It is a new year, which means the NELMS Annual Conference is only a few months away! The theme for this year’s event is “Mindful in the Middle: Making Every Day Awesome” and we are very excited for all it has to offer, highlighted by two talented and highly relevant keynote speakers whom you will not want to miss: Monica Genta and Carla Tantillo Philibert.

Monica is the author of two books, *Game Changers* and *180 Days of Awesome*, a middle school science teacher, and nationwide educational consultant and motivational speaker. She has earned a Masters in Curriculum & Instruction and a Masters in Educational Leadership & Administration and is a National Board Certified teacher. Her goal is to transform teachers, leaders, and schools from seeing education as an ordinary job into an extraordinary adventure. Genta feels that every person who walks into a school deserves to love their experience! She is a believer in finding awesome and celebrating life every day! Genta is full of energy, full of passion, and full of love naturally want to celebrate awesome in classrooms, but that can be hard with all those “extra” things that come when working in schools. Monica will show us how to focus on those little amazing moments that have the power to change everything in schools and in lives, because sometimes it’s the small things that make the biggest difference! Learn lots of tips, tricks, stories, solid ideas on how to celebrate education with your students and staff on a daily basis! Also, learn how to be a game changer for kids and for education, how this meaningful time of social and emotional development of adolescents can be brought to another level using Genta’s 3 Ps. Let us build a level of trustworthiness among students and learn how to turn a class into a family!

Carla Tantillo Philibert is a recognized expert on Social-Emotional Learning (SEL), mindfulness and yoga practices in the school setting. She is the founder of Mindful Practices, co-founder of Class Catalyst and oversees a team of dedicated practitioners who have served thousands of students and teachers across the country since 2006. Carla has a Master’s degree in Curriculum and Instruction and is a certified yoga teacher. She is a regular, featured speaker at CEC, NSBA, NAESP and the Kripalu Yoga in School Symposium. She is the author of *Cooling Down Your Classroom: Using Yoga, Relaxation and Breathing Strategies to Help Students Learn to Keep Cool and the Everyday SEL series of K-12 books* (Routledge 2016).

Carla’s empowering address “I Teach Because…” renews educators’ energy for the challenges they face daily as they serve...
Welcome! 2019 is upon us as we, educators, gear-up for the second half of our school year. What are the key needs of your students that will be the focus of your time and energy as winter melts into spring? How do you encourage your kids to take healthy academic risks, and then guide them towards success as they struggle? How do you build positive, meaningful connections with students? What is your biggest challenge as an educator? These are important questions not easily answered yet our pursuit of them remains a critical part of our journey as middle-level educators and life-long learners. As many who have attended over the years will attest, our Annual Conference will prove to be a meaningful and significant two-day experience where one can learn from experts in the field, connect with other dedicated educators, as well as gain skills and ideas that you can immediately apply to the classroom! Our two keynote speakers, Monica Genta and Carla Tantillo Philibert highlight a schedule that is equally entertaining as it is informative!

So what do you say? What connections will you make with middle-level educators this year? Visit our website for more information and I look forward to seeing you at our conference in March!

With hopes for a meaningful school year

Jason Webster.

NELMS News from the E.D.

“...learning with and from each other is a necessary and important aspect of all courses. The role it plays varies widely and the forms it takes are very diverse, but without it students gain an impoverished education.” (Boud, 2001)

I hope that each of you were able to enjoy a well deserved vacation and were also able to spend time with family and friends during the Holiday break. It is hard to believe that we are nearly at the halfway point of the school year.

The quote above is interesting. As we know, classroom planning and preparation should include opportunities for students to learn from each other and be able to share what they know with their classmates. Now, let us take that same quote and apply it to ourselves. If we believe that learning is truly a lifelong endeavor, than we, as educators, have the responsibility and motivation to keep improving upon our practice. Whether it is Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment, Leadership and Organization, or Culture and Community (This We Believe: Keys; to Educating Young Adolescents) we can be the role models for our students and for our staffs.

