



MARCH 2026

# SPONSOR UPDATE



## MISSION

Through strategic authorizing and partnership, we develop educational communities of achievement through innovation, hope, and support.

## VISION

We envision a rich ecosystem of community schools ensuring ALL students and families have access to a high-quality public education.

## Annual Needs Assessment Open Until March 15

BCHF's Annual Needs Assessment is now open through **March 15, 2026**. This is your annual opportunity to shape our work plan and technical assistance for the coming school year. If you have already completed the needs assessment, *we thank you*. If you have yet to complete the needs assessment – it's a short survey—please do so as soon as possible at the following link:

<https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/JNYBX8J>

THANK YOU FOR YOUR TIME AND INPUT!

## Student Writing Challenge Extended

Due to the abundant amount of snow days this year, we will extend the deadline for the BCHF Writing Challenge one week to **March 22, 2026**. Please see the link below for the information that was distributed earlier in the school year regarding this year's Writing Challenge. We encourage all students to participate - there's still time to get involved, and it's excellent preparation for the OST Writing portion of the ELA test!

[Writing Challenge](#)

# Learning Differences in Reading, Writing and Arithmetic, OH MY!

By Sandra Harris, School Improvement Representative

Think of a time when you wanted to ask for assistance but didn't feel comfortable in doing so! Now, think of a moment when you just needed extra time to perform a given task, but as you looked around, everyone else completed it! Now, think of how it made you FEEL! Did it make you feel "less than" when individuals in your proximity understood the same information and were able to complete the same task immediately? It's not what you said or didn't say, but how you made me FEEL! It's not always what we say to students, but it is always how we make students FEEL! Encounters such as this will have a negative or positive mental impact on a student for the rest of their life!

## **Words Matter:**

Special Education or Special Needs both have a negative connotation towards our students and families, as well as using labels such as (low/high functioning). Start today with more inclusive terms focusing on support, inclusion, and self-esteem such as: Additional Support Needs (ASN), Learning Differences and Exceptional Student Education. Terms such as these promote respect and focus on the individual, not just their challenges, recognizing that respectful, precise language empowers students and fosters true belonging.

## **Reinforcing how Exceptional Student Education (ESE) supports our students:**

ESE provides specially designed instruction and support for students with disabilities and gifted students, adapting education to meet individual needs beyond the standard curriculum, often through services like Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) to help students reach their full potential in academics, life skills, and career transitions.

## **What it is:**

**Inclusive Approach:** ESE (also known as Special Education) serves learners who have unique learning profiles due to disabilities (learning, physical, emotional, intellectual) or giftedness. **Tailored Support:** It involves modifying lessons, providing assistive technology, and offering related services (like speech therapy) to ensure students can access education effectively.

## **Who it serves (Exceptional Learners):**

Students with learning disabilities, autism, ADHD, communication disorders, emotional/behavioral issues, and physical/sensory impairments. Gifted students with superior intellectual development or high-performance capabilities.

## **Key Components:**

**Individualized Education Program (IEP):** A legal document outlining goals, services, and accommodations for a student with a disability. **Transition Services:** Programs (like internships) that help older students with disabilities develop job skills and independence for adult life. **Assistive Technology:** Tools and materials to help students overcome barriers.

## **Purpose:**

To maximize a student's functioning and success by adapting education to their specific strengths and challenges, ensuring they can participate in school and life.

## **Exceptional Student Education Supports in Reading:**

Supporting exceptional learners in reading, use multisensory, explicit instruction focusing on phonics and background knowledge, provide assistive tech (audiobooks, text-to-speech), differentiate materials (shorter texts, visual aids, summaries), build confidence with positive reinforcement, allow extra time, and use flexible grouping like literature circles to foster engagement and peer support, ensuring a safe space for mistakes.

## **Exceptional Student Education Supports in Writing:**

Supporting exceptional learners in writing involves a multifaceted approach that is individualized, motivating, and integrates effective strategies and technology to address their specific needs.

## *Key strategies include:*

- Foundational Strategies

- Provide explicit, systematic instruction
- Make it meaningful and engaging
- Offer alternatives to handwriting
- Creating a supportive environment
- The Writing Process; pre-writing and planning, drafting, and composing, revising, and editing
- Assistive Technology and Tools
- Word processors with spell-check and grammar checks
- Word prediction software to reduce keystrokes
- Speech-to-text software for students with physical writing difficulties
- Digital dictionaries and thesauruses to expand vocabulary

### **Exceptional Student Education Supports in Mathematics:**

Supporting exceptional learners in math involves explicit instruction, hands-on manipulatives, real-world connections, and fostering a growth mindset, tailoring approaches for both struggling students (breaking down steps, using visual aids, repeated practice) and gifted students (deep dives into topics, complex problems, real-world applications) to build conceptual understanding, confidence, and engagement.

