

SPONSOR UPDATE

MAY 2017

Peggy Young,
Director

Jennifer Schorr,
Associate Director

OUR 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.

OUR 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.

Budget bill may include changes to sponsor evaluation

State Representative Andy Brenner (R-Powell), who chairs the House Education and Career Readiness Committee, has submitted amendments to the biennial budget bill (H.B. 49) to address key concerns regarding Ohio's sponsor performance assessment.

One of the amendments addresses the fact that the Ohio Department of Education (ODE) evaluation framework provides that a sponsor cannot be rated higher than "ineffective" if it receives a score of zero in any of the three components. This violates the letter and spirit of the law, which requires the three components to be equally weighted.

Another amendment would ensure that the academic performance of each school in a sponsor's portfolio would count equally toward the overall component score. ODE's framework is based on Average Daily Membership (ADM), which results in schools serving greater numbers of students impacting a sponsor's academic performance score more than schools with lower enrollment.

Rep. Brenner also seeks to address the compliance component of the assessment, which includes more than 300 items.

"I think the (Department of Education) needed to be a little more thorough at following what H.B. 2 intended," Rep. Brenner said.

"I think it's gone overboard," he said of the evaluations. "I think we went from one extreme to the other extreme and there's got to be a balance. If we would apply some of these things from charter schools to traditional schools, there would be outcry."

If the amendments aren't included in the final version of H.B. 49, Rep. Brenner said he will likely introduce stand alone legislation to address the issues of concern.



SHORTFALL IN REVENUES TO IMPACT STATE SPENDING

As the Ohio House of Representatives continued its review and consideration of Gov. John Kasich's biennial budget proposal (H.B. 49), the administration and legislative leaders announced that budget allocations must be reduced by \$400 million in each of the next two fiscal years.

Citing lagging tax revenues resulting from Ohio's sluggish economy, the administration said all aspects of the budget must be reviewed for potential cuts in order to align with revised revenue projections.

"Our numbers were pretty conservative, but really not conservative enough," Gov. Kasich said at a Statehouse press conference. "It's important for us to get ahead of this."



Sponsor/board contract process begins

Applications and information have been posted on the BCHF website for all new, replicating and transfer applicants. Renewal applications for those schools whose charter expires June 30, 2018 will be emailed out by May 1, 2017.

Important dates to note

New/replicating applicants: Proposal summary is due July 1, 2017; full application is due August 1, 2017. BCHF will host a webinar May 10, 2017, 3-4:30 p.m. to review application components and answer questions. Please visit BCHF's website to register. A recording of the webinar will also be posted on BCHF's website for future reference.

Renewal applications are due August 30, 2017

Transfer applications are due November 1, 2017

Please direct any questions to Associate Director Jennifer Schorr at jschorr@buckeyehope.org or (614) 942-2002.

Debate continues on graduation requirements for class of 2018

Following review and discussion of recommendations made by a graduation requirements workgroup formed by the state superintendent, the State Board of Education passed a resolution asking the legislature to take into consideration the workgroup's specific recommendations and to provide the State Board flexibility to develop alternative pathways to graduation for the class of 2018.

Under current law, students have three pathways to receiving a diploma: by earning a cumulative passing score of 18 points on seven end-of-course exams (in Algebra I and geometry, or integrated math I and II; biology; American history and American government; and, English I and II); by earning 12 points through a State Board-approved industry-recognized credential or group of credentials and achieving a workforce readiness score in the WorkKeys assessment; or, by earning a remediation-free score in English language arts and math on a nationally recognized college admission exam (including the ACT and SAT).

According to the Ohio Department of Education (ODE), about two-thirds of high school juniors are likely to score the minimum 18 (of 35) points required on end-of-course exams. Alarm over the potential of withholding diplomas from up to one-third of students who comprise the class of 2018 has prompted discussion among policy-makers – including the State Board – on the need for alternative pathways for one year only.

Continued on pg. 3

STAKEHOLDERS SEEK TO RESTORE INFOhio FUNDING

Education stakeholders testified at a recent legislative hearing on the state biennial budget bill (H.B. 49) in support of increased funding for the INFOhio program, after significant cuts were made in 2015.

