



SPONSOR UPDATE

JULY 2025



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Mission

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

Vision

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

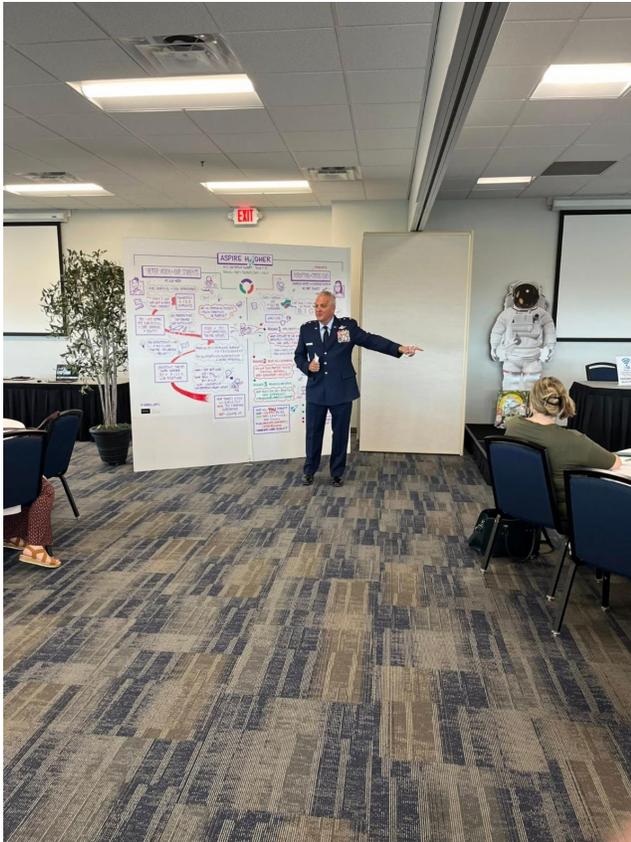


Annual School Leadership Summit

Thank you to all who attended our 2025 Leadership Summit: Aspire Higher! We hope you had a wonderful 2 days full of new knowledge, inspiration, and reflection. Your participation and engagement truly made the summit impactful!

An extra thank you to all of our incredible guest speakers, including our keynote speaker, Major General David B. Johnson. We hope you take this professional development into the new school year with success! Happy summer!





Commencement Reflections

By Mindy Farry, School Improvement Representative

I have had the honor and privilege to attend nearly 100 commencement ceremonies in my 48 years in education...watching my students cross the stage...speaking at graduation ceremonies as a principal...handing diplomas to young adults as they cross into their next chapter...watching my own children begin their adult chapters...and now, attending commencement exercises for our BCHF schools.

In professional development trainings, I often ask teachers what their “ideal” graduate looks like. Whether twelve years in the future or next week, what qualities and knowledge do the adults want the ideal graduates to possess by the time they cross that stage? Without exception, teachers list qualities such as creativity; willingness to take risks; collaboration skills; problem-solving; growth mindset; discernment in this age of social media information. Adults know those qualities well. These qualities have served adults well in the world of work. The information avalanche is moving so quickly that we can no longer teach stagnant information; we need to teach students how to learn and discern the quality of the information they are receiving. We are preparing students for jobs that do not even exist yet.

So as we watch the Class of 2025 walk across the stage, we educators (whether a kindergarten teacher or the senior class advisor) must ask ourselves what we did, as educators, to help develop those qualities we said were so important. Did we make learning relevant and challenging? Did we teach collaboration skills and put students in positions where they had to solve complex problems with no “right” answers? Did we teach them how to discern fact from fiction? Did we allow them to fail so that they could learn how to pick themselves up and try again? We know what lies ahead of our graduates: triumph, heartbreak, successes, failures, and many near failures. We wish we could protect them from the heartbreak and stand beside them in the triumphs, but if we’ve done our jobs as parents and teachers—they will fly away.

