediate School Administrators, and Michigan Virtual aims to increase literacy in Michigan.

The Early Literacy Professional Learning Grant was awarded to MAISA and Michigan Virtual in December 2016 as a two-year grant. The grant was designed to develop and implement robust, sustainable professional learning supports for pre-K through third-grade teachers and literacy coaches across Michigan at the local and intermediate school district level, focused on essential literacy practices that should be implemented with every child, in every classroom, every day.

Guided by the MAISA General Education Leadership Network’s (GELN) Early Literacy Task Force, this initiative has provided ongoing, monthly support for ISD literacy coaches and several intensive training institutes for ISD literacy coaches. This work will continue to expand to include district level coaches as well.

There may not be a more critical instructional priority than early literacy. We know that reading is a core competency that establishes a foundation for future learning. We are excited about our partnership with MAISA, MDE and GELN to support this legacy work that will impact every elementary school in Michigan.

Work is ongoing to finalize and publish instructional modules around each of the Essential Instructional Practices for Early Literacy for use by coaches with groups of classroom teachers and by individual classroom teachers. Administrator training institutes will be held in 2018, as well as formal rollout sessions on the professional learning modules and supporting materials. The materials will include essentials guides, instructional modules and accompanying videos filmed in classrooms in Michigan.

**Essentials**

The Essential guides for each grade level “can have an enormous impact on the development of literacy knowledge and skills,” as stated in Essential Instructional Practices in Early Literacy: Grades K to 3.

The purpose of all the essential guides is to identify a small set of research-supported instructional practices. Each guide outlines 10 essential practices that “should occur throughout the day.” The guides were developed by the Early Literacy Task Force, a subcommittee of the MAISA General Education Leadership Network, which represents Michigan’s 56 intermediate school districts.

In addition to the grade-level guides, Essential School-Wide and Center-Wide Practices in Literacy and Essential Coaching Practices for Elementary Literacy were developed to: (1) improve children’s literacy by identifying systematic and effective practices that can be implemented at the organizational level in educational and care settings that serve young children; and (2) increase Michigan’s capacity to improve children’s literacy by identifying a small set of research-supported literacy coaching practices that should be a focus of professional development throughout the state.

“The Early Literacy initiative, representing an outstanding partnership among so many critical entities, has the potential to deeply impact instructional practice and student learning. The dedication and work of the MAISA team, the Early Literacy Task Force, the researchers and literacy coaches throughout the state has been unlike anything I’ve experienced in my 30 years in education. I’m honored that Michigan Virtual is part of this work,” said Tamara Bashore-Berg, executive...
director of professional learning services for Michigan Virtual.

**Training modules**

Training modules for Essential Instructional Practices in Early Literacy provide detailed information on what is included in each essential and the research that supports them. The content presentations are accompanied by classroom videos that demonstrate each essential in practice. Reflection activities are included to support learners in checking their understanding and applying what they have learned to their own practice. To complete the module, participants must view all presentations and videos and complete all reflection activities.

Visit literacyessentials.org to sign up.

Although modules can be completed individually, teachers are strongly encouraged to work through the content with the support of their district or ISD literacy coach. Modules will be added throughout 2018. Approximately five SCECHs can be earned for completing each no-cost module.

“It’s encouraging to be involved in a project that’s assisting with a clear need in Michigan. The project is strongly research based and supported using instructional strategies already tested and proven to have an impact,” said David Young, assistant director of instructional product development for Michigan Virtual. Young is leading the Michigan Virtual team developing the training modules.

**Videos**

Videos demonstrating the Essential Instructional Practices in Early Literacy will be available in coordination with module releases.

The purpose of the videos is to demonstrate practical application of the Essential Instructional Practices in authentic classrooms throughout the state. Paired with the content presentations, the videos give teachers a window into the Essentials in action.

Research suggests that each of these Essential Instructional Practices can have a positive impact on literacy development. It’s believed that the use of these practices in every classroom every day could make a measurable positive difference in the state’s literacy achievement.

For the latest information on the project’s progress, visit literacyessentials.org.

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Jamey Fitzpatrick serves as president & chief executive officer of Michigan Virtual. Contact him at 517.324.5360.
BOLD, COMPASSIONATE, AND ATTENTIVE ARE THREE WORDS USED TO describe the leadership style of Dr. Jeanice Kerr Swift, the superintendent of Ann Arbor Public Schools.

