



## NEW LESSON PLANS

Teachers at new math and science middle school say they're excited about allowing children to solve problems, do projects rather than expecting them to follow book



**Felicia Campbell, shown monitoring the halls at Riedinger Middle School in May, will teach language arts and social studies at Akron's new math and science middle school. Above, teachers and staff of the new school check out the progress at the South Broadway site.**

**By John Higgins**  
Beacon Journal staff writer

Akron's new math and science middle school, which opens this fall in a temporary home, aims to serve children of all abilities.

It's not a magnet school for the district's best and brightest.

Felicia Campbell, one of the 14 teachers picked for the school's first year, wouldn't have it any other way.

"That's how it should be," said Campbell, a 20-year veteran who will teach language arts and social studies.

"If you tell me that this is just for an elite

group of teachers or kids, then I would probably not want to be a part of it simply because I'm an Akron Public Schools teacher, which means I take in all kids."

The new school aims to nurture and sustain the sense of wonder and discovery kids express about the natural world in elementary school but too often lose in the middle-school years, when they decide math and science aren't for them.

Campbell knows many of those students are smart enough for science, but they'll never get to those ideas through textbooks alone because they're not reading at their grade level.

That's why she's excited that the teaching methods she and her colleagues will use at the

new STEM (Science Technology Engineering and Mathematics) school aren't as dependent on textbooks.

Those methods - known as project-based, problem-centered or inquiry learning - provide students with opportunities to struggle with real-world projects and problems and experience the potentially addictive rush of solving them.

Teachers such as Campbell have practiced the methods in isolated classrooms around the district, but never together under one roof, across subject areas and disciplines, with every-

Please see **Teachers, A8**

Experienced educators speak out on project-based, problem-centered teaching method coming to Akron school. **PAGE A8**

## Health-care reform has seniors anxious

Older citizens have plenty of questions about the future of Medicare. Lack of a definitive plan adds to concerns

**By Judith Graham and Janet Hook**  
Tribune Newspapers

**DENVER:** Far from the hue and cry over health-care reform erupting in town hall meetings across the United States, many older citizens are quietly confused about what an overhaul might mean to them.

The opinions they form in weeks ahead may well prove crucial, as older adults are a highly influential, politically active group of voters. They bring a unique perspective to the topic: they are the only group in the country with guaranteed health care, from Medicare. Also, they're the heaviest users of medical services.

On a recent afternoon, a group of 80- and 90-year-olds at a 14-story retirement complex just north of downtown Denver voiced some of the same questions about health reform circulating in living rooms, retirement communities and senior centers elsewhere in the country.

"Will it affect how quickly I can get in to see my doctors?" asked Anna Jane-way, 80, a retired marriage and family counselor.

"You hear all these things about Medicare going broke if we do nothing. Where would that leave everybody?"

Please see **Health, A5**

## Students need to learn the ABCs of influenza

Experts urging parents to teach their children how to prevent swine flu

**By Cheryl Powell**  
Beacon Journal medical writer

A new threat could be awaiting children when they return to the classroom this month.

Medical experts here and nationwide are concerned that the H1N1 influenza virus, also known as swine flu, might spread more rapidly after students are back in school.

This new form of influenza first surfaced in the United States in the spring and has since been declared a pandemic by the World Health Organization.

"We kind of got lucky in terms of our planning in the

spring, because then schools went out and everyone went their own way," said Dr. Blaise Congeni, director of infectious disease at Akron Children's Hospital. "It's very reasonable to assume that the virus will be back."

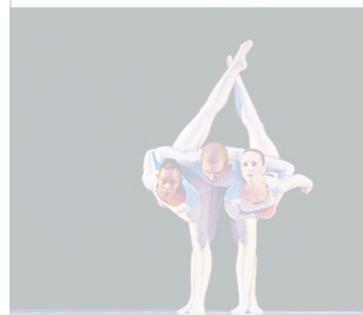
"... Your child may get H1N1 influenza. We expect a substantial proportion of the population to get it."

Back-to-school season typically is a time when many communicable diseases tend to increase, said Dr. Marguerite Erme, disease control medical officer for the Akron Health Department.

Public health officials usually get more reports for lice, scabies, respiratory illnesses and other conditions in the fall.

