

MEA • VOICE

Literacy *in the* **DIGITAL AGE**

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School Closure List Prompts Important Questions

IF YOU HAVEN'T FOLLOWED THE SAGA OF 38 SCHOOLS IN MICHIGAN THREATENED WITH CLOSURE THIS YEAR, HERE'S WHY YOU SHOULD BE PAYING ATTENTION—EVEN IF YOU DON'T LIVE OR WORK IN ONE OF THE 10 DISTRICTS WITH BUILDINGS ON THE LIST.

Under current state law, another 40 buildings could be targeted by the state School Reform Office for closure next year, in Flint, Benton Harbor, Saginaw, Grand Rapids, Lansing, Oak Park, Warren, Redford, Port Huron, Hazel Park, and Southgate.

And the year after that? More schools.

There will always be a bottom 5 percent, no matter how high all schools raise test scores, so the question of how the state will respond to “low-performing” schools as measured by student performance on one state standardized test potentially has broad implications.

What good does closing buildings do for children, families, and communities? None. A growing body of research shows that closing schools does not improve education outcomes in struggling communities where test scores align with poverty.

Parents in neighborhoods threatened with school closures don't simply want “choice”—they want investment. The state holds the word “account-

able” like an anvil above educators' heads—but parents want the *state* to be accountable for equitable school funding and services.

High-performing states identify struggling schools to provide additional supports—not to threaten and punish educators, parents, and children. One such state, Massachusetts, spends \$1 billion more than Michigan on educating 3 million fewer students.

Even the governor's own 21st Century Education Commission pointed out the state's disinvestment in education in its final report last month. In 2000, Michigan ranked 8th highest in per-pupil spending but since has cut funding by \$663, adjusted for inflation, dropping Michigan's ranking to 24th. At the same time, U.S. per-pupil spending increased by over \$1,400.

Meanwhile, what to do about those 38 schools in high-poverty communities where students ranked in the bottom five percent three years in a row?

State Superintendent Brian Whiston recently negotiated a lifeline

for the schools: If districts signed a “partnership” agreement, they could get another 18 months to improve, with another 18 months added on if progress was made in the first stretch.

The partnerships would bring together state officials with local education leaders and intermediate school districts to develop a turnaround plan. But as Kalamazoo Superintendent Michael Rice pointed out recently, the state doesn't have a great track record for school turnarounds, as evidenced by its Education Achievement Authority—a takeover district with more than a dozen schools on the closure list.

What good does closing buildings do? None.

Even more importantly, where is the funding for the programming and supports needed to implement plans that emerge from these partnerships? So far—nowhere to be found.

We support efforts by Sen. Phil Pavlov (R-St. Clair) to get rid of the “chaotic” law that mandates school closures. Senate Bill 27 would repeal the so-called “failing schools law” and start over from scratch.

After that, it's up to us to stay involved as new policies emerge from the vacuum. If we want adequate funding, effective interventions, respect for educator voices, and less labeling of schools based on test scores—we have to be willing to engage in the fight and bring our parent allies along to strengthen our army. ■



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On the cover: Brian Chinavare is a media specialist at Flint Middle School in Livonia.

MEA Voice

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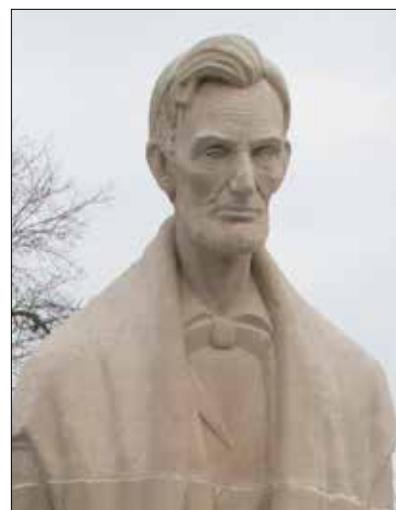
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10—COVER STORY: Certified school library media specialists are trained to help teach information literacy and serve as technology leaders, but they're in very short supply in Michigan.



6—NEWS & NOTES: Flint educators benefit from generous donations to the MEA supply drive.



8—ISSUES & ADVOCACY: School employees in Lincoln Consolidated Schools achieved a first.



27—MEMBERS AT WORK: A Grosse Pointe Library support staff member started a "seed library."



30—MEMBER SPOTLIGHT: This MEA-Retired member never told colleagues she worked at NASA.

Editor's Notebook

FOR THIS MONTH'S COVER STORY I SPOKE FOR AN HOUR WITH MIKE WARD, A MEDIA SPECIALIST AT CLINTONDALE COMMUNITY SCHOOLS, ALTHOUGH I COULDN'T FIT NEARLY THAT MUCH INTO MY ARTICLE.

Late in our talk, I lamented how politicians from Gov. Rick Snyder to President Donald Trump often give speeches praising other hard-working public servants and community leaders—including themselves—while talking about public schools and educators only in terms of failure.

We're not failures, but the forces of privatization have hammered on that message for 20 years. The fact is—as Valerie Strauss of The Washington Post said in her excellent “Answer Sheet” blog about public education—the U.S. wins international education matchups where it matters.

- The 2015 Global Creativity Index ranks the United States second of 139 countries.
- The 2016 Global Innovation Index ranks the United States fourth out of 128 countries.
- The 2017 Global Entrepreneurship Index ranks the United States first of 121 countries.

Educators are doing amazing work without getting much credit, and it's depressing, I said to Ward. He agreed—school employees are stretched to the limit and demoralized.

And it's his job as Clintondale's newly reinstalled middle-high school librarian to expose the staff to new ideas—the latest apps and other technology for use in the classroom. At the same time, he's experiencing his own “critical mass” in the workload he's carrying—taking on a new role, plus rebuilding the library after a five-year closure.

“I am completely fired up,” he said, and my ears perked.

Not too long ago, he felt burned out by his job of 25 years, he said. Then he was introduced to a self-help leadership series that's helped him manage his stress by changing the way he thinks.

“You live best if you live from the inside out,” he said. “You have full control of what's happening inside of you and no control of what's going on outside. That's my first mantra—it's made this year enjoyable, despite problems and headaches along the way.”

And his second mantra? “In life you're either creating or disintegrating. One or the other. The most dynamic, innovative people are creating. Creating new stuff every day fuels the fire.”

Ward isn't ignoring negative political messages or damaging education policies. On the contrary—he recently became president of his local union after the longtime former leader retired.

He's controlling what's in his control, creating every day, and starting conversations. “That's how we change the narrative,” he said—all things I already knew but needed to hear that day.

I hope it inspires you, too. We can't control politicians, but we can act. Share your stories with me at BO Ortega@mea.org.

—Brenda Ortega, editor



The number of Michigan public school districts among a list of 55 across 20 states with the most inequitable funding, according to a new report. Dearborn, Kalamazoo, and Lansing are the Michigan districts that made the list of 55 districts nationwide with higher than average student poverty and lower than average resources when state and local revenues are combined. The report, titled “Is School Funding Fair? America's Most Fiscally Disadvantaged School Districts,” was published in February by Rutgers University and the Education Law Center, one of the leading advocates for equal educational opportunity and education justice in the U.S.

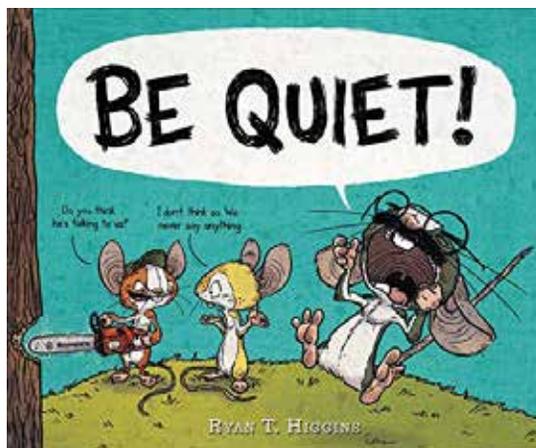
QUOTABLES

“Every teacher everywhere in the universe throughout all time is trying to get kids into STEM. This is a good way to present science in an interesting way kids will like.”

Andy Weir, author of the blockbuster bestselling novel *The Martian*, on a new “classroom-friendly” edition of the book recently released with offensive language removed. The novel about an astronaut stranded on Mars contains math problems the main character is trying to solve, which some teachers are assigning for students to work on as a way of sparking interest in Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math (STEM).

ICYMI

Elizabeth Bird is a librarian in New York who writes a blog called “A Fuse #8 Production” at *School Library Journal*. She recently posted “Some of the Funniest Picture Books of 2017,” a list that includes this gem—*BE QUIET!*—about a brainy mouse melting down over the antics of his doofus companions—a storyline ideal for assigning parts and performing a Readers Theater, she said.



QUOTABLES

“Many students hate writing because the only writing they do in school is to answer the teacher’s questions.”

Kelly Gallagher, a California high school ELA teacher, author, and consultant—considered one of the leading voices in literacy education—commenting on Twitter about best practices in having students write across the curriculum.



