



# MARCH '16

**"Ninety percent of leadership is the ability to communicate something people want."**

**– Dianne Feinstein**

- March is Middle Level Education Month!:** One of the ways we can improve our own skills in working with this sometimes challenging age group is to learn from the successes of others. Go to [nassp.org/mlmonth](http://nassp.org/mlmonth) to find ways to celebrate Middle Level Education Month at your school/district.
- Spring Emergency Drills:** Under updated Michigan law that took effect on July 1, 2014, each school building must conduct at least (8) emergency drills each school year: five (5) fire drills, two (2) tornado drills (one of which must take place in March), three (3) lockdown drills, including security measures appropriate to an emergency "such as the release of hazardous material or the presence of a potentially dangerous individual on or near the premises." (one of which must take place after January 1). At least two drills must take place at an inconvenient time (i.e. lunch, recess, between classes). A list of all scheduled drill days should have already been provided to the county emergency management coordinator by September 15. It's then his/her responsibility to share this information with the appropriate local emergency coordinator. Make sure you also communicate plans about drills to parents to let them know that the school is in compliance and prepared for emergency. Don't forget to document the drills on your school website within five days of completion. Read about the requirements on the [MASSP website](#).
- Spring IEP Season:** Spring yields not only busted March Madness brackets and spring break sunburns, but also a rush of year-end IEPs. Make sure that you fully understand the IEP Process, who the key players are on the team, the nuances regarding parent participation and what it takes to excuse a mandatory member of the team from the meeting. For more information, check out this [memo from Thrun Law Firm, P.C.](#)

Additionally, the Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services (OSERS) recently issued a "Dear Colleague" letter reminding school officials that an IEP for a student with a disability must be "aligned with the state's academic content standards for the grade in which the student is enrolled." ([Dear Colleague Letter, 66 IDELR 227 November 16, 2015](#)) For a student whose present levels of academic achievement and functional performance are significantly below grade level, OSERS recommends that the IEP team estimate the student's expected growth and set goals that are "sufficiently ambitious to help close the gap," but that are also achievable. For example, a student with a specific learning disability who is reading four grade levels below his/her current grade level must be provided grade-level content in a manner that allows him or her to progress in the general education curriculum based on state content standards. The delivery of the content, however, must be modified for the student's specific needs. The IEP must address the student's reading deficiencies and allow him or her to increase reading fluency.

"Dear Colleague" letters often signal an area in which OSERS will be increasing scrutiny and monitoring. To ensure compliance, Thrun Law Firm, P.C. recommends that IEP teams make sure to discuss whether a student's annual goals allow him or her to make progress on grade-level content standards as well as disability-related needs.



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- M-Step Testing Schedules:** If you aren't done with your M-Step testing schedule yet, make sure it's in the works. MASSP is collecting samples and posting them to the website [here](#). Make sure you understand all of the testing dates, windows and options. This MDE-provided [PDF](#) provides a full calendar and additional information.
- Education YES! School:** All Michigan schools and districts are required to complete an in-depth internal-analysis, guided by process rubrics, each year to address state and federal accountability and accreditation requirements. This process is designed to help schools and districts identify strengths and areas in need of improvement. Schools must submit their School Systems Review (SSR) or Self Assessment by March 18 (or 4 weeks prior to AdvancED External Review). [See the MDE memo and requirements.](#)
- Staff Schedules:** In many schools, the student course selection process is complete or at least underway by March. Once students have registered it is time to start making difficult decisions regarding which classes will run and which will not. It is important to know your districts staffing thresholds as you make these decisions (for example, lab classes max at 28, composition classes max at 26, etc). You also need to be aware of how funding may be impacted by your decisions – there are CTE programs which must be run as part of a continuum to be fully funded. Make sure you keep your supervisor aware of the courses you are considering cutting or not running. There will always be some parents/students not happy when you can't run French IV or AP \_\_\_\_\_ due to low numbers.

Once you have determined the number of sections you have available, include staff as much as possible in the assignment of teaching schedules. One way to do this is to provide time during a staff meeting for departments to divvy up the sections available. This allows the staff to gain an understanding of the scheduling process and to see that it is often difficult to meet everyone's requests. It is better if they are "the bad guys" that don't fill the requests – rather than you! The following rules may be helpful for this activity:

- All staff must have at least two different preps (courses), in elective areas there will be many more than two.
- Core teachers must have a mix of required and elective courses (no one can have a full day of English electives).
- Everyone must have a "balanced schedule" no one is allowed to have all upper or all lower level classes. This ensures fairness between tenured/untentured and also helps to ensure consistency between courses when someone retires.
- Staff need to be told that their department recommendations for teaching schedules are appreciated, but that ultimately administration maintains "right of assignment" and will make the final decisions. It is important to accept the staff recommendations as much as possible, IF they follow the rules provided. If you do make a change, be sure to provide your rationale.