Many of today’s challenges in public education are complex, and require a dedicated and tireless advocate to ensure student success in school. In 2013, Ann Arbor Public Schools hired Dr. Swift as their district leader, and she used these leadership traits to tackle the many complex problems AAPS faced—and restored confidence in the community’s public schools. In 2018, the same three qualities earned Dr. Swift the title of MASA Superintendent of the Year, an award that recognizes an individual who has shown tremendous dedication to enriching the lives of children and has demonstrated effectiveness in maximizing their success in school and beyond.
When she arrived in Ann Arbor, Dr. Swift quickly understood the importance that sharing AAPS' community values would have on her success, and she embraced the fact that education was one of the top-shared community values. Specifically, she knew she would need to engage in strategic listening around what the community members felt needed attention, improvement or adjustment.

**Gathering collective community wisdom**

Taking the superintendent helm, Dr. Swift’s 29 years of education experience as a classroom teacher, teacher coach, assistant principal, principal, district leader and assistant superintendent guided her discovery of the culture and climate of AAPS, and how she could gather the community’s collective wisdom in order to turn the district around and move it forward.

Dr. Swift began the process by adopting the World Café approach to structuring local community conversations, which included an aggressive plan to convene more than 90 meetings in the diverse district in a little over six months. At these meetings, participants were seated at tables and offered a question for discussion. Participants then moved to another table, and the answers to the discussion questions became a very deep, layered document of responses.

“You can see how the collective conversation emerges from just an offering of four really great, robust questions,” Swift said. “We had really excellent conversations over 60 to 75 minutes. The process resulted in more than me saying what I thought I was going to say when I walked into the room, and what the participants wanted to say when they walked in.”

Dr. Swift believes that the World Café process facilitated the critical part of the conversation, specifically the transformation of the activity of listening to producing the necessary community conversation process capable of moving the district forward.

“We hoped that what emerged through the process of interaction was generative, even if it did not lead to an immediate resolution, that another set of ideas emerged or something new or different is created,” Swift said.

Important to the process was the inclusion at the meetings of team members, such as building principals, teachers, central office staff and others. The University of Michigan was also included in the process with the purpose of assisting with gathering and analyzing the thousands of words of ideas and responses. AAPS was hoping to get a better view of what patterns emerged during the conversations, to assist moving from the gathering information phase to actionable processes.

*Students take turns sharing their day’s experiences with Dr. Jeanice Kerr Swift during one of her classroom visits.*
According to Michael Madison, principal at AAPS’s Dicken Elementary and president of the Ann Arbor Administrator’s Association, when Dr. Swift arrived as superintendent, the district was still reeling from a lack of communication, support and trust from the previous administration. Enrollment was down, parents were pulling their kids out of the district, and the financial future looked very bleak.

“Dr. Swift decided to get the pulse of all stakeholders of the Ann Arbor Public School by holding a ‘Listen & Learn’ Tour,” Madison said. “She wanted to hear from the parents, teachers, administrators and even the district’s students about what was working well and what needed improvement to make AAPS the best school district that it could be. Based on insight from the meetings, when people are invited to the table to share their ideas, they feel heard.”

Dr. Swift put together an aggressive plan based on the community meetings to shore up the pieces AAPS stakeholders had clearly articulated needed immediate attention.

One of the fundamental things that Dr. Swift learned during the Listen and Learn Tour was the existence of real commonality of purpose within the district. She absorbed the simple truth that no matter where the parents came from within the district as far as diversity, socioeconomic status or neighborhood were concerned, everyone was in agreement that they wanted what was best for their children.

“I think when I started on the tour that I worried that patterns wouldn’t emerge, that there would be a thousand answers and not really have any patterns,” said Dr. Swift. “However, what I learned right away was that there were very clear and distinguishable patterns for us to work with.”

The Listen and Learn Tour also reminded AAPS building administrators of the fact that district vision and purpose come from the values and aspirations a community has for its children.

“In eliciting these [values and aspirations] during the tour, Dr.
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Life Is On

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Swift empowered us to articulate our best ambitions for our community, our school district, and our students, uniting us to strive to achieve them,” said Chuck Hatt, principal at Burns Park Elementary.

“Dr. Swift continues to teach us that leadership begins with listening for the most noble and compassionate version of ourselves. As Abraham Lincoln said, she helps us hear ‘our better angels’ and empowers us, through pragmatic and consistent action, to fulfill our best hopes and discover the best version of ourselves as parents, educators, and supporting community members.”

