



Power Lines

Florida League of Middle Schools
August 2012



Florida League of Middle Schools

www.flms.org

From the Desk of the Executive Director



Dr. Chet Sanders, Executive Director

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Once again the FLMS State Conference more than met all of the expectations for learning new ideas, linking up with colleagues, and laughing about shared experiences in the field. The theme for this year's conference was right on target, "Middle schools—A Shelter of Strength: Leaders and Learners...Surviving the Storm."

From my perspective the past school year was indeed about navigating around legislative "bad weather" so that we could maintain progress towards our goals. Now more than ever educators need to join together and remain true to their core values. One of the keynote speakers summed it up best when he reminded us that sometimes you have to "bend the rules" to do the right thing for students.

And as a matter of fact that has been the mantra for FLMS members over the years. We know how to design schools and instruction that work best for young adolescents, and despite ill conceived State mandates, we have succeeded in finding creative solutions.

Typically, the breakout sessions at the conference are shining examples of the innovation that continues to exist throughout Florida's schools, and serve as a wonderful clearinghouse to showcase the best and brightest practice. It is unfortunate that the numbers of administrators and teachers attending the conference has fallen off each year coinciding with the perfect storm created by the economic recession and continuing legislative assaults on public education.

To counteract this trend and put us back on course, the FLMS Board is proposing that we begin to energize the base by getting more people involved in leading at the local/regional level. Therefore, we have asked regional directors to work with their local members to host three fall conferences with the goal of building membership and supporting the state conference later in the year. These regional conferences will be strategically located in St. John's County, Hillsborough County, and Broward County. The League will be sending out the specific information on these in the near future.

If you are employed as a teacher or administrator in or near one of these counties, please consider getting in touch with the regional director and offering your assistance. Otherwise you can show your support by continuing your membership with the League and convincing your colleagues to join as well. FLMS is and always has been solely comprised of caring and committed volunteers. In these turbulent times, please help us to keep the guiding light burning for progressive educational practice.

FLORIDA LEAGUE OF MIDDLE SCHOOLS

Membership Registration Form, Yearly from July 1 - June 30

Membership Type

Institutional/School Membership

_____ Individual \$25.00

_____ Institutional/School \$150.00
(30 copies of POWER LINES sent quarterly.)

Name: _____

School: _____

Address: _____

City: _____ State: _____ Zip Code: _____

County: _____ Phone: (_____) _____

Email: _____

Please mail to: **Florida League of Middle Schools**

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Clermont, FL 34711

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What is the Florida League of Middle Schools?

The Florida League of Middle Schools was founded in 1972 by a group of individuals who were designing, teaching and working a new kind of school called a "middle school." The association is designed for individuals and institutions dedicated to the cause of quality middle level education for grades 5-9.

The League is the only professional educational organization in the state that opens its membership to interested individuals and professional educators, regardless of subject area of specialization, who focus on students in their early adolescent years (10 - 14 year olds). Quality middle level education is challenging, developmentally appropriate, and available to all students in a middle school.

The Florida League of Middle Schools is an affiliate of the National Middle School Association which has over 30,000 members in the 50 states and abroad.

Benefits of membership in FLMS are many. You will receive the quarterly newsletter with information on current trends and hot topics in middle level education. You will also enjoy the yearly FLMS journal with topical articles and original artwork. Additionally, you will be invited to attend the yearly state conference and have the opportunity to network with experienced middle level professionals.

Mission of FLMS

The mission of the Florida League of Middle Schools is to improve education for middle grade students in the state of Florida. The mission of the League is accomplished by:

- acting as an advocate for middle grade students and education in Florida
- facilitating curriculum improvement and inservice education
- being a clearing house for middle level ideas, materials, and personnel
- coordinating statewide efforts in the School improvement Process in Florida
- securing support for middle level education from groups and agencies
- representing middle schools in public discussion of education issues
- establishing and supporting regional affiliates of the Florida League of Middle Schools

UPCOMING REGIONAL CONFERENCE

Saturday, December 1, 2012

Gamble Rogers Middle School

9am-2pm

St. Augustine

Navigating The Waters of Young Adolescents...

Common Core Curriculum, Best Practices and Teacher Evaluation

More information about this exciting mid-year event will be available soon. Regional conferences will also be held in Hillsborough and Broward counties this upcoming school year. Be sure to look at the www.flms.org for event information.

