

SECONDARY CONNECTION

MIDDLE SCHOOL / HIGH SCHOOL CURRICULUM NEWSLETTER

AUGUST 2019 | ISSUE 12

Girls in Tech

**Using Podcasts As An
Instructional Tool**

Tricks Math Teachers Play

Academies in Focus

Kindling the Flame

**Are Questions More
Valuable than Answers**

Welcome Back

Are You Stuck in a Rut?



**BACK TO
School!**

RCSD Secondary Curriculum Department

Catherine Beasley

Middle / High School Social Studies Curriculum Specialist

Sheri Blankenship

Middle / High School District Literacy Coach

Jana Comer

Middle / High School English Language Arts Curriculum Specialist

Stephanie Cotnam

Middle / High Instructional Technologist

Angy Graham

Director of Secondary Curriculum, Instruction, and Professional Development

Montgomery Hinton

College and Career Ready Preparation Specialist

Meghan Hutchins

Administrative Assistant

Rhonda Kilgo

Middle / High School Mathematics Curriculum Specialist

Cassondra Vanderford

Director of Career Technical Education and Acceleration

Lorie Yates

Middle / High School Science Curriculum Specialist

Paula McClain

Fine Arts Teacher, Brandon High School

Contents

Girls in Tech | 4

Using Podcasts As An Instructional Tool | 6

Tricks Math Teachers Play | 10

Academies in Focus | 12

Kindling the Flame | 13

Are Questions More Valuable than Answers | 13

Welcome Back! | 17

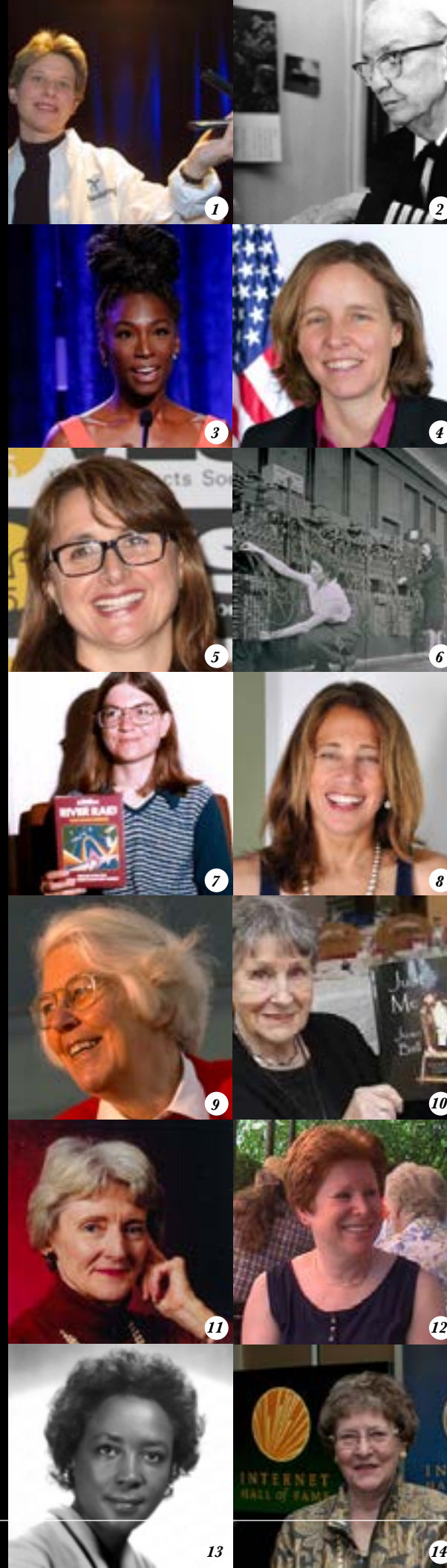
Are You Stuck in a Rut? | 18

Girls in Tech

by Stephanie Cotnam

STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math) related careers are on the rise across our country. Coding, information technology, software development, and information security are a few of the newer career options for our students. While researching tech career paths, I came across an interesting statistic repeated over and over. According to Bose (2018), even with all the growth in technical career paths, women only made up less than 20% of the current technology job market. In actuality, this is the lowest representation of females in technology since the 1980s. According to the Girl Scouts of America (2019), fewer girls are transitioning to careers in tech for two main reasons: there are not enough female mentors in the field and the lack of STEM experiences in school.

What are we doing as a district to help with these issues? Currently, our school district is an active member of CS4MS (Computer Science 4 Mississippi). CS4MS is a computer science program for students in elementary through high school that teaches students 21st Century skills. In addition to this, RCSD has Student Tech Teams (STT) for students in 7-12th grade. This program is unlike any other in the state. Students learn technical skills to help our district maintain the 1:1 initiative. In addition to this, many of our students earn their Apple Certification. Currently, forty-eight percent of all tech team students in RCSD are female! To help grow our program and increase the number of girls in tech, we have recently piloted Jr Tech Teams in the Northwest Zone and will be pushing out more Jr Tech Teams across the district. Events like National Coding Week and Girls Who Code have been offered to shed light on the need for females in tech. Over 82% of our Student Tech Teams are led by female Tech Team Leaders. These women are helping to mentor the next generation of female and male technicians.



