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JACKSON
MAGAZINE

February 2018 | Volume 27 | No. 02



Classroom CREATIVITY

Josh Nichols and CrossBraining enhance student learning through video, digital storytelling

- *The future of the workforce: Michigan Talent Architecture Coalition, Career Readiness Initiative*
- *Jackson County Cradle to Career: Working to improve education outcomes*

INSIDE: GOOD ATTENDANCE AND WHY IT MATTERS FOR EMPLOYERS

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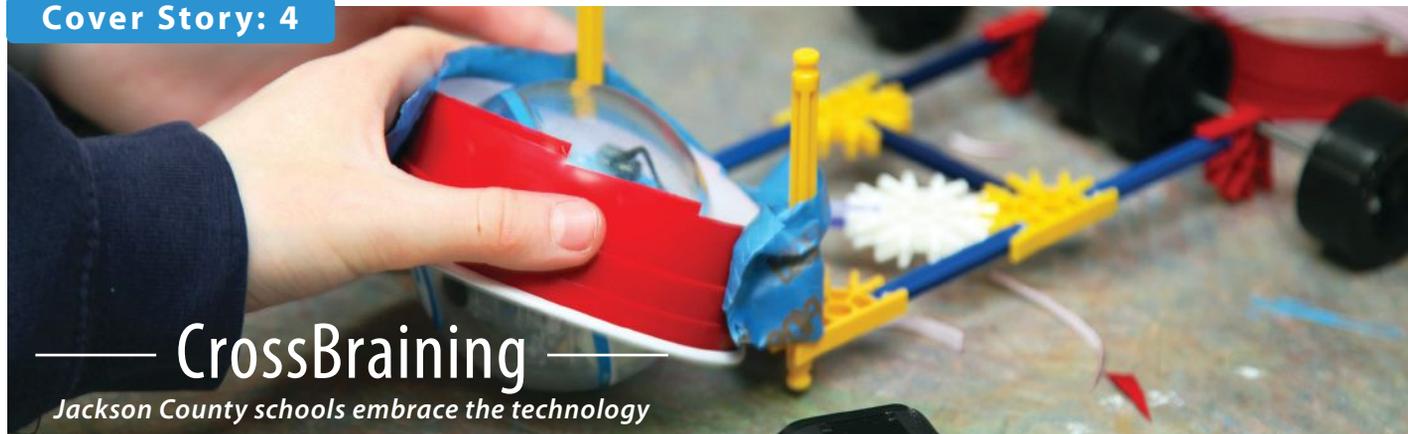
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When we meet to plan editorial content each month, we discuss the most interesting, compelling stories we find for our particular theme. In Education this month, we began looking at the public and private schools, local colleges and universities and more. What we quickly recognized was the great amount of work being done on a collaborative basis between educators and community leaders. Finding qualified workers to fill jobs is the most important topic facing Jackson County today, and our articles reflect how great that need is and what is being done to address it.

Two of our main feature articles are remarkably similar, where we take a look at the Michigan Talent Architecture Coalition and Career Readiness Initiative in one and the Jackson County Cradle to Career Education Network in the second. While the first examines how employers are going to find enough skilled workers to fill current and future jobs, the second explains how educators and leaders are working to improve education outcomes for local students. All those initiatives have happened only because many leaders in a variety of industries have stepped forward to pair their strengths for the greater good.

Even our cover story, which features the CrossBraining technology used in many Jackson County schools, is the result of

collaboration between co-founder Josh Nichols and many local educators and entrepreneurs. It was this ongoing support, said Nichols, that enabled the creation and distribution of technology that pairs digital storytelling with education discovery.

This issue also looks into why good attendance habits matter to employers, and how the way kids and teens spend their hours after school are so important.

If Jackson County businesses are going to find the right people, and if schools are going to make sure students are well-prepared for work and life after graduation, this collaborative work will need to continue. As Jackson Area Manufacturers Association Executive Director Bill Rayl put it, "The community has to get it right if we are going to thrive." *B*



Bonnie Gretzner
Bonnie Gretzner



February 2018 ♦ Volume 27 ♦ No. 2

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JACKSON PUBLISHING COMPANY

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P.O. Box 1467, Jackson, MI 49204

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515 S. West Ave.
Jackson, MI 49203

Phone: 517-783-2637

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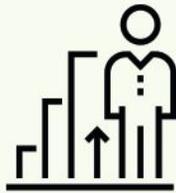


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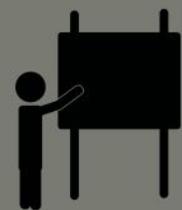
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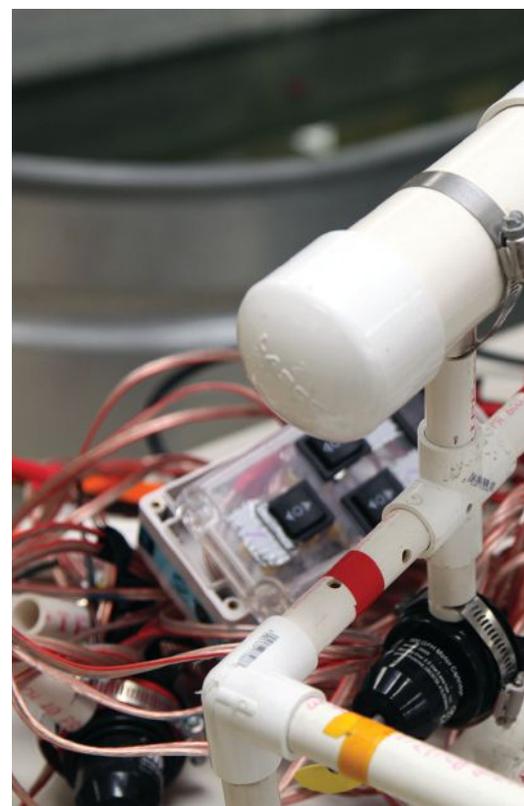


DIGITAL *Storytelling*

CrossBraining helps students achieve higher levels of learning through hands-on, project-based curriculum

By Ann Kammerer





CrossBraining in action: Josh Nichols explains the project to students; the underwater robot pictured in the center is one example of classroom projects; GoPro cameras enable students to capture the learning process from start to finish.

Josh Nichols never imagined that a learning process he applied off the coast of a Western Pacific island would make its way back to classrooms in Jackson. But his colleagues saw the potential and urged the STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Math) educator to share his vision for technology-enhanced learning.

In 2014, Nichols launched CrossBraining, a company that offers teachers tools for capturing the learning process through the use of a popular action and video camera. CrossBraining, Nichols said, was born from a project-based learning experience he facilitated for students in the Stockbridge School District.

"I had no intention of starting a business," said Nichols, who teaches third through sixth grade at Heritage School. "But people were noticing and wondering what we were doing, and asked how it related to project-based learning in the classrooms."

