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New England League of Middle Schools

# MidLines

## NELMS Welcomes New Executive Director

by Jason Webster, Board Chair

Jeff just completed his 41st year in education, forty of those years at the middle level. Most recently, he was the Principal of the Middle School of the Kennebunks in Kennebunk, Maine. It was a position that he held for 10 years. He also served as principal of the Fal-mouth (ME) Middle School and Wells Junior High School. Prior to delving into administration, Jeff taught math and coached a variety of sports at Old Rochester Regional Junior High School in Mattapoisett, MA.

Jeff earned his undergraduate degree from Dakota State University in Madison SD and his Masters from Harvard. He has served on the Maine Association for Middle Level Education Board of Directors since 2005. He was president of the organization from 2012 - 2014. Additionally, Jeff is active in the Association for Middle Level Education (AMLE). He is chair of AMLE's Affiliate Advisory Committee, a member of the Election Committee, and for the past two years he has served on AMLE's conference session Selection Committee.

Jeff is a dedicated educator who is passionate about the middle level. He looks forward to both supporting and growing NELM's mission of promoting middle level best practices by providing collaborative learning experiences that support students' academic, social, and emotional

growth and success.

Currently, Jeff lives in Arundel, Maine with his wife, Ellen. He has two stepsons, Jordan who lives and works in Portland and Jon, who is entering his senior year at Keene State. We welcome him to NELMS.

### From the desk of the Executive Director

I would like to introduce myself. My name is Jeff Rodman and I am the new Executive Director of the New England League of Middle Schools. I come to NELMS after a 41 year career in public education. Forty of those years were spent working in the middle level. I am excited to be here and I am really excited about the incredible professional opportunities that NELMS offers. Please, when time permits, take a look at our comprehensive website. But as it is late August you have a lot of "other" things that are, most likely, consuming your time.

You have probably noticed that it is, once again, butterfly season all across New England. No, not the season for any of the more than 100 species of butterflies that inhabit our great region, but the ones that we feel in our stomach as another school year gets underway. These are the butterflies that keep us up at night wondering about those first days of school. Will I have good classes? Will the students like me? Am I prepared? Did I remember to zip up my fly?

Teaching middle school is a great challenge as each fall enthusiastic, energetic, eager, and well-rested budding adolescents arrive to begin a new school year. The students come to us in all shapes and sizes with a myriad of abilities and needs.

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50 High Street – Suite 10  
North Andover, MA 01845  
P: (978) 557-9311  
F: (978) 557-9312

www.nelms.org

The NELMS Mission: We are leaders in promoting middle level best practices by providing collaborative learning experiences that support students' academic, social, and emotional growth and success.

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MidLines welcomes your thoughts and suggestions as well as your editorial comments.

Please send them to MidLines, c/o NELMS, 50 High St., Suite 10, North Andover, MA 01845

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Editorial issues: call Jerry Frew, Executive Director.

#### NELMS OFFICE STAFF

Jeff Rodman,  
Executive Director  
jrodman@nelms.org

Mary Jean Fawcett,  
Assistant Executive Director  
mjfawcett@nelms.org

Karin Wilmarth, Events Coordinator,  
kwilmarth@nelms.org

Brenda Houle, MidLines Editor,  
bhoule@comcast.net

#### ADVERTISING IN MIDLINES

Publications of the New England League of Middle Schools are read by thousands of middle level educators. We invite you to strive with NELMS to continuously refresh the learning experience for young adolescents. NELMS only advertises products and services which serve the professional and educational needs of our membership.

MidLines is e-published three times a year and circulated to 15,000 educators through their membership. Contact NELMS for current advertisement rates.

#### Deadlines:

November 1 for Winter issue

March 1 for Spring issue

July 1 for Fall issue

### \*\*\*Correction from spring '18 edition of MidLines\*\*\*

Due to a reporting error on page 1 in the spring edition of MidLines, we would like to acknowledge that the principal at Hudson Memorial School is Keith Bowen not Jason Roberts. We regret the error.