For next year’s Class of 2026 and all future graduates, we need to rethink education. We cannot continue to teach as we were taught because the world is nothing like it was when we were students. Information sharing needs to be relevant and challenging for students at all academic levels. Today’s verified online sources eliminate the need to memorize the periodic table of the elements or the capitals of the fifty states. Higher expectations lead to higher results for every student. The classroom must become a place of student-led instruction; intelligent discourse (yes, even in first grade); and teacher as facilitator.

So as we congratulate this year’s new alumni, it is a time for reflection about how we will re-invent our classrooms and schools to better reflect the skills our future graduates will need.

Seeing the Whole Tree: The "How-To's" of High Expectations

By Carol S. Young, Ph.D., Director, Accountability & School Improvement



Wounded Heart Tree

BCHF’s recent School Leadership Summit, “Aspire Higher: Raising the Bar for Students, Staff, and Self” addressed the theme of high expectations. Clearly, educational research supports the finding that students’ perceptions of what they *can achieve* determines, to a great extent, what they *will achieve*. If you believe you can climb a mountain, you are more likely to successfully climb one. If you believe you can conquer Algebra in grade 8, you are more likely to be successful at advanced math work. School leaders who want to move academic achievement forward must foster positive belief. Students and staff must believe they can accomplish grade level or advanced learning standards. They must embrace the motto: “I can do it!”

Following the Summit, we surveyed leaders. One participant challenged us with the comment:

“How do we do this? How do you create a high expectations school?” The leader’s challenge is a valid one. How does a school begin to raise expectations? Students may not be accustomed to cognitive challenges; they may not stick with a difficult problem or assignment. Teachers may be empathetic about students’ prior adverse experiences or trauma, and they may not feel comfortable inserting pressure or challenge in learning activities. When things get too hard, parents may even complain.

In my oh-so-many years in education, I rarely found a cookbook of “How To’s” for any leadership challenge. But many changes rely on one simple ingredient--- perspective. In a recent walk in a park in Florida, I encountered the “Wounded Heart Tree.” The tree’s trunk is gouged on one side, the result of a lightning strike or even some sort of collision. The nameplate reminds us that we often view people as broken or irreparable. Walking around the tree, however, you come to the other side, a strong sturdy beautiful trunk. This side of the tree invites you to lean against it, conveying the message, “I am sturdy; I am strong. Just try me.” It has, in fact, weathered several hurricanes.

Schools need to honor the sturdy side of its students, the side that loves escape rooms, video games with higher and higher levels, and music videos with custom lyrics. Schoolwork designed for the sturdy side of students should be presented in the light of cognitive challenge or even “thrill.” Teach students that confusion, disorientation and even discouragement may be the initial reaction to a difficult assignment or problem. But triumph comes with finding our way out, making some false starts or even

errors, and eventually finding a solution that works! What a thrill!

A few other ingredients contribute to a culture of high expectations:

1. *Grade level learning* - All students, even those with disabilities or language learning needs, must be exposed to direct instruction at the level of grade level standards or higher. Students need to see grade level outcomes modeled and demonstrated. Then, they need time to struggle with them.
2. *Stretch goals* – Our brains like easy solutions. But, like most systems of the body, our brains can be stretched with some exercise. Students need challenge, stretch goals that will deepen their learning or understanding. When students are interviewed about which teachers they most appreciated, they often report that a preferred teacher “gave me stretch goals” or “made me do things I didn’t think I could do.”
3. *Teach students to ask questions* – Students benefit when they learn how to question what they have read, what they have heard, or what they have seen. Use Socratic circles and teach question formulation techniques (Right Question Institute, 2025).
4. *Build student agency* – Encourage students to drive their own learning. In many cases, students will expect more of themselves than teachers will. Assignments and experiences with real-life problems, choice and decision-making, or goal tracking add to student agency.
5. *Provide support* – Students who struggle with learning assignments or experiences need the reassurance that they can get help. Encourage students to figure out problems or assignments on their own. Convey a belief in students’ abilities. Teach or suggest strategies for problem solving, but do not answer a question or complete an assignment for a student. Answering questions for a student contributes to a feeling of helplessness.