The original project, Nichols said, involved taking a dozen high school STEM students to Palau Island with school colleague Bob Richards. Once there, students applied

innovative technology to assist a volunteer organization, BentProp, in locating and identifying Americans that had gone missing or taken prisoner in World War II and other conflicts.

Nichols explained how the project with BentProp involved searching for downed aircraft off the Western Pacific island. Equipped with GoPro cameras and underwater robotics, students explored waters and reefs and reported on what they found. The more Nichols explained the tools, the more he realized how he could apply the approach closer to home.

"It was all about doing real-life things with students," said Nichols of the off-site project. "Project-based learning isn't about turning in worksheets. It's about giving students a task and going through interactions. Whether that be in a setting like Palau Island or a classroom, the challenge is how to manage it and ensure that every single student participates."

The power of storytelling

CrossBraining is about empowerment. Students follow a rubric provided by

teachers, then capture the entire learning process from start to finish using a GoPro or smartphone camera. The resulting output includes short, narrated videos that document their learning and reflect key terms and skills learned in class.

In turn, schools can use the student-made videos to give parents, community members and other teachers a window into the classroom. CrossBraining, Nichols said, allows students to show proficiency in a concept through reflection and creativity, as well as through communicating and collaborating with peers on their project-based team.

"As I was developing this platform, I began to realize I had found a solution for teachers who love to engage their students in projects and hands-on learning," said Nichols. "I just wanted to go into Jackson and other schools and say, 'Hey, check this out.'"

Nichols admits CrossBraining hasn't been a complete solo flight, and acknowledges the support he received from BentProp and GoPro. His colleagues from Stockbridge and surrounding districts, as well as leaders



in the Jackson community, also challenged him to take CrossBraining to the next level.

Inspired by the support, Nichols launched his company in Pleasant Lake and began presenting the concept beyond Stockbridge to K-12 districts and colleges. Several schools adopted the platform including Jackson, Grass Lake, Michigan Center, Northwest Community Schools, Springport, Jackson Christian, and Spring Arbor University. Additional conversations are in the works with schools state- and nationwide, including those in Chicago, California, Kansas and Pennsylvania.

For now, Nichols said his company is focused on Michigan. Jackson, he said, holds interest since he is an alumnus of Jackson Public Schools. His parents, too, held education-focused careers and raised him to be civic-minded. Those values, he said, inspired him to pursue a career in the classroom, and to advocate for involved, student-centered learning.

"Educators have a chance to create an environment they would like to have as a student," said Nichols. "I had various

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The greenhouse at Heritage School houses examples of plants the students are learning to grow/propagate.

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teachers who were very engaging when I was in school. For me, the ideal education environment is one that engages through project-based learning and hands-on inquiry. It gives students the chance to constantly polish their efforts, to collaborate, and to have a meaningful task that is solved by a group of people."

The power of projects

Nichols spent two years readying CrossBraining for classroom use. Pitched at grades third through high school, the basic CrossBraining kit includes five to 10 GoPro cameras, 10 springboard lessons, and personalized support to walk through processes like transferring and editing videos and interfacing with classroom laptops. Teachers, too, can participate in professional development opportunities coordinated through Spring Arbor University or through webinars. In December, Nichols added a CrossBraining app to enhance the platform's power and ease of use.

CrossBraining coordinates well with STEM-based subjects, but can be applied to most any topic. The key, Nichols said, is

A RALLY OF SUPPORT

CrossBraining Learning Solution began with an innovative approach to project-based learning on a remote Pacific island. That idea – one that combined digital storytelling with educational discovery – made its way back to Michigan thanks to the ongoing support of Jackson-based individuals and educators, entrepreneurs and business owners, and community leaders from the public and private sectors.

They include:

- **ANGIE NICHOLS**, elementary teacher and co-founder of CrossBraining
- **H. RONALD GRIFFITH**, special advisor to the president-external relations; Linda Sherrill, assistant provost/interim dean of the School of Education; and Doug Wilcoxson, executive vice president, Spring Arbor University
- **BRANDON ANSEL**, founder, Pitch.Me
- **SERGIO GARCIA**, international businessman
- Numerous Jackson County teachers including **MICHELLE DUBOIS**, Michigan Center, and **JENNIE O'BRIEN**, Jackson Schools
- **WILLIAM PATTERSON**, director of secondary education/federal programs, Jackson Public Schools
- **GEOFF BONTRAGER**, superintendent, Northwest Community Schools
- **REBECCA AND FLIP COLMER**, entrepreneurs and members of the BentProp Project
- **JOHN R. WALDRON**, senior vice president, County National Bank
- **SCOTT ROBERTSON**, partner and co-founder, Bamboo Ventures

In addition, the Hurst Foundation, led by President **TONY HURST**, has provided 50 percent of the funding needed to bring CrossBraining kits to schools in Jackson County.

"All this support makes me feel really proud of the Jackson community," said Josh Nichols. "It makes me feel good about where I grew up and about where Jackson is going. When you have all this support for innovative ideas, that's how a community thrives."

for students to take direct instruction from their teachers and apply it toward a real-life task by creating a concise digital story of what they did and what they learned.

Jennie O'Brien instantly recognized the motivating potential of CrossBraining for her gifted and talented class of fourth and fifth graders at Frost Elementary. O'Brien was among the CrossBraining beta testers, and has used the platform in her classroom since 2016.

"They loved putting together the video, picking out music, and having the chance to write and read and narrate," said O'Brien. "So, while it was about science or math, they also got to learn about editing, making things look good visually, and what's important to show and what's not."

Michelle DuBois teaches fifth-grade social studies and science at Keicher Elementary in Michigan Center. Also a beta tester, she adopted CrossBraining in her classroom about two years ago. She said her students show heightened retention of key concepts, and tend to ask more questions when using the platform to narrate their learning.

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PHOTO GIFTS



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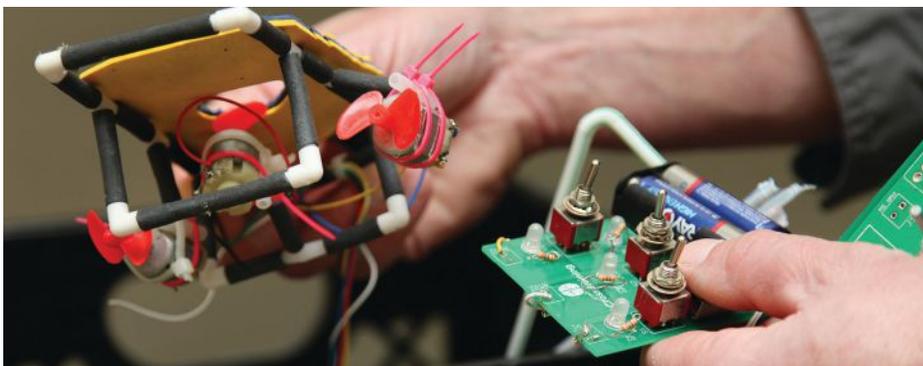
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Pictured on top are boards that students built and control with circuit boards; below, students designed and 3D-printed action figures and packaging, marketed toward their peers.

