

Keynoter Marcus Conyers Will Promote “BrainSMART” Approaches to Teaching
By Gena Bramlett, AIMS

The 26th Annual Association of Illinois Middle-Level Schools (AIMS) Fall Conference will offer Illinois educators the special opportunity to benefit from brain research expert, Marcus Conyers. Known as “the Brain Guy” by the many students with whom he has worked, Conyers will provide a keynote speech and later lead a conference breakout session. His innovations will enhance understanding of young adolescent learners and their unique educational needs.

Conyers, an international author, keynote speaker, and learning consultant has devoted 25 years to translating Nobel Prize winners’ research into practical teaching tools for effective instruction and learning. In an electronic conversation he stated,

“Some 90% of what has been learned about the human brain has been discovered in the last 20 years. Over the last 10 years we have worked with educators across North America to translate the implications of this research in a practical framework that we call the BrainSMART learning and teaching approach. We have fine-tuned the model in classrooms with thousands of students and 55,000 educators. In the keynote we will be exploring the five key factors that positively influence how well young adolescents learn.”

Conyers also added that his presentations will share practical thinking tools that Illinois middle level educators can use to make the most of their own brains and lives. He conveyed that,

“We are now learning that individuals who think optimistically tend to live around seven years longer. More importantly optimism can be learned and taught. Using the right thinking tools can help us make the right decisions about nutrition and exercise. Harvard researchers have found that the right lifestyle reduces the risk of heart disease by 80% and stroke and some cancers by 70%. In fact the rate at which we age is determined 30% by our genes and 70% by our actions. I just celebrated my 47th birthday on June 26. My Real Age or physical age clocked in at 36. In my breakout session we will learn how to *Drive Your Brain to Health, Happiness, and Peak Performance*. The same tools we need for our own lives are needed by students to achieve at high academic levels. Imagine if all students learned how to drive their brains well!”

Conyers suggests that just as a physician must have acute knowledge of human physiology, educators should have a greater understanding of the brain in order to best facilitate learning for students. He firmly advocates the application of neuroscience in the classroom and encourages educators to inform themselves of the most current research.

“For example,” Conyers explained, “researchers at Harvard Medical School found that standard lecture-based instruction resulted in only about 10% of the knowledge being retained after two years. They redesigned their approach to be more effective. In the same way we have worked with middle level educators to design more brain-friendly learning experiences that result in deeper understanding and long-term retention and transfer. We are also starting to understand what drives attention and how teachers can capitalize on this knowledge in their day-to-day teaching.”

Conyers recognizes that once middle level educators begin to discover the excitement of learning about the human brain and its amazing capacity, they tend to seek more knowledge. He suggests visiting his website www.brainSMART.com which features a plethora of information on the brain, free strategies, and links to other resources. The website also offers Conyers's eight books on the brain and learning including *BrainSMART Strategies for Boosting Test Scores*. In response to the success he has experienced, he and colleague Dr. Donna Wilson have developed an on-line Ed.S and M.S. degree program in BrainSMART with Nova Southeastern University.

"The Brain Guy" is certain to offer a great deal of insight at the upcoming Fall Conference as he will deliver his mission that by 2020 every student will be learning effective tools for thinking, learning, and communicating in addition to building a healthy, productive life.. The Association of Illinois Middle-level Schools' dedication to promoting and disseminating innovative curricular and instructional practices will be well supported by Marcus Conyers and his informative presentations.

Registration materials are provided in this issue of the *AIMS Newsletter* on page_____. Any questions regarding the Fall Conference can be addressed by contacting the AIMS office, (217)-333-7104.