Meet a couple of our RCSD girls in tech.



Brandi Bailey

...is a Junior at Northwest Rankin High School where she has been a Student Tech Team member for 3 years. She has also taken and passed the Apple Certified Mac Technician Exam.

Why did you want to join the Student Tech Team?

My teacher approached me and asked if I was interested. She told me that I had good teaching skills and was familiar with laptops and good at typing.

What are your future career or college plans?

I plan to major in business with a minor in art.

Has working at ITD helped you learn more? If so, explain.

Yes! ITD has taught me the way around the insides of laptops, likely causes of issues, and how to better myself in customer service.

Any recommendation to girls about joining tech team....

Go for it! There's nothing stopping you from joining, so if you think you want to, do it! In tech team, it doesn't matter your gender, you're an important asset to the team no matter what.



Lauren Barnett

...is a Senior at Florence High School. Lauren has been a Student Tech Team member for 5 years and is an Apple Certified Mac Technician.

Why did you want to participate on tech team?

My teacher approached me and said I had great potential and that it would be a great opportunity for me to do.

Future career or college plans:

Currently, I am undecided.

Has working at ITD helped you learn more? If so, explain.

ITD has helped my knowledge grow and expand in the world of technology. It has taught me not only the software side of computers, but hardware and also safety instructions.

Any recommendation to girls about joining tech team....

Do what makes you happy, and don't be afraid to step out of your comfort zone.

Lauren will continue to work with ITD during the 2019-2020 school year. Each year, ITD employs a current RCSD student that is Mac Certified. This allows students to earn school credit, experience, and earn a paycheck while enrolled full-time as a student. These two ladies have been tremendous assets to the RCSD Technology Department. Over the summer, they met with and trained Student Tech Team members from across the district. They helped to create a helpful video that is used to teach incoming 7th grade parents and students proper use of their new Macbooks. In addition to this, these ladies have repaired numerous Macbooks, which allowed school technicians to install all new access points in every classroom across the district.

Students like Lauren and Brandi are shining examples of how RCSD students, male or female, are getting opportunities to explore career opportunities within the tech industry. ■

Sources

Bose, S. (2018, December 26). Only 20% of Tech Jobs are Held by Women, How About at Your Business? (INFOGRAPHIC). Retrieved August 5, 2019, from <https://smallbiztrends.com/2018/03/women-in-technology-statistics.html>

(2019). New Girl Scout Study Shows What Girls Are Doing to Gain Traction as Digital Leaders. Retrieved from <https://www.girlscouts.org/en/press-room/press-room/news-releases/2019/new-girl-scout-study-shows-what-girls-are-doing-to-gain-traction-as-digital-leaders.html>

NOTEABLE WOMEN OF TECH 1: Donna Dubinsky 2: Grace Hopper 3: Angelica Ross 4: Megan Smith 5: Victoria Alonso 6: The Women of ENIAC 7: Carol Shaw 8: Susan Kare 9: Karen Spärck Jones 10: Joan Ball 11: Mary Allen Wilkes 12: Adele Goldberg 13: Annie Easley 14: Elizabeth "JPake" Feinler 15: Brandi Bailey 16: Lauren Barnett



In the early days of radio, families and individuals would gather around a transistor radio to listen to programs. Back then, this was how most people got their news as well as their entertainment. To me, podcasts are the modern version of radio programming. A podcast is a digital audio file made available for download. Some podcasts are about news and current events. Others are educational. Some are dramas where podcasters read short stories, or are serial programs centered around a theme. Just like families waiting to gather around the transistor radio to listen to the latest political speech or episode of War of the Worlds, podcast listeners subscribe so they have immediate access to the newest episodes through their cell phones, ipads or computers.

My own podcast library is diverse. Right now, I subscribe to [This is Criminal](#), [Lab Out Loud](#), [Sports Wars](#), [10 Minute Teacher Podcast](#), [Science Rules! By Bill Nye](#) and [This is Love](#). It was while listening to an episode of [This is Love](#) that I really got to thinking about how a podcast could be a perfect way to engage students in the content of our courses. In one particular episode, “One in a Million,” a scientist shares his quest to find a mate for an individual snail with a rare trait. Although briefly, it does discuss genetics

USING PODCASTS AS AN INSTRUCTIONAL TOOL

BY LORIE YATES

and the scientific research around this particular species of snail. I could easily envision how this podcast could be used - play the first part of the podcast, get students hooked on the story, stop the podcast, discuss the science, model with Punnett squares, then finish the podcast to hear the rest of the story.

Now, as I listen to various types of podcasts, I can’t help but listen with students and teachers in mind.

Podcasts are a great resource for the classroom. They are simple to use and easy to download to a computer or hand-held device. They are time-efficient. Podcasts allow you to absorb more information in a shorter period of time. They are a great tool for improving listening comprehension. A well-constructed podcast is informative, fast-paced and entertaining and captures the listener’s attention and imagination. Research has suggested that on average students can listen 2-3 grade levels above what they can read. This stimulates discussion, which in turn encourages creative thinking and open communication between teachers and students. And there’s one other great reason to love podcasts. They’re FREE!