At the end of the process, AAPS created and distributed a report containing the recorded observations from the community, seeking further community feedback in order to develop it out to reach a more refined, finished state.

“As Abraham Lincoln said, she [Dr. Swift] helps us hear ‘our better angels’ and empowers us, through pragmatic and consistent action, to fulfill our best hopes and discover the best version of ourselves as parents, educators, and supporting community members.”

“The report was our way to let the community know we heard what they had to say, and importantly, what did they think about those words we heard,” said Dr. Swift. “This allowed us to then do what I would call the ‘Process of Calibration,’ where the people offered input of where we needed to clarify or adjust what we heard around the tables during meetings.”

The Listen and Learn Tour was not a one-time event for AAPS, it has become an ongoing process. The process is a reminder to the community that the district is doing what they wanted them to do, that they carefully and thoughtfully listened and formulated a plan based on community desires.

“We are updating and monitoring our progress as we go, so that folks understand we didn’t forget and we are continuing the journey,” said Dr. Swift.

“I think one of the rarest among skills in our country is the ability to really listen for understanding and then follow along a path of meeting the needs that come up through that...”
conversation, and wrapping back to folks to say we heard you and here are the steps we’re taking to ensure that we are following through,” said Dr. Swift.

**AAPS listens to drive significant accomplishments**

The Listen and Learn Tour resulted in significant accomplishments in the district under Dr. Swift’s leadership, and specifically drove development in STEAM, International Baccalaureate, Early Childhood Education, and World Language programs.

AAPS turned a traditional elementary school into a K-8 STEAM building. Enrollment went from below 50 percent capacity for a K-5 building, to an at-capacity K-8 building, even after adding additional classrooms and a new gym. Enrollment increased from 189 in Fall of 2013 to 606 in Fall 2017. To support curriculum improvements, AAPS also introduced Project Lead the Way into every grade level, at every building.

AAPS now has a fully authorized International Baccalaureate (IB) program in an elementary, middle, and high school. The elementary originally was a facility below student capacity that is now full, even after a permanent expansion for the 2016-17 school year that included the addition of four modular classrooms on the campus for this school year. The IB middle and high school have also seen positive enrollment numbers in the 100s since 2013.

In terms of early childhood education, the district has expanded its Young Fives offerings from about 30 students total, spread out in a couple of buildings in 2013, to 302

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**The World Café**

Using seven design principles and a simple method, the World Café is a powerful social technology for engaging people in conversations that matter, offering an effective antidote to the fast-paced fragmentation and lack of connection in today’s world. Based on the understanding that conversation is the core process that drives personal, business, and organizational life, the World Café is more than a method, a process, or technique; it’s a way of thinking and being together sourced in a philosophy of conversational leadership. Find out more about conversational leadership at www.theworldcafe.org.

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students in the current year housed in 20 classrooms spread out across 15 schools.

Reflecting on the cultural diversity of the district community, they now offer seven World Languages: Arabic, Chinese, American Sign Language, Spanish, French, German, and Latin, with five of them offered through the AP level.

Overall AAPS enrollment (not counting preschool) has grown from 16,449 in fall 2013 to 17,681 this fall, with an additional 459 kids in preschool programs.

“Simply, before Dr. Swift, AAPS was on the verge of being a district of independent dysfunctional schools,” said Hatt. “Now we are a highly functioning school district. She inspired us and supported us to seek ‘greatness’ and we are on the verge of being great once again as a district.”

**Thoughtexchange**

Thoughtexchange is The Group Insight Platform™ that fosters information exchange and collaborative leadership. Collaborative leaders use Thoughtexchange to hear the community’s thoughts and surface and develop the best ideas. Stakeholders share their thoughts, star what others say, and discover what matters most. Leveraging the best and most effective aspects of crowdsourcing and the principles of collaborative negotiation, the Thoughtexchange platform is used for community engagement, collaborative planning, border restructuring, facilities review and more. For more information on how to engage your community, visit www.thoughtexchange.com.

**Next Steps**

This year the district will use the Thoughtexchange online communication tool for the community to explore and share their thoughts on the districts direction. This online mechanism allows the district to put out the questions to the community, gather the responses, compile those and distribute them back out to the community where they can be then “starred” based on how much the participants agree or disagree with them.

