Learning On AIR

The On AIR production team at Antwerp High produces every aspect of the live morning announcements, which often include younger students who take turns leading the Pledge of Allegiance. (see story p. 7)
The purpose of the Martha Holden Jennings Foundation is “to foster the development of individual capabilities of young people to the maximum extent through improving the quality of teaching in secular primary and secondary schools” and “to provide a means for greater accomplishment on the part of Ohio’s teachers by encouraging creativity in teaching and bringing greater recognition to the teaching profession.”

Pro Excellentia is published to describe a sampling of those efforts.

We ask that you please share this copy with colleagues who may gain valuable information and ideas from articles covered in this publication.

Mary Kay Binder, Editor

Dedicated to fostering Excellent Teaching and Deep Learning in Ohio’s secular schools.
Anne Conway Juster Succeeds George Milbourn as Foundation’s Chair/President

George B. Milbourn has long been a familiar face to those associated with the Martha Holden Jennings Foundation. Mr. Milbourn was first asked to join the Foundation’s Board of Directors in 1992, three years after the death of his father Frank Milbourn, who was a close friend of the Foundation’s founder Arthur S. Holden and one of its earliest advisors. George Milbourn stepped into the role of Chairman/President in 1999 when Mr. Holden, then the Foundation’s Chairman, and President George B. Chapman, Jr. retired from their respective positions.

Mr. Milbourn remarks that at first he “was scared to death” of the new responsibility. “I had spent my entire working career in the capital goods machinery business and was by no means an ‘expert’ in education,” he remarks. “Academically, I was a ‘C’ student and the thought of presiding over an educational foundation was daunting. But my father once told me that if a ‘C’ student surrounds himself with ‘A’ students, the organization might have a chance to be successful.

“In my 25 years involvement with the Foundation, I have been surrounded by ‘A’ students at all levels who have offered me constructive criticism, astute advice, and indescribable positive support. For all of this, I can only say thank you so much!”

Last spring, Mr. Milbourn announced his plans to retire from his role as Chairman/President at the end of 2016. He has been succeeded by Anne Conway Juster, who similar to Mr. Milbourn, served the Foundation as a director for seven years before taking on the leadership role. Mrs. Juster’s family has been close friends with the Holden and Milbourn families for seven decades, and in that respect, she continues to carry forward the “family” tradition. Mrs. Juster holds a master’s degree in education, is a former teacher, and has a strong resume of volunteer service in Northeast Ohio. Mr. Milbourn will continue to serve the Foundation as a member of the Board of Directors and will be close at hand to support Mrs. Juster going forward.

The Foundation welcomes Mrs. Juster in her new position and would like to share her comments regarding her new responsibilities and the Foundation’s role in contributing to Deep Learning and Excellent Teaching in Ohio’s public school classrooms.

Q: You have been associated with the Foundation for several years as a member of the Board of Directors, what are you most excited about in your new role as Chair/President?

A: I joined the Foundation as a Director in 2010. It was a wonderful experience to learn about the Foundation’s role and impact alongside then Executive Director Bill Hiller as well as longer serving directors, such as Mark Collier, Julian Earles, Karen Nestor, and Jon Outcalt. In my new role as Chair I am most excited about undertaking and implementing a strategic planning process. The Foundation is a star in the educational constellation yet we can benefit from learning more about how to fine tune our processes and increase our impact. Finally, I am grateful for the opportunity to partner with Executive Director Dr. Dan Keenan. Dan’s leadership and vision on a daily basis helps us achieve the goals of Deep Learning and Excellent Teaching.

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This past January, Anne Juster succeeded George Milbourn as the Chair/President of the Jennings Foundation. Mrs. Juster is the fourth person to serve in this post since the Foundation’s inception in 1959.
Q: You began your career as a teacher, what attracted you to the teaching profession?

A: You could say that teaching is our family profession. My parents were always deeply engaged with educational board work and I, as the youngest of four children, spent more time at the dinner table hearing about their work and passion. My oldest brother was a middle school teacher and a principal and my sister continues to teach in the fields of adaptive sports and yoga. My oldest daughter will keep the tradition going—she will have her first class of fifth graders in the fall.

Q: The Foundation is unique in its mission to “recognize teachers.” Why do you believe this is important?

A: Teaching is an undervalued profession. Most of us could name at least one teacher who had a profound impact on our lives (is that true for law or finance?); yet the field itself is not always given the respect it deserves. From the beginning the Foundation has recognized and celebrated excellence in teaching. Generations of Jennings Scholars took pride in this designation. Today, we annually recognize exceptional science, math, and team teachers as well as an outstanding Ohio superintendent at the July Educators Retreat. By providing opportunities for recognition as well as lifelong learning, the Foundation is a renewable energy source for those who make such a difference in the lives of others.