Two years ago, funding for INFOhio was moved from one line item in the state budget to another and, in the process, was cut - perhaps inadvertently - from \$2.5 million to \$1.4.

Geoffrey Andrews, CEO of the Management Council of the Ohio Education Computer Network, which oversees INFOhio, told legislators that carryover and one-time funds prevented cuts to the program in fiscal years 2016 and 2017. If funding is not restored, school districts would face expenditures of up to \$50 million dollars to replace services currently provided through INFOhio, which provides a variety of online databases and other resources that help prepare students for college and career.



Grad requirement — continued

If the legislature approves the State Board's request, students who failed to achieve the required number of points could still be eligible to receive diplomas by meeting at least three of six other conditions:

- ◆ A senior year attendance rate of 93 percent;
- ◆ A 2.5 grade point average for senior classes;
- ◆ Completion of a senior capstone project;
- ◆ Completion of 120 hours of work or community service (including internships and apprenticeships);
- ◆ Completion of a College Credit Plus course; and,
- ◆ Completion of an International Baccalaureate of Advanced Placement course and earning a score of 4 on a related IB exam or a 3 on a related AP exam.



Career technical students could earn a diploma by scoring proficient or better on career-tech program end-of-course exams or test modules, earning credentials, or having 250 hours of workplace participation.

It seems likely that the legislature will take action to address the problem of low graduation rates for the class of 2018 through the state biennial budget bill (H.B. 49) currently under consideration.

Access the State Board resolution online at:

<http://education.ohio.gov/Media/Ed-Connection/April-17-2017/State-Board-of-Education-recommends-additional-hig>

Legislature to consider teacher evaluation system changes

The State Board of Education recently passed a resolution in support of changes to the Ohio Teacher Evaluation System (OTES) as developed and proposed by the Educator Standards Board.

The changes include elimination of shared attribution, which calculates an average value-added total for all teachers in a school, used in calculating teachers' individual scores. Also proposed is a revision to the structure and timing of classroom observations, as well as providing a professional growth process for teachers rated "accomplished" and "skilled."

The State Board's recommendation to adopt the proposed changes will now move to the Ohio General Assembly for consideration.

IMPORTANT REMINDER!

Schools must annually check and update emergency management plans stored in SAFE to ensure procedures and contact information are current. Certification requires an internal review by the school administrator. The annual certification is due by July 1.

Learn more at: <http://education.ohio.gov/Media/Ed-Connection/April-10-2017/Annual-emergency-management-plan-certification-due>

SPECIAL ED PROCEDURAL SAFEGUARDS NOTICE RELEASED

A new special education procedural safeguards notice – *A Guide to Parent Rights in Special Education* – is now available for district, school and parent use. This publication replaces the earlier procedural safeguards notice, *Whose IDEA Is This?*, which can no longer be used effective Aug. 1, 2017. Access the guide at: <http://education.ohio.gov/Topics/Special-Education/A-Guide-to-Parent-Rights-in-Special-Education>

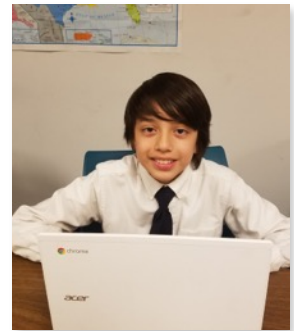
School garners support through DonorsChoose.org

“Give Mrs. Blausey a high five!” read the email notifying Head of School Terrence Franklin that the L. Hollingworth School for Talented and Gifted would be receiving three touch-screen Chromebooks and three Sony headphones thanks to funding raised through DonorsChoose.org.

Intervention Specialist Tamara Blausey had previously raised funds for school projects through DonorsChoose.org – a free nonprofit website that makes it easy for teachers to solicit funding for classroom resources.

Her most recent request for Chromebooks and Sony headphones – “Plugged in for Success” – was her largest with total project costs of more than \$1,000.

“It was a bit of gamble to request that much,” Blausey said. “But I really needed resources to support three students – the most I work with at any given time.”



