



SPONSOR UPDATE

DECEMBER 2025



Mission

The mission of the Education Division of Buckeye Community Hope Foundation is to establish strong public community schools by adhering to quality authorizing practices, ensuring responsible oversight, and setting high standards for school performance.

Vision

The Education Division's vision is strong communities of healthy, well-educated students, and a future in which all students have access to a high quality public education. Ohio thrives as increasing numbers of schools graduate students equipped to assume a positive role in society.



BCHF Annual Holiday Card Art Contest

We're delighted to share that this year's holiday card will once again spotlight the remarkable creativity of students in our sponsored schools. Learners from across all grade levels were invited to submit their festive artwork, and we're proud to congratulate this year's winners: Tayla, a 7th grader from Horizon Science Academy Columbus Middle School, and Desire, an 11th grader from Engage High School.

Their designs will be on the cover of our holiday cards, spreading cheer and celebrating their artistic talent.



Above: Tayla, 7th grader, Horizon Science Academy
Columbus Middle School
Right: Desire, 11th grader, Engage High School.



We also want to recognize the many outstanding submissions shared by students throughout our schools. Each entry brought its own imagination and holiday spirit. Enjoy these wonderful pieces below.

All Student Submissions

How Schools Can Build Systems Around Student Experience

By Dr. Zoe Plotnick, School Improvement Representative

School leadership practices that center student voice support learning environments that are equitable, inclusive and responsive. For schools serving students from traditionally underserved populations, however, collecting and acting on student experience data must become an imperative. Students with disabilities, multilingual learners, at-risk youth, and students from other marginalized groups often navigate school systems that have not been designed with their experiences in mind. When we embrace student voice as a driver for improvement, everybody wins: students gain agency, while the adults gain insight (Dugan & Safir, 2021; Hammond, 2025; Mitra, 2018).

Measures focusing on how students experience school can offer a form of “street-level data” that sheds light on many of the realities that are often invisible to traditional metrics (Bryk et al., 2015; Dugan & Safir, 2021). While attendance and achievement scores can certainly help us identify patterns and spot important trends, the snapshots they provide are incomplete without an understanding of the opportunities, barriers, root causes and challenges that may only be perceptible to those willing to view them from the student perspective on the ground. For example, shadowing a newcomer English learner for a day will often reveal the barriers to comprehension, missed opportunities for interaction, and inaccessible routines that satellite-level data fail to capture.

The dividends of centering student experience data do not end with informed planning processes for leadership, however. This approach to understanding school systems aligns with culturally responsive and sustaining frameworks (Gay, 2018; Hammond, 2015; Paris & Alim, 2017) that prioritize identity, belonging, and affirmation. When students’ cultural and experiential assets shape school decisions, engagement rises and achievement follows. Below are some strategies that school leaders and

administrators can implement immediately to start collecting street-level data and approaching school improvement using the lens of student experience.

Full-Day Student Shadowing

Shadowing provides leaders with firsthand understanding of a student's access, challenges, and opportunities. Select a student who is among those in your school who are least likely to be heard – newcomer ELs, students with disabilities, or students with chronic absenteeism – and spend a day following them to observe their school day, from arrival to dismissal. You might decide to create an informal tally, checklist or other protocol or system for taking notes during your observations. If you aren't sure what to look for, here are some things worth noting:

- How often is the student invited to speak?
- Where do they encounter barriers (e.g., instructional language, lesson pacing, transitions)?
- How often do they seem confused, and do they try to hide it?
- How many opportunities exist for authentic engagement? Meaningful interaction? Belonging?

Action Research Mini-Cycles & Design Sprints

Youth Participatory Action Research (YPAR) empowers students to become co-researchers of their own school experiences (Camarota & Fine, 2008; Kirshner, 2015). In these cycles, students identify a problem, then collect data using tools like surveys, interviews, photography or mapping in a small-scale investigation. Students then go on to analyze their findings, brainstorm solutions, and present their proposals to authentic audiences that may include school administrators, community partners, parents, or local leaders.