The winner of the “Best in Show” award at this year’s MEA/MAEA Art Exhibit, Pat Miller-Coy, is a former school bus driver who retired from Paw Paw Public Schools in 2005 after 15 years of service. A graduate of Paw Paw schools and a founding member of the Southwest Michigan Art Association, Miller-Coy spent two months creating her oil painting, titled “Power & Beauty of Earth—Pictured Rocks,” with a goal of inspiring anyone who viewed it to visit the Pictured Rocks National Lakeshore along the south edge of Lake Superior in Michigan’s Upper Peninsula. “I wanted to focus on the magnitude of the size and the amazing colors, because that’s what fascinated me when I saw it,” she said. The painting features kayakers dwarfed by the massive multi-colored sandstone cliffs and formations.

UPCOMING EVENTS

April 21-22 Spring Representative Assembly

Lansing Center, Lansing

MEA's highest governing body, the Representative Assembly will consider the organization's policy matters for the coming year. Delegates are elected from locals around the state.

May 9 Teacher Day/ School Family Day

Statewide

Each year, schools and communities observe Teacher Day/School Family Day with local celebrations that pay tribute to the contributions school employees make to our communities and society.

June 30—July 5 NEA Representative Assembly

Boston, Mass.

The NEA Representative Assembly, consisting of 8,000 delegates from across the U.S., adopts the strategic plan and budget, resolutions, the Legislative Program, and other policies of the Association. Delegates vote on proposed amendments to the Constitution and Bylaws.

August 1-3 Summer Leadership Conference

*Lake Superior State University,
Sault Ste. Marie*

Conference sessions help association leaders and members be informed and engaged on topics that include organizing, advocacy, political action, professional development, legal issues, and communications. For more information, go to MEA.org/conferences.

The 17th Annual MEA Scholarship Fund Golf Outing

is set for June 19 at the Forest Akers Golf Course in Lansing. The outing raises funds for scholarships given to college-bound students from Michigan public schools. Since 1997, more than \$554,000 in scholarships has been awarded.

Golfers will start at 9 a.m. in a four-player scramble. A continental breakfast will be served, and lunch will be provided on the course. A prize drawing and buffet will highlight the dinner program. The golf fee is \$120 per person, a portion of which is tax-deductible. Tax-deductible donations can be made for hole sponsorships, prizes, or directly to the scholarship fund.

Registration forms are available at www.mea.org/golfouting or by contacting Barb Hitchcock at bhitchcock@mea.org. Forms must be accompanied by entry fees. For questions, please contact Barb Hitchcock at 517-333-6276 or bhitchcock@mea.org.



FLINT EDUCATORS “OVERWHELMED” BY DONATIONS TO MEA SUPPLY DRIVE

Like many educators, Southwestern Classical Academy science teacher Jarrett Trombley says his meager supply budget from Flint Community Schools disappears quickly—once he buys paper for copying classroom handouts and ink cartridges for his printer.

Trombley was among 140 MEA members from Flint who received free bags of classroom supplies purchased with nearly \$40,000 in donations from union members across Michigan and the U.S. in the wake of the Flint water crisis.

“This means when my students need a pen or a pencil to work with, I have them,” Trombley said. “Need paper? Got it. A highlighter? Right here.”

Many educators spend hundreds and thousands of dollars out of pocket every year in Flint, said Marybeth Walworth, a high school special education teacher. “To know there are people out there that support what we are trying to do makes it easier for us to help kids,” Walworth said.



New MESSA options allow you to keep more of your paycheck

As the state's hard cap law continues to squeeze school employees' paychecks, MESSA has worked quickly over the last year to launch several new plan options designed to help bargainers and members reduce the amount of money taken out of members' paychecks for health insurance.

To help ease the financial burden placed on education employees, MESSA has moved quickly to create new, more affordable options that lower premiums while maintaining the large physician network and legendary personal service MESSA members love.

- ✓ **Coinsurance:** We have launched new coinsurance riders for certain MESSA Choices and MESSA ABC plans. Coinsurance lowers the amount taken from your paycheck. In exchange, after your deductible is paid, you pay a percentage of the cost of medical services when you use them over the year. If you don't need many services, you come out ahead at the end of the year.
- ✓ **Rx by mail:** Employee groups can now bargain a mandatory mail prescription rider, which requires members to sign up for convenient mail-order delivery for their routine maintenance medications. In exchange, this lowers premiums by more than one percent while also saving money on prescription costs.
- ✓ **Higher deductible options:** We've also introduced three higher-deductible options for MESSA Choices plans. Members have less money taken out of their paychecks, in exchange for a higher deductible when and if you need medical services.
- ✓ **Online doctor visits:** All MESSA plans now include low-cost online doctor visits through Amwell, saving members money by avoiding many expensive trips to the emergency room.

This is just the beginning. We at MESSA will continue to quickly roll out creative new plans and options in an effort to be proactive to our members' needs—without sacrificing the quality and service for which MESSA is known.

If you'd like to talk to someone about ways to reduce your health care costs, call your MESSA field representative at 800.292.4910. He or she can provide specific details for your group. ■

WE UNDERSTAND

We recognize that many education employees are struggling financially.

For over a decade now, education employees have faced stagnant or dropping wages, an increase in the amount the state government is forcing them to pay for their retirement benefits and a state-mandated "hard cap" on their health benefits. This hard cap is not keeping up with inflation, meaning you must pay an increased share of your health care premiums.

As a nonprofit founded and governed by education employees, MESSA understands more than our competitors about the pressures facing teachers, education support professionals and higher education staff—all of the members of our board are school or higher education employees. We at MESSA are actively working on solutions to ease the burden placed on school employees, because we *are* you.



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School Employees Sacrifice to Save District

By Brenda Ortega
MEA Voice Editor

THE FINANCIAL SITUATION IN YPSILANTI'S LINCOLN CONSOLIDATED SCHOOL DISTRICT WAS DIRE WHEN SCHOOL EMPLOYEES STEPPED UP TO TAKE HITS FOR THE TEAM—ABSORBING JOB CUTS, INSURANCE PREMIUM HIKES, PAY REDUCTIONS, AND MORE IN THE HOPES OF RESTORING STABILITY OVER A FIVE-YEAR PERIOD.

What a difference one school year made. A \$7.5 million difference, to be precise.

Thanks to employee sacrifices, the 4,000-student district moved from a \$2.3 million deficit to a positive fund equity balance of more than \$5.2 million in record time—exiting state financial oversight four years early.

“To my knowledge, no one else in Michigan has been able to do what

we have done,” said Jackie Shock, a teacher at Bishop Elementary School who was president of the Lincoln Education Association when the deficit elimination plan was negotiated.

To turn finances around quickly, union leaders agreed to reduce staff numbers by 50 with a combination of retirements, attrition, and layoffs. Employees also agreed to reopen an already concessionary contract, which

resulted in salary cuts, higher health insurance costs, and reduced Health Savings Account contributions from the district.

Support staff and administrators had been making concessions for years, but to make a big impact on the budget quickly teachers absorbed the biggest hits in 2015. Class sizes got bigger—above 30 in the elementary grades—but educators soldiered on.

Among the most painful concessions for teachers was the loss of prep time. With no breaks during the school day, without time to plan and grade outside of nights and week-



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- Student Rights & Programs

For more information on joining MEA-Retired, go to www.mea-retired.org.

MEA-Retired
The Commitment Continues



ends, people approached burnout levels of stress last school year, said Michael Weathers, a Lincoln High School teacher and current LEA president.

“It was very tough for our own mental well-being having no prep time,” Weathers said. “We were in survival mode, and people said they could not do it again; they were exhausted.”

That’s all changed with the district’s rapid recovery. Now Lincoln employees are working under an amended contract for this school year—a significantly altered spending plan approved by the School Board in January once the fund balance reached 12 percent of the total budget.

New staff is coming on board. Class sizes are falling. Prep hours have returned. A 3 percent pay cut was restored for 2016-17. Next year, teachers will receive both a step and their first on-schedule raise in 10 years.

“Now we have a bit of a bright future ahead of us and definitely a much more optimistic feeling,”

Weathers said.

Including Lincoln, 16 Michigan districts or charter academies eliminated deficits between June 2015 and December 2016, most after multiple years under deficit elimination plans. Twenty-seven remained in the red.

A study released last summer by Michigan State University showed that districts in Michigan get into financial trouble almost entirely based on factors outside of their control, yet state policies enacted since 2011 employ a punitive approach to dealing with so-called “deficit districts.”

The MSU research, published in the *Journal of Education Finance*, found the causes of financial distress are chiefly drops in state per-pupil funding, declining enrollment, and higher shares of special education students—especially in areas where charter schools are prevalent.

Meanwhile, lawmakers passed new measures between 2011 and 2015 allowing emergency managers to take over schools in financial emergencies,

authorizing state officials to dissolve districts considered “unviable,” and increasing financial reporting requirements to intervene sooner in districts with low fund balances.

Like other districts, Lincoln was hit hard by the financial crisis of 2008. The community experienced huge job losses. Foreclosures skyrocketed. School enrollments declined. Charters opened up. At the same time, the district experienced high administrative turnover.

Painful concessions made by Lincoln school employees to rein in the deficit last year “crushed morale,” said former School Board President Kim Samuelson. “Teachers were exhausted, and support staff found themselves doing work they were never expected to do before.”

