

# Welcome Back!

## Utah Middle Level Association

### President's Message

Welcome back to the 2015-16 school year. I hope you are settling in to a fabulous year. Now that you are back in the swing of things don't forget to take the time to "sharpen the saw."

Sharpen the Saw means preserving and enhancing the greatest asset you have--you. It means having a balanced program for self-renewal in the four areas of your life: physical, social/emotional, mental, and spiritual. Here are some examples of activities:

- Physical: Healthy eating, exercising and resting.
- Social/Emotional: Making social and meaningful connections with others.
- Mental: Learning, reading and writing.

- Spiritual: Spending time in nature, expanding spiritual self through meditation, music, art, prayer, or service.

As you renew yourself in each of the four areas, you create growth and change in your life. Sharpen the Saw keeps you fresh so you can continue to grow personally and professionally. You increase your capacity to produce and handle the challenges around you. Feeling good doesn't just happen. Living a life in balance means taking the necessary time to renew yourself. Just remember that every day provides a new opportunity for renewal--a new opportunity to recharge yourself. When you have sharpened the saw, you can bring that energy to the classroom with renewed energy and invigoration.



Georgia Wing,  
President

### UMLA is Looking for School Liaisons

We know that as an educator you are bombarded with emails, catalogs, and all sorts of communication. A lot may have little relevance to what you do daily in your building. UMLA has worked for over 30 years to create a learning community of middle level educators and this year we want to branch out to reach every single teacher, counselor and administrator in the state. Our goal will be to provide monthly tools you can use with your students.

But, we need your help. We are looking for one person from every school that can serve as a point of contact. We will be providing interesting tips for the classroom each month and ideally this person might share the monthly strategy with colleagues at a faculty meeting or in PLCs. The Liaison will also make sure that new teachers to the school receive the quarterly newsletters and conference information.

In return for their efforts, Liaisons may receive discounted registration to the Utah Middle Level Association's annual conference. To volunteer, or for further information, please contact [utahmla@gmail.com](mailto:utahmla@gmail.com).

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### Intellectually Middle Grade Students:

- Are curious
- Prefer active learning
- Want learning to have real world application
- Are egocentric
- Are intellectually at risk

"Characteristics of Middle Grade Students." *Caught in the Middle* (1989). Sacramento: California Department of Education, pages 144-148.

## Set a Goal for the New Year

How many of you have students who come to school and promise that “this year I am going to get straight A’s!” only to fall back into habits of failure within a week or two? No young adolescent wants to be a failure but they have developed a view of themselves that really serves to affect the way they live.

### What Kind of Mindset Do You Have?



One way that you can cultivate success is by teaching students to develop what Stanford University researcher Carol Dweck calls a “growth mindset.” Dr. Dweck has found in her research that one of the most basic beliefs that we carry about ourselves has to do with what we consider our personality. A “fixed mindset” assumes that our character, intelligence and creativity are fixed traits, like the color of our eyes. Students with fixed mindsets say things like “I’m

dumb at math,” “I can’t do this,” or shut down when they know they won’t succeed. A person with a “growth mindset,” on the other hand, believes that through effort and challenges intelligence can grow, much like exercise develops muscles.

Students with fixed mindsets want to show how smart they are or hide how unintelligent they are. They avoid asking questions or exerting effort because if they do have to try it must be that they are not as smart as they think they are or they don’t want to show that they don’t know something or they can’t do it. When faced with a setback they give up. Students with growth mindsets want to learn. They ask questions, they view effort as a way to get smarter and they like challenges.

You can help students make

shifts from fixed to growth mindsets. Taking the time to learn more about it and then dedicating time weekly to teach students what a growth mindset is and reinforcing it can have a significant impact on student success. You might start by reading *Mindset: The New Psychology of Success* by Carol Dweck. Online resources include [edutopia.org](http://edutopia.org), [mindsetkit.org](http://mindsetkit.org), [mindsetonline.org](http://mindsetonline.org), and there are some great Pinterest boards, including one set up by the Utah Co-Teaching Project.

Remember the old adage; “Students don’t care what you know until they know that you care.” Believing in the capacity to grow and learn of every student and helping every student internalize that belief will make a lifelong difference in the lives of your students.

## Student Learning Objectives Part 1

Did you know that Student Learning Objectives (SLOs) would determine 20% of teacher evaluation results in the State of Utah? You may ask why? How did we get here? What is an SLO? This article will address these questions generally.

To answer why, we must go back to 1983 with “A Nation at Risk” report that led to self-examination of teaching reform. Since “A Nation at Risk,” other reforms have occurred. Title II Regulation of Higher Education Act in 1998, No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) in 2001, and Race to the Top (RTTT) in 2012, which allowed states to opt out of NCLB’s annual yearly progress (AYP). The Utah State Legislature passed Senate Bill 64 (SB64) to apply to Utah State Board of education Rules 277-530/1 to satisfy the RTTT requirements. These board rules led to the Utah State Office of Education creating Student Learning Objects (SLOs).

SLO’s have three important components: learning goals, targets, and assessments. Teachers already do these. A learning goal is what teachers expect students to be able to accomplish by the end of the class or course. To come up with a learning goal the teacher, or professional learning community (PLC) uses that course/class/grade levels State Standards and Objectives (which includes Common Core Standards). Once a teacher, PLC, school, or district has created a Learning Goal, both the Target and Assessments of those Learning goals should be created.

The Utah State Office of Education (USOE) defines “Targets” as “projected expected outcomes of growth for groups of students by the end of the instructional period. Teachers should set targets for the whole class as well as for different subgroups of students, as appropriate” (2013a). Using data, teachers set goals for improvement for

the whole class and individual students. This can be done by giving a pre-assessment at the start of the year/course and then giving the same assessment at the end of the year/course, comparing the data to see if the class (and each student) hit your targeted learning improvement goals.

