

SECONDARY CONNECTION

Middle School / High School Curriculum Newsletter

March 2021 | Issue 17

RCSD 2020 / 2021

Teacher of the Year

Kalea White!



CONNECT

RCSD Secondary Curriculum Department

Erin Barious & Stephanie Cotnam
Middle / High Instructional Technologists

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

Angy Graham
Director of Secondary Curriculum, Instruction, and Professional Development

Montgomery Hinton
College and Career Ready Preparation Specialist

Meghan Hutchins
Administrative Assistant

Dr. Rhonda Kilgo & Jasmine Rosemon
Middle / High School Mathematics Curriculum Specialists

Cassandra Vanderford
Director of Career Technical Education and Acceleration

Dr. LaVonda White
*Instructional Data Specialist,
Middle / High Distance Learning Liason*

Lorie Yates
Middle / High School Science Curriculum Specialist

Paula McClain
Fine Arts Teacher, Brandon High School



**Rankin County
School District**

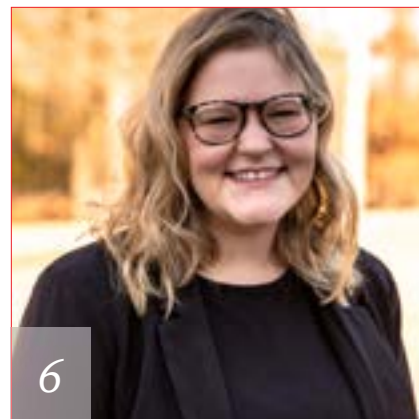
TRADITION OF EXCELLENCE



4 | A NEW YEAR, A NEW YOU... TECH IN 2021

So...now that you are techie, what is next? One thing we can do is to continue trying to grow in our use of instructional technology. You may need to ask yourself if you are just using tech to survive the current situation, or if you are using tech to increase engagement and build instructional practices in your room.

by Erin Barious & Stephanie Cotnam



6 | TEACHER OF THE YEAR KALEA WHITE

Our 2020-2021 Rankin County School District Teacher of the Year has lived into her dreams of pursuing a path in the field of education and pouring into students the same way she was when she was in their shoes. Busy schedules aside, we had the privilege to sit down with Mrs. White and ask her a few questions regarding work and life outside of her career.

by Jana Comer



8 | TIME FOR REFLECTION

Much like the New Year, the end of the school year provides us some time to resolve to change things in our classroom or try them differently next year or, sometimes, not at all. While this year has been so hectic and stressful, there have been so many good things that have happened - both personally and professionally for many of you. How can we use this time to reflect on what is worth taking into the new year?

by Catherine Beasley



9 | IS COLLEGE A WORTHY INVESTMENT?

The answer to the question of if college is a worthy investment is a resounding "Yes." Holders of college degrees have salaries who weekly earn as much as 80% more than their high school equivalent selves. So students need to start preparing now to invest in their future.

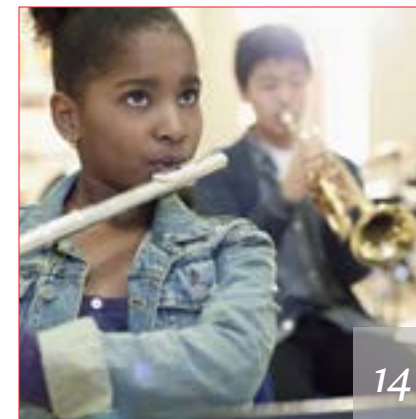
by Montgomery Hinton



14 | A DUTY TO STRIVE

In this article, Lorie Yates revisits our district's Core Values. She provides some links to several resources. As you read, reflect on some of what we have learned this past year, but also use our core values as reminders of what it takes for us to "continue a tradition of excellence by providing a world-class education that empowers all to grow through curiosity, discovery and learning."

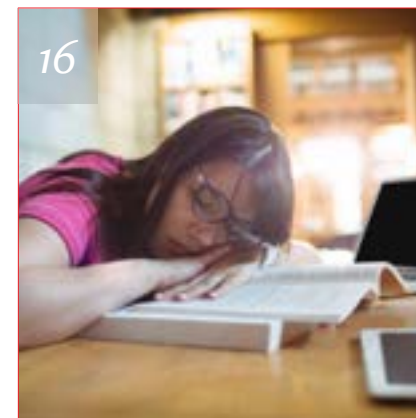
by Lorie Yates



14 | DON'T FORGET TO LOOK DOWN

Band programs usually do not EVER have a lack of students, they are usually quite a tight knit group of people, students are happy and productive, Directors are true leaders, and they usually have a track record of improving year to year. So, what is it that makes them so successful? What are Band programs doing nationwide that the rest of the educational world could use as a model? EASY...THEY...LOOK...DOWN.

by Paula McClain



16 | COMBATING STUDENT APATHY IN THE MATH CLASSROOM WITH ENGAGEMENT & EMPOWERMENT

Providing opportunities for productive struggle in attempts to find, make sense of, and solve real world problems with mathematics not only engages students in the learning process but also empowers them to develop a deeper understanding of mathematical concepts and skills needed for future success both inside and outside of school.

by Dr. Rhonda Kilgo & Jasmine Rosemon



While driving in the car, I heard the Michael Buble remake of “Feeling Good.” For those non-Buble fans, the song’s chorus goes,

It’s a new dawn | It’s a new day | It’s a new life | For me | And I’m feeling good | I’m feeling good
—Buble, *Feeling Good*, 2005

With everything going on, it really is a new dawn. Life seems very different today than it did this past March. I had to ask myself if I was really feeling good with this new dawn? All the twists and turns have been never ending, but through it all there has been some good. More time with family, a Spring Break that never ended, and a new mindset to take advantage of every moment in life are just a few of the things I have enjoyed through this pandemic. Over the past 9 months, teachers in Rankin County have embraced this new dawn and risen to the occasion. Switching from in-person to virtual on the fly, learning to zoom overnight, and embracing a higher level of tech integration in the moment are just a few of the things that you have done.

