



South Shores Counts On Success

South Shores Elementary School in Decatur, Illinois, sponsored an evening of success and celebration focusing on math skills during the 2002-2003 school year. Sue Ridgely, Modern Red SchoolHouse Facilitator, with the support of principal, Linda Zinn, organized a school wide instructional unit that culminated in Family Math Night at the school.

Ms. Ridgely is a retired teacher who works part-time as a consultant at South Shores. While looking at various ways to utilize the Curriculum Development Library (CDL) produced by MRSRH, Ridgely went through the entire selection of math units. She examined the standards in each unit, matching them with the Illinois standards at each grade level. The teachers then chose one unit from the CDL per grade to teach in their classrooms. Ridgely printed hard copies of the selected units for each teacher and then stood back to watch the action.

Teachers and students worked on the units for one week, displaying their work samples and products in the hallways of their school. Excitement was high as students were intrigued and challenged by the various activities. There was a scavenger hunt in the hall that had everyone scurrying to locate math shapes—and all agreed they had never measured so many objects in so many different ways before, including their own bodies. For example, did you know that the length of your foot is equal to the distance from your elbow to your armpit? Ask any student at South Shores, and you will get a grin and the advice to “check it out.” Even so, the students couldn’t decide if the best part was doing the activities themselves or planning the culminating celebration of learning and inviting their parents to participate.

After much planning and preparation, the night arrived—and what a night it was! The February evening may have been chilly, but the events were definitely cool. The grade levels set up different stations for the occasion. These



Special Education teacher, Linda Kuhns (right), shows off student-designed tangrams to some students and parents at South Shores' Math Night.

were interactive, and parents were invited not simply to view the student work, but to participate in the many math activities at these stations. Children were thrilled to be able to explain to their families exactly how to perform tasks ranging from tangrams to optical illusions to calendar counting. One clever decision was to forego the usual refreshment tables and turn the different activity stations into munching opportunities by offering snack items as prizes. Mints and fruit roll-ups were highly sought after prizes.

Many parents expressed delight that their sons and daughters were so interested in practicing math skills. Family Math Night was a definite success as school personnel distributed praise and prizes among the more than 400 parents and students who joined them for the evening. Teachers expected the guests to select from the available math stations, but as it turned out, most of them man-

aged to participate in all twelve! The large turnout, coupled with a rise in test scores in mathematics, has the folks at South Shores planning a similar unit for this year that will focus on literacy. Will they experience the same kind of success as with their math unit? They are counting on it!

The Standard **Has a New Editor!**

Lynn Lewis, a veteran MRSRH trainer from Vidalia, GA, has taken on the noble task of writing our quarterly newsletter. We are excited about offering our schools, supporters, and colleagues this “view from the trenches.” We want to thank Lynn for accepting this position, and we invite you to share your successes, challenges, and inspirations with her when she’s training at your school. You can email your story ideas to: jlyles@mrsh.org.

National Educators' Conference

Glancing at the Past...

Few teachers and principals tried out the slot machines while in Las Vegas attending the MRSH conference for educators in February, 2003—they were much too interested in the speakers and special sessions held at the annual conference. This comes as no surprise—considering that Lorraine Monroe was the first keynote speaker to greet conference participants. Dr. Monroe reminded us all why we had chosen to enter schools and work with students. There are children who need us—children with potential and ambition as well as needs that can only be met by educators who pay attention. Some educators from Chicago joined our gathering simply because they remember the profound effect that Dr. Monroe had on their development as new principals.

Kay Toliver gave attendees conviction that they too could find mathematics not only compelling, but also fun. Ms. Toliver, an award-winning educator, provided an extra afternoon session on teaching mathematics,

and quite a few participants chose to stay and work with her.

Educators also had an opportunity to share their experiences and wisdom in developing task forces and instructional units. New members of the MRSH family took comfort in the experiences shared by those who had been at the work of changing schools somewhat longer:

Uncertainty passes, results come.

Gazing toward the Future...