“This will be a really innovative way to come up with the most...
generative, important and critically resonating patterns that are taking place in the community conversation,” said Dr. Swift. “As leaders, often we hear the loudest voice at a meeting and don’t always get the opportunity to hear every voice.”

Thoughtexchange creates an opportunity for everyone to see the feedback at the end collection time via a website, where it shows what all participants said.

“To me, that is beautiful in regards to transparency—that everyone can see what everybody else is saying, and how popular some of the ideas were, and how some did not resonate with others,” Dr. Swift said.

There will be challenge areas for the next round according to Dr. Swift, but she believes that it is enormously important to look to the community for suggestions on how to continue to successfully meet the community needs and thrive as a local district, despite facing the external challenges public schools everywhere are facing.

“I want to encourage folks to lift up the idea that we can provide school of choice within our public school districts. I also think the idea of having to open a charter, or having vouchers in order to create choice, is just simply misguided. I want to encourage folks on the idea of innovating from within,” said Dr. Swift. “Public schools are our community schools; these are our children and our best hope and biggest resource for the future. They require and deserve our strongest investment for their future. The public school system is the cornerstone of our democracy, the great crossroads where children from all over America and all walks of life, all socioeconomic and racial backgrounds meet and make a stronger community and a stronger country. I believe that we need to hew back to our fundamental roots around public school and public education, and the importance of quality public education for every child.”

Dr. Swift is using human interaction as a way of discovering the collective wisdom of her community, listening in order to build a stronger, vibrant Ann Arbor Public Schools.

Mitch Smith is a communications specialist for MASA. Contact him at 517.327.9244 or mitchsmith@gomasa.org.
TIMES ARE CHANGING RAPIDLY IN education and many school leaders are facing the reality of aging facilities and programs that do not meet the changing demands in the workforce. Particularly in the area of skilled trades, we are seeing an abundance of new opportunities, but a shortage of qualified employees.

We have our work cut out for us to raise students’ awareness of these needs, shift the traditional focus of parents and graduates from four-year university tracks to shorter-term certificate and degree programs, and provide an education that prepares our young people for highly technical careers based on problem-solving and innovation.

It is against this backdrop that Laker Schools has begun to plan for a once-in-a-generation, high-stakes bond proposal that will help us make this shift in practice and preparation. We have been promoting PBL instruction, visiting innovative districts such as Clarkston, Stockbridge, and Fraser; studying leaders, including Couros, Ritchhart, and Dweck; and embracing new ways of thinking and learning, based on a more personalized approach to each student’s education.

We have also hosted a series of business and industry luncheons to hear our local stakeholders’ thoughts on workplace dynamics and deficits, and have found that they are crying out for the same kind of change. If all goes as planned, we will soon launch a robust new Innovation Center in our ag/industrial arts/technology wing that will facilitate the kind of teaching and learning that our students and community truly need.

The piece that follows is offered as encouragement to others who are working to make this shift.

THE VISION THAT PULLS STUDENTS FORWARD

BY Brian Keim

I HAD A CLEAR VISION FOR HOW my catapult would work, and after some final adjustments, I was ready to give it a try. Dad’s shovel was perfectly balanced across the railroad tie in the drive, with my collection of stones resting on the blade, awaiting launch. Gathering myself, I jumped as high as I could into the air, aiming both feet toward the handle-end of the shovel . . .

Steve Jobs, the late and legendary Apple CEO, once said, “If you are working on something exciting that you really care about, you don’t have to be pushed. The vision pulls you.” That was certainly true for me and my homemade catapult, and most likely for you and your personal experiences, too. Whether we are trying out a new set of clubs, putting an engine in a motorcycle, or picking up another musical instrument, most of us find it more fulfilling to do something we enjoy than something we have to do. It is just common sense, our natural tendency, the way we are wired.
In education, we sometimes forget this fundamental truth and continue to pound round pegs into square holes. We mean well, but often insist on using safe, traditional methods of instruction that appeal only to the traditional learner, rather than taking risks and giving all students the opportunity to learn in ways that suit them best. Most students learn by doing—by innovating—and will achieve more when they are curious about a topic and find meaning in their work. Imagine a class where a student says, “I think I can build a better hunting bow,” and is then given time and resources to experiment with woods and composites, conduct tests on force and velocity, and compare the physical properties of a recurve, a compound, and a crossbow. As he stumbles into roadblocks, he approaches his teacher for guidance, maybe even a brief lecture, or perhaps he calls on an expert in the community to give him a few pointers and get him back on his mission.