But now the district is strong and well-positioned for the future, she said. “It is the staff’s commitment to our kids, in spite of deep personal sacrifice, that makes Lincoln so attractive to parents,” Samuelson said. ■

DIGITAL

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ne  s a  e

"The computer is not doing any thinking. It's just giving kids information without distinguishing between good or bad, biased or non-biased, factual or untrue.

**"That's something students need to learn, and it's our job to teach them."
—Brian Chinavare, media specialist**

LITERACY





Teaching *Old-Fashioned Skills* in a *New-Fangled World*

By Brenda Ortega
MEA Voice Editor

WHEN MEA MEMBER BRIAN CHINAVARE SEES HIS FACEBOOK FRIENDS SHARING MISLEADING OR PHONY INFORMATION, HE CAN'T HELP THINKING OF THE STUDENTS THEY USED TO BE—AND THE CRITICAL READING SKILLS THEY DIDN'T LEARN IN SCHOOL.

After all, who knew we'd be living in a "post-truth" society—a term declared by the Oxford English Dictionary as the 2016 Word of the Year?

Helping kids navigate the digital world in the age of "fake news" and

"alternative facts" is one of the missions undertaken each day by Chinavare and other school librarians—also known as media specialists and information literacy specialists.

"My job is to teach kids, first, how

to recognize that they need some information and then how to locate it, evaluate it, and use it effectively," said Chinavare, librarian at Frost Middle School in Livonia.

Times have changed, he said. It's simple to find information, but harder to judge its credibility. "We've gotten to a point where the technology behind creating a website is not that difficult anymore, and amateurs can

make themselves look pretty credible.”

It would be easy to assume today's young people don't need any guidance in the virtual realm. Known as digital natives, they've grown up with supercomputers at their fingertips around the clock—which has made them savvy tech consumers, right?

Not so fast, according to Stanford University.

A recent Stanford study of nearly 8,000 students found the majority of preteens and teens don't know how to determine the accuracy and credibility of information they find on the internet—particularly social media sites where many of them get their news.

The study released last November revealed 82 percent of middle school students could not distinguish between news and “sponsored content” on a website. Four in 10 high school students cited an unidentified photo of deformed flowers as “evidence” for claims of toxic conditions near a nuclear plant.

It's not a problem confined to young people, said Mike Ward, a librarian at Clintondale High School who also serves as his association president. “Everyone wants to click a little piece, and then they're gone and rolling,” he said.

Nor is the issue of false or misleading information a new phenomenon. Ward, a longtime social studies teacher before becoming a librarian, said he opened his U.S. History classes years ago with a *National Enquirer* article he noticed standing in line at the grocery store.

“The headline on the cover said, ‘George Washington Aided by Aliens While Crossing the Delaware.’ I bought it, copied it, and that was the conversation starter.”

However, with the explosion of so-called “fake news” spreading rapidly across social media platforms, the importance of addressing gaps in the quality of information has grown exponentially along with it.

Percent change in school librarians 2003-2014

**U.S.
Average
Down
17%**

**Michigan
Average
Down
62%**

Declining support for certified school librarians in Michigan has negatively impacted student achievement, at a time when the need for school librarians has increased.

Source: National Center for Education Statistics

FREE RESOURCES FOR TEACHING INFORMATION LITERACY

“Best practices” in teaching information literacy shift with the digital landscape, says Dr. Troy Hicks, an MEA member and professor of English and Education at Central Michigan University. Hicks co-hosted a March #MichEd Twitter chat on the subject, at www.tinyurl.com/MILitChat.

Hicks co-authored a book with Dr. Kristen Hawley Turner, titled *Argument in the Real World*, published last November. Check out the book’s free classroom resources related to information literacy at www.tinyurl.com/RealArgument.

Look for these other great resources:

- ✓ A checklist for how to confirm news accuracy can be printed at “Breaking News Consumer’s Handbook: Fake News Edition,” at www.wnyc.org.
- ✓ At AllSides.com, students can view articles on a particular issue from three different points on the political spectrum.
- ✓ A ready-made web-quest for students to complete can be found at 21Things4Students.net if you look for “Search Strategies.”
- ✓ “Web Literacy for Student Fact-Checkers,” is a richly detailed guide from a digital strategist available at webliteracy.pressbooks.com.
- ✓ Visit the website of the College Ready Writers Program at www.nwp.org for units and lessons on research writing, including how to read and critique mentor texts.
- ✓ Look for OpenSources.co a free service that allows students to check the reliability of a website or news outlet using the site’s curated lists of credible and non-credible online sources.

Sorting out the good from the bad requires critical thinking skills and patience—qualities that must be taught and modeled by educators, Ward said.

“The conversation begins in the classroom and works out from there,” he said.

Andy Schoenborn has embraced the challenge in English 12 classes he teaches at Mount Pleasant High School—drawing on work he’s done as a teacher consultant at the College Ready Writers Program, part of the National Writing Project site at Central Michigan University.

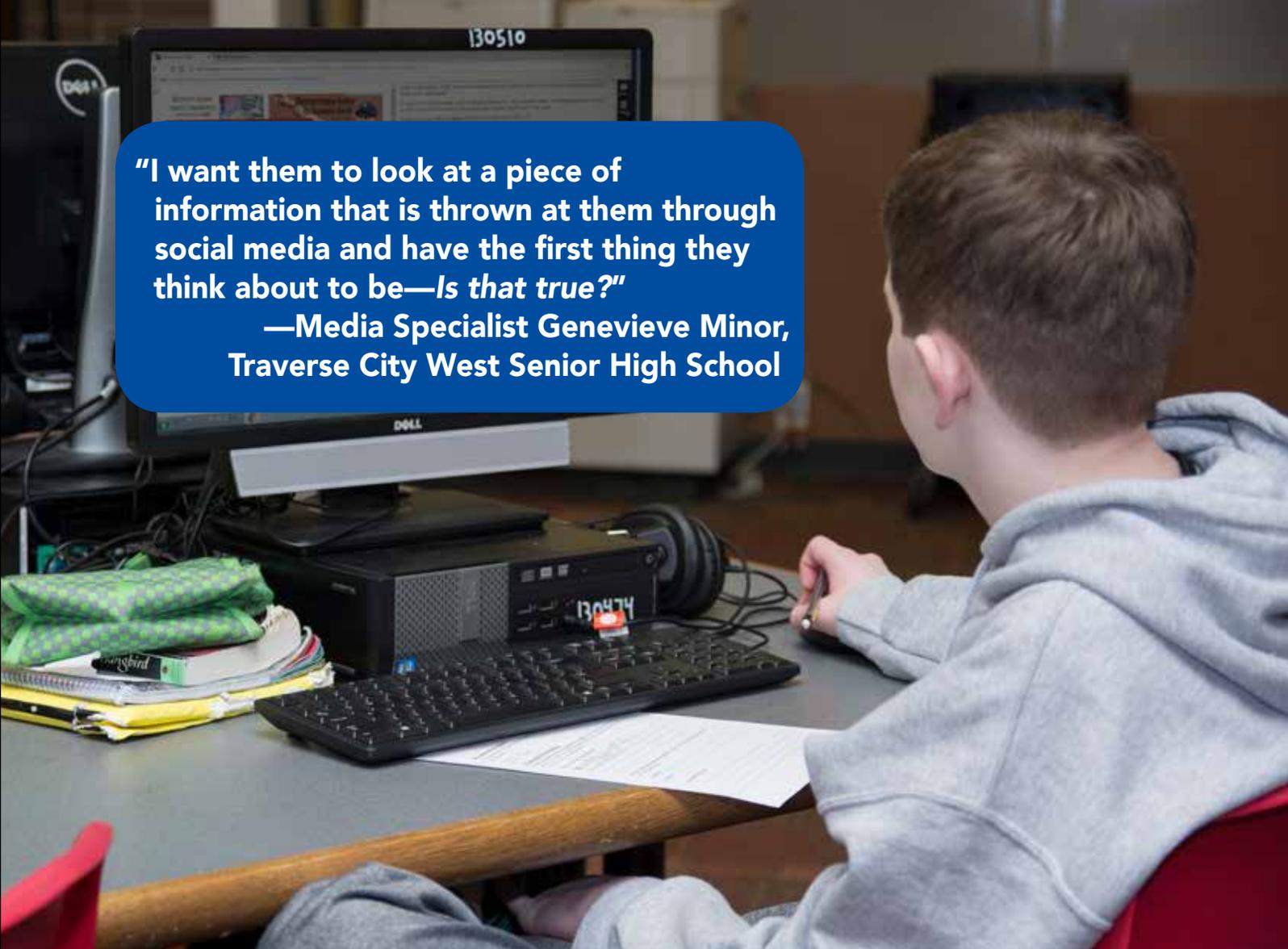
His seniors undertake a rigorous research, debate, and writing project, tackling a controversial subject (most recently digital tracking and online privacy rights) to develop an authoritative piece of writing that draws on and critiques the strongest research and opinion articles from a variety of perspectives on the subject.

“We’re using informational texts as mentor texts—to examine how writers are doing what they’re doing—but then really tearing these pieces apart from other things and using informational text to extend and share what students think about a topic,” Schoenborn said.

As an English teacher, taking on ambitious projects in the classroom is manageable with a librarian on staff to help students find and evaluate primary and secondary sources of information, which is why Mount Pleasant educators worked hard to fight off administrators’ attempt to cut media specialists several years ago, Schoenborn said.

