

MAEO

Michigan Alternative Education Organization

The purpose of the Michigan Alternative Education Organization is to advocate quality alternative education for Michigan's youth, to provide a network of support for alternative educators and students, and to promote awareness of alternative education at the local, state, and federal levels.

Welcome to the 2019 MAEO SERVICE AWARDS BANQUET

It has been my pleasure to serve as the President of the Michigan Alternative Education Organization for the last six years. I feel an important function of our organization is to recognize those in the field of alternative education that are making a difference. Our students face many barriers to completing their high school requirements and it is people and programs like you will hear about tonight that have changed the direction of their lives and made it possible. I realize tonight's group is just a small sampling of the people across the state giving students another chance, another choice and doing an outstanding job of it. Please consider nominating your school, a fellow alternative educator and/or advocate for one of our service awards in the future.

Thanks for all you do!

Deb

Outstanding Program Component Social Emotional Learning Mentor Program

Alternative Learning Center
Utica Community Schools
Sterling Heights, Michigan

When Utica Community Schools Alternative Learning Center Principal Marc Kay went looking for “a way to help improve student engagement, achievement and graduation rates”, he found an assessment called *Clear Path*. Using this instrument to provide both pre and post scores, *Clear Path* helped staff measure students’ “understanding of education’s relevance in achieving life goals, academic confidence, connections to others, stress management skills, sense of well-being and intrinsic motivation” I think we can all agree that these are goals we all strive for, and are much more relevant to our students than their scores on the SAT!

In the development phase, scores from *Clear Path* were used to build a *Social Emotional Learning Program*. They began a mentoring program using the following materials: Scholar Centric Success Highways, My Success Roadmap and teacher developed lessons. Students moved from learning the skills, to practicing the skills to teaching the skills. You know how the story goes: if you give a person a fish; students from the Utica Alternative Learning Center moved all the way from being given fish to teaching others how to fish; in other words students who participated in the SEL Mentoring Program were fed for a lifetime! They had developed critical resiliency skills that they could apply to the rest of their lives.

Their **Social Emotional Lessons** cover learning about confidence, connections, stress and motivation, and include self-awareness and self-management, social awareness, relationship skills and responsible decision making as well as communication, empathy, health and well-being and responsibility. After that, students move into the application stage where they become a part of the leadership group. There they apply their skills by assisting teachers in an SLS (*Student Leading Students*) capacity.

Perhaps it is best summed up by Class of 2019 graduate Nicholas Baum: “Being able to practice my skills has made me want to be a better person and has helped prepare me for leadership opportunities. The application phase of the leadership mentor group has been the most beneficial because I have been able to help special needs students and show empathy to others. It also taught me choices I have made in the past do not need to dictate my future. The mentor groups have helped me to stop and think before reacting, and how to cope with my problems and not always blame others. This program is especially beneficial for students in alternative programs because it helps them have a way to connect with an adult in the building, not just their classroom teacher. It helped to put me on the road to success!

**CONGRATULATIONS Utica Community Schools
Alternative Learning Program!**

Outstanding Staff Member

Sarah Johnson

Renaissance High School
Plainwell Community Schools
Plainwell, Michigan

When we give credit for a school's success, we frequently acknowledge the teaching staff and the principal. Often overlooked are the other staff members who serve a vital function in the school. They are often the glue that holds the school together. Paraprofessionals provide relationships and support for students that no one else on staff can do. Sarah Johnson does all that and more. In the words of Renaissance High School Principal, Tammy Glupker, "Sarah is responsible for all the pieces of being a school/family that could fall through the cracks if not for her efforts."

Sarah's official title at Renaissance High School is "aide". However, as the school's only paraprofessional, she is described as performing a multitude of functions that are not listed in her job description. She feeds the students (we all know that's a big job!), monitors lunch and breaks, supplies the school's kitchenette and keeps the school sign up to date with announcements and events. She coaches athletics, plans school events, chaperones all of the school's field trips, and serves as a learning mentor for all of the school's virtual learners. As RHS's MAEO STARS advisor, Sarah prepares and accompanies their team of students to all three annual leadership events; not to mention Sarah is always in the role of advocate. As her students compete for places in the sixteen events that make up the College and Career Competition in May, Sarah is their loudest cheerleader.

Even before Sarah was an official MAEO Board member, she volunteered to pitch in and help plan and supervise the evening activities for MAEO STARS groups who spend the night at a hotel after the competition. Sarah's enthusiasm for the activities she planned spread to the students who were there from other schools, and students who would not otherwise get to know each other, did. And oh yeah, she was elected to the MAEO Board last year and took on the major task of planning and overseeing the organization's very successful one day Trauma Informed conference.

