

**COMING
MONDAY**
Your guide to...
SUMMA FIELD
**INFOCISION
STADIUM**

**PENN STATE
BATTERS
ZIPS 31-7
IN OPENER**

**OSU stays
afloat in game
against Navy**
SPORTS, C1

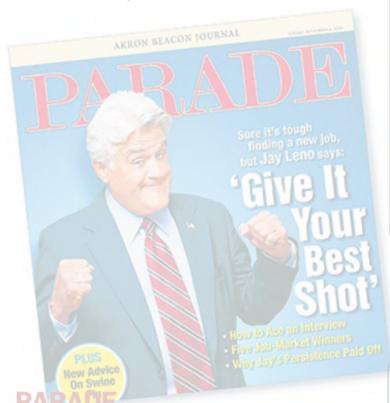
**Get sneak peek
at network TV
shows set
to debut
this fall**

PREMIER, E1

In today's Beacon Journal:
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**'Robocalls'
are silenced
by rule change**

RECLAIM THE DREAM
Mother of two
reaches a key goal
by pinching pennies
BUSINESS, D1



Jay Leno talks about why his persistence paid off. And find out how to ace an interview and meet five people who took a career leap – and are happier now.



MIKE CARDEW/Akron Beacon Journal photos
Bill Jandecka watches as his son, Hunter, 11, a sixth-grader at Akron's new Science, Technology, Engineering and Math (STEM) middle school, shows off what he has learned on his laptop. Hunter's sister, Heather, 8, studies at the dining room table in the family's home in the Firestone Park neighborhood.

Parents encouraged by new STEM school

Mom and Dad's role is to give support, but also step back to let kids learn

By John Higgins
Beacon Journal staff writer

On a rainy afternoon last April, a group of Boy Scouts navigated a course through south Akron's Firestone Park using a compass to find a series of paper-scroll clues.

Each scroll indicated the distance and compass direction to the next clue.

Bill Jandecka walked with the group that included his son, Hunter.

A misreading on their compass had left them wandering off-course and frustrated when they noticed other groups were progressing faster. But as Scout leaders are trained to do, Jandecka didn't take charge. "That's all right. Don't worry about them," he said. "It's not a race. It's more important to be on the

money."

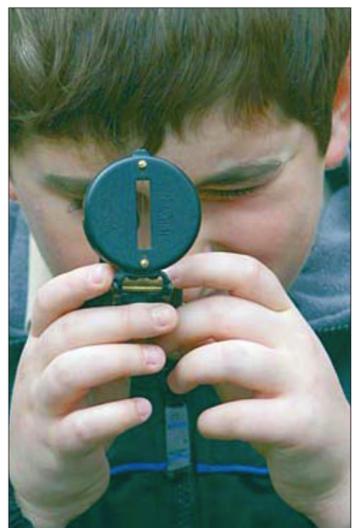
He urged his group to stay focused and figure it out. In Boy Scouts, boys turn to each other, not the adults, to solve problems.

"That's what's nice about it," Jandecka said. "Mom and Dad fall back and the patrol leader takes over. It's all boy led."

That's the same attitude Jandecka will need now that his son is in the first class of sixth-graders at Akron's new Science, Technology, Engineering and Math (STEM) middle school.

Hunter and two of his buddies who were on the compass course that day started classes Aug. 26 at the school's temporary home at 400 W. Market St.

Please see **STEM, A6**



Nick Lewis, 11, runs a compass course with his Boy Scouts troop. Nick is attending the new STEM school.

Hospital leaders weigh in on overhaul

Akron General, Summa, Children's officials agree changes are needed in health-care system

By Cheryl Powell
Beacon Journal medical writer

When it comes to national health-care reform, the leaders of Akron's three hospital systems agree: There is no quick cure.

The issue will probably take center stage this week, when Congress returns from its summer break and resumes its debate about President Barack Obama's health-reform initiatives.

The president has said he wants sweeping changes to the nation's

medical care enacted by the end of the year.

But such massive reform "can't be done in a year," said William Considine, president and chief executive of Akron Children's Hospital. "Whatever is going to be done has to be done in a multiyear fashion, step by step."

Leaders from Akron Children's, Akron General Health System and Summa Health System recently shared their thoughts during separate interviews with the Beacon Journal about how national health

reforms could affect their institutions and the patients they serve.

The local impact could be wide-ranging.

