



professional

LEARNING

April 2009

Michigan Staff Development Council hires first Executive Director

Dr. Amy Bernstein Colton has been named as the first Executive Director of the Michigan Staff Development Council (MSDC). The Michigan Staff Development Council is an organization of professional educators and staff developers which advocates for quality, research-based professional development policies and practices to increase the capacity of those who work to improve student learning. Dr. Dan Jonker, Superintendent of Allendale Public Schools and current president of the Michigan Staff Development Council said, "MSDC's Board of Directors is committed to increasing the organization's visibility and influence in supporting quality professional learning for educators in Michigan. With the hiring of Dr. Colton, we feel we are taking a giant step forward in our efforts to influence policy and the quality of staff training."

Dr. Colton has facilitated professional learning for educators as a staff development consultant within Michigan, across the country, and internationally. Over the last several years, Dr. Colton has served on the Michigan Staff Development Council in many capaci-

ties including president, treasurer, and chair of the Programming and Advocacy Committee. At the national level, she participated in the first National Staff Development Council (NSDC) Leadership Academy and was consulted on the development of the NSDC Distinguished Staff Developer Designation. She has worked with the Michigan Department of Education on several statewide initiatives, including the approval of the Update of Professional Development Vision and Standards for Michigan Educators, the State's Professional Learning Strategic Plan, the Individual Professional Development Plan, and the Office of Special Education's and Early Intervention Services' State Performance Plan indicators regarding disproportionality.

When asked to comment on her new role, Dr. Colton said, "Historically when school district budgets begin to shrink, professional learning funds are the first on the chopping block and this year is no exception. Now more than ever, when the stakes are high for our students and our schools, the Michigan Staff Development Council has to speak loudly and persistently about the key role professional learning plays in improving student achieve-

ment. But MSDC can't do it alone. I am very excited to be in a position to help MSDC build strong alliances with our membership, other professional organizations, the Michigan Department of Education, the intermediate and local school districts, the teacher unions and our legislative body to advocate quality, research-based policies and practices to increase the capacity and "competency" of those who work to improve student learning--the MSDC's mission."

Dr. Colton is best known for her co-creation of the *Collaborative Analysis of Student Learning* (CASL: pronounced "castle") and related inquiry, a professional development system that creates learning communities and tasks that support professional and student learning for excellence with equity. She holds a doctorate in teacher education from the University of Michigan. Her work and research on teacher education, teachers' reflective decision making, and school reform appears in publications including *Journal of Teacher Education*, *Educational Leadership*, and *The Journal of Staff Development*. Colton begins her work as Executive Director of MSDC on April 1st.

Make Professional Development Work for You

Don't have time or money to take a graduate course? Want to expand your knowledge about learning strategies? Do you want a place where you can reach out to other professionals to share your reflections and questions and receive feedback to develop new skills and understanding? Would you like to learn more about Web 2.0 technologies? Are you looking for quick and easy ways to find high-quality resources to use in the classroom? Visit www.learnport.org today and *Michigan LearnPort*® can help you with all of these questions.



Michigan LearnPort is an Internet portal designed for everyone in Michigan's K 12 community who needs access to high-quality online courses, tools and resources. Funded through federal ESEA Title II, Part (A) funds in a partnership between Michigan Virtual University® and the Michigan Department of Education, this online professional learning portal is intended to assist Michigan educators in taking courses, tracking and managing and reporting on their professional development, as well as to provide useful communication tools and resources.

Launched in 2003, *Michigan LearnPort* has been steadily adding meaningful resources for its growing user base. Michigan school employees, members of education-related professional organizations, preservice teachers and their college or university faculty, non-employed Michigan certificated teachers and administrators and others are welcome and encouraged to register for their free account. Currently *Michigan LearnPort* has over 41,000 registered users and nearly 300 courses in the course Catalog. Many courses are

provided at no cost, while others are offered for nominal fees. Several of the free and fee-based courses earn users free SB-CEUs.

New courses are added on a routine basis. Development is underway on these new courses:

- Michigan History for Third Grade Teachers
- Financial Literacy for Teachers
- Transition Assessment

A full suite of free compliance courses, including Bloodborne Pathogens, FERPA/HIPAA issues, and Hazard Communications, helps districts stay current. Nine courses that help middle and high school teachers teach the challenging concepts of the Michigan Merit Curriculum to all students are also available. The April 1st and June 1st sections carry a \$150 stipend for users who meet the completion requirements. National vendor content, such as courses from ed2go, and federal and state supported content, such as the U.S. Department of Education's Teacher to Teacher program, is found in the *Michigan LearnPort* catalog, too. In addition to providing online courses, all users can take advantage of Michigan LearnPort to create, track and report on their progress by accessing their Development Record.

Michigan LearnPort is more than a site to visit when you need professional development. Included at no cost to all educators is access to netTrekker d.i., the acclaimed educational search engine used across the country by teachers looking for the most up-to-date and engaging supplementary material for their students. A key tool to help teachers differentiate instruction, this site provides linkages to the Michigan Grade Level Content Expectations

and 21st Century skills, readability statistics on most Web pages, allows filtering by resource types, gives access to tools for ESL students and even provides software that will read content to students. What teacher would not use this valuable resource if it was available at no cost?