Here are just a few ways you might use podcasts in your classroom:

USE LISTENWISE: LISTENING THAT SPARKS LEARNING.

Listenwise provides free podcasts and accompanying lesson plans. Each podcast includes the transcript (so students can read along as they listen), discussion and comprehension questions, teacher guide, graphic organizers and extra resources.

PODCAST WALK-ABOUT

The class is assigned a podcast. Take the class on a walk outside while students listen individually to the podcast on their phones or other device. Return to the classroom for a whole group discussion about their thoughts, what they learned, and questions they may still have. Or, have discussion questions posted on chart paper and do a silent conversation/gallery walk before a whole group discussion.

THE FLIPPED CLASSROOM

If you are trying to establish a flipped classroom model, podcasts are perfect. Students can listen to a podcast that discusses a specific topic at home, which will provide them with valuable content knowledge on the subject. Since students already have background knowledge on the subject, class time can be used for discussion, writing, labs, problem-based assignments, research, etc.

USE AS A HOOK

Student engagement is a critical component of a quality lesson. Play a section of a podcast at the beginning of a lesson as a “hook” to engage students in the topic. If you don’t have time to listen to the entire episode, encourage students to listen to the rest at home.

JIGSAW

In the same way you would divide up a chapter in the textbook or assign various articles to groups, you can assign groups podcast episodes to listen to and take notes on. Each group could be assigned the same episode to listen to and take notes on individually. Then, provide time for the group to discuss their episode by sharing the notes they took. Through the discussion, students will develop a deeper understanding of the content. Then, jigsaw, mixing the groups up so that the new group formed is now composed of students who listened to different episodes. Students share with one another the key takeaways from their episode. Encourage group members to ask questions and discuss.

USE THE PODCAST AS A UNIT OF STUDY

In his article, “How Podcasts Can Improve Literacy in the Classroom,” Michael Godsey describes how he used the podcast [Serial](#). As students listened to this highly engaging series, they analyzed data, studied maps, engaged in arguments around the available evidence, and routinely wrote in their journals. He was most impressed with how it improved their speaking skills as students would have conversations with other students, teachers, parents and administrators who were listening to the same podcast. He goes on to explain how he provides the transcripts of the podcast episodes so students can read along as they listen.

USE PODCAST EPISODES AS A SUPPLEMENTAL TEXT OPTION

During a unit of study, pair a podcast with an article or chapter from a textbook or novel.

GIVE FEEDBACK

Create a quick podcast to give your students specific feedback on a piece of writing, lab report, project, etc. Watch Sarah Brown Wessling at the Teaching Channel describe how she uses podcasts to give her students feedback. [Teaching Channel: Student Feedback Through Technology](#)

ROUND TABLE DISCUSSION

Small groups of 3 to 4 students participate in a round table podcast discussion based on the week’s classroom topic. One student can serve as a facilitator who will introduce the participants and the topic and direct the flow of the discussion. Another student could help create original

artwork for the podcast. If necessary, the teacher could provide the group with a focus or guiding question for the podcast. Students must research their topic and gather information prior to the discussion. You could assign this once a week; each week different groups of students will have an opportunity to create a podcast. All students will listen to each of the created podcasts.

MATH IN REAL LIFE

Students are challenged to find real-life applications for the math they are learning about in class. They can then describe their findings in a small group podcast. As an extension, students might interview people who actually use math in their professions.

POETRY

Poetry was meant to be read aloud and this is a chance for students to read their poetry in a way that is a little less nerve-wracking than reading it to an entire group. Students can add intro music or get into the idea of slam poetry. It’s a chance to edit, revise, and re-record.

CREATE YOUR OWN SERIES

Choose a title for a series. Examples of Series: Historical Figures in Mississippi History, The History of the Atomic Theory, Real Life Math, Notable Works of William Shakespeare. Assign pairs or small groups a topic/title/person on which to research and create one episode for the podcast series.

CREATE PODCASTS TO GO ALONG WITH POSTER/SLIDE PRESENTATIONS

In the NSTA article “Podcasting in the Science Classroom”,one techer describes how her students produce 3-4 minute podcasts to accompany a poster about a science concept. Each poster has a QR code on it that links to a student-made podcast offering more information about the topic. Students must research and write a script first. Once posters and podcasts are completed, they can be displayed in hallways, libraries, cafeteria or other places around the school to give students a chance to help educate a broader audience.

MODEL BEING A LIFE-LONG LEARNER BY POSTING WHAT YOU’RE LISTENING TO

Because of the connections a podcast makes, many of these shows have built a tremendous community around them, filled with people who have interests just like you and want to learn

more. You can post what you’re currently listening to (school and student appropriate material only), or you could choose episodes that are content-specific to post. Share your excitement with the students to try to encourage them to listen on their own. Get creative with how you share podcast episodes with your students. Give them options, such as, “If you are curious about today’s lesson and want to learn more, check out _____” and link them to an episode. You can even offer a small range of episodes and ask students to listen to a minimum number of them. Or give students more ownership and ask them to find and recommend course-related podcasts to their peers.