"CrossBraining encourages students to go back, pick up the process and to try again if things failed," she said. "It's not just 'Oh this didn't work.' It's more 'Why didn't this work?' The project-based philosophy of learning is all about testing and retesting."

Nichols concurs that CrossBraining can result in improved learning and retention. His website notes a 40 percent increase in Michigan Standardized Test Scores when CrossBraining is used to enhance curriculum.

And while test scores have their place, DuBois points out another area where CrossBraining makes a difference.

"When kids come to me and I ask them their opinion, they think there is a right and wrong answer," she said. "They are so used to teachers giving them information and regurgitating it back on a test. It can be hard to get them understanding there is no right or wrong answer. CrossBraining, though, is student-centered and not teacher-centered. It gets students thinking in a different way." 🍌

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CLOSING THE GAP:



(From left to right) Sharon Miller, Michigan Talent Architect from Consumers Energy; Mindy Bradish-Orta, President of the Jackson County Chamber of Commerce; Jill Bland, Managing Partner from Southwest Michigan First, engages with Jim Coutu of Michigan Works! Southeast at the Talent Pipeline Management Academy in Grand Rapids.

One of the hottest topics across Michigan isn't about who's going to get the most gold medals this month at the Winter Olympics. Rather, it's about where and how employers are going to find enough skilled workers to fill their current and future job vacancies and close the talent gap.

"The No. 1 problem for economic development and businesses is to hire people with the skills needed to be successful," said Mindy Bradish-Orta, Jackson County Chamber of Commerce President.

About 100,000 available positions are posted on the Pure Michigan Talent Connect website. The professional trades fields are expected to add about 15,000 new jobs each year by 2024. (Source: bridgemi.com)

"Every employer we go into is experiencing a lack of talent," said Jim Coutu, Business Services Manager at Michigan Works! Southeast. "We need to close the talent gap to supply employers with the workforce

that's needed so they stay in the state or locate in Jackson County."

Bill Rayl, Executive Director of the Jackson Area Manufacturers Association, said, "It used to be that talented workers went where companies were hiring. Today, companies go where the talent is. Our goal is to make sure our local businesses will be successful at finding workers they need today and tomorrow. The community has to get it right if we are going to thrive in the future and be successful."

Business, labor, economic development, government officials and education leaders statewide have launched initiatives to create more opportunities for middle and high school students to explore career options and highlight the pathways that lead to good-paying careers. The initiatives match Gov. Rick Snyder's priorities from the 21st Century Education Commission report.

This month, *Jackson Magazine* features several initiatives to educate and train

FAST FACTS

-  **What**
Michigan Talent Pipeline
-  **Who**
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Consumers Energy
Michigan Talent Architect*
-  **Website**
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mitalentarchitecture](http://ConsumersEnergy.com/mitalentarchitecture)*
-  **Phone**
248-433-5948

our future workforce. While each is independent, they all are connected by a common thread: to create a quality workforce within the community to help people and businesses prosper.

Community leaders launch initiatives to develop a talented, qualified workforce | By Nancy Miller



Photos Courtesy of Consumers Energy

Michigan Talent Architecture Coalition

Several years ago, Consumers Energy, one of Jackson's largest employers, needed to hire electric line workers to replace many long-term employees who retired. The company received thousands of job applications, but found fewer than 50 job seekers who qualified.

Recently retired Consumers Energy Senior Vice President Dan Malone realized if the utility was having a problem, their customers must be as well. That's when the utility formed the Michigan Talent Architecture Coalition. The group is comprised of more than 100 statewide leaders from over 60 industry, labor, education, economic development, government and non-governmental organizations. Its mission is to create a successful system that businesses can use to address the state's talent shortage.

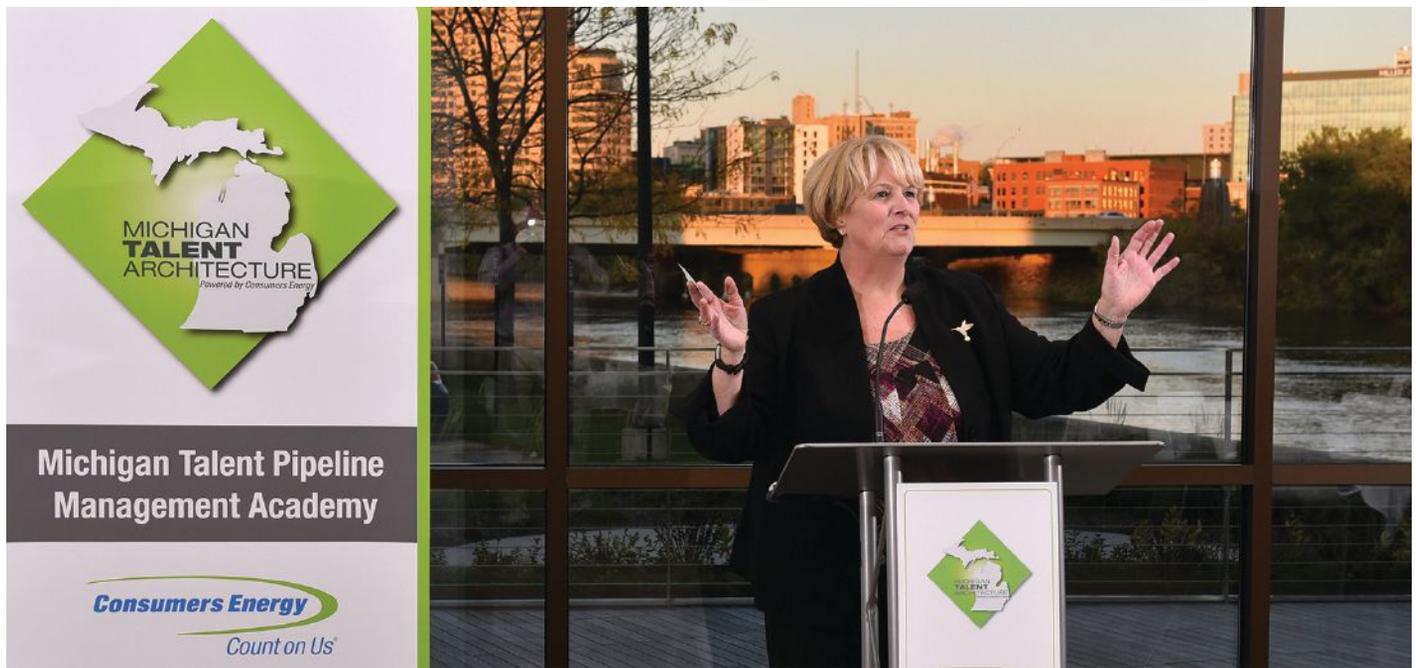
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Sharon Miller of Consumers Energy said academy graduates will help employers communicate more effectively with educators about specific skills they need.

