

Community partnerships

Many school districts are looking for ways to create partnerships with their communities. There is such a program in the Cambridge-Isanti School District.

The Cambridge-Isanti School District has created a committee called Community As A Classroom that meets monthly to discuss ways to create partnerships that benefit education and business. This group is comprised of members from business, industry, education and government. The goal of the committee is to help sponsor and organize activities for schools and businesses that will benefit all groups.

Examples of programs that have evolved as a result of the partnership are: a grade six career day based on an interest inventory, a community-wide initiative to promote character education, business leaders speaking to middle level students about manufacturing, having business leaders help with curriculum development, working with youth on developing retail skills, helping to name a new city park, and helping to design a new city skateboard park.

The program was started as a result of a vocational education grant and has evolved into a monthly forum that brings together all of these groups to promote partnering for issues of common interest. If you would like additional information about this program, please feel free to contact Mark Ziebarth at Isanti Middle School. His phone number is 763-691-8605.



Isanti skateboard park involves students!

Isanti Middle School and the City of Isanti are partnering to help design and construct a new skateboard park for the city of Isanti. Isanti Middle School students have been put into teams and they are researching site, equipment, and surface, and making recommendations to the Isanti City Council.

Students will prioritize their requests and make presentations to the city council of Isanti on their recommendations. Each student will be part of the presentation team and answer city council questions in relation to the park project.

Students are part of the design team in order for the proposed park to meet the needs of the youth it intends to serve. This project follows an earlier project involving students naming a new city park and helping to dedicate the new park. All of this activity stems from a partnership between the city and the middle school.



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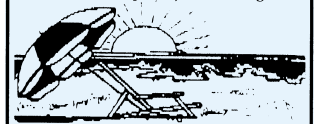


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Please note that the reading component for Minnesota licensure can be completed at the Nuts and Bolts Symposium.

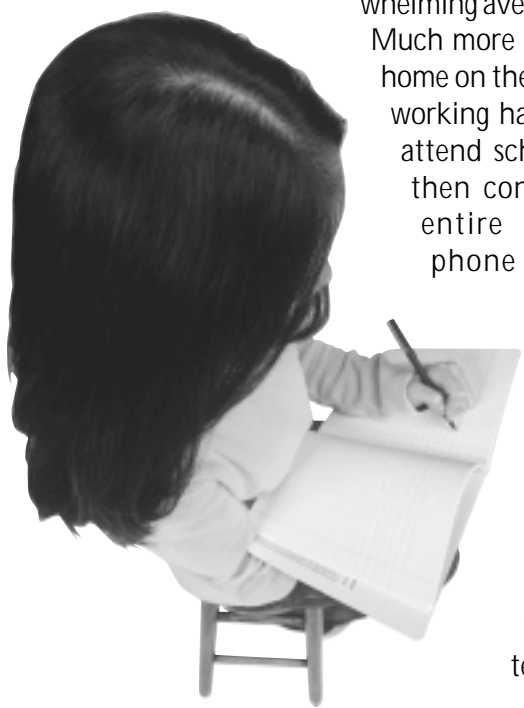
Notes from the executive director

By Kitty Krueger

It was after 5 when staffing for the EBD child finally concluded. It had been difficult; the child was not having success and the parents were resistant to the proposed IEP at first, but gradually began to recognize that it needed to be a joint effort between school and home if the child was to be successful. As I unlocked the door to my office and flipped on the light, I looked at my cluttered desk. I briefly wondered if the old adage about a cluttered desk being the sign of a cluttered mind was true. As I sat down, I resolved to clear the desk top before heading off for the day.

The first scrap of paper I picked up reminded me to return a call to Tony's mom. He had had numerous problems at school. Although he came from a two-parent family, only one parent was willing to work with the school. An angry little boy, uncertain of his role as a seventh-grader, he craved structure and consistency. Receiving none, he lashed out and bullied. I wondered what I could say to Mom as I dialed her number to convince her that we (she and the school) needed to work together in order for Tony to realize success.