Among the many roles they play, certified professional media specialists extend the conversation about information literacy beyond the walls of individual classrooms, connecting educators with tools and curricular resources across grade levels and subject areas.

Unfortunately, state funding cuts to education have slashed the num-



“I want them to look at a piece of information that is thrown at them through social media and have the first thing they think about to be—*Is that true?*”

**—Media Specialist Genevieve Minor,
Traverse City West Senior High School**

ber of certified librarians in Michigan schools by 62 percent between 2003 and 2014, compared to a 17 percent loss nationally during the same time period. (See related story, page 16.)

“I think we are more important than ever, and we’ve been reducing in numbers,” said Judy Freels, an information literacy specialist at Stoney Creek High School in Rochester. “In this day and age, information literacy skills are critical—even more so than 10, 15, 20 years ago.”

Freels said students regularly pull articles from websites that have no author listed, no publisher, no dates of publication or last updates, “and they think because it’s in print or on the screen that it’s factual. That’s when I say, “This could be true, but

let’s verify.”

Indeed, in the Stanford study even college students were found to be easily duped by a website’s high production values and polished “About” pages—even if fake or false.

Freels helped develop the curriculum for the Rochester district’s required ninth-grade class on digital citizenship, which includes lessons on how to find reliable sources and determine if information is credible or not.

Like many other librarians, Freels trains students in the intricacies of navigating research databases, including the free Michigan e-Library known as MeL. Databases are searchable collections of academic journals and other professionally written and vetted material.

Unlike Google and other popular search engines, databases require students to use keywords and Boolean operators instead of natural language in phrasing their search terms. MeL offers educators a resource page with tips and handouts, broken down by grade level.

Once students find material through MeL or another database, the challenge is in grasping the content, said Genevieve Minor, a media specialist at Traverse City West Senior High School.

Minor takes students through a step-by-step process that begins with reading general articles to learn the

[continued on page 18]

Loss of Librarians Hurts Literacy Efforts

By Brenda Ortega
MEA Voice Editor

CERTIFIED SCHOOL LIBRARIANS ARE AN ENDANGERED SPECIES IN MICHIGAN.

Even as politicians have toughened academic standards and passed a strict new third grade reading law, school districts across the state have cut professional library staff to balance budgets under pressure from state per-pupil funding cuts.

Also known as media specialists, librarians have seen their numbers slashed by 62 percent since 2003, compared to a nationwide drop of just 17 percent. Michigan now ranks 47th among the 50 states in the ratio of students to media specialists.

“At the same time that all those people were being cut, our reading scores have plummeted in this state,” said Kathy Lester, a full-time media specialist in Plymouth-Canton and advocacy chair of the Michigan Association for Media in Education.

A recent study by a University of Michigan professor found that since 2003 Michigan students have shown the least growth nationally on the National Assessment of Education Progress (NAEP), often called the nation’s report card. Michigan has fallen to the bottom of state rankings in reading and math profi-

ciency as well.

Over the same period in many school buildings across the state, libraries have been shuttered altogether—with those spaces reorganized for other uses. Elsewhere, libraries remain but uncertified employees have been reshuffled to staff the circulation desk alone. Only 8 percent of public school buildings in Michigan have at least one full-time media specialist.

Certified teacher-librarians do more than check out books. Media specialists provide expertise and professional support in how to integrate technology with teaching in meaningful ways. They offer students specialized instruction in information literacy. With a big-picture view spanning grades and subject areas, they help align curriculum vertically and horizontally.

“These are not your grandma’s librarians anymore,” said Judy Bowling a former elementary school media specialist in Livonia who recently became a library consultant at Wayne RESA, providing services and support to 33 public school districts

in Wayne County.

Media specialists still purchase and recommend grade-appropriate books for pleasure reading, Bowling said, and that’s an important role in many areas where low-income students have little access to high-quality reading material at home.

But with degrees and certification in Library and Information Science, they also serve as school and district leaders in literacy and technology in areas where they have survived the budget axe.

Livonia schools media specialist Brian Chinavare teaches research and critical reading skills to classes that come to the library. He helps teachers learn to use technology and troubleshoots issues. In addition, he has created a “maker space” at Frost Middle School where students can experiment with electronics and learn to write code to program a bot to move as directed.

“Mostly I see myself as a crutch to help kids do better in school,” Chinavare said. “The kids all know they can come to the library for help.”

This year in Clintondale, Mike Ward returned as a media specialist in the library that connects the high school and middle school—five years after the district cut librarians in a budget crunch.

In his role promoting 21st Century skills and literacy, Ward finds and learns new apps and programs and trains teachers to use them if they choose. Ward says, “We’re all teachers of reading,” regardless of content area, and he’s also an early adopter of new technology. He believes in a “TLC” philosophy of teaching—marrying Technology, Literacy, and Content.

DID YOU KNOW?

Research shows the presence of certified librarians in schools improves reading achievement and graduation rates, with the biggest effects in schools that serve large percentages of poor, minority, or disabled children—those communities least likely to have them in Michigan.



Media Specialist Genevieve Minor (far right) succeeded in getting a public library card issued to every student at Traverse City West High School, helped here by Kristi Jackowski, a library aide at the Traverse Area District Library.

“The better you can read, the easier things are going to be for you socially, academically, personally, professionally,” he said. “Good readers find ways to be good citizens, good students, and successful people.”

In Traverse City, media specialist Genevieve Minor teaches, helps to align curriculum, finds resources for classroom use, and trains teachers. This year she also arranged for more than 900 high school students to get Traverse City District Library cards issued during school hours. Students now have access to the public library’s rich databases. But her goal was bigger than that, she said.

“I want students to use the library for their whole life. I want them to use it in college; I want them to bring their babies to it; I want them to join a book club; I want them to go to see what the community events are; I want them to check out a ukulele or a telescope.”

In Clarkston, the number of li-

brarians has dropped from five years ago when one worked in every building, but the district has kept as many as possible. Laura Cadreau now works as a media specialist in two elementary schools and tag teams with a paraprofessional, Karen Fallis.

Cadreau teaches information literacy classes and serves on the district’s information literacy team. Fallis manages circulation and troubleshoots technology issues. She also helps students research and learn how to find resources through progressively complicated scavenger hunts.

Without guidance, students think research is surfing Google to find facts to cut and paste into reports, Fallis said. “They’re very savvy at manipulating the data on the screen, but it’s critical we teach them how to do research in ways other than just Googling it,” Fallis said.

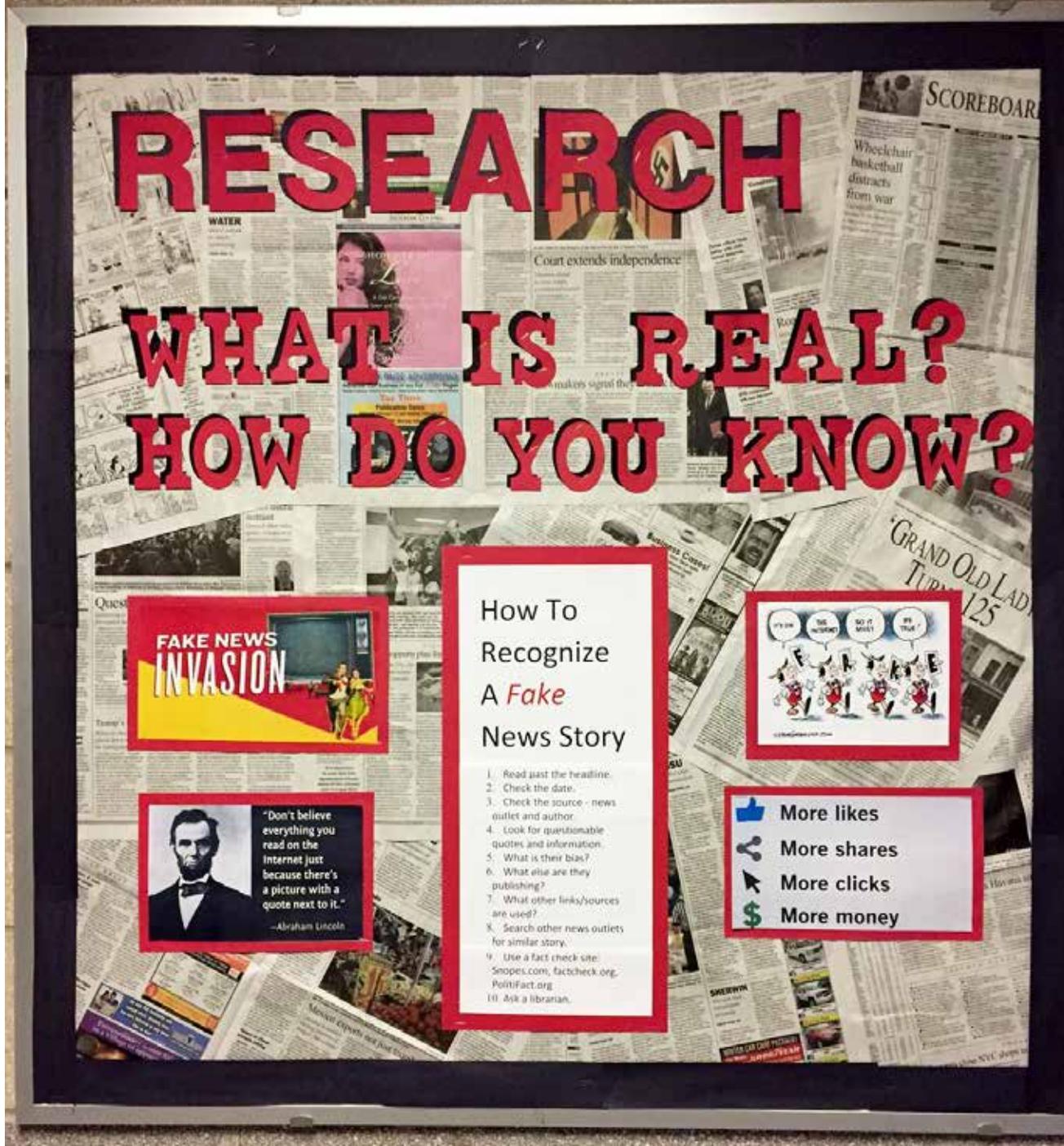
The decline in media specialist jobs statewide has decimated the

professional pipeline, said Sandra Yee, dean of the Wayne State University Library System. In 2004, 63 people were studying Library and Information Science at Wayne; today, that number is six—an all-time low, Yee said.