# View from the Chair



It is with great energy and optimism that I step into my new role as Chairperson of our Board of Directors. I am currently beginning my 5th year as Principal of the David J. Quinn Middle School in Hudson, Massachusetts, where we educate 636 students in grades five, six and seven. Entering my 18th year in middle-level education and third year with NELMS, I have gained a great deal of insight and information from board discussions, school evaluation visits, and conferences which I have used to the benefit my school and I'm looking forward to our work together as we strive to reach our goals as we support middle-level educators in New England! With a new full-time Executive Director at the helm and a dedicated Board of Directors, we are primed to take our League to the next level as we build membership and develop meaningful resources for teachers and students.

*Jason Webster*

## NELMS News from the E.D.

*News from the E.D.... continued from page 1*



They are simple, yet complex. Just when we think we know our students, we find out there is so much more to learn about them. Middle school students are truly a wonderful enigma. As middle school educators, we need to understand what it means to be simple, yet complex. We are lucky to work with them but we have an incredible task that takes great skill, great patience, and great humor.

As a middle school educator, you should expect to bring to your students a firm and professional commitment to their educational, intellectual, and social-emotional well-being that will ensure their growth and development toward becoming positive members of your schools and your communities. Teaching is an obligation you have all made and you have all dedicated yourselves to being the best teachers you can be. I am confident you will all succeed in this endeavor. There is so much to be accomplished in all schools, yet there is no better place where it can happen than in middle school.

So as the butterflies migrate away, on behalf of the New England League of Middle Schools, I wish you all a successful school year. May it be filled with great learning, great patience, and great laughter.

Sincerely,

Jeff Rodman  
Executive Director

# Editor's Desk



boost in confidence to these young people and helps them meet the daily challenges that they will meet.

In addition, NELMS wishes that all your new ideas, strategies, and plans that you have designed for your students be successful. It is a new start, a chance to do this all over again! Engaging young learners, cheering them on is one of the perks of our profession. It should give us the energy for all the challenges you will face over the year as educators and administrators.

In closing, please note that NELMS supports you in a variety of ways. Please take advantage of our offerings in this newsletter. Please provide us with feedback to tweak or create opportunities to grow together. [www.nelms.org](http://www.nelms.org)

Here we go!

Brenda Sullivan Houle  
Editor, MidLines

Feedback to: Brenda – [bhoule@comcast.net](mailto:bhoule@comcast.net)

## Support your state organization!

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

**Commonwealth of  
Massachusetts  
Middle Level Educators**  
[www.commle.org/](http://www.commle.org/)

**Connecticut Association of  
Schools**  
[www.casciac.org](http://www.casciac.org)

**Maine Association for Middle  
Level Education**  
[www.mamleonline.org](http://www.mamleonline.org)

**New Hampshire Association for  
Middle Level Education**  
<http://www.nhamle.org/>

**RI Middle Level Educators**  
[www.rimle.net](http://www.rimle.net)

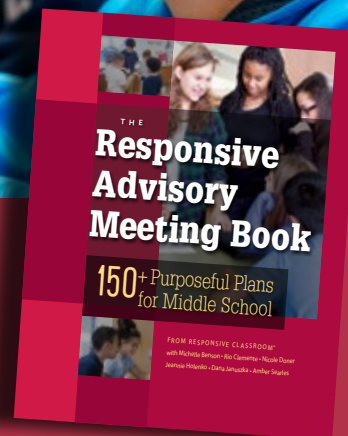
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[www.vamle.org](http://www.vamle.org)



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## Tech Corner Good Technology Rich Teaching

“Just what does ‘good’ technology-rich teaching and learning look like?” This question has focused my attention this summer as I think about returning to the middle school classroom as the school year begins.