The second task before me was Ashley, a sweet young sixth-grader with an overwhelming aversion to school. Much more comfortable at home on the farm, we were working hard to help her attend school daily and then continue for the entire day. As the phone rang, I rehearsed in my mind the recommendations I would discuss with the mom regarding her daughter.



My last task for the day was to write a letter to Ray's parents. After some legal problems, we had decided to increase the time he spent in counseling and mental health support. Although Mom said the right things, the follow-through was sporadic, at best.



Sound familiar? The common element in each of these scenarios is parental involvement. The data and research are clear. Kids do better in school when parents are actively involved. When surveyed, only 39 percent of middle school students reported that they talked about school at home on a daily basis and 21 percent stated that they almost never talked to their parents about school. We must, as educators, encourage our students to share their school lives at

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home.

It comes as no surprise to us that in order to foster an environment that supports learning as well as social growth, the child must experience a connection with his teacher. In addition, the child must realize that the school and his parent have a relationship as well. Yes, I understand that we may teach and work with from 25–175 children each day; however, I don't have to remind middle level educators that "Turning Points" calls for middle schools to create small communities for learning where stable and close, mutually respectful relationships are considered fundamental for intellectual development and personal growth.

So go ahead and make that telephone call, send that e-mail, or create that monthly classroom newsletter. And so I called Tony's mom, and Ashley's parent, and had "the conversation;" at the end of each there was a long pause followed by "I'm so glad you called." And so was I. 🐼

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At-risk students — the canaries in the mine

By Jerry Meschke

Coal miners used to take canaries into the mines with them because canaries are more sensitive to the poison gases that would eventually kill the miners as well. As long as the canaries stayed alive, the mine could be considered safe. In the book *Turning Them Around*, Vicki Phillips strikes out at the very heart of understanding our most frustrating students by asking us to first “know thyself.” Socrates’ statement is the core of Ms. Phillips’ research—if we know who we are, we can better understand who they are. Before we can understand our middle school students, let’s first determine our own personality temperament. Look at the following descriptions and identify the one temperament closest to yours (you may have tendencies in all types, but one should be more prevalent).

- **I am student-oriented.**

My classroom environment is an open and interactive one in which students feel comfortable sharing. My main motivation is to help develop students’ personal and social awareness. I like to provide opportunities for building student self-esteem and to nurture and support student growth. I believe in building a close rapport with my students, and I am emotionally sensitive to their needs. My classroom atmosphere is democratic and harmonious. I like cooperative learning, group projects, and interactive discussions, and I also like individualization because that way each student’s needs are met. I believe in using a variety of materials and linking learning to individual needs. My style of “discipline” is personalized and democratic. I am sometimes inconsistent and subjective in handling discipline, depending what I feel that student needs. I sometimes have to be careful that I don’t “rescue” stu-

dents too much, since I do like to help them as much as I can. (Intuitive - N / Feeling - F)

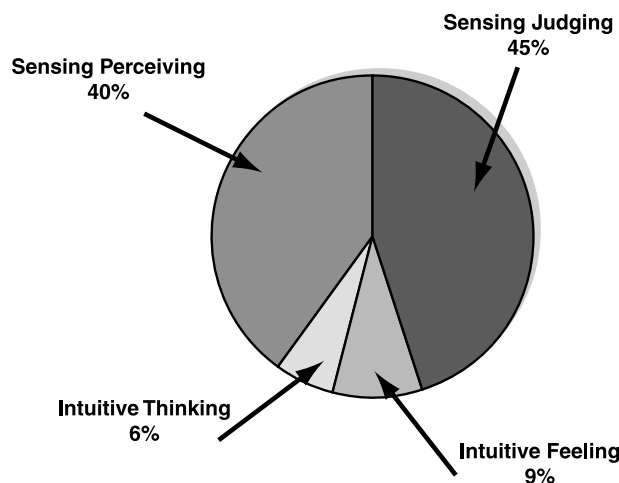
- **I am subject-oriented.** I want to develop competence and intelligence in my students. I enjoy inspiring students to stretch their intellects and to increase their ability to think critically and to analyze. I want to give students opportunities to explore new knowledge. I believe in presenting instruction in a logical manner which emphasizes cause and effect and covers important concepts. I like the lecture/discussion method, but I also like projects, reports and debates. I dislike assigning “busy-work.” I expect my students to be interested in the subject, since learning is its own reward. I am not into “praising” my students much; I would rather critique their progress as a method of improving their mastery. (Intuitive - N / Thinking - T)