Along with providing medical services, the three hospital systems are among Summit County's largest employers, accounting for thousands of jobs in the region.

Akron's hospital leaders agree that changes are needed.

An estimated 46 million Americans – including more than 70,000 Summit County residents – lack health insurance.

As a result, even people with health insurance end up paying higher bills, Considine said.

Hospitals routinely mark up prices and take higher reimbursements when insurers agree to help balance the free care and government programs that don't always cover the entire cost of services, he said.

"One of the ways we're part of the solution is to be transparent – to explain what happens with the cost shifting," Considine said.

Please see **Health, A7**

Civilians at Afghan site, NATO says

General inspects charred remains of fuel tankers bombed by U.S. jets

By Jason Straziuso
Associated Press

KUNDUZ, AFGHANISTAN: The top NATO commander confirmed Saturday that civilians were wounded by a devastating airstrike targeting insurgents in northern Afghanistan, a major test of his policy to curb airpower to reduce civilian casualties and win Afghans over to the war

against the Taliban.

Gen. Stanley McChrystal waded through a knee-deep river to inspect the charred remains of two fuel tankers destroyed in the Friday attack, which Afghan officials say killed about 70 people. It was unclear how many were Taliban and how many were villagers who rushed to the scene to siphon fuel

from the stolen trucks.

McChrystal visited the site about 100 miles north of Kabul as European leaders already nervous about the escalating war demanded answers. Some called the airstrike – requested by the Germans and carried out by U.S. jets – "a tragedy" and "a big



SOURCE: ESRI

Associated Press

Please see **Afghan, A5**

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intervals of
clouds and
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STEM

Parents need to give teachers their space

Continued from Page A1

They'll spend their first year there before moving into a multimillion-dollar addition to the former Inventure Place on Broadway in downtown Akron.

What's true in Scouting also is a principle of the problem-centered teaching methods teachers will use at the new school. It's the struggle and the payoff when they figure it out for themselves that make a lesson engaging and memorable.

Teachers hope the methods will sustain the sense of wonder and discovery that seems to evaporate during the middle school years, when too many students decide that math and science no longer interest them.

Although the approach is unlike what most parents remember from their own school days of sitting in rows, taking notes and cramming for tests, the parents share an initial faith in what the school is trying to accomplish.

But many, like Jandeka, already may know more than they realize about the new methods, because they've been encouraging that sense of wonder in their children since they were born.

Parent involvement

Craig Middle School in suburban Indianapolis has had several years to learn the importance of parent involvement. Akron educators have visited the school and consider it a model.

The seventh-grade science and language arts classes worked together last school year on a plan to teach preschoolers the importance of washing their hands. The lesson was an outgrowth of their own study of communicable disease.

But before students turned in their final project, they had to present it at a "parent coffee" made up of parents who had been asked to come in during school to observe their work.

Parents were asked to offer critiques that the students could use to improve their presentations. The parent ownership blossomed into public attention. By the time the older students presented to the preschoolers, stories about schools closing because of H1N1 "swine flu" were all over the news.

"You're learning something that's actually happening instead of, just like, fake stuff," seventh-grader Nora Zeng said.

Nora and classmates Olivia Cummings and Taylor Federspill worked together on a book. If they wanted a B grade, they had to produce and publish an illustrated book that accurately presented the information about microbes and hand washing.

To get the A, they needed to do something extra, like translate the book into Spanish, which is what Nora did for her group.

And just as teachers tried to make projects interesting and relevant to them, they had to make their book, *No, Frankie*, relevant to preschoolers.

"If we just, like, said all the facts in this book, little kids wouldn't like it," Taylor said. "We used things that little kids would do or would think was funny to get their attention, like picking their nose."

So Frankie, the title character, demonstrates all the reasons kids should wash their hands, like picking his nose and playing in the mud.

When Taylor and Olivia read *No, Frankie* to a classroom of preschoolers seated on the floor, they got the reaction they wanted.

"Frankie headed for the bathroom to wash his hands," Taylor read. "While in the bathroom, Frankie stopped and spotted his rubber duckie in the tub. He didn't want to fill up the bathtub with water so he decided to play with his duckie in the toilet."

The kids erupted with a chorus of "Ewwws!" punctuated with a "He's gross!"



Carol Sweizer (left) talks with Julie Harding and her son, Gavin Wilson, 11, at the STEM middle school open house. Gavin is in Sweizer's advisory group at the school.