So...now that you are techie, what is next? One thing we can do is to continue trying to grow in our use of instructional technology. You may need to ask yourself if you are just using tech to survive the current situation, or if you are using tech to increase engagement and build instructional practices in your room. *Don’t Ditch that Tech* by Matt Miller challenges teachers to examine where they are as a technology integrator. Once we identify the type of technology

integration occurring in our classroom, we can set new goals to grow.

Types of Technology Integrators

Matt Miller has 5 types of technology integration teachers. Each kind of teacher integrates technology in a different way, which impacts the level of student engagement and participation. Let’s take a look at each type of teacher to see where you may fall.

- Pilot:* A student is along for the ride while using technology.
- Museum Exhibitor:* Interactively curates the “same” technology options for the students.
- Restaurant Owner:* Lets the students take a bite of a variety of pre-planned tech activities!
- Council Member:* Creates a partnership with students’ input on technology.
- Creative Art Coach:* Allows the students and teachers to partner with technology choice in the classroom increasing engagement and student centered focus.

Growth is imperative throughout our life and career. While uncomfortable at times, growth sheds light on things that need to be left in the past and areas that can be improved upon creating a more effective path. So, if this pandemic turned you into a technology pilot overnight, what is the

next step? Look at Matt Miller’s continuum of tech integrators and move to the next level. For a pilot, this would mean trying to become a museum exhibitor. What can you bring from this type of tech integration that will foster differentiation and options in the classroom. This means you move

from just using Canvas to share and gather assignments to adding in tech tools that offer more possibilities and increase engagements for your students. Take a look at this chart for some examples of tech use at each level.

Tech Tool		How to Incorporate	
Pilot	Google Docs	Use the comment feature to give live feedback as students work	<div>Teacher Centered</div> <div>Student Centered</div>
Museum Exhibitor	Nearpod (free version)	Guide students through a topic while inserting interactive elements that help to formatively assess understanding	
Restaurant Owner	Flipgrid	Have students explain work further, correct missed conceptions, or have asynchronous discussions with classmates	
Councilmember	Google Slides Google Drawings Jamboard	Students work in groups with a platform of choice to create infographics	
Creative Art Coach	iMovie	Students create movies, discussions, or newscasts using various tech skills in conjunction with classroom learning. They incorporate another tech tool (Google Slides, Jamboard, etc.) to share work with others	

Interaction, reflection, empowerment, and differentiation are four words that will help you as you make your progression through the levels of tech integration. Seek to create activities that allow your students to collaborate and interact. Remember the old adage, “A sage on the stage or a guide on the side.” Offer students time in the classroom where they are leading the way in their learning while we are there to helpfully guide. Use your newfound tech tools to offer feedback and time for student reflection. Students can learn how to progress monitor for themselves and can leverage tech tools to help them map out next steps. Additionally, empower all students by giving them choices. We don’t all learn the same way. Offering choice boards and varied ways to share knowledge can allow students to invest

in their learning. Don’t forget this will not happen overnight! Pick one thing and try it.
Curious to know what type of tech integrator you are? Check out this online quiz from Matt Miller at dontditchtech.com/survey. Fill out the form and you will receive your level of technology integration. Once you know, you can determine what steps you need to take to move up a level. Leveling up will bring slight changes to your classroom tech integration that will help to increase student engagement and creation. If you are interested in learning more about this, please contact us.

Canvas is now offering Google Assignments. Check out this new feature.

Have you backed up your Mac? New computers are coming in May...back up today!

Don’t forget the RCSD Technology Canvas course for great tech help guides.

Remember to have your students restart their computers daily!

KALEA'S FAVORITES

BOOK: *Pride & Prejudice* (classic); *The Hate U Give* (contemporary)

SONG: anything from *Hamilton*

MOVIE: *You've Got Mail* (all day, every day)

DRINK: Peppermint hot tea (didn't I tell you I wasn't interested?)

FOOD: hands down, my Meme's chicken salad and biscuits [seriously, you've got to put this in because she works for RCSD and might lose her marbles if she reads this]

2020-2021 Rankin County School District Teacher of the Year Kalea White, Northwest Rankin High School

by Jana Comer

Kalea graduated from Mississippi College in May of 2011 and is currently in her tenth year at NWRHS. She is married to Kevin White, and they have the sweetest furchild, Walt. They attend Fondren Church, and Kevin regularly preaches youth events at other churches in our area.

Even as a young girl, decorating her aunt's elementary school classroom each year, Kalea White knew she wanted to be a teacher. Her future in education was later solidified throughout her high school experience by multiple teachers who fostered in her a life-long love of reading and learning. Now as a tenth year educator at Northwest Rankin Highschool, our 2020-2021 Rankin County School District Teacher of the Year has lived into her dreams of pursuing a path in the field of education and pouring into students the same way she was when she was in their shoes. Busy schedules aside, we had the privilege to sit down with Mrs. White and ask her a few questions regarding work and life outside of her career.