Thanks to family and friends – and Google, which supported DonorsChoose.org project requests that included Chromebooks – Blausey received full project funding.

“I have a wonderful group of students who deserve a high quality education with the best resources possible,” Blausey explained in her project summary. “They come from a variety of different backgrounds and have special needs in the areas of academics and/or behavior. Most of my students come from underprivileged homes and some are learning English as a second language. I provide them with daily intervention to help them reach their goals toward success in the classroom.”

Soon after receiving notification that the project was fully funded, the new equipment arrived at the school.

“Students are drawn to technology – they’re always excited to work online,” Blausey said. “They’re now able to use the Chromebooks to produce projects for their classrooms through Google Docs and other applications that allow myself and their classroom teachers the ability to interact and help them edit their work. They’re able to track their own progress of each of their goals to see how well they are doing toward achieving success.”

The headphones and Chromebooks have been a “God-send” to Blausey, as well as her students. The headphones support literacy, allowing students to listen and learn without interrupting others.

Continued on pg. 5

“CASHLESS” OHIO LOTTERY TO BOOST K-12 FUNDING

The Ohio Lottery Commission recently announced that it will go “cashless” in fiscal year 2018, retrofitting all lottery vending machines to accept debit and credit cards, increasing net profits – and allocations to public schools -- by as much as \$7 and \$14 million in fiscal years 2018 and 2019, respectively.

“No other state lottery has implemented a full cashless program, and ours will be at the forefront of the cashless initiative among state lotteries,” said Danielle Frizzi-Babb, who serves as the commission’s spokesperson.

State Senator Bill Coley (R-Liberty Township), a vocal proponent for lottery changes, said as much as 40 percent of the population doesn’t always carry cash.

“When we preclude those people from buying lottery tickets, it just seems silly to me,” he said.

Identifying alternative funding streams is particularly important as the legislature seeks to address a state tax revenue shortfall.

DonorsChoose — continued

They use the touchscreen Chromebooks to play educational games and scroll through readings online. Some have found that they enjoy writing much more when they can type their ideas using Google Docs. They also practice math facts and some use the Chromebooks for research.

Blausey recently posted another funding request on DonorsChoose.org for magnetic letters and numbers aimed at supporting student learning in the areas of literacy and math.

Another teacher at the school heard about Blausey’s success with DonorsChoose.org and is using the website to raise funds for classroom wobble seats for students who need to burn off excess energy in order to better focus on learning.

All that’s asked in return for project funding are “thank-you packages” which include a letter from the teacher, photos of students using the new resources and – in some cases – thank you notes from students.

Since its inception in 2000, DonorsChoose.org has raised funds from more than 2.5 million supporters – reaching more than 22.5 million students through 900,000-plus projects.

Student, teacher honored

The Youngstown Ohio Chapter of The Links Incorporated recently honored 2017 Black Diamond Award recipients for their hard work, commitment and determination. Among the honorees was Academy for Urban Scholars Youngstown student Devon Culver and teacher Wasilwa Mwononyi.

The Links Incorporated – a women’s volunteer service organization established nearly 70 years ago to enrich, sustain and ensure the cultural and economic survival of African Americans – celebrated the accomplishments of 55 outstanding African American men from Mahoning and Trumbull counties.



Diamond Awards were presented in three categories: Diamond Chips for school students; Rough Diamonds for men early in their careers; and, Polished Diamonds for men who have made enduring impact on the community.

Devon Culver was recognized as a kind and dependable student. In the first semester, he earned a place on the school honor roll while

Continued on pg. 6

STATE BOARD TO PUSH FORWARD DESPITE TURNOVER

With ten, of 19, State Board members new to their roles, some stakeholders have voiced concern over the board's ability to adequately address complex education issues effectively. But the new board president, Tess Elshoff, is committed to helping new members transition as best as possible.

"Right now, it's just about taking everything and trying to slow it down as much as possible so all the new board members can fully understand what we're working on right now, what issues we're facing, get the background and the history of it all so they feel comfortable with things that come up for a vote," she said.

Some hope that so many new members will serve to change the dynamic of the board, which has been deeply divided on some issues and subject to flaring tempers.