SAVE THE DATE: STATE CONFERENCE

Saturday June 15, 2013

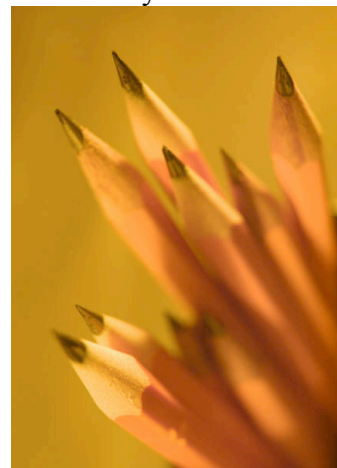
Once again, we will be meeting in the beautiful city of Sarasota to learn, share and reflect on middle level learning. This year's conference is a one-day event filled with exciting speakers and resources. More information will be forthcoming! Look forward to seeing you.

BACK TO SCHOOL: FIRST WEEK IDEAS

By Jennifer M. Denmon

August brings with it the return of the school year. After two and a half months off, students are well rested and ready, though usually dreading, the start of school. Teachers are prepared as well, having spent the better part of their summer vacation planning for the year's activities and hoping their students are better behaved than last year's group. According to Harry and Rosemary Wong (2001), the first days of school are the most vital. Everything that happens in school for the entire year is based on what takes place the first few days (Wong & Wong, 2001). It is important the activities during the first few days build a safe, caring environment that allows teachers to create mutually respectful relationships where students feel they can be successful (Gay, 2000; Noddings, 2000; Pimental, 2011). Classrooms with a caring environment can increase students' academic and social success (Ellerbrock & Kiefer, 2010). When students perceive they are cared for, they learn and retain more and achieve academically and socially (Ellerbrock & Kiefer, 2010; Noddings, 1994; Owens & Ennis, 2005; Rabin, 2008). What follows are some activities designed for the first week of school that aim to build a safe, caring classroom environment and foster respectful relationships between the teacher and students.

Introductory PowerPoints: A fun way for students to introduce themselves to the teacher and the class are through PowerPoint. PowerPoints allow students to be creative



and share information in an interesting format. This also allows the teacher to infuse technology early into the curriculum. It is helpful to provide a rubric or example for students, but allow them the opportunity to be creative and have some choice in the project. Choice is an important motivator and gives students ownership over what they are learning (Lavoie, 2008). A typical introductory PowerPoint may include background on the student's life, information on their family, details on their favorite things or activities, their strengths, interesting facts about them, short and long-term goals, and what they hope to learn this year. Pictures, songs, and video clips can also be used to make PowerPoint personal. Teachers can create an introductory PowerPoint to present on the first day of class as a model of the assignment, a way to introduce themselves, and an opportunity to start building a strong teacher-student relationship. Introductory PowerPoint allow students to creatively share who they are and will help teachers and classmates remember important information about them.

I Am Poems: I Am poems are a creative way for students to share information about each other and help build a caring classroom environment. I Am poems follow a specific format, though teachers can adjust this format to fit their needs (ReadWriteThink, 2004). The poem has three stanzas, and is often modeled like this:

FIRST STANZA

I am (2 special characteristics you have)
I wonder (something of curiosity)
I hear (an imaginary sound)
I see (an imaginary sight)

I want (an actual desire)
I am (the first line of the poem repeated)

SECOND STANZA

I pretend (something you actually pretend to do)
I feel (a feeling about something imaginary)
I touch (an imaginary touch)
I worry (something that bothers you)
I cry (something that makes you sad)
I am (the first line of the poem repeated)

THIRD STANZA

I understand (something that is true)
I say (something you believe in)
I dream (something you dream about)
I try (something you really make an effort about)
I hope (something you actually hope for)
I am (the first line of the poem repeated)



Teachers can create an I Am poem as a model and a way to introduce themselves to class, like the introductory PowerPoint. This activity also allows teachers to introduce poetry during the first week of

school, and can serve as a jumping off point for a poetry unit later in the curriculum.