This type of interdisciplinary project-based learning offers powerful opportunities for students to apply what they learn across different content classes, but it can also be scaled down to a smaller scale: you might try inviting students to participate in a design sprint. Over a 60-90 minute period, students co-design potential solutions to thorny problems that affect them at school – for instance, *How can we streamline our lunchroom procedures to maximize time spent eating and hanging out with friends?* – then present a prototype to school admin. If you would like to learn more about how teachers and students might apply design thinking in a K-12 class setting, you might want to start with the free info and resources offered by organizations like [IDEO](#) and [Stanford d.school](#).

Reimagine Student Advisory Councils

The makeup of traditional student councils tends to skew heavily toward academically successful, socially confident students. Making student partnerships and advisory groups truly meaningful, though, requires school leaders to be intentional about ensuring that students who tend to be marginalized have a seat at the table. Some councils reserve seats for immigrant newcomers, students with disabilities, LGBTQ+ youth, teens who are pregnant or parenting, or other historically excluded groups (Cook-Sather et al., 2014). Another approach is to regularly recruit panels of students who represent “unlikely voices:” students who are experiencing homelessness, have migrant status, are recent transfers, speak a minority language at home, are chronically absent, or are simply the ones staff describe using words like *quiet*, *shy*, and *introverted*. Because students representing these categories often have unpredictable schedules, it likely makes sense to rotate participation.

Scaffolds that support participation from these students can include providing discussion questions or prompts ahead of time, offering sentence frames or “talk stems,” using small-group pre-discussions beforehand, and providing multiple options for responses (e.g., verbal or written). You also might consider offering some form of compensation – whether that looks like “points” or “bucks” within your school's incentive currency, service-learning hours, or even a literal stipend, it's worth acknowledging that voice counts as labor.

Embark on an Experience Walk

Rather than focusing on compliance or instruction during your next round of walkthroughs, try walking a route through the building with an eye for *student experience* instead. As you move through arrival or dismissal routines, hallways during class transitions, the cafeteria and playground, restrooms, etc., with an eye for who is (and isn't) assumed to be the “default user.” If your data suggests that at least one student subgroup is less consistently connected and engaged, what aspects of the school feel designed *for* those students? What aspects feel like they were designed *without* them in mind? Do you notice any indicators that reveal subtle features of your school's emotional climate (e.g., warm greetings and staff availability)?

Invite Students to Document Their Lives at School

If you like the idea of YPAR but aren't sure you have the time and resources to devote to such an

initiative, you might instead start small by asking a few students to log their *blocks* or *boosts*. With support from staff, students can spend one week documenting tasks, events and interactions like the following:

Blocks

- something that slowed me down
- a moment when I felt confused
- a time when I didn't know what to do or how to start on the work
- a reason I didn't ask for help, even though I really could have used it

Boosts

- things that helped me learn
- something that helped me understand better
- a moment when I felt like I belonged
- when something “clicked” for me
- a time I took a risk and raised my hand

Another way leaders can visually zero in on areas where supports might be added is to invite students to mark a floor map of the school building (Ralls & Pottinger, 2021), an approach that is especially useful for schools that are welcoming newcomer English learners. Students can make markings and notations on a printed or digital floorplan of the school as they respond to questions about their daily experiences:

- Where does the student feel safe (or unsafe) in the building?
- Where does learning feel easier (or harder)?
- Where is it easy to get help from an adult?
- In which places is it more difficult to find someone who can help?
- Where do communication or participation barriers most frequently arise?
- In what places does the student feel their home culture is affirmed?

Let Students Inform Staff Development

Students can get involved in teachers' professional development by sharing how they learn best, what challenges they face, and which practices help them access grade-level material. They might be invited to demonstrate how they annotate texts, create and deliver a mini-lesson on “What helps me succeed,” explain what helps them persist and feel connected, or show how they use digital tools to access and communicate knowledge. This experience aligns with culturally responsive teaching principles that emphasize learner agency and cognitive engagement (Hammond, 2015) and is transformational for teachers and students alike.