### **Words Matter:**

While supporting students through their Exceptional Student Education Plan journey, words matter immensely as they shape perceptions, create inclusive or exclusionary environments, and impact student dignity.

### **References**

A guide to the Individualized Education Program. (2000). [Washington, DC]: Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services, U.S. Dept. of Education: Office of Educational Research and Improvement, Educational Resources Information Center.

Brittany Hott, Laura Isbell, Teresa Montani Year: 2014 URL: [https://council-for-learningdisabilities.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/12/Math\\_Disabilities\\_Support.pdf](https://council-for-learningdisabilities.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/12/Math_Disabilities_Support.pdf).

Hallahan, Daniel P., Kauffman, James M., Pullen, Paige C. (2009). Exceptional Learners: An Introduction to Special Education, 11th ed. (11).

## **STEM Excellence Shines at Noble Academy Euclid**



Curiosity and creativity were front and center as sixth and seventh grade students at Noble Academy Euclid proudly presented their work at this year's Science Fair. After weeks of research, experimentation, and preparation, students unveiled projects spanning a wide range of scientific topics. From hands-on investigations to detailed visual presentations, each display reflected thoughtful use of the scientific method and a genuine excitement for discovery.

Students confidently walked judges and visitors through their hypotheses, procedures, data analysis, and conclusions. Their ability to explain complex ideas and respond to thoughtful questions

demonstrated not only strong content knowledge, but also growing confidence and communication skills.

To elevate the experience, the school welcomed two outside judges with professional backgrounds in scientific careers. Their participation added authenticity to the event and gave students valuable exposure to real-world applications of STEM fields.

Looking ahead, Noble Academy Euclid is preparing to expand the event even further. Beginning next year, the traditional Science Fair will evolve into a full STEM Fair, providing opportunities for students to explore science, technology, engineering, and mathematics in greater depth.

## Focus Learning Academy Soccer Team Wins Championship



When a group of Focus Learning Academy students asked if they could start a soccer team, Mr. Okon, Mr. McVey and Mr. Syracuse didn't hesitate to say yes. What followed was something pretty special.

The team was made up almost entirely of international students from countries that love and play soccer - and it showed, They won nine out of ten games on their way to a championship season.

But the real story isn't just about the wins. Charlie, the only student from Focus East and the only player with limited soccer experience, joined the team not knowing quite what to expect. What he found was encouragement at every turn. His teammates, many of whom are English learners and understand what it feels like to be the new or less-experienced person in the room, welcomed him in and made sure he felt like he belonged.

The dedication was undeniable. Players committed to weekly practices, and Charlie even traveled two and a half hours just to show up. Teammates helped one another with rides whenever they could. They weren't just building skills; they were building trust.

"I learned to say phrases like 'pass the ball' in students' first languages," Mr. Syracuse shared. "Everyone worked so well together."

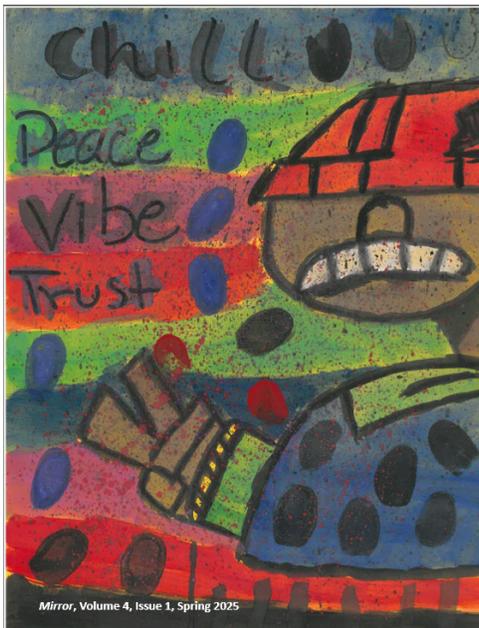
That sense of unity carried them all the way through the season. To celebrate their championship run, the team attended a playoff match between the Columbus Crew and FC Cincinnati - a fitting way to wrap up a season built on teamwork and shared passion.