“To solve the problem, the coalition focused on the talent pipeline management model that the U.S. Chamber of Commerce created based on a supply chain management methodology,” said Sharon Miller, Michigan Talent Architect for Consumers Energy. “We used the system to develop programs at Lansing Community College and Alpena Community College to give potential electric line workers the skills we needed. It was a perfect fit.”

Miller said the chamber model worked so well that it became the cornerstone strategy for the Talent Architecture Coalition.

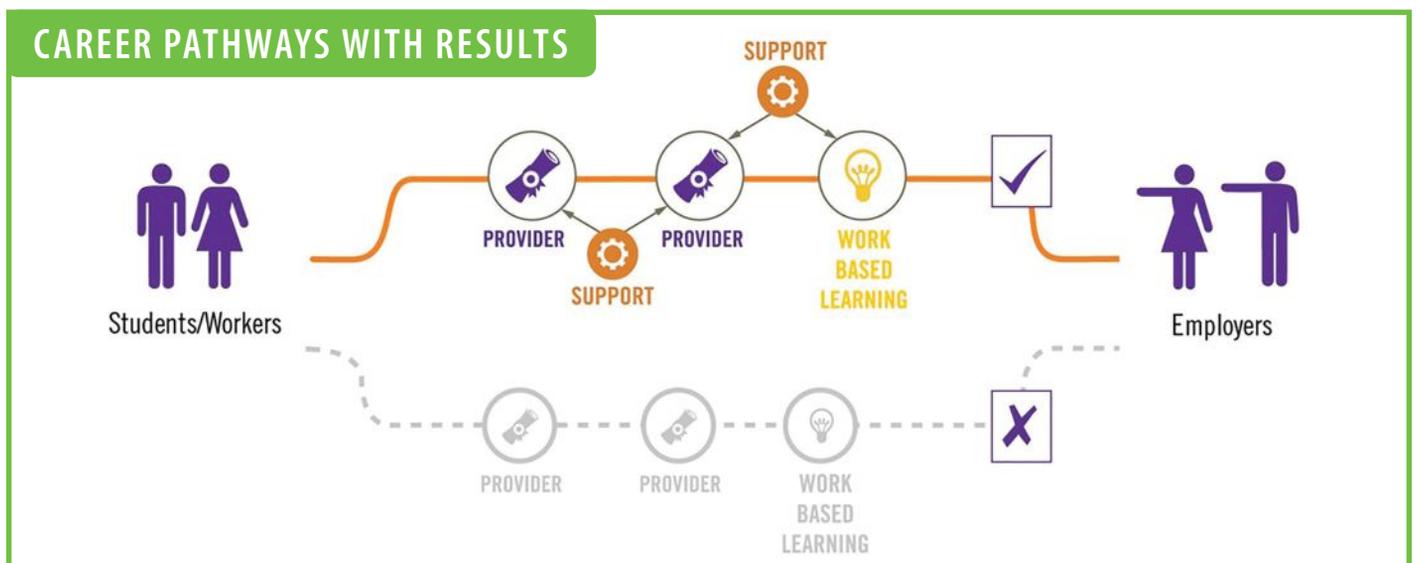
With a \$50,000 grant from the Consumers Energy Foundation, the utility worked with the U.S. Chamber of Commerce Center for Education and Workforce to create the Michigan Talent Pipeline Management (TPM) Academy. In October, Michigan became the first state in the nation to offer its own TPM Academy when the utility launched its inaugural training program at the John Russell Leadership Center in Grand Rapids.

“Academy graduates will return to their communities and help employers communicate more effectively with

educators about the specific skills they need,” Miller said.

Bradish-Orta and Coutu were among the first 20 participants selected for the six-month training program. They studied how to solve skill gaps, collect job needs data and measure success. They learned to use web tools provided by the chamber foundation to apply supply chain management strategies, track data and outcomes.

After completing the program, Bradish-Orta and Coutu will work with local businesses and industries to determine



Information taken from U.S. Chamber of Commerce training information on a supply chain management methodology.

immediate and future workforce needs, formulate strategies and direct business leaders to job training programs, community colleges, universities and other groups that can help.

“It will be gratifying to add what I learned at the academy to what Michigan Works! Southeast already does,” said Coutu, who noted that Michigan Works! Southeast distributed a \$1.12 million grant to 15 local companies for apprenticeship programs, hiring and training employees and buying equipment.

Besides the talent gap, there’s a career awareness gap among middle and high school students. They don’t know enough about good-paying careers that are in demand and the training or education required to enter those professions.

Jackson County Career Readiness Initiative

Every Jackson County school district is on board to solve the awareness gap. The Superintendents Association took the lead,

asking Northwest School District’s Cari Bushinski, Director of Instruction, to chair the Jackson County Career Readiness Team, comprised of a representative from each district. Western School District’s Christy Cottingham and Jackson Public Schools’ Rob Bobeda also have leadership roles on the team.

Bushinski’s team outlined six career readiness goals for the countywide curriculum: Career cruising, labor market awareness; career pathways; career awareness; work-based learning opportunities; and employability skills. An advisory team consisting of local businesses recommended the skill sets.

Another career awareness tool, which Jackson County plans to launch, is an online program called MI Bright Future to connect students, educators and employers. Students can get information on over 600 careers. Educators can use the website as a tool in their classrooms. And employers can use the website to promote their company to students, interact with

students, and offer advice and career development opportunities through company speakers, job shadowing, internships and summer jobs.

“Our common goal is to make sure that when students graduate they have an awareness of career opportunities

FAST FACTS

 **What**
Career Readiness Initiative

 **Who**
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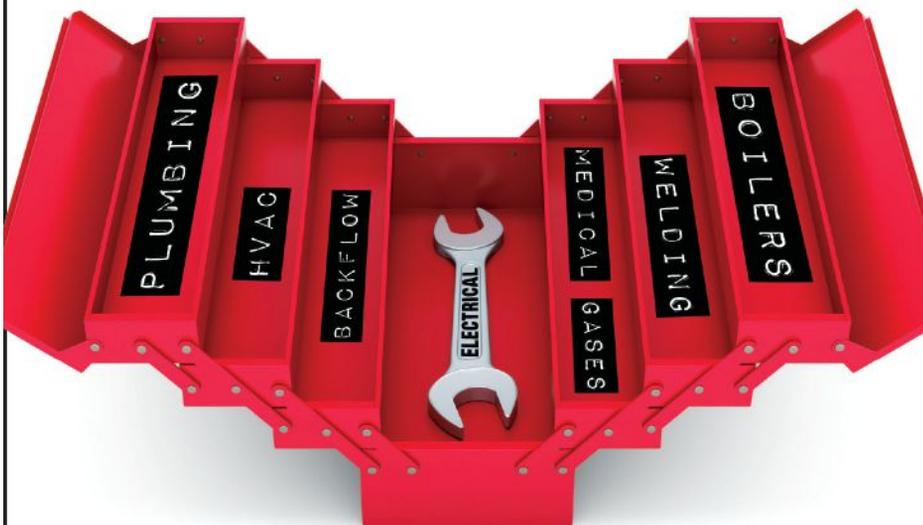
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The Jackson County Career Readiness team, which aims to help solve the career awareness gap, recently met at the Jackson Area Career Center.

and are prepared to enter certification or apprenticeship programs, college or university, on-the-job training or the military and to be successful in their chosen career,” Bushinski said.

