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# the STANDARD

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## Record numbers attend Modern Red Administrators' Conference

**O**pryland Hotel and Convention Center provided a beautiful setting for the Modern Red Schoolhouse Institute's (MRSh) Annual Administrators' Conference. This year's theme was "Exploring Successful School Partnerships." Principals, administrators, teachers and parents from school districts across the United States came to learn more about the Modern Red Schoolhouse design and how to develop working partnerships with colleagues in like settings. More than 100 education leaders attended the two-day conference packed with learning sessions and opportunities for networking. We offer the following highlights and trust that participants will share details on site.

### Communicating what matters

Information is easy to come by in our high-tech age. In fact, most of us are faced with information overload. But information has to be understood, applied and ultimately evaluated if it is to be useful. Not so easy — especially when we recognize that not all people take in and process information in the same way.

Karen Reynolds, MRSh consultant, addressed key concepts in successful communication, taking into account the various types of "listeners" or "processors" we all encounter in our daily lives. Reynolds identified learners according to the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator, which offers four basic categories: those who rely fundamentally on either their senses (S), intuition (N), thinking (T), or feelings (F) when processing information and drawing conclusions.

She then demonstrated how each of us typically combines these processes when making decisions and encouraged school officials to allow for these varied approaches when presenting information to a faculty. For example, in order to persuade a faculty to accept a school reform program, the presenter should show how results can be measured (ST), point out how the program enhances relationships (NF), offer personal testimonies from those

who have benefited from it (SF), and explain the theory involved (NT).

Conference participants were provided opportunities to apply these concepts while working in small groups. They were challenged to create a "message" or presentation that would take into account the varied needs of an audience, particularly the "audience" in their home-school setting.

Being aware of these diverse learning styles is important when designing effective messages that overcome

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### Additional Sessions and Facilitators

"District Support and Expectations for School Reform,"  
Beth Stroh, along with Georgette Charlton  
(Memphis City Schools, Memphis, Tenn.), and  
Natalie Twyner (Jackson Public Schools, Jackson, Miss.)

"Overview of the MRSh Design,"  
Teresa Skeete and Genie DePolo

"Steps to Developing a Standards-Driven Curriculum," Tim Gaddis

"Using the MRSh Network,"  
Ed Fitzgerald, Abner Oakes, and Judy Lyles

"Models for Reading Instruction,"  
Ann Ritchie, MRSh reading consultant

"Using Technology to Expand Learning Beyond Classroom Walls,"  
Jenny Garcia and Teresa Skeete

"The Role of the Administrator in Creating Effective  
Environments for Children," Ursula Davis, MRSh consultant  
with expertise in effective learning environments

"Telling Your School's Story: Public Relations Strategies and Tools,"  
Susan Dahn (Barnstable Grade 5  
Public Charter School, Hyannis, Mass.)

## Conference ...

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people's concerns, deal with their questions, and pave the way to increased commitment. People move forward and act on information that makes sense to them and feels right, two powerful considerations when asking educators to implement new ideas in the teaching/learning environment.

### Monitoring a standards-driven classroom

Old methods for “evaluating” teachers will not necessarily provide feedback appropriate for fine-tuning the curriculum and methodology that takes place in standards-driven classrooms. Those responsible for oversight need to know whether teachers have grasped and are applying new concepts, whether students are progressing, and how well the physical learning environment is serving stated purposes.

Lynn Mariaskin, vice president of program design and development, tackled just those challenging issues at the Administrators' Conference. In particular, she discussed the practical application of MRSh training and materials related to classroom monitoring.

Administrators are encouraged to “plan for success” by following a three-step process. First among these steps is a pre-observation conference in which the administrator sets forth explicit expectations. For example, (1) Are the **standards** clear? (2) Does the **teaching** integrate content, process, and strategies to meet rubrics for the lesson? (3) Do **learning** activities and assessments include higher-level thinking for all students? (4) Does the **learning environment** allow for diverse learning experiences and reflect student accomplishments?

Second, Mariaskin worked through the MRSh “Monitoring Observation Sheet,” which matches expectations with actual classroom practice and encourages comments keyed to specific teaching/learning activities. For example, the teacher knows ahead of time that the observer will be looking for such things as clearly visible rubrics for activities and assessment tasks, integration of content and process, ample opportunities for cooperative learning, and displays of student work.

Step three in the monitoring process is a post-conference discussion of what was observed, what staff development is indicated, and what questions the teacher would like to have addressed. Subsequently, the observer should re-monitor the classroom — several times — assisting the teacher in honing classroom skills, linking performance to professional development, offering clear

expectations, identifying shared responsibility for improvement, and specifying accountability of all parties. The result: successful monitoring of school reform.

### The times, they are a'changin'

Change is inevitable — and often resisted. “To facilitate a smooth transition in school reform,” says MRSh trainer Beth Stroh, “administrators must be aware of staff's concerns and stresses during the change process.” Leaders in school reform must have a vision, believe schools are for learning, value human resources, communicate and listen, be proactive, and take risks. They must also have a game plan that includes supportive organizational arrangements, training plans, modeling of desired teaching behaviors (in faculty meetings, for example), consultations to reinforce training where needed, and communication skills.

Other tools available to leaders include resources within the building (such as mentors on the faculty), orientation and instruction in the use of computers and other technical aids, and renewal opportunities for staff members.

### Successful principals share their experiences

Stroh arranged to have two highly successful principals share some of their experiences and advice. **Chris Miller**, principal of Cresthaven preK-6 school in Broward County, Florida, has worked with the Modern Red design for two years. She introduced the program in a skeptical community where students had low test scores and the school had virtually no resources.