"We're so proud of the team," Mr. McVey said. "They came together and supported one another in a very special way."

And that's exactly what made this season unforgettable.



## Great Western Academy Awarded Magazine Honor



Above: Winning 2025 Magazine Cover

Great Western Academy's student literary arts magazine, *Mirror*, has been awarded the highest distinction by the National Council of Teachers of English as part of its Recognizing Excellence in Art and Literary Magazines (REALM) contest. This marks the first time *Mirror* has earned the First Class designation. In previous years, the publication received Honorable Mention, Distinguished, and Excellent ratings.

The REALM contest received 456 student magazine submissions from schools in 44 states, Washington, D.C., and six countries. Of those, 135 magazines (from middle schools, high schools, and colleges) were awarded the REALM First Class distinction.

The REALM program celebrates outstanding student-produced literary magazines created with the guidance of educators and is designed to encourage schools to develop publications that honor the craft of writing and artistic expression.

Great Western Academy's achievement reflects the creativity, dedication, and collaboration of its student editors, writers, and advisors. Congratulations!

## Maureen Barbessi's "Why" in Education

As part of our ongoing strategic planning work with The National Charter Schools Institute, our Education Division has been taking time to reconnect with our "why"—the personal purpose that drives each of us in education. This reflection has reminded us that behind every role and every initiative are powerful stories rooted in service to students and schools. We're excited to share those stories through our Sponsor Updates.



This month, we're proud to feature Maureen Barbessi, Director of Compliance. Maureen has a background in business, holding a Bachelor's degree in business administration from Youngstown State University. She began her career working in marketing and sales, and later became connected to education after assisting schools and non-profits with their fundraising efforts. She started at BCHF in 2010 as a Compliance Representative, and was promoted to her current role in 2023.

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

The ability to make a meaningful difference is what motivates me every day. Compliance may not be the most glamorous part of education, but it is essential. It provides the foundation on which strong, effective schools are built.

Our compliance team ensures that schools are not only aware of local, state, and federal requirements, but that they truly understand those laws and how to implement them with fidelity. Over the years, we have seen a clear and consistent connection between strong compliance practices and strong academic outcomes. When schools operate within a solid regulatory framework, they create stability and structure that allow students and educators to thrive.

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

What I enjoy most about my role with BCHF is the people. Our compliance team and school improvement team are not only exceptional at what they do—they are truly wonderful human beings. I also have the privilege of meeting and collaborating with so many passionate individuals at the schools we sponsor.

Across BCHF and our partner schools, we share a common purpose and move in the same direction with a student-first mindset. That collective commitment is what makes the work meaningful and keeps me motivated every day.

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

My “why” is rooted in making a difference—whether at the school level or within my own team. I want the people around me to feel their importance, and I strive to create that through sharing knowledge, offering encouragement, and leading with genuine kindness. When others feel supported and empowered, they are able to bring their best selves to the work, and that is where real impact begins.

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

The Starfish Story by Loren Eiseley always grounds me when I feel overwhelmed. It reminds me that I can't control every situation or solve every challenge—but I can make a difference for at least one person each day. And when I do that, I've succeeded.

**What have you learned about yourself through your work? How do you hope to continue growing in your role?**

I've learned that I am more resilient than I once believed. When difficult situations arise, I've found that I can regulate my emotions, stay grounded, and problem-solve when it matters most. Each challenge has shown me that I'm capable of navigating complexity with calm, clarity, and purpose.

Although I've been in my current role for two years, I know I still have a lot to learn. Each person I work with brings specialized knowledge and unique strengths, and I want to continue learning from every one of them. I'm committed to developing my leadership skills so I can contribute even more to BCHF as a whole and support the collective work we do for students.

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

“Positive things come to positive people.” — Sarah Beeny. I believe that optimism is a mindset, one that shapes how we show up each day. The more positivity you put into the world, the more it comes back to you. Choosing to lead with encouragement, gratitude, and a forward-looking attitude not only strengthens relationships—it creates an environment where people feel supported and capable.

**Who inspires you in your work?**

The entire compliance team inspires me. I have the privilege of working with a group of people who consistently contribute to the good of our team and the entire Education Division of BCHF. Their

dedication, collaboration, and commitment to doing what's right for schools and students motivate me every day and remind me how fortunate I am to work alongside them.