For this kind of student, is it likely that he will learn more deeply in this manner, or through a traditional text-and-homework approach? What about a student who wants to learn the mechanics of writing while composing a musical for her theater program, or a group that wonders how to build a robot that can assist with chores at home or on the farm? These curiosities should never go to waste!

While traditional book learning has its place, and may work for some, we must recognize that real experiences are best for others, and can even help the traditional student learn more deeply. I know that was true for me, both inside school, and as a boy at play. . . . As I landed on the handle of my homemade catapult, the blade-end did exactly what it was supposed to do—it flew upward, in a hurry. But it didn’t stop. After pelting my face with stones, the edge of the shovel sliced into my arm, leaving a souvenir that I still wear today, and a lesson in physics that no book could teach me.

Fortunately, that gash wasn’t the only thing my experiment left behind. It left a hunger for more experiments, more adventure and innovation, more learning—the kind of vision that pulls students forward.

Brian Keim is superintendent of Laker Schools. Contact him at 989.453.4600 or bkeim@lakerschools.org.
A SIMPLE SHOW OF HANDS DURING THE HOT TOPIC SESSION AT MASA’s 2017 Fall Conference made the reality clear: Too many public school districts across Michigan are experiencing an educator shortage.

That Hot Topic Session near the end of September featured a panel consisting of State Superintendent Brain Whiston and representatives from the MDE Office of Educator Talent, the MDE Office of Professional Preparation Services, and the Michigan State University College of Education. After hearing data and professional perspectives from the panel, MASA Executive Director Chris Wigent conducted his own action research by asking for a show of hands from those in the room who currently had open educator positions roughly one month into the new school year. More than half of the participants raised their hands. This would seem to imply a serious experiential gap between the presented data and the real-life problem.

“We get the data,” said Wigent, commenting on the presentation. “But the bottom line is there is a problem out in the field with a shortage of available, qualified educators.” To explore the problem and come up with possible solutions, MASA is facilitating a statewide Educator Shortage Workgroup, focused on understanding the problem and developing an action plan and toolkit, to ensure that all districts across the state are able to attract and retain high-quality educators.

“It’s easy to dismiss Michigan’s educator shortage because not everyone is experiencing it in the same way,” said Karen McPhee, leadership consultant and facilitator of MASA’s Educator Shortage Workgroup.

It is important to consider when one looks at the data that correlation does not automatically imply causation. For example, a causation between two variables (for example, the number of students in teacher education programs at the university level and the educator shortage) may well be due to other variables (such as a district location or size of student population). In fact, when it relates to the educator shortage that is being
experienced in Michigan districts, it can be arguably traced to a number of forces.

“In acknowledging this reality, we need to look at strategies that not only increase the available pool of qualified candidates for all districts, but would be customizable to individual district needs,” McPhee said.

**Workgroup formed to dig deeper**
The conversation surrounding Michigan’s educator shortage was center stage as public school superintendents convened in Holt in December 2017. Eighteen superintendents who represented each of the MASA regions participated in a workshop, facilitated by McPhee, to develop a better understanding of what is happening surrounding the teacher shortages that many districts are experiencing. The workgroup represented the breadth of Michigan districts—urban, rural, suburban, remote, big, and small.

“This is really, really critical work, not only for MASA, but for all of us on a statewide level,” Wigent said. “This workgroup is going to be action focused. The need is immediate and we are going to work really hard to come up with short-term, mid-term and long-term solutions and strategies for the problem of teacher shortages.”

“In its first meeting, the workgroup reviewed dozens of ideas from several other states that are slightly ahead of Michigan in addressing the educator shortage challenge,” said McPhee. “Many of these strategies are adaptable to Michigan, and in studying them the workgroup is expediting its understanding of what works and where it works.”

Dr. David Hornak, superintendent of Holt Public Schools, participated in the workgroup.

“First, there is a true need to investigate the educator shortage in the state of Michigan,” said Dr. Hornak.