- **I am action-oriented.** I create a dynamic, exciting classroom atmosphere by using an unstructured and spontaneous approach and by making learning fun. I like to deal with students directly and prefer hands-on methods and real-life issues that can be put to use immediately. I feel that students learn best by doing. I use projects, contests, games, demonstrations and simulations whenever possible. I consider myself an innovator who teaches in the here and now by providing a variety of activities and experiences, including considerable use of audio-video materials. I prefer not to give lectures. (Sensing - S / Perceiving - P)

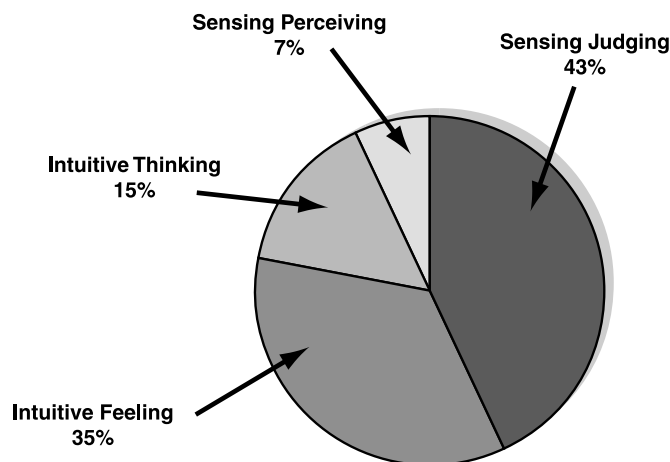
- **I am institution-oriented.** I run a well-organized and well-structured classroom and believe in having consistent classroom routines. I believe in sequential, step-by-

step directed instruction with clearly defined goals. I make considerable use of the textbook along with related reference materials, and my emphasis is on mastery of the course content. I pride myself on being firm and fair when it comes to discipline. I expect students to be accountable for their

Student Temperament



Secondary Teacher Temperament



learning and to follow the rules. I believe in encouraging responsibility and I consistently recognize students for being on-task. (Sensing - S / Judging - J)

As you read through the descriptions, try to think of your colleagues and where they fit. In fact, at a staff meeting, ask them to sit in one of the four areas most closely matching their temperament. In Ms. Phillips' research, she has found 78 percent of K-12 teachers fall in two camps: Sensing-Judging (SJ) or Intuitive-Feeling (NF). But where do students fall? The table shows how teachers and students compare:

| Temperament | Teachers | Students |
|------------------------------|----------|----------|
| Intuitive (N) / Feeling (F) | 35% | 9% |
| Intuitive (N) / Thinking (T) | 6% | 15% |
| Sensing (S) / Perceiving (P) | 7% | 40% |
| Sensing (S) / Judging (J) | 43% | 45% |

What draws teachers to the profession? Many attributes of the SJs and NFs are satisfied in the order, structure, personalized approach to teaching. But our clientele is not matched to who we are. It is no wonder why we become frustrated as an SJ whose style is perfectly matched to half of the students in the classroom, but is almost opposite of the SP student's temperament. Further analysis will disclose that almost all at-risk students fall under the SP category.

What does the typical teacher need to add to his or her repertoire in order to reach this group of students? At-risk learners usually have not been taught the pro-social attitudes, skills and behaviors they need to be successful in school and in life. Because of the breakdown of the family, many children are, in effect, raising themselves or are receiving their values from television. The results are all too evident at school.