Please see **Flu, A7**

N. Main St. intersection is called worst COMMUNITY, B1



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## What some educators say about project-based, problem-centered and inquiry-based teaching at schools that routinely practice the methods

### On assessing student abilities:

"The idea around project-based science is that they're given multiple ways to show what they know. They can do it in discussion, they can do it in presentation, they do it in reports, they do it in things that they build."

— **Ann Rivet, assistant professor of science education, Teachers College, Columbia University**

### On the importance of group dynamics:

"In any kind of work group, there is always the hogs who want to do it all. 'It's mine; it's mine; it's mine. I'll do it all because you won't do it right.' There's also the logs who are happy to just sit there and float as long as everybody else is doing it. . . . So what a good PBL design will do is create enough tension that the hogs recognize they can't do it by themselves, they need help, and the logs feel their help is truly needed."

— **Debra Gerdes, professional development leader at Illinois Mathematics and Science Academy (IMSA), PBI Network, Aurora, Ill.**

### On answering questions with questions:

"In the end, problem-centered is a really, really cool way to say Socratic. Because in the end, that's what you're doing. You're constantly pushing on them and quizzing them and trying to build on what you've done the last several weeks or months with the idea that they would be constructing a bigger picture for themselves."

— **IMSA history teacher Lee Eysturild**

### On the importance of teachers knowing their material:

"They have to have more stuff ready. And if you don't know your content area, you're going to stink at it. Lecturing is easier. You have your notes, you know where you're going and you don't have to wander around."

— **Lee Eysturild**

### On comparing inquiry with traditional teaching methods:

"I taught for seven years in a very traditional paradigm and you didn't really know where everybody was until you gave a quiz. That's too late for that kid who just bombed. I should have known that he didn't have a clue what was going on. Not that kids don't sometimes fail quizzes here, but at least no one is surprised about it and we hopefully have started taking some steps to get them more help outside of class."

— **Janice Krouse, math teacher at IMSA**

### On the differences between the inquiry approach and the traditional lecture:

"You don't come in with this very neat, polished lesson, ready to deliver it, knowing you're not going to make a mistake because you've got it down. You've got to be OK to react on the spot, to maybe make a mistake in front of your class."

— **Janice Krouse**

### On the reluctance to move beyond textbook lab experiments with predictable results:

"Traditionally, if you let students investigate on their own, science is really messy and it can get outside the comfort level of a lot of teachers."

— **Josie Wallmuth, science teacher at IMSA**

### On IMSA's Methods of Scientific Inquiry course for sophomores:

"The science team constructed the MSI class because, in general, we get many, many bright students, very curious students who have never really done authentic science. . . . In their previous life science or physical science classes, they've had some lab experiences, but oftentimes they're very cookbook and there's just worksheets and it always works. And so they really don't understand that a lot of science is about failure and what happens when I don't design an experiment correctly or I don't have a large enough population."

— **Josie Wallmuth**

### On students showing that they understand the concepts:

"We call it 'presentations.' Back in the day, we called it 'get your butt to the board.' We've kind of lost that in the classrooms, and then they come here and everybody's got to go to the board. Everybody's got to stand up and talk."

— **Lisa Floyd-Jefferson, a former math teacher at Metro Early College High School in Columbus**



**National Inventors Hall of Fame School... Center for Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics Learning**  
Grades: 5-8

**Enrollment:** Initially, 98 students in 5th grade and 108 students in 6th grade. Of the total enrollment, 22 are from

outside the district. Eventually school will have a maximum of 400-500 students.

**About:** Scheduled to open in the fall of 2009 in a temporary home at 400 W. Market St. in Akron. The following year it will open in a \$14.5 million new building on Broadway in downtown Akron.

**Admission policy:** Geographic lottery representing each cluster of the district with some slots reserved for open enrollment from outside the district.

**Web site:** <http://www.akronscienceschool.com/>

**Affiliation:** Ohio Stem Learning Network: <http://www.osln.org>

## BEACON JOURNAL SERIES TAKES A LOOK AT MATH AND SCIENCE MIDDLE SCHOOL

Akron Public Schools have spent five years designing a \$14.5 million math and science middle school where students will learn in ways dramatically different from traditional classrooms.