“We are drastically worse than other states in terms of what is happening with media specialists in the schools,” she said. “We have seen schools of Information Library Science in other states whose enrollment actually has gone up, because there are jobs for those people once they finish.”

The trends in Michigan don’t make sense, says Livonia’s Brian Chinavare.

“There’s so much focus now on reading and math and literacy, and as a state we say we want to help all students become better readers—but at the same time we’re cutting libraries,” Chinavare said. “What are we doing?” ■



With the recent attention on “fake news” and “alternative facts,” Media Specialist Genevieve Minor created this bulletin board display to coordinate with her teaching on information literacy at Traverse City West High School.

DIGITAL LITERACY

[continued from page 15]

basic facts and vocabulary of a topic, which helps them formulate better questions, sharpen their research focus, and comprehend increasingly challenging articles.

“Facts are indisputable, and you

need to know that factual information before just diving into magazines and newspaper articles and other things where you’re going to see more opinion and potential bias,” Minor said. “If you don’t know that information, you’re not going to be able to become the skeptic—and I want them to be skeptics of information.”

That doesn’t mean Minor ignores the reality that students—and most

adults—regularly use Google and other popular search tools. In fact, Minor thinks educators must embrace that truth and teach students how to evaluate internet sources they’ll be using all their lives.

This year she’s pushing for 11th-grade English teachers to pilot a research project in which students conduct a comparative study of various sources of information on an issue.

Students would analyze the quality of information based on a set of journalistic and research standards.

It's not easy for human beings to challenge their own assumptions, but good researchers must be willing to step outside of their comfort zone—a useful framework she uses with students.

“I want them to look at a piece of information that is thrown at them through social media and have the first thing they think about to be—*Is that true?*”

The best way to develop that habit might be to start early. In Clarkston, Laura Cadreau serves as the media specialist and tag teams library services at two elementary schools with a paraprofessional who's worked side by side with her for 13 years.

Cadreau rotates classes of all grade levels through her library for weekly lessons in literacy. One of her favorite lessons for older students asks them to go to a website and answer questions about an endangered species—the Pacific Northwest Tree Octopus.

She doesn't tell them the site is a hoax, and students don't figure it out right away. Some realize the truth eventually, but at least half are shocked when Cadreau tells them at the end.

“They will accept it at face value,” she said. “And then we talk about the importance of looking at related links and to ask questions and be suspicious—to look for bias or try to figure out if it's a reputable website.”

By the time they get to college, young people live on the internet and it's important to meet them where they are, said Nicole Ellet-Petersen, who teaches writing and literature courses at Gogebic Community College.

She sees hopeful signs in this generation's preoccupation with their phones and social media, she said. “They immerse themselves in text all the time. They're reading all day long.”

Her students care about social issues and current events, she said. They want to discuss difficult topics. And they're better readers than their predecessors, at least at Gogebic, where the numbers of incoming students testing below college level now is roughly half what it was five years ago.

Her students know that internet information can be unreliable, but they lack confidence in how to root out the good stuff, Ellet-Petersen said. She talks in her classes about liberal and conservative bias—defining the terms because many students don't know what they mean. She relates it all the way back to Thomas Jefferson and John Adams, and federalism versus states' rights.

“They don't even know what side I'm on when I'm explaining it, because on both sides there is a legitimate political philosophy,” she said.

Using that foundation, she has freshmen undertake research and debate in which some students are advocates and try to sway independents who haven't formed opinions yet. It's a useful strategy for encouraging students to use only high-quality information, she said.

Training in information literacy doesn't stop when students arrive at college, where they're expected to confirm facts with multiple articles and document the validity of sources, said Lisa Anderson, a reference librarian at Muskegon Community College.

“Our goal is to help students become better researchers and get them to understand that true research does not just stop—it is cyclical,” Anderson said. “The more you read, the more questions you have, and the more research you need to do.”

As with any important skill, students need to have critical reading modeled and taught again and again in various settings to eventually master it, said Mark Blaauw-Hara, a literature and writing professor at North Central Michigan College in Petoskey.

“People who haven't worked as teachers tend to think we tell students facts and how to do things and students just do it and know it,” Blaauw-Hara said. “In reality it's a dialogue; we have to get to know students and meet them halfway and have conversations and ask questions. It can be hard, but that's what our job is—opening people's minds.”

Watching that transformation happen is the reason he's a teacher-librarian, said Clintondale's Mike Ward. “Seeing someone go from hopeless and giving up, because they can't find what they need, to knowing how to find good information is pretty fulfilling.”

Livonia's Brian Chinavare agreed. “If we can make a good impression on kids when they're here, then they'll be good users of information when they're adults. And that's important for our democracy.” ■



Candidates for MEA offices and NEA director



MEA PRESIDENT

- TOM BRENNER
- PAULA HERBART
- RICK TRAINOR

MEA VICE PRESIDENT

- FRANK BURGER
- MAURY KOFFMAN
- CHANDRA MADAFFERI

MEA SECRETARY-TREASURER

- JENIFER ALMASSY
- DEBRA PORTER
- BRETT SMITH

NEA DIRECTOR

- DOUG HILL

DELEGATES TO THE MEA SPRING REPRESENTATIVE ASSEMBLY APRIL 21-22 WILL HAVE THE IMPORTANT DUTY OF ELECTING CANDIDATES TO MAJOR MEA/NEA POSITIONS.

They will cast ballots for the offices of MEA president, vice president, and secretary-treasurer, and fill one NEA Board of Directors position.

Listed in alphabetical order, the candidates running for president are Tom Brenner, Paula Herbart, and Rick Trainor; for vice president Frank Burger, Maury Koffman, and Chandra Madafferi; and for secretary-treasurer Jenifer Almassy, Debra Porter, and Brett Smith. Doug Hill is running for a position on the NEA Board of Directors.

MEA members who are running for statewide offices are allowed to have information published in the *MEA Voice*. Each candidate is allowed a short biography, a photo, and a campaign statement. *MEA Voice* staff writes the biography from information submitted by the candidate; each candidate may also provide a campaign statement that is printed verbatim.

Candidate statements follow, starting with president and ending with NEA director. Statements for the office of president are limited to 750 words, plus biographical information. Statements for other officers are limited to 350 words, plus biographical information. ■

Tom Brenner

Candidate for MEA President



Brenner is past president of the Novi Education Association in Oakland County, where he works as a high school social studies teacher. A member of the MEA Executive Committee and Board of Directors, he previously served on the NEA Board where he was chair of the Board Steering Committee. He has held a variety of leadership positions within his local and region, including serving as Region 7 president and vice president, MEA and NEA Representative Assembly delegate, coordinating council delegate and local PAC chair. He also is a political science adjunct at Oakland Community College and a Farmington Education Foundation trustee.

Dear fellow MEA member,

I am excited to address you as a candidate for MEA president! On April 22, 2017, delegates from locals across our great state will convene at the Spring Representative Assembly to elect new officers to lead our union and I ask for your support. I appreciate this opportunity to share with you some of the important reasons why Frank Burger and I are best suited to lead MEA. As of this writing, I am honored to have received endorsements for president from Regions 10 and 11, as well as the Michigan Association for Higher Education (MAHE).

I am running because I believe our union needs to advocate in a positive and proactive manner for our students and our members every day. We must create an organizational foundation of the highest integrity, especially during a time when the political climate has targeted public educators, causing low morale and many to leave our great profession prematurely. Our plan is rooted in the reality that there are no quick fixes. MEA must have leaders who are committed to analyzing and addressing every aspect of our organization.

As we speak with members from across the state we recognize that while our union membership has many common threads, each individual, local and region is unique. It is our intention to reach out to ALL of our members. We are committed to spending quality time with you, listening to your ideas, and sharing with you what we learn from your colleagues.

We will start by incorporating the significant experiences and sacrifices of our retirees as a model to be emulated, especially when it comes to bargaining, organizing and mentoring. We will create a strong connection between our retirees, student members, and early career educators which will sharpen our collective ability to attract and retain membership.

