

A Message from the MIDDLE

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President's Message



I always like to look for things that I am grateful for and have composed the following list:

- The love of family and friends
- The health of family and friends
- The return of sports—whether playing sports or watching a game has been amazing
- My job—teaching face to face and being around middle level kids has been great
- The reopening of borders means it is time to travel again

Last year has been hard, but keep looking at the great things in your life to help you get

through this. Hope to see you in Banff in the spring at our face-to-face conference.

The Middle Years Council (MYC) is continually looking for new ways to support middle years teachers. We are committed to making sure that you receive as much as possible from your MYC membership. Please let me know how we can help improve your years in the middle by contacting me at jeremy.spink@rdpsd.ab.ca. We hope that you love being part of our council and that you have a great year “in the middle.”

Jeremy Spink

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From the Editor

Thank you to all the contributors of our publication. We know that it takes some time and effort to sit down and put something together, but we do appreciate all of your efforts. We hope you enjoy reading all of the articles. If you have something that you would like to share with middle school teachers in Alberta, please forward your article and photos to me.

Thank you.

*Emma Holota,
Editor, North East MYC Representative,
Aurora Middle School, NLS
holota.emma@gmail.com*



PEC Report



Recently, I have been thinking about a few things that I am thankful for, actually quite a few things, but the following in particular:

I am thankful for *all* teachers: full-time, part-time, substitutes, administrators, support, online, first-year and retired. Without your dedication and resilience, students would have a completely different education experience, especially during the past two years. Without your advocacy in Stand for Education, the current provincial

government would think that they came up with a reasonable draft K-6 curriculum and are funding education properly. You do all this work for the love of public education to expertly pass on knowledge to future generations, and I want you to know that your Association recognizes your efforts and cannot do its work without you.

There are a lot of reports of fatigue, exhaustion and desperation. Please reach out for help from your family, friends, employer and your Association. A quick way to find information is to call the ATA at 780-447-9400 (in Edmonton) or 1-800-232-7208 (toll free in Alberta).

Thank you so much for everything you do.

*Murray Lalonde,
PEC Liaison*

Conference 2022: “Back to Banff”

We are “Back to Banff” this year, and we’re so excited! With 144 delegates already committed, and a limit of 350 delegates, space is limited at the best little conference in Alberta! This year’s conference will rejuvenate, inspire and bring much needed joy to middle years teachers! Join us, and put the struggles of the past year(s) behind us. MYC 2022 will bring you the information you need to be the best teaching professional you can be, all in a relaxed and fun environment.

In addition to our keynote speakers, we generally offer between 15 and 20 scheduled sessions during the conference. If you are interested in sharing your expertise at the conference, more information is available on our website. Why not stop by,

enjoy a beverage and talk about ideas and issues close to your heart with colleagues from around the country? You will have this opportunity on the Thursday night of our conference in our famous speed sessions, which will allow you to mingle with other middle school teachers and talk shop. On top of all of this, we will once again be hosting our fun Friday night social, which will give you a chance to unwind, have some fun and win fabulous prizes.

MYC 2022 is “Back in Banff” and ready to roll. Are you? For more information, check out our website www.ata-myc.com and follow our social media channels on Facebook, Instagram and Twitter.

Questions? Reach out to Chris McCullough at chris.mccullough.teacher@gmail.com or Tom Stones at tstones@cesd73.ca, conference cochairs.

Chris McCullough

THE MIDDLE YEARS COUNCIL WANTS YOU!!!

EXECUTIVE COUNCIL MEMBERS

We are always looking for volunteers from all over the province who would like to join the executive and promote middle years education. The executive meets five times a year; two meetings are via video conference and one is held at the annual conference in April. Please contact **Jeremy Spink** at jeremy.spink@rdpsd.ab.ca if you are interested in joining the executive.

NEWSLETTER CONTRIBUTORS

Request for Links, Games, Lessons or Cool Activities

Do you have any website links, games, lessons or cool activities that you would like to share with other middle school teachers? Send them to **Emma Holota** at holota.emma@gmail.com. We will include them in upcoming issues of our newsletter.



The MYC website is
WWW.ATA-MYC.COM.
Add it to your favourites.