"I think we've got a great board," Elshoff said. "I really do. I think each and every board member brings a quality to the board and an experience that will help going forward as long as we can respectfully work together."

Honored — continued

taking classes at Choffin Career and Technical School to further his altruistic goal of service as a certified firefighter. He encourages his peers to strive for excellence in the classroom through tutoring and mentoring them in their studies.

Wasilwa Mwonyoni distinguished himself with a large and ongoing commitment in educating and encouraging youth. In addition to his role as a teacher, Mwonyoni supervises fellow engagement coaches to ensure that each student has a direct and personal advocate within the school. He also contributes to a positive school culture in and out of the classroom.

Congratulations to the honorees and the Academy for Urban Scholars Youngstown!

Photo credit: Traci L. Cain Photography



State Board to develop model truancy policy

Legislation passed by the Ohio General Assembly last year to address student truancy requires the State Board of Education to develop a model policy for violent, disruptive or inappropriate behavior – including excessive absences – that stresses preventative strategies and alternatives to suspension or expulsion, for use by schools in complying with the provisions of H.B. 410.

That process has begun with the board's Accountability and Continuous Improvement Committee reviewing and discussing requirements of the new law including the creation of absence intervention teams and plans to address individual student challenges.

Some members of the board indicated that they've already received questions from districts about staffing of intervention teams, making exceptions for necessary absences and involving families in the effort.

According to Chris Woolard, senior executive director of the Ohio Department of Education's (ODE) Center for Accountability and Continuous Improvement, most of the concerns and comments expressed at stakeholder meetings have focused on how to build teams that work effectively with students who have missed 10 percent or more of the school year. He said ODE will create a clearinghouse of strategies currently in use by various districts.

Continued on pg. 7

STUDENT PERFORMANCES EARN LOCAL, NATIONAL RECOGNITION

Congratulations to Horizon Science Academy (HSA) Lorain students who participated in the Northeastern Ohio Science and Engineering Fair (NEOSEF) - the largest science fair in Ohio - and the Mohican District Science Fair at Ashland University.

As a result of their successes, HSA Lorain students have been pre-selected for two international science and engineering fairs.

Four students were pre-selected for a six-day event at the International Sustainable World Engineering Energy Environmental Project (ISWEEEP) in Texas and the Genius Olympiad in New York.



Continued on pg. 8

Truancy policy — continued

Under the law, chronic absenteeism is defined as missing 92 hours – with or without a legitimate excuse – in any given school year. But the law requires that the problem be addressed sooner for students who are habitually truant, which is defined as missing 30 or more consecutive hours, 42 hours in a month or 72 hours in a year without a legitimate excuse.

The bill’s sponsor, Rep. Jeff Rezabek (R-Clayton), understands district and school concerns, but believes it’s essential to address chronic absenteeism.

“We have to be very careful not to make it as difficult as I think people are making it out to be,” he told the State Board committee. “I would just encourage those entities to take a deep breath and really focus on putting that child in the center of the room.”

Accountability and Continuous Improvement Committee Chair Nancy Hollister, who also serves as State Board vice president, is on the “same page” as Rep. Rezabek.

“You don’t have to reinvent the house, you may have to add on a room, but that’s okay because you’re touching a whole different population that you can improve, and that’s the most important thing,” she said. “You can have a positive impact and (we) need to give you the flexibility and the tools to do this.”

School shares perspective on DOR challenges

No public school has been unaffected by Ohio’s constantly changing education landscape, and dropout recovery (DOR) charter schools are no exception. From new learning standards and assessments, to new report cards – including one specific to DOR schools – change has meant challenge and continued debate among policy makers.

In legislation (H.B. 2) passed after implementation of the new DOR report card, a committee was created and tasked with making recommendations on the definition of “quality” for charter schools that primarily enroll students between 16 and 22 years of age who dropped out of high school or are at risk of doing so.

When the committee first met in Spring 2016 – just weeks prior to its statutory deadline for submitting recommendations – it was comprised of ten individuals representing various stakeholder groups appointed by the House speaker, Senate president and governor. There was quick agreement that the key relevant issues are complex and additional time would be needed to provide sound, well thought out recommendations for consideration by law makers.