All students desire an education that believes in their capacity to establish roots, grow, and show strength. Leaders can grow school capacity for high achievement by focusing on perspectives and mindsets first. The, as one of our school leaders stated, “It should be flattering to a teacher if a student complains about how hard something is.” Demanding work is challenging *and* joyful. Educators must see our students in their true light, as beautiful, whole individuals. Walk all the way around the tree and you will see.

References:

The Right Question Institute (2025). *Teaching students to ask their own questions*. Retrieved from [Teaching + Learning - Right Question Institute](#).



The Healed Tree

Ohio's Plan for K-12 Mathematics

On June 23, the Department of Education and Workforce released *Ohio's Plan for K12 Mathematics*, a guide for mathematics instruction in all Ohio schools. The plan calls for high quality instruction in mathematics and the use of evidence-based curricula. Specifically, the plan calls for high-quality core instruction at or above grade level. It states:

“All students must have the opportunity to engage in **grade-level core instruction, regardless of ability, which requires the replacement of remediation (the practice of teaching below grade-level content)** with the just-in-time intervention that allows students to complete unfinished learning and access grade-level instruction (or above)” (DEW, 2025, p. 16, emphasis added).

School leaders are encouraged to carefully study the mathematics plan with their building leadership teams in planning instruction for the upcoming 2025-26 school year. Suggested grade-level areas of emphasis highlighted in the plan (p. 17 & 18) will be of special interest to leadership teams and grade level/department teams.

As part of plan implementation, BCHF will review comprehensive plans for instruction to ensure all

sponsored schools offer evidence-based curricular and intervention resources.

The plan may be accessed at: [Ohio's Plan for K12 Mathematics](#)

In The News: The Richland School of Academic Arts

The Richland School of Academic Arts (RSAA) is making headlines for its innovative approach to education. RSAA integrates the arts, such as music, dance, theater, and culinary studies, into every subject, offering students a creative and hands-on alternative to traditional learning. With small class sizes and a strong focus on personalized instruction, students are encouraged to explore their strengths and connect deeply with their learning through collaborative projects and performances.

Teachers like Angel Vega and Dan Jones highlight how this model not only meets academic standards but also helps students build confidence and stay engaged.

[Click here to read the feature.](#)



Dr. Plotnick Presents at A-Game

Dr. Zoe Plotnick of Buckeye Community Hope Foundation presented at the National Charter Schools Institute's A-GAME conference, leading a thought-provoking session on how to better align accountability systems with the missions of alternative high schools.

"My conference presentation was based on the study I did for my dissertation-in-practice," Dr. Plotnick said. "The session included some facilitated small-group discussions around how we might develop accountability systems that are aligned to the missions of alternative high schools by asking the students themselves what they defined as a "successful outcome."

Alternative high schools and dropout prevention and recovery programs are designed to serve students whose needs are not met by traditional systems. Yet, many accountability frameworks continue to evaluate these schools using the same metrics applied to traditional schools—metrics that often fail to capture the complexity and success of these alternative environments.

Dr. Plotnick's session challenged this one-size-fits-all approach. She introduced a bottom-up accountability model rooted in student-defined success, a sense of belonging, and pathways to workforce integration. By centering student voices and lived experiences, this framework seeks to more accurately reflect the mission and impact of alternative education.

Drawing from qualitative research and student narratives, participants explored how street-level data can reshape accountability measures to reflect the realities of alternative high schools. Through interactive discussions, scenario analysis, and small-group activities, attendees confronted the gaps in existing evaluation models and explored practical strategies for more equitable, context-sensitive oversight.

Attendees, ranging from authorizers to education leaders, left the session with actionable strategies to reshape accountability policies in ways that support, rather than penalize, schools serving the hardest-to-reach students.



BCHF Team Retreat

The BCHF Education Division recently held our annual staff retreat in Columbus - two days filled with collaboration, reflection, and forward-thinking.

We kicked things off with team-building activities and energizing updates from across our school portfolio. These conversations sparked new ideas and reinforced our shared commitment to improving educational outcomes for every student we serve.

On day two, we shifted our focus to strategic planning with Mary Bradley from the National Charter Schools Institute. With her guidance, we explored actionable strategies to strengthen our impact, align our vision, and build sustainable systems that support long-term success.