USE PODCASTS FOR YOUR OWN PROFESSIONAL GROWTH AND LEARNING

Podcasts are a great resource for learning more about the content you teach and pedagogy. I recently listened to an episode in Lab Out Loud on place-based education, and one episode from the 10 Minute Teacher Podcast on effective grouping strategies. Episodes are generally short enough to give you concise, quality information that expands your own learning. ■

REFERENCES:

[CommonSense.Org Article: How Podcasts Can Improve Literacy in the Classroom](#)

[ListenWise White Paper: Is Listening a Missing Link to Academic Language Acquisition in Today’s Secondary Schools?](#)

[Emerging Tech Article: 8 Ways Teachers Can Leverage Podcasts as a Learning Tool](#)

[NSTA Reports Blog: Podcasting in the Science Classroom](#)

[Education Week Article: Teachers Are Turning to Podcasts as an Instructional Tool](#)

[50 of the Best Podcasts for High Schoolers](#)

PODCAST SAMPLER

Podcasts For The Classroom

[This American Life](#)

This popular NPR radio show and podcast combines personal stories, journalism, and even stand-up comedy. Teachers can browse the Education Resources on the show’s website to learn how other teachers are using This American Life in the classroom..

[RadioLab](#)

This podcast delivers scientific ideas in a creative, innovative way. Teachers of science, math, ELA, and other subjects can use full episodes or segments as prompts to get kids thinking or to kick off a discussion.

[Presidential](#)

In 44 chronological episodes, the “Presidential” podcast takes listeners on an epic historical journey through the personality and legacy of each of the American presidents.

[Constitutional](#)

This series explores the Constitution and the people who framed and reframed it — revolutionaries, abolitionists, suffragists, teetotalers, protesters, justices, presidents – in the ongoing struggle to form a more perfect union across a vast and diverse land.

[Math Mutation](#)

A podcast that discusses fun, interesting, or just plain weird corners of mathematics.

[Education World Podcasts for Every Subject: English Language Arts](#)

[Education World Podcasts for Every Subject: Science](#)

[Book Club for Kids](#)

In every episode of this podcast, a different group of kids discusses a young adult book. Each episode also features a celebrity reader and an interview with the book’s author.

[Star Talk Radio](#)

Hosted by astrophysicist Neil deGrasse Tyson, “StarTalk Radio” is all about space.

Podcasts For Teachers

[The Cult of Pedagogy](#)

Hosted by a former secondary language arts teacher and instructional coach, this podcast takes a deep dive into practical strategies, tips, resources, and other topics important to teachers.

[The Creative Classroom](#)

Author John Spencer’s podcast releases a new episode every Monday with a thought-provoking 10-15 minute exploration of the creative process. The focus is on helping teachers and schools leaders inspired to boost creativity and spark innovation in any classroom.

[The Google Teacher Tribe Podcast](#)

Offers tips, tricks, and hacks for making the most of Google Classroom.

[The Book Love Foundation](#)

Penny Kittle and her guests talk about how to develop a love of reading in students. It is a show filled with information, inspiration, and, of course, book love.

[10 MInute Teacher Podcast](#)

This podcast is unique in that it offers five episodes a week, each focusing on different themes in education. You can tune in to Motivational Mondays, EdTech Tool Tuesdays, Wonderful Classroom Wednesdays, Thought Leader Thursdays, and Five Idea Fridays. Each episode features a short interview with a remarkable teacher. This show provides a lot of variety and freshness to keep you thinking about new angles in education.

[Truth for Teachers](#)

Hosted by Angela Watson. Each Sunday, a new short episode is released to speak life, encouragement, and truth into the minds and hearts of educators.

[The House of #EdTech](#)

A great resource if you want to learn about new apps, tech resources, and programs you can use in your classroom.

[Ted Talks Education](#)

Some of the world’s greatest educators, researchers, and community leaders share their stories and visions onstage ■

As with any material used in the classroom, always preview podcast episodes before sharing with students.

PEMDAS, FOIL, “Butterfly Method,” and the list goes on. It is likely that there are several acronyms or “tricks” you remember from math classes over the years. For example:

- » the answer always comes after the equal sign
- » the product of a number and 2 is always greater than the sum of a number and 2
- » when subtracting, the smaller number is subtracted from the larger
- » when solving an equation or inequality, the variable must be on the left.

However, what happens when these do not work anymore or are used to describe a strategy for working more than one type of problem? How can we be sure that the language of mathematics can be used and applied no matter what course level students are taking? Often, using tricks or “rules” will create a lack of conceptual understanding for students, and using these can cause misunderstandings. Although teachers may have used one or more “tricks” during their teaching careers, there are several that expire at various levels of mathematics.

According to Karp, Bush, and Dougherty (2014, 2015), many times, these tricks come from the over generalization of common strategies. Teachers will describe a strategy or define a term using “always” when what is actually meant is that this is true for the current math class, but may not be applicable later in the students' mathematical careers. It is often these over-generalizations which give the perception that math is “magic.” When students begin to struggle in mathematics, they may try to go back to tricks that they learned previously.

There are some rules which expire in late elementary and middle school while others expire in early high school (Karp, Bush, & Dougherty, 2014; Karp, et al, 2015). The following list describes a few “rules” or tricks - many of which are used at more than one level of mathematics (elementary, middle, and high school).