Tierrah Jones tries an experiment as her mom, Tara Jones, watches during a meet-and-greet for incoming fifth- and sixth-grade STEM school students last month.

Parent Beth McCarty remembers the parent critiques.

"They read to you and then you also read through their story and then you gave them your opinion, you know, 'Do you want to be a little bit more exciting here to try to engage the kids that you're going to come to read to?'" she said.

The experience allowed her to see the diversity in families and children. There were students in special education and some who were learning English as a second language.

"So it exposed all of the kids, coming from all different backgrounds and diversity, to an opportunity to work together in a team, to build a project and to actually have something tangible, a product that they could hold in their hands at the end of it that also was practical," she said.

McCarty, who is a pharmacist, told a friend, Indiana Health Commissioner Judith Monroe, about the books.

On the day the students presented, the state health commissioner and television crews were on hand.

Monroe's visit made the project even more real to the students.

Just as the teachers made the project interesting and relevant to them, the students made their hand-washing books interesting and relevant to the preschoolers.

But the parents who attended the coffees also came away with a greater appreciation for what project-based learning is about.

Common bond

A common bond with other parents is what Charlene Williams is looking forward to sharing at Akron's STEM school.

Her son, Dondi Jr., is among the first fifth-graders at the new school.

Williams, a senior administrative assistant at Chase bank in Akron, heard about the STEM middle school at work before Dondi came home with a flier.

Williams said her son has had good teachers at Robinson Elementary School who encouraged his interest in science.

But Robinson had received the lowest overall rating the state hands out - academic emergency, the grade equivalent of an F - when Williams was searching for alternatives. (Robinson jumped two ratings to continuous improvement on the state report card released Aug. 25.)

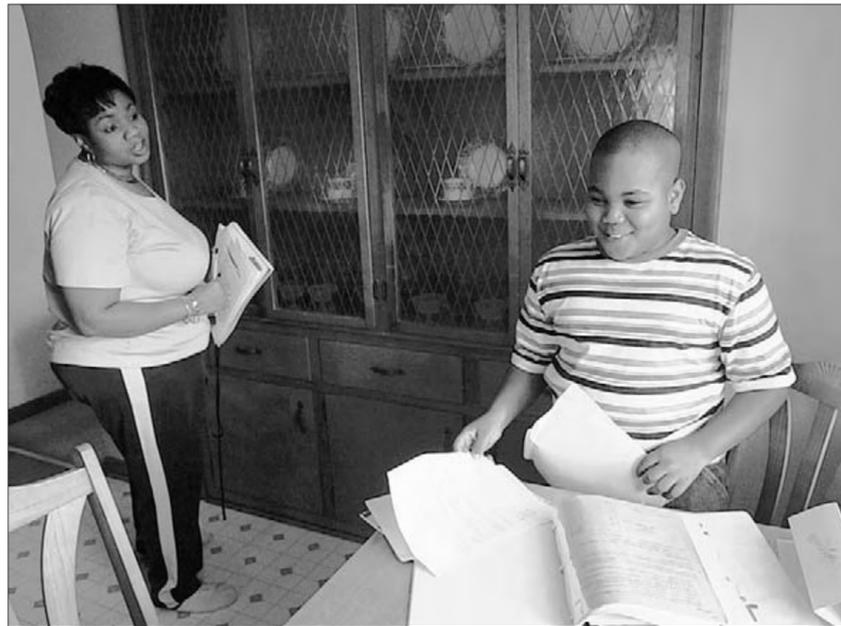
"I had tried a couple years to apply at different schools during open enrollment and was not able to get in," Williams said. "I applied for King. I applied for Firestone Park and they were closed because they were at capacity."

She even considered using a state voucher to enroll her son in a private school.

"I'm such an inquisitive person," she said. "I left several messages for the principal [of the private school]. She never returned my phone calls. That kind of put a bitter taste in my mouth."

She was thrilled when she learned Dondi Jr. had been selected for the new STEM school.

He had gotten into scrapes with other kids at Robinson be-



Charlene Williams (above left) checks on her son, Dondi Jr., as he does his homework from Robinson Elementary School last year. Dondi now is a student at the STEM school. Below, Jake Billich, a fifth-grader at the new STEM school, shows his mom, Rebecca Wilson, how he works his laptop.



cause of peer pressure, Williams said. And there were kids whose bad behavior would command a lot of the teachers' attention.