By 2019, the goal is that students will graduate with an individualized, attainable, written post-secondary plan that will help them become a talented member of the workforce.

“We have a working model that bridges the gap between schools and careers,” Bushinski said. “Our responsibility as educators is to provide learning opportunities in the various fields so that students can find out what they like and are good at. We want students who are well matched for the career they choose.”

At Northwest Middle School, seventh- and eighth-graders explore various careers and take a required advanced manufacturing course. At Northwest High School, students can enroll in a two-year STEM (science, technology, engineering, mathematics) program that includes a three-hour block focusing on engineering and manufacturing skills while also taking classes required for graduation.

There are multiple initiatives in the community working to shrink the talent and awareness gaps. Jackson County Cradle to Career (featured in this issue) connects those threads so the initiatives align. 

CONGRATULATIONS

30 AND UNDER



Jackson Magazine celebrated the Class of 2017 30 and Under honorees at an event on Tuesday, December 5, 2017 at the Commonwealth Commerce Center.



Emcee Jamie McKibbin of K105.3; 30 and Under winner Abba Reeve with Jackson Magazine Publisher Donovan Cronkhite.



Thank you to our sponsors for helping us make the 30 and Under awards a success, and thank you to Don Finelli and the wonderful staff at the Commonwealth Commerce Center, along with CCC Catering, for hosting our event.



Community Collaboration

Local leaders work to improve education outcomes for Jackson County students

By Marta K. Dodd



The C2C Coordinating Council

Photo by Audrey Spring / Jackson Magazine

The Jackson County Cradle to Career (C2C) Education Network is a collaborative group of education and community leaders working across organizational boundaries to improve education outcomes in Jackson County. The cross-sector group meets and identifies root causes of social, financial and academic barriers to students' success (from early childhood through adulthood), then examines possible ways to remove or minimize the barriers. The C2C's Coordinating Council is 21 community leaders (see sidebar), each of whom has the authority to implement changes that reduce or remove barriers in their own organization.

This cross-sector "collective impact" approach moves their discussions to a community focus, eliminating the single-focus "silos" of an organization looking only at its own interests. This uses

resources and personnel more efficiently, and reduces duplicated efforts, say leaders.

The mission of the C2C mission is to create and sustain equitable educational pathways and support systems that prepare Jackson County residents for success. C2C is committed to a national and state objective of ensuring that 60 percent of residents have a post-secondary degree or "valuable credential" such as a work-related license or certificate, by 2025.

Since its 2012 founding, the C2C exploration of education barriers has resulted in approximately a dozen "shifts" in the way Jackson County education-related processes, policies, organizations and institutions operate. The shifts range from small, creating the first common definition of absenteeism and its disciplinary consequences across the county's 13 school districts, to large: Directly counseling high school seniors in ways

to be more college- or work-ready when they graduate.

Throughout, the C2C looks for ways to adapt organizational or community systems to fit students' learning needs, rather than expecting students to adapt themselves to systems that seem unworkable in their lives, as well as ways to help both traditional college-bound and non-college bound students (63 and 37 percent of Jackson County graduates, respectively) be successful.

Collective impact brings results

Collective impact recognizes that creating large-scale, lasting solutions to social problems requires organizations to work together toward mutual goals with shared measurement systems, aligning and reinforcing each other's efforts, and



Photo Courtesy of Jackson County C2C

C2C Coordinating Council members congratulate coordinator Irene LeCrone upon receiving the MCAN Flagship Award. Pictured l-r are Irene LeCrone, Kevin Oxley, Zoe Lyons, Jeremy Frew, Ken Toll, Nancy Peters-Lewis and Monica Moser. The Flagship Award recognizes those that develop sustainable college access networks in Michigan. Jackson C2C Network was selected as the recipient because of their strong commitment to growing their network and increasing degree attainment for Jackson County residents.

tracking progress. The Jackson Community Foundation (JCF) provides an office for Irene LeCrone, C2C’s coordinator and sole staffer; JCF is C2C’s fiduciary.

LeCrone and Monica Moser, the president and CEO of JCF, identified some of the system changes resulting from C2C’s focus on identifying and removing barriers:

- The creation of the first-ever common definition of “school readiness,” which

guides efforts to teach parents how to help their children learn skills they need before entering grade school. Those skills include being able to use a pencil and scissors, recognizing shapes and colors, knowing numbers 1 to 10, and being able to follow simple directions, among others.

- United Way’s Energizing Education reading mentoring program aims for all county students reading at or above their grade level by the end of third grade.
- Creation of the Jackson College & Career Connection early/middle school

FAST FACTS

Organization
Jackson County Cradle to Career Education Network

Location
One Jackson Square
Suite 308

Coordinator
Irene LeCrone



Focus
A collaborative effort to improve education outcomes in Jackson County

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In May 2016, students from the C2C/JPS/JC Lumina Bridge Partnership celebrate the completion of their math class with representatives from the C2C Coordinating Council, Jackson College and Jackson High School.

applications, rather than only providing that help at the Jackson Crossing.

- Many Jackson County teachers and Department of Health and Human Services customer service employees participated in training to better recognize and appropriately respond to signs of trauma in their students and clients.

Working with employers

Before C2C, it was difficult to figure out which organizations played in what space and the right people to contact for collaboration, said Bill Rayl, executive director of the Jackson Area Manufacturers Association (JAMA) and the Academy for Manufacturing Careers. “The C2C network makes that easy and elevates the conversation from education for education’s sake, to education with a purpose.”

LeCrone agreed, saying “Business leaders have said repeatedly that they are not getting what they need in job candidates. They want people who are work-ready, who will show up for work every day, and who have good ethics.”

partnership between the Jackson County ISD, local school districts, Baker and Jackson colleges, The Enterprise Group, the Jackson Area Manufacturers Association (JAMA) and other partners, which allows high school juniors to job shadow and learn employment skills at local manufacturing companies.

