

**MAKING A  
DIFFERENCE  
IN MIDDLE  
LEVEL  
EDUCATION!**



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# Arizona Middle Level Association

## IMPORTANT NEWS & EVENTS

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**THANK YOU!  
SHARON KUEHL AND  
BOB BECKE FOR YOUR  
CONTINUED HARD  
WORK AND DEDICATION  
TO AMLA**

**MARK YOUR CALENDAR!  
AMLA TEACHER  
APPRECIATION  
BREAKFAST WILL BE ON  
APRIL 22, 2009**

### Join AMLA Today!

**Join AMLA at:**  
<http://cmweb.pvschools.net/~bbecke/amla>

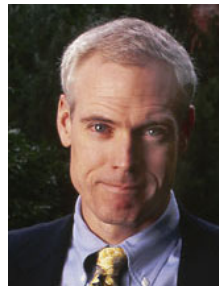
**Send Your Teaching Tips to:**  
**Mary Trent**  
[mtrent@susd.org](mailto:mtrent@susd.org)

## NMSA Conference Highlights

Jim Collins – Author of **Good To Great** was a keynote speaker at the recent NMSA annual conference in Denver, Colorado.

One of his key beliefs is “good is the enemy of great.” For once an organization or person believes they are good, the motivation is removed to improve. For schools in improvement, the path to improvement is easily seen. Schools who are achieving often decline because the organization believes it has “arrived” and no further work is needed.

Jim Collins’ work was put to work right here in Arizona in another publication called, “Beat The Odds.” He studied achieving and underachieving schools in Arizona and applied his “good to great” principles to schools. This



is very interesting study worthy of your time.

A second belief is the “fly wheel” principle. A fly wheel is a very large mechanical wheel that usually powers items in manufacturing plants. Jim Collins uses the fly wheel as an example of how organizations can sustain their momentum. In his analogy, the wheel is so large that all of the organization’s efforts collectively put on the wheel barely moves

the wheel at first. However, slowly the wheel does start to turn and then suddenly the wheel is building momentum and shortly thereafter the wheel begins turning with little effort from the organization. Jim Collins believes most organizations give up on a new innovation or pathway to change before the fly wheel begins to move. It is not one single event or person pushing that makes the fly wheel move, it is the collective efforts of everyone. He suggests picking one program or innovation and then sticking with it.

Jim Collins suggested we could all be more effective if we made a “stop doing” list. While our to do lists are important to get things done, a stop doing list will help us be more effective. He suggested organizations should also create a stop doing list. A diagnostic tool is available on his website – [jimcollins.com](http://jimcollins.com).

## Transforming Classroom Behaviors

This session dealt with recognizing the need for adolescents to move and how to incorporate some minor disruptions into your classroom.

Betty Berger led the session and discussed classroom disruptions. She believes classroom disruptions fall into several categories:

1) Inattention – all of us tend to multi task in our minds. We are in one place, hearing someone talk, yet are thinking about something else in our minds. These behaviors exist in our students as well. She asked the audience to recognize this, examine WHY this bothers us so much and then pick a response to such behaviors. Responses could include: ignoring, redirecting, having a signal to draw a student or the students back, give a break, compliment the opposite behavior, discipline, etc.

2) Disruptions we encourage – disruptions we encourage???! Betty Berger stated how we structure our classroom and how we react to some of the above behaviors escalate these behaviors in our classrooms. If our lessons are not engaging, creative, and differentiated, our students will check out mentally.

3) Extreme behaviors – examples would include fighting, calling out, bullying, etc. Betty Berger believes even these extreme behaviors can be prevented to a large degree if we include certain elements within our classrooms.

What are these elements? They are characteristics we want our own children and every child to possess. Honestly, self-reliance, tenacity, organization, people skills, compassion, community

mindedness, etc. Betty Berger believes that we need to include these “skills” within our classes. We need to teach the skill and give opportunities for the students to practice, receive corrective feedback, and practice again. It is by the addition of these character education and people skills to the curriculum that discipline issues will be reduced.