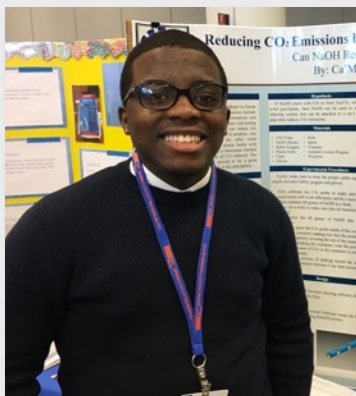
Continued on pg. 8

LOCAL, NATIONAL RECOGNITION — continued

HSA Lorain students also qualified to participate in this year's Concept Schools Science and Engineering Fair (CONSEF) in Cleveland where the school took home four "Best of the Category Awards," eight gold medals, four silver medals and seven bronze medals. HSA Lorain also earned second place honors in the "Best Schools" category.

"All of these opportunities provide our students the ability to not only showcase their talent and hard work, but a chance to change their lives by earning scholarship opportunities, monetary awards and experiences at the highest levels in the STEM fields," Assistant Director Jayson Bendik said in a press release.

Congrats to HSA Lorain and its award winning students!



DOR challenges — continued

Since that time, other stakeholders have been officially added to the committee, and observers have been invited to engage in ongoing discussions.

Among those who followed and engaged with the group is Roger Fox, who serves as director for The Academy for Urban Scholars (AUS) in Columbus.

Fox was joined at a recent committee meeting by Kristen Muenster, who serves as the school's director of curriculum and instruction. As luck would have it, Muenster was seated next to Senate Education Committee Chair Peggy Lehner (R-Kettering) during a lengthy small group discussion.



"Everyone else at our table represented conversion or credit recovery schools," Muenster said. "I brought a different perspective to the discussion and was pleased that Senator Lehner was interested in what I had to share."

In follow up, Muenster reached out to Lehner with an invitation to visit AUS, which was immediately accepted.

"As we considered how best to utilize our time with Senator Lehner, we thought 'who better for her to hear from than students and families,'" Muenster said. "So Mr. Fox and I invited students, an alumni, a parent and a teacher to join us in talking with Senator Lehner."

They met in a classroom with Lehner leading the conversation by asking students why they attend the Academy for Urban Scholars, and why the school is a better option for them than a traditional district public school.

Some shared negative experiences -- bullying and feeling "lost in the shuffle" -- at other schools. And what they value most at AUS is the safety it offers and teachers who truly care and offer strong support.

Lehner, who had great rapport with the students, explained that her goal is to establish meaningful ways to assess DOR school performance and to identify those that are truly serving students well.

Continued on pg. 9

COMPLIANCE UPDATE

Review of health & safety policies

School boards are required to periodically review their health and safety policies to ensure safety of students, employees and other persons using a school building from any known hazards in the building or grounds that pose an immediate risk to health or safety. Boards should add a health and safety policy review to their board agendas for the May or June 2017 board meeting if the school's health and safety policies have not been reviewed since January 2016. Examples of health and safety policies: pesticide use; lead-based paint; storage of hazardous materials; medication administration; wellness; and, peanut/food allergy

School policy review

Schools should review their comprehensive policy manuals to ensure that the following policies have been adopted and meet statutory requirements: diabetes care; student possession and use of epinephrine auto injectors; student possession and use of metered dose inhalers or dry powdered inhalers; prohibition of the use of corporal punishment; serving a la carte beverages (if applicable); and, sale of food & beverages on premises (if applicable)

Continued on pg. 10

DOR challenges — continued

Fox has not only attended and participated in the committee's meetings and discussions, but he has also demonstrated leadership by coordinating meetings with other DOR school representatives to discuss key issues and make recommendations to the Ohio Department of Education (ODE).

The school also hosted a visit by Sen. Bill Coley (R-Liberty Township), who played a key role in a decision made by the Joint Committee on Agency Rule Review to block ODE from retroactively applying administrative rules relating to implementation of Ohio's sponsor performance assessment.