JC: What's your most memorable moment as a teacher?

KW: Although not one specific moment, my favorite parts of teaching are class discussions. I am continually amazed at the way my students respond to topics and questions we explore. They are intuitive and wise and such critical thinkers. I always leave a discussion with new ideas and knowledge.

What's the biggest reward of your job?

KW: The biggest reward of my job is the "ah-ha" moment. I love being able to watch a student master a skill, become a better writer, find a book they love, or change their thought process. It's empowering as a teacher to be a part of the learning process and see it unfold.

JC: What is a piece of advice you wish someone would have told you before you started this career?

KW: Be nice to your students. I remember being told to "not smile until after Christmas." That's the advice I'm glad I never took. Developing relationships with students is integral to the learning process. We all need someone to be kind to us every single day.

JC: How have you kept a positive mindset while being on the frontlines during the pandemic?

KW: I'm not going to lie and say it's been easy. The resilience of our students has helped. In the midst of everything, learning is still occurring every day, and that helps to reassure my purpose. My sweet mother also made me a jar full of affirmations, and I read those each day. :)

JC: What is the most interesting thing about you?

KW: HA! I...um.... I don't even think I'm that interesting.

JC: If you could choose one song to play every time you walked into a room for the rest of your life, what song would you choose and why?

KW: Hail to the Chief.

I kid. I kid.

The Friends theme song ("I'll Be There for You") because I would have so much fun doing all the handclaps. But also because it's just such a reminder that we don't do anything alone-there's always a team of cheerleaders urging us along.

JC: What is your most embarrassing "teacher" moment?

KW: I am one big chaotic awkward moment, but at the beginning of this year, I taught the first 20 minutes of a class while accidentally on mute....so I then had to start all over again so my CHOICE students could hear me. Ha!

JC: Teachers LOVE school supplies! What are some of your "must-haves"?

KW: I've recently become obsessed with the Sharpie S Gel pens, but my true love is probably a black Flair pen. I can't function without my planner or sticky notes (lined and neutrally colored, please). I also have a deep fondness for the RCSD notebooks and have been known to beg for extras.

JC: If you could trade places with any other person for a week, famous or not, living or dead, real or fictional, with whom would it be?

KW: I cannot pick just one. Sorry for breaking the rules.

Real life- Ruth Bader Ginsburg
Fictional- Scout Finch

This was really difficult. :)

JC: Any additional information you would like to add or share with teachers across our district

KW: Soak up every opportunity you get to learn. I have learned so much about being a good teacher from watching good teachers. The PD opportunities our district provides are innumerable and so worthwhile. We work for the best district and are so supported-we cannot take that for granted. And on the flip side of that, take time for yourself. There is no way we can adequately pour out enough for our students if we do not pour into ourselves. It's so important to close our computer lids and go for a walk, pick up a book, cook a good meal; we cannot be a shell of ourselves and be a good teacher.

Time for Reflection

by Catherine Beasley

Looking forward to another school year. Much like the New Year, the end of the school year provides us some time to resolve to change things in our classroom or try them differently next year or, sometimes, not at all. While this year has been so hectic and stressful, there have been so many good things that have happened-both personally and professionally for many of you. How can we use this time to reflect on what is worth taking into the new year?

One of the remarkable aspects about working in education is that we get an opportunity to reset on a regular basis. This profession offers the chance to reflect on ourselves and our practices daily! We get opportunities to evaluate those lesson plans that were poured over and thoughtfully created. We get a chance to see what worked or did not work for our students. We can change up plans based on student and peer feedback. We have the ability to discuss with students and colleagues to get a deeper understanding for better context. We get to read, research, and find new ideas and more creative ways to engage in our content. We can create a variety of opportunities for our students to experience content we love on a daily basis.

The end of the school year gives us an opportunity to reflect. A time to take in the bad with the good. While 2020 brought hardship and loss, instability and unpredictability, it also brought some silver linings! We have learned. We have adapted. We have grown more than we ever thought we could. We have found that we can do so much more than we ever thought possible, both inside and outside of the classroom.

Many times, the end of the year brings that rush of excitement for sunshine, summer break, and time off. We are consumed with testing schedules and finishing out the school year, cleaning out our classrooms and moving our students to the next level. When we finally get some time to sit down and plan for the next year, it is usually for those concepts we teach in the fall.

Right now, I challenge you to take some time to reflect and process this past year! Use this time to write down notes or jot down ideas that you want to explore within these Spring semester units. Challenge yourself to reflect on the learning that took place in your classroom and the experiences around your content. The questions in the opposite column can help you think through some reflection topics -

What seemed to go smoothly this semester in teaching your content?

What seemed to be disconnected this semester within your content standards?

How did your students teach you this year? How can you create opportunities for your students to teach you in upcoming years?

What can you do to make your content more engaging for students?

What would you like to learn more about around your content?

What opportunities can you provide for your students to create more questions around your content?

"The ability to reflect is crucial for understanding and processing. It is also essential to our ability to move forward and create something from what we have learned."