Implementing CSH Through APPLE Schools

For the past seven years, I have had the pleasure of working with the students, staff and community of Lac La Biche in rural northern Alberta as an APPLE Schools health champion at Aurora Middle School. Through a comprehensive school health approach, students, staff and the community of Lac La Biche have worked together to sustain programming to support positive mental health, healthy eating and physical activity for the students of Aurora Middle School.

Aurora Middle School is joined by 73 other schools from British Columbia, Alberta, Northwest Territories and Manitoba as part of the APPLE Schools project. The APPLE Schools project, “shifts schools’ culture around health and wellness, making the healthy choice the easy choice for everyone.” APPLE Schools uses evidence-based data to develop a school action plan specific to the needs addressed by students and staff. Aurora’s goals focus on sustaining a school environment that supports healthy eating, to improve recess opportunities for students and DPA breaks within the classroom and to continue to provide healthy alternatives for celebrations, holidays and work events.

To support healthy eating choices, students are provided with daily fruit bins in homeroom classes. Each week one classroom cleans and distributes fruit bins for the entire school. By having students directly involved, they gain an appreciation and take ownership in the process. This year our funding for fruit bins ran out, and community members, Councillor Charlyn Moore, the Parent Advisory Council and

the Lac La Biche Kinettes have generously donated funds to keep this weekly nutrition project going. Aurora’s cafeteria provides breakfast for students through a healthy initiative from Northern Lights School Division partnered with the Alberta nutrition grant, and students who do not have lunch are supported by our Kids Are Worth It program. Through administrative leadership, and staff desire, the cafeteria has transformed and currently provides healthy options for students to purchase daily lunches.

Each month our school focuses on a specific topic addressing healthy eating, physical activity or mental wellness through the APPLE Schools monthly campaigns. By providing a daily morning announcement, students and staff kick off each day with a message to build awareness. These announcements connect to a visual display on a centrally located bulletin board. Aurora’s SWAT (student wellness activity team) are involved by creating the visuals for their peers where staff can build on topics from information to share in health classes.

Each year APPLE Schools provides our school with implementation funding to support our individualized action plan. This year, APPLE Schools funds have been used to purchase DPA bins. Our 15 classrooms are provided with a different DPA bin on a biweekly rotation by SWAT to provide students with classroom movement breaks. The Grades 7 and 8 recreation-theme classes use equipment funded through a BOK’s (Building Our Success) grant to lead recess activities for younger

elementary students. These students have gained valuable leadership experience through implementation of recess games, and our younger students engage in organized games run by peers. This also builds our younger students' capacity as they will be able to be student leaders in the future keeping the use of the equipment sustainable for years to come.

Being part of the APPLE Schools team, I am fortunate to have attended professional development, gaining research knowledge and practical applications, through attending APPLE Schools fall and spring knowledge exchanges, EverActive Schools self-regulation games PD, HPEC conferences and Shaping the Future. Using information from these conferences with the support of Tina Skakun, our APPLE Schools health mentor for northeast Alberta, we have been able to provide staff with professional development on DPA games, self-regulation games and recess games. Sharing resources adds strategies to colleagues' tool boxes and strengthens the school community.

One other huge success that we have had due to the APPLE Schools program and through the generous donation from many community sponsors is the building of a growing dome. This dome allows our school to grow vegetables, berries and Indigenous plants year-round. Prior to the pandemic, produce was used in home economics and for taste testing. Currently, the dome is housing Indigenous medicinal

plants as part of the medicine box project. Students and staff can connect to Indigenous culture through smudging, gifting and tending to the plants in the growing dome. It also provides a place to relax, a unique space for science lessons and curriculum connections, and the chance to participate in some plant therapy.

The approach to health and wellness that APPLE Schools offers is truly invaluable! They have helped to change the perspective Aurora Middle School has on comprehensive school health, have influenced students to make the "healthy choice, the easy choice," and have supported staff to implement healthy changes in their classrooms to allow students to reach their full potential.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank APPLE Schools for their dedication to our school for the last seven years and for the years to come, as our school continues on its health and wellness journey. This is only a brief overview of the initiatives that we have achieved; however, due to the pandemic, we have had to shift our approach which has proven successful.

APPLE Schools has an amazing website with many free resources for schools to access, including DPA activities, fitness circuits and monthly campaigns. If this article has piqued your interest, check them out at www.appleschools.ca.