Legislators pledge to address student absence notification

As previously reported in the April issue of Buckeye Community Hope Foundation's *Sponsor Update*, legislation was recently introduced that would require public schools to notify parents within one hour of the start of the school day when students are absent without excuse.

Senate Bill 82 – also known as Alianna Alert – seeks to memorialize Alianna DeFreeze who, at age 14, was kidnapped and found murdered in an abandoned house four days after she disappeared.



Alianna's mother, Donnesha Cooper, testified at a recent Senate Education Committee hearing that had she been made aware of Alianna's absence right away, the search for her would have begun much sooner.

Damon DeFreeze, Alianna's father, also testified. "We were told that for some reason there was a glitch in the automated system" used by the school to notify parents of student absences.

Committee Chair Peggy Lehner (R-Kettering) and Sen. Sandra Williams (D-Cleveland), who serves on the Senate Education Committee, are co-sponsors of S.B. 82. Both offered assurances to Alianna's parents that they are committed to seeing the legislature address the issue to help ensure other families don't suffer similar tragedies.

Photo credit: Capitol Square Review & Advisory Board

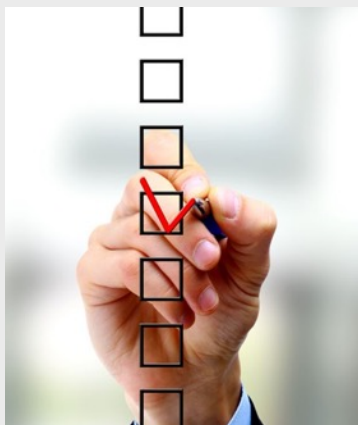
COMPLIANCE UPDATE — *continued*

Year-end submission of safety drill log

All schools are required to submit safety drill logs to the state fire marshall at year-end (May/June). The logs should be submitted via e-mail to Jennifer Smith at Jennifer.smith2@com.state.oh.us, Ohio Department of Commerce, Division of State Fire Marshall - Code Enforcement Bureau.

Compliance Progress Reports

Third quarter compliance progress reports will be generated on May 15, 2017. The reports will detail the status of each school's compliance efforts for items due through April 30. Contact your sponsor representative if you have questions about any outstanding items.



UPCOMING PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT SESSIONS

As the school year winds down, all schools should feel ready to tackle the next school year with renewed information and energy. Please consider participating in these sessions to help prepare for the 2017-2018 school year!

REVISED OHIO LEARNING STANDARDS UPDATE SESSION – May 30

Buckeye Community Hope Foundation will facilitate a session with Ohio Department of Education to better prepare schools for the revisions in English language arts and mathematics standards enacted this year by the Ohio Board of Education.

The three-hour session will help school leaders and others learn about the revisions in English language arts and math standards. How do the new standards compare with the prior standards? What resources are available for helping students and teachers adjust to the changes? This session will be presented by Brian Bickley and Stacy Ludwig of the Ohio Department of Education. Attend to hear the latest information and view the latest resources.

Register at: <https://register.eventarc.com/38064/new-ohio-learning-standards-update>

LEADERSHIP SUMMIT – June 20-21

June is the perfect time to get new ideas and support for your school's 2017-2018 planning. The BCHF Leadership Summit is the premier event for school leaders. In response to requests from school leaders, the theme of the Summit will be: "SOAR WITH HOPE: How to Overcome Poverty with Excellence (*and change lives forever*).” Watch for a brochure with more details. This will be a fun-filled, information-filled two days of sharing and learning. *Please note that this event will fill up early. Be sure and secure a space by registering soon.*

Register at: <https://register.eventarc.com/35527/leadership-summit>

Remember to make eventarc a trusted site in your email in order to receive confirmations and email updates on our workshops! Please email Josh Miller at jmiller@buckeyehope.org if you experience difficulty registering.

BCHF provides all seminars without cost to personnel from its sponsored schools. However, a minimum number of registrants may be required in order for a seminar to proceed and BCHF reserves the right to cancel or postpone programs as needed. BCHF also reserves the right to invoice a school for lunches or other costs associated with registered personnel who do not attend.

SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT

Landmark case sets higher standard for serving students with disabilities

By Carol S. Young, Ph.D., Department Lead, Accountability and School Improvement

In March 2017, the United States Supreme Court unanimously passed a decision that will change the standard schools must meet in serving the needs of students with disabilities. In the case of *Endrew F. vs. Douglas County School District*, the Court ruled that schools must ensure more than minimal benefit from an individualized education plan (IEP). The decision set aside a prior legal standard, called the “de minimus test,” whereby schools had only to demonstrate that the student was deriving some benefit from an individualized education program (IEP).

The court decision was in response to an interesting case in which a young student in Colorado was diagnosed with autism spectrum disability. His parents felt he was making minimal progress, year after year, so they enrolled him in a private school. After the student made substantial progress in the private school, his parents sued to get the local school district to reimburse the \$70,000 annual tuition. A denial by a lower court led to the Supreme Court appeal (McKenna, 2017). Based on the high court’s decision, the school district must now reimburse the tuition plus court costs.

With the new ruling, schools must demonstrate that an IEP is appropriate by providing evidence of student progress on individualized learning goals. In the decision, Chief Justice John G. Roberts Jr. wrote “When all is said and done, a student offered an educational program providing ‘merely more than de minimis’ progress from year to year can hardly be said to have been offered an education at all ... The IDEA (Individuals with Disabilities Education Act) demands more. It requires an educational program reasonably calculated to enable a child to make progress appropriate in light of the child’s circumstances” (Walsh, 2017). The new standard suggests that an IEP should enable a student with a disability to make passing grades and progress with same-age peers from one grade level to another.

The impact of the new ruling on all schools, including charters, is likely to be significant. Schools will need to even more closely monitor and keep documentation on

student progress in meeting IEP goals. In addition, schools cannot settle for small increments of progress, even for students with more serious or multiple disabilities. Schools will need to work closely with parents in ensuring that goals on individualized education programs are written to reflect a level of attainment that is challenging yet reasonable. Finally, schools will need to be cautious that successive IEPs for a student do not reflect the same goals from one year to the next.

As with any decision of this nature, costs of educational services are at issue. The financial capacity of a private agency that sets its own tuition rates to pay for very individualized or specialized services is different than that of a public school. Charter schools in Ohio, for example, receive less than \$15,000 in weighted per pupil funding even for students with severe disabilities.

Under the IDEA, parents have the right to participate fully in the development of an IEP and to question whether or not progress on goals is sufficient. Under the new ruling, parents will have more latitude to seek reimbursement from schools for private services or even private school placement if it is clear that the student derives more benefit from the private program.

Although the decision sets a higher bar for schools, those that are doing their best to meet the needs of students with disabilities are most likely already showing the kind of progress supported by the Court’s decision. BCHF’s Accountability and School Improvement Team provides technical assistance to schools that may wish to review their special education services, policies and procedures. For more information, contact us at pd@bchfschools.org.

McKenna, L. (2017). How a new Supreme Court ruling could affect special education. *The Atlantic*, March, 23, 2017.

Walsh, M. (2017). Unanimous Supreme Court expands scope of special education rights. *Education Week*, March 22, 2017.

SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT

A different take on differentiated instruction

By Carol S. Young, Ph.D., Department Lead, Accountability and School Improvement

“Help, I am a new fifth grade teacher and my students have reading skills that are anywhere from first grade to seventh grade! What am I supposed to do?” In today’s world of diverse learners and high-stakes school accountability, this dilemma is very real. Teachers need to meet the needs of all learners, at their various skill levels, but with the idea of getting all to master rigorous grade-level standards. The typical advice for this dilemma is for the teacher to differentiate instruction.

Differentiated instruction is not a new concept in education. In fact it was perhaps the hallmark of the one-room schoolhouse. There, students of many grades and skill levels had their needs met by one teacher in one schoolroom. Whole-group, small-group and individualized instruction were used to tailor learning to each student’s needs and levels. From many who attended such schools, I have heard that third graders often found themselves unknowingly working on fifth grade work, simply because they sat next to a fifth grader.