—George Couros

Innovate Inside the Box

Is College a Worthy Investment?

by Montgomery Hinton

So, how does one increase test scores? Everyone wants to know the answer to this question. With average cost of college tuition increasing at an average rate of 25% over the last ten years according to this [article](#) on CNBC.com, parents should be alarmed and acknowledge the need for preparation. Part of the reason lies within the real lingering cost of the economic downturn in 2008. Mississippi ranks 6th nationally in decrease of student funding during this time, resulting in colleges increase tuition to offset this decrease in the revenue stream. Looking back another ten years finds even more disheartening information. According to this [report](#) in US News, in-state tuition and fees have increased 212% over this time period. To put this in perspective, the starting [salary](#) of a school teacher in Mississippi in 2000 was \$23,040.00 according to National Center for Education Statistics. In 2020, according to the Mississippi Department of Education, the starting salary of a school teacher in Mississippi is currently \$35,890.00, an increase of 156%. If one looks at national statistics of job earnings over a similar range of time, one will find that in 2000 a typical [wage-earner](#) made \$32,154.82 compared to a typical [wage-earner](#) in 2019 made \$54,099.99. This is an increase of 168%. So, both national and Mississippi teacher wage increases lag behind the increase in cost of tuition.

How does this compare to the cost of inflation? According to this [article](#) in mybudget360.com, housing is up 196% over the same time period. However, the cost of a Big Mac is only up 126%. This leads us into the biggest question.

So, the question becomes is college a worthy investment? The CNBC article presents data that points to the fact that, in fact, "Yes" is the resounding answer. Holders of college degrees have salaries who weekly earn as much as 80% more than their high school equivalent selves. So, managing debt to future earnings is now a huge calculation. Students no longer need to go to college to just get a degree. They need to get a degree at the lowest cost with the highest return in the form of wages. Another CNBC article

points to the resources that are available for students now. This [article](#) provides resources where you can get projected income-to-college costs. We must become better at being prepared.

Lack of preparation is the most important piece to fix. How do you prepare? First, save and save a lot. There are funds where you can invest for your future. Second, select a school and a major with a lot of return. However, make sure that you are truly interested in this carrier. Do not decide to be a doctor only to figure out quickly that you are not cut out for that career. This results in you being behind and in debt. Check out this Clarion Ledger [article](#). Third, simply increase your standardize test scores. In our previous newsletter, we highlighted the many resources that one could use to better prepare. We also highlighted what scores mean in relation to monies awarded.

Do you have the time to prepare? Are you willing to give up some of your time to study, attend additional workshops, etc? Your ACT and SAT scores can save you a lot of money. In fact, it can actually make you money. Many of our students are making money by going to college. Then, when they get out of college, they have money to use for all of their day-to-day needs rather than paying debt.

According to this Mississippi State [study](#), integrate a fine arts class into your schedule. Find room to take one of these classes. Statistically, it has been proven

to help your test scores. Play games, even some video [games](#). Do not become addicted to video game playing, however. It could lead to a gaming [disorder](#). Take time to read. Read anything that is one grade level or higher above you. Take a math and science class that is both challenging and, at the same time, engaging. The above-mentioned report shows that students who spend large amounts of time on social media tend to have lower standardize test scores. So, read. Study. Play. Think. Stay off social media.

If you take the April or June ACT, order your tests and answers. Work over your mistakes. Challenge yourself to fix half of the mistakes you previously made on the next test. Take practice tests. You have two free tests in your Mastery Prep account. The link to additional practice tests on the county site can be found [here](#). Work hard. Expect great things. Earn higher scores.

All juniors will be taking the ACT Workkeys on April 13, 2021. If you are going immediately into the workforce, this certification is often needed to obtain a job or obtain a higher pay scale. If you are going to college, having this certification could help you land a job by simply having a certification that others do not. More information on ACT Workkeys can be found [here](#).





A DUTY TO STRIVE

A Reflection on
our District’s
Core Values

by Lorie Yates

“The sense of obligation to continue is present in all of us. A duty to strive is the duty of us all. I felt a call to that duty.”
—Abraham Lincoln

The personal, societal, and professional challenges that we have collectively faced this past year have been undeniably difficult.

One thing is certain though—Rankin County School District educators continue to STRIVE to do our best and to be our best for our students, schools, and communities.

It is no surprise that our district’s core values are summarized in the acronym S.T.R.I.V.E.

In this article, we’ll revisit our district’s Core Values. I also provide some links to several resources. My hope is that as you read, you’ll reflect on some of what we have learned this past year, but that you will also use our core values as reminders of what it takes for us to “continue a tradition of excellence by providing a world-class education that empowers all to grow through curiosity, discovery and learning.” See the [RCSD Strategic Plan Summary](#)

Service - Work to benefit others.

“A servant-leader is servant first. It begins with the natural feeling that one wants to serve. Then conscious choice brings one to aspire to lead. The difference manifests itself in the care taken by the servant- first, to make sure that other people’s highest priority needs are being served. The best test is: do those served grow as persons; do they while being served, become healthier, wiser, freer, more autonomous, more likely themselves to become servants?” Robert Greenleaf

Robert Greenleaf coined the term “servant leader” and defined it as someone with a natural desire to serve and meet the needs of others. Larry Spears, the former Executive Director of the Robert K. Greenleaf Center, further defined servant leadership by identifying the following characteristics of servant leaders that are observable in effective teachers and school leaders:

- **Listening** - Listening and reflection are essential to our personal and professional growth.
- **Empathy** - Striving to understand students, colleagues, and the parents.
- **Healing** - Exhibiting actions that truly help others.
- **Awareness** - Being open to professional learning and regularly assessing students’ academic and social needs.
- **Persuasion** - Achieving buy-in within groups (colleagues and students) through shared leadership, consensus building, and mutual respect.

