



OhioSchools

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Springfield teacher Melissa McKenna
reads with kindergarten student
Preston Bitzan.

Advocacy in action

When educators at Springfield's
Snowhill Elementary School saw
problems with the Third Grade
Reading Guarantee, they decided
to do something about it. **p15**

Ohio's Master Teachers are part of national effort to develop, curate and share compelling lesson plans



Jody Barnes



Jennifer Martinez

One teacher uses photographs and even performance to help students understand that knowing which perspective your information comes from can make a difference. Another uses literature and visual aids to spark conversation about the power of friendships in her 3rd-grade class.

Across the nation, a group of the country's best teachers are using these and other techniques in their classrooms to help their students learn.

This year, 96 of those teachers are putting their best ideas in one place, showing how innovative methods can be incorporated into daily teaching, and eliminating the need for other educators to hunt down lesson plans in an increasingly bewildering array of places.

Throughout the school year, educators **Jody Barnes** (Columbus) and **Jennifer Martinez** (Hamilton Local) are participating in a national effort to develop, curate, share and eventually implement some of the most compelling lesson plans.

Called the Master Teacher Project, the lesson plans are being put together during a time of major transformation in American education when nearly all states, including Ohio, are tackling the Common Core State Standards.

Once completed, the Master Teacher Project will be a repository of best practices providing the educational community with a roadmap for effective teaching. The roadmap will include the 180-day Common Core aligned courses and instructional strategies, classroom management practices and classroom systems.

All of it will be published on the single website, **BetterLesson.com**, for the use of the educational community.

"Professionally and personally, being chosen for this project is an honor," says Barnes, a fourth-grade teacher at Easthaven Elementary School. "It means that I get to further my own practice and knowledge of the Common Core State Standards. It also gives me a chance to share tremendous resources and information with my amazing colleagues who work so hard every day to meet the needs of the students at our school."

She says the work she does with her Better Lesson coach and 4th grade English/Language Arts team inspires her and pushes her to be the best teacher she can be. "Being involved with the Master Teacher Project also means that I get to push myself outside of my comfort zone and stretch myself as a person," Barnes says. "Every person associated with the project—and I mean every person—is so positive and supportive."

For Martinez, a third-grade teacher at Hamilton Elementary School, being a part of the Master Teacher Project has been life changing both personally and professionally.

"The process of creating original lessons and materials for every school day of the year has challenged me to really focus on not only the 'what' in my teaching but also the 'why,'" she says. "I've spent a great deal of time reflecting on the content of my lessons and instructional strategies to ensure that they align with the standards and exhibit best practices." Martinez notes that although this has always been her goal as a teacher, the Master Teacher Project has ensured that her first year using the Common Core State Standards has been an effective one.

A veteran teacher with 18 years of experience, Barnes and Martinez, who has taught for nine years, join the other Master Teachers across the United States selected to provide the content for what will ultimately be a living, breathing document to transform and modernize teaching and learning.

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JODY BARNES, TEACHER,
EASTHAVEN ELEMENTARY SCHOOL (COLUMBUS)

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JENNIFER MARTINEZ, TEACHER
HAMILTON ELEMENTARY SCHOOL (HAMILTON LOCAL)

The two teachers are excited about the opportunities for growth that their involvement in the project has for their Columbus students.

“For my students, this project means that they get the benefit of my learning from some of the very best teachers in the country,” Barnes says. “They also get to showcase their work on the website, and that’s something that they are super excited about.”

Martinez says that being a participant in the project means that every day in the classroom is especially meaningful and challenging for her students.

“I’ve seen the level of their work rise as they know their work products will be used as examples for others around the country,” she says. “The level of ownership, excitement and pride has been so rewarding to see as they are instrumental in such important work!”

The Master Teachers’ work is a partnership between the National Education Association and BetterLesson, and the result of a months-long effort to find and recruit the best teachers in the nation. Their work is being developed over the course of the school year and is being rolled out in stages as U.S. schools in 45 states—including Ohio—implement Common Core Standards.

While the standards aim to create a coherent educational identity for schools and prepare students to be college and career-ready by stressing skills such as fractions and informational texts, many teachers have reported facing a range of challenges achieving those aims. Among them: little help from some school districts in preparing for the standards, and a dizzying array of lesson plans already on the Internet.

By bringing thoroughly vetted, peer-reviewed lesson plans online, the Master Teacher Project will soon be a ready resource and a single forum for teachers.

“We want to see an inspiring, thought-provoking teacher for every student everywhere,” said BetterLesson co-founder Erin Osborn. “We think this partnership is a powerful step towards realizing that vision. We agree with the NEA that, to date, teachers really haven’t been getting the supports they want and need to improve their instruction. With the work of the NEA Master Teacher Project, we’re solving this problem by bringing the full richness of master teachers’ curriculum and practice within reach for every teacher—for free.”

The teachers’ focus on materials “ready to use” in the classroom is another driver of the Master Teacher Project.

“The best ideas for the classroom come from classroom teachers,” NEA program director Bill Raabe said. “We want to build a free, open body of knowledge around effective curriculum and instruction—for teachers, by teachers.”

Martinez says the highlight of the program is being part of a network of like-minded professionals. “I look forward to our bi-weekly team meetings where we share ideas and support one another through the process,” she says. “Were it not for this opportunity, I would never have made these connections that will last well beyond the scope of the project.”

Barnes says she can’t say enough about the people involved in the Master Teacher Project, and the experience it’s been for her and for her students. “I couldn’t do it without the amazing support from my district, my principal and colleagues at Easthaven and my family and friends,” Barnes says. “It’s been an amazing journey so far and I’m looking forward to the rest of the year as well as to my future involvement with Better Lesson.”

As the lessons are developed and reviewed during the 2013-2014 school year, educators can access them on a beta site. Ultimately, all the lessons will be available on BetterLesson.com. The NEA plans to expand the partnership to include science as the Common Core’s science standards are rolled out.