



APRIL 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.

Spring Board Training

[Register Here](#)

Our Spring Board Training is on Saturday, April 11 from 9-10:00 A.M. This training will fulfill the open meetings and public records training requirement for Board members and administrators. Attorney Adam Schira will present the basic concepts of these laws and give rich examples applicable to community schools. Time will be devoted as well for questions from Board members and administrators.

Clarification on Learning Differences in Reading, Writing and Arithmetic, OH MY!

In our March Sponsor Update, we included the article, ***Learning Differences in Reading, Writing and Arithmetic, OH MY!*** The article made suggestions about positive ways to use language that emphasize students' strengths. It also presented suggestions for positive student supports. In Ohio, students eligible for services under an IEP (Individualized Education Program) or 504 Plan are properly termed "students with disabilities," in accordance with the Ohio Operating Standards and Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). These laws also refer to settings where students are served as a continuum of services that include regular classes, special class/learning centers, resource rooms, itinerant services, special schools, and home instruction. We encourage schools to align their terminology with the operating standards and IDEA where possible. And, we thank our schools for their efforts to support all learners.

Serving More Than Food: A BCSS Hero Recognized



At Buckeye Community School Springfield (BCSS), this year's Black History Month celebration took on a deeply personal and heartfelt tone. Students were invited to create art projects highlighting a Black hero in their lives. While many chose to feature well-known historical or cultural figures, one student took a different and meaningful approach.

Jullian, a talented young artist, wondered if his project had to focus on someone famous. When he learned that it didn't, he chose to honor someone he sees as a hero every day: the school's food service leader, Mr. Alan Quisenberry.

Jullian created a striking portrait of Mr. Alan, capturing not just his likeness but the impact he has on the school community. When asked why he chose him, Jullian explained simply, as seen on his art; "I like him, cause he makes sure I never get hungry."

That statement reflects a bond that has grown over time. Both Jullian and Mr. Alan have been part of BCSS since it opened just two years ago, and through daily interactions, they've built a genuine friendship. For Jullian, Mr. Alan isn't just someone who serves meals; he's someone who cares, shows up consistently, and makes a difference.

Mr. Alan's role at BCSS goes far beyond the cafeteria. Each day, he prepares fresh, healthy, and delicious meals for students and visitors alike, helping ensure that everyone is nourished and ready to learn. His work is rooted in care and connection, something he clearly values.

When asked what it meant to be chosen as Jullian's hero, Mr. Alan shared, "It felt really nice. You get to know these kids, what they like and want to eat. You get to form a relationship with them. It's just nice to get to be a part of their day."

That sense of connection is at the heart of BCSS. Walking through the school, it's clear that it's more than just a place for learning, it's a community. Staff and students alike look out for one another, united by a shared goal of making sure everyone has what they need to succeed and feel supported.

Jullian's project is a powerful reminder that heroes aren't always found in history books or on television screens. Sometimes, they're right in front of us - serving meals, offering kindness, and making sure no one goes without. Through his art, Jullian not only celebrated Black History Month, but also highlighted the everyday impact of a local hero who helps make BCSS feel like home.

Being smart is relative. As a teacher, I always wanted my students *to be and to feel* smart and savvy. But our operational definitions of “smart” are ever-changing. The Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT), a standard measure of “smartness,” changed dramatically in 2024. Check it out—if you took it over 10 years ago, it is much harder, and it is all digital! Frequently used intelligence and academic achievement tests are also periodically re-normed. As times change, different societal needs and values determine “What is smart?”

Approximately ten years ago, Ohio redefined “smart” for all K-12 students in public schools. Ohio’s “new” standards and their aligned assessments (next-generation Ohio State Tests) diverged from traditional ideas and norms. The standards did not define what students *were doing*, for example what a typically educated third grader knows. The new standards defined what students *“should be doing.”* The definition of “smart” shifted to “being prepared for the future.”

Ten years later, educators still struggle with the shift. What does it take for our students to be “smart” today? “Smart” extends beyond basic education and factual knowledge. Mathematics and science students need to comprehend and apply conceptual underpinnings of these disciplines. Students in English Language Arts need to master the foundations of learning to read and write early, so they may apply these skills to learning content. Students in social studies need to be able to view history in context, interpret data, and apply knowledge to current events. And all students need to master technology. Knowledge, critical thinking, application, technology skill, and reasoning cut across all subject areas of Ohio’s learning standards today.