- The Jackson High School (JHS) curriculum now includes a remedial course for students who need a

mathematics boost before college math classes. Students complete the class at JHS rather than delaying credit-bearing college work and paying tuition for the similar, non-credit college class. JHS students also can take and receive credit for a college-level calculus class.

- To address transportation barriers, College & Career Access Center representatives now travel to each high school to help students complete college and financial aid

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Photo by Audrey Spring / Jackson Magazine

A recent meeting of the C2C Coordinating Council; the Council is composed of 21 community leaders (see below for complete list).

Business owners don't care about grade-point averages, said Moser. They want someone who will work well with others and follow directions, and the students need to be prepared in that respect, not just academically.

"I think about how to be more inclusive with others sitting at the C2C table, knowing that our impact together is more far-reaching than staying tightly in my lane of workforce development," said Pam Gosla, research and education manager at Michigan Works! Southeast. "When employees can answer the call for a skilled and able workforce producing technologically competitive, quality products, the quality of life and economic standing of the entire region benefits."

Jeremy Frew, vice president of student services at Jackson College, said one of C2C's best outcomes to date is addressing education challenges and issues as a community. "It's no longer just the school districts' or colleges' problem."

Rayl, Gosla and Frew are founding members of the C2C Coordinating Council.

More to come

In the first five years, the growth of C2C's growth is primarily in increasing collaboration in Jackson County, according to LeCrone. "Organizations are better connected, and collaboration is becoming the norm. Organizations are thinking about addressing root causes of issues, not just applying programming Band-Aids. "Since

we are addressing root causes of issues, it could be at least 15 years before we see how these changes and those yet to come impact student success," LeCrone added.

Added Moser, "We have made some dynamic changes in our systems, but this is a long-term approach. It's an iterative process; we try something, learn from that, try something else and learn from that. The hope is that in the end, these things will align to improve education outcomes for our students."

The primary funding source for C2C is the Michigan College Access Network (MCAN). Funds also come from the Lumina Foundation, and local match funding for MCAN grants from the Jackson County Superintendent Association, United Way of Jackson County, Jackson College, Jackson Community Foundation, Baker College, Jackson County ISD, Community Action Agency, and the Great Start Collaborative, with substantial in-kind support from the Jackson Community Foundation and the ISD. 

Jackson County Cradle to Career Education Network Coordinating Council

ORGANIZATION NAME REPRESENTATIVE

(Joined C2C in 2012, except where noted)

Baker College.....	Marie Bonkowski
City of Jackson	Freddie Dancy
College & Career Access Center.....	Nancy Peters-Lewis
Community Action Agency.....	Toby Berry
Cradle 2 Career Network.....	Irene LeCrone
Great Start Collaborative.....	Kelly Sheppard
Jackson Area Manufacturers Association.....	Bill Rayl
Jackson College.....	Jeremy Frew
Jackson Community Foundation.....	Monica Moser
Jackson County Chamber of Commerce (2014)	Mindy Bradish-Orta
Jackson County Board of Commissioners	Daniel Mahoney
Jackson County Education Association.....	Melissa Anderson
Jackson County Intermediate School District.....	Kevin Oxley
Jackson District Library	Sara Tackett
Michigan Department of Health & Human Services (2016)	Zoe Lyons
Michigan Works! Southeast	Pam Gosla
South East Ministries Association (2016).....	Darius Williams
Spring Arbor University (2014).....	Linda Sherril
Superintendents Association	Sandy Maxson
The Enterprise Group (2013)	Tim Rogers
United Way of Jackson County	Ken Toll

Good Attendance: Why Does it Matter?



CARI BUSHINSKI

DIRECTOR OF INSTRUCTION

Northwest Community Schools

You may be familiar with the term “chronic absenteeism,” which occurs when a student misses 10 percent of the school year, or 18 days out of a 180-day year. Because it is an indicator of negative academic achievement and work habits later in life, Jackson County is working to collaboratively address this complex problem.

In 2016, 25 percent of Jackson County students were chronically absent from school, compared to 15.6 percent of students in the State of Michigan. This is a major concern for both area educators and local employers. The habits related to absenteeism impact not only the student’s performance in the classroom but also personal and professional achievement later in life.

Absences contributing to chronic absenteeism can be excused or unexcused and do not have to be in succession. One missed day impacts another, as students often spend the next day back trying to catch up.

The negative impact of chronic absenteeism can be seen from the earliest grade levels. According to recent national studies, children who miss too many days in kindergarten and first grade can struggle mastering to read by the end of third grade. In high school, a student who is absent 10 or more days during a 180-day school year is 20 percent less likely to graduate, and 25 percent less likely to ever enroll in college.

We’ve already taken major steps in Jackson to collaboratively address this complex problem.

“It is our job as educators to change this behavior and teach positive attendance as a lifelong skill and employability work habit.” said Caitlin Williams, Attendance Officer for Jackson County Intermediate School District. “It is because of this high rate of

absenteeism that Jackson County leaders are joining forces to change the mindset and promote positive attendance in schools. It is my responsibility to monitor student attendance and ensure that the Michigan Compulsory Attendance Law is being upheld.”

Teaching positive attendance habits leads to development of critical employment skills (soft skills) such as reliability and dependability, a work ethic that Pure Michigan Talent Connect identified as one of the 14 Job-Related Soft Skills.

“I address the topic of having positive attendance habits to our employees and how critical attendance is in their role here at Technique,” said Laura Wright, Human Resource Manager for Technique Inc. “It is the accountability and dependability factors that need to be understood. Reporting to work every day and on time should be a normal work habit that is instilled in the employee long before they come to work for us.”

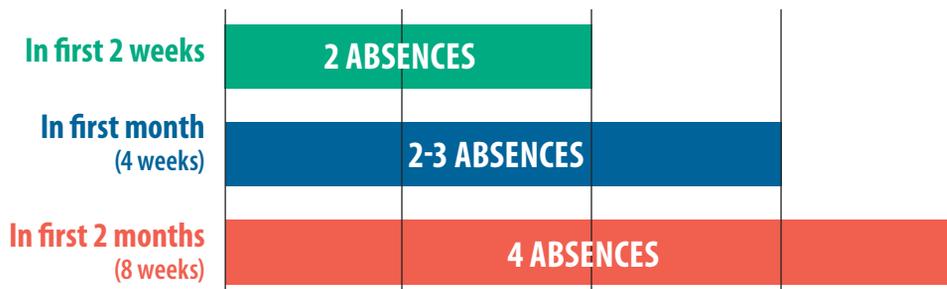
Schools encourage positive habits

As educators, we recognize that attendance patterns start as early as preschool and kindergarten. The first year of full-time schooling is critical for establishing good attendance habits. Children learn that school is important if families are prioritizing good attendance from the earlier grades, but our work must go further to support the students who are catching up, and continue to promote the important habits that shape our success after graduation.