Implement Quick Feedback Loops

Leaders may be surprised by the depth of insights that can be obtained with this approach, which only requires a few minutes per day. As you walk through the building and encounter students in hallways and common areas, you can conduct a “micro-interview” by posing one or two questions to a few students. Alternatively, you might conduct one-question surveys using QR codes that allow students to anonymously respond to a prompt like *If you could change one thing about our hallway procedures, what would it be?* or *What made learning easier or harder today?* Track patterns regularly, and don't forget to share your findings (and how you will act on them!) with students.

Conclusion

To sustain these practices, leaders will need to intentionally create formal structures that ensure that student voice and collaborative problem-solving are practices that remain embedded in their schools' culture rather than a one-off initiative. By consistently adopting participatory and human-centered approaches, we can create systems that reflect the lived experiences, aspirations, and needs of students. Most importantly, though, we must remember that authentic student voice requires more than simply collecting input – we actually need to shift some meaningful decision-making power toward students, too. By taking care to nurture a sense of belonging and improve instructional access, we will create schools where all students can thrive.

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Dane Puterbaugh Presents at RAPSA



On November 3rd, Buckeye's very own Dane Puterbaugh was a featured speaker at the 2025 RAPSA Forum in San Diego. RAPSA is a California based organization dedicated to advancing inclusive education and redefining success for opportunity youth. Dane's presentation was on Buckeye's Workforce Literacy initiative, highlighting the hard work our schools are doing getting students prepared for their futures while also closing literacy gaps. By sharing our initiative on a national stage, Buckeye is contributing to broader conversations about educational best practices for opportunity youth across the country.

Carnival Night at Summit Academy Columbus



Summit Academy Columbus kicked off the holiday season with their very first student carnival! The after-school event turned the school's indoor space into a fun-filled celebration that students absolutely loved.

The carnival had all the classic favorites - bounce houses where kids jumped around with huge smiles, face painting that let them show off colorful designs, and carnival games where they could win awesome prizes. Students grabbed some food and moved from activity to activity, soaking up all the festive energy.

The laughter echoing through the halls and the excited faces said it all - the first carnival was a hit! Students had a blast celebrating together, playing games, and enjoying a well-deserved break as the holidays approached. It was the perfect way to wrap up this time of year, and everyone is already hoping it becomes a yearly tradition.

Upcoming Early Literacy Summit

Does your school want to improve upon its "one star" rating in early literacy? Or deepen educator knowledge of effective, high-yield early literacy strategies?

We recommend representatives of ALL schools serving grades K-3 attend this in-person Summit. We encourage you to send a third-grade teacher, lead literacy teacher, or literacy coach to this important meeting.

The Summit will be held in person at the BCHF Training Room, 3021 E. Dublin Granville Road, Columbus, Ohio 43231 on **December 17** with a snow make-up date of January 15, 2026. Learn how the early literacy component is computed on the Ohio School Report. Find out how your literacy leadership team can use data to determine where students struggle the most. Discuss, with peers and experts, what quality early literacy lessons look like. Prepare for this meeting by bringing your third grade Fall Ohio State Testing results and most recent norm referenced score reports for grades K-3.

[Register Here](#)

Rooted in Student Advocacy: Karen Rose's "Why"



Our Education Division has been working on strategic planning with The National Charter Schools Institute. A key part of the experience has been reconnecting with our “why” in education, a reflection on the personal purpose that drives our work. We're excited to share our stories in upcoming Sponsor Updates.

This month, we're featuring Karen Rose, Compliance Representative.

What originally drew you to a career in education?

I earned my Bachelor of Arts in English from Kent State University in 2002 and later completed the Bachelor's Plus program for an Intervention Specialist (Mild/Moderate) in 2013.

What motivates you to come to work every day?

The people I work with and the people I work for. I truly enjoy being surrounded by passionate, caring individuals who put students' best interests and futures at the center of everything they do.

What do you enjoy most about your role at BCHF?

I enjoy collaborating with a diverse group of people from all walks of life. Our team brings incredible

depth of knowledge and experience, and I value being part of such a strong, supportive professional community.