In addition, you will play a vital role in rejuvenating MEA. We plan on utilizing your talents and the expertise of local, regional and statewide leaders to involve everyone in a systematic pattern of dialogue and trainings that will engage and motivate all members. It is high time we flex our collective educator muscles!

As the only candidate for office with an advanced degree in political science, and teaching government full-time in the classroom every day, I approach the politi-

cal role our union takes from a strategic vantage point. I know firsthand the impact that school funding decisions, poorly crafted education legislation, and bureaucratic red tape have on our teaching and our students' learning. Under our positive and proactive leadership, MEA will engage in the political process with all members—Democrats, Republicans and independents across the state, to ensure we effectively impact the policymaking process from the ground up.

We will continue to work collaboratively to build partnerships with stakeholders and outside groups who share our vision and goals. Our desire to be a profession that is respected by our communities is what will bind us together. We will establish a culture of accountability in terms of honest, consistent and timely communications. And we will model real best practices, rooted in evidence, and be recognized as the experts in our field.

I am a leader at every level of our organization (local, region, MEA and NEA) and have developed valuable skills and relationships across our state and our country. My experiences as the Novi EA president have reinforced my conviction that we value high quality professional development, political engagement and a deep pride in our union. As we broaden our presence across all platforms of media, our positive and proactive commitment to our union and our students' futures will be self-evident.

My wife Emily and I have two boys in Farmington Public Schools. I help coach their baseball teams and I serve on our local education foundation. Our family is deeply invested in the success of our community and we believe our schools are the foundation of that community. These local connections have demonstrated to me the integral nature of cooperation of all stakeholders in public education.

My vision for our union is not for the next term, but for the next generation. We need officers who are motivated to cultivate that new generation of leaders. We can and will become the most powerful voice for our children, our members and our society!

Fellow colleagues, please consider Tom Brenner for MEA President and Frank Burger for Vice-President as your choice to be the next leaders of the Michigan Education Association.

Thank you!

Paula Herbart

Candidate for MEA President



Herbart is president of MEA-NEA Local 1 in Macomb County. She serves on the MEA and NEA Board of Directors and as chair of the 6-E Coordinating Council. A music teacher and former local president from Fraser, she has held a variety of bargaining, PAC, grievance and election positions at the local level. She is the Vice Chair of both the MEA's Local Option Coalition and the Instructional and Professional Development Committee, an MEA Representative Assembly delegate, a member of the Long Range Bargaining Committee, an ex-officio member of the Budget Committee and a member of NEA's Charter School Task Force.

Across the country, all of us as educators are being vilified and our professionalism is constantly under attack. Our ideas are dismissed regardless of their merits, and that's just plain wrong. Now, more than ever, the union is the beacon of professional strength, and that's what my campaign is all about.

Within MEA, we flourish as education professionals. In the Union, smart people are honored. Good ideas are recognized for their worth and valuable people are valued. Our union provides a professional arena where we elevate and promote one another's ideas. The union creates opportunities for us to be the best version of ourselves—professionally and personally.

In 1994, as a second-year music educator and emerging leader, I was asked to speak at a General Membership meeting. When I got to the meeting I saw that MEA president Julius Maddox was in the room. That made me nervous, but I pressed forward because I had something to say. Standing on a chair, in a smoky VFW hall, I spoke about PAC, why it was important, and the risks in the upcoming election. I implored my fellow members to remember that voting has consequences and reiterated how one vote can change the events for an entire nation.

Concerned I might say the wrong thing, or even offend my friends and colleagues, I was floored when the membership erupted in a standing ovation. In that moment, as the room came together in a show of solidarity around voting, I understood the power of unionism. Since that time, I have joined with members across the state, collectively rallying and speaking out on issues ranging from wages, insurance coverage for us and our families, working and learning conditions in our schools, and fighting for our 3%!

MEA must be the premiere voice for public education and its employees in the state. We must build relationships with our members, asking them what they want from our union and working every day to make sure their voices are heard. I have the experience needed to engage our

members and the public around the issues facing us today.

A 25-year veteran public school educator in Fraser Public Schools and its 2007-2008 "Teacher of the Year," I served on the Fraser Education Association Executive Board since 1992. I have served as FEA PAC Co-Chair, Grievance Chair, Elections Chair, Corresponding Secretary, and President. I was elected to the MEA Board of Directors in 2011 and to the NEA Board of Directors in 2012. I have traveled extensively, informing our members, and responding to their concerns about education and union issues—both statewide and nationally. I have provided training and presented at the MEA Bargaining and PR Conference, the MEA ESP Conference, MEA Summer Leadership Conference, MEA President's Summit, the National Council of Urban Educators Association's Fall Conference, and at NEA's Student Program Summer Leadership Conference.

I am in my fifth year as President/Chair of MEA-NEA Local 1 and 6-E Coordinating Council, serving approximately 4,600 EA and ESP members from 14 school districts in Macomb County and two school districts in Wayne County. Local 1 members work in rural, suburban, and urban areas, serving diverse communities. Our office employs four Executive Directors and two Assistants, providing service, support and programming while managing a multimillion dollar dues revenue stream to the Michigan Education Association. Recently organizing six new Associations within 6-E Coordinating Council, with each obtaining a successfully bargained first-time contract.

MEA's collective strength will help us reclaim our rightful place as professionals. Public education relies on the expertise and experience of all of us. And it's the union that can nurture and develop the next generation of public education employees. With me as your President and Maury Koffman as your Vice President, we will work together in tandem with members to ensure that your vision becomes MEA's reality.

Rick Trainor

Candidate for MEA President



Trainor currently serves as MEA secretary-treasurer. An English and physical education teacher from Mt. Pleasant Public Schools, he previously served as local president and several other positions within the MPEA. He represented Region 12 on the MEA Board and as region president, treasurer and PAC chair. He is vice chair of MEA's Staff Retirement Plan Board and was formerly president of the MEA Statewide Presidents Caucus. He served on the Local Affiliates and Legislative Commissions, the MEA Budget Committee, and the MEA PAC Council and Governing Board. A U.S. Marine Corps veteran, he earned his teaching credential from Central Michigan University.

What Is MEA?

It's a large, complex, multi-corporation, membership based business. It's operations are sophisticated. The CEO of this operation is the MEA President. The President must know and understand, on day 1, all aspects of the four entities making up the MEA family; MESSA, MEA Financial Services, the MEA-MESSA-MEAFS Staff Retirement Plan, and MEA itself. The business volume and assets that are involved are significant.

Here is why that's important to understand:

On September 1, 2017, our current Vice President and President retire. Our current Executive Director has not agreed to have her contract extended beyond December 31. More than 75 years experience at MEA leaves in a four month stretch. This is not the time to start from scratch.

As the only candidate for MEA office who has ever been in an MEA Financial Services Board, or a MESSA Board meeting, let alone on those boards, and as the only candidate for President or Vice President who has ever been in a Staff Retirement Plan Board meeting, I am ready to lead and manage on September 1. I am the only candidate with knowledge of how MEA works and what we have done to meet the challenges of the last six years. I understand our finances, the work we do, and who we can count on.

I have served on the MESSA and MEAFS Boards for nearly six years. I have served on the Staff Retirement Plan Board seven years, having been elected vice chair my second year.

For nearly six years, I have served as the Secretary-Treasurer of MEA, have learned the intricacies of union, its affiliates and how to get things done. I have earned the trust of local leaders and RA delegates who have adopted five consecutive MEA budgets on voice votes without a single call for division, each significantly different from the prior budget.

I was the leader who recognized in 2014 and 2016, the unintended consequence of the dues transmittal policy that would have unjustly shut out hundreds of delegates from the floor of MEA's RAs. I authored and presented New Business Items that remedied that problem and allowed us to have full representation at every RA since the Fall of 2014.

My experience as an officer makes me unique among ALL candidates for office this spring. I have demonstrated the ability to take on difficult challenges and the courage to stand up and do what I believe to be the right thing for our Association.

My experience and my willingness to make change at MEA, led me to ask Chandra Madafferi, the Novi EA president, to be my running mate. I sought a successful local president who has dealt with the loss of payroll deduction, agency shop, evaluation law changes and outsourcing of support work. I sought a leader who has served as a local treasurer and who has actual, real world management and leadership experience in a non-profit organization.

We have worked together for more than two years planning for what we see as the challenges we believe MEA must address now so that we can position our union for the long term.

It is our leadership/management experience, gained not only by serving on committees and boards, but also by actually running the day-to-day operations of large non-profits, that led us to run a different campaign than other candidates.

We have put forth, in every region candidate night since November, written proposals that give members a specific idea of what they can expect of us. They are posted at www.meahometeam.com where you can also find more complete information about me and my running mate.

We put ideas in writing so that members can not only see what we propose but also join those initiatives they feel strongly about, and hold us accountable. Our first two orders of business will be ramping up the training and tools available to local leaders and improving the communications with and between local leaders, regions, and MEA. We will increase the visibility of MEA officers by using the tools we already have in place to communicate more efficiently and effectively.

As I traveled the state during my term, I have been listening to members. I have heard what they have asked for and am eager to use my knowledge of MEA to transform MEA and to protect public education, serve members, and I humbly ask for your vote for the Home Team on April 22, 2017.