CORE VALUES

Service Work to benefit others.

Teamwork Drive success through strong collaboration and communication.

Relationships Value people by building strong, respectful partnerships among our students, colleagues, families, businesses, and communities

Integrity Uphold our ethics and principles with every action and every decision

Vision Plan for the future with imagination, innovation, creativity and wisdom.

Excellence Pursue and achieve academic excellence and personal development by delivering a high-quality education to every student.

- **Conceptualization** - “dream great dreams by keeping the ‘big picture’ and end goal in mind through conceptualization and reflection.” Put a plan in place to meet that goal.
- **Foresight** - Asking questions and anticipating things to come and having a plan to address barriers that might get in the way of meeting goals.
- **Stewardship** - Serving the needs of others and demonstrating stewardship through engagement in purposeful, meaningful and productive work.
- **Commitment to the Growth of Others** - Committing to actions that promote student growth, personal growth and the growth of others in the organization.
- **Building Community** - Engaging with one another, sharing experiences and resources, and learning with and through one another.
- **Calling** - Feeling “called” to make a difference for others and have an impact on others’ lives.

In the *Educational Leadership* May 2017 issue, “Lifting School Leaders,” Carol Ann Tomlinson wrote, “I have a compelling sense that our investment in professional development and mentoring of teachers and principals would take us to a very different and higher place if it were centered on... being servants of those we lead.”

Click here to [Listen to Simon Sinek talk about why practicing empathy should be in every leader’s toolbox.](#)

Click here to [Listen to Simon Sinek describe how good leaders put people first.](#)

Teamwork - Drive success through strong collaboration and communication.

A key component of the College and Career Readiness Standards is providing opportunities for students to communicate their developing ideas with others. Consensus, discussion, answering questions, and solving problems all require social interaction and discourse. Learning is collaborative.

This holds true for educators as well. Many of our schools have used Zoom as a way to socialize and carry on PLCs in a safe manner. We have been innovative in thinking of ways to highlight the great things teachers are doing across the district and within each school. We continue to provide professional development for teachers to plan, analyze student work, and create common tasks and assessments.

Check out *The RCSD Basecamp Series* where teachers and administrators share how they build teamwork in their schools.

Read “New Beginnings: Transforming the Student Learning Experience Through Collaboration” (p. 4) and “Becoming a Connected Educator: What it Means and Why It Matters” (p. 6) in the *November 2020 Issue of the Secondary Connection Newsletter*

Relationships - Value people by building strong, respectful partnerships among our students, colleagues, families, businesses and communities

Strong relationships are at the heart of learning.

Catlin Tucker, author of *Balance With Blended Learning - Partner With Your Students to Reimagine Learning* and *Reclaim Your Life*, says, “I honestly believe that the only way we as educators can find true balance in our teaching profession is if we see our students as partners in the learning journey...”

When we stay in isolation—teach in isolation, assess in isolation, learn in isolation, practice in isolation—we miss out on conversation! Conversation with our students, with one another as professionals, with stakeholders within our community is the pathway to building strong relationships.

During the pandemic, educators have had the opportunity to reimagine stronger relationships within our schools and school communities. Our schools have made many efforts to help maintain relationships with students and parents with regular phone calls to parents, home visits, uwwsing breakout rooms to conference with virtual students, using Zoom in classes to connect students in class with those at home, and by using Zoom to offer enrichment/tutoring

“Leadership is not about being in charge. Leadership is about taking care of those in your charge.”
—Simon Sinek

opportunities. Administrative teams have reached out to local businesses to help provide teachers with tokens of appreciation in efforts to make their daily lives just a little bit easier. This past year, more than any, has taught us that creating partnerships spreads the work load out, rather than it piling up on one or a few. And, when true partnerships are created, successes and celebrations can be enjoyed by everyone.

Click here to *[Listen to Catlin Tucker talk about the six principles of partnership.](#)*

Read “Community is Key” (p. 16) in the *October 2019 Issue of the Secondary Connection Newsletter*

Integrity - Uphold our ethics and principles with every action and every decision.

“Every action.” “Every decision.” This applies not only to our professional and personal interactions with others, but it also applies to our instructional actions and decisions. It is our ethical duty to use our school/district time and resources wisely. It is challenging to figure out how to “make up” for lost instructional/learning time and still be consistent with the expectations of our standards. Scope and sequence may have to be modified, our content focus may shift, but it is critical that students not be disadvantaged by receiving less engaging and rigorous instruction as a result of these modifications. We must maximize all time with our students. There is no time for busy work. Student work must build knowledge and skill. All this has taught us that designing authentic, rigorous, and meaningful instruction and assessment is not just “best practice,” it gets at the heart of our integrity as teachers.

We also know that we have to model integrity for our students. Many RCSD teachers have reported concerns about a high number of students cheating during assessments. This motivated many of our teachers to try new ways of monitoring students’ learning and to use more authentic instructional materials and assessments.

As one teacher said, “To monitor and support student learning, especially in remote learning environments, it is important to collect evidence of student thinking, not just whether students chose the right answer or have memorized the correct words.”

