I have a story that I’d like to share with you. It is the story of how one teacher, named Sue Hjort, made a difference in our efforts to get legislative approval for funding the implementation of the new Common Core State Standards (CCSS). Sue is a wonderful second grade teacher and very much a supporter of the new CCSS. She has worked very hard over the last several years in studying the new standards, adjusting her teaching style, and developing units of instruction that are reflective of the CCSS in both ELA and Math. So you can imagine Sue’s reaction when reports began to surface out of Lansing that the legislature might be back tracking on the CCSS and withholding the funding to fully implement these standards.

Knowing that the CCSS are good for students and having observed the success her students have had in learning the new CCSS, Sue realized that she needed to get involved and take her case to her elected representative in Lansing. It just so happened that Sue’s representative is Rep. Lisa Lyons of Ada, MI. Rep. Lyons is the Chair of the House Education Committee. Sue contacted me in July and asked if I would accompany her if she set up a meeting with Rep. Lyons. Of course I said “yes”, as long as I could bring our MEMSPA Executive Director, Paul Liabenow. This was an opportunity beyond belief. Rarely, in the role of political advocates, do Paul and I have the opportunity to spend such and extended amount of time speaking to the most influential person on the House Education Committee. We were excited beyond belief!

So in late July, at a restaurant in Lowell, MI, the three of us met with Rep. Lyons for over two hours. Sue led the presentation, showing Rep. Lyons the units of study she’d developed, interjecting how her students greatly benefited from the instruction that was consistent with the new CCSS. Rep. Lyons asked many good questions, which Sue skillfully answered with passion and conviction. Paul and I spoke about the many hours of P.D. that have gone into the implementation of the CCSS thus far and how other states have made subtle adjustments to the CCSS based on their unique needs.

The end result was turning the Chairperson of the House Education Committee from a “No” vote to a “Yes” vote and a clear supporter of CCSS. All this was the result of one passionate second grade teacher who took the initiative and spoke with passion and conviction on behalf of her students and her colleagues. Who says one person can’t make a difference?! Here is a living example that we can, and it does matter!

As MEMSPA President for 2013-14, it is truly an honor to serve this great organization. I hope that each of you had a successful beginning to the new school year. It’s always exciting to begin a new school year and to see our students arrive on campus, full of energy and excited to learn.

Sincerely,
Chuck Shultz
President