

February 22, 2010

Dear MAMLE and NELMS colleagues,

Recently the Maine Department of Education released *Bright Futures*, the report of the Maine Commission on Middle Level Education. *Bright Futures'* 12 Core Practices describe the characteristics of highly effective 21st century middle grades schools. *Bright Futures* should not be seen as another layer of things to incorporate into the school day, but rather as a multi-faceted lens through which to view current school practices and initiatives. With this lens, Maine's middle grades schools will be able to ensure that they are developmentally responsive in their programs and policies and are helping their students develop the competencies and confidence necessary for a successful future.

This letter outlines information about current and future activities designed to help individual educators and schools become more familiar with the document and to reflect on their own work in light of the 12 Core Practices.

First, the MDOE website now contains pages devoted to middle level education and the *Bright Futures* report. These pages change periodically as more information becomes available. The website is located at <http://www.maine.gov/education/ml/index.html> where you will find:

- A letter from Commissioner Gendron on the report
- The complete document of *Bright Futures* report (downloadable)
- *Bright Futures* by section
- Links to the Middle Level Learning Wiki, Facebook and Twitter pages
- Links to the other MDOE middle level web pages including:
 - Research that supports *Bright Futures*
 - *Bright Futures* professional development opportunities

Also available at the MDOE middle level pages are:

- Middle grades professional development opportunities
- Resources on middle level philosophy and current trends including:
 - Teaming
 - Heterogeneous Grouping
 - Scheduling
 - Curriculum
 - RTI

A colorful *Bright Futures* poster is available. To receive one, contact Argy Nestor (argy.nestor@maine.gov), the MDOE Middle Level Point of Contact.

Secondly, in order to better understand what kinds of support Maine leaders might need in order to implement the recommendations put forth in *Bright Futures*, the Maine Association for Middle Level Education (MAMLE) Board of Directors developed a needs assessment survey that was disseminated to all Maine middle level principals in January. The results indicate that most principals and their staffs are not very familiar with the report. Many identified the need for introductory workshops during staff meetings or other designated professional development time in their district and schools. Principals also indicated the need for other professional development resources such as webcasts, interactive workshops, and professional development tool kits focused on specific aspects of the report. The MAMLE Board will be reviewing the results of this survey and developing action steps towards meeting these needs at their March meeting.

Currently MDOE is sponsoring a series of free webcasts focusing on the 12 Core Practices. Facilitated by Chris Toy and Jill Spencer, these webcasts feature outstanding Maine middle level educators. They share examples of how they address the essential elements of the Core Practices and some of their favorite resources. The webcasts are archived so that they can be viewed at any time. Accompanying each webcast is a “meeting plan” that could be used for a staff meeting or other professional development opportunity. The meeting plan is not dependent on the webcast, but focuses on the same Core Practices. The dates of future webcasts, archived webcasts and the meeting plans are located at <http://www.maine.gov/education/ml/dev.html>.

It’s important that Maine legislators be informed about the *Bright Futures* report. MAMLE and the New England League of Middle Schools (NELMS) members are encouraged to contact their local representatives and/or members of the Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs (http://www.maine.gov/legis/house/jt_com/edu.htm) to share the contents of the *Bright Futures* report and to help the legislators understand the critical importance of the middle grades years in a child’s academic, social, psychological, and physical development.

Lastly, upcoming MAMLE and NELMS professional development events provide outstanding opportunities for individuals, teams, and schools to increase their understanding of young adolescents and their learning needs in order to incorporate more fully the essential elements of *Bright Futures*’ Core Practices. Here is a brief listing:

- Differentiated Instruction with Rick Wormeli. (NELMS)
 - March 8 & 9 in Sturbridge, MA
 - April 29 & 30 in Meriden, CT
- NELMS Annual Conference In Providence, RI April 8 & 9
- Middle Level Education Institute (MLEI) sponsored by MAMLE at Thomas College in Waterville July 12-16 (<http://mlei.pbworks.com>)
- MAMLE’s Annual Conference at Sugarloaf October 21 & 22

More detailed information about these events and others, plus a variety of great resources are available on the NELMS and MAMLE websites:

- MAMLE: <http://www.mamleonline.org>
- NELMS: <http://www.nelms.org>

If you are interested in receiving information electronically about *Bright Futures*, please send your email address to Argy Nestor (argy.nestor@maine.gov).

Thank you for your continued support of Maine’s young adolescents and middle level education.

Sincerely,
Bright Futures Partnership

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