1. “When you multiply a number by ten, just add a zero to the end of the number.” This rule expires relatively early as it does not apply when students begin to multiply decimals. Without a clear, conceptual understanding, students may believe that $1.5 \times 10 = 1.50$ instead of 15 (2014).
2. “Addition and multiplication make numbers bigger.” This rule begins to cause students confusion when they begin multiplying fractions and decimals and when adding negative integers (2014).
3. “Multiply everything inside the parentheses by the number outside the parentheses.” This is a rule that implies an absolute and leads to confusion when students are asked to work problems where multiplication or division is the operation inside the parentheses (2014).

4. “PEMDAS: Please Excuse My Dear Aunt Sally.” This “rule” for order of operations is often misinterpreted by students. They believe that it is very rigid and think that the order always has to be parentheses first, multiplication before division, and addition before subtraction when there are actually situations where these do not hold true. Students often only think of parentheses when discussing grouping symbols and are therefore, confused when other grouping symbols are introduced in higher level mathematics. Karp, Bush, and Dougherty, as well as others, suggest using a hierarchical model with grouping & exponents first, followed by multiplication and/or division, and lastly, addition and/or subtraction (2014, 2015).

5. The “Butterfly Method” when working with fractions. Students are often taught this when they are comparing fractions, adding fractions (to help find the common denominator), and solving proportions. The name being used to describe different scenarios is confusing within itself. The other problem is that students do not gain a conceptual understanding of fractions (2015).

While teachers often use these tricks and mnemonics to help students remember strategies and vocabulary in math class, the impact on future math classes can be counterproductive. A better approach may be to align strategies, processes, and vocabulary both vertically and horizontally. When vocabulary and content is introduced, it is important to give students a strong conceptual understanding of these procedures as well as being intentional about the vocabulary that is used. This coherence will allow students to build on what was previously learned without having to learn something again and will allow for a much smoother transition between grades. ■

References

Karp, Karen S, Bush, Sarah B., and Dougherty, Barbara J. 2015. “12 Math Rules That Expire in the Middle Grades.” *Mathematics Teaching in the Middle School* 21 (November): 208-215.

Karp, Karen S, Bush, Sarah B., and Dougherty, Barbara J. 2014. “13 Rules That Expire.” *Teaching Children Mathematics* 21 (August): 18-25.

Tricks

Math Teachers Play
by Rhonda Kilgo

Academies In Focus

Cassondra Vanderford

RCSD Career and Technical Education welcomes five new academies for the 2019-2020 school year. Academies allow students to follow a program of study centered around a broad career field. Students experience integrated academic and career technical curriculums, dual credit, project-based learning, student organizations, and work-based learning. CTE programs such as academies can increase student attendance, high school graduation, postsecondary enrollment, and average annual earnings (Hemelt & Lenard, 2018). Academies engage students in learning and allow them to gain insight to a future they wouldn't see otherwise. New academies include Florence High School, Broadcast Journalism Academy; Northwest Rankin High School, Teacher Academy and Convergent Media Academy; Pisgah High School, Health Science Academy; and Richland High School, Ag Science Academy. This will bring the total academies available district wide to 30. In addition, Brandon High School was one of 12 high schools selected to pilot the C Spire Software Development Pathway as part of its Computer Science Academy. This academy

pathway will allow students to take dual credit computer science courses their junior and senior year of high school and transition into the Hinds Community College Coding-Software Development Program. Current academies by school include:

Brandon High School

- » *Ag Science*
- » *Business*
- » *Computer Science & CSpire Coding*
- » *Culinary*
- » *Digital Media*
- » *Graphic Design*
- » *Health Science*
- » *Sports Medicine*
- » *Teacher*

Florence High School

- » *Ag Science*
- » *Broadcast Journalism*
- » *Business*
- » *Sports Medicine*

McLaurin High School

- » *Ag Science*
- » *Teacher*

Northwest Rankin High School

- » *Convergent Media*
- » *Engineering*
- » *Health Science*
- » *Sports Medicine*
- » *Teacher*

Pelahatchie High School

- » *Ag Science*
- » *Industrial Maintenance*

Pisgah High School

- » *Ag Science*
- » *Health Science*

Puckett High School

- » *Ag Science*
- » *Business*
- » *Educational Leadership*

Richland High School

- » *Ag Science*
- » *Business*
- » *Firefighter*
- » *Teacher*

Welcome back to another year of the most fulfilling profession there is. As the ebb and flow of the educational realm goes on as usual, one thing that remains constant is the capability we have to pour into others and make a difference in the lives of our students and colleagues. While this game changing mentality may look very different for everyone, the purpose shares a common goal.

A couple thousand years ago Socrates offered some pretty solid insight that still proves true today--"Education is the kindling of a flame, not the filling of a vessel." As we interact with our students, it is crucial that we are intentionally focused on igniting a spark of passion for learning in order for them to later blaze a path into the limitless opportunities they may encounter. By teaching them how to think and not what to think, we are kindling a flame, and not simply filling a vessel.