Frank Burger

Candidate for MEA Vice President

Burger is president of the Carman-Ainsworth Education Association in Genesee County. Aside from holding many offices within his local and Region 10, he serves on the MEA Executive Committee and Board of Directors and is a delegate to the MEA and NEA Representative Assemblies. He previously served on the NEA Board and has held several leadership positions within the NEA Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual and Transgender Caucus. He has served on the MEA PAC Council and Governing Board, the Legislative Commission, Local Affiliates Commission, and chaired the Credentials Committee. He has also served as chair of the Genesee County Democratic Party.

As a proud union member and local president of the Carman-Ainsworth Education Association, I currently teach high school biology and physical science. Growing up in an MEA family, I learned the importance of unionism. I have appreciated your past support as an NEA Board Member, and am now again seeking your support for the office of MEA Vice-President. As of this writing, I've been honored with endorsements from Regions 10 & 11!

Good leaders have vision, are passionate, focused, committed and caring. Strong leaders go further by motivating others to achieve higher goals and take collective action. As a leader, my passions include advocating for members, social justice issues, educating the public, and building alliances at the grass roots level. My vision is to move our organization in a positive and proactive direction! We are at a crossroads. We have been attacked by the state legislature and membership continually declines. Now is the time for change.

We must ensure our members' voices are heard no matter where they live or work. People need to see their MEA officers fight-



ing for every aspect of public education as stated in our mission statement "to ensure that the education of our students and the working environments of our members are of the highest quality." We can start by training members how to influence the public and our elected officials and be more visible at the Capitol. MEA must build strong partnerships

at all levels to gain support and once again be seen as the "education policy experts." This will be difficult, especially during this political climate, but it is imperative that our members work together and stay focused on our mission.

We can't do this alone. I helped build successful coalitions with several labor unions, including AFL-CIO, Teamsters, and UAW in Genesee County. As your Vice-President, I know we can build on this success around the state.

I have the vision, passion and experience to guide this organization to be a stronger voice for our members and public education. Along with Tom Brenner, we will lead MEA in a positive and proactive direction!

Maury Koffman

Candidate for MEA Vice President

Koffman is president of the Michigan State University Administrative Professional Association. He is a member of the NEA Executive Committee, having previously been elected to the NEA Board of Directors. He has served on the MEA Board, the MEA ESP Caucus Board, the Michigan Association for Higher Education and the MEA Budget Committee. An information technology professional at MSU, he held many positions in his local, including secretary, lead negotiator and chair of the membership, finance and communications committees. He earned a bachelor's degree in international studies and a law degree with concentration in employment and labor relations from MSU.

I believe that we make a difference and transform the lives of the students we serve. I believe that we need to stand up and fight back against the attacks on public education. And I believe in the strength of the Michigan Education Association.

I'm fired up for educators to reclaim our rightful place as professionals, and it's our collective strength that will make sure it happens. I promise that as the next Vice President of MEA I will stand up for all members and especially for the 1.5 million Michigan students that we serve every day.

I was one of those students. I grew up in a union household in Blanchard, Michigan and my mother was the president of the ESP local in my district at Montabella Community Schools. When I was just 7 years old, my mom took me to walk my first picket line to fight privatization of my school district transportation and food service.

At a young age my mother impressed upon me the power and importance of collective action on a member's livelihood, public education, and our community.



With those core values as my foundation, I entered Michigan State University and earned a degree in international studies and then a law degree with a concentration in employment and labor relations. And for the past nine years I have had the honor to continue my Spartan connection serving as the president of the 2,500 member APA—my local in the land of Green & White!

I am a millennial leader and an education support professional who has been on the MEA Board since 2009. I am also serving my final term as one of the nine officers on the National Education Association's Executive Committee, the governing body overseeing our 3 million-member national union.

With me as your Vice President and Paula Herbart as your President, we will work together to fight for Michigan's public schools. I believe in our state, I believe in our union, and I believe in the fantastic work that all of us do with Michigan students every day.

Chandra Madafferi

Candidate for MEA Vice President

Madafferi is the president of the Novi Education Association in Oakland County. A high school health teacher, she has served as Novi EA's treasurer, PAC chair and negotiation spokesperson. She is a delegate to the MEA and NEA Representative Assemblies and the Region 7 council. Having joined Student MEA member while earning her undergraduate degree in education at Central Michigan University, she has served as the member liaison to the Student MEA Advisory Committee. She is also a member of the MEA Communications Committee. She lives in South Lyon with her family, where her children attend South Lyon Community Schools.

A new direction with the experience you trust. Together Rick and I believe we have the most experience and education that will make us ready to lead and manage MEA from day one.

As a local leader for 15 years I have held many positions including Treasurer and President, my current office. As a part-time president, I dealt with loss of agency shop, dues deduction, evaluation changes and outsourcing of support services. My status kept me grounded in changes with evaluation, increased class sizes, less support and the never ending pressure we all face.

In addition, I was the coordinator for SCAMP, a program for individuals with disabilities and a part of Bloomfield Hills Schools (www.bloomfieldscamp.com). Duties mirrored those of MEA Vice President giving me unmatched qualifications and experience.

For 15 years I protected the quality program people expect from us. Year round responsibilities were so extensive that BHS reported a full year's service credit to ORS and paid me a yearly salary. Hiring, managing



and evaluating staff, camper enrollment, programming and invoicing were just a few of my responsibilities.

At the state level, I served as representative to Student MEA, and on the MEA Communications/PR Committee for ten years. I was selected to lobby for MEA, testify before the legislature defending MEA membership rules, represented MEA in

election campaigns, was featured in the "Not in My Classroom" TV ad, on YouTube and represented MEA in multiple media including an Associated Press interview. As an LPA graduate and Local President, I am ready to lead LPA as MEA Vice President

With Rick's experience and extensive knowledge of our organization, and my experience passion, drive, and creative mind we will bring about the change in MEA to make us a viable organization in the future. Ready to rebuild from the ground up, Rick and I are the Home Team and are committed to Michigan and ready to work for you! www.hometeam.com

Jenifer Almassy

Candidate for MEA Secretary-Treasurer

Almassy is president of the Reese Professional Education Association in Tuscola County. She serves on the MEA and NEA Board of Directors and as president of Region 11. A high school business and English teacher, she served her local as a negotiator and as coordinating council and region representative. She currently serves on the Long Range Bargaining Committee and the Legislative Commission and has co-chaired the Summer Leadership Committee. She has a bachelor's in business education from Northern Michigan University and a master's in instructional technology from Saginaw Valley State University. She was elected a Flushing Township Trustee in 2016.

Advocating for our students, our members, and all of public education is something I'm passionate about, and will work hard to make MEA a stronger voice for ALL of our members. Public education is one of the greatest treasures in America—high-quality education is a pathway to achieve dreams—and we have to protect it!

I am a proud union member and local president of the Reese Professional Education Association. I have been a business and English educator for 20 years in a variety of positions, and have learned to appreciate the different views of MEA members. As one of your current NEA Directors, I have carried the Michigan perspective to DC, fighting for all MEA members.

As your MEA Secretary-Treasurer, reexamining our dues structure and exploring ways to increase services in the field will be a priority. Being from a local that has had seven UDs in five years, I know how staff reductions impact locals. We must work together with state & local option to maintain service at a high level. By increasing our training of new local officers, we can build better relation-



ships with members.

Our officers also need to create strong connections between our locals, MEA and NEA by utilizing the many programs available to engage new members to grow our membership. The officers you elect need to be informed, professional and positive, and communicate effectively to everyone, especially our politicians that we

are what makes a difference for students and for public education.

Because I have a business education degree, I have the academic credentials for this position and understand fully the audit process, budgets, accounting principles, etc. However, my experience serving on MEA committees, including Long Range Bargaining and Staff Retirement Plan Board, have prepared me for the many challenges we face.

I am proud to be an educator in the classroom. I advocate for members and work to protect all that our previous leaders have fought so hard for. It would be my honor and privilege to serve as MEA Secretary-Treasurer fighting for our members, our students, and public education!

Debra Porter

Candidate for MEA Secretary-Treasurer

Candidate did not submit biographical information or candidate statement by editorial deadline.

Brett Smith

Candidate for MEA Secretary-Treasurer

Smith is president of the Linden Education Association in Genesee County. He has been a proud Linden 5th grade teacher and MEA member since 2000. He serves as the treasurer of the 10G Coordinating Council and the 10G Governing Council. He and his wife Tracey have four children—one attending Baker College, one at Kendall College, and two who are students at Linden Community Schools. Smith earned a bachelor's degree in Business Finance from University of Michigan Flint, a master's degree in Science of Administration from Central Michigan University, and an endorsement in Education Administration from Eastern Michigan University.

Right to Work was an attack on my profession and my family. I was born in Flint, I have a strong UAW history in my family. The devastating impact of Right to Work drove me to become more involved. My desire to run for office was sparked when I was asked by the MEA to travel to Minnesota and Illinois to speak about how Right to Work had impacted the MEA. After these speaking engagements, I felt the need to continue forward in my role as a leader and seek an office at the state level of the MEA. I have the business background necessary to make the MEA more member-focused. I have worked for GM and for Ameritech in a Customer Service / Accounts Receivable role.