As such, many College and Career Readiness programs in middle schools and high schools teach soft skills. At Northwest Community Schools, for example, high school students in each course are

IDENTIFYING WHO NEEDS EXTRA SUPPORT

Chronic absence (missed 10% or more of school) in the prior year, assuming data is available. And/or during the beginning of the school year, student has:



Source: attendanceworks.org

Teaching positive attendance habits leads to development of critical employment skills (soft skills) such as reliability and dependability.

taught and graded on soft skills within a four-level rubric. The work habits of consistent attendance, punctuality and preparedness for class are a few of the soft skills that are reported weekly to parents.

Many schools have created Positive Attendance Campaigns to teach this attitude. Some schools send home calendars for students to post on the refrigerator and mark off every day that they go to school. These campaigns provide a foundation to the broader, community-wide efforts to educate and support students and parents in ensuring their child makes it to school every day.

Michigan Department of Health and Human Services, with its Pathways to Potential program, provides Success Coaches in many Jackson County school districts. These coaches can be instrumental in providing information to parents about the importance of their child attending school.

Angie Soltis, a Success Coach in Northwest Early Elementary School, sends home monthly newsletters and holds drawings and contests for students to enter to promote positive attendance. She creates bulletin boards that share facts about chronic absenteeism as well as positive messages about attending school regularly.

Weekly, Soltis studies the school attendance data and creates "students to watch" lists based on those who are beginning to show attendance concerns. These students will receive letters and phone calls home to determine if families are having troubles getting their students to school with such as issues with transportation and health care. Soltis will then work to provide the components that are needed for the family by helping to connect them with local agencies or resources to eliminate the barriers of attending school regularly.

Another outstanding support system is through the Center For Family Health, which has provided school-based health

centers in Jackson County for schools with higher at-risk student populations. These centers give excellent health support inside schools for students and families with medical, dental, or mental health needs. The Center for Family Health also offers mental health care professionals for student who may be experiencing anxiety or depression that can also lead to missing school.

What parents can do

Partnering and communicating with families is the best approach to solving this problem. What can families do to help your child attend school regularly? Here are a few tips:

- Help your student pick out clothes and pack their backpack the night before school
- Don't let your child stay home unless they are actually sick. Often stomachaches or

headaches are signs of anxiety and not necessarily a reason to be absent

- Make doctor appointments for when school is not in session.
- Set a bedtime and regular morning routine.
- If your child seems to be anxious about going to school, talk to his/her school counselor or teacher on how to make school a positive, comfortable place for learning.
- Know the school calendar, like when school starts and what days are off. Make sure your child has all the required shots.
- Plan family vacations during times that school is not in session.

There is much work to be done to build a culture of learning that promotes positive attendance. However, if we work together, Jackson County can provide the encouraging knowledge and the local support systems that will create the habit of good attendance and ultimately lead to school success for all our students. For more information, visit www.attendanceworks.org. 

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The most dangerous time of the day

LAURA JURASEK

COMMUNICATIONS AND MARKETING SPECIALIST

Highfields Inc.

Onondaga; serving mid-Michigan schools, including Jackson County



Photo Courtesy of Highfields Inc.

Students in Highfields' Reaching Higher program at Springport Middle School painted rocks with positive words and phrases and put them around town.

Do you know when the most dangerous time of the day is for children? According to Afterschool Alliance, the hours between 3 p.m. and 6 p.m. are the peak hours for juvenile crime and experimentation with drugs, alcohol, cigarettes and sex.

The reason is simple: Many parents work, and a lot of kids have no structured place to go once school dismisses.

What is the solution? Out of School Time Programs like Highfields' Reaching Higher program. Highfields is a nonprofit human services organization dedicated to serving at-risk children and families in mid-Michigan. Reaching Higher is an educational program in nine area schools which focuses on elementary and middle school students and gives them a safe place to go when they're out of school.

Reaching Higher provides students with a learning environment that reinforces the academics they learn throughout the school day and teaches life and social skills. Each program can serve up to 45 kids per day and focuses on at-risk students.

"Reaching Higher helps students academically, but it also helps meet their social and emotional needs too," said Brenda Weck, Reaching Higher Program Manager.

All nine schools offer after school programs for 2.5 hours a day, Monday through Thursday, except for Attwood School, which provides before and after school programs.

A typical day in Reaching Higher begins with academic time for students. Qualified staff reinforce school day curriculum through hands-on learning, direct instruction, tutoring, and homework help. The main focus is reading and math academic lessons.

Curtis Richard is the Reaching Higher Site Coordinator at da Vinci Primary School in Jackson.

"If students are falling behind, they can get help from teachers and stay ahead of their schoolwork," said Richard. "Most of the students' grades improve because of it."

Following academic time, students participate in fun and exciting activities called “enrichments.” Enrichments are designed to give students an opportunity to try something they’ve never done before and help teach them new skills, like cooking, hobbies, exercise, and STEAM (Science, Technology, Education, Art, and Math) activities.

“These are ‘life-enriching’ activities that most of these students would never do anywhere else,” said Curtis. “It helps them develop new interests and maybe find something they’re passionate about.”

Reaching Higher staff come up with the enrichments, and they change throughout the year.

At da Vinci Primary School, students can choose between enrichments like: Sphero – learning to control and program Sphero robots, “What Do You Think” – cultural exploration and discussion, or Arts and Crafts – making holiday ornaments for family and friends.

At Springport Middle School, they created an enrichment that focused on community service called “Reaching Out.” Students painted rocks with positive words and sayings on them and placed them all around the downtown. At the same time, they were also picking up trash and disposing of it.

Thanks to community programs like Reaching Higher, out of school hours don’t have to be dangerous after all!

Reaching Higher operates in da Vinci Primary School, Gardner Academy, Springport Middle School, Vandercook Lake, Leslie Middle School, Hunt Elementary School, Dwight Rich Academy, Pleasant View Visual and Performing Arts Academy, and Attwood School. Reaching Higher is funded through a 21st Century Community Learning Center grant and operates throughout the school year and summer. 

For more information:

visit www.highfields.org/reaching-higher.

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Communication and Dementia:

Five tips on how to better interact with a loved one with Alzheimer's Disease

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This Valentine's Day, loved ones across the country will express their affection for each other in different ways. For the 5 million Americans with Alzheimer's disease, however, expressing love and gratitude may become increasingly difficult as the disease lowers a person's ability to communicate. If your spouse or family member has been diagnosed with Alzheimer's or another form of dementia, it may become frustrating to get through to them and understand their needs. Communicating with a person with Alzheimer's requires patience, understanding and good listening skills, and can vary based on the person and where he or she is in the disease process.