Additionally, as colleagues, we have to not only model for our students but each other as well, the art of having a growth mindset. Being successful is wonderful and should certainly be celebrated, but how can we be better than we were the day before? Failure is inevitable, but not irrevocable. Every time we try something new or outside our comfort zone, there is a risk that we may fail, but we did succeed at trying. While we may not have mastered the attempt yet, we can ask ourselves what we can do differently the next time to produce a more productive outcome. In life sometimes you win, sometimes you learn; either result will yield success if viewed with a growth mindset.

It's not a surprise that life is hard for a variety of reasons, so it is up to us to work together to inspire, encourage, and serve one another to make it a little less difficult. As passionate, hardworking individuals dedicated to our profession, we should strive to make each other better. If we can't find the light-we must be the light.

As we delve into another school year, I challenge each of us to be deliberate in our endeavor to be better than we were the day before, whatever that may look like for you. As iron sharpens iron, so one person sharpens another.

This year in the ELA world, there are a lot of new aspects to be celebrated in our continuation of the tradition of excellence.

NEW Pacing Guides (RCSD ELA Pacing Guides)

Over the summer, pacing guides for 7-12 ELA were revised. The revisions were made in an effort to intentionally focus on manageable chunks of standards -and for tested areas- closer alignment with benchmarks to provide more accurate data points.

NEW English Language Arts Resources Course in Canvas

I absolutely love sharing resources with you all; however, receiving massive amounts of emails can sometimes be a bit daunting. To alleviate the hassle of searching through an endless amount of emails, I have created a course in Canvas, ELA Resources. In this course, I have created modules of staple materials such as pacing guides, learning targets, standards, etc. for each grade level. I have also created a module dedicated to writing resources and will upload new materials and resources as they become available. If you have any suggestions or information you would like for me to share, please let me know!

NEW Professional Development Focus- Standards-Based Item Writing

This year the professional development focus will be on standards-based item writing for ELA teachers in grades 7-10. Partnering with the Kirkland Group, we will be able to refine our item writing skills, as well as

has graciously purchased Newsela Pro which allows access to so many more fantastic features. Check out [Newsela](#) to see how you could utilize the new benefits of this resource in your instruction.

EDULASTIC

EduLastic is an online interactive assessment platform that allows teachers to create their own assessments in common standardized test formats or choose items from an assessment library. The program also monitors student achievement in real time to allow instant feedback for both the student and the teacher.

RCSD Social Media

Last year the curriculum specialists began showcasing teachers and students in action in different content areas across our district. While this effort was successful, we know that we can do an even better job promoting all the wonderful learning opportunities we are providing our students in the Rankin County School District! With that being said, please take a few snapshots of shareable moments to be posted to the RCSD social media outlets. You can send them along with a brief description via email or text to jana.comer@rcsd.ms or 662.610.4424. ■

#traditionofexcellence | #RCSDg2b

Noteworthy Professional Reading

[The Quickwrite Handbook: 100 Mentor Texts to Jumpstart Your Students' Thinking and Writing by Linda Rief](#)

[Why They Can't Write: Killing the Five-Paragraph Essay and Other Necessities by John Warner](#)

[Writing with Mentors:](#)

[How to Reach Every Writer in the Room Using Current, Engaging Mentor Texts by Allison Marchetti and Rebekah O'Dell](#)

[For White Folks Who Teach in the Hood...and the Rest of Y'all Too: Reality Pedagogy and Urban Education by Christopher Emdin](#)

KINDLING THE FLAME

by Jana Comer

create a district item bank for student assessments. As these items are created, they will be vetted for clarity and rigor, then uploaded into our new online assessment platform, Edulastic.

NEW Resources

NEWSELA

Many of you are currently using the free version of Newsela in your classrooms, but this year the district

ARE QUESTIONS MORE VALUABLE THAN ANSWERS

by Catherine Beasley

The author of *A More Beautiful Question* states, that “questioning enables us to organize our thinking around what we don’t know.” Using this theory, as teachers, we can help students construct their own learning around topics within our content areas. But first, we need to help students learn how to ask questions.

Research shows that a child asks about forty thousand questions between the ages of two and five. WOW! If you’ve ever been around a child that is easy to believe! Have you ever stopped to think about why they stop asking questions when they get to us?

By using an easy classroom strategy called the Question Formulation Technique (QFT) We can start to help students develop a love of inquiry and, maybe, help them learn a little content, too!

WHAT IS INQUIRY?

Inquiry is, simply, seeking knowledge or information. By definition, an act of asking for information. Too often we do not allow students an opportunity to “ask for information.” If we can get them ask more questions, we can unlock background knowledge, misconceptions in their content understanding, and find out what they may be interested in learning!

RESOURCES FOR GETTING STARTED WITH INQUIRY

[C3 Inquiries](#)
[Geoinquiries](#)
[HIstorical Inquiries](#)

Check out this [VIDEO](#) on Inquiry Based Instruction

THE QUESTION FORMULATION TECHNIQUE

The Question Formulation Technique is a step-by-step protocol or classroom strategy, developed to help students design and produce their own questions around a specific content area or focus.

Using this strategy allows students an opportunity to practice

talking and questioning within the content area. By developing questions around a specific focus, students are able to take greater ownership in their own learning of the content.