Read “Making the Grade: Reimagining the Testing Experience” (p. 12) in the *October 2020 Issue of the Secondary Connection Newsletter*

Check out tips on *[How to Prevent Student Cheating During Remote Learning: 4 Tips](#)*

Learn ways of *[Creating a Culture of Integrity in the Classroom](#)*

“Strong teachers don’t teach content; Google has content. Strong teaching connects learning in ways that inspire kids to learn more and strive for greatness.”
—Eric Jensen

Vision - Plan for the future with imagination, innovation, creativity, and wisdom.

Through the spring of 2020, teachers had to consider innovative ways to deliver content. Tools like *[Edpuzzle](#)* and Nearpod allow teachers to incorporate questions and interaction into videos and Google slide presentations. Teachers have created instructional videos using Zoom, Screencastify, or QuickTime. These videos provide students with a resource to go back to as many times as needed. Some teachers have gone as far as uploading their own instructional videos into Edpuzzle and embedding formative assessment questions throughout the video. Many teachers now use video as a way for students to communicate their ideas. With resources like Flipgrid or even cell phone and/or computers, students can record videos to communicate their understanding of a topic. Teachers are able to use these student artifacts as formative assessments. Students can even watch each other’s videos, give critiques, and ask questions, seeing for themselves how to give good feedback. Tools like Jamboard, Google Docs, and Google Slides provide a space for students to collaborate on research, projects and written work.

Some of our teachers have really stepped out of their comfort zones and have used breakout rooms in Zoom to provide students a chance to work through problem solving or answering a question before presenting to the whole group.

Planning for the future requires a growth mindset and an innovator’s mindset. A team of teachers recently shared in the Basecamp presentation *[Community Building Using Google Slides](#)* that many of the changes they were ‘forced’ to make in their unit plans because of hybrid and/or distance learning actually are better than what they did ‘before.’ Change is constant. Change is inevitable. As George Couros wrote in *An Innovator’s Mindset*, we have learned that “in a world that constantly changes, if our focus is to only maintain what’s already been done, we are bound to become worse.” Having a vision and plan for the future is necessary for all of us if schools are to move forward.

Excellence—Pursue and achieve academic excellence and personal development by delivering high quality education to every student.

As I reflected on this particular core value—excellence—I kept asking myself “How does someone become ‘excellent?’” The thing that kept coming to mind was a conversation we had during our book study on *Balance With Blended Learning* by Catlin Tucker. This particular book study

“Always strive to improve yourself: To become better today than you were yesterday: To serve those around you and the world.”
—Roy T. Bennett

meeting was focused on the chapters in the book about using flipped learning to make time to work with students on goal setting and giving students feedback. In Chapter 7, Tucker cites Hattie’s research on effect sizes and writes, “Feedback is one of the most powerful influences on learning and achievement.”

Great teachers know that, for our students to achieve excellence, we must establish the criteria for success with students. Effective success criteria include answers to the following questions: (1) What am I learning? (2) Why am I learning this? and (3) How will I know I succeeded? Students need examples and a reason to improve. With clear success criteria, students can self- and peer-review work. Instead of thinking in terms of the material that must be “covered” over a year, great teachers think about how students will demonstrate skills and knowledge and how they can provide feedback to help their students get there.

In a lot of ways, the best educators are driven by the same success criteria...we want to know what high quality instruction and assessment look like, we plan for how to get there, and we use data and information (from our students, peers and administrators) to evaluate the success of our plans. And, ultimately, we adjust as needed. The challenges of teaching during a pandemic have ‘forced’ us to try new resources, strategies and assessments. In the pursuit for excellence, many have been willing to step out of their comfort zones, listen and learn from others, and partner with others to design better learning experiences for their students. On the other side of these crazy challenges, we have become better educators.

Check out “A Focus on Feedback (p. 4) in the *January 2020 Issue of the Secondary Connection Newsletter* and “Creating Your Own Virtual PD” (p. 16) in the *November 2020 Issue of the Secondary Connection Newsletter*

As the nation braced itself for the final throes of the Civil War, thousands of spectators gathered on a muddy Pennsylvania Avenue near the U.S. Capitol to hear President Lincoln’s second inaugural address. It was March 4, 1865, a time of great uneasiness. As the speech progressed, President Lincoln turned from the divisive bitterness at the war’s roots to the unifying task of reconciliation and reconstruction. In the speech’s final paragraph, the president delivered his prescription for the nation’s recovery: “With malice toward none, with charity for all, with firmness in the right as God gives us to see the right, let us **STRIVE** on to finish the work we are in...”

“When we strive to become better than we are, everything around us becomes better, too.”
—Paulo Coelho

STRIVE



DON'T FORGET TO LOOK
DOWN!
by Paula McClain

Band programs usually do not EVER have a lack of students, they are usually quite a tight knit group of people, students are happy and productive, Directors are true leaders, and they usually have a track record of improving year to year. So, what is it that makes them so successful? What are Band programs doing nationwide that the rest of the educational world could use as a model?

EASY...THEY...LOOK...DOWN.

Band programs do not start in High School, they do not start in Middle School, they begin in Elementary schools. Yes, Elementary Schools.

Band Directors have a proven method for grabbing students at the Elementary level, drawing them in, keeping them, and building on their skills year after year. Every High School and Middle School Band Director knows their Secondary program is dependent upon the Elementary Music class these students attend at their feeder campuses. Secondary Band programs are dependent upon Elementary Music classes K-5. Band Directors form a good working relationship with their feeder campus Music Teacher, and for good reasons.