**KAREN MCPHEE, LEADERSHIP CONSULTANT:**
“Knowing that there is no single thing to point a finger at, and hearing the diverse opinions in this room, is recognition about what is happening in this state surrounding the teacher shortage discussion.”
“I am also aware that this is an issue for the entire nation. In Michigan, the number of certifications listed on the education shortage list continues to grow. As a superintendent of the 50th largest school district in the state, I am acutely aware of the lack of applicants for certain positions. The drive to better understand what is happening in Michigan, specific to our teacher shortage challenge, motivated me to join the Educator Shortage Workgroup.”

Members listened to each other’s experiences in finding, hiring, and retaining qualified teachers, support staff, and administrative staff, and they began cultivating a statewide mindset about the work ahead. While there are no easy answers, the group acknowledged that the answers must address a wide variety of issues representative of Michigan’s diverse educational landscape.

“The Michigan educator shortage has three distinct faces: a diminishing pool size, especially in some certifications; difficulty in recruiting candidates, especially in urban and rural districts; and difficulty in retaining new recruits for a variety of reasons,” McPhee said. “The workgroup is exploring the nuances and underlying factors that contribute to these challenges.”

The facilitated discussion focused on developing short- and long-term strategies that would address improving the quality and quantity of future teacher candidates, as well as recruiting and attracting applicants, and developing and retaining educators, particularly in high-need areas.

The workgroup also began to develop key questions for the MDE, the Legislature, and higher education programs that are producing the next generation of educators.

Following the first workgroup session, Dr. Hornak left the meeting motivated and optimistic that the workgroup can yield positive results. “I realized that MASA is the true conduit to bring issues like the Educator Shortage Workgroup forefront. I left inspired by opportunity to collaborate with other MASA members on such an important topic. We not only identified the issue, we evaluated the factors that are affecting the shortage specific to Michigan and began to prioritize strategies for moving forward. I remain excited to serve as part of this workgroup.”

The workgroup has attracted the interest and the support of other partners. MSU’s Education Policy
Innovation Collaborative (EPIC) has offered assistance in the areas of research and surveys with the hope of uncovering helpful suggestions to assist with answering the questions surrounding the educator shortage. Research and related surveys could focus on district level questions regarding what it takes to attract and hire talent, grow and retain them in your district, and even cultivate current students to consider a path to becoming an educator. In addition, exploring the thinking of middle and high school students in regards to a future career in education, and including what information and incentives would contribute to them considering a pathway to becoming an educator.

“If we can be pushed to educate more plumbers and welders, we should be able to step up and develop more teachers,” Wigent said during the December workgroup session.

**Next steps**

McPhee believes there is an urgency to this workgroup.

“While some strategies, particularly those that involve policy and law, might take longer, other strategies need to be immediately useable in the upcoming recruitment cycle. To this end, the workgroup hopes to generate both a shorter-term toolkit and a longer-term action plan.”

MASA collected the information that flowed out of the December workgroup session, and will reconvene in early spring with identified experts that further assist the goal of continuing the development of a teacher shortage action plan and toolkit.

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**Mitch Smith is a communications specialist for MASA. Contact him at 517.327.9244 or mitchsmith@gomasa.org.**

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“This is the next generation of research,” said Dr. Katharine Strunk, EPIC co-director and MSU’s Clifford E. Erickson Distinguished Chair in Education. “It will break new ground not only in helping us understand how specific policies work—or fail to work—but to highlight how policy change affects children of different backgrounds and needs. We not only evaluate what works, but answer how, why and for whom, beginning with the neediest students.”

Professor Strunk has more than a decade of experience implementing state and district partnerships in California and elsewhere. The College of Education recruited her to help build and lead EPIC’s work in Michigan. That work at EPIC was begun by EPIC co-director Dr. Joshua Cowen, associate professor of education policy at MSU, in the belief that answering the need for evidence-based policymaking requires collaboration between researchers and state and local stakeholders. Through deep, local partnerships, EPIC can use and expand existing community capacity to respond to state and federal policy changes.

EPIC also is combining efforts with the Michigan Department of Education (MDE), the Center for Educational Performance and Information (CEPI), and the University of Michigan to launch THE EDUCATION POLICY INNOVATION COLLABORATIVE (EPIC) conducts and distributes rigorous and impartial research to improve policy. EPIC builds partnerships between researchers and state and school district leaders to strengthen evidence-based decision making. Combining cutting edge data and analytics with an approach that focuses on policy and practice, EPIC produces research with consequence.