WHAT HAPPENS?

- **Students are producing their own questions.**
- **Students begin to improve their own questions.**
- **Students strategize on how to use their own questions.**

THE PROCESS

Decide on your Question Focus

- **What should this do?**
 - *Generate Interest in a topic*
 - *Stimulate new thinking around a topic*
 - *Introduce a topic or content*
 - *Set a learning agenda*
 - *Deepen comprehension and understanding*
 - *Formatively assess*
 - *Sumatively assess*

The question focus is designed around your curriculum content and with a specific end goal in mind. The QFocus should be brief and promote new lines of thinking. When designing your focus, think about what you want students to do with the questions they create.

Click [HERE](#) to see a guide for planning a Question Focus

Students Produce Questions

- **Give them “THE RULES”**
 - *Ask as many questions as you can.*
 - *Don’t stop to discuss, judge or answer*
 - *Write down every question exactly as it is stated*
 - *Change any statement into a question.*
- **Divide students into small groups**
- **Ask groups to identify a note-taker**
- **Remind student groups to number their questions**
- **Discuss the QFocus with the class**
- **Give a time frame for working and let students go!**

As a classroom strategy, this is something that develops with multiple encounters and gets better with practice. You may have to work through some kinks at first, but keep at it! Always give students the rules ... even the 27th time students work through this process!

Students then work to Improve Questions

- **After time is up, have students categorize questions as open-ended or closed-ended**
 - *Open Ended Questions can be answered with a “yes” or “no or with a one-word answer*
- **Closed-Ended Questions require more of an explanation**
 - *Students should mark each question with a “C” or an “O” for this part of the activity.*

As students practice with this technique, their skill level will grow. In the beginning, it may be important for you to help students by discussing the value of each type of question ... there is purpose in both! Always make sure you keep you QFocus in mind. In the beginning, you could have students practice changing questions from one type to the other.

Students Prioritize Questions around your FOCUS

- **Select your top questions, based on the QFocus**
 - *Students would determine the top questions based on the criteria you have set - what will they be doing with these questions? You could consider these examples*
 - ❓ Which ones are most interesting to you?
 - ❓ Which ones will help you design your research project?
 - ❓ Which ones help you solve a problem?
- **Mark the most important questions with an “X”**

All through this process, you should guide students in working through rationale and keeping their focus in mind. This is content specific and will not work without your guidance.

Students Share Out

- **You could ask for many different things here, depending on where you want the lesson to go. Examples would include -**
 - *The questions they changed from open to closed*
 - *Reasons for changing*
 - *The groups priority questions*
 - *Reasons for making those the priority questions*

This process helps students to verbalize their thinking. When you listen to this in action, other students begin to hear examples of good questions and can help further their thinking around a specific content area.

Next Steps

- **Students use their questions for the completion of**

the activity.

- *Independent projects*
- *Topic/Content-Specific Research*
- *Experiments*
- *Presentations*
- *Interviews*
- *Classroom debates*
- *Socratic seminars*

Reflection

- **Ask students to think about the work they have done and what they learned**
 - *What have you learned?*
 - *How did you learn this?*
 - *What is the value of what you learned?*
 - *How can you use what you have learned?*

Reflection is an important component in helping students understand what they learned. This allows time for students to digest the content in a non-threatening way and helps to develop life-long learners.

The QFT is a great strategy to help students think and process material before and after teaching. Try it out in your classroom and see what your students can do! I would love to see this in action. Feel free to shoot me your trials and tribulations as we help our students develop a more inquiry based mindset! ■

RESOURCES TO CHECK OUT

Using the QFT in Science [Video](#)

Using the QFT in Social Studies [Video](#)

[Interview](#) with Dan Rothstein, author of *Make Just One Change*

[Article: Making Questions Flow](#)

QUESTION FORMULATION TECHNIQUE

The Question Formulation Technique (QFT) is a simple step-by-step, rigorous process that facilitates the asking of many questions.



The QFT was developed by Dan Rothstein and Luz Santana at RQI and detailed in their book *Make Just One Change: Teach Students to Ask Their Own Questions*, 2011 Harvard Education Press. <http://www.hepg.org/hepg/book/144/MakeJustOneChange>

RQI Right Question Institute

Professional Development
teachthought
WE GROW TEACHERS

Welcome

by Montgomery Hinton

Back!

Yes, the 2019-2020 school year is upon us. What does that mean? Rankin County School District is prepared to offer even MORE test preparation for you!

First, ACT is in the process of offering free ACT prep through Alexa. You can pick your own tunes from Alexa and then have Alexa give you ACT help as you get ready to go to school. For information on that, read the article [here](#). Alexa will help guide you through the registration process and then prep you all the way up to test day!

Second, if you are looking for free ACT help from ACT, use [ACT Academy](#). It is personalized practice and it's free!

Third, if you are needing math help, head on over to your student apps. Locate Algebra Nation; then you can review specific content on each math class, or you can select SAT math prep. Since the SAT and ACT share a

major portion of math concepts, practicing for SAT math is very similar to ACT math. Additionally, in your student apps, you will find Method Test Prep which will provide ACT and SAT content instruction.