Colleen Moghrabi, APPLE Schools Health Champion, Aurora Middle School, Lac La Biche

Being a Comfort Space



In the field of education, we often talk about how schools must be places where students feel safe. For students to be successful, they must feel welcome

inside classrooms, and we need to promote a sense of belonging and safety before we can even begin to teach from our programs of study. This is not a groundbreaking article about something new, but rather a request to middle years teachers to keep an especially watchful eye on students who come to us for help.

What has become more integral than ever in our school environment is to provide a space of comfort to current students and to those who have moved on to other grades. Our previous students often reappear in fond stories and cheerful conversations with colleagues as those students are met in the hallway or at classroom doors. What has been noticed in the last two months, especially as strict cohorting has somewhat eased compared to last year, is the increasing number of former students who return to our classrooms seeking comfort rather than a quick conversation.

Certainly, over the last two years, students have not had an easy time of things; numerous provincial orders, pandemic worries and quarantines have interrupted learning in schools. In my own community of Fort McMurray, these issues have been

compounded by a flood in the spring of 2020 and, of course, the ongoing repercussions of the 2016 fire. Needless to say, students are more stressed than ever, and this has had an impact on their successes both in and out of school.

Along with students who come to shoot the breeze, more students than ever are coming to my door during lunch looking for a sense of comfort. Some come for a bite to eat, because they know about my filing cabinet stash of noodle cups and granola bars. Others come for homework help, because they know I'll take the time to make sure that they understand something they missed in math class but are too anxious to ask their current teachers about. And yet others—and these are the ones that inspired this piece—just need to sit quietly in a familiar space and calm down about something that has them on an edge. They do not appear every day, but when they do, they quietly ask for a hug or a tissue. These are the students who truly come to the classroom for comfort, not just a quick fix.

It is not new that teachers are often the only ones consistently offering comfort to students, especially middle years students who are breaking away from parents and guardians, and gaining independence. In the bustle of our third school year with COVID-19, it can be difficult to recognize and make time for those kids who are having trouble asking for help; to them it might appear that everyone else is handling the pandemic better than they are. This is not a new issue, but with student mental health lower than ever, we must make sure the kids are all right.

Victoria Holota, Grade 8 teacher, Father Mercredi High School, Fort McMurray

Outdoor Education

I have taught Grade 7 outdoor education for several years now. It truly is my passion, and although it's an incredible amount of work, it is my favourite thing to teach and do with students. We have done many wild and fun outdoor activities, such as rabbit snaring, camping, fishing, butchering deer and cooking with wild meat. Last year I was faced with teaching Grade 7 social studies for the first time ever. As I started working through the curriculum, I realized that some of my outdoor activities are closely linked to some of the social studies programs. One specific area of the curriculum that got my attention was how trapping beavers for their fur was one of the main reasons Europeans really pushed to explore and establish settlements in North America. I have trapped beavers for many years and instantly knew I could help the kids connect to the curriculum by bringing in a trapped beaver and showing them the process of skinning the beaver and preparing the fur for sale. I went so far as to record myself setting the beaver traps under water in -40°C to show the students the entire process of actually trapping beavers. I made the videos to help the students connect with what the life of those early trappers was like. It's incredibly risky and hard work! I've taught Grade 7 science, so part of my beaver trapping lesson involved relating to the students all the biology of trapping beavers, animal behaviour, why it's a good idea to control beaver populations and so on. I also thought it would be a great idea if the students learned about how beaver fur ran the

entire world's economy. Many of the students were fascinated that the majority of the wealth of the world at that time was all connected to the large beaver laid out on the table in front of them. The students were blown away at the idea of how much a beaver top hat was worth back in those times! We had great discussions about the ethics of trapping and why some people don't agree with it as well. All said and done, before we even began to skin the beaver, I think we touched on every Grade 7 academic curriculum.

While skinning the beaver, kids learned a lot about anatomy and all the useful parts of the beaver itself. Castor glands were saved to sell at an auction to be processed into perfumes and colognes, and the meat and even the tail were saved to be eaten later. I discussed with the students how many of the early



Europeans that came to North America to be trappers would often perish while trying to live off of rabbits for food. Those early Europeans did not know the importance of fat in their diet and the fact that rabbits have very little fat on them. You can have an endless supply of rabbits and still starve to death without fat. While skinning the beaver, the students saw how fatty beavers actually are, and those early trappers learned to use beaver fat as a way to avoid starvation while trying to survive on a mainly meat diet. The beaver's tail alone is nearly pure fat, much like bone marrow.