Every detail of the new school, which opens this fall in a temporary location, has been planned to grab and keep a student's interest by solving real-world problems and exploring the concepts underlying mathematical formulas rather than just memorizing them for a test.

Years of planning, millions of tax dollars and the contributions of practically every significant public and private institution in Akron are riding on the effectiveness of these methods.

What do they actually look like and feel like in the classroom?

The Akron Beacon Journal, with the assistance of a fellowship from the Hechinger Institute on Education and the Media, will explore that question from the perspective of students, teachers and parents in a periodic series as the school begins operation.

**Today's story focuses on teachers.**

COMING NEXT: The parents' perspective.

— **Beacon Journal**



Sam Crews, sixth-grade math and science teacher at the new middle school, helps Morgan Delany, 11, (left) and Avery Bable, 11, at a school and family get-together Saturday at Lock 3 Park. The students made latex balls.

MIKE CARDEW/Akron Beacon Journal photos

# Teachers must show how they would conduct a class

Continued from Page A1

one from the superintendent to the principal supporting the approach.

Campbell's last assignment was at Riedinger Middle School, one of five schools closed at the end of the school year because of declining enrollment.

Riedinger's principal, Traci Buckner, has been hired as the new math and science middle school principal.

Campbell and two other Riedinger teachers, Amanda Boyd and Sam Crews, are among the teachers selected for the new middle school from around the district.

A panel that included representatives of the school's main partners — Akron Public Schools, the University of Akron, the city and the National Inventors Hall of Fame Foundation — conducted the job interviews.

"We had to teach a lesson where we had live students. We had actual kids that were brought in. I had five kids," Campbell said. "After we taught our lesson, then we were put through a grueling 12-person interview where they each had a set of questions for us on the spot. There was no prep."

Campbell taught a specialized class at Riedinger for students who were reading at two or more years below their grade level. Twenty years of teaching also has taught her a little about human nature, at least at the middle-school level.

"Those students who didn't fare very well in elementary and didn't get the skills that they needed to help them be confident in their learning, they tend to be the instigators or the bullies that make the other kids feel somewhat bad," she said.

They know their academic shortcomings will be exposed if they're called on in class.

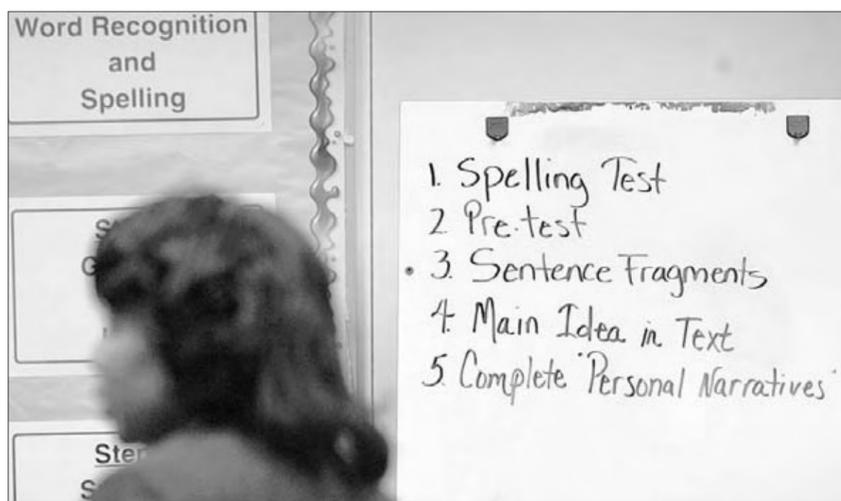
"So, rather than have that attention put on me, I'll just act up. I'll just pick with other kids, I'll just really be a real cutup in class," Campbell said.

"And then the attention all of a sudden switches from what I do or don't know academically to my behavior. As outrageous as it may sound, there are many students who would rather be known by their off-the-wall behavior than their academics."

Those kids will pick on the better-prepared students who raise their hands and answer questions.

Traditional read-a-chapter, take-a-quiz teaching methods make the language arts teacher the gatekeeper for all other subjects.

"You have the burden of carrying the building because, as I always say, social studies, science, those are technically extended reading classes that deal with nonfiction," she said. "It's



Felicia Campbell is one of the 14 teachers picked for the new math and science middle school's first year. In the new school, she hopes children will be able to use video technology to tell their stories.

fact-driven, information-driven."