An “Assessment” is a tool a teacher uses to see what students know. This can be done through giving the exact same pre and post-test, data collection and monitoring student progress throughout a course ending with a project that uses a simple but thorough rubric.

Middle school educators already do these things. The change will be sharing our results with our school principals/administrators. This is a quick and dirty overview; please stay tuned for in-depth articles each separately discussing one of the 3 components of an SLO.

*“Using data, teachers set goals for improvement for the whole class and individual students.”*

## How to Bribe Your Students by Kimberly A. Henkle, Benjamin N. Witts

Teachers seem to be naturally resistant to rewarding students for doing "what they are supposed to do." Some equate reward with bribery and claim that students will be working only for the points/recognition/reward, and ask "Why should we reward students for doing their job? They should just want to do it."

Some of the more severe criticism focuses on reducing an intrinsically motivated task like academics to one of external motivation, which, it is argued, ruins the value of the task. In other words, students should want to do the work because they find it personally rewarding, not because they get some kind of reward when they are done.

We would like to address each criticism in turn.

### Isn't It a Student's Job?

We take issue on two fronts with the claim that students should not be rewarded for doing their job. First, replace the word "rewarded" with "paid" and consider your own circumstances. The school district pays teachers to teach. It's likely you would not choose to stay in your job if the district stopped paying you. So it is with students. If learning is

their "job," shouldn't they be rewarded for putting in the time and effort just as you do? Second, consider what we tell students they are working for: a better career and a larger paycheck...eventually. Would you work for 13 years with the promise of getting paid later? The reward may be great, but it is too far removed to have any real effect on a middle school student's performance today.

### The Motivation

Finding personal satisfaction in our work is something we learn. When our parents or teachers took notice of a job well done, we were rewarded with pats on the back or a trip to the ice cream store. Eventually, we began to look at our own work and take pride in our job well done. Our motivation became intrinsic. Although it is important that teachers and school personnel provide external motivation, too much motivation in terms of rewards may leave students refusing to work unless that motivator (or something bigger) is promised. So what is an appropriate reward? It may as simple as praise from a teacher or it may be a more elaborate classroom management system in which students can earn an early release to lunch for working hard.

Whatever the system, the most important consideration has to be that the students are doing their job. That job may vary for each student, but it should include working hard, staying on task, and completing each assignment. (Notice that grades were not included in our list.) Consider the struggling student who, for the first time, works through the entire period without interruption. The work may not garner a high grade, but the effort of staying on task should be rewarded.

By teaching a student to continue to work hard and persevere, you allow that student more opportunities to learn and achieve more at a later time. Encouraging success speaks to the importance of knowing the level of your students and helping them be successful no matter where they start.

School is the student's job. For some students, achieving high marks and working diligently seem to come naturally. Other students, however, need an extra hand in changing their habits. Regardless which student you're dealing with, supplementing their school day with a little bit of "bribery" may be just what they need to keep them going or get them started.

“Finding personal satisfaction in our work is something we learn.”



If kids come to us from strong, healthy functioning families, it makes our job easier. If they do not come to us from strong, healthy, functioning families, it makes our job more important.

-Barbara Colorose



## School Spotlight- Hillcrest Junior High



Hillcrest Jr. High School is part of the Murray City School District and is located in Murray, Utah. Hillcrest Jr. High School serves students in grades 7, 8, and 9 with 750 students. We have a diverse population with 35% of our students being non-Caucasian/white. Our socioeconomics include 49% of our students qualifying for free or reduced lunch. Together as a school we have worked hard to create a positive school culture and have implemented a school-wide vision we . This vision stands for: Take Care of Yourself, Take Care of our Each Other, and Take call T3 Care of Our School. We reiterate this with students every day during our daily announcements.

Hillcrest Jr. High School has outstanding parental support. As a school, we want parents to be partners in their student's learning and we have committed to improving communication with our parents. A weekly "Hillcrest Happenings" email is sent out from the principal every Friday morning which lists school information and activities for the upcoming week. Our school website is updated each week with announcements and features. Additionally, our school website has a year-long calendar and resources for parents and students alike. Teachers have been asked to communicate with parents by having an updated website with current class information and/or by sending out a weekly email to all parents through our Student Information System.

Our school has both grade level teams and departments which meet multiple times per month. The focus of our grade level teams is on students' social and emotional well-being and success in citizenship. Each term, our grade level teams nominate six students from their grade level to be recognized as a Hillcrest Hero. These students are recognized at a breakfast with their parents for modeling our T3 values. Our departments are focused on student academics. Departments are working on common formative assessments, data disaggregation and implementation of departmental goals during their department meetings.

One of our most notable areas of achievement as a school has been the implementation of our Plus Period. Plus Period is a 25 minute intervention/enrichment period that is offered four days a week. Prior to implementation, the number of students failing classes was over 30%. Our most recent data shows that number to now be 9%. Our school has worked hard to reinforce the message that learning is important and that if students are not understanding the content, we will do everything we can to help them be successful with it.

Hillcrest Jr. High School will be moving into a new building for the 2015-2016 school year. The new building is located just east of our current location. It is a beautiful facility with abundant natural light and spacious student areas. As a school, we are looking forward to offering expanded programs and technology options to our students in this new building.

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### Navigating the Middle Years



### The UMLA Board Members

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The mission of UMLA is to address the unique needs of young adolescents by providing leadership and support to educators and families and to promote effective practices and programs that improve middle level education. We can serve to strengthen your position as an advocate for middle level reform and enhance your professional learning and practices. The role of UMLA is to advocate for and assist in giving the best possible education to all young adolescents in the state of Utah.