In the end, the students made beaver stew with bannock and grilled beaver tail. The beaver stew was an absolute hit with the students, and the majority of the students who braved to try a piece of beaver tail were pleasantly surprised with its rich flavour.

It's amazing to see students connecting with curricular outcomes like they do when you bring a beaver in and spend a few hours discussing its importance in Canadian history!

*Patrick Lyons, Aurora Middle School,
Lac La Biche*

AMLE Update

AMLE Affiliation

The MYC is affiliated with the Association for Middle Level Education (AMLE), which is the international organization for middle years educators. The AMLE website (www.amle.org) includes a variety of resources and information related to middle years education. With the free membership, you can access some materials. With the professional membership, you have full access to all resources, as well as discounts on books, resources and conference registration.

AMLE at a Glance

AMLE is committed to helping middle school educators

- reach every student,
- grow professionally and
- create great schools.

Mission

AMLE is dedicated to improving the educational experiences of all students ages 10–15 by providing vision, knowledge and resources to educators and leaders.

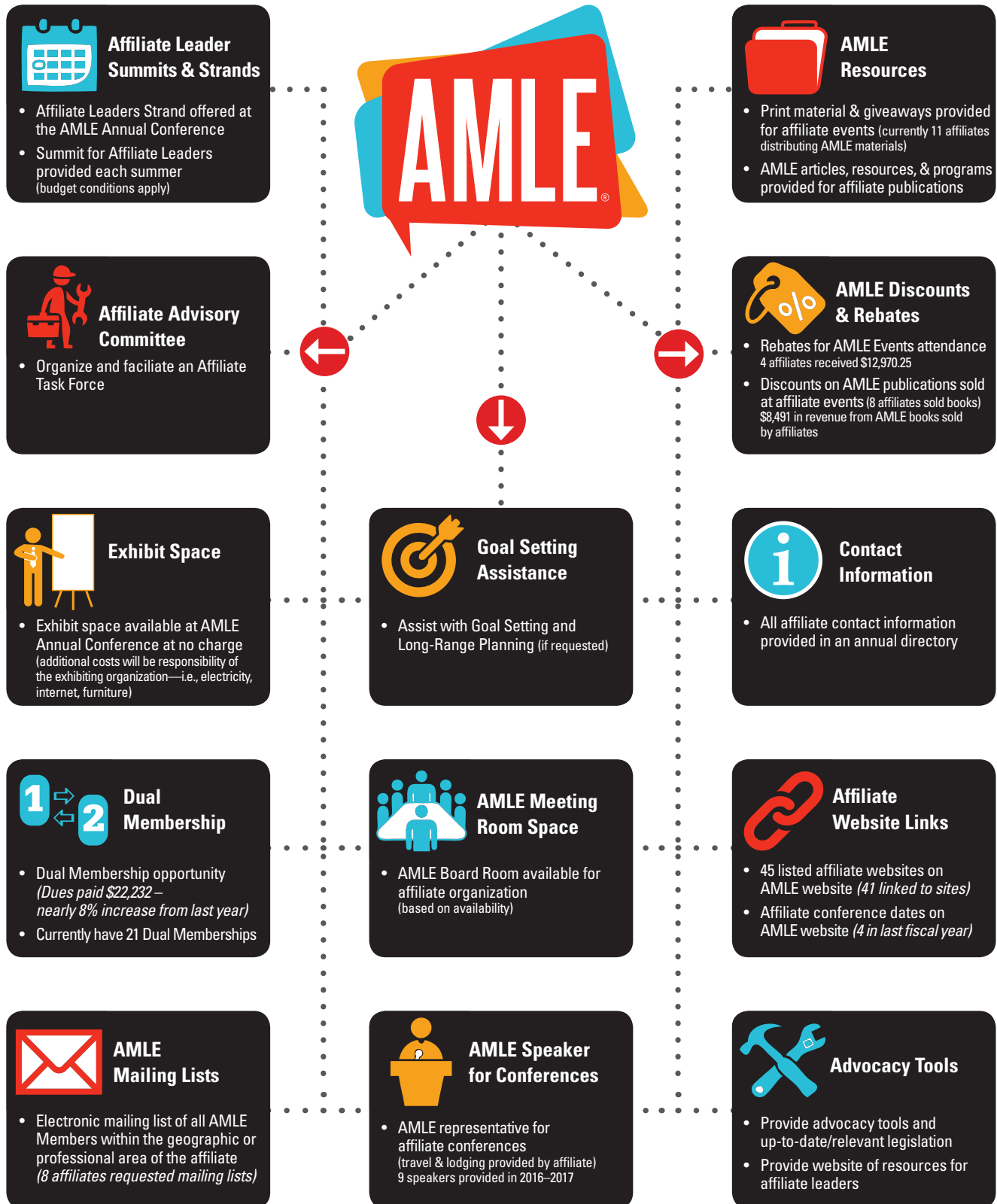
Vision

AMLE is the leading international organization advancing the education of all students ages 10–15, helping them succeed as learners and make positive contributions to their communities and to the world.

Core Values

- *Integrity.* AMLE practises the ethical, inclusive and courageous behaviours that sustain an open and honest organizational culture.
- *Future thinking.* AMLE is visionary and prepares for the future.
- *Respect.* AMLE values human worth, dignity, diverse talents and varied perspectives.
- *Collaboration.* AMLE seeks active partnerships and shared leadership opportunities at the state, national and international levels.

What does AMLE provide to affiliates?



Tech Corner



As we continue in this new world of teaching in class, being prepared for online learning and keeping students who are working at home up to date, we need a tool that allows us to not only show students what to do but also talk to them about it at the same time. In past Tech Corners, we have talked about Screencastify, but in recent weeks I have found a more user-friendly program called Loom. Loom allows the teacher to record their desktop while simultaneously recording themselves. I find Loom more user friendly as it can be downloaded immediately and used in other programs such as WeVideo and Google Slides. I currently use Loom to do a week-in-a-review video that I send to all of my parents and that students can access on my classroom website when I am away. Loom can be found at [Loom.com](https://loom.com) as well as a free extension in Google Chrome.