She's hoping that won't be a problem at a school that the students and the parents have chosen. The school system required students and parents to submit statements of interest when applying for the admissions lottery.

"I'm happy that maybe because of the process you have to go through, these kids will be more focused on learning, they'll come from better backgrounds, working families and parents who are involved, which probably will make me step up my game more, too," Williams said.

Learning by doing

Project-based learning also focuses on learning by doing, which won't be a new concept for Tara Jones. She not only has been pushing her daughter, Tierrah, to do better, she's also been

showing her by example the importance of a good education.

Jones is a registered nurse taking master's degree classes to perhaps teach nursing. Tierrah, who is a fifth-grader at the STEM school, would like to be a nurse, too, or maybe a dentist.

Jones wanted to know that even though the school is using different teaching methods, it's covering the basics and providing a well-rounded education.

"I want to make sure: Are you guys going to be at the standard of the state? Are you going to at least teach her the minimum as far as what the state requires?"

The answer to both questions is yes. The projects that students engage in will be tied to specific state standards.

Jones said she's been satisfied so far with the information she has received from school organizers, dating back to the first parent meetings in February.

"I know at the first meeting people were concerned about gym and art and music," Jones said.

"Well, they answered all that. They sent me information this summer: Have her sign up for this and that. What would she like? Choir or band or orchestra? They sent me information last week, art every other day, gym every other day."

That kind of communication is essential to earn and keep parents' trust, said Ann Rivet, an assistant professor of science education at Teachers College, Columbia University.

"The school has to be very very clear about what they're doing [and why] and not just sort of wave their hands and say this is research supported, you've got to trust us," Rivet said.

She said the new middle school should not take parents' support for granted. The absence of quizzes, worksheets and other tangible measures of performance may be disconcerting.

"Parents need to give the teachers the space in order to do this and not worry so much about the external evaluations, which I know is really hard,"

"I'm a big research person," she said. "I want to know what's involved. I want details. I researched it for probably a good couple of weeks, here and there. Every other night, I'd get online. I noticed there were a lot of schools all over the United States."

She also involved her son in her quest for information.

"He saw me doing research and saw the things I was looking at," she said. "I would let him sit there with me and read some of the things about it."

Perhaps that's where he gets his voracious appetite for a subject that grabs him.

The August before last, the family went to Washington, D.C., and he gazed on Lincoln's monument and the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in awe. He wanted to learn all he could about John F. Kennedy, even imploring his mom to buy a rare book by JFK on eBay.

"That's the type of kid he is," Harding said.

Gavin, who had attended Barber elementary school since kindergarten, had always liked math, but he was sold on science in fourth grade, when the class did an experiment with M&Ms to see what would happen to the candy-coated chocolates if they were dunked in milk or in water, or frozen or melted.

Some parents didn't like the idea that the students would be selected for the new school by lottery, not on academic merit, but not Harding.

"There's a lot of kids out there who unfortunately are not given the opportunity," she said. "They might come from a broken home. Their parents don't spend time with them. It doesn't mean that they shouldn't get that same opportunity. So I was all for the lottery."

That said, she knows that the school will ask a lot of the parents.

"I really like the fact that they want the parents involved," she said. "I think it's not just the school's job to teach."

Essential relationship

It's that relationship - between parent and child - that's essential to keeping that sense of wonder teachers see in fifth-grader that so often seems to vanish by the end of middle school.

Rebecca Wilson already knows the power of project-based learning because she saw that wonder flourish in her own son, Jake Billich, when he was in the University of Akron's child development center preschool.

"The kids would sit in a circle and they would decide what they would investigate," she said. "And then they would do this investigation for several weeks at a time."

She said her son and his classmates learned because they were experiencing the world, not because they were memorizing flashcards or filling out worksheets.

She knows when the addictive power of solving problems hits his brain with a dose of dopamine.

"I know when Jake's learning something because he's lit up," Wilson said. "He's asking questions, he's talking about it, he's interested, he's figuring things out. He'll be in his room and he'll come running out and say, Mom, I just figured out whatever it is. That's the kind of learning that matters to me."

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Craig Middle School seventh-grader Katie Piscione reads to children at the early learning center in Lawrence Township, Ind. Katie and classmates had to write a children's book as a school project.

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

The Akron school district has 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 program, which opened 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 the parents' perspective.

COMING NEXT: How is the new school doing?