### **Who are you outside of work?**

Outside of BCHF, I enjoy exploring nature—admiring trees and flowers, obsessing over birds and butterflies, and always striving to capture the perfect photo. Being outdoors brings me a sense of calm and curiosity that balances the pace of my work. I am married and have two amazing adult daughters who still have my heart. My favorite days are the ones when the four of us are together. Those moments remind me of what matters most and keep me grounded in gratitude.

Through her steady leadership and unwavering focus on people, Maureen helps create the strong foundation our schools need to serve students well. We are grateful for the care, resilience, and positivity she brings to BCHF each day, and proud to highlight the purpose that drives her work.

## **Important DEW Professional Development Offerings**

### **New Teacher Institute**

The Council for Exceptional Children-Ohio Unit has partnered with the Ohio Department of Education and Workforce to provide mentoring to any new teacher in Ohio. Teachers need support and guidance now, more than ever. The mentoring ties relevant evidence-based practices and resources to instructional practices and Ohio's Integrated MTSS model. Joining the Institute opens a door to connections, resources, CEC membership, and exploration of all CEC resources.

Review the [flyer](#), apply, and plan to join for the second cohort of the New Teacher Institute!

### **The Basics of Special Education Video Series**

The Basics of Special Education video series is relevant to new Intervention Specialists, teachers, and school leaders. The series includes *The Basics of an IEP*, *The Basics of an Intervention Assistance Team*, *The Basics of an Evaluation Team Report*, and *The Basics of Progress Monitoring*. The series may be accessed at: [The Basics of Special Education Video Series | Ohio Department of Education and Workforce](#)

### **Drop Out Recovery Report Card Trainings**

This training, offered through DEW's Report Card Training Hub, will familiarize educators with a deep dive into the calculations utilized in the Components for the Dropout Prevention and Recovery Report Cards:

- High School Test Passage Rate
- Progress
- Annual Measurable Objectives
- 4-Year through 8 Year Graduation Rates

Session dates and times:

- Thursday, March 5, 2026 12:30-2:30p.m. | [3/5 Meeting Link](#)
- Wednesday, March 11, 2026 9:30-11:30a.m. | [3/11 Meeting Link](#)

For more information visit The Report Card Training Hub and click on Upcoming Trainings: [Report Card Training | Ohio Department of Education and Workforce](#)

## **March Compliance Update**

### **Food Service Licenses**

Food service licenses expired statewide on March 1st. Updated licenses for schools and vendors/caterers should be uploaded to Epicenter and posted in your buildings.

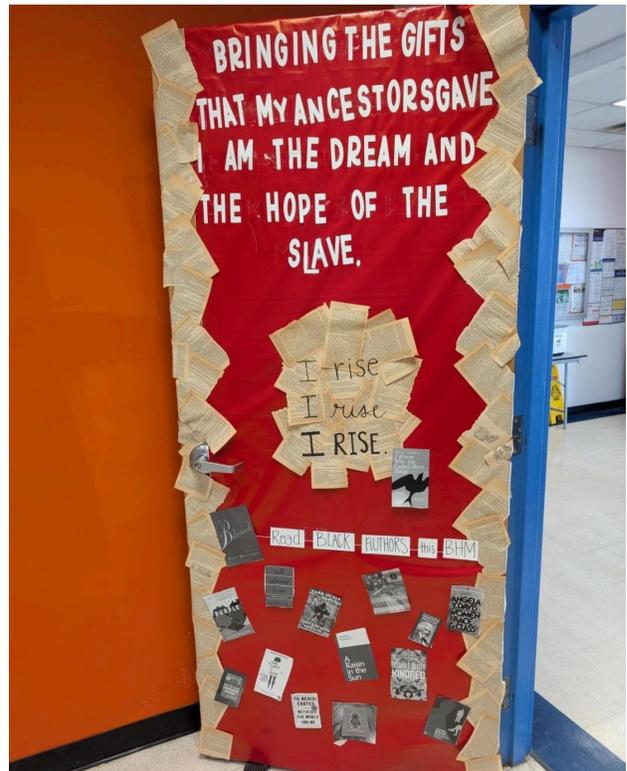
### **Board Member Annual Training Requirements**

Board members are required to complete 2 hours of board training per school year as stated in the sponsor contract. This board training must include Public Records and Open Meeting Law training as required by Ohio Revised Code (see [Section 3314.037 - Ohio Revised Code | Ohio Laws](#)). The required training can be completed by any of the following options:

- On demand or live training sessions through the Ohio Attorney General
- **Sunshine Laws Training Schedule - Ohio Attorney General Dave Yost;**
- On demand through the Ohio Auditor of State:
- **Sunshine Laws Training Schedule - Ohio Attorney General Dave Yost;**
- BCHF virtual spring Governing Board Member Training April 11, 2026 (registration opening soon);
- Attorney licensed in Ohio who serve as legal counsel for or are employed by community schools, sponsors, or operators.