The 2004 MRSH National Educators' Conference will be held in Orlando, Florida at Disney's Coronado Springs Resort on February 5-7! This three-day conference will focus on powerful, research-supported instructional practices, proven strategies for inclusive decision-making, and real-world success stories by teachers and administrators.

Modern Red is pleased to announce the featured speakers for the conference:

Dr. Carol Ann Tomlinson, author of *How to Differentiate Instruction in Mixed Ability Classrooms*; **Dr. Crystal Kuykendall**, author of *From Rage to Hope: Strategies for Reclaiming Black and Hispanic Students*; and **Dr. Sue Nelle DeHart** with Dr. Ruby Payne's organization—techniques, and strategies for working with students and their families from poverty.

Registration fee is \$400 per person or \$360 per person for three or more staff members from the same school. Overnight lodging is \$125.00 per night plus tax.

We encourage you and your staff to make plans to attend this conference!

To register, visit us online at www.mrsh.org, or contact Judy Lyles at the Modern Red SchoolHouse Institute at (888) 275-6774, ext. 10.



Conference Bonus—Visit a MRSH Success Story

Those attending the 2004 MRSH National Educators' Conference in Orlando in February may be planning side trips to one of the many nearby theme parks or recreational sites for after-conference hours. MRSH is organizing a particularly meaningful pre-conference side trip—one that will give participants an "up close and personal" glimpse of a unique school with a dramatic turnaround story.

Moton Elementary School, part of the Modern Red family since 2001-2002, is located in Brooksville, Florida and serves more than 650 students from pre-K through 5th grade. Early MRSH training sessions in all schools included examining the change process and formulating a vision for the school. While most sites seek improvement and accept change as a necessary by-product, the teachers and administrators at Moton embraced change as a desirable element in their determination to re-make the school's image and improve its record of performance.

Historically Low Morale

Three years ago, Moton teachers and students suffered from many ailments. There was a large staff turnover every year, student performance was discouraging, and teachers felt they had no control over a bad situation.

Their reputation in the community and morale in the building were at all-time lows. So what happened?

Focus on Standards

Academically, they shifted from a school with a curriculum determined by the instructional programs or textbooks adopted by the district to one with a curriculum based on Florida state standards. Being allowed to write their own instructional plans gave the teachers a sense of ownership that had been missing. Principal Donnie Moen speaks strongly about their commitment to teaching all children what they need. "I think we know what the standards are. Our standards are the basis for what we do...not the textbook."

"We Can Make a Difference."

Sue Hegedus, lead teacher and MRSH Facilitator at Moton last year, worked to instigate team learning at the site. One day each week every staff member attends a mini staff development training session held during teachers' planning periods. The topics vary and may be proposed by individual teachers or brought up by the Leadership Team. Sessions sometimes consist of panel discussions of a pre-determined topic, a group book study,

a resource speaker, an in-house presentation, or a video series.

The staff is very focused on student achievement, effective instructional practices, and ways to differentiate instruction in Moton's very diverse student population. 63% of their students qualify for free and reduced lunches and over 30% are in the Exceptional Student Education program, some severely physically or mentally handicapped.

Teachers have learned that they *can* make a difference in the educational environment and academic progress of their students. In the present climate, they know their voice will be heard. The sense of empowerment resulting from collaboration among teachers, administrators, and MRSH trainers has directly impacted their morale. The consensus at Moton is, "Our students are engaged in learning, and our teachers feel responsible for every child in the building, not just the ones in their own classrooms. And the parents? They are now glad to have their kids here." The results speak for themselves. Moton Elementary School is now the 3rd highest performing school in the county and is recognized by Florida as an "A" school!

Mileston Gets a Makeover

The learning environment in a school can be a critical factor in student achievement. The environment does much more than simply *reflect* instruction—it directly *impacts* the kind of instruction that occurs in a classroom. Armed with that knowledge, the teachers and administrators of Mileston Elementary in Tchula, Mississippi and representatives from MRSH came together in July to transform the environment of the school. Before they were finished, the entire town had gotten in on the act.