How do you define your “why”? Is there a particular moment that reinforced it?

My “why” began when my oldest daughter started elementary school and struggled significantly. It took years of advocating for her to finally receive a dyslexia diagnosis, something we ultimately had to pay hundreds of dollars for privately. Watching my bright, capable child struggle so deeply sparked my desire to pursue a career in special education.

I knew there were other children like her—kids who simply needed time, attention, and educators willing to think outside the box. Living in a large school district, I often wished for a smaller, free public option that could better meet her needs. That wasn’t available then and still isn’t for many families today.

It wasn’t until I joined Buckeye that I truly understood how much “one size does **not** fit all” in education. Children shouldn’t be required to attend the school assigned by their zip code if it’s not the right fit. Families deserve meaningful choices—both in the type of education and the environment where their child will thrive.

How do you reconnect with your “why” during tough times?

During challenging moments, I remind myself of the students and families who benefit when educators are willing to advocate, persist, and problem-solve. I think back to my daughter’s journey and to the countless children who simply need someone to see their potential. I also lean on my colleagues, being part of a team that shares a common mission makes it easier to stay grounded, focused, and encouraged.

What have you learned about yourself through your work at BCHF?

Working at BCHF has shown me that I am more resilient and adaptable than I once realized. I’ve learned that I thrive in environments where collaboration, creativity, and flexibility are not only valued but essential. This work has also reinforced my belief that meaningful change happens when people are willing to listen, reflect, and continuously grow—something I strive to model every day.

How do you hope to continue growing in your role?

I hope to continue deepening my knowledge of Ohio regulations and school operations so I can better support my schools and their families. Ultimately, I want to keep contributing as a member of the Buckeye team who others can rely on for guidance, clarity, and encouragement.

What is a quote or mantra you live by?

“Education is the key to unlocking the world, a passport to freedom.” — Oprah Winfrey

This quote reminds me every day that meaningful achievement begins with education. When I was younger, my family encouraged me to pursue my college degree, reminding me that it would open doors for my family’s future. I firmly believe that each step in a student’s educational journey creates new opportunities and possibilities.

Education is something many of us take for granted, yet it deserves to be valued and protected. And among all the milestones, the most significant door is the high school diploma. That is why I love working with my high schools that serve dropout recovery students. When a student commits to earning their diploma—often while navigating the toughest circumstances—they are not just completing coursework. They are changing the trajectory of their life and opening doors they may have once believed were closed to them.

Who inspires you in your work?

I am inspired by the educators who show up every day ready to give their best, even when the work is hard. I’m especially inspired by parents and teachers who advocate fiercely for their children and by students who persevere despite obstacles. Their determination and hope remind me why this work matters and push me to keep learning and improving.

Through her commitment to compliance, collaboration, and student-centered advocacy, Karen continues to help unlock doors for students across Ohio.

Focus North High School Soccer Team Takes First Place

Focus North High School launched its inaugural soccer program this year, marking a significant milestone for the school's athletic offerings. The program was organized by Mr. Okon Ekpenyong and managed by Mr. Matthew McVey, who worked together to bring competitive soccer to the school's students.

The team found its footing under the guidance of Coach Aden Mohamed. Through his leadership, players developed stronger communication skills and learned to work effectively as a unit. Their growth led them to a first-place finish in the Charter School League, a remarkable achievement for a first-year program!

The team's success extended beyond the field. Players demonstrated exceptional camaraderie by providing rides to practice and making reminder calls to ensure everyone arrived on time. These efforts earned them participation credit in their CBI class, recognizing their commitment to supporting one another.

The program benefited from strong community support throughout the season. Ms. Joy Bonar, the school's IC specialist, supplied specialized "Press" attire for students developing sports journalism portfolios. Mr. Ekpenyong coordinated with Eric Rutkowski at Leveling the Playing Field to secure gear and uniforms for the entire team. Ms. Fadumo Adam, the school's ELL Teacher and Somali translator, attended every game and practice, providing lunch and refreshments while offering her unwavering support to the players.