Take a practice state test and you will see. On Ohio’s fifth-grade science test, for example, students read a chart and determine which species will increase or decline if the population of salmon declines. The question presents a level of uncertainty; there is more than one correct answer. Students must *use* the knowledge they gain from the chart and must make accurate entries into the chart using technology (ODEW, 2025).

We as educators want our students to be smart and prepared for the world they will join as adults. To do so, our operational definitions of teaching and learning must keep up with the times. Specifically, we must ensure early mastery of foundational skills, wise technology use, development of critical thinking and reasoning strategies, and increased student agency in learning. These components are simple to understand but more difficult to act on.

1. Early mastery of foundational skills. Despite controversy surrounding it, the Third Grade Guarantee is based on strong research. It is *urgent* for young students to acquire basic literacy and numeracy skills early in their school careers. Without this foundation, students struggle and continue to fall behind. Schools must have strong programs in place for young students that include high-level core instruction and targeted interventions. Students who enter school without the readiness skills need more practice and exposure to high quality instruction, not less. Foundational skills need to be practiced in authentic contexts (Rablin, 2025).
2. Wise technology use. Technology is everywhere but its wise use makes students “savvy.” Students must be able to use technology purposefully and selectively as a tool for learning.
3. Critical thinking and reasoning strategies. Students today have access to abundant information. They need to be able to sift through it, thinking critically about information, claims, and arguments. Weighing information against its supportive evidence is a clear focus in Ohio learning standards. Critical thinking is also a life skill, one that enables students to make smart decisions about their own goals and plans. Employers rate critical thinking at the top of the list for desirable job applicants. To be “smart,” students must analyze complicated situations, make decisions, and propose solutions.
4. Increased student agency. Educators are hesitant to allow students to struggle. The operational definition of learning today, though, includes the ability to struggle through problems with little or minimal help. Unfortunately, the average student in a U.S. classroom will work on a challenging mathematics problem for just a few minutes. Fearing failure or the embarrassment of an incorrect answer, too many students become quiet or passive in their engagement in learning. To be prepared, our students must invest in their own learning, set goals, and pursue knowledge on their own. Educators assume the role of teaching students how to learn, not what to learn. Educational experiences must then allow for guided choice, independent study and research, and student-led activities.

One of my family members is “smart” because he can recite many passages from classical literature, often in different languages. Another can remember everyone’s phone numbers, including those from

twenty years ago. These skills, though fascinating, are not as “smart” as they used to be. Educators today must use a larger keyboard than an array of basic skills and useful facts. We must prepare our students for today’s definitions of “smart” and for the changing definitions yet to come.

References:

Ohio Department of Education and Workforce (2025). *Spring 2025 released test items and scoring guides*. [Item Release Scoring Guides](#).

Rabin, T. (2025). Four ways to guide disengaged students to try again. *Edutopia*, [Guiding Disengaged Students to Try Again](#) | Edutopia.

Hamilton County Math & Science Academy Hosts "Black History is American History"

Hamilton County Mathematics and Science Academy's (HCMSA) Black History Month production was a powerful and inspiring experience, with the theme "Black History is American History."

The production showcased the creativity, confidence, and cultural pride of their students while reinforcing HCMSA's commitment to academic excellence, identity development, and community engagement. Students across all grade levels participated in a dynamic performance that blended music, poetry, dance, and dramatic storytelling to honor the legacy, resilience and achievement of Black leaders throughout history.

Families, staff, and community filled the auditorium, creating an atmosphere of celebration and collective pride. This production served as a shining example of HCMSA's mission to empower students academically, socially, and culturally.



Dr. Zoe Plotnick on Tarot, Pokémancy, and the Art of Interpretation



Photo: Dr. Zoe Plotnick (left) and OCTELA President Darla Jackson (right)

The Ohio Council of Teachers of English Language Arts (OCTELA), a state affiliate of NCTE, hosted its 2026 conference on March 6-7 at the Cherry Valley Hotel. This year's conference theme was a celebration of the interconnectedness between literacy and the visual and performing arts, featuring presentations that highlighted action research and practices grounded in the use of art as a medium to engage students and foster a love for literacy. Keynote speakers included artist/illustrator Rachelle Baker, graphic novelist Bianca Xunise, educator Dr. Alfred Thompson and poet Siaara Freeman.

