



## SPONSOR UPDATE

JANUARY 2026

### 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.

## Happy New Year! A Message from our VP of Education:

Happy New Year from all of us at Buckeye Community Hope Foundation! As I reflect on the past year, I am deeply humbled and grateful to all of you in our sponsored schools and to my team for your hard work in 2025. The new year is a reset and reminder of who and what is important. Every decision we make, every dollar we spend, every initiative we consider must go back to supporting and helping our students. Each of us has an important job to do in 2026 – to make decisions based on impact, hold ourselves accountable for the results, and most importantly do what is right and what matters for students, every time. Elevate what is working for students, stay focused on your mission, work with intention, and never waiver. Our students are counting on all of us!

Our Foundation is here to help and support you in the new year. Please reach out at any time, my door is always open. Thank you for your continued commitment and professionalism every single day. This work is not just something we do, it is something we live.

Sincerely,  
Jennifer L. Schorr, VP of Education

## High Expectations, Joy, and Thriving in Urban Schools

By Ilie Massey, School Improvement Representative

Early in my work with urban schools, I visited a building that had been labeled "low performing" for years. The hallways were quiet, student work was minimal, and much of the instruction I observed centered on remediation. In one classroom, a teacher shared, almost apologetically, that she avoided grade level texts because "the students just aren't ready for that." However in conversations with students, I heard curiosity, humor, and insight. They wanted to engage. What they lacked was not motivation or ability, but consistent access to rigorous learning experiences rooted in belief.

Moments like that stayed with me. They reflect a pattern many districts are actively working to disrupt: when expectations are lowered, often with good intentions, students are unintentionally denied access to the very opportunities that lead to growth. This is why high expectations should be not just a classroom practice, they should be a districtwide equity priority. Ensuring that all students have access to grade level content, meaningful discussion, and intellectual challenge is foundational to improving outcomes in urban schools.

Dr. L. S. Desautels' work on academic press reinforces this idea. Desautels emphasizes that high performing schools create a shared expectation that learning will be challenging and worthwhile, and that students will be supported in meeting those challenges. Academic press is not about pushing students without support, it's about coherence, clarity, and consistency in expectations across classrooms and schools. When districts align curriculum, instruction, and professional learning around this belief, students experience school as a place where their thinking is valued and stretched.

At the same time, high expectations alone are not enough. How those expectations are communicated matters deeply. In many urban schools, accountability pressures can unintentionally shift focus toward compliance, control, or surface level performance. This is where joy becomes essential, not optional. Dr. Ghodly Muhammad (2020, 2023) reminds us that learning should cultivate not only skills and intellect, but also identity, criticality, and joy. Joy affirms students' humanity and creates conditions where they are more willing to take risks, persist through challenge, and see themselves as scholars.

Joy, however, is not the absence of rigor. In fact, classrooms that center joy often demonstrate the highest levels of engagement and intellectual work. Students debate, question, create, and connect learning to their lived experiences. This aligns closely with district priorities around culturally responsive instruction and student voice. When students see themselves reflected in the learning, and feel respected and challenged, achievement follows.

Dr. Bettina Love (2019) pushes this idea further by naming joy as a form of resistance. In her work on abolitionist teaching, Love argues that schools must move beyond helping students merely survive inequitable systems and instead create conditions where they can truly thrive. From this lens, joy is not frivolous, it is transformative. High expectations grounded in care and cultural responsiveness communicate a powerful message: *You deserve challenge, creativity, and intellectual freedom.*

Across the schools I support, the most sustainable improvement occurs when district priorities are aligned around a shared vision: rigorous instruction, equitable access, culturally responsive practices, and positive school culture. High expectations anchored in joy support all of these goals. Teachers plan with intention. Students engage more deeply. School cultures shift from compliance driven to purpose driven.

Reflecting on my experiences, I am reminded that high expectations are not about perfection or pressure. They are about belief, belief that students can think deeply, contribute meaningfully, and grow without sacrificing their identity or joy. When districts commit to this balance, high expectations become more than a strategy; they become a promise to students about what school can and should be.

#### **Leader Call to Action: Turning Belief Into Practice**

As district and school leaders, we play a critical role in shaping the expectations students experience every day. High expectations are not sustained through vision statements alone; they are realized through the instructional decisions, professional learning structures, and cultural messages we consistently reinforce.