## School Highlights

Celebrating culture, creativity, and pride at **The Academy for Urban Scholars Youngstown**. Students decorated doors as part of their celebrations of Black History Month. Their decorations brought stories, leaders, and legacies to life throughout the halls, showcasing the voices and talent of scholars.





Horizon Science Academy Westerville hosted a VEX IQ Robotics Competition, welcoming 21 teams from across the state for a full day of STEM excitement and collaboration. Students, families, and community members filled the building as teams competed in a series of robotics challenges that showcased problem-solving, teamwork, and engineering skills.



Black excellence took center stage at the Legacy & Excellence Black History Month Expo at Summit Academy Columbus. Open to students and their families, staff members, sponsors and invited

community guests, the expo was designed to showcase Black excellence across industries in real time, as well as from historical and cultural perspectives.



## Upcoming Events

March presents an exceptional opportunity for you to “Spring” into growth and collaboration through BCHF’s professional development offerings. You are invited to explore and participate in a diverse array of workshops and training sessions designed specifically to meet the evolving needs of our schools and their educators. Register for sessions via the link in the title, or go to BCHF’s Professional Learning Opportunities Catalog, [available here](#).

### **WRITE WITH CONFIDENCE: MASTERING OST WRITING IN GRADES 3-5 – March 2, 2026 – 4:00 to 5:30 P.M. – Online via Zoom**

Preparing young writers for the Ohio State Tests requires clarity, structure, and a solid understanding of what high-quality responses look like. This session provides a deep dive into the OST expectations for grades 3-5, including how the rubrics break down organization, development, conventions, and the use of textual evidence. Participants will examine sample student responses, identify common strengths and misconceptions, and explore kid-friendly language that helps younger learners internalize key writing skills. We'll look at effective mini-lessons, graphic organizers, modeling techniques, and strategies for helping students elaborate with clarity and purpose. Teachers will leave with ready-to-use resources, scaffolded writing support, and confidence in how to guide students through both opinion and informational writing tasks.

### **DEBUNKING THE TEST: How to Have a Peaceful, Pleasant Testing Season! – March 3, 2026 – 4:00 to 5:30 P.M. – Online via Zoom**

Spring testing season is upon us. Are we prepared? This workshop will examine the process of state and other high stakes testing in the context of teaching and learning. Revisit ideas about how encourage best attitudes and best conditions for testing situations. Discuss organizational strategies. And, most importantly, prepare to discuss testing with your students to encourage a calm, positive, “best effort” mindset.

### **COHORT: Multilingual Learners – March 5, 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.

### **CLEAR, COHERENT AND COMPREHENSIVE: OST WRITING SUCCESS FOR GRADES 6-12 – March 9, 2026 – 4:00 to 5:00 P.M. – Online via Zoom**

Secondary students face increasing demands in OST writing, from synthesizing information across multiple texts to crafting logical, evidence-based arguments. This session provides an in-depth look at what scorers are evaluating-and how to help students meet and exceed those expectations. Participants will analyze mentor texts, explore high-impact approaches for teaching argumentation and

explanatory writing, and learn practical methods for improving organization, elaboration, and precision. We will also address common challenges such as weak evidence integration, unclear reasoning, and formulaic writing. You'll gain strategies for supporting diverse learners, building writing stamina, and using feedback cycles to strengthen student work. By the end of the session, teachers will be equipped with actionable tools, model responses, and classroom routines that drive consistent writing growth.

#### **COHORT: Mathematics 4 – March 10, 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.

#### **10. COHORT: Wired for Success-Executive Functioning in Special Education – March 11, 2026 – 3:30 to 4:30 P.M. – Online via Zoom**

Executive functioning (EF) skills like planning, organization, and self-regulation are often at the root of academic and behavioral challenges for students with disabilities. This session explores how EF difficulties show up in learners with ADHD, autism, and learning disabilities, and how trauma can further impact these skills. Participants will gain practical, trauma-informed strategies to support EF development through direct instruction, co regulation, and classroom routines. Leave with tools to help students build independence, reduce shutdowns, and improve task initiation, while honoring neurodiversity and promoting student success.