It was an inspiring and purposeful retreat that left us energized and united as we continue working to empower students and support the educators and leaders who make it all possible.





Board Member Spotlight



Buckeye Community Hope Foundation (BCHF) recognizes the important work that governing board members do in supporting their school community. In recognition and support of this hard work, BCHF highlights one board member each month in our sponsor newsletter.

This month we are featuring Henry Curtis, who serves on the FLEX High School board. *The mission statement at FLEX is to:*

-Use innovative, data-driven, and research-based strategies to meet the diverse needs of all students.

-Provide wraparound services to ensure students have resources to master their life obstacles.

-Offer a multi-layered education to prepare students for 21st century college and careers through strategic business partnerships, Career-

Technical offerings, and our rich academic coursework.

Henry became a board member at FLEX in 2020, drawn to the mission and invited by a trusted colleague.

“I joined the FLEX High board in 2020 at the invitation of Jim Trakas,” Curtis shared. With a long-standing commitment to public service, his experience positioned him well for the unique demands of a school board.

Lessons in Board Membership

Henry brought with him a strong foundation in governance and leadership from decades of service on nonprofit and government agency boards.

“I have an extensive history of service on nonprofit and government agency boards,” he said. “This board functions very similarly, so it has been a good experience.”

Increasing Efficiency

From his first days on the board, Henry sought out ways to make meetings more effective.

“This is a well-run board,” he said. “To make it easier for the secretary to record motions, I have asked the members to state their last names when making or seconding a motion.”

Supporting Fellow Board Members

While Henry doesn't actively recruit new members, he plays a key role in creating a supportive and collaborative environment.

“I do not solicit new board members,” he noted. “However, for retention purposes, I listen to my colleagues' concerns and work with them to solve any issues that arise, especially those that are most important to them.”

Proudest Moments

Henry's proudest moment came when the school celebrated a key milestone: its first graduation.

"The proudest moment was our first graduation exercise," he said. "We were able to see firsthand the fruit of our labor. It gave our school, which was still in its infancy, a sense of accomplishment and legitimacy."

Connecting with the Mission

What drew Henry to FLEX High, and keeps him deeply engaged, is the school's holistic approach to education.

"I most resonate with our school's mission to provide wraparound services to ensure students have resources to master their life obstacles," he said. "Students do not arrive at FLEX High in a vacuum. There are circumstances that led them here. Once they are in our care, our school has the capacity to provide a quality education, while helping them mitigate some of the obstacles that prevented them from completing a traditional high school."

Advice for New Board Members

Henry advises newcomers to school boards, particularly those serving non-traditional schools, to embrace change and adaptability.

"In this field of non-traditional education, new board members must be flexible and nimble to pivot when unexpected changes occur," he said. "This is especially true when joining the board of a start-up school like FLEX High, Cleveland."

Life Beyond the Boardroom

"I enjoy playing golf, spending time with my family and listening to music," he said.

All of us in the Education Division of BCHF appreciate the commitment to students Henry Curtis has shown. We hope, in sharing these stories, others will consider serving as community school governing board members.

July Compliance Update

OPENING ASSURANCES

BCHF Compliance Representatives will conduct Opening Assurances to certify that schools are eligible to open for the school year, the following items *must be current 10 business days prior to the school's first day for students*. Documentation should be uploaded to Epicenter or e-mailed to your sponsor representative:

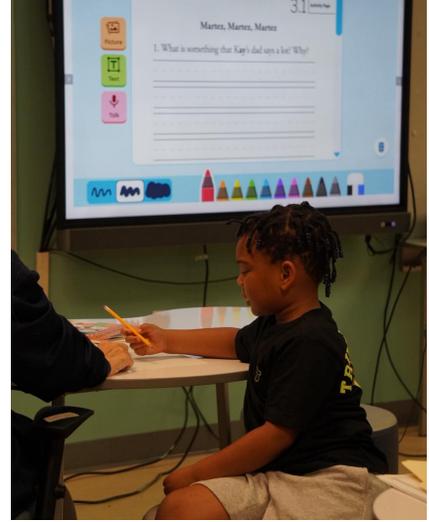
- Building lease (or proof of ownership)
- Occupancy permits (for first year in building or recent renovations)
- Health & safety inspections
- Fire inspections
- School emergency plans
- Liability insurance

ATTENTION OEDS-R ADMINISTRATORS

As the deadline for Opening Assurances draws near, please be reminded to review and update information in the OEDS-r system, paying particular attention to changes in personnel. As always, if you have any questions, please contact your school's sponsor representatives.