To move this work forward, leaders are encouraged to:

- Examine expectations in practice, not just intent. Engage in classroom walkthroughs and team conversations that ask: *Are students regularly engaging with grade-level content? Are tasks cognitively demanding and accessible with support?*
- Protect instructional rigor while providing support. Ensure that interventions, MTSS structures, and pacing decisions expand access to grade level learning rather than replace it with remediation.
- Center joy as a leadership priority. Look for evidence of student voice, curiosity, and belonging in classrooms. Celebrate instructional practices that affirm identity and make learning meaningful, not just compliant.
- Align professional learning to belief. Provide ongoing learning opportunities that address implicit bias, culturally responsive instruction, and asset-based approaches to teaching and learning.
- Model the expectations we hold for students. Communicate a clear, consistent message to staff: *All students are capable of deep thinking, and it is our responsibility to create the conditions that allow them to thrive.*

When leaders align expectations, support, and joy, we send a powerful message across our schools and communities: rigor and humanity are not in conflict, they are inseparable. Our collective commitment to this balance will shape not only academic outcomes, but the lived experiences of students in our urban schools.

#### **References**

Desautels, L. S. (2016). *Improving student achievement through academic press and instructional coherence*. Educational Leadership.

Love, B. L. (2019). *We want to do more than survive: Abolitionist teaching and the pursuit of educational freedom*. Beacon Press.

Muhammad, G. (2020). *Cultivating genius: An equity framework for culturally and historically responsive literacy*. Scholastic.

Muhammad, G. (2023). *Unearthing joy: A guide to culturally and historically responsive teaching and learning*. Scholastic.

## **The Academy for Urban Scholars Youngstown Students Speak Up for Traffic Safety**



Students at the Academy for Urban Scholars Youngstown recently took a stand at a city council meeting, voicing serious concerns about a proposal to remove the traffic light directly in front of their school. They argued that the signal plays a critical role in keeping everyone safe on Market Street, a busy five-lane thoroughfare many cross each day. Seniors and faculty described multiple close calls and dangerous conditions, saying that without the light, crossing the street before and after school becomes even riskier. School staff also noted that the school remains the only high school in the city without a designated school zone and urged city leaders to prioritize student safety as decisions are made.

We are proud of these students for speaking up, advocating for their safety, and using their voices to drive meaningful change!

## The Steve Guthrie Memorial Award for Excellence

In late 2023, we unexpectedly lost Steve Guthrie, a great man who has served on the Buckeye Community Hope Foundation Board for over 20 years. Steve was a generous, kind, and loyal friend to many. He was always willing to help anyone and demonstrated that in his work with Buckeye, within his family, and his daily life. He left a hole in the hearts of all who had the pleasure of knowing him and working with him. In honor of Mr. Guthrie, the Board of Trustees of Buckeye Community Hope Foundation created an annual employee award in his honor. One BCHF employee each year will be recognized for their contributions that exemplify the character of Mr. Guthrie and supports our Goal of improving the lives of others through housing, support, and education.

It is with great pleasure that we congratulate Stan Nicol, **Data Analysis and School Accountability**, on being selected as the 2025 recipient of the Steve Guthrie Memorial Award for Excellence.



**BUCKEYE COMMUNITY HOPE FOUNDATION**

**Stan Nicol**  
2025 STEVE GUTHRIE MEMORIAL AWARD FOR EXCELLENCE RECIPIENT

Stan brings over 30 years of experience in education, and is an admitted, "data geek," having worked extensively with state and local student and school performance data.

Stan Nicol exemplifies the descriptor of "going above and beyond." We think all of us in BCHF's Education Division would agree that Stan has been a key catalyst in making us a better sponsor, year after year!

Stan is vital in the hub of teamwork across the Division. He provides a foundation of best data knowledge for our accountability and school improvement representatives to go out and help schools. Stan searches for good ideas and always asks how he can better refine a report so that the whole team is more prepared and can work smarter, not harder. Stan is a key contributor to the BCHF Annual Report, annual school performance reports, and periodic features in the Sponsor Update. If Stan has a deadline, he always finishes in advance of that deadline. He is critical of his own work and often perfects something he has worked on over time with newer and better versions. His attention to detail drives us crazy sometimes, but we all know that it makes us better too!

## Community Giving Event at Horizon Science Academy Elementary



Community Giving Night at Horizon Science Academy Elementary (HSAE) was a part of the school's Problem Based Learning project, with every grade level playing a role in its success. From planning to execution, students contributed their time, creativity, and effort toward a shared goal of giving back.