Q: In referring to the Foundation’s work, Chairman Emeritus Arthur Holden frequently asked: “Did we do a little good today?” What does that mean to you and the Foundation today?

A: I wish I could meet Art Holden and ask him what he means! I have a feeling he might have been a master of understatement. Have we done a little good? You bet! I have learned from George Milbourn that Mr. Holden wanted to keep things in perspective. The Jennings Foundation maintains a daily focus rather than the more removed, though equally important, work of policy. Fortunately we have other strong local foundations who make policy a priority.

Q: What would you like educators in Ohio to know about you personally or professionally?

A: I believe that quality education is a human right. If the Martha Holden Jennings Foundation can improve the quality of teaching and learning in the state of Ohio we have an obligation to make that happen. As Chair, I feel honored to be a part of this mission.
Building Future Entrepreneurs

When a business owner in Ashtabula needed input on how to expand her business she turned to an unlikely source—a team of teenagers from the area’s local high schools. The parties were connected through a youth leadership program designed and facilitated by Leadership Ashtabula County called LEADERship Lab. The pilot project began in September 2016 and was designed to develop entrepreneurial skills among high school seniors that would serve them well in any future endeavor.

There is a desperate need for programs that prepare our county's students for success in school, college, and the workplace, explains Laura Jones, Executive Director, Leadership Ashtabula County, the organization that received a grant from the Jennings Foundation to get the program up and running. “We’ve seen a real disconnect from what’s in the textbooks and how students believe that information applies to their lives.”

LEADERship Lab, which is rooted in the principles of project-based learning (PBL), focuses on developing skills crucial to future success: critical thinking, complex problem solving, collaboration, effective communication, and self-management.

Ms. Jones and Program Director Kesha Conway designed the pilot project for students from Lakeside, Grand Valley, and Geneva high schools, all located in the northeast corner of Ohio. To develop the curriculum, they attended a three-day Entrepreneurial Project Based Learning Workshop, which focused on the how to build a PBL experience into entrepreneurial studies. Prior to the start of school last fall, they recruited 15 students from Ashtabula County schools to take part.

“Students are hungry for this real world type of learning,” says Mrs. Conway, who started the year’s effort with a core group of students she had worked with in a prior leadership program. She expanded the group to include several new students from Lakeside High School in the city of Ashtabula.

A Real World Problem

The students’ first assignment was to meet with the owner of Cones Ice Cream, an ice cream parlor located in Ashtabula’s historic harbor. The owner was searching for ways to attract more customers, boost sales, and gain a greater market share in the homemade ice cream business. In keeping with the PBL format, the students walked away from that meeting with a driving question: How could Cones grow from a start-up business that merely breaks even into a sustainable, profitable business? They spent the next three months researching market trends, interviewing customers, analyzing the cost effectiveness of various ingredients, and rethinking advertising plans.

“The students were uncomfortable at first because they were given a real business problem,” explains Mrs. Conway. “We left the ice cream shop and they said, ‘Now what?’ I told them: ‘The answers aren’t in the back of the book. I will give you sources of information, I will give you methodologies, but it’s up to you to figure out what the right solution is.’ At first, that was met with a lot of resistance because they aren’t used to that. They had to take that deep dive to figure out what the answer was, and yes, they made a lot of mistakes along the way.”

However, what the students accomplished in the following three months was far more than anyone expected. They made a presentation to the owner of Cones that was met with very high marks.

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Instead of looking from a surface perspective, they dug deep into the problem and presented recommendations in a very professional manner. “It was a nice consequence that the students gave the business owner solutions that she is going to implement,” says Mrs. Conway, “but the real purpose of this experience was for these students to absorb a huge amount of business acumen in a short amount of time, build self confidence, work in a real world setting on a small team, and be the owners of their own success.

“The project allowed them to be curious, inquisitive, and successful for an authentic reason,” she adds. “They now know they are responsible for their own learning, and they can do it well and effectively. If they are given a problem that they don’t know the answer to, they know how to flounder, figure it out, be uncomfortable and ask for help, think critically, and come up with a solution.”

The second half of the school year tasked these same students with a new entrepreneurial challenge. Working in teams, the students developed ideas for a new product or service that would benefit their community. The teams were paired with local entrepreneurs who volunteered to meet with the students to offer professional guidance as they refined their ideas.

One team envisioned an online service that creates specialty care packages for college students living away from home. Parents or friends can choose from an assortment of products they view on the company website. The selections are packaged and delivered to students saving customers the time and energy of collecting and shipping items on their own.

“Parents don’t know how often to send a care package, they don’t know what to put in a care package, and they don’t have the time to put one together,” explains one member of the group who developed the service they named Peace, Love, and Home. “Our idea is a hassle free way to show college students you love them.”