Sally Kilgore, president of MRSH, and Ursula Davis, specialist in learning environments, set the project in motion. Davis, a New York resident, led the training using the module, “Creating a Positive Learning Environment for Student Success.” Margaret Officer, a MRSH trainer from Nashville, provided additional assistance during the four-day workshop. The school’s principal, secretary, and custodian conducted a tour of the premises so that a detailed needs assessment and inventory of the existing environment could occur. The custodian, Mr. Cox, had already painted the interior and most of the exterior of the building to make it as inviting and child-friendly as possible.

Davis urged the teachers to look first at the needs of the children and set up their classrooms to meet those needs so that the environment could and would support student success. This should not be left to chance. Learning environments should be designed to support children’s physical, social, emotional, and academic needs, the curriculum, and the teacher. Since children spend so much of their day in classrooms, these



Dot Blanton (right), a community volunteer, and Joyce Pully (left), MRSH Site Manager, look as Ursula Davis covers a crate to make a bench for a learning center.

rooms are critical to the development of basic life skills such as organization, time management, independence, respect, responsibility, and the love of learning.

Sending a powerful message

One key concept stressed was how important the appearance of any building is in which students are supposed to learn, because the building conditions send clear messages to students about who they are and how they are valued. Davis reminded them it does no good to *tell* students they are trusted and valued but contradict that message by actions such as removing bathroom soap dispensers because “the kids will only make a mess with them.” One goal that was definitely accomplished during this week was sending Mileston students the message that they are respected. The teachers and staff of their school respected them enough to clean up, paint, repair, organize, and purchase many items for classroom use. They went on several shopping sprees—definitely searching for bargains—but always buying quality items that were bright, cheerful, and child-friendly.

Another area the group addressed concerned instructional materials and room arrangement. Again, they concluded that the environment could create problems or diminish them. They examined several problem-causing situations, such as crowded areas near pencil sharpeners, desks with no room to move among them, lack of a comfortable place for reading, lack of necessary materials, and the difficulty of collaboration when all seats face the same direction. Then, the teachers worked in groups to create a “child” on a life-size piece of paper. They wrote all their ideas about ways the learning environment could support the child socially, physically, emotionally, and academically somewhere on the child. Displaying and sharing these “children” led to further analysis of how best they could address the needs of their students through their classroom environments.

Demonstrating a powerful spirit

On another day, the teachers viewed slides showing different room arrangements and how these arrangements affected learning and teaching. They then designed the perfect arrangement for their own rooms, based on their children’s needs, the needs

of the curriculum they would be teaching, and their own needs as facilitators of learning. This was not merely an exercise; these teachers fully anticipated making as many of these changes as possible, and time was set aside to do it. Officer commented that the principal, Ms. Valerie Lovelady, never said, “We can’t do this or that.” Instead, she often said, “We’ll find a way, or we’ll figure something out.”

From all of this work—the lists, the charts, the discussions—Davis, Officer, and Kilgore constructed shopping lists for supplies and materials. They bought lumber for building shelves and benches, bins and crates for storing learning center materials, fabric, foam, burlap, oilcloth, paint, and any other items essential to the creation of a cheerful, welcoming environment to accommodate learning activities most appropriate for student success. The staff really got into the spirit of things and showed willingness to sacrifice their comfort zones if necessary to accommodate the needs of their students.



Dr. Sally Kilgore (right), MRSH President, and Anne Lovelady (left), a community volunteer, look at the “children” created by teachers.

And then it was Saturday... and word had spread in the town of Tchula that something exciting was going on at Mileston and volunteers to help would be welcome. And so the community turned out to cut and sew and build and paint and move furniture and hang and clean and arrange and label all the new materials in their designated spaces. MRSH brought in a camera crew to capture the spirit of this little town whose citizens spent their Saturday turning a drab metal building into a positive learning environment for the sake of their children.

And of course, all that work seemed worthwhile in August when students entered bright “new” classrooms, adding the one missing ingredient—enthusiastic children ready to learn!