There is little doubt that schools are now filled with digital devices. For the first decades of digital teaching and learning, we yearned for the funds to make sure every student had a computer. Now, we find so many Chromebooks, tablets, laptops, and desktops in schools that many have reached the one-to-one goal. Combined with the smartphones that students carry into classroom in their pockets, students can use more than one device at a time.

Walking through a school where students are using the digital devices can lead one to observe many practices and these can be very different. Here are the “rules of thumb” I use to evaluate what is happening during a technology-using lesson:

*Listen for mouse clicks.* If the sound of mouse clicks

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# Spotlight School Focus



**W**ith the start of another school year I want to remind you about our Spotlight Schools Program. NELMS is proud to recognize over 30 Spotlight Schools throughout New England. These schools demonstrate research-based middle level best practices and a commitment to early adolescent learners and their unique needs. In this issue I am pleased to introduce **Captain Nathan Hale Middle School, Coventry, CT**, and **Leicester Middle School, Leicester, MA** our two newest Spotlights. These snapshots will attest to the good things happening for middle schoolers. For more information on how to become a Spotlight School, check out our website at [www.nelms.org/spotlight-schools](http://www.nelms.org/spotlight-schools). Watch for information coming soon on our Emerging Spotlight School Consultation Program.

## Leicester Middle School

What makes Leicester Middle School (LMS) a Spotlight School? According to Mrs. Nelson, the school’s principal, Leicester Middle School is a small school with big ideas and a lot of heart. We are housed in an old building, but we believe it’s what’s inside that counts. LMS was selected for the Spotlight Schools award because of its ability to create an excellent learning environment for young adolescents and its consistent observance of middle school best practices.

LMS teachers and staff are passionate about their work, and it shows by the level of commitment they bring to it. Their dedication is evident inside the classroom and by the amount of time they spend coaching sports teams and advising clubs and activities. LMS has a strong middle school schedule that includes daily common planning time by department and an 8-period by 8-day rotation that emphasizes double blocks of ELA and mathematics each day. The school’s program of study is well-rounded with challenging core courses, a

variety of related arts classes, and an inviting extracurricular program including three-season sports and more than 18 different clubs and activities. The school’s new 1:1 Chromebook Program, along with its strong library program enables students to stay current with technology, study independently, build problem-solving skills, and collaborate with peers and experts around the globe. Project Lead the Way provides STEM courses to all students during at least one trimester every year. LMS is only one of two schools in the state of Massachusetts to provide STEM in this format. At LMS, student achievement and growth is a priority as evidenced by the amount of progress monitoring and tiered intervention they undertake in the regular classroom as well as in response to intervention and special education settings.

The LMS community believes that students who are truly engaged in their learning are less likely to become involved in or cause behavioral incidents. LMS has partnered with Engaging Schools, a program that helps schools develop a systematic, positive approach to school discipline, while strengthening teacher effectiveness in the classroom. LMS effectively uses data to zero in on trends and assigns staff specialists to dig deeper to address the root causes of poor behavior or lack of achievement and growth. With this program and other key efforts, the school has been able to significantly decrease disruptive behavior and increase school safety.

A vibrant relationship exists between the school and the community. Friends of Leicester Middle School is a supportive parent/community body whose mission is to strengthen communication among parents, community members, staff, and administration and provide support by raising funds for students’ educational and recreational needs. Additionally, the school provides many service learning opportunities with the town’s senior center, food pantry, nursing home, animal shelter, and

*Continued on page 5*

other local organizations.

Above all, LMS places considerable emphasis on school culture. The school's mission is to grow strong minds and kind hearts. The core values, Kindness, Achievement, Responsibility, Respect, and Service, clearly state the expectations for student achievement and behavior, and the entire school community works continuously with students to meet them. The deep concern for and understanding of the young adolescents the school community serves permeates the culture and the environment of the school, making it a great choice for the Spotlight Schools Award.