You may want to put certain staff names on particular courses that required specific training or degrees. Staff will need to know the highly qualified degrees required for particular courses.



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**Transition Planning:** It's time to start thinking about the arrival of 4th, 6th or 9th graders (depending upon the transition grades in your district) to your building for the 2016-17 school year.

- Start to plan a transition activity for students:

Consider a lunch visit. Bus the transition level students to the Middle or High School (after the seniors leave) in June to have lunch and a quick campus visit. Students often report their biggest transition fears to be: "lunch, lockers and lost." This visit will help to reduce their anxiety and will make the first few lunch periods run more smoothly upon return in the fall.

Plan a full day of orientation in August:

- The orientation day can be completely run and facilitated by students who sign up to be mentors. You will need to begin a mentor application process in April and plan to hold a training a few days before orientation so that student mentors are prepared.
- There are a number of successful student orientation programs up and running. The Rochester Community Schools use a program called, "Kick off." Kick off supplies the agenda for the orientation and does the mentor training for you. Mattawan High School also runs a very effective freshman transition day which they shared at the Assistant Principal's conference this year.
- Host an evening parent night in March to welcome the new families, review the curriculum choices and to introduce key staff. A possible program may include:
  - 7:00-7:10 pm – Arrival (parents only) and welcome by the Principal.
  - 7:10-7:40 pm – Have each department create a short video introducing the courses in their content area available for the transition grade to consider. Using a video format allows you to control the time and to edit as needed (rather than having department chairs parade up to a microphone).
  - 7:40-7:50 pm – Counselor provides a general overview of the scheduling timeline and how courses are entered into the computer.
  - 7:50-8:30 pm – Parents leave the main meeting to go to smaller rooms to meet with just their child's counselor for a more indepth review of course offering.
  - 8:30-9:00 pm – All key staff (department chairs), club sponsors and athletic coaches are available in a main gathering space in the building. Have each at a labeled table ready to answer questions and share information. Club sponsors may have club displays, athletic coaches have summer tryout/practice and camp information and department reps answer curriculum questions.
- Provide parents with the date for your student orientation in August and the date of a parent meeting in August. (I would suggest an August parent meeting to cover a variety of topics such as: parent involvement opportunities, code of conduct, general rules/expectations, communication pieces (school website, Facebook page, email system etc). Allow time for "parent to parent" talk – have a panel of 7th or 10th grade parents to share advice and give support.





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- 'National Day' Calendar:** It's important to make note of noteworthy national days and it can be fun to celebrate unusual or lesser known national days. [Click here](#) for the March edition of the National Day calendar.
  
- Monthly Meetings:** Here are two items you should consider adding to your staff meeting agenda this month.
  - **Staff Meeting Icebreaker of the Month:** Positive Reinforcement Cards Game: Whenever a participant volunteers for activities, are helpful, answers a difficult question, etc. give them a playing card. At the end of the meeting, play one hand of poker. Give a small prize to the best hand (you can also pick the top two or three hands if you want to give away more prizes). Note that the more cards a person has, the better the chance of winning.
  
  - **New Teacher Meeting Topics of the Month and Mentor Teacher Checklist:** (PHD) E-mail the mentor checklist each month to encourage conversation with untenured teacher mentees.
  
- Upcoming MASSP Events:** For more information or to register, please visit [mymassp.com/eventlist](http://mymassp.com/eventlist).
  - **March:** Student Learning Objectives (SLOs) - 3/2 | Observation & Formative Feedback: Best Practices - 3/7  
Aspiring Principals Workshop - 3/12 | Student Learning Objectives (SLOs) - 3/21 | Legislative Day - 3/22  
Handbook & Legality Check - 3/23 | Creating Alignment: SIP, Professional Practice and Student Growth - 3/30
  - **April:** Evaluation Conference - 4/29 (w/ optional pre-con on 4/28)
  - **June:** EdCon (Grand Traverse Resort) - 6/27-6/29