The New England League of Middle Schools Annual Conference provides the very vehicle where this learning happens. The conference, featuring more than 80 concurrent sessions facilitated by your colleagues, focuses on research based middle level philosophy and practices specifically designed for “educating young adolescents.” Additionally, this year’s conference includes two
In our profession, there are several times during the school year where we can pause and, then start over, renew. This is one of those times. The Holidays, while somewhat stressful, is a time to recharge, renew, and resume! Those goals we set for ourselves in September may have to be tweaked to support the ever-changing adolescent we have before us. That is good practice! These teens and pre-teens need guidance and caring from us, especially the more challenging ones. There is an abundant source of research out there that emphasizes the need for children to feel someone has their backs, someone is in their corner! The mind only works if it and the body are aligned. Anxiety, lack of self-worth, and personal/family problems threaten many of our students. It is easy to praise, encourage, and support those who have the family support, the academic gifts, and the success in learning. What is more challenging is to surround a student who is facing roadblocks in their learning. These are the students who need us more than ever to help face the hurdles before them. It maybe family chaos, a learning or physical challenge, or an emotional challenge that may not be evident on the surface that prevents them from learning and growing. Seek them out; look for someone, a guidance counselor, the school nurse, another teacher or administrator. Our work as educators is not for the faint of heart. Our profession demands all of us to stretch ourselves in many directions in order to prepare our students, academically, socially, and emotionally. Please turn to the professionals. We, here at NELMS, offer connections through workshops, publications, and, of course, our Annual Conference that is being held in Providence, RI on March 20-22 at the Omni Hotel. You can find all the offerings at our home page, nelms.org.

As 2019 begins and state testing in on the horizon, be not afraid. Students, who have a strong school culture with supportive adults, administrators, staff, and parents, will perform to their very best. Do not worry about percentiles only. Growth is so much more important and can give a struggling student the confidence to continue! Happy New Year and we hope to greet you at the Annual Conference in March! Brenda Sullivan Houle, Editor, MidLines

Feedback to: Brenda – bhoule@comcast.net

Support your state organization!

These organizations are great resources for support, information about local events and issues, and advocacy opportunities.

- Commonwealth of Massachusetts Middle Level Educators [www.commle.org/](http://www.commle.org/)
- Connecticut Association of Schools [www.casciac.org](http://www.casciac.org)
- Maine Association for Middle Level Education [www.mamleonline.org](http://www.mamleonline.org)
- New Hampshire Association for Middle Level Education [http://www.nhamle.org/](http://www.nhamle.org/)
- RI Middle Level Educators [www.rimle.net](http://www.rimle.net)
- VT Association for Middle Level Education [www.vamle.org](http://www.vamle.org)

News from the E.D…. continued from page 2

outstanding keynote addresses, Monica Genta and her 180 days of Awesome and Carla Tantillo-Philibert’s, I Teach Because… Also, new for this year are three incredible pre-conference workshops scheduled for the Wednesday preceding the conference. Please check out our website for more information.

Don’t miss out on being a part of this great middle level experience as educators from across New England will be coming together to share with and learn from each other. As we know and believe, that learning with and from each other is a necessary and important aspect of all aspects of education.

I hope to see you all in Providence this March.

Sincerely,

Jeff Rodman, Executive Director
Middle School of the Kennebunks
EconoBunk: An Innovative Practice

by Tom Taylor and Ruth Ellen Cialfi

For many years our sixth grade team at the Middle School of the Kennebunks participated in a program called Exchange City. We found the program to be engaging but fell short of a few things we thought should be emphasized, so we created our own version. We worked together with many contributing community partners to develop the program we call, Econobunk.

EconoBunk is an economic and civics based program where students are involved in hands-on, experiential learning. In this eight week interdisciplinary unit, the teachers, students, and parents experience and apply mathematics, civics, social studies, and literacy through real-life problems, teamwork and interactive simulations. Students also learn about different career opportunities, develop personal finance skills and practice their role as consumers and producers in our economy.

The process begins with students reviewing and learning about classified ads. Each position in our “community” has been broken down into a detailed, student friendly description. Students are then taught how to write a resume using real-life experiences like raking leaves, walking dogs, or running a lemonade stand. Then they turn these experiences into professional descriptions and incorporating all the right buzzwords, for example, “developed an innovative citrus beverage production method”. The resumes are submitted with a job application and their top three job choices.

Parent volunteers are a key part of this program. We recruit about 15-20 parents to come in and do a 5-10 minute interview with every student. The volunteers come from all walks of life, such as school resource officers, salespeople, engineers, and trade workers. We ask the volunteers to take anecdotal notes and to complete a preparation checklist. Did they have a firm handshake and do they make eye contact? Did they dress professionally? Did they ramble on? Did they seem prepared? Interview skills are practiced in the classroom beforehand in a variety of ways from videos and games to articles and demonstrations. The interview questions are provided for students ahead of the interview; but, how they answer the questions depends on their attention to detail, preparation and how badly they want the job. The natural consequences of effort or lack thereof, can be seen throughout this process.

We also have a town election to fill seats in our city government. Anyone interested may run for Town Manager or Judge. Students run a three-day campaign with their campaign manager and must give a speech to the entire team, laying out why they are the best person for the job. Students then vote on their preferred candidate. The election winners lead then run City Hall.