### **Why Capt. Nathan Hale Middle School is a Spotlight School**

Dena DeJulius, Principal

Capt. Nathan Hale Middle School (CNHMS) prides itself on building positive relationships within the school community! Our middle school provides students with strong academic programming that integrates advanced learning, current technology and student choice in an engaging and enjoyable atmosphere. CNHMS offers students a wide variety of related arts programming as well as extra-curricular offerings including fall, winter and spring sports, ski club, select choirs, jazz band and drama club. Our English Language Arts (ELA) and Mathematics departments continue their curriculum work aligning instruction and assessments with the Connecticut Core Standards. The science department continues its work on preparing for the Next Generation Science Standards (NGSS) curriculum. Science classrooms are incorporating anchor phenomena, 3-dimensional learning, and engineering practices into their units of study. We continue with year three of our one-to-one technology initiative that includes having all Grade 8 students have individual iPads. Teacher training in the use of Google Apps for Education (G Suite) is ongoing across grade levels as well as Chromebook usage within classrooms from shared mobile Chromebook stations. Student-led conferences were held for the

first time in 2017-2018 with all Grade 7 students leading their own conferences and 95 percent of our parents attended these student-led conferences! All students in grades 6-8 will lead a student-led conference in 2018-2019.

For the past two years (2016-2017; 2017-2018), CNHMS has been the recipient of a U.S. Department of State's Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs funded Teachers of Critical Language Program (TCLP) grant which supported the addition of the Mandarin Chinese program at Capt. Nathan Hale Middle School and provided a teacher from China each of the two years. TCLP supported our students' study of the Terracotta Warriors of the First Emperor and subsidized the overnight field trip in February to the Franklin Institute in Philadelphia where students visited the Terracotta Warriors exhibit, which is on loan to the U.S. from China. We are thrilled to be able to have the addition of a teacher for the 2018-2019 school year to support our Chinese curriculum at Capt. Nathan Hale Middle School.

The CNHMS Student Council supports our positive school culture with promoting school wide events that enhance student learning, school spirit and a stronger sense of community. Accomplishments for 2017-2018 include school spirit days and grade level competitions, service initiatives such as our annual Thanksgiving Food Drive to benefit our local food pantry and our annual Pajama Day fundraiser to benefit Connecticut Children's Medical Center Oncology Unit. New this year was the first annual Playing in PJs after school event, which was a huge success with about 175 students attending. Our Citizen of the Quarter luncheon highlights the accomplishments of 15 students each quarter for their academic commitment, and positive school attitude. In May, CNHMS held its first National Junior Honor Society Induction Ceremony where it recognized 26 Grade 7 students who demonstrate great character and academic excellence. All of the above and more makes Capt. Nathan Hale Middle School a Spotlight School!

dominates in the room, then students are likely answering questions posed by the program. While this type of lesson has a role in education, it is a very minor role. Lessons in which the interaction is mouse clicks should be used only occasionally.

**Watch where students are looking.** Good technology-based lessons will find students looking away from the screen often. They look at books, notes, posters, sticky notes on the wall, other screens, and people most often. Digital devices are tools for creation as much as they are tools for consumption. Students who are creating cannot spend all of their time staring at a screen. There are exceptions, of course. Programming and multimedia production are examples. In those cases, the most active creators are the students who are moving between windows and using multiple panes within the application.

**Listen for questions.** Students who are actively using digital tools ask lots of questions. "How do I...?" "What do you think of this?" "Can you help me find...?" are examples of the questions one hears in classrooms where technology is well-used. The questions are designed to help students clarify their thinking,

# Attending and Presenting at NELMS Annual Conference

By Daryl Dunbar

**A**fter the 36th annual conference reinvigorated me as a professional educator, (I've been teaching for over 2 decades, but last year being my first year in middle school!), I vowed to return as I found it to be the most useful and transformational conference I have attended. One of my coworkers and I decided to apply to be presenters at the 37th annual conference, both so that we could add to the experience for others, and so that we could return to the exciting and innovative professional development experience.