"Each grade has had a part in the success of this event," said Sara Hill, Outreach and Activity Coordinator at HSAE. "Our scholars are so proud of themselves and we are beyond proud of their hard work and commitment."

The school was thoughtfully transformed into welcoming spaces for all who attended. One side of the building featured games and interactive activities, creating a fun and engaging atmosphere for students and families. The gym served as a gathering space with food available for families to enjoy together, while another area of the school was organized for community members to select donated items, including toys, clothing, canned goods, and books.

The pride shown by the scholars and the collective effort of the school community made the evening truly special and reinforced the impact students can have when learning is connected to real-world purpose.

## Early Literacy Summit



Thank you to everyone who joined us for the Early Literacy Summit on December 17, 2025! The day was a powerful example of what can happen when educators come together around a shared commitment to early literacy.

Throughout the summit, participants engaged in meaningful conversations and hands-on learning focused on strengthening early literacy outcomes. Educators explored the Early Literacy component of the Ohio School Report Card, examined student data to identify areas of need, and discussed high-yield instructional strategies that can be implemented immediately in classrooms and schools.

The willingness of attendees to bring real data, ask thoughtful questions, and collaborate openly made the experience both practical and impactful.

Thank you again for investing your time, expertise, and energy. We look forward to continuing this work together and supporting your efforts to advance early literacy across our schools and communities.

## Sandra Harris on Purpose, Positivity, and Impact



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 Sandra Harris, School Improvement Representative.

### What originally drew you to a career in education?

I discovered, even at an early age, that learning felt meaningful only when it could be shared. I loved helping classmates, especially younger students understand directions, I enjoyed reading aloud, and pretending to "teach" at home with notebooks and stuffed animals lined up like a classroom. School wasn't just a place I attended; it was a place where I felt purposeful.

Becoming an educator was not a sudden decision, it was the natural result of a lifelong desire to be effective. What began as a childhood dream became a mission, a profession rooted in purpose.

### What motivates you to come to work every day?

As the years passed, that early interest grew into a clear sense of direction. Teachers became role models, not only because of what they taught, but because of how they made me feel. I noticed the impact that a caring educator could have. That impact motivated me as a child and continues to motivate me as an adult and is my 'why' for coming to work every day. I learned many years ago that, "It's not always what you say, but how you make a person feel!"

### What do you enjoy most about your role at BCHF?

Having the means and opportunity to support, encourage, change confidence, influence patience and open doors for all learners, especially struggling learners, is what I enjoy most about my role at BCHF.

### How do you define your "why"? Is there a particular moment that reinforced it?

Balancing high expectations during tough times can be stressful, but I consciously reconnect to my "why" during those challenging times with the mindset of a sense of purpose. I am by no means perfect, however I always show up 100% with a positive and cheerful outlook because I understand that the long-term impact of my work is the goal. I remove "me," from the scenario because the service that I perform is not about me. Through my work at BCHF, I have learned to be a servant leader by understanding that leadership is not about authority or titles, but about service, trust, and impact..

### How do you hope to continue growing in your role?

I will continue to grow and evolve in my current role by continuing to put our mission first, believing that when individuals are supported and uplifted, our schools thrive. The inspiration that drives me the most is the simple word, "positivity." The positivity in a smile! The positivity in a kind act! The positivity in doing the right thing for the right reason! The positivity in wishing the best for others and supporting each other!

### What is a quote or mantra you live by?

We all have heard the mantra, "hurt people hurt people," I live by the mantra. "Empowered people empower others," which inspires me through my daily life and daily work.

Grounded in the belief that empowered people empower others, Sandra's "why" reminds us that when we lead with purpose, positivity, and service, the impact ripples far beyond ourselves.

Sandra leaves us with a challenge: *"I challenge you to imagine a world where people unmistakably treat others, the way that they want to be unmistakably treated! Imagine!"*

## January Compliance Update

HB 96 (Budget Bill) included a new law requiring all businesses and district schools to create a cybersecurity program. The Ohio Auditor of State recently indicated that they interpret that the new law *does* apply to community schools. Therefore, by July 1, 2026 the school boards will need to adopt a written program plan that includes assessment of critical functions and associated cybersecurity risks, impacts of a breach, mechanisms to detect threats, procedures for incident response, and employee training. We would suggest schools consult with their legal counsel to develop this plan.