MRSH Trainer Spotlight

MRSH Trainer LEADs the Way

Have you ever wondered what Modern Red consultants do in their “other” lives? Gloria Talley practices what she preaches. As the director of Project LEAD, part of a fifteen state initiative of the Southern Regional Education Board in Atlanta, Georgia, Dr. Talley is in a unique position to impact school reform from more than one perspective. Through MRSH, she works to improve student performance by training classroom teachers in effective instructional and curricular practices. Through Project LEAD, she works to strengthen and develop the pool of potential educational leaders by improving training and creating conditions that will allow them to work effectively. Specifically, Dr. Talley works with school districts and their university partners to redesign training models for school leaders.

This is essentially a new frontier in leadership training. One of her

biggest challenges, aside from the usual budget cuts and the impact of *No Child Left Behind* legislation, lies in altering the historical perception that leadership training is primarily comprised of a series of activities or courses of study within the university setting. Candidates for leadership degrees and positions definitely need a field-based experience; they need to work in schools as interns. In order for schools to be successful, they must have strong leaders at the helm. According to Talley, “Schools need people who can take ordinary teachers and make them extraordinary.”

Where do districts find such people? Dr. Talley encourages them to look deliberately at teachers who are leaders in their schools and encourage them to apply for leadership positions. She calls this “tapping” and says that often it is all an individual needs to be inspired to move into leadership programs. She also finds that such teachers are often surprised when approached by their principals, as in the case of a candidate from Connecticut who stated, “What made me decide to

move from the classroom into leadership? My principal saw something in me that I didn’t see in myself.”

In fact, Dr. Talley shared that their

strongest candidates are those with backgrounds in curriculum and instruction who are placed in schools with exemplary principals. When they complete such preparatory work and are placed in leadership positions, they can hit the ground running, and this propensity for immediate effectiveness is invaluable. She maintains that changing the model for leadership training is critical in order to provide schools with the personnel they deserve. In the realm of school leadership, Talley says, “There is no shortage of *certified* candidates. There is a great shortage of *qualified* candidates.” Gloria Talley is working to remedy that.



Dr. Gloria Talley

From the President’s Desk...

Sylvia Peters Joins MRSH Board of Directors

I’m delighted to announce that Sylvia Peters has agreed to join MRSH’s Board of Directors. Ms. Peters is a native Chicago educator who gained national recognition for the success of the children who attended Alexander Dumas School, a K-8 school in a highly impoverished section of Chicago. Under Sylvia Peters’ leadership, Dumas School was recognized by the U.S. Department of Education for educational excellence and featured on NBC television for its drug-free environment and character education program.

Most people would be content to serve one city with such accomplishments, but not Sylvia Peters. She was a founding member of the Edison Project.

After working with Edison, she went to work reinvigorating three

schools in Baltimore’s Sandtown-Winchester neighborhood, part of the federally designated Empowerment Zone—some of the poorest neighborhoods in the nation. Within a few years, those schools were producing high-achieving, highly engaged students. Many at MRSH met Sylvia at this point—for we shared her belief that Core Knowledge had the potential to improve the accomplishments of students from a

variety of life stories.

Several years ago, the Enterprise Foundation persuaded Ms. Peters to move south to Atlanta, Georgia to work in one of its poorest communities. Ms. Peters didn’t just work there; she lived there—across the street from one of the oldest public housing projects.

She’s not just an educator, though. I’d have to say she’s also a community organizer in the best Chicago tradition—spending as much time with moms and dads as she does children.

Sylvia and her husband, Jan, have their permanent home in Knoxville, Tennessee—having found southern living to their liking. If you have the opportunity to visit her home, you’ll find a stunning collection of African-American art—a collection that has been years in the making.



Sylvia Peters (left) with her husband, Jan (center), and Joyce Pully at the MRSH Open House in April.

MRSH Open House Celebrates 10 Years of Helping Schools

Most of you know that Modern Red staff moved into new offices during the Christmas holidays. We'd had one too many days when the electricity wasn't working, and one too many days when the plumbing wasn't working. Our new offices, somewhat incidentally, reflect what we're all about—the best of the old and the new. The owner of the office space—a builder in the Nashville community—chose to connect a wonderful old 1920's home with a new building. The new and connecting building has lots of natural light and provides us with a conference room and kitchen. Most important, we think, is that Todd Smith, our fantastic manager of supplies delivered to our partner schools, has adequate space to store and manage the packing of materials to schools.