School Highlights

Summer school is underway at [Great Western Academy](#)! From reading to math and everything in between, students are proving that learning is a year-round adventure.



At **Horizon Science Academy of Lorain**, college prep is a priority! High school students had the exciting opportunity to visit Cleveland State University. They explored key campus facilities and recreation areas, gaining a firsthand look at what life is like as a college student.



Kindergarten promotion ceremonies always have a special place in our heart! Congratulations to the kindergarten grads at **Imagine Schools of Akron**!



Students at **Main Preparatory Academy** celebrated the start of summer with a field day!



Upcoming Events

Happy Summer! We are pleased to offer the following professional development opportunities in July. Register for sessions via the link in the title, or go to BCHF's Professional Learning Opportunities Catalog, [available here](#).

Hiring and Supporting Special Education Staff

Wednesday, July 23 | 3:30-5:00 P.M. | Virtual

What personnel are qualified to deliver specially designed instruction? What related service personnel must a school have? As school leaders face the teacher shortage, they must plan ahead for the needs of students with disabilities. Learn about licensure requirements, ways to develop your personnel, and successful staffing strategies.

Register: <https://www.mylearningplan.com/WebReg/ActivityProfile.asp?D=22359&I=5095187>

BCHF School Leader Orientation

Tuesday, July 29 | 10:00 A.M. - 3:00 P.M. | In-person at BCHF

Are you and your school new to the BCHF portfolio of schools? Have you just been promoted to a school leadership position? Are you brand new to a school leadership role? Are you a leader within our portfolio of schools who wishes to refresh some information? If so, this meeting applies to you and to members of your management/leadership team! Our annual orientation covers the basics about Buckeye Community Foundation, our role in support of your schools, and some of our key operations. We also cover school funding basics for leaders, compliance monitoring, school improvement supports, and school discipline. Former participants tell us that this was the most relevant training of the year for leaders. Join us "in person" at our Columbus training room for an information-packed day! A light lunch will be provided.

Register: <https://www.mylearningplan.com/WebReg/ActivityProfile.asp?D=22359&I=5080408>

TEACHING TRAINING LAB! (2 opportunities)

Wednesday, July 30 - Thursday, July 31 (4-5:30 p.m. virtual)

Saturday, August 2 (10a.m. to 3 p.m.--IN PERSON at BCHF offices)

Do you want to "up" your teaching game? Are you new to the profession or just want to hone your skills? Two virtual afternoon sessions on July 30 and 31 will focus on classroom routines and procedures, effective lesson planning, and best practices for engaging lessons. Or, if you'd rather attend an in-person event, join us on Saturday, August 2nd from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. at the BCHF offices for an in-person Teaching Training Lab. Do yourself and your students a favor by increasing your knowledge as the school year gets off to a strong start!

July 30-31: <https://www.mylearningplan.com/WebReg/ActivityProfile.asp?D=22359&I=5118262>

August 2: <https://www.mylearningplan.com/WebReg/ActivityProfile.asp?D=22359&I=5118263>

Custom Professional Development

August is filling up quickly! If you have professional development needs for the first of the year or at any time, please fill out the PD Request form at the link below to request your needs. Our School Improvement team can deliver specialized sessions to match your needs and this year's goals. They can also customize any of their Leadership Summit sessions for your staff.

Custom sessions: <https://form.jotform.com/241714167765159>

Have a story or event at your school you would like to share? Send it to Hana Chandoul, Strategic Communications Specialist: hchandoul@buckeyehope.org.

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