The combination of dedicated coaching, student teamwork, and community backing established a strong foundation for Focus North High School's soccer program in its debut season. Congratulations!



Renaissance STAR Dropout Prevention and Recovery Testing Open Office Hours

The Office of Community Schools, in coordination with the Office of Assessment, has been working with SAS to determine the number of weeks between Test 1 and Test 2 to use for the progress measure on the state report card.

Effective December 1, there must be **at least 16 weeks between the administration of the first and second STAR assessment**. Students become eligible to take the second test **on the first day of the 17th week** following the administration of the first test. **There will be no assigned windows for testing dates**. The only time the test may not be available is during the last two weeks of December.

If a student enrolls, takes the first test, withdraws, and later returns to your school, the student may take their second test beginning on the first day of the 17th week after the original test date. It is essential that students are moved from the “active roster” and identified as “inactive” when they are withdrawn from the school and added back into the “active roster” when they return. **Students should never be deleted from the testing roster.**

Students may take the STAR assessment multiple times; however, the **lowest and highest scores that are at least 16 weeks apart** will be used for the report measure.

Please remember, administering the STAR assessment to all students ages 14-21 is a requirement for dropout recovery schools.

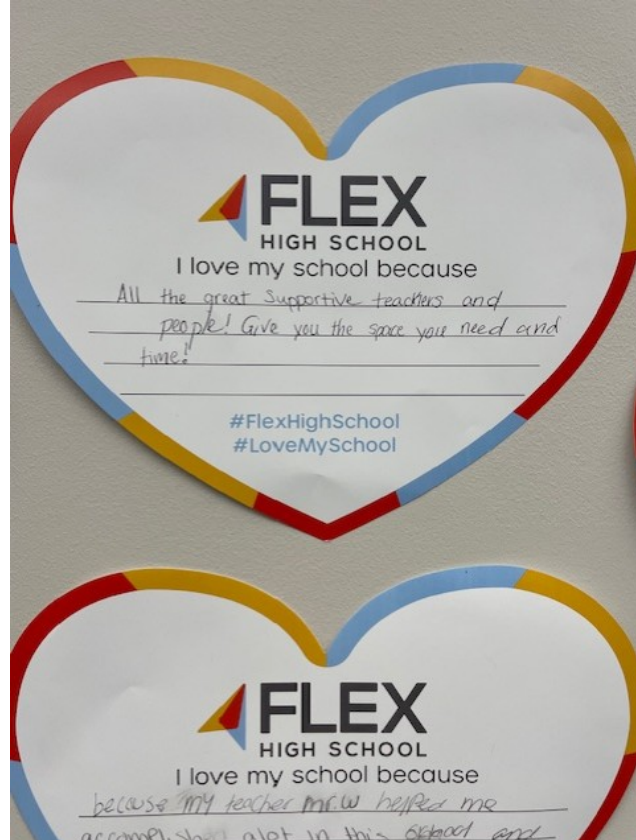
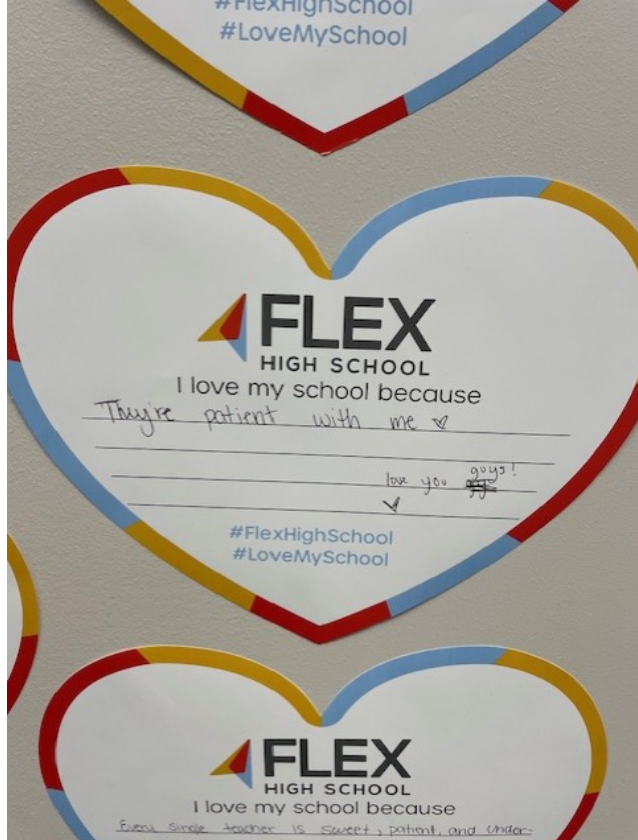
The Office of Community Schools is working with Renaissance to obtain accurate reporting on students who are missing SSIDs or dates of birth, as well as a communication plan to ensure you receive the necessary student file information from the vendor to support corrections. They believe these changes will increase test percentages and provide more accurate data for the report card measure.