Celebration

We decided that we should follow our advice to partner schools—celebrate our accomplishments. For MRSH, that was our ten years of helping teachers and principals improve achievement for all students. Old and new friends were invited to our new location for an open house that squeezed over 80 guests into our commons area.

Bishop Frederick H. Talbot and Dr. Sylvia Ross Talbot, chief pastor and Episcopal supervisor of the 13th Episcopal District, African Methodist Episcopal Church (shown here) are some of our new friends. One of Dr. Kilgore's Texas friends, Ted Talbot—a trustee for the Presbyterian Children's Homes & Services—insisted that he join us and, obliging soul that he is, he came.

**DON'T
FORGET TO
MARK
YOUR
CALENDARS!!!**



**MRSH
NATIONAL
EDUCATORS' CONFERENCE
IN ORLANDO, FLORIDA
FEBRUARY 5-7, 2004**



Pictured here are several MRSH guests gathered in the Commons Area—enjoying good company, good food, and good conversation.



Ken McLemore (left), MRSH CFO, Bishop Fred Talbot (center), Dr. Sylvia Talbot (back center), and Dr. Sally Kilgore, MRSH President, share a smile for the camera.

New Staff at MRSH



We are proud to announce the addition of Sandra Cagle to our sales and marketing department. Sandra brings with her many successful years in education sales and marketing with Pearson Education Technologies. Sandra started her new position as Regional Sales Director for MRSH on May 5, 2003. Sandra will be responsible for coordinating the sales and marketing activities in West Virginia, Virginia, North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia, Florida, Alabama, Mississippi, Louisiana, Arkansas, Kentucky, Tennessee, Texas, Arizona, Maryland, Bureau of Indian Affairs, and those schools designated as American Indian schools.

Sandra Cagle, Regional Sales Director

MRSH Bulletin Board

Visit our Web site at www.mrsh.org to access our members-only discussion area. Modern Red staff, teachers, and administrators share resources, discuss issues, and find opportunities to build capacity and boost results.

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Welcome New MRSH Sites

- ◆ Eliza Miller Junior High School
West Helena, AR
(Helena/West Helena School District)
- ◆ Buena Park Junior High School
Buena Park, CA
(Buena Park School District)
- ◆ Continental Colony Elementary School
- ◆ Parkside Elementary School
- ◆ Whiteford Elementary School
Atlanta, GA
(Atlanta Public Schools)
- ◆ Barbour Language Academy
- ◆ Rockford Science & Technology
Academy
Rockford, IL
(Rockford Public School District #205)
- ◆ Jefferson Middle School
Springfield, IL
(Springfield Public School District #186)
- ◆ Bagley Elementary School
- ◆ Bagley High School
Bagley, MN
(Bagley Independent School District
#162)
- ◆ Webster Elementary School
North St. Paul, MN
(North St. Paul/Maplewood School
District)
- ◆ Williams-Sullivan High School
Durant, MS
(Holmes County School District)
- ◆ Heart Butte School
Heart Butte, MT
(Heart Butte School District #162)
- ◆ Henry Wilson Middle School
Farmington, NH
(Farmington School District)
- ◆ PS #86, Irvington School
- ◆ PS #377,
Alejandina Benitez De Gautier School
Brooklyn, NY
(Brooklyn School District #32)
- ◆ PS #197, John B. Russwurm School
New York, NY
(Manhattan School District #5)
- ◆ Kerr-Vance Academy
Henderson, NC
- ◆ Turkeyfoot Valley Area School
Confluence, PA
(Turkeyfoot Valley Area School
District)
- ◆ Defiance Elementary School
- ◆ Robertsdale Elementary School
Defiance, PA
(Tussey Mountain School District)
- ◆ Bransford Elementary School
- ◆ Cheatham Park Elementary School
- ◆ Krisle Elementary School
- ◆ Westside Elementary School
Springfield, TN
(Robertson County School District)
- ◆ Mississquoi Valley Union Junior High
School
Swanton, VT
(Franklin Northwest Supervisory
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