She also suggests the use of student-centered assignments. An example for a summary of a unit might be an ABC book about the unit. Students need to fill in a word for every letter of the alphabet about the unit or story or topic. There is more than one correct answer and it helps the students to reflect upon the topic.

They like it because it gives them freedom within the structure.

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# Spencer Kagan - Proven Instructional Strategies Close The Achievement Gap

We all have students in our classes and school who seem to fall further and further behind each and every year. The reasons for this are many and debatable in some circles. The reality these students sit in our classes and need our help to make up the gap. Research has proven when students work together we achieve more gains – 28%tile gains over individual learning.

When we ask a question to the class and call on one person the following scenario unfolds: one group of students is hoping the teacher calls on them, one group of students is hoping the student who is called upon will miss the answer so they will be able to correct them and shine, one group is simply not interested, and one group will decide to watch the drama unfold. We tend to call upon those who need it the least and ignore those who need it the most.

Traditional teaching methods work, they produce gains at different rates for different students. The low students will gain some but not at the same rate as the high students. This is how the gap continues to grow between these two groups each year.

Spencer Kagan, well known author of Cooperative Learning techniques, is careful to point out cooperative learning is not the same as group work. Many teachers continue to believe putting students in groups in being cooperative. Additionally, Spencer Kagan wanted the audience to know cooperative learning has evolved over the past 20 years. They have learned more about learning and have applied this research to their methods.

He answered a few questions about cooperative learning.

1) There is a lot of pressure to cover the curriculum. How can I cover the curriculum if I allow time for student discussions? If we want to cover as much curriculum

as possible, we need to stand in front of our class, talk fast, and allow no interruptions, student questions, or student discussions. We will cover the most curricula possible, but students will understand and retain little. If we want our students to understand and appreciate our curriculum we need to stop talking on a regular basis and let them talk. It is through student discourse and interaction of different ideas that students construct meaning. We retain a great deal more of what we say than what we hear; there is an inverse relation between teacher talk and student learning!

2) Doesn't preparation of cooperative learning lessons take too long?

At the beginning of cooperative learning it was too complex and did take quite a bit of preparation. We now say, "don't do cooperative learning lessons, make cooperative learning part of every lesson." We see greater value in a 2 minute Timed Pair Share or a 1 minute round robin, than a two day Jig saw activity.

3) Where does cooperative learning fit into my lesson plan? Teachers using cooperative learning structures do not redesign their lessons, but their lessons get redesigned. For example, during a set for a lesson a teacher might use Timed Pair Share to assess prior knowledge or to have students verbalize what they would like to learn. The lesson remains basically the same, the implementation allows for more student interaction. He who does the work, does the learning. A teacher might include an occasional cooperative learning structure and as the students master the structure the teacher can add more structures. In the process the otherwise routine lessons become increasingly powerful cooperative learning lessons.

Teachers like it because students will put more effort and deeper thinking into such an assignment, and the students remember more about the subject matter.

## Betty Berger recommends:

- *Stretch breaks for the entire class after about 20 minutes of sitting*
- *Use of cooperative learning strategies within the class*
- *Getting feedback from your students*
- *Use of drawing, cartooning, collages and other creative venues to draw in multiple intelligences to the lesson*
- *Get in the habit of wearing something odd that will be a "conversation starter" for dialogue with the class. (different tie, clothing from the time period studied, use of a famous quote, etc.)*
- *Student centered assignments*

## AMLA Member Schools

Arcadia Neighborhood Learning Center

Cheyenne

Cocopah

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Supai

Desert Canyon

Superior

Desert Shadows

Estrella

Explorer

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Greenway

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Hillcrest

Ingleside

Mohave

Mountain Trail

Mountainside

Prospect

Shea

Sierra Vista Academy

Sierra Vista MS

Sunrise

SUSD Executive Director of Middle Schools

SUSD Curriculum Specialists

Please send any teaching tips to

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