Dr. Zoe Plotnick, who serves the OCTELA Board as TESOL Chair, presented a session exploring how art and visual imagery can offer an accessible point of entry for students to playfully practice drawing inferences, synthesizing text-to-self and text-to-text connections, and other cognitive skills that are the foundation of literary analysis. Her session, which was titled "This Card is You: Tarot, Pokémancy, and the Art of Interpretation," introduced approaches that invite students to approach literary theory with symbolic play, visual analysis, and recognition of the everyday archetypes that help stories resonate across time and culture.

[View the Presentation](#)

Ideas & Takeaways for the Classroom

1. What is going on in this picture?
2. What do you see that makes you say that?
3. What more can we find?

- How do colors, lighting, brightness, etc. set the mood here?
- What is Cleffa's relationship to the viewer?
- Which "everyday archetypes" are present?

ARCHETYPES =

- character types
- themes
- symbols
- plot devices
- other recurring patterns in literature

Stan Nicol Shares His "Why"

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 Stan Nicol, Data Analysis and School Accountability.



What motivates you to come to work every day?

I do not feel like I need motivation to go to work every day. I enjoy the work that I do for Buckeye Hope and see my work as a chance to continue to grow.

What do you enjoy most about your role at BCHF?

When the work I do has a positive impact on our schools.

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

My “why” is my goal of providing a data service to our schools which they may not be able to do internally. The challenge is providing a service which meets the needs of our variety of schools in the Buckeye Hope portfolio.

How do you reconnect with your "why" during tough times?

When I hear a school leader tell me how impactful my data reports are it encourages me to continue my work.

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

I have learned that I can have a positive impact with our sponsored schools. I hope to incorporate more State level data within our portfolio data.

Who inspires you in your work?

Dr. Young is a great mentor who I often go to for advice on improving our data systems. The strong content area specialist at Buckeye is also a source of inspiration.

Who are you outside of work?

I try to get in an hour per day physical activities. This is usually a combination of weightlifting and aerobic exercises. In the winter months I enjoy skiing. My wife and I try to get to one of Ohio's State or metro parks each weekend.

Stan's focus on using data to empower decision-making highlights how essential this work is to student success across our portfolio. We're grateful for the expertise and purpose he brings to our team, and we look forward to continuing to share the stories that drive our mission forward.

A Gift of Art and History



Our BCHF President, Steve Boone, recently acquired a portrait of Abraham Lincoln from Granville-based artist James Young, with the intention of giving back in a meaningful way - by donating the artwork to one of our schools. The piece now has a new home where students can engage with it as part of their learning environment, offering a connection to history and the arts.

April Compliance Update

Kindergarten/First Grade Admission

Effective March 20, 2026: Kindergarten/First Grade age requirements

House Bill 114 was passed to clarify that kindergarten admission is open to any student who is 5 years old (or 6 if they have not completed first grade) by the first day of instruction at the school. Age requirements for first grade were unchanged. The school's early admission is still an option for students who turn 5-years-old prior to January 1st pursuant to the early entry or acceleration policy.

Regulation against Imitation Meat and Egg Products

Effective March 20, 2026: Regulation against Imitation Meat and Egg Products

House Bill 10 was passed in an attempt by the state to protect students from the unknown long-term effects of "experimental foods." Other states have passed similar legislation regarding imitation meat and egg products sold at schools. By March 20, 2026, each board must adopt a policy that prevents the purchase of a food that is either misbranded as either a meat product or egg product or is a cultivated-protein food product.

Read Across America Week



In celebration of Read Across America Week, several BCHF team members were invited to read some of their favorite books to students at Horizon Science Academy Primary and Horizon Science Academy Westerville. We're grateful for the invitation and the chance to connect through the joy of reading.



Upcoming Events

April is a great month for Spring renewal! Step into some of our professional development opportunities, meet new colleagues, and explore fresh perspectives! Register for sessions via the link in the title, or go to BCHF's Professional Learning Opportunities Catalog, [available here](#).

SPRING BOARD TRAINING – Saturday, April 11 – 9:00 to 10:00 A.M. – Online via Zoom

This training will fulfill the open meetings and public records training requirement for Board members and administrators. Attorney Adam Schira will present the basic concepts of these laws and give rich examples applicable to community schools. Time will be devoted as well for questions from Board members and administrators. We urge all board members and administrators who have not completed their annual training to attend this session!