Involved in the Process

A second group wrestled with a way to improve upon the typical college fair. In a span of two hours, the team of three refined their original idea from one that was extremely broad to one that was narrow, targeted, and more manageable. Their improved plan was to create an annual event in which potential interns and potential employers gather in one room and through a “speed dating” format search for a compatible match. The team’s “business” would vet interns in advance, a service employers would potentially pay for.

“Today these students came in with an idea and by the end of our meeting it was a completely different idea; but that’s what entrepreneurship is,” explains Eric Diamond, Director, NEO Fund, who has 25 years experience as an entrepreneur and believes entrepreneurship education should be taught in school as early as the middle grades. Mr. Diamond met with a team of students at Lakeside High School as they were just beginning to develop their thoughts.

“I challenged their original idea,” he remarks. “But this is their business. They have to do the work. I am only here to be a sounding board and to offer advice.

“There is no way to learn—and I mean truly learn—entrepreneurship without doing it,” he adds. “It’s not just reading a book, or watching videos. They have to think through an idea and solve a problem. That’s how you learn it—by doing it.”

“These students are now in a place where they don’t see barriers as to who they can be and what they can do,” adds Ms. Jones. “They have built this incredible level of confidence in their ability to perform, to interact, and to learn.

“Watching their growth has been phenomenal. We are seeing the desire of students to immerse themselves in their learning—to seek out answers and to apply them. And there is joy in the process. They are happy about their accomplishments, and they will be better prepared for the next step in their educational journey because of this process.”

“Sometimes it’s hard for me to stand back; but the more I do that, the more effective they are,” adds Mrs. Conway.

“I’ve worked with some of these students for two years now, and I am perfectly confident that they are going to do really well in the future. But because they did this, now they know that too.”

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Working together on projects, Ms. Jones says, “students learn how to hold themselves and group members accountable and experience some of the ‘wins and frustrations’ that come with the process.”
On AIR Broadcasts Teach Career Skills

At 7:50 a.m. each morning, every classroom in the Antwerp Local Schools—kindergarten through grade 12—tunes in to the district’s live televised morning announcements. After reciting the Pledge of Allegiance and recognizing students and teachers with birthdays, the anchors update the audience on school events, the day’s lunch menu, athletic schedules and sports scores. They remind students of deadlines, such as when to register for ACT and SAT tests or purchase Prom tickets. And they often showcase unique projects taking place at the elementary, middle, or high school. The segments are not only viewed by the district’s 700 students, but they are watched by community members through the school’s Facebook page or online stream.

Twenty to thirty high school students work regularly on the broadcasts. They act as anchors, engineers, camera operators, and audio technicians. Yet, many more students of all ages are drawn into the experience when they appear as guests, possibly reciting the Pledge in Spanish or highlighting an upcoming performance.

Periodically, the telecast airs a pre-recorded feature story, which usually adds about three minutes to the usual five-minute segments. Recent topics have included an exploration of Antwerp’s solar farms, an introduction to the new owners of the local Root Beer Stand, and a conversation with the director of the elementary school play.

These vignettes are produced by students in the high school broadcast journalism class. The curriculum requires them to brainstorm topics, conduct interviews, compile research, write and revise scripts, and record and edit audio and visuals for the final product.

Kayla Bagley, the district’s media specialist and broadcast journalism teacher, who received a grant from the Jennings Foundation to update equipment the district had been using for ten years, explains how students learn by producing the On AIR broadcasts:

“The students develop critical thinking skills using a multi-camera video program that captures, mixes video/audio, stores, and streams daily productions.”

Mrs. Bagley assumed responsibility for producing the morning shows seven years ago when the crew involved a voluntary group of students and the set was a table in front of a white wall. She realized the program had incredible potential to offer students in this isolated rural community an opportunity to develop important 21st century and career-based skills. She admits she had much to learn, but over time, she has developed a comprehensive broadcast journalism class and upgraded equipment to resemble a professional studio.

When the new equipment arrived in the spring, it was the students’ job to get it up and working. “I am not overly techie,” admits Mrs. Bagley, “so I handed it to the students to figure out, and that’s exactly what they’ve done.” The high school engineering class is now in the process of designing and building a new set for the program, which should be ready for the 2017-18 school year.

As excited as she and the students are to receive the upgraded equipment, Mrs. Bagley believes students can develop skills in this area with limited resources: “You can start with the basics; that’s what we did,” she explains. “For the first few years we literally had one camera in front of a white wall. You can even use your phone, and it will still be effective.”

From the planning stage to the production stage, Mrs. Bagley says the program relies on and stresses development of the four C’s: “We focus on communication, collaboration, critical thinking, and creativity,” says Mrs. Bagley. “So, it doesn’t matter what these students end up doing in life, this experience is going to help them.”