"Reclaiming Youth At-Risk" by Drs. Larry Brendtro, Martin Brokenleg and Steve Bockern, states that at-risk youth are discouraged because their circle of courage has been broken. The components of this circle, which you can help mend, are belonging, competence, independence and generosity. What they need to mend their broken circle is attachment, achievement, autonomy and altruism.

Find ways to help your students feel attached—to you, to each other, to a purpose greater than themselves. Help them achieve by teaching the way they learn. Give them the autonomy they need by offering choices so that they can experience the feeling of being in charge, which at-risk students seem to need so much. As to the fourth "A," altruism, today's teenagers are criticized for being self-centered and egotistic, and yet few opportunities are given for them to contribute to others. Any time you can offer

an at-risk student the chance to help anyone else, you are giving him/her a wonderful opportunity to feel worthwhile. Tutoring younger children is one example which schools can implement.

A fifth "A" needs to be added: aspirations. Discouraged students tend to lack motivation and to act out because they don't believe their education is leading toward any kind of future anyway; therefore, all their energy is directed toward living for the moment. Rather than confine your focus to the symptoms, you can sometimes more effectively turn behavior around through a heart-to-heart discussion about future dreams and goals. Research has shown that resilient students are those who can keep their focus on creating a positive future for themselves. Students who have been able to experience altruism are more likely to believe they might be worthy of a positive future.

"Turning Them Around: Developing Motivation, Responsibility & Self-Discipline in At-Risk Youth" contains 302 pages of practical techniques and strategies on how to succeed with students most at risk of school failure. Personality temperaments, teaching and learning styles, teaching pro-social skills, attitudes and behavior, and handling discipline in a positive way are covered in the book (\$59.95 + \$5.00 shipping). More information can be found at www.personaldevelopment.org. 🍀

Lynn Searcy runs for NMSA office

Lynn Searcy, Minnetonka Middle School East's former principal, is on the faculty of the University of Minnesota's Department of Educational Policy and Administration. She is hoping to be elected to the National Middle School Association Board of Trustees and would appreciate your support in the upcoming election.



Ballots will be wrapped around the April *Middle Ground* magazine. The deadline to submit a vote is May 14, 2004. Members may vote by mail or fax back their ballots. An outside independent firm is retained to tabulate the ballots. The member's membership number must be written on the ballot for it to be valid. All candidates will be notified by June 11, 2004, with the election results.

Dr. Searcy's area of research and expertise is the American Middle School. A director on the Minnesota Middle School Association Board, she provides inservice to districts seeking impetus for or recommitment to middle level philosophy. Searcy, on the planning committee for NMSA's 2004 national convention, screened presentation

proposals for the 2003 convention. Dr. Searcy seeks to support middle level administrators, increase preservice teacher membership, and engage professors of middle level education in fostering NMSA's goals.

A director on the Minnesota State Middle School Association's board, Searcy promotes middle level philosophy, working with districts to champion middle schools. Her work with undergraduate students in teacher education and aspiring administrators in the licensure program affords opportunities to teach the needs—personal and curricular—of middle school-aged students, and to influence commitment to meeting those unique needs. As a national board member, Dr. Searcy would welcome a broader platform and richer resources to publicize the credibility of best practice research, influencing attitudes and

actions of policymakers and practitioners.

NMSA strongly advocates for academically excellent, developmentally responsive, and socially equitable middle schools. Critics trumpet inaccurate descriptions, painting melodramatic pictures of institutions addressing students' emotional needs at the expense of academic excellence. The NMSA board must publicize existing research, sponsor new and unbiased studies, and loudly challenge those who try to bully our middle school communities—those who ignore sound longitudinal studies as described in NMSA's "The Middle Level Concept: Why It Works," research that says kids feel safer and achieve more in middle schools with high levels of implementation of middle level best practices. We are academically excellent; as the voice from the middle, we must trumpet that. 🍎



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