SPECIAL EDUCATION LEADERS NETWORK: Coffee Talk #2 – April 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.

Coaching New Teachers: Building Confidence, Skill and Classroom Success – April 15, 2026 – 10:00 to 11:30 A.M. – Online via Zoom

This session will include a review of the Coaching Cycle, Common Needs of New Teachers, a basic Coaching Template, and how to develop your staff even if their skill level is still in progress. Participants will discuss and determine where to begin--starting with teachers who need to build the skills for a successful classroom. You will determine the high-level focus and strategies that are appropriate for your school.

Summer Reset: Light Prep, Big Impact – April 16, 2026 – 4:00 to 5:30 P.M. – Online via Zoom

What if a few smart moves this summer could make August feel completely different? Instead of over planning or starting from scratch, this session focuses on the small, strategic actions that have the biggest payoff. Teachers will walk away with practical tools to map the year, plan meaningful writing, tighten instructional clarity, and build routines that actually stick. Grounded in real classroom practice, this session helps educators reduce stress, increase impact, and start the school year strong-without sacrificing their summer.

THE ENGAGEMENT BLUEPRINT: Routines that Motivate Deep Learning – April 21, 2026 – 3:30 to 5:00 P.M.- – Online via Zoom

Students need to find the "why" before they will invest in the "what:" in other words, they won't buy into learning unless they see purpose and possibility. This session explores practical ways to activate students' prior knowledge and lived experiences as entry points, setting the stage for deep thinking and sustained engagement. You'll leave with ready-to-deploy ideas for making lessons feel meaningful from the very first minute. If you have students who struggle to invest in academic work, you won't want to miss it!

TEACH LIKE A CHAMPION 3- A Guide to the Science of Reading – April 23, 2026 – 3:30 to 4:30 P.M. - – Online via Zoom

This is the third 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 address how students access academic language. We dive into Vocabulary Reconsidered, examining why vocabulary is the most important form of knowledge for comprehension and how to explicitly teach not just definitions, but complex syntax. We will also explore the reciprocal relationship between reading and writing, showing how intentional writing tasks function as an accelerator for deeper reading comprehension.

PBL UNLOCKED: DESIGNING LEARNING THAT STICKS – April 27, 2026 – 4:00 to 5:30 P.M. – Online via Zoom

Project-Based Learning offers students the chance to engage in meaningful, authentic work-but it can feel overwhelming to know where to begin. This introductory session breaks PBL down into manageable steps, helping educators understand the essential components that make projects both academically rigorous and deeply engaging. We'll unpack how to craft compelling driving questions, design inquiry-rich learning pathways, and plan checkpoints that guide students toward high-quality final products. Participants will explore examples across subject areas, discuss strategies for managing group work, and learn how to embed assessment throughout the project lifecycle. You'll leave with a clear blueprint for designing your first project, complete with planning templates, classroom structures, and tips for fostering student ownership and creativity.

COHORT: Social Studies Cohort 4: Reflecting, Refining, & Future-Proofing – April 30, 2026 – 3:30 to 5:00 P.M. – Online via Zoom

How do we take the lessons learned this year and turn them into a blueprint for future success? In our final session, we'll focus on the "reflective practitioner" model-analyzing student growth and evaluating the impact of the new strategies we've implemented. We'll spend time curating our best resources and refining units for next year while the experience is still fresh. You'll leave with a streamlined digital "toolbox" and a clear vision for your professional growth. We will conclude our year-long journey with a final networked improvement community to celebrate our wins, troubleshoot final hurdles, and solidify the professional bonds we've built.

REPLACING "CHALLENGING" BEHAVIOR WITH MEANINGFUL SKILLS – May 5, 2026 – 3:30 to 4:30 P.M. – Online via Zoom

Instead of just trying to eliminate challenging behaviors, what if we replaced it with something more functional? This session focuses on teaching replacement behaviors that meet the same needs, whether it's escape, attention, or sensory input. You'll learn how to uncover the root cause (function), identify lagging skills, and explicitly teach alternatives using visuals, modeling, and practice. We will also cover how to embed this instruction into your daily routines, without overloading your day. Ideal for educators supporting students with emotional or behavioral challenges who want long-term change, not just short-term compliance.

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

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