If you are not already convinced that she sounds like Captain Marvel, to seal the deal you need to hear some comments from the students who wrote letters of support for her nomination. She is described by Olin: "Miss Sarah Johnson goes above and beyond all working standards and doesn't quit 'til she has to. She is always there to help and put a smile on every student's face. Jason Moore added: "There are times to where she has to correct some students, but she doesn't do it out of spite, she corrects the student out of the love that she has for her Job and her students, even if that student thinks she is being mean, she isn't, she is doing her J-O-B." Sarah has changed numerous lives. Letters of support all wished to honor Sarah's constant kindness and caring with this award. And their wish came true!

CONGRATULATIONS Sarah!

Outstanding Teacher Award

Michele Schmitz

Lincoln High School
Owosso Public Schools
Owosso, Michigan

I know I am preaching to the choir when I say teachers do not enter the field of education for the money. People who choose to work in education, especially alternative education, are passionate about making a difference. When we are talking about passion and referring to Michele Schmitz in the same sentence, we need to capitalize the word PASSIONATE!

It was obvious from colleague Deb Baughman's nomination as well as the letters of support received from fellow teachers Josh Dewley and Beth Kelley, School Board Member and Community Agency Director Marlene Webster as well as her Principal Steve Irelan, that all those that come into contact with Michele admire her dedication to alternative ed. and her students. And Michele's passion and determination are apparent in all that she teaches. Her intentions go well beyond teaching the required Economics and World History classes that she is assigned, Michele has worked hard on developing classes that had/have true meaning to the lives of her students including *Social Justice, Study of Human Rights, Native American History, African American History, Civil Rights, Real Money and Evolution of Women.*" In her letter of support, Marlene states "She is passionate about helping her students become contributing members of the community. Her classes exhibit her willingness to go above and beyond the call of duty as a teacher, her ingenuity and creativity, and her willingness to roll up her sleeves and get the job done." Fellow teacher Beth Kelley adds "her passion for her students is only overshadowed by her desire to teach them to be good citizens and stewards of this earth."

Besides passionate, several adjectives and phrases are used to describe Michele: risk taker, not in the negative sense but in her willingness to take chances and offer classes and experiences to her students that are relevant and not just the norm; leadership in terms of her students as well as her colleagues, and brave. Michele demonstrates bravery in her relationships with both students and staff; she is willing to admit that she may not have handled a situation in the best way and work hard to restore her relationships in a respectful way.

Strong relationships are at the core of Michele's being. Her respect for others and their experiences is obvious in every thing she does. Whether it be laughing together, or more frequently crying together, in the words of friend and colleague Josh Dewley, "our program wouldn't be as successful as it is without Michele's passion, humor and dedication." Beth adds: "Michele Schmitz's real talent lies in her ability to empathize, to persevere through difficult circumstances and to always strive to be a better educator and role model. I know I am a better teacher, and person, because of her."

CONGRATULATIONS Michele!

School of the Year

The Bridge Alternative High School

Brighton Area Schools
Brighton, Michigan

Dedication to working with students in alternative education is clearly evident in the nomination of The Bridge for MAEO's 2019 School of the Year prepared by School Principal Colleen Deaven. It is also very clear that The Bridge strives to be a school that is not "one size fits all". That goal is carried out by keeping class sizes small and developing individual learning plans for each student. The Bridge works hard to fulfill their mission statement: "to connect and inspire each student to achieve social, emotional and intellectual success for post-secondary pursuits and professional work opportunities."

Many things make The Bridge special, for both the students and the staff. When staff was asked the question "What makes The Bridge special?" Jake, the art teacher said: "The entire staff is devoted to building strong relationships with our students, and to creating a warm, nurturing environment"; Pamela, the school secretary (who chose to transfer to The Bridge from working in a district middle and elementary building) remarked: "It is very rewarding to see them grow with our program and finish a high school diploma. Because of our small size, the staff and students really get to know each other much better than in a traditional school setting and we are able to work together creatively to help each individual student become successful"; and English teacher, Carly added: "The Bridge Alternative High School is a place where students come from different schools feeling defeated, frustrated, and in many cases alone. However, when we see our students walk across the stage at graduation, we see students leaving The Bridge with purpose, passion, and family."

What makes The Bridge unique? "Using restorative practices to help students learn from their mistakes instead of simply punishing them for their transgressions; having enrichment activities on Fridays geared to immerse students in different opportunities such as cooking from different time periods and cultures. the ability to connect with the community by having a question and answer session with local congressional district candidates; a staff trained in *mental health first aid* and to recognize past trauma in students to help them navigate through any difficulties and steer them toward professional guidance, *Project Success* to raise awareness and educate The Bridge school community on drug abuse prevention, encouraging all students to make healthy decisions"; and the list goes on...

School Social Worker Deb Fairchild put it this way in describing the school: "they just get the kids, they understand what these students bring to the table every day in their challenging lives and what they need to do to help them light their own fire for learning." Superintendent Greg Gray also provided his endorsement about the staff in his letter of support for their nomination: "This program is innovative and motivated every day to help kids that are struggling to find their way. What they have created is family. This family sometimes laughs together and sometimes cries together but always has each other's backs as they look toward their success in the future."

CONGRATULATIONS to The Bridge!