Boys especially are drawn to hands-on science, but if reading is too hard, they never get past the printed page.

"The problem is they get bogged down in trying to decipher every word, every syllable, and they work so hard trying to decipher what's in print until everything else that you say and do is kind of lost because they struggle so hard just trying to read the material," Campbell said.

"So once you get through that part, now you have to go back and make meaning out of what it is that you just read. By then, they've forgotten, because all the energy was put into trying to decipher what the words were."

### Trial and error

These inquiry teaching methods require teachers to give up some of their control over those classrooms, and that doesn't come easily. And, just as their students learn through trial and error, so must the teachers.

In the traditional model, children are supposed to sit quietly in neat rows facing the front of the class.

Lessons are well planned and follow a strict timeline. The teacher lectures, assigns the reading in the textbook or the sample problems, collects the assignments and grades the quizzes.

At all times, the teacher controls the pace.

In a classroom using inquiry methods, things get a little messier and noisier. At the beginning of a project, the teacher typically will hand out a guide sheet describing what the project is about and what the student must demonstrate to get an "A."

Then students tackle the problem, usually working in groups, and the teacher coaches from the sidelines. Projects might be completed on schedule, or they might run a little long or short. They might take unexpected directions, depending on the students' interests.

Teachers might jump in with a traditional lecture or textbook reading when students hit a snag and need more information before they can continue, but generally students are responsible for getting the work done by the deadline.

Students have many ways of showing they understand the material.

"If you sit and talk with students, these same students who may struggle if you gave them a book, they can very intelligently tell you what pollution is, how they see it every day, what they think are some of the causes," Campbell said. "And with that help, with the different types of technology and the different webs of information, we can help them make sense out of, 'Well, why is it the sky is foggy some days and there are odors in the air?'"

"We can help them through that without them being a stellar reader, and at the same time, still help them fill those holes, fill those gaps, so that they are learning how to read better and comprehending and understanding what they're reading."

Her students last spring, for example, were writing personal narratives, struggling to get through the mechanics of writing — correct spelling, grammar and punctuation.

In the new school, she could use video technology to guide students in creating mini-movies about their lives, with words, but

also music and video clips and other characters to flesh out their stories.

"That's totally different than hearing, 'You're going to write a personal narrative about an important event in your life,'" Campbell said. "It's those types of experiences I really look forward to being able to do and having the technology to back it up and support it."

Over the years, Campbell has had opportunities to use those methods, but only in after-school programs and other isolated circumstances.

"It's always been a separate program, and not so much part of the curriculum," she said. "I have created my own projects for students, but once again, I was somewhat limited in how far I could go because of materials or time restraints keeping up with what you have to cover."

### Tough neighborhood

Another colleague at Riedinger, Sam Crews, also is among the first class of teachers at the new school and he, too, has used these kinds of methods before, but never in a building where everyone was doing it together.

When Crews went to work at Riedinger in 1997, the district boasted a number of buildings that sounded like math and science schools.

The district had secured federal money to establish magnet programs to attract more whites to schools where most of the students were minorities.

So Buchtel High School became Buchtel Natural Science & Technology High School and Perkins Middle School became Perkins Technology Middle School and Essex Elementary be-

Please see **School, A9**

## Hard-to-reach kids respond to approach, teacher says

Wayne Naylor, formerly a sixth-grade science teacher at Craig Middle School in suburban Indianapolis, taught project-based learning most of his 21-year career. (He recently was promoted to interim assistant principal at the school.)

Naylor offered these insights:

- Some kids need to be taught social skills that adults take for granted, such as knowing how to take seats facing each other at the table.

"You can't assume that kids

know that. They're going to sit all one side or they're going to sit on top of the table and somebody can't see the group."

- Project-based learning can help kids who otherwise would drop out.

"I don't think it's a silver bullet and solves every issue, but it sure does reach a lot of kids we don't ordinarily reach," Naylor said. "I can name six kids right now this year that I think they're changed forever."

- Students feel like they have

some control over what they're learning, unlike their chaotic home lives, where they have little control. That's something Naylor discovered for himself teaching a section about raising worms. He would ask the students to list the daily needs a worm must meet to survive.