Renaissance will be hosting the following Open Office Hours for DOPR schools:

- December 10 – Reading the bi-weekly report and resolving SSID/DOB issues - [Register Here](#)
- February 18 – Reading/using STAR reports - [Register Here](#)
- April 15 – Topic to be determined - [Register Here](#)
- May 13 – EOY wrap-up - [Register Here](#)

School Highlights

While visiting schools during the Thanksgiving season, we noticed lots of wonderful decor. We loved this student display of appreciation at **FLEX High School!** Students filled cut-out hearts with the reasons they love their school - a heartfelt showcase of gratitude and pride.



Horizon Science Academy Columbus Middle School's robotics program achieved remarkable success at the VEX IQ Robotics Competition Mix and Match Middle School Contest! Four teams represented the school, with one team standing out by earning the prestigious Teamwork Champion Award. Based on last year's criteria, this accomplishment makes them eligible to compete at the State Championship. Congratulations!



This week, students at **Horizon Science Academy Dayton Downtown** had the exciting opportunity to present the books they created to their families during their Student Book Showcase Event. After weeks of brainstorming, writing, illustrating, and revising, the young authors proudly shared their hard work with parents and guardians.



Noble Academy Euclid's staff successfully organized Veterans Day celebrations that brought history to life for their students. The school welcomed an impressive group of visitors, including retired veterans from the Army, Navy, and Air Force, parents, a Euclid Councilwoman, and active-duty Euclid Police Officers. These honored guests visited classrooms throughout the day, reading books and sharing personal stories about Veterans Day with eager young learners. The event proved to be both memorable and educational, leaving a lasting impact on the entire school community.



Porscha Bell of Seven Seventeen Credit Union kicked off the first session of the Financial Awareness Series at **The Academy for Urban Scholars Youngstown**, setting an engaging and informative tone for the program.



Upcoming Events

HAPPY HOLIDAYS! This season, you can give yourself the gift of renewed learning and collaboration with other educators! Take advantage of just-in-time professional development sessions to end the calendar year. Keep checking for new gifts in our online catalog via Frontline Education; it is being renewed and updated for second semester.

Register for sessions via the link in the title, or go to BCHF's Professional Learning Opportunities Catalog, [available here](#).

[SPECIAL EDUCATION LEADERSHIP: Coffee Table Talk 2](#) – December 4, 2025 – 3:30 to 4:30 P.M. – Online via Zoom

Join us for a candid and engaging Coffee Table Talk on leadership in Special Education. We will kick things off with brief updates from the facilitator, followed by open, collective learning grounded in real-world challenges. Together, we will explore a shared problem of practice and use that as a springboard for rich discussion and collaborative problem-solving. Whether you are a seasoned administrator or new to special education leadership, this is your chance to share experiences, ask questions, and explore collaborative solutions in a relaxed, welcoming space. So grab your favorite mug, pull up a chair, and join us for rich conversation, community, and learning.