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Teachers Tackle Difficult Math

Once a month a group of mathematics teachers in Summit County gather after school to tackle complex mathematical problems. None of them are easy. Topics address Sudoku patterns and possibilities; Tessellations: patterns, repeating patterns and rules; and combinations, patterns, and complex matrices. The tasks are not meant to be connected to the standards, and they are “deep enough” to demand hours, days, or even longer to work through variations and extensions. They rarely have one right answer. Working through the challenges, teachers gain confidence in their problem solving abilities and acquire a greater understanding of some very complex mathematics.

These teachers, primarily middle school level, are participating in a newly-created Math Teachers’ Circle (MTC), a professional learning community of teachers and mathematicians, formed by Summit Education Initiative (SEI) with a grant from the Jennings Foundation. This group is associated with a national network of MTCs, of which there are 125 established throughout the country. Based on practices founded at the American Institute of Mathematics, Math Teachers’ Circles have been proven to improve teacher confidence in their own mathematical skills leading to positive changes in math teaching methods.

SEI set out to establish the intra-district MTC in Summit County in the fall. Educators were invited to attend eight monthly afternoon sessions led by mathematicians and physicists from SEI, The University of Akron, and Stow-Munroe Falls schools. Participants came from Akron, Nordonia, Cuyahoga Falls, Tallmadge, Stow-Munroe Falls, Manchester, Green, and Streetsboro.

Matthew Deevers, Senior Research Associate, SEI, explains that part of the intent of Math Teachers’ Circles is to let teachers experience what it is like to grapple with challenging problems so that they can better understand the struggles of their students.

“Math Teachers’ Circles are designed to put teachers back in the seat of being a student. It’s a place where once a month, adults get together and feel safe to say, ‘I don’t know the answer to this problem,’ and then try to come up with solutions together.”

Dr. Deevers emphasizes that the problem solving sessions are not designed to help teachers teach the content standards. There are lots of organizations, he remarks, that do that already. “This is about letting the teachers themselves wrestle with complex mathematical concepts. If we want to encourage an inquiry-based approach to mathematics that requires deep learning in students, then might it not be a good approach to have teachers themselves engage in deep learning?”

“This is a relatively new concept,” he continues. “The lessons are very open ended. There are evenings when we don’t get through the whole concept because that is what the teachers want. If you are approaching a really complex math problem and you don’t already know the answers, it takes awhile to solve. And I have enjoyed watching the struggle.” After working through the problems, teachers have the ability to scale the concepts they’ve learned to their own classroom level.

As the year concludes, Dr. Deevers hopes those who participated in the program gained a deeper knowledge of complex mathematics and a greater appreciation for what their own students experience when learning middle school math.

“These teachers are experts at how to teach their grade level, but that doesn’t mean that they’re experts at all mathematical concepts,” he explains. “When you are an expert at delivering your content, you can make it seem like it’s easy. But when you sit here once a month you remember that it’s never easy. “These teachers are coming to realize that if they can structure learning experiences for their students that require them to struggle through the issues, to communicate with each other, and to persist through the challenges, it will ultimately be more meaningful to them.

“We are not making mathematics professors here; we are making better, more empathetic mathematics teachers.”

To encourage increased participation in 2017-18, SEI will be offering sessions for middle school teams during the school day and will be starting local circles in specific school buildings across Summit County.

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Invention Convention  

Champion Middle School  

It’s early May and the gymnasium at Champion Middle School is buzzing with teams of eighth graders pitching an array of newly designed products. Using a Shark Tank style format, the students compete to attract visitors—“potential investors”—to their display tables where they showcase products that can do everything from help you locate a cell phone in the dark to keep you dry during a driving rainstorm.

The inventions are products of a three-week interdisciplinary project that challenged students to brainstorm, develop, test, redesign, and prototype new or improved products that solve common, everyday problems.

At one table a group of boys demonstrate the Beast Bag—a backpack that grows right along with students because it’s adjustable straps allow it to accommodate users of various heights. Next to them, a team of girls solved the awkward dilemma of holding both a box of popcorn and a large drink at the movie theater with an invention called Pop N’ Sip. Across the gym, a team invites visitors to pitch wads of paper into the Strike Zone, an interactive game that encourages people to recycle.

“The students really enjoyed having time in class to do something that is so untraditionally school,” says Jessica Hrubik, an eighth grade language arts teacher who received a Grant to Educators from the Jennings Foundation to purchase supplies to make the Invention Convention possible. These include boxes of “brainstorming” materials (i.e. tennis balls, fly swatters, flotation devices, rope, tape, pipe cleaners, and a host of everyday objects used to create prototypes), a 3D printer, and a class set of The Klutz Book of Brilliantly Ridiculous Inventions.