To learn more, visit www.education.msu.edu/EPIC.
To explore a partnership with EPIC, contact Drs. Strunk and Cowen at kstrunk@msu.edu and jcowen@msu.edu.
new research projects on behalf of and for the benefit of MDE. These research projects will include exploratory analyses of MDE-initiated questions and formal research that allows for more in-depth analyses. By working with MDE and combining resources, EPIC will play a direct role in the state’s “Top Ten in Ten” strategic plan to improve academic outcomes within the next decade.

EPIC researchers will work closely with leaders in state Partnership Districts, as well as with leaders in other districts who request support, to provide data and analysis with the ultimate goal of improving instruction for all students in Michigan.

“We will be the research arm on policy issues for both the state and our local district partners,” Cowen said.

The center’s work will focus on several strands of research: school performance and improvement; school choice and student mobility; and recruiting and retaining educators, particularly in high needs areas.

“We know that the need for a skilled workforce that can respond to a changing labor market requires higher levels of education,” Strunk said. “These relationships require holistic approaches to policy and practice. The most valuable analysis integrates these strands into a larger whole and creates a big picture approach to the research.”

EPIC’s work is being supported by private foundations and Michigan State University, continuing the university’s emphasis on outreach and service.

Valerie von Frank is the project manager for EPIC. Contact her 517.353.3617 or vonfrank@msu.edu.
STRATEGIC PLANNING IS ABOUT CHANGE. OFTEN, change is rooted in trying to fix something broken. For many educators, most experiences in strategic planning have been about trying to make the current systems and processes better—or solving lingering problems.

Organizational and systems expert and The Fifth Discipline (1990) author Peter Senge sees a real flaw in that approach. He contends that sustained efforts at real change are difficult to achieve when the purpose for doing so is rooted in deficit thinking. Rather, more energy and commitment are often the result of aspirational thinking toward a compelling future vision.

If you consider the great works in human history—grand cathedrals, moon landings, iPhones, colossal stadiums, inspiring works of art, etc.—few, if any, were designed to fix a problem. People pursued these grand plans to fulfill a dream—to create, to build where there was once a void.

This same thinking can and should be applied for strategic planning for schools. In short, we should “dream, don’t fix,” for garnering system energy toward successful strategic planning.

Toward this end, there is an innovative movement afoot in the work of school system strategic planning that dreams. This movement is centered on the work called “Portrait of a Graduate.” What are our aspirations for graduates of our schools and districts? What skills, mindsets, and literacies do our graduates need to thrive in a rapidly changing landscape? Starting a district’s strategic planning with this visioning process anchors the endeavor in a future vision, from which the plan can be back-mapped to current reality.

As is widely understood, our schools were made for a different time. The physical, curricular, assessment, and instructional structures and processes of schools today better served society and individuals during a bygone era—the industrial age and its economy. During that time, our schools did really well at preparing students for 20th century expectations in their work, civic, and personal lives.

A quick example of how successful our schools (and related government policies) were during this age can be seen by the explosive growth of the middle class during the mid-20th century. However, because of the vast changes in technology, geopolitical policies, and interpersonal human dynamics since then, schools should seize the opportunity to revise how best to prepare our students to thrive in a dramatically new context.

Consider for a moment these monumental shifts in our world:

- **Employment**: Moving from routinized work tasks to high task variety, high concept-high touch engagement in a service economy;
• **Engagement**: Shifting to a flat world where people need self-inspired motivation and global awareness to be active participants in work, personal, and civic life;

• **Experience**: Shifting to a world where empathy is critical for driving and producing meaning in personal, civic, and work-life experiences.

Because every school system community has a different conception of the landscape shifts, and therefore a unique definition of success, we ask this key question early in our strategic planning process:

**What do students need in terms of rigorous academic content and the skills, mindsets, and literacies to be prepared for being lifelong learners and contributors in the 21st century?**

This is where we begin, convening and educating a strategic design group of key representative stakeholders about shifts in expectations for our graduates and what they need to get to success. When students graduate, you and your community want them to be ready for whatever the future brings. To be lifelong learners and contributors, young people need deeper learning experiences rooted in rigorous academic content, as well as 21st century skills, mindsets, and literacies. This is what we call deeper learning, and it leads to 21st century success.

Many districts call this their Portrait (or Profile) of a Graduate. The process captures this re-envisioning. It entails, in part, learning about how society has changed. Knowing this prompts the next step: engaging with the community to imagine the learning experiences required to develop the knowledge, competencies, and mindsets our graduates need to live to their fullest potential in the new landscape.