When Miller became principal, teachers were not empowered to participate in the governance of the school. Many resisted the idea of change, but some were in favor of reform. One of the first things Miller did was give the school budget to team leaders, telling them, “This is what we can spend. Study it, and get back to me about how you believe we can use the money most effectively.” At first they hesitated, pointing out that they had never been involved in school budgeting. “Now you are,” said Miller. The result was a well-thought-out budget ... and a core of teachers who felt ownership and control over their own teaching circumstances.

**Joyce Pully**, principal of North Jackson Elementary School in Jackson, Miss., explained that bringing in MRSh school design meant that virtually everything had to change: use of time, expectations, parental involvement, and more. Pully, who has great success in marshalling the financial support of businesses and corporations in the surrounding area, offered practical advice to administrators. A few of her high-spirited admonitions follow.



“Develop trust through open and honest communication. If you say you will do something, do it. Allow experimentation; if it fails, say, “Okay, we gave it a good try” ... and move on. Be flexible and provide all the help you can muster. Engender a positive attitude among staff, students and parents. Campaign to get your teachers what they want to do their jobs. Set high standards for teachers and students alike. Train, train, train your teachers. Work with them as they develop a scope and sequence ... and **know** the scope and sequence of every grade. Try everything — including good food — to involve parents and community members in your school. If you put your mind to it, productive change will come, and it will be welcome.”

### Rubrics — not just another checklist

The word *rubric* is derived from an Old French word meaning “red earth.” Chapter headings, titles of legal statutes, and directions for prayer in early manuscripts were inscribed in red, ostensibly to call attention to their importance. *Rubric* later came to mean any direction or rule of conduct. In modern educational settings, *rubric* often refers to a set of criteria describing the successful completion of an assignment or project — a tool to measure quality and monitor progress. In standards-driven classrooms, rubrics serve as guides to clarify for students exactly what they are expected to do to reach varying levels of performance.

Not all assignments are “rubric worthy,” according to Ron Heady, MRSh vice president. In his conference presentation, Heady told his audience that a “rubric worthy” assignment must be challenging and valuable, focus on quality rather than quantity, and provide opportunities for application and synthesis of ideas. The rubric criteria must be multi-dimensional, focus on both content and process, be clearly linked to identified standards, and be observable in the culminating product of the assignment.

Dimensions (expectations for students) identify levels of performance, usually on a scale of four or six (uneven numbers promote “middle of the road” evaluation). When writing the standards for each level of proficiency, teachers should use demonstrative verbs, identify observable behaviors, focus on what **should** be done rather than what should not, set the top level of performance above the expected standard, and differentiate clearly between levels. In short, rubrics should be designed to give students excellent guidance in pursuing an assignment.

*We have given you only a taste of the rich information imparted at the conference. We will rely on participants to fill in the many gaps.* 📌

## Kilgore addresses Conference

*Excerpts from MRSh President Kilgore’s address*

**T**he passing of the 20th century and the beginning of the 21st coincidentally benchmark major transitions in our economy and new understandings of what it is that will educate a child.

The 20th century essentially required skills to participate in America’s economy — as farmer, carpenter, line worker, lawyer. Young people can expect, in contrast, six different jobs or vocations during their adult careers — requiring them to learn new strategies, new concepts.

In the 21st century, teamwork will cut across levels. Authority is no longer at the top; it is distributed throughout the organization to expedite response to customer demands.

We have moved to an integrated world economy. Environmentally, we’ve acknowledged the wisdom of our native Americans — concentrating on restoring rather than conquering our natural environment.

Barbara Jordan in one of her last speeches to the American public said, “We need an economy where a young black woman or man from the 5th Ward in Houston or south-central Los Angeles, or a young person in the *colonias* of the lower Rio Grande Valley can attend public schools and learn the skills that will enable her or him to prosper.”

### Implications for educators

To prosper, our children will need to know more than their parents and grandparents knew. It is not enough for students to remember something for an exam; they need to remember for life. It is no longer enough for young people to recall an algorithm for solving a mathematical problem; they must be able to apply concepts and algorithms in real situations. They need tools that will allow them to engage in lifelong learning.

It is no longer enough to develop strategic ways of choosing the correct answer on a multiple choice test. Young people need to know how to write about what they know. Most state assessments require it, and in Kentucky or Maryland, students have to answer science questions in essay form.

Inclusiveness — enabling larger and larger proportions of students to graduate from high school — constitutes the major accomplishment of educators in the 20th century. More important, however, will be the sophisticated

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## Kilgore ...

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knowledge and skills that young people bring to the workforce.

### **Capitalizing on what we have learned**

Fortunately, we know more about how people learn, remember, and apply various concepts and facts than we did just 50 years ago. We know that children understand and remember conceptual knowledge better if they have had the opportunity to apply that knowledge to real-world situations. We know that one instructional strategy does not fit all. Students need varying amounts of time to learn and to achieve high standards. The future requires that we move from batch learning to individualized learning opportunities, from teacher centered to student centered, and yes, from individual work to team work, requiring students to explain what they know.

### **The shared responsibilities of partnership**

As your partner in education, the Institute assumes responsibility for addressing your needs. We join with you

in a long-term relationship for the children you serve, taking into account the history and culture your community encompasses.

As leaders within your school districts, you are responsible for creating a dynamic educational environment. Only you can set expectations for your staff, encourage them to pursue new ways of doing things, and make known your needs. It is the Institute's responsibility to understand and meet those needs. In our partnership, all leaders must model learning — not just expect it of others. 📌

## **The MRSh Bulletin Board**

**An online communications center for MRSh school administrators was demonstrated at the conference. To sign up for the MRSh Bulletin Board, please email [Jlyles@mrsh.org](mailto:Jlyles@mrsh.org). Give name and school/district.**

**Visit our website at [www.mrsh.org](http://www.mrsh.org)!**



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