The idea for Invention Convention came from a technology conference a group of Champion teachers attended the prior year. “We thought it was important for students to see how subjects connect,” says Mrs. Hrubik, explaining that the entire eighth grade team was on board for the experience. Through an interdisciplinary unit, she explains, students realize how individual subjects can come together in a real world experience.

Mrs. Hrubik was quick to add that the project aligns to the common core standards in every subject. In math class students made scale drawings of their product ideas, researched costs, devised budgets, and calculated potential profits; in science they used the scientific process to create prototypes; while the project kicked off in social studies class where students brainstormed societal “problems” and researched three potential product ideas before deciding on one to produce.

In Mrs. Hrubik’s language arts class, the students reflected on each class session in digital journals. “This project encourages deep thinking on several levels and it really is one giant display of the writing process,” she remarks. “They planned, outlined, edited, and revised, and ultimately presented to an actual audience.”

Teamwork was another important focus of the project. The students were grouped in teams of four or five and were responsible for dividing the work among themselves and working collaboratively to complete each task. Many remarked that this was their favorite part of the experience.

Commenting on what she wants students to take away from the experience, Mrs. Hrubik says: “I hope they realize that this was a challenge, a struggle, and that the expectations were set very high. But they did it, and they did it well. Now they can say, ‘This was hard, but I am so proud of what I accomplished.’”

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Students tout the benefits of their new or improved products, such as the Pop N’ Sip, a combination drink/popcorn holder, and Hair Buster, a self-cleaning hairbrush.
Music: A Key to Cultural Understanding

Hudson City Schools

When Hong Le applied for the Foundation’s Master Teacher Award she wanted her first and second grade students to experience the joy of playing Zimbabwean marimba music.

“It is our responsibility to introduce our students to a world beyond themselves...whether that is learning about other cultures or helping them to discover skills they did not yet know they possessed,” says Mrs. Le, who is General Music Specialist in the Hudson City Schools. She received recognition from the Foundation as an “Excellent Teacher” and was awarded funding to bring this cultural experience to her young music students.

There is much to learn from and celebrate about all people in the world, explains Mrs. Le, who believes children can discover the beauty of the world’s diverse cultures through music. Performing that music on authentic instruments, she says, adds significantly to their depth of learning.

“Because music plays a central role in traditions around the world, my students can become the people of that culture through the study and performing of their traditional music, played on authentic instruments, sung in their language, and danced with their flair,” she remarks.

With funds from the award, Mrs. Le purchased three soprano marimbas, which resemble the students’ Orff xylophones only they are significantly larger and require more precise hand/eye coordination. The instruments arrived in February and were immediately adopted into the curriculum.

“At first the children were in awe,” remarks Mrs. Le, who works with 320 music students each week. “The particular instruments we purchased are very large because they are the lowest sounding instruments in the marimba family. However, once the students played them, they enjoyed the depth of sound and timbre that they added to the over all keyboard sounds.”

With just three marimbas added to their keyboard collection, the students took turns playing them while classmates accompanied them on the xylophones. But even those not currently playing the marimbas, says Mrs. Le, enjoyed the blend of sounds the different instruments make.

Mrs. Le’s interest in Zimbabwean marimbas was sparked just three weeks into her teaching career as a result of the 9/11 terror attacks. She believed the way to stem a rise in cultural hatred was to teach the “beauty” of ethnic differences. Beginning in 2001, she immersed herself in learning how to play music of various cultures and has since been trained to play and teach marimba music. She has become a member of the national World Music Drumming staff and teaches week long workshops in this musical style to music educators each summer.

Next school year, she expects to incorporate the marimbas in her music lessons, excited that students will have an entire year to enjoy the experience. “I want students to know and learn about an instrument of another culture, to see that there is more than one way to build a keyboard instrument, to understand that different timbres together create an ensemble sound, and to feel confident about their ability to play,” she concludes.

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Revising How We Teach Writing

Angie Jameson has only been teaching three years, but she believes her participation in a program called Writing Ourselves has transformed her work. In the past year, she has refocused her curriculum to place a greater emphasis on writing. Students in her classes now write at least three days a week. While still completely aligned to the Common Core standards, writing assignments are more meaningful, student-centered, and designed to teach teens how to write.

“What Writing Ourselves has really shown teachers is that we need to step away from the literature-based English class because that is not at all what college professors tell us students need,” explains Ms. Jameson.

Ms. Jameson, who teaches pre-AP honors English and journalism at Chagrin Falls High School, continues, “We are trying to break down a system where we give students a writing assignment, they complete it, we grade it and hand it back to them, and that’s the end of the assignment. We are trying to push it further, to teach students that their voices matter. Writing Ourselves has provided a lot of opportunities to do that.”

A professional development collaborative developed by William Kist, Professor, School of Teaching, Learning and Curriculum Studies, Kent State University (KSU), Writing Ourselves aims to align high school English instruction with college English expectations. The goal is to improve student writing at the secondary level and reduce remediation rates of incoming college freshmen.