This work not only excites participants about the possibilities of the vision, but it can be richly informative and appropriately provocative for all stakeholders. There is real potential when a school district serves as the hub for the community’s conversation about how to help students succeed. Compellingly, the landscape shifts conversation is one wholly embraced by the school community, which is critical for building the political support necessary to redesign our schools.

Aspirational thinking breathes new life into strategic planning. The Portrait of a Graduate process is about building and creating. It sets the community’s vision framed by student success, based on the many ways our students can have bright futures. The Portrait helps us set our sights for 21st century learning experiences and educational transformation to frame your school system’s future.

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Mike Nicholson, PhD, is senior director of research for Battelle for Kids. Contact him at 614.488.KIDS (5437) or mnicholson@bfk.org.
VEN IN WINTER, SUMMER HAS the power to summon happy memories—sounds of children splashing in swimming pools or laughter as they rush around the neighborhood playing tag, to the feel of sun-soaked warmth on bare feet. The freedom of summer can be joyous. For many long-term English learners, the season starts with the knowledge that they have overcome a major hurdle—or made great strides—with their academic language during the school year. It’s important that they maintain their confidence and progress even while they’re enjoying the sunshine and long days.

In today’s era of rigorous performance standards, it is more imperative than ever that English learners avoid the precipitous drop-off in growth that can occur as a result of summer learning loss. This is important for all English learners across the grades, and it’s more urgent for long-term English learners (LTELs) in grades 4–8. These students are reaching a point in their academic careers when the course selection decisions they make in middle school can impact their ability to take the college preparatory courses they’ll need in high school for successful college admission. Confidence and engagement are as essential as academic skills and language growth for success with today’s standards. Do English learners feel confident enough in their academic English to take an advanced middle school history class, or will they settle for something known to be easier? Will they be able to refine and grow their command of the nuances of academic language as it applies to a variety of disciplines?

Long-term English learners have typically acquired proficiency with conversational English (basic interpersonal communication skills), but need to overcome the hurdle of proficiency with academic English (cognitive academic language proficiency). It can be challenging to ensure that they are deeply engaged in the content they’re learning across the curriculum, while simultaneously expanding their academic language skills. This is why time spent in summer school can pay high dividends; it provides an added dose of intensive support in an environment that’s free of the bustle of a regular school day, and it can be preventative and enriching at the same time. Summer school can be a time of focused engagement in academic language across the curriculum; and with the right program, it can even be fun and invigorating. Here are some tips for strategizing for optimal summer school success for long-term English learners.

Summer School Strategies for Long-Term English Learners:

- Offer highly engaging content that supports learning across the curriculum (literary and informational texts, and multimedia in the form of language-rich videos, podcasts, as well as social content, such as blogs).
- Ensure the content students engage with is at grade level.
Offer numerous scaffolds that support grade-level access and achievement, such as:

- General academic and domain-specific vocabulary support prior to reading
- Media that builds background
- Prompts to dig deeper with specific, challenging sections of text
- Ongoing tips for students across listening, speaking, reading, and writing
- Support provided at challenging points in a lesson at different levels, depending on what students need—(not too much and not too little).

- Include online tools that support and enable access to the grade-level content—such as eBook versions of your print books, which provide audio access, give students the ability to highlight and annotate the texts, and enable students to share their online notes with you so that you can seamlessly monitor their language usage and growth.

- Organize content by unit topics. This provides LTELs with opportunities to deepen their conceptual knowledge and their understanding of how academic language works across different types of texts within the same topic.

- Most importantly, ensure that academic language learning is an active process in which students use their growing language to communicate across all language modalities—listening, speaking, reading, and writing. We cannot limit our LTELs to language usage tied to scripted call-and-response teaching. They must be able to expand on their language skills in a variety of ways through:
  - Collaborative discussions with peers on the topics they’re learning about
  - Active, collaborative work on brief and extended projects and performance tasks
  - Writing for a variety of purposes in response to what they are reading
  - Sharing responses to curated online resources in a teacher-monitored social media outlet

I know, you’re probably now thinking, but summer is short; how can I possibly pull all this cool content together? My response is to consider a comprehensive program that offers all of the above in different formats to accommodate and allow for time and flexibility. After all, you too will want, and need, to preserve some time to feel the warm beach sand between your toes!

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