



Jackson County Intermediate School District Gerald B. Kratz Education Center

February 27, 2009

Dear Summit Planning Committee Members:

The school districts of Jackson County are pleased to join with our post-secondary partners to bring together educators to focus on math achievement in the county. The county superintendents have a stated goal for our districts to be 'unusually successful' in moving our students toward higher levels of achievement in math and welcome the opportunity to have our teachers work with post-secondary faculty to further this work. As we move forward with this effort, we thought it may be helpful to provide an overview of some of the steps that have been and will be taken.

The Jackson County ISD's Math/Science Center, working with all of our local districts, has increasing math achievement as part of its ongoing mission. Current efforts have focused on helping teachers learn differentiated instructional methods that better explain concepts to all variety of learners. One of these efforts has been the HSMASS (High School Math and Science Success) grant that brought inquiry-based instruction training to area teachers. Also, as participants with Michigan State University in a Title II grant, training is being provided for administrators to understand how to more effectively recognize good instructional practices in algebra and lead all math staff toward adopting those instructional practices. Similar work is being done on instructional practices in middle schools through the MMSTLC (Michigan Math and Science Teacher Leadership Collaborative) grant. Vandercook Lake and Michigan Center middle schools are piloting these efforts.

Concurrent to efforts influencing instructional methods, work is being done to identify students early on that are struggling and create opportunities for their remediation. This is being done through the 8th grade Back On Track grant. Through this grant additional instruction is being provided to identified 8th grade students showing signs of not mastering the necessary material to successfully transition to high school algebra. Along with these efforts, on-going work to align local school programs to the new state expectations at all K-12 levels continues.

Jackson County public schools have also embarked on an ambitious plan to better identify and use data to focus attention on learning gaps and create targeted interventions to fill those gaps. The introduction of the Data Director tool for data analysis and the accompanying Data Retreat training that helps educators strengthen their capacity to effectively use student data is an on-going initiative in most county schools. An additional component will be the introduction of the EPAS© system to area public high schools. ACT's Educational Planning and Assessment System allows students to take benchmarking assessments as they enter high school (EXPLORE test) and one year into high school (PLAN test) that show their progress relative to where they need to be prior to taking the ACT test as a junior.

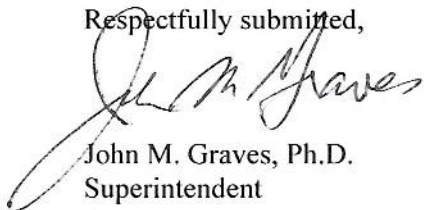
In addition to these initiatives, a countywide effort to bring STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Math) experiences is taking place in area schools. Working within a pipeline of activities collaboratively offered by the Jackson Area Manufacturers Association and the ISD, students are exposed to hands-on activities that bring math and science to life in youth camps. These activities are continued at the middle school and high school levels through engineering courses under a program called Project Lead The Way.

The initiatives cited are examples of ongoing efforts at the K-12 level to improve student achievement in math. We see the “Math Summit” as an opportunity to tackle key issues surrounding math achievement. Above all, if students are to be well served, we need to reach a common understanding of the expectations secondary educators will have for students leaving high school and post-secondary educators will have for students entering their world. A shared definition of those expectations and how student progress is to be measured will allow for educators across the county to more effectively align our efforts.


Furthermore, as we address the gap in expectations, we can begin to tackle some of the causes of the gap. At the top of that list may be the need for our larger community to better understand and more fully appreciate the importance of math to the future of all students. K-12 school districts generally reflect the expectations of their communities quite closely. To the extent those expectations are out-of-line with what students need to be successful at the post-secondary level, we need to work together to send powerful messages to move community expectations and aspirations to meet world realities.

While some important steps are being taken, many challenges still remain. With financial resources being ever more stretched and existing initiatives pushing the capacity of schools and teachers, we welcome the opportunity to come together to look at ways to maximize the effectiveness of our collective efforts. Working together, we can and will be “unusually successful” in moving our students toward higher levels of achievement in math.

Respectfully submitted,



John M. Graves, Ph.D.
Superintendent



Kevin Oxley, Assistant Superintendent
Career and Learning Services