Band Directors know they MUST be successful at the Elementary feeder campus with several things:

- They must grab the attention of the students and make learning fun.
- They must make music, in general, appealing and something that students want to participate in.
- Then, just prior to leaving Elementary school, Band Directors go into the school and assess each students' abilities and knowledge.
- What did they learn in Elementary Music class?
- What do they remember?
- What are they naturally gifted at?
- Where do they fit into my program?

These are the questions EVERY High School and Middle School Band Director has to look at. They focus on the individual student - every single one of them. They know every student is a potential candidate for their program; in order to have a successful program they must continue to recruit and plug students in where they will succeed.

So what does this have to do with the rest of Secondary education? LOADS! If we are truly being objective, we must begin to see that connections between feeder campuses at the Elementary level are crucial to academic success at the

Secondary level. We must, as Secondary educators, begin to look at Elementary teachers as our partners and guides.

Vertical alignment does not begin in Secondary, nor is it the responsibility of the Elementary educators alone. We must work together in tandem. Sixth grade teachers need to know about their incoming students prior to school beginning. Benchmark tests are great, but how much more successful could that teacher be if he/she already knows where his/her students ended the year? The same goes for all Secondary teachers.

I know this takes a lot of time and effort. As a former Elementary teacher, we did this yearly. Every third grade teacher knew the testing data from second grade student, as well as the levels of EVERY student in their class for each tested subject, and even important information about their learning styles and individual giftedness. THIS TAKES TIME. However, the more you do it, the easier and quicker it gets and the more you (as the professional) know where you need to put your focus for each class (and each student for that matter). No need to wait for Benchmark testing to see where students are, you already know. As an educator, that puts you

ahead of the game. Something as simple as looking at data from their state tests/benchmark tests from the previous campus really helps to improve organizing your year as a teacher.

There is another benefit to forming relationships with teachers at the feeder campus, it makes our educational community that much stronger! When we come together for our students, collectively, we become a force for educating students that is powerful. These relationships can be fostered through: participation in Homecoming parades and Christmas parades, attending community activities, and of course through attending sporting and Fine Arts events. Working together can and should be fun!

If we, as Secondary and Elementary educators will continue to move forward in forging relationships, working together, and playing together the outcome is positive for everyone involved: students, teachers, Administrators, faculty, parents, and stakeholders in the community.

Remember that the key to being even more successful as a Secondary teacher is to look down.



Combating Student Apathy in the Math Classroom



APATHY is a lack or absence of concern, interest, or enthusiasm towards a single subject or many subjects that lasts for a relatively brief moment or a long period of time (C.M., 2020). It can be naturally derived and manifested by a lack of interest in something or emotional fatigue. Mainly, the lack of interest in something is what generates student apathy (2020). Although it seems amplified and has possibly become an even bigger issue in secondary schools due to the challenges that have come with Covid-19, student apathy is something that has been around since the beginning of time. For example, it is considered unacceptable for the average person to lack basic reading and writing skills, but people often brag about their inability to “do math” (George, 2011) and become content with their lack of math proficiency, thus putting forth minimal efforts to learn math concepts. This mindset and complacency has become more and more evident in math classes and has posed a threat to student math knowledge development and overall mathematical success.

Some may say that schools’ emergency plans, often mistaken as distance learning, from the Spring of 2020 has contributed to a widespread lack of motivation for learning. It seems that grades are at an all time low, consistent attendance (physical and mental) is down, and students seem even less engaged in the learning process because they see no true value or relevance in the material being taught. In “Building a Math-Positive Culture (2016),” Cathy L. Seeley restates the work of Findell & Swafford (2002) to remind us that according to the National Research Council, mathematical proficiency consists of five strands, one of which is “Engaging”. For mathematics to be engaging, students are asked to make sense of the math and be able to see the math as something that is useful, doable, and adequate preparation for their future.

Is this where the problem lies? Could we address several of the issues we are seeing by increasing student engagement? Disengagement seems to lead to behavior problems, and in fact, boredom has an effect size of -0.47 which indicates that this decreases learning at a high rate (*The Distance Learning Playbook*, 2021). Engagement is actually defined across three dimensions: behavioral, cognitive, and emotional. To truly engage students, a task must provide the opportunity for students to experience each. Behavioral engagement is what we have traditionally thought of as engagement: students participate in class and submit their assignments. This type of engagement is what some refer to as a student’s ability to “do school.” However, if this is the only type of engagement we encourage from students, deep learning fails to occur (2021).

Cognitive and emotional engagement are the two dimensions that are harder for us to target and harder to assess. Cognitive engagement occurs when students are

asked to plan tasks, monitor their own progress, set goals, and solve problems. Emotional engagement includes the relationships and interests of students. Students who are cognitively engaged tend to engage in discussions, pose questions, seek help when needed, and exhibit curiosity toward the subject and task (2021). How do we create or determine if already existing tasks allow students these opportunities? There are templates we can use to investigate instructional techniques in order to determine if these allow for all three dimensions of engagement. One of these is the *Drawing on My Expertise* template - one of the resources provided in *The Distance Learning Playbook*.

The research conducted by the South Australia Department of Education and Child Development (2019) provides recommendations for designing tasks which create engagement.