Once students are placed in a business, they work collaboratively with teammates in developing advertising slogans, creating products, and calculating expenses to run the business. Businesses take out loans from the bank based on their expenses for salaries, raw materials, advertising, utilities, and other costs needed to run the business. Students also take on the role of Congress in writing bills for potential laws that they vote on and all are held accountable to obey our police officers. Throughout the unit, students learn personal finance skills. They are expected to purchase insurance, pay taxes,
and balance a checkbook. They learn the difference between Debit Cards and Credit Cards as well as budgeting. The culminating activity for this unit is a trip to EconoBunk, a simulated city right in our gymnasium. We have built a city that is assembled and disassembled each year. While in the city each student has a role as a producer in a business, a citizen, as well as a consumer. Students apply what they have learned from the unit during this day-long simulation to generate as much revenue as possible for the business, in an effort to pay back the business loan, all the while, behaving as regular citizens spending their salary on goods and services.

We have many partners in this simulation: Our high school’s Alternative Education Program built our 13 mobile businesses. The Chamber of Commerce connects us with local businesses willing to volunteer. Our Ed Foundation provided the majority of the funding for our endeavor. Our Parent Teacher groups assist in the purchase of supplies each year. Our RSU 21 IT Department designed our banking program to allow us to monitor bank payments, perform check clearing and other financial transactions. Our local business representatives come in and talk with kids about careers and opportunities. Most importantly, 20–25 parents volunteer to perform interviews and supervise businesses. Without the parents we would never be able to run this program. It is a true cooperative community endeavor. Each year we continue to add more pieces to the puzzle in our efforts to immerse our students in an authentic experience to learn personal finance skills, job search skills, and a love of entrepreneurship.

*Tom Taylor and RuthEllen Cialfi are 6th grade Social Studies Teachers at the Middle School of the Kennebunks in Kennebunk, ME.*

---

**NELMS Middle Level Scheduling Workshops**

**ARE YOU...**
Challenged by your schedule?
Looking for ways to create a schedule that “works” for your particular school?
Then NELMS Scheduling Workshops are designed for you!

**ATTEND THIS WORKSHOP TO:**
- Gain information about components of a middle school schedule
- Look at a variety of schedule types
- Think about the pluses and minuses of your current schedule
- Take time to identify your school’s non-negotiables
- Identify priorities
- Share challenges and solutions with colleagues
- Begin the work of revitalizing your schedule

**For more info and/or to register for one of these events click here.**

---

One change that educators have been slow to make, however, is making sure their files are more compatible with the [Americans with Disabilities Act](https://www.ada.gov/). That law is designed to ensure all citizens can access and use information created by government sources. As educators, we have a responsibility to ensure our files are “ADA compliant,” so that students, and others who use screen readers or who have difficulty seeing colors or small text, are not prevented from accessing our information.

ADA compliance is accomplished by taking a few simple steps. While these can appear to be a step that slows us down, once one gets used to creating in this way, it is not a serious impediment to our productivity. Some easy steps to take:

1. Use the headings that are built into your word processor to format text. Screen readers—tools built into productivity suites and operating systems that convert the text on screen onto audio that one can hear—use these headings for navigation. The formats are frequently not to the taste of educators (or even compliant with the ADA color contrast requirements), but a few clicks can change those settings. (Check with your IT folks; they will show you how to do this.)

2. Add “alt-text” to your pictures. Alternative text is a description you give of the
image, and the screen reader software will read that so listeners know what the content is. Again, ask your IT folks how to open the picture formatting tools so you can add this text.

3. Learn how to use your “accessibility checker.” Users of Microsoft products can open this tool that will display a pane on the right of the screen where errors or problems are identified. As users “clean up” their files, the errors disappear. Users of G Suite can install Add-ons such as Grackle Slides which checks your slides to be sure they are compliant.

4. Install and use the Colour Contrast Analyzer. This software is available for Macintosh and PC computers, and it can be installed for free. It allows users to use the eyedropper tool to select background and foreground colors; then, it displays green checkmarks if the colors are compliant and a red “x” if they are not.

One other step many educators take when ensuring their materials are accessible is to save word processing and slide show documents as PDF files, then sharing those. PDF is a universal format that can be viewed on any device. Adobe has its own accessibility checker in Acrobat, and that can be used to ensure files are ADA compliant.

Video is another commonly used media, and the best strategy for ensuring ADA compliance is to upload the video to YouTube, then use the closed captioning tool to transcribe the spoken words in the video.