Partner Interviews: Partner interviews allow students to learn about and introduce each other. This helps build a safe, caring environment as students are learning more about their peers, and builds student-student relationships in the process. In this activity, students interview a partner and subsequently switch roles. Then, each introduces the other to the class using information gained from the interview. Interviews should not take more than 5 minutes. It is helpful to have interview questions created before this assignment. Otherwise, students may get off track or finish too early. This also ensures everyone shares detailed information. Interview questions can be created by teachers beforehand or as a class, allowing students to have a voice in the assignment. This method could motivate students to complete the assignment (Lavoie, 2008). Students should have the opportunity to get creative with these interviews and the presentation. This prevents the assignment from becoming repetitive, allows students choice, thus increasing motivation and achievement, and fosters a caring environment (Ellerbrock & Kiefer, 2010; Lavoie, 2008).

These activities are designed to introduce students to the teacher and their peers in an effort to build a safe, caring environment, strong teacher-student relationships, and help set the tone for a productive school year.

Jennifer M. Denmon is currently a Doctoral student in English Education at the University of South Florida. She has been a middle and high school English and Language Arts teacher for seven years and earned her Bachelor's Degree and Master's Degree from the University of Florida. She can be contacted at the following email address: jdenmon@mail.usf.edu

TEACHER TIPS: BACK TO SCHOOL

Get the school year off to a friendly start with creative icebreaker activities.

You're not the only one excited and nervous about the first day of school. Your students are, too! Here are four getting-to-know-you activities that will help everyone break the ice and create a sense of classroom camaraderie from the very beginning of the school year.

Big Bubble Name Posters

Kechia Williams, a middle school teacher in Columbia, South Carolina, has students design a collage that features their names written in big bubble letters, filled with words and pictures that define them. To start, she has students practice printing their names in big bubble letters.

"I tell them to aim to fill an entire 8" x 10" sheet with the letters in their name or nickname," says Williams. After they figure out how to stylize their names

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and make a final copy on white paper, students fill in each letter with information about themselves.

As Williams explains: "The topics could include family, friends, pets, favorites, hobbies, goals, food, or sports. They can fill letters with drawings, small personal photos, and magazine or newspaper pictures that embody who they are, what they like, or a personal

characteristic." When they are complete, she hangs the posters on her walls or bulletin boards. Students enjoy seeing everyone's designs and the colorful displays are a way to personalize the classroom for [Back-to-School Night](#).

Spin a Classroom Web

Melissa Walker, a teacher in Graham, North Carolina, begins the school year with a "unique" discussion circle. "I take a ball of yarn and tell them one thing I think is unique about me," shares Walker. "I will say, 'I competed in a tennis tournament this summer and won the whole tournament.'" She then holds onto the string, tosses the yarn ball to one of her students, and asks him or her to reveal something unique. By the time the ball of yarn has made its way around the circle, everyone will be holding a part of it, and it will look like a web. "When we finish, I ask the kids, 'What did we make?'" explains Walker. "They will, of course, say that we made a web. I will then ask them to tell me about the web. I encourage them to discover that, even though we are all unique and special, we are all connected to each other like the web, because we are a class. The kids end up loving the activity once they see the connection and ask me several times through the year if we can do it again to see how they have changed."

Show-and-Tell in a Lunch Bag

About two weeks before school starts, Amy Scalf, a teacher from Winchester, Kentucky, sends her students a letter in which she introduces herself and describes some of the exciting activities her class will be doing during the school year. She also sends them each a paper bag and asks each student to fill it with four or five items that are of some significance, perhaps a photo, an item from a collection, a souvenir, a token from a favorite game, or a team memento. "On the first day of school, we all sit together



and open up our bags to show each other something about ourselves, myself included."

Guess Who?

Since she teaches upper elementary and middle school students who are already familiar with their classmates, Anna Hallock, a teacher in Elgin, Illinois, turns getting-to-know-you into a fun guessing game. "On the first day, I have students write three unique facts about themselves, such as a pet's name, favorite sport, talent, and so on. I collect the papers and read a description aloud to the class. The students then guess to whom I'm referring. I continue until all the descriptions have been read, including my own."

One more thing to keep in mind: Getting-acquainted activities aren't just for the first day of school. Experienced teachers recommend sprinkling these types of icebreaker and welcome back activities throughout the first week of school. They know it's the quickest route to building a strong class community.

The ideas mentioned in this article originally appeared in Instructor, published by Scholastic.

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