- Encourage students to think in more than one way by transforming from closed to open tasks. This requires more than one entry point for the task.
- Move from information to understanding by requiring students to connect and relate. Students are asked to articulate and defend relationships they notice between two problems or pieces of information.
- Ask students what they think first, rather than telling them what they will know. Students work through problems and try procedures or processes first. This encourages students to think through previous learning and also sends the message that it is okay to fail before “getting it right.”
- Position students to plan a way forward by moving from procedure to problem-solving. Allowing students to rely on one another and only giving them some information or even providing irrelevant information helps students become owners of their learning.

Helping students to become self-directed and owners of their learning is an act of empowerment. In the Innovator’s Mindset (2015), George Cuoros states that empowering students means giving them the knowledge and skills to pursue their passions, interests, and future goals. It goes beyond getting kids excited about the age-appropriate content and curricula that is pre-determined by the department of education. A culture of empowerment is built upon all three dimensions of engagement and propels students to think critically and to be innovative. Much research has shown that in our technologically rich world, engaging students in tasks that are slightly above their mathematical expertise but giving them the tools they need in order to figure out how to solve the problem or ask the questions about the math they are learning builds a more positive attitude toward math. It has also been shown that students are more engaged with mathematics if they are presented with a problem and struggle to find the solution before they are

shown procedures. This constructivist learning approach builds academic confidence and independence in students by allowing them to actually brainstorm ideas they might use in order to arrive at the desired outcome.

Engaging tasks can be used at any time during class. These tasks can range from five minutes to lasting through multiple class blocks. The content depth of the task can also vary depending on when the task is implemented.

Bellringer/Warm Up/Exit Ticket: Engaging tasks used at the beginning or end of class could require students to research some basic procedures and how they are used in the real world, or if completed at the beginning of class, these tasks could be done to simply get students to talk and take an interest. In fact, spending five minutes to simply allow students to research or discuss something important to them has been found to go a long way toward building positive relationships. Having a short, engaging task at the close of a lesson can give us some powerful formative assessment data which can drive future instruction and tasks.

Lesson: These tasks are more content focused and usually take more time to complete. These are the tasks where students need to be allowed time to struggle, form and carry out ideas, and then redo when necessary. Mistakes are encouraged and even celebrated. In “Beyond Hooks: Real-World Contexts as Anchors for Instruction,” Stephen, Reinke, and Cline discuss using a real-world context which is carried out through multiple lessons as opposed to the real-world examples we often find in textbooks. They describe the importance of having students use a context to complete a series of tasks which helps students become invested in the outcome (*Learning Teaching*, 2020). Students are then able to see how the mathematics builds and notice the relationships within the mathematical content. Many current events are very relevant to students and allow a myriad of ways to perform and make connections to the mathematics - from the most simple to more advanced. Because students are already familiar with these events or experienced them in their own lives, using these in lessons makes ensuring engagement less challenging.

Once we select our engaging task, there are numerous tools for delivery which create even more engaging, classroom experiences. Resources such as Nearpod, Google apps., EdPuzzle, Classpad, and Desmos (just to name a few) provide us with easy alternatives for presentation of the tasks or lessons. Many presentation tools allow students to collaborate and present their work. A few of these are Padlet, Flipgrid, and Google apps.

Providing opportunities for productive struggle in attempts to find, make sense of, and solve real world problems with mathematics not only engages students in the learning process but also empowers them to develop a deeper understanding of mathematical concepts and

skills needed for future success both inside and outside of school. Just like students don’t care how much a teacher knows until they know how much a teacher cares; most students don’t care how cool a teacher thinks the content is until they experience enjoyment and gain personal interest from understanding the math content’s relevance to real life.

Below are a few relevant activities that you may be interested in using in the near future as you work to pique your students’ behavioral, cognitive, and emotional levels of engagement!

A Pandemic Notice and Wonder
Which State, Proportional to its Population, has the Most Cases?
Social Distancing

For more information or support, please contact one of the secondary curriculum specialists.

REFERENCES

Couros, G. (2015). *The Innovator’s Mindset: Empower Learning, Unleash Talent, And Lead A Culture Of Creativity* California: Dave Burgess Consulting, Inc.

Fisher, D., Frey, N., & Hattie, J. (2021). Module 6: Engaging tasks. *The Distance Learning Playbook: Teaching for Engagement & Impact in Any Setting* (pp. 101-121). California: Corwin.

George, C. (2011, April). “Getting Beyond Math Apathy” *Education Week* Retrieved from <https://www.edweek.org/teaching-learning/opinion-getting-beyond-math-apathy/2011/04>

M.C. (2020, May). “Student Apathy: An Inherent Problem in Schools” *Psychology of Education: The Science of Learning* Retrieved from <https://psych385on.wordpress.com/2020/05/25/student-apathy-an-inherent-problem-in-schools/>

Seeley, C.L. (2016). “Building a Math-Positive Culture: How to Support Great Math Teaching in Your School” *ASCD Publication*, Alexandria, VA.

Stephan, M.L., Reinke, L.T., & Cline, J.K. (2020, October). “Beyond Hooks: Real-World Contexts as Anchors For Instruction” *Mathematics Teacher: Learning Teaching* 113(10), 821-827.



Brandon
Florence
McLaurin
Northwest
Pelahatchie
Pisgah
Puckett
Richland

**Rankin
County
School
District**

TRADITION OF EXCELLENCE