Fourth, with the launch of the new and improved county website, the ACT resource pages have new URLs. The general ACT resource page can be found [here](#). The ACT English resource page can be found [here](#). The ACT math resource page can be found [here](#). The ACT reading resource page can be found [here](#). The ACT science resource page can be found [here](#).

The national testing dates are located in this [link](#)! Don't let a chance to qualify for dual credit or gain valuable college and career readiness pass you by; the link also contains testing center codes for our local schools and a way to find any testing center!

The PSAT is October 16, 2019. It is the ONLY test that determines national merit semi-finalist and only counts in a student's junior year. I highly recommend that any junior take it; also, any sophomore with those aspirations should take it as practice. There is a resource page for PSAT located [here](#)!

Have no idea what it means to be college ready? Click [here](#) for an easy explanation. What about career ready? Click [here](#) for an explanation for a layout of what that looks like! Also, you should consider taking the ACT Workkeys test as many of Mississippi's manufacturing jobs such as Continental Tire in Clinton, MS, are now requiring this certification. More information on the Workkeys test can be found [here](#)!

Have any questions about test prep? Feel free to email [me](#)! I hope that this is the GREATest year ever for you! ■

Are You Stuck

in a Rut?

by Paula McClain

The beginning of school is the PERFECT time to evaluate your approach to education! For those who have been teaching a while, things can get stagnant and stale. (New teachers have an advantage here because everything is new, possibly overwhelming, but new.)

We all live in Mississippi, so here's an analogy I think you should be able to connect with: stagnant pond water is stinky and you don't want to go in it.

The last thing we want, any of us, is to have a classroom environment where students do not want to go. We don't want them dreading coming to our classes. In fact, we want the exact opposite. We want our class to be that class that every kiddo wants to be in.

Now, for a moment, think back to the end of the last school year, and how you felt.

Were you tired?

Did you feel as though you were just "going through the motions"?

Was your heart "just not in it"?

Speaking honestly here, after teaching for twenty years, I've been there on multiple occasions. It's not that you hate what you do, but you get tired. You can get to the point where you feel like it's an uphill battle; you may think about other occupations where they do not have to deal with the struggles you do in the educational field.

If these things sound familiar to you, you may be in a rut.

The definition of a rut" (according to Google) is this: "a habit or pattern of behavior that has become dull and unproductive but is hard to change. "

Think about that for a moment..."dull and unproductive". That doesn't, or shouldn't sound, like our classrooms at all! In order for your class to be meaningful it must be engaging and producing results!

We are all familiar with the Ron Clark Academy. Think back to that first time you saw a video about that school. You probably thought, WOW - now that is an exciting place to be. Teachers standing on desks, students dancing to the beat of a song, and people sliding down a slide inside a school! I mean, what student wouldn't want to be there?! That's the way we want students to view each and every class they attend.

According to hopeineducation.com,

- *"The top 5 signs your teaching is stuck in a rut are:*
- *You reuse all your lessons from previous years without any revision.*
- *Students and families know the drill before the year starts because you are known for doing certain projects.*
- *If you hear yourself saying, "We always do it that way" or "This is how we do it every year" you just might be stuck.*
- *Change is not your thing*
- *Your desk position and classroom configuration stays the same all year."*

Why does it matter?

If you are state tested class you have to cover the same material every year...right?! If you have had students be successful in the way you have been teaching it, why change?

The reasons are many, but I will list a few:

- *If you are in a rut, your lessons are not as engaging as they need to be.*
- *If you are in a rut, your students will be going through the motions just like you; not learning much.*
- *If you are in a rut, your classroom becomes a time for (let's be honest here) babysitting rather than a time for students to flourish.*
- *If you are in a rut, you are more likely to want to change campuses or leave the educational field altogether.*

What do you do? How do you get out?

Simple, start at the beginning.

Treat this year like it is your first year teaching.

Look at what you must cover with fresh eyes. Ignore what you have done in the past, with every single lesson. Begin asking other teachers what they do to teach that skill, search on the internet (you have it right there on your phone), and seek out resources. Yes, this will take time, but it's worth it! Even if all you do is revamp a portion of your lesson, it's totally worth it in the end!

Every time that I have been in "a kind of funk" (or rut), and I have made time to revamp my lessons I have noticed something. New lessons (that teach the same skills as before) excite and energize me and my whole attitude.

Your attitude towards teaching, regardless of what you think, affects everyone. When you are energized about what you are doing and how you are doing it, that feeling spreads like a wildfire.

When you are excited about the lesson you are teaching tomorrow, your energy rubs off on: your students, your team members, the faculty members you pass in the hall, the janitors and cafeteria staff you interact with, the maintenance personnel you meet, your family at home, and on and on!

The definition of a rut was right, it is "hard to change"...but not impossible. It takes effort and time on your part. It isn't going to be easy, especially if you've been teaching for a while, but it is so worth it! What's stopping you?

Get out there and revamp, revitalize, and renew your lessons, your class, and yourself! And, make this year the best year you have EVER had! ■



Brandon
Florence
McLaurin
Northwest
Pelahatchie
Pisgah
Puckett
Richland

**Rankin
County
School
District**

TRADITION OF EXCELLENCE