The first Writing Ourselves workshop revealed how little communication there actually is between English instructors at the college level and English teachers at the high school level, explains Dr. Kist, who received grants from the Jennings Foundation during the past two years to fund two Writing Ourselves programs. These workshops, which have taken place during the summer with follow-up sessions held during the school year, bring together English teachers from several northeast Ohio school districts and college writing instructors from KSU and The University of Akron to learn from and with each other. The high school group is comprised of novice teachers, such as Ms. Jameson, as well as those with years of experience. With the guidance of experts, the educators work face-to-face and online to enhance all writing experiences at the high school level.

Dr. Kist explains that thus far the group has made significant progress. During the first year, they developed effective writing prompts, established rubrics, and encouraged the use of technology in high school classes because it is a significant part of the college writing experience. Grant funds also allowed them to create a professional, user-friendly website where they document and share their work.

Data revealed that dramatic growth occurred in student writing when teachers incorporated specific rubrics that aligned with college level expectations, explains Dr. Kist in his evaluation of the first Writing Ourselves program. In year two, the group, which expanded to include teachers from 11 area districts, has focused on implementing Writers Workshop and blended learning experiences (a combination of face-to-face...
and online learning) in the high school curriculum. Educators have addressed questions such as:

**What are best practices in blended learning, particularly in writing instruction?**

**What apps are most useful for teaching using the Writer Workshop model?**

**How can technology be used productively to help young people learn to become better writers?**

**How can we implement a Writing Workshop in our classroom using blended learning?**

A strong believer in the benefits of Writers Workshop, Ms. Jameson says it has encouraged her students to write from the heart and to become comfortable sharing their words with others. She begins each class with a 5 to 6 minute writing assignment and frequently asks students to partner with a classmate to review each other’s work.

“I love collaboration, so I love a loud classroom where students are talking and sharing with each other,” remarks Ms. Jameson, who facilitates discussion among the students and frequently models how to do so effectively using her own written words. “My cardinal rule is that they never mark on someone else’s paper. It’s always about talking about ideas and offering suggestions to strengthen the writing. The purpose is to help the writer, not the paper.

“At the beginning it’s a little scary to share your work out loud,” she admits. “But I think modeling is the key. I show students that it’s okay to share their writing and they have become comfortable with that.”

**Suggested Writing Prompts**

**PERSONAL NARRATIVES**

- **This I believe…**
- Write a personal narrative that describes how a single pivotal moment in your psychological or moral development has shaped you as the person you are today.
- Write about a time you’ve responded to a cultural collision and explain its significance to your life.
- Write about a time you’ve been pulled in conflicting directions by two compelling desires, ambitions, obligations, or influences.

**RESEARCH**

- How can students, high schools, and community members solve the problem of texting and driving?
- Select a documented medical condition that affects one’s ability to complete daily tasks and educate yourself on challenges people living with the condition face on a daily basis. Brainstorm adaptations to current products or develop a brand new product to make life easier for them.

“The freedom in the writing prompts really allow students to jump out of their comfort zone,” she continues. The This I Believe… prompt has been transformative for these kids. They never thought anyone would care about what they believe. Writing Ourselves has allowed them to see that their ideas matter, that they can be shared, and that people want to read them. That’s been really great.”

Ms. Jameson adds that having an authentic audience for their work is encouraging better writers as well.

Students can submit their essays to be published on the Writing Ourselves website, which also includes resources and teaching strategies that can be helpful to any English instructor.

Although students are taking more class time to write about issues of importance to them, Ms. Jameson says literary analysis is still an integral part of her curriculum: “I want students to feel confident in their writing skills for various types of writing tasks,” she remarks. “And I hope they learn that brainstorming takes time and proofreading is one of the most important components of the writing process.”

Reflecting on the outcomes of the Writing Ourselves workshops, Ms. Jameson says she has heard fellow teachers say they are thinking of changing everything they are doing. “It has really opened their eyes to the writing side of English.

“I’ll be honest,” she adds, “it’s much easier not to teach writing in an English class. It takes a lot of work to prepare, to grade, and to provide these opportunities. But in the end it’s what the students need. I think Writing Ourselves has shown that to a large group of teachers.”

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At a recent “Green STEM Fair” 7th and 8th grade students at Hughes STEM High School in Cincinnati traveled from station to station in the school’s gymnasium where professionals from the community introduced them to green technologies. The presenters devised interactive activities to engage students in topics such as solar power, recycling, alternate energy sources, urban planning for sustainability, and air quality control. Each presenter also explained careers available in their fields, mentioning many job titles most students had never heard of: solar energy technician, wind energy civil engineer, air quality environmental scientist, energy consultant, and pollution control equipment technician.