The idea of differentiated instruction was re-invigorated in the late 1990’s, particularly with the publication of *The Differentiated Classroom: Responding to the Needs of All Learners* by Carol Tomlinson (1999). According to Tomlinson and Allan (2000, p. 6), “the idea of differentiating instruction to accommodate the different ways that students learn involves a hefty dose of common sense, as well as sturdy support in the theory and research of education.”

Differentiation is therefore a teaching approach that involves thoughtful planning with the expectation that your learners will be diverse and will have differing needs, interests and readiness levels. Differentiated instruction techniques increase a teacher’s toolkit by incorporating respectful ways to vary content, process and products used in instruction. A teacher with well-developed differentiation skills is aware of several ways to reach the same learning goal.

The idea of tailoring instruction to student needs through well-planned variations and strategies sounds ideal for the dilemma posed by our fifth-grade teacher. However, in practice, differentiation has yet to reach this promise. Many studies of differentiation suggest that, overall, teachers have yet to master the art and practice of effective differentiation. To many teachers, differentiation means organizing learners into low-, medium-, or high-ability work groups, based most often on large-scale test results. This practice is a misinterpretation of differentiation because students who lack readiness often receive watered-down content, while more capable learners just receive extra work. In addition, while norm-referenced testing may provide an overall reading or math level for students, this type of testing is not skill specific. And students, particularly those with differing backgrounds, do not have skills that fall flatly into a given level. Most students who test at a third grade reading level, for example, have mastery of at least a few fifth grade vocabulary words.

In her more recent update of *The Differentiated Classroom*, Tomlinson (2014) stresses that differentiated instruction is not synonymous with ability grouping, nor is it the same as giving advanced students additional assignments. Differentiated instruction, done well, incorporates a series of instructional alternatives and universal design elements¹ to plan and implement appropriate lessons that may look a bit different for each student. For example, a reading assignment may be taught and questions asked of all students, thus gathering information from a short, formative assessment of responses. Students would get then strategically-designed questions of differing readability levels to meet their individual needs. Students would investigate and respond to the second set of questions, perhaps working in groups or pairs. The teacher would provide differential

Continued on pg. 13

Differentiated instruction — continued

support and constructive feedback to students as they work. After all groups finish, the teacher would facilitate student-led discussion of responses to the questions. In this translation of differentiation, all students have access to high-quality material at their grade level. All students get coaching support from the teacher at their own level of readiness.

Tomlinson (2014) has compared differentiation to a butterfly. Through high-quality instruction, students receive the challenge as well as the supports they need, though each support may be as unique as the chrysalis of a larva. The support, along with a good dose of sunshine (challenge), must surround the student for a critical period of time. The ultimate outcome is that the student soars as a beautiful, unique learner. This beautiful-sounding analogy, though, cannot be fulfilled if differentiation is simply a system of harder versus easier content. All learners deserve full sunshine and full support.

Early in this school year, I was in a school hallway with a classroom of young, very new kindergarten students. Their teacher asked them to “get into a

perfect linear formation.” Most students, even in these earliest days of the school year, knew what the teacher was asking because the students had practiced the routine a few times. But some students still looked confused by the vocabulary. The teacher simply whispered to them, “I mean line up nicely,” a quick, respectful and supportive cue. This teacher was delivering on the promise of differentiated instruction -- high quality learning experiences and well-planned, differing supports with the goal of mastery for all students. Our wish would be that all students receive a differentiated education from which they may soar.

¹Universal is an approach to planning lessons so that all aspects of the lesson are appealing and accessible to all learners.

Tomlinson, C.A. (1999). *Differentiated instruction: Responding to the needs of all learners*. Alexandria, VA: ASCD.

Tomlinson, C.A. (2014). *Differentiated instruction: Responding to the needs of all learners. Second edition*. Alexandria, VA: ASCD.

Tomlinson, C. A. & Allan, S.D. (2000). *Leadership for differentiating schools and classrooms*. Alexandria, VA: ASCD.

BUCKEYE COMMUNITY HOPE FOUNDATION
3021 East Dublin-Granville Rd; Columbus OH 43231
(614) 942-2002 www.buckeyehope.org