[MATHEMATICAL DISCOURSE: Centering Student Thinking and Voice](#) – December 9, 2025 – 3:30 to 5:00 P.M. – Online via Zoom

Meaningful math learning happens through student thinking, not teacher telling. This session explores how to facilitate mathematical discourse that supports reasoning, equity, and agency. Participants will examine discourse moves, task structures, and classroom norms that elevate student voice. With a focus on practical strategies, participants will analyze video clips and co-develop routines that support all learners in sharing, listening, and building ideas together.

[THE MIRROR AND ME: Teacher and Student Reflection](#) – December 10, 2025 – 3:00 to 4:30 P.M. – Online via Zoom

Reflection is a powerful driver of growth-for both teachers and students. This session explores how intentional reflection practices can enhance teaching, deepen student learning, and build a culture of continuous improvement. Educators will learn practical strategies for embedding reflection into daily instruction, fostering meta cognition in students, and using self-assessment to guide professional growth. Participants will leave with tools and techniques to make reflection a routine, meaningful part of the learning process for everyone in the classroom.

[COHORT: Social Studies 2: Engagement and Strategies and Test Prep](#) – December 11, 2025 – 3:30 to 4:30 P.M. – Online via Zoom

How do we make social studies more meaningful and memorable for students? This session focuses

on practical strategies to boost engagement and student ownership, along with tools for making test prep more effective without sacrificing curiosity or critical thinking. Whether you're looking to try new activities or tighten up your approach to state testing, you'll leave with ideas you can use right away. As always, we'll close with a collaborative networked improvement community to workshop real classroom challenges and build on each other's ideas.

RECONNECTING DISENGAGED STUDENTS: Bridging Learning Gaps – December 16, 2025 – 3:30 to 4:30 P.M. – Online via Zoom

When students fall behind, they often lose motivation. But with the right support, those students can reconnect with learning. This session is ideal for educators working with students who struggle due to learning gaps. Participants will explore strategies to re-engage these students, including differentiated instruction, targeted interventions, and building strong teacher-student relationships. Learn how to create an inclusive classroom where each student feels valued and capable, no matter their starting point. You'll leave with practical tools to identify learning gaps early and foster resilience in students, helping them regain confidence and actively participate in their educational journey.

*******EARLY LITERACY SUMMIT***** - December 17, 2025 – 10:00 A.M. to 3:00 P.M. – In person in Columbus (BCHF Training room)**

DOES YOUR SCHOOL WANT TO IMPROVE UPON A "ONE STAR" RATING IN EARLY LITERACY? Or deepen your knowledge of effective, high-yield early literacy strategies? We recommend ALL of our schools with needs in early literacy improvement attend this in-person Summit. We advise you to send a third-grade teacher or lead literacy teacher or coach to this important meeting. The Summit will be held in person at the BCHF Training Room, 3021 E. Dublin Granville Road, Columbus, Ohio 43231 on December 17 with a snow make-up date of January 15, 2026. Learn how the early literacy component is computed on the Ohio School Report. Find out how your literacy leadership team can use data to determine where students struggle the most. Discuss, with peers and experts, what quality early literacy lessons look like. Prepare for this **VERY IMPORTANT** meeting by bringing your third grade Fall Ohio State Testing results and most recent norm referenced score reports for grades K-3.

COHORT: Mathematics 3 – January 13, 2026 – 3:30 to 5:00 P.M. – Online via Zoom

This virtual professional learning community brings together K-8 school leaders and teachers across Ohio to strengthen mathematics instruction and improve student outcomes. Meeting quarterly (9/23, 11/18, 1/13, 3/10), each session explores research-based instructional strategies, unpacks legislative updates, and examines problems of practice focused on leading and implementing effective math instruction. A central goal of the cohort is to reframe deficit-based narratives about mathematics by cultivating bold, asset-based mindsets among educators, students, and communities. Participants will be invited to apply new strategies, reflect on implementation, and refine practices, bridging leadership and instruction to foster equity and high expectations. This collaborative space supports educators in creating sustainable systems for strong mathematics teaching and learning that benefit all students.

Have a story or event at your school you would like to share? Send it to: hchandoul@buckeyehope.org.

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