Another new add-on I use to keep my students interested while learning online is Google Meet. Sometimes I feel like Google Meet is light years behind certain other video software (that rhymes with boom) in terms of creating engaging backgrounds that grab the initial attention of the students. Recently a new extension in the for Google Chrome called Visual Effects for Google Meet allow for teachers to change their backgrounds and add things such as bubbles, manipulate some of the colour, add messages as well as blur the

background. This can be found as a free extension in the Chrome Web Store.

Looking for that tech tool that will interest kids and give you instant feedback? Then check out Quizizz (<https://quizizz.com/>). Quizizz is a free tool. It works on any device: web browser, iOS, Android and Chrome apps. You can access hundreds of ready-made learning quizzes or create your own. Join as a teacher, pick a quiz and use the code for a virtual room to give to your students. Quizizz can be an activity done as a whole class and assigned as a homework activity to be done at home. Quizizz is similar to Kahoot, but instead of having all the students looking at your interactive whiteboard for the questions, the questions are on their device randomized to eliminate the blurting out that occurs.

Looking to try out Screencasting? Screencastify (www.screencastify.com/) is a free user-friendly Chrome Extension. Screencastify allows for you to record what you are doing on your screen, then later share it with your students. Screencastify works with Google Drive and will automatically save your files in your drive.

As we continue to dive deeper into having our classrooms becoming more and more digital, I find myself struggling with old files not matching up with the new file formats. I often have great quizzes that I would love to use in the newer world, but they are stuck in an old format.

Automagically is a Google Drive add-on that allows for you to convert PDF files into Google Forms. After installing the add-on to your profile, all you need to do is click on the desired PDF you would like to be a Google Form, and it will convert it. There are some hiccups when it comes to multiple-choice questions, but it has worked flawlessly for me when I am looking to take some older PDF files and

turn them into something for instant feedback from students.

Tired of Kahoot? Used up your free log-ins with Gimkit (www.gimkit.com/)? If this is you, then the next thing you are going to want to try is Blooket (www.blooket.com/). Blooket runs a similar interface to Kahoot but adds in the element of games to your activities. There are eight games to choose from including Tower Defense, Battle

Royale and Gold Quest. These games can put students into one-on-one battles or set them up into teams for cooperative play. Blooket has a large database of already made quizzes you can use, and the interface is easy to use if you are looking to create your own.

*Jeremy Clevette, Webmaster and
Central Alberta Representative*

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Maggie Shane, the ATA's privacy officer, is your resource for privacy compliance support.

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