I have begun a series of blog posts that address some of the tools that we can use to make files accessible you can find it here: [https://bit.ly/2qWB8gk](https://bit.ly/2qWB8gk)

“Dr. Gary Ackerman has been supporting technology-rich education for several decades. He blogs at [http://www.hackscience.net/blog](http://www.hackscience.net/blog) and is @garyackerman on Twitter.”
Presque Isle Middle School Picks Apples for Service Projects and Activities

by Julie Gardner

The Presque Isle Middle School students and staff participated in an all school Service and Learning fundraising project in September. By grade level, the students and their teachers went to the MSAD #1 School Farm to pick apples in the orchard. This fundraiser pulled together everyone to raise money for student services and activities. Students and teachers worked together for 2 hours on 3 beautiful afternoons to fill boxes and crates for fresh pack sales and apple cider. The school worked together to raise over $5000.00! There was a follow up assembly with a slide show and a “reveal” of which grade picked the most apples. While there was an incredible amount of background planning for a project this size, the overall results were amazing. Because middle school kids bring so much enthusiasm to a hands-on learning activity, this project is definitely one that we will continue to do.
“Treat people [students] as if they were what they ought to be and you help them become what they are capable of becoming.”
Goethe

Imagine a World
Shaped by Life-Ready Leaders

Deepen your leadership skillset.
Develop life-ready leaders.

Leader in Me is a K–12 whole-school improvement model and process—developed in partnership with a global community of educators—that empowers students with the leadership and life-readiness skills they need to thrive in the 21st century.

Learn more at www.leaderinme.org
Do you know a child who needs a chance to succeed?

Exclusively for children from lower-income families, Milton Hershey School offers a top-notch living and learning environment, with just about every student need covered at no cost — even a way to accrue money to use for college.

Each child is guided, nurtured and challenged to maximize his or her potential. Small class sizes provide individualized attention. Athletic, recreation and arts facilities offer amazing opportunities for students to explore their interests.

It's a life-changing opportunity that can transform a child's future.

Help a family take the next step to learn more. Visit mhskids.org
On October 2, 2018 the New England League of Middle Schools, once again, took to the campus of Southern New Hampshire University with over 250 middle level students and teachers representing schools from New Hampshire to Rhode Island. These students came together for a day of learning, collaboration, team building, and goal setting.

This year our opening keynote address was from 2018 Billboard Artist to Watch, country music star Jessie Chris. Jessie shared with students her personal struggles with overcoming bullying, along with her commitment to end bullying and spread kindness. She finished with sharing her new children’s book “Dreams” and singing three of her hit songs. Students were then welcomed to take photos with Jessie provided by our sponsor Geskus Photography.

Students then participated in team building and communication challenges, that allowed student leaders to work with leaders from other schools to complete tasks. The students then broke for lunch at the SNHU dining hall, and returned for more Team Building and activities to foster communication and to get them thinking about what it means to be a leader, and what their personal leadership strengths are.

Students then talked about goal setting and the steps needed to create an action plan for their leadership teams and their school. Students then broke into their individual school teams and spent time creating Action Plans and laying out the steps needed to achieve their goals. They concluded with each school sending representatives to join us on stage and share out their school’s goal and plan.

The day was such an overall huge success, and the students had an amazing time. Many schools returned home and began to put their plans into action and shared the success of the conference with their administrators and school boards. NELMS is looking forward to expanding our leadership opportunities for students further and can not wait for next fall.
Climb to new heights with your class, club, or group!

Talk to us about three to five day residential programs that focus on:

» Team building
» Healthy Relationships
» Decision Making
» Effective Communication
» Adventure
» Solo

To schedule a program for your group call or email Jess at (207) 563-5172 or leadershipschool@kievewavus.org

PO Box 169  ∙ Nobleboro, ME 04555  
(207) 563-5172  ∙ www.kievewavus.org
Supporting Your Schools with Superior Services and Solutions

(plus, really great photography)

Lifetouch delivers exceptional portraits with an unmatched commitment to our partner schools. Others may try, but none can match everything we offer.

- One-stop-shop for school, commencement, sports and seniors photography as well as yearbook.
- Save time, budget and reduce questions with the Lifetouch Portal, Parent Notify and MyFamily Rewards.
- Utilize the Lifetouch PrintShop design services to help make your communication tools reflect your district’s unique messages.

To learn more about Lifetouch, visit schools.lifetouch.com or contact

Cathy Lis
Territory Manager
(508) 615-6947
clis@lifetouch.com
Massachusetts

Mo Pantos
Territory Manager
(508) 400-2221
mpantos@lifetouch.com
Massachusetts

12 MidLines | Winter 2019
New England League of Middle Schools
38th Annual Conference & Exhibits
Mindful in the Middle:
Making Every Day Awesome!
March 21 & 22, 2019
Rhode Island Convention Center
Providence, RI

Now this year!

Three Full Day Pre-Conference Sessions
Wednesday, March 20th
Lunch Included

Lunch For All Attendees
Thursday, March 21st