As the next MEA Secretary-Treasurer my goal in the next three years is to foster a more user friendly MEA for local leaders and members. I would like to develop an online form for budget input as we begin the creation of the 2018-2019 budget. I would like to work with the MEA board to develop an incentive for locals based on total



members in good standing. I would like to reduce the past due receivables that are attributed to membership dues in arrears by 25%. I would like to create a read only report for Individually Billed Locals that allows the local leader to have current and complete access to payment information. This will allow for informed one on one conversations to be held

between leaders and members that are having dues issues. I would like to implement a detailed accounting system for membership numbers by region and local. I would also run trainings on the Locally Billed Local concept using the Plymouth- Canton/Novi model and provide trainings for local leaders.

I am a local leader for local leaders. I feel I am the grass roots leader that the MEA needs right now to grow membership. I want to thank the MEA ESP Caucus Executive Board, Region 10, Region 12, and Region 13 for supporting me in my candidacy for MEA Secretary-Treasurer.

Doug Hill

Candidate for NEA Director

Hill is a second-career educator, leaving the world of professional journalism in 1997 to pursue his teaching certification and a position as a classroom teacher. He entered the education world as a 7th grade English Language Arts teacher in 2000 before moving to teach at the elementary level (both 5th and 4th grades). He served as a classroom teacher for 11 years before being elected as the release-time President of the Rochester Education Association. He is married to Carol, who also works in Rochester Community Schools in technology, and they have two children, daughter Helena (20) and son Jake (15).

I welcome the opportunity to continue serving as one of Michigan's NEA Directors and be a voice for our members in Washington, D.C. As the MEA prepares to elect a new leadership team, I believe it is critical to have an experienced NEA Director in place. Especially valuable is one who has learned to navigate the nuanced landscapes at MEA, NEA, and the offices of Michigan's congressional delegation. I believe I will be an asset to whomever becomes our new MEA President, Vice-President, and Secretary/Treasurer to better leverage support (both financial and



human) from the NEA. Since being elected President of my local—the Rochester Education Association—in 2010, I've made it a practice to hear our members' stories and utilize these to inform my advocacy on their behalf. Further, I have consistently taken a thoughtful approach to decisions that impact the membership. If you place your trust in me to continue

serving as NEA Director, I promise to maintain these informed, thoughtful approaches on your behalf in all that I am asked to do.

MEA ESP Member Grows New Library Program

By Brenda Ortega
MEA Voice Editor

AN OLD CARD CATALOG CABINET ON ITS WAY TO THE SCRAP HEAP PRESENTED AN OPPORTUNITY FOR MEA MEMBER DEBORAH LYNCH TO START A FRESH NEW PROGRAM AT GROSSE POINTE PUBLIC LIBRARY, WHERE SHE WORKS AS ASSISTANT CIRCULATION MANAGER AT THE EWALD BRANCH.

Lynch seized on the cabinet, considered obsolete since the advent of computerized library catalogs, and infused it with new life—literally—as a seed library called “Grosse Pointe Grows.”

A few years ago, Lynch and her husband visited a public library in Munising where patrons could “check out” packets of flower and vegetable seeds. At the same time, administrators at the Grosse Pointe library were asking employees for new program ideas, Lynch said.

“I saw it, I got the idea, the librarian said it was very popular, and I thought—*This is so cool*,” Lynch said. “It’s been a learning experience.”

The idea of seed lending libraries has gained momentum in recent years as a way to encourage community gardening and protect seed biodiversity, Lynch said. More than 500 seed libraries now exist worldwide, up from about 300 four years ago.

Commercialization of seeds narrows the varieties down to the most marketable ones, Lynch said. For that reason, she focuses on circulating heirloom varieties to play a role in maintaining food crop biodiversity that helps species withstand threats such as diseases, climate change, and pests.

Lynch also wants to encourage gardening as a hobby to strengthen families and the community.

“Gardening is excellent for us

emotionally and physically,” she said. “Maybe we’re not going to grow all of our foods, but crops like tomatoes and beans are easy to grow and add to the supper table.”



In some seed libraries, patrons check out seeds, grow crops, and harvest seeds from the plants at the end of the growing season to return them to the library. However, to control seed quality, the “Grosse Pointe Grows” program for now buys seeds from catalogs and distributes them.

Because seed packets sold through catalogs contain more than the average gardener needs, Lynch repack-

ages the products in envelopes she makes herself from discarded paper and books. She adds labels and bar codes, and sorts them into drawers in the card catalog for checkout.

Lynch spent months refurbishing the 30-drawer card catalog to match the library’s décor—stripping and sanding it and adding a new formica top to match marble countertops

elsewhere in the building. Last year, more than 3,066 packets of seeds were checked out from the branch.

“It’s a very popular program” Lynch said.

Maryanne McKenna is a longtime Grosse Pointe gardener who loves being able to pick up high-quality seeds from the library, including peas, peppers, and tomatoes.

“Deb is always there with any answer she can give to your questions,” McKenna said. “I tell everyone I know about it, and they’re so impressed we have a program like this. It’s just wonderful.” ■

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Ross Wilson,
MESSA Executive Director



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MEA's 'Hidden Figure'

Her Michigan friends don't know, but **MEA-Retired member Ruth Westbrook**—who worked at schools in Pontiac, Highland Park, and Troy—once followed in the footsteps of African-American women depicted in the Academy Award-nominated movie *Hidden Figures*, human math computers at NASA who fought discrimination to become trailblazers at the space agency.

Did you always know you were good at math?

I knew I was pretty good at math, but I came from a very small school in Texas—eight people were in my graduating class—so I thought I had gotten an inferior education. I always liked math because it's like a puzzle, but I thought I had not had enough preparation for a career in it.

What changed?

In college, I took general math and I did my work in ink. My instructor said, "Who is this person doing assignments in ink and getting most of them right?" He persuaded me to go into math.

How did you end up at NASA?

After college I worked two years as a teacher, then left to work at NASA at the Manned Spacecraft Center near Houston. It was 1964. I was a programmer. I learned Fortran on the job—other languages, too—but Fortran was the main scientific language we used to write programs.

What kind of projects did you work on at NASA?

There were a lot... In my most memorable one, I was given all of the steps that were used to get a man to the moon and back, and my job was to write a program for each of those steps to see how long it took in real time for that step to be completed. So I didn't have the whole program for going to the moon and back, but I had part of it.

What an exciting time to work for NASA—during the Space Race with the Soviet Union.

That's right, it was. And when I went to see the movie *Hidden Figures*, every time I saw a space ship, I got a chill through my whole body. To know—look, I worked on something like that.

The movie depicts racial discrimination and sexism at the NASA research facility in Virginia. Did you experience that in Houston as well?

No, I never did, and I worked with all men except for two females. I was treated like one person on the team. There were no separate restrooms and no separate places where I had to eat. I never knew what those ladies had done; that was a few years before my time, but I am thankful to those women who went through that, so I did not have to.

In 1970, you moved to Michigan with your husband and two young children, where you returned to teaching—eventually earning advanced degrees in library science, counseling, and law. But you never told your coworkers about your previous life at NASA!

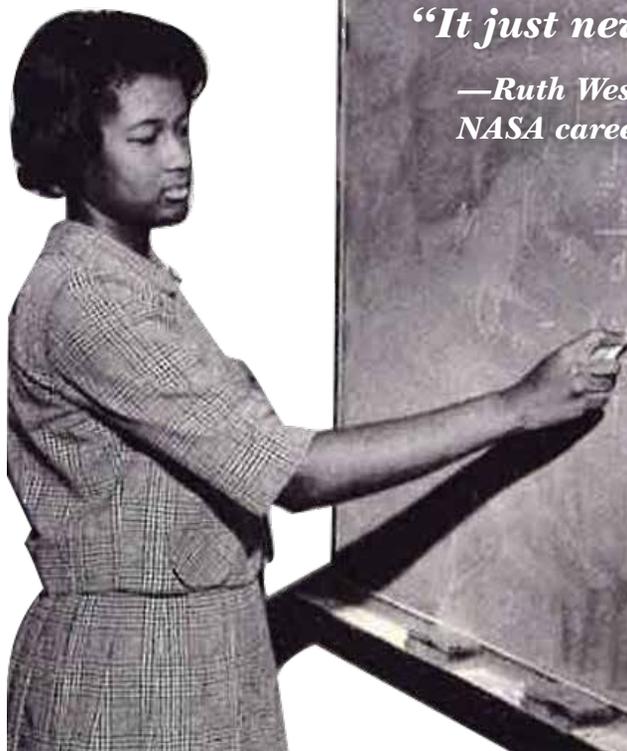
It just never came up. I was kind of shy, and I never talked about myself.

Did you ever encourage a talented math student as you had been encouraged in college?

Yes, especially my girls. When I was teaching mostly ninth graders in Troy, if I found someone that was really good, I would talk to them about taking more math to be on track so they could take calculus as a senior. I had many students that changed their track to take more math.

What do your son, daughter, and three granddaughters think of your accomplishments?

Well, when I worked in NASA, my children were little—but they think a lot of it now! And for my granddaughters, I took all three of them to NASA a few years ago, and I was able to tell them what I had done and show them where I worked. I felt pretty excited about it; it was the history I always wanted my grandchildren to see. ■



"It just never came up."

—Ruth Westbrook, about her NASA career before teaching.

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