### [Ohio HB 96: New Cybersecurity Requirements for Public Entities | CyberOhio](#)

Under this new law, each **political subdivision's legislative authority** shall adopt a "cybersecurity program" that safeguards the entity's data, information technology, and information technology resources to ensure availability, confidentiality, and integrity. See Ohio Rev. Code § 9.64 (C).

This means the political subdivision legislative body (county commissioners, township trustees, city council, etc.) should pass a resolution adopting a cyber program. These resolutions can look like a statement of intent to align with Ohio Rev. Code § 9.64 (C). **Note:** It is best practice not to include specific program information in a public resolution that could give cyber attackers information that may help them target your systems.

The program shall be consistent with generally accepted best practices for cybersecurity, such as the NIST Cybersecurity Framework and the CIS Controls. A cyber program may include, but is not limited to, the following components:

- Identify and address the critical functions and cybersecurity risks of the political subdivision.
- Identify the potential impacts of a cybersecurity breach.
- Specify mechanisms to detect potential threats and cybersecurity events.
- Specify procedures for the political subdivision to establish communication channels, analyze incidents, and take actions to contain cybersecurity incidents.
- Establish procedures for the repair of infrastructure impacted by a cybersecurity incident and the maintenance of security after the incident.
- Establish cybersecurity training requirements for all employees. The frequency, duration, and detail of which shall correspond to the duties of each employee.
  - Annual training provided by the state and the [Ohio Persistent Cyber Initiative \(O-PCI\)](#) program of the Ohio Cyber Range Institute satisfies the training requirements. The O-PCI program, delivered by the Ohio Cyber Range Institute, includes online, hybrid, and in-person modules tailored to various types of organizations, ranging from small to large, and from rural to urban areas. The program is funded by the [State and Local Cybersecurity Grant Program](#). O-PCI operates at the organizational level and does not currently offer training to individuals.
  - For a bite-sized start to O-PCI training, see the [Cyber Frontline First Aid Kit \(CFFAK\)](#).

Political subdivisions should adopt a cybersecurity program that is tailored to the unique environment/needs of their entity. There is no one-size-fits-all template or policy that will be effective for everyone. [NIST](#), [CIS](#), and [CISA](#) provide extensive resources to help entities establish a robust cyber program.

See the [Auditor of State Bulletin 2025-007: Adoption of Cybersecurity Program](#)

As always, please reach out to your Compliance Representative with any questions.

## School Highlights

**Bennett Venture Academy** hosted their annual gingerbread house event on the last day of school before winter break. Families joined their children in the classroom to create gingerbread houses together, while Ms. Danielle welcomed community partner Kiddie Kollege to take part in the celebration. Parents also enjoyed visiting the Christmas Boutique hosted by PSA, featuring handmade items and festive stocking stuffers. The day was filled with connection, creativity, and community. An unforgettable way to close out the semester!





Congratulations to Gretchen, Makylah, Zakirah, and Jayonna on completing their in-person STNA program at [Focus Learning Academy Southwest](#), under the direction of VIP Academy. Their hard work and dedication truly paid off, and this is a milestone worth applauding.

Next up: STNA clinicals and preparation for the state STNA exam!



[Imagine Schools of Akron](#) kindergarteners stole the show with their Virtual Christmas Concert, spreading holiday cheer! Whether families tuned in from the couch or listened from the kitchen, the joy and excitement of the season truly shined through.



Each student at [The L. Hollingsworth School for the Talented and Gifted](#) received a brand-new book to take home and keep - just for the joy of reading! Here's a glimpse into Miss Finney's 4th grade class, diving into their new stories and embracing the love of reading.



## Upcoming Events

Celebrate! It's a great New Year! Let us help you kick off the year with an emphasis on learning and professional collaboration.

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

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**THE 3 Rs OF CLASSROOM MANAGEMENT: ROUTINES, RELATIONSHIPS, AND RESULTS –**

**January 8, 2026 – 4:00 to 5:30 P.M. – Online via Zoom**

Effective classroom management is more than a set of rules—it's the intentional design of a learning environment where students feel safe, supported, and ready to engage. In this session, we will explore the essential components of a well-managed classroom, including proactive routines, positive behavior systems, and relationship-centered strategies that build trust and community. Participants will examine real-world scenarios, reflect on their current practices, and learn concrete techniques to enhance transitions, minimize disruptions, and maintain instructional momentum. You'll walk away with customizable tools, sample procedures, and practical language you can implement immediately to create a classroom culture that maximizes learning time and supports student success.