Michigan LearnPort also offers an online communication tool called, Community Rooms, that helps local or dispersed groups streamline communications and create professional learning communities. Features include an email console, a place to post documents, a common calendar for scheduling, discussion forums, and chat. More than 100 public Community Rooms related to content areas, school-specific topics and technology are currently available in Michigan LearnPort. See My Account |Tutorials to learn more about using Community Rooms or creating one for your group's needs.

It can be liberating taking an online course because one can do it anytime, 24/7, and virtually anywhere provided there is an Internet connection. Debbie Slusher, an elementary teacher in Utica says, "I took one of the courses for credit and found it to be so useful that I'm using many of the strategies in my daily instruction. Taking an online course allowed me to take the course in the comfort of my home and at my convenience."

School districts or ISDs that are interested in learning more about free onsite training, online professional development or about using Michigan LearnPort as their own learning management system for professional development management should contact *Michigan LearnPort* Executive Director, David Myers, dmyers@mivu.org or 517.664.5468.

If your PD doesn't reflect the standards, it isn't shovel-ready

By Ben Boerkoel

The education component of the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) has two goals: 1. To help stimulate the economy by providing jobs and building infrastructure in the state and local educational systems; 2. To improve educational achievement for all of the nation's children.

One of the major tasks of schools over the next few weeks will be to discern how to spend the millions of dollars coming as part of this stimulus package. Included in the challenge will be how to use short-term dollars for long-term impact. Will we hire coaches in an attempt to swiftly increase educator skills in math or literacy? Will we implement or increase after-school support for students? Will we hire subs to release teachers for additional professional learning? Will we upgrade technology?

Over the past few years, as school funding has become tighter, one of the first victims of cuts has been the professional development budget. However, given the fact that schools now face an infusion of cash, my fear is that, like a child who has just been given extra allowance and wants to spend it without careful thought, we may fall victim to the same thinking.

Given the requirement that a minimum of 85% of the funds must be spent in the next fifteen months, and assuming that many of these dollars will be spent in some form of professional learning for staff, I wonder if we will take the time to ensure that dollars invested in professional development will reflect the standards of high quality. Will we take the time to ask ourselves questions such as the following?

- Is the PD aligned to district goals? Do we have data that supports the need to use dollars for this content?
- Do we have research evidence suggesting that what we are choosing has the potential for significantly impacting student achievement or the learning culture if implemented with fidelity?
- Will the learning be deep, long-term and used to improve our work as a community rather than being surface, one-shot and promote isolation?
- Will the professional development use a variety of adult-focused learning strategies and are we considering incorporating Web 2.0 tools both as methods for presentation as well as to model how teachers can incorporate such tools to support student learning? If we spend the dollars on technology, are we also providing the necessary support?
- Do we have an evaluation plan in place that will tell us if what we are doing is having the desired impact and that is substantive and comprehensive enough to satisfy the increased scrutiny by the federal government of how schools use this money?

With an increase in dollars also comes the increased need to use them strategically. Let's make sure that we are investing for the long-term for both our educators and our students.

Are your plans truly shovel-ready or should you just use the shovel to throw them out?

Michigan Joint Education Conference

As a partner in the Michigan Joint Education Conference, MSDC is seeking presentation proposals that support the purpose of the event, to establish widespread use of highly relevant integrated curriculum in Michigan Schools. Please submit proposals on issues, teaching techniques, standards, assessments, educational technology, and other elements common to all subject areas. Deadline for submissions is Friday, April 3.

The Michigan Joint Education Conference is June 24 at Holt High School.

Presenters selected to present at the conference will receive a complimentary registration, and co-presenters will receive a discount rate of \$20 (full conference rate: \$49).



Proposals can be submitted through the Michigan Joint Education Conference website, www.mijec.org.

Mission Statement:

"MSDC advocates for quality research-based professional development policies and practices to increase the capacity of those who work to improve student learning."

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MSDC Board seeks candidates

The MSDC Board is looking for members of the Michigan Staff Development Council who would be willing to serve three-year terms on the MSDC Board of Directors as Members-at-Large. Each at-large board member is expected to be an NSDC member in good standing; attend and participate in four yearly board meetings and actively support NSDC's and [MSDC's mission statements](#) and activities.

In addition to contact information, all nominees are asked to list a minimum of three instances in which they have worked to support professional learning within the last five years as well as a statement of an issue or direction they believe MSDC should address for Michigan educators. If you would be interested in nominating yourself or someone else, you can access the nomination materials at www.msdconline.org. Completed nomination materials must be received by March 16, 2009. Questions about the board position or the nomination process can be addressed to Nominations Chairperson Sam LoPresto, lopresto@gomasa.org.

RESOURCE TIP:

The new Learning Point Associates Recovery and Reinvestment Center www.learningpt.org/recovery/ offers a single site where educators and policymakers can track all the developments and find current information on the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act. There, you will find information on all aspects of the recovery funds. Learning Point Associates has tailored resources to all the needs they anticipate, including a helpful side-by-side guide to the funds available to Michigan or your locality and its reporting requirements. They have supplemented the resources with the best information from other sources. Users can also submit questions and receive a customized response.

The site will be updated twice a week with new materials.