STEM careers are culturally invisible to minority and low-income students and that dynamic prevents them from expanding the vision of what’s possible for their lives, explains Ginny Frazier Executive Director, Environmental Alliance for Leadership & Interconnection (E-ALI) in Cincinnati.

“We want these students to get an idea of the possibilities that are available in energy management, environmental science, and STEM fields. Even if students don’t pursue a Green STEM career, environmental issues are going to be a part of every job at some point, so we want them to get that exposure to sustainability.”

E-ALI’s mission is to inspire and engage K-12 students to become the environmental stewards of the future. It does so by facilitating STEM programs and activities in renewable energies and green technologies in elementary through high schools. Working hand-in-hand with regional partners, they

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challenge students to create real-world sustainability solutions that interconnect with their larger communities. Two such efforts were funded in 2016-2017 with a grant from the Jennings Foundation. “We are an intermediary organization—we have a lot of community partners that we bring into the schools to deepen students’ learning about STEM and environmental issues,” remarks E-ALI’s Program Officer Steve Schumacher. “And it works. Everybody benefits.”

Practical Application of the Science Standards

Through a program called ECO-Mentoring, three teams of eighth graders at Hughes volunteered to participate in a four-week project to “dive deeply” into technologies they first learned about at the Green STEM Fair. With the guidance of their science teacher, Grace Conrad, and E-ALI Environmental Educator Susan Vonderhaar, the students chose topics to study that interested them and prepared a project to enter into a STEM showcase held at the end of the school year.

One group learned about, assembled, operated, and demonstrated a renewable energy model car. They prepared a poster on fuel cell technology and its applications, which they presented at the showcase in May. A second team demonstrated how fruits and vegetables can conduct electricity (i.e. you can light a light bulb by placing an electrode in a potato) showing the food/energy connection. A third team was interested in environmental news reporting. They prepared questions and interviewed classmates on the other STEM teams, as well as the E-ALI educator, about their work. They reported on what they discovered in a program called New Science News.

E-ALI’s Eco-Mentoring Program consists of delivering STEM curriculum that incorporates critical and creative thinking, creating objectives and strategies to achieve goals, problem solving, and oral and written communication skills, explains Ms. Frazier. They partner with many regional green professionals who visit the schools and serve as mentors, assisting students with their projects. “It’s really practical application of the science standards, and it’s hands-on application right away,” she adds. “It’s not about being lectured to or reading about these topics in a book.”

Jennings funds also allowed E-ALI to create elementary age programs for students from two STEM-focused Cincinnati schools that serve as feeder schools to Hughes: John P. Parker and W. H. Taft elementary schools. Together, 150 youngsters were introduced to six different environmental technologies or disciplines, including renewable energy, energy efficiency tools, and water quality practices and procedures.

“We wanted to spark an interest and motivation among many of these students to prepare them for more concentrated learning on these topics in the fall”, says Ms. Frazier, adding that they have planned to provide intensive follow-up sessions with these children next school year.

“We are using hands-on activity and deep learning so students become excited and motivated,” adds Mr. Schumacher. “Then they can start to set goals and have a vision for themselves about how they want to engage with both environmental issues and with STEM in the future.”

“The end goal,” he continues, “is for students to become social agents of sustainability.”

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As a first year teacher, Joe Brooksbank is always looking for experiences that will help him become a better at his job. Last year, he found that through the Jennings Fellows Program.

“Going through the process of becoming a Jennings Fellow, I was able to find new methods to get my students excited and invested in their own education,” says the fourth grade teacher from Stewart Elementary School in Cincinnati’s Princeton City School District. “It is so hard to find something that gets students intrinsically motivated about school work.”

Mr. Brooksbank, who holds a masters degree in education, was one of 14 southwest Ohio teachers recognized in May as a Jennings Fellow. These teachers were nominated by their districts to participate in the Jennings Educators Institute the prior fall. A three-part professional development program, the Institute encourages, supports, and fosters the development of teachers and their work in the classroom. Professional educators lead each session and through interactive work engage teachers in practices that lead to deep learning.

“The presenters [at the Educators Institute] were the most valuable piece of the experience,” remarks Mr. Brooksbank, a retired combat veteran who has always had the drive to serve and a desire to teach. “Listening and learning about their perspective for helping and challenging our students was amazing.”

Each year, Institute participants who choose to earn the distinction Jennings Fellow take the extra step to immediately put what they learn to work. During the following months, they design and implement specific lessons that incorporate the ideas presented at the Institute sessions. They also prepare a PowerPoint presentation describing how that work impacted their students and enhanced their own personal practice, which they share with colleagues in the spring.