**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 teaching and learning that benefit all students.

**SPECIAL EDUCATION LEADERSHIP NETWORK: Coffee Table Talk #1 (Rescheduled) – January 14, 2026 – 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'll kick things off with brief updates from the facilitator, followed by open, collective learning grounded in real-world challenges. Together, we'll explore a shared problem of practice and use that as a springboard for rich discussion and collaborative problem-solving. Whether you're 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.

**COHORT: Multilingual Learners – January 15, 2026 – 3:30 to 5:00 P.M. – Online Via Zoom**

Looking for a space to connect and grow with others who support linguistically diverse students? The Multilingual Learner Cohort is a relaxed, teacher-driven community of practice that meets quarterly over Zoom. Each session is shaped by the group, so we welcome all voices to learn, bring ideas, or even co-facilitate! Whether you're a classroom teacher, specialist, or administrator, you'll gain strategies, build relationships, and stay inspired throughout the year.

**AUTHENTIC CLASSROOMS: Engaging Students through Real Life Work – January 20, 2026 – 4:00 to 5:30 P.M. - Online Via Zoom**

Why are so many students disengaged? Might we be able to teach them to INVEST in their own learning? If so, how? Students engage and even rise to the level of "investment" when they see life relevance in their learning. Learn from some examples of authentic, life-embedded classroom activities and share out some of your own! This session is all about "making it real" as we learn!

**COHORT: TENACIOUS TEACHING 3: Mid-Year Moves; Using Mid-Year Data to Prepare for Second Semester – January 22, 2026 – 4:00 to 5:30 P.M. – Online Via Zoom**

The halfway point of the school year is a powerful moment to pause, reflect, and refocus. In this session, educators will learn how to analyze formative and benchmark assessment data to identify student learning needs and make strategic instructional adjustments. Participants will explore practical methods for grouping students, targeting skill gaps, and planning responsive lessons that build on student progress. Whether you're working toward growth goals or preparing for spring assessments, this session will help you turn data into action for a strong second half of the year.

**COHORT: Workforce Literacy 3: Crafting High-Impact, Real-World Activities – January 27, 2026 – 3:00 to 4:00 P.M. - Online Via Zoom**

How do you translate workforce literacy concepts into engaging classroom assignments? This session dives deep into the nuts and bolts of curriculum design. We will analyze examples of effective, authentic assignments used in previous programs, providing you with practical blueprints for your own work. The core focus will be on creating activities that meaningfully integrate reading, writing, speaking, and listening skills, mirroring the communication demands of actual workplaces. You will learn strategies for developing tasks that are not just about careers, but that genuinely require students to perform like industry professionals. We'll close with our networked improvement community where you can adapt these examples and begin building your next career-connected unit.

**COHORT: Literacy/Dyslexia: Is there Anything New Under the Sun?** – January 28, 2026 – 4:00 to 5:30 P.M. - Online Via Zoom

Many of the service strategies we rely on can feel repetitive and may not always align with the unique needs of our students. In this session, we will revisit proven, time-tested approaches while also exploring innovative methods. Our goal is to design instructional plans that are purposeful, adaptable, and effective in meeting diverse student needs.

**USING DEEP DATA TO PLAN AND DELIVER EFFECTIVE INTERVENTION** – January 29, 2026 – 4:00 to 5:30 P.M. - Online Via Zoom

Assessment and accountability data tell us a lot more than how well our school performs. Assessment and accountability data, including performance indices and item analyses, provide a roadmap for services at the heart of our mission -- educating students! Learn how to use data indicators to target schoolwide needs, meet specific student learning needs, and deliver effective, tiered intervention programs. We have the data. Let's use it!

**FALLING FORWARD: TURNING FAILURE INTO MOMENTUM** – February 5, 2026 – 4:00 TO 5:30 P.M. - Online Via Zoom

Mistakes aren't obstacles--when leveraged well, they are catalysts for deep learning. This session explores how educators can create conditions where students view errors as valuable data rather than failures. We'll discuss the psychology behind mistake-making, including growth mindset principles, brain science, and the role of productive struggle. Through interactive examples and discussion, participants will learn how to model reflective thinking, design tasks that encourage risk-taking, and implement feedback systems that guide students toward improvement. By the end of this session, you'll have a set of strategies to help students analyze their missteps, revise their thinking, and build resilience and confidence in their learning journey.

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

**BUCKEYE COMMUNITY HOPE FOUNDATION**

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