"I'm thinking you need soil, water, need to be fed every day, and they're listing things like they need to be loved, or they need their mom and dad to stop arguing," Naylor said.

At first he was thrown by the answers, thinking, "That's not what I meant."

But the more he listened to the students talk about the worms, about how the worms' parents were divorced and the dads beat them, he realized that the kids weren't talking about worms at all. They were talking about themselves.

"I know now it's going to happen," Naylor said, and he just deals with it.

— **John Higgins**

# School

## Teachers decide kids need new way to learn

Continued from Page A8

came the Essex Global Telecommunications and Modern Languages Elementary School.

Later, when the federal grants dried up, so did most of the magnet programs, but the hope of improving math and science instruction continued.

Crews eventually progressed to teaching language arts, then science for several years and more recently, math. In his previous career, he counseled people with drug addictions and led teens on wilderness adventures that served as a kind of practical therapy, but he was still dismayed to learn about the home lives of his students at Riedinger.

Many of them lived in the inner-city Opportunity Park neighborhood near Riedinger, unfortunately named, because opportunities are so limited there for many kids.

"The biggest challenge you'll have all week is nothing compared to the challenge they had that morning just trying to get to school - if they're allowed to come to school, because maybe they're in charge of the siblings that day," Crews said.

He and other teachers used to do home visits after school, but they proved too dangerous - not in the homes but in the streets, trying to get to and from their students' homes. The same streets their students must travel to get to school.

"You don't just walk around Opportunity Park after dark," he said.

In a dozen years of teaching, he has attended the funerals of four former students because of gang violence.

"I buried five since '97 - one to sickle cell [anemia] and the rest were gangs. One of them got shot a block from my building," Crews said.

And already he has taught the children of former students.

"I'm talking about Opportunity Park culture: that you need to be pregnant by the time you're 16 because that's what gets you to the paycheck," Crews said.

He wanted to empower those kids, persuade them that they had choices, but he was frustrated that he was losing too many of them with the traditional way of teaching.

"It's hard when you feel like you're beating your head on the wall and giving all this energy and your kid ends up dead or they go home and get beat or any plethora of other examples I could give you that are so hurtful," he said.

Crews has seen many students become successful, but the kids he has lost, either to death or the streets, haunt him.

He never bought into the cliché that teaching was all worth it if you could just reach one kid and change that life.

"Really, my whole life, my whole career for one kid? I don't think so. I was shooting for more than that," he said.

### Science teachers unite

Crews sought out the counsel of older teachers and soon after he was hired, he joined a group of like-minded science teachers from around the district who would meet after school to compare notes.

Kathy Sparrow, the district's science curriculum specialist who since has retired, organized the group.

"That was a place where they could commiserate," Sparrow said. "It always helps to talk to somebody who is doing the same thing or has similar experiences, so they could get feedback from them."

The monthly gatherings were voluntary, only teachers and the science curriculum specialist, talking about their craft.

"This is some place where they were doing the same things, so they could connect with each other, even if all the teachers in their building weren't doing it," Sparrow said.

They knew that traditional read-a-chapter-take-a-quiz instruction, so deadly dull and irrelevant to their students' lives, wasn't working.

No regular Akron middle school has reached 75 percent proficiency on a state science test; only one has passed a math test. Ever.

"We talked about investigation. We talked about student-driven learning. We talked about inquiry," Crews said.

They learned how to do projects such as the eco-column, the combined aquarium-terrariums in fifth grade that sparked such wonder and excitement in their students.

"This is a woman who was way ahead of her time," Crews said of Sparrow. "When I first came to the district, that science learning network, it was huge. She brought teachers every month together."

Crews usually left those monthly meetings with something practical to use the next day in his classroom, not just another Ivory Tower educational theory.

Disruptive behavior melted away when his students worked

on projects they cared about, and they stayed focused, often to the surprise of other teachers.

One day, Sparrow invited Crews to imagine with other like-minded teachers what a problem-centered approach would look like beyond an isolated science class.

What if it became the organizing principle for an entire middle school, down to the physical layout of the building?

Sparrow and the district's math curriculum specialist, Steve Miller, led a group of 20 Akron math and science teachers who recommended an inquiry approach.