“I like opportunities that enable me to look closely at my own practice,” says Jennings Fellow Nancy Flickinger, a 20-year teaching veteran who works with juniors and seniors interested in teaching careers at Taylor High School in the Three Rivers Local School District in Cleves, Ohio. “The only way to address areas of weakness in my practice is to shine a light on it. Through this experience, I took a strategy I was using and made changes to it to adapt to specific issues a group of students brought to my classroom. The experience reinforces my belief that every learner brings a unique learning style to my classroom and it is up to me to accommodate that learning need.”

The Jennings Educators Institute is open to teachers and administrators in selected areas of Ohio each year. In 2016-17 the program was held at The University of Cincinnati for teachers in southwest Ohio. In 2017-18, the program will be held at Bowling Green University for educators in the northwest region.

The Foundation created the Jennings Fellows program to recognize teachers for their commitment to professional learning and excellent teaching, explains Executive Director Dr. Daniel Keenan. He congratulated each Jennings Fellow at the conclusion of the program in May and encouraged all to continue their work to ensure deep learning for Ohio’s students.

2017 Jennings Fellows

2017 Jennings Fellows (L to R): Jill Mohr, J.F. Burns Elementary School, Kings Local School District; Jennifer Weiler, Boyd E. Smith Elementary School, Milford Local School District; Nancy Flickinger, Great Oaks at Taylor High School, Great Oaks/Three Rivers Local School District; Shannon Jones, Loveland Early Childhood Center, Loveland City School District; Sarah Preda, West Elementary School, Fairfield City School District; Rachel Thorman, Taylor High School, Three Rivers Local School District; Michell Thompson, Mulberry Elementary School, Milford Local School District; Heather Dingus, Mulberry Elementary School, Milford Local School District; Leslie Hattemer, Robert A. Taft Information Technology High School, Cincinnati Public Schools; Rebeka Beach, Robert A. Taft Information Technology High School, Cincinnati Public Schools; Michelle Watts, GRAD Cincinnati, Cincinnati Public Schools; Joseph Brooksbank, Stewart Elementary School, Princeton City Schools; Cheryl Zachry, Liberty Junior School, Lakota Local School District; (not pictured) Amy Ossola, Pattison Elementary School, Milford Local School District
New to the Jennings Family

The Foundation recently welcomed Mr. William Young, Jr., President and CEO of Southwest General Health Systems in Middleburg Heights, Ohio, to the Board of Directors. Mr. Young is responsible for the leadership of the health system, which includes the daily operation of Southwest General Hospital and the post-acute care providers. The facility serves patients in southwestern Cuyahoga, northern Medina, and eastern Lorain counties. He joined Southwest General in January 2016 after having served in a similar capacity at St. John Medical Center in Westlake.

Mr. Young has spent most of his career in the healthcare field compiling a long list of accomplishments. These have focused on improving the quality and safety of patient care, increasing communication to patients, and developing trusting relationships with medical staff and employees. Mr. Young has also served South Pointe and Marymount hospitals, Humility of Mary Health Partners, and Meridia Health Systems.

Mr. Young holds a Masters of Business Administration from The University of Toledo and a Bachelor of Science in business administration from Ohio Northern University in Ada, Ohio. An accounting major, he began his career as a staff accountant at Mercy Hospital in Toledo.

Mr. Young resides in Hudson, is a member of several professional organizations, and is active in numerous community activities. The Foundation is very pleased to welcome Mr. Young to the Board of Directors and will benefit greatly from his vast business expertise.

2017 Mathematics Institutes

Each summer the Foundation sponsors Mathematics Institutes designed to re-energize Ohio’s math teachers in grades 4 & 5 and 6 - 8. The separate sessions are filled with practical strategies teachers can incorporate immediately into their lessons.

Once again Jeffrey Wanko, Chair, Teacher Education and Professor, Miami University, will lead the two sessions. He hopes teachers become more at ease with problem solving after participating in the programs. “There’s a level of professionalism that all teachers are working towards to become better teachers and teach mathematics in a way that better reaches students. That’s what we are striving for through the Institutes.”

This summer’s Mathematics Institutes will be held in July:

July 24 - 25 • Grades 4-5
July 27 - 28 • Grades 6-8

Best Wishes in Retirement

At the close of 2016, the Martha Holden Jennings Foundation honored Mr. Lorenzo “Ren” Carlisle for his contributions as a member of the Distribution Committee for the past 14 years. Mr. Carlisle is co-owner of Carlisle’s Home in the Harbor in Ashtabula, a business that has been in his family since 1857. The Foundation’s Executive Director Daniel Keenen, who worked for several years with Mr. Carlisle on the Distribution Committee, remarks: “Ren utilized his business background to provide critical viewpoints when evaluating proposals. As a committee member, he was a great listener, bold advocate for what he believed in, and a team player.”

His insights on grant proposals will be missed, but the Foundation wishes him the best in his retirement.