As cautious, determined, and terrified first-time presenters, Matt Gerdling and I were glad that our presentation, *Take It Outside*, was placed in Session 1! Our session went well, and we really appreciated all the support from the attendees and the NELMS conference organizers. Sharing our passion and excitement for adding outdoor education experiences for kids, as an honor. We are still in contact with some of the attendees and are assisting them with spreading the idea that there are many benefits to engaging students outside of their classroom walls.

After my presentation, I was looking forward to becoming a learner again, and I was delightfully entertained and informed by Dave Burgess, and have already added some of his **Teach Like a Pirate** strategies to my practice as

a Mathematics educator. Listening to Penny Kittle, I kept wishing that she had been one of my teachers. My favorite quote of the conference was "If 20% of your books are not being stolen each year, then you are not buying the right books," - and this idea really shows how Penny believes in putting books in students' hands. I found that the strategies she shared, for inspiring reluctant readers, were easily transferable to my Mathematics classroom!

The three days at the conference passed so quickly, and I am still unpacking (literally and figuratively) it all, while at the same time looking forward to next year's conference. Thank you for the opportunity.

The three days at the conference passed so quickly, and I am still unpacking (literally and figuratively) it all, while at the same time looking forward to next year's conference. Thank you for the opportunity.

"Education is what survives when what has been learned has been forgotten."  
B.F. Skinner

*Tech Corner – Continued from page 5*

seek feedback, and learn to use unfamiliar parts of the programs they are using.

**Listen to who answers.** Where technology is well-used the individuals who answer students' questions are most often other students.

**Watch the end of interactions between students and teachers.** Teachers do answer questions and interact with students in classrooms where technology is being well-used. The interactions often begin with a group of students giving up on solving their problem and calling the teacher over to their space. They will ask for help interpreting information or clarifying expectations or perhaps for some feedback. They may also ask how to accomplish a certain task with the program; this is most common when the students are using complex applications or creating new types of media they have never created. In those lessons where technology is most effective, the students will return to work before the answer is complete.

Screen time is now common for middle school students. We are fortunate to be able to give students experience using digital tools to access, analyze, manipulate, create, and disseminate information. If technology-based lessons find students interacting with each other and other media more than with the contents of their screen, we can be confident technology is leading to valuable learning.

*"Dr. Gary Ackerman has been supporting technology-rich education for several decades. He blogs at <http://www.hackscience.net/blog> and is @garyackerman" phd on Twitter."*



# Innovation in Education: Science at Somersworth Middle School

By Christopher Asbell

**A**t Somersworth Middle School, we take a watershed approach to environmental education. The seventh graders start the year out with water quality monitoring of the Salmon Falls River in Somersworth, NH. We analyze the chemistry with NH Fish and Game so they can add our data to their research and monitoring. We collect and identify macro invertebrates to determine the health of the water. Certain “bugs” only live in clean water. If we find these bugs, it is an indicator that the water is healthy. The fall data collection helps us determine if the watershed is healthy enough to stock our trout in April.

Our research brings to light that the Salmon Falls River is also the source of our drinking water. We investigate the quality of our public tap water by conducting a blind taste test against several bottled waters to identify the taste and clarity of our tap water. We then analyzed the water quality data from our Water Treatment facility to identify the health of the tap water.

This leads to an investigation into the environmental effect of plastic water bottles. With our environmental lens in place we expand our studies into solutions to the environmental changes occurring in our world. The focus of Aquaponics and hydroponics is to build climate resilience. Our class helps students focus on the solutions to water supply and access issues, food shortages, and agricultural practices that degrade the earth. The students research, design, build... and very often fix the growing systems throughout our classroom. We are currently growing several varieties of lettuce and tomatoes. Cafe Services has recently donated a hydroponic growing tower and asked our group to grow salad greens for students in the lunchroom.

We promote civic responsibility by having students participate in service projects that improve the health of our forest, rivers, and school grounds. We learn by doing.

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