"The focus was more on kids doing science," Sparrow said. "Not that there's no direct instruction with that, but definitely not the lecture, read-the-book, lecture, answer-the-questions mode. That was a given."

And just as their students at the new school will be working in groups, so will the teachers - under one roof.

"They have in a microcosm right there in one place what we tried to do pulling them in from all over the district," Sparrow said. "Just think how much more fruitful that's going to be when they're working together and feeding off each other's ideas and creating more ideas."

Crews would never describe himself or his fellow teachers as revolutionaries. Nevertheless, five years later, their revolutionary vision is about to become reality.

### Teachers excited

The teachers at the new middle school closed out the last school year by packing up their classrooms for the move to temporary quarters at 400 W. Market St., where they will spend the first year of the school.

One day in May, their principal, Traci Buckner, had a treat



MIKE CARDEW/Akron Beacon Journal

Intervention specialist Juwan Hardin (right) celebrates on teacher appreciation day at the temporary school site on West Market Street.

for them.

They were going to tour the multimillion-dollar building under construction on South Broadway, which wouldn't be ready until they started the second year of the school.

### Channeling Rocky

First, however, she had something else in mind.

She cued math teacher Crews to hit the play button and the fa-

miliar trumpet fanfare of the Rocky soundtrack filled the classroom at 400 W. Market St.

"I just wanted to take a few moments and let you know that we didn't forget this is Teacher Appreciation Week," Buckner said.

She called each teacher's name and acknowledged him or her with pins and certificates.

The Rocky theme resonated

among the teachers.

Just as the boxer in the movie was an underdog going into the fight of his life, the teachers will face the fight of their careers: engaging students in math and science and keeping them engaged through the critical middle-school years and beyond.

Campbell feels like she's prepared all of her career for the opportunity.

"There's days to me it's like a

dream. You spend your whole career preparing yourself for something really big and you really don't know what the something really big is," she said. "It just makes me feel like I've been in school for 20 years and now I get a chance to graduate and try some of the skills that I've learned over the years."

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Offer available on select phones. 3G not available in all areas. Coverage is not available in all areas. See coverage map at stores for details. Limited-time offer. Other conditions & restrictions apply. See contract & rate plan brochure for details. Subscriber must live & have a mailing addr. within AT&T's owned wireless network coverage area. Up to \$36 activ. fee applies. Equipment price & avail may vary by mkt & may not be available from independent retailers. Early Termination Fee: None if cancelled in the first 30 days; but up to \$35 restocking fee may apply to equipment returns; thereafter up to \$175. Some agents impose add'l fees. Unlimited voice services: Unlimited voice svcs are provided solely for live dialog between two individuals. No additional discounts are available with unlimited plan. Offnet Usage: If your mins of use (including unlit svcs) on other carriers' networks ("offnet usage") during any two consecutive months exceed your offnet usage allowance, AT&T may at its option terminate your svcs, deny your cont'd use of other carriers' coverage, or change your plan to one imposing usage charges for offnet usage. Your offnet usage allowance is equal to the lesser of 750 mins or 40% of the Anytime mins incl'd with your plan (data offnet usage allowance is the lesser of 6 MB or 20% of the KB incl'd with your plan). AT&T Promotion Cards: USBConnect Mercury price before AT&T Promotion Cards, DataConnect plan req'd, & with 2-year svc agreement is \$119.99. Minimum \$60.00 DataConnect plan req'd, & with 2-year svc agreement is \$129.99. PANTECH MATRIX price before AT&T Promotion Cards, minimum \$20/mo messaging plan required, & with 2-year svc agreement is \$79.99. Allow 60 days for fulfillment of cash & cannot be used for cash withdrawal at ATMs or automated gasoline pumps. Card request must be postmarked by 10/29/2009 & you must be a customer for 30 consecutive days to receive card. Sales tax calculated based on price of activated equipment. DataConnect plan is not unlimited & substantial charges may be incurred if included allowance is exceeded. Facebook & a registered trademark of Facebook, Inc. ©2009 AT&T Intellectual Property. Service provided by AT&T Mobility. All rights reserved. AT&T, the AT&T logo and all other marks contained herein are trademarks of AT&T Intellectual Property and/or AT&T affiliated companies. All other marks contained herein are the property of their respective owners.