Problems you can expect to see throughout the progression of the disease include difficulty finding the right words, using familiar words repeatedly, easily losing a train of thought, speaking less often, and relying on gestures. The first step to effectively communicating with a loved one with Alzheimer's is understanding the difficulties they face and making them feel comfortable with you. Having a loved one with Alzheimer's disease or another dementia is difficult, especially if you are a primary caregiver of that person, and it is easy to feel as if they are slipping away. Love takes on many forms, and it is important to remember that your loved one cares about you even when they are unable to express themselves.

The five strategies below can help both you and the person with dementia better understand each other. For more information about communication,

caregiving, and more, contact the Alzheimer's Association at alz.org or call 800-272-3900.

1. Give the person time to speak without interruptions.

This is especially important in the early stages of the disease when your loved one may have difficulty forming thoughts and words. Take time to listen to how they are feeling, what he or she is thinking, and what they may need. Don't interrupt or finish sentences unless he or she asks for help finding a word or finishing a sentence.

2. Treat the person with dignity and respect.

Being honest and showing warmth in your actions and conversations will encourage your loved one to express their feelings as well. Don't talk down to them, act as if they aren't there, or make them feel that they are no longer the person they were before their diagnosis. Your support is important to the person, so don't pull away.

3. Engage the person in one-on-one conversation in a quiet space with few distractions.

Give the person your full attention and be patient when they have trouble getting their point across. Minimize distractions in the room to allow your loved one to become more engaged and comfortable while speaking directly to you. Make eye contact; this shows you care about what your loved one is saying and make them feel comfortable asking for help in the future.

4. Be patient and supportive.

Avoid arguing whenever possible. Instead, listen and try to find the meaning in what is being said. Ask the person what they are experiencing, be supportive in their frustrations, and understand that this journey is difficult for both of you.

5. Encourage non-verbal communication.

Late-stage patients also tend to rely on non-verbal communication such as facial expressions or vocal sounds. If you do not understand what is being said, ask the person to point or gesture. Use touch, sights, sounds, smells and tastes as a form of communication with the person, and recognize that sometimes the emotions being expressed are more important than what is being said. *B*

Financial Education: Covering the Basics



KIRK A. HOFFMAN,
CASL®, CFP®,
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OF PLANNING
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GuideStream
Financial

For many children, basic financial education is not part of their school curriculum. Many adults didn't have this offered to them and generally learned from their parents or on their own. Here are some financial education basics that you can share with your children to help them be better prepared.

Clarify your financial experience.

Share your own perspective on money, including how you got to where you are now, your views on cash management, debt and liquidity, and how your outlook has changed over the years. Sometimes the discussion of financial matters is uncomfortable or considered taboo. Being open about financial issues is a great benefit for your children and can help them avoid mistakes that you might have made. Let them know if you've managed things yourself or if you've had a financial advisor.

Establish and maintain a simple budget.

Budgeting in its most basic form is just a plan for spending. Teach your children to think about how their purchases impact one another and how the budget can help them make better spending decisions. You can use anything from a simple spreadsheet to an online tool like Mint.com.

Encourage savings and investing.

Saving and investing are tools for reaching financial goals. Explain different saving and investing alternatives. Share the choices you've made in your own plan.

Establish a bank account.

Help your children learn what a savings and checking account are. Show them how to view the accounts, how to make deposits, withdrawals, transfers, and how to write a check. Explain how to balance their checking account. Teach them how to read a bank statement. Get them in the habit of reviewing their account regularly.

Learn about credit.

Explain how credit cards work and how you feel they should be used. Explain how mortgages, car loans, and personal loans work. Discuss how to build a positive credit history.

Stress the importance of insurance.

Encourage your children to establish an emergency fund. Help them understand the importance of homeowners and auto insurance, life insurance, disability insurance, health insurance, and long-term

care insurance. Share how you have used insurance in your own plan.

Encourage retirement planning.

The earlier you start planning for retirement, the more funds you will accrue. Explain how Roth and traditional IRAs work. Talk to your children about company sponsored retirement plans like Roth and traditional 401(k) plans and how to take advantage of company match offers.

Develop financial relationships.

If you have a financial advisor, give your children the opportunity to meet with him or her on their own. This can give them the opportunity to ask questions they may be embarrassed to ask when you are there. Use your financial advisor as a resource to help explain any of these issues.

Don't take for granted that your children know the basics. Discussing these with them is a good way to see how much they already understand and it allows you to share your values in these important areas. 

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Michigan can be dark and dreary in the winter. The cold seeps into your bones and your mind, making the days a bit more “blah” than usual. And there are some days we find ourselves dreaming of running away to warmer climates.

For some people, the season change darkens their world to a greater extent, plunging them into a deep hole of depression. Commonly called Seasonal Affective Disorder, or SAD, it’s much more than the “winter blues.”

Winter is usually what people connect to having SAD, but any change of season that causes symptoms can also be SAD. Repeated symptoms at the same time of year for more than one year can be a sign that this is something to talk to your doctor about.

Typically triggered by the winter’s shorter days, the lack of sunshine and the change of seasons, SAD has several warning signs: Feeling down more days than not; a change in appetite; sleeping too much or too little; moodiness; sluggishness; trouble concentrating; and feelings of guilt, worthlessness or helplessness.

Extreme cases can harbor thoughts of suicide or self-harm. In these extreme cases, seek out professional help as soon as possible.

Women are more likely than men to have SAD, and younger people succumb more often than older adults. People with a family or personal history of SAD, bipolar disorder or depression have a greater risk of being affected.

There are various treatments, and the symptoms usually are temporary, ending when the sunshine returns in the spring or with the change of season.

If you are feeling more down than usual this winter and it’s interfering with your daily life, start out by talking to your doctor, who can evaluate you and rule out any physical reasons for your symptoms. Open conversation with your doctor can help figure out the issue – with or without medications.

Other treatments may work to lift the veil of darkness, including talk therapy and light-box treatment.

Talk therapy can help you develop coping skills and deal with seasonal stressors. Special light boxes mimic sunshine, making a 30-minute session with the box in the morning a way to start the day off right.

Some have found relief with a dawn simulator, which replaces an alarm clock and wakes you up gradually by increasing light in the room.

Other possible responses to overcoming the effects of SAD are Vitamin D treatment, aromatherapy, a daily routine, exercise, and mindfulness or relaxation.

Small environmental changes can make a huge difference - trying to get out into the sunshine, opening a window for fresh air, flooding your home with artificial light, or opening the drapes if it’s too cold outside.

Most importantly, take care of yourself in your own unique way. Whatever you find that helps you to control your symptoms in a healthy way is the right thing for you.

Eat healthy, exercise and do the things you enjoy. Stay busy, focus on the positives in your life and keep the thought: It will be better in the spring. ☺

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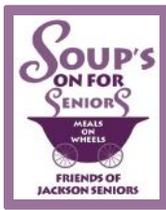
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