#### **COHORT: TENACIOUS TEACHING 4: Finish Strong! Thriving in the Final Quarter of the Year – March 12, 2026 – 4:00 to 5:30 P.M. – Online via Zoom**

The last part of the school year brings unique challenges and powerful opportunities. This session offers practical strategies to help teachers maintain energy, focus, and purpose through the end of the year. Participants will explore ways to sustain student engagement, celebrate growth, manage classroom momentum, and reflect meaningfully on the year's impact. With a focus on wellness, motivation, and intentional closure, this session equips educators to end the year with confidence and clarity- ready to finish strong.

#### **TEACHING KIDS TO REASON – March 17, 2026 – 4:00 to 5:30 P.M. – Online via Zoom**

Reasoning is the cognitive process of drawing conclusions, making decisions, and solving problems. But how do we encourage our students to develop deeper reasoning and thinking skills, skills that will serve them well throughout life? Learn about the kinds of reasoning: Deductive, inductive, abductive, and analogical reasoning. Participants will learn how to incorporate reasoning skills into enjoyable lessons and learning experiences.

#### **TEACH LIKE A CHAMPION 2- A Guide to the Science of Reading – March 18, 2026 – 3:30 to 4:30 P.M. – Online via Zoom**

This is the second session for the book study on Teach Like a Champion's Guide to the Science of Reading. Anyone can attend any session! Attendees who register and attend at least three sessions will receive a copy of the book. In this meeting, we explore two critical comprehension engines. First, we cover Fluency, discussing why a lack of automaticity in reading stalls comprehension at every grade level and then dive into research-based methods to build speed, accuracy, and prosody. Next, we review the Hidden Power of Background Knowledge, arguing that it is the single greatest predictor of reading success. We will share actionable strategies for building the knowledge that underpins complex thinking and makes skills-based learning possible.

#### **COHORT: LEADERSHIP #6 - Resolving Staff Conflict – March 24, 2026 – 3:30 to 5:00 P.M. – Online via Zoom**

Keeping a positive climate among school staff is one of the more daunting tasks of a school leader. But how do you build trust and cohesion among a staff who have diverse opinions, who form cliques, or who even may be in overt conflict with one another? Let's discuss how to build staff cohesion and deal proactively with conflict. School climate has a profound impact on student learning-- bring your best ideas to this discussion! The BCHF Leadership Cohort is a safe place for leader dialogue, problem-solving, and idea sharing. Don't miss out on this important time for YOU as a leader!

#### **JOYFUL RIGOR: Designing Instruction That Lifts, Not Limits – March 26, 2026 – 3:30 to 4:30 P.M. – Online via Zoom**

Teaching students with disabilities should be both challenging and joyful. This session explores how to design instruction that affirms students' identities, engages their intellect, and cultivates deep learning, without sacrificing creativity or connection. Grounded in Gholdy Muhammad's Five Pursuits (Identity, Skill, Intellect, Criticality, and Joy), participants will learn how to shift lessons from compliance-driven to culturally responsive. Through practical examples and hands-on redesigning activities, you'll walk away with tools to create learning experiences that are rigorous, relevant, and rooted in joy.

#### **COHORT: Workforce Literacy 4: Building a Sustainable Program & Growth Strategy – March 31, 2026 – 3:00 to 4:00 P.M. – Online via Zoom**

A successful program is one that endures and evolves. This session is dedicated to the strategic planning required to ensure your Workforce Literacy initiative lasts far beyond its initial year. We'll explore methods for creating institutional buy-in, securing diverse and ongoing resources, and developing a clear growth strategy for expansion across different content areas or grade levels. You will gain actionable insights into how to foster a culture of continuous improvement, integrate your work into school-wide goals, and build a supportive community of practice that fuels long-term success. We'll use our final networked improvement community to develop next-step action plans to ensure your program's sustainability and continued growth.

---

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**

**3021 E DUBLIN GRANVILLE RD.  
COLUMBUS, OH 43231  
(614) 942-2030**

**Get In Touch**



Buckeye Community Hope Foundation | 3021 E Dublin Granville Rd | Columbus, OH 43231 US

[Unsubscribe](#) | [Update Profile](#) | [Constant Contact Data Notice](#)



Try email marketing for free today!