



FIRST RING STUDENT LEADERSHIP INSTITUTE 2025-2026 YEARBOOK



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SECTION I

ADVANCING PUBLIC EDUCATION TOGETHER



The First Ring Schools Collaborative (FRSC) is an organization of more than 100 superintendents and administrators from 16 school districts that border the City of Cleveland. The FRSC represents more than 50,000 students in pre-K through grade 12. The FRSC was first established in 2000 to help districts address the interrelated challenges of poverty, mobility, diversity, equity, and the achievement gap. In addition to sponsoring the First Ring Student Leadership Institute (FRSLI), the FRSC sponsors the First Ring Leadership Academy (FRLA) for emerging teacher leaders. It has also implemented student wellness initiatives, career development projects, academic achievement programs, and school-based health care programs. FRSC also supports networks of colleagues in similar roles across its member districts, including administrators in Career Readiness, Curriculum, Early Childhood, EMIS, Equity, Family and Community Engagement, High School Principals, Public Relations and Communications, Pupil Services, Registrars, Safety and Security, Transportation, and Treasurers.

FRSC collaborates closely with the Cleveland Metropolitan School District and serves the following 16 member districts:

- Bedford City Schools
- Berea City Schools
- Brooklyn City Schools
- Cleveland Heights-University Heights City Schools
- Cuyahoga Heights Local Schools
- East Cleveland City Schools
- Euclid City Schools
- Fairview Park City Schools
- Garfield Heights City Schools
- Lakewood City Schools
- Maple Heights City Schools
- Parma City Schools
- Richmond Heights Local Schools
- Shaker Heights City Schools
- South Euclid Lyndhurst City Schools
- Warrensville Heights City Schools

FIRST RING STUDENT LEADERSHIP INSTITUTE

STUDENT VOICE



FRSLI has changed the way I look at what we know about the world, and how we can challenge our assumptions.

- Cora, Senior,
Lakewood High School

This year, more than 90 sophomores participated in the 2025-2026 First Ring Student Leadership Institute (FRSLI) where they worked to help solve important issues in their schools such as stress and mental health, school safety, motivation and engagement, and school spirit. Using a social justice framework called Youth Participatory Action Research (YPAR), students conducted original research on their issues based on their findings, and pitched their recommendations to First Ring Superintendents at the end of the year. In the process, they honed their skills in public speaking, teamwork, consensus building, critical thinking, leadership, and gained the confidence to share their views with others.

Approximately 90 juniors and seniors returned for their second or third year in the program, collaborating with students from our sister program in central Ohio to investigate the perceptions of their peers around Ohio regarding the use of artificial intelligence in K-12 education. They met with Dr. Chris Woolard, Chief Integration Officer for the Ohio Department of Education and Workforce in October, to learn about the state law requiring all Ohio public school districts to develop a local policy on the use of AI in schools. In November, the students collected preliminary survey data from attendees at the OSBA Capital Conference to inform their thinking around possible survey questions. In December, they developed an online survey for high school students across Ohio, and at the date of this writing, there over 3,000 respondents. This spring, students shared their results with leaders in education at several Ohio colleges and universities, with superintendents and high school principals in Northeast Ohio, and in November 2026, will present their research and findings at OSBA's Capital Conference.

As facilitators, my colleagues and I are deeply impressed with the hard work, dedication and passion for change these students demonstrate. As one of our Advisors said, "If you listen to students, they have insight on how to make schools better."

Thank you to the First Ring Superintendents and our many other partners for giving our students the opportunity to use their voices to make real change in their schools and communities!

Director, First Ring Schools Collaborative
Educational Service Center of Northeast Ohio

“

Even as a kid, I am able to create change.
- Grace, Senior

“

The ability and confidence to speak in front of larger crowds, and knowing my voice can be heard.
- Devin, Senior

“

I learned... what it means to be a social, professional adult, as well as a leader.
- Maya, Senior

“

I learned that each student has unique leadership skills...and that all students when given the opportunity can be leaders.
- Lynn, Advisor

OUR PARTNERS



MARTHA HOLDEN
JENNINGS FOUNDATION



The First Ring Schools Collaborative (FRSC), its networks and programs would like to thank the following partners and funders:

- Educational Service Center of Northeast Ohio
- Center for Educational Leadership, Cleveland State University
- Center for Urban Education, Cleveland State University
- Levin College of Public Affairs and Education, Cleveland State University
- Martha Holden Jennings Foundation
- Ohio State University Student Leadership Research Collaborative



SECTION II - YEAR 1

DISTRICT RESEARCH PROJECTS 2025-2026

Bedford City Schools

Engagement Within Classrooms

Our team investigated what factors affect student engagement because we felt this was a big issue in our school. This issue matters at our school because student engagement can affect academic success, extracurriculars and it affects mental health.

Our research question was: “What factors make students feel more engaged during class?” To answer this question, we collected data by surveying students and included 138 participants from all grade levels. We found that teachers and classmates affect engagement the most. In addition, 50% of the students are only sometimes engaged during class. Also, time of day and class schedule are the factors that affect student engagement the most.

Because of these findings, we recommend that teachers should foster a positive atmosphere for each class period, students should have the option to choose class periods that work best for them, and teachers should create an improved working environment for students so that students are more focused and more involved in their classes and school setting.

To begin making this change, our first action step is scheduling a meeting with our counselors and administration in early April, where we will discuss the importance of student engagement and how we can improve these factors. We hope this action will lead to better and more focused classrooms and ultimately improve student engagement at our school.



Bedford High School Leaders:

Left to right:

Front: Nyah Pittman, Artur Faison,
London Whisenant, Braylon Wray
Back: Bakara Robinson (Advisor),
Angelina Moore, Deshon Lawson, Aeneas
Matey, Janelle Brown, Amy Hujarski
(Advisor)

Not pictured: Za'kyla Groce, Reign
Lanier

SECTION II – YEAR 1

Berea-Midpark High School

College and Career Readiness

Many students feel lost and unsure of their futures at the end of their high school careers. While Berea-Midpark does an excellent job of assisting students to prepare for life after high school, there are some areas that can be improved.

Berea-Midpark does a great job at preparing students for life after high school with the assistance of the College and Career Readiness Program (CCRP). Our survey was distributed to all 2nd Period Classes using a Google Form. After collecting our data from 587 responses, we used qualitative and quantitative data to form recommendations that could be used to help our students become the best version of themselves, while improving our College and Career Readiness Program.



Berea-Midpark High School Leaders:

Danica Patel, Jazmyn Ledwell, Kyle Yoakam, Sofia Ewing, Somiya Galarza, Brooklyn Kovatch, Gabriel Bumbrey, Hannah Cunningham, Katelyn Williams, Taylor Biglang-awa, Caprice Brennan, Devin Voloschuk, Emersyn Fleming, Grace Trella, Pat Meyer (Advisor)

Brooklyn City Schools

Brooklyn High School’s Relationship with Mental Health and Work Ethic

Our team investigated the effects of work ethic and how it correlates with mental health because the lack of work completion was becoming increasingly noticeable. This issue matters at our school because we want to see a positive change that will bring more excitement to our classroom, and it will affect the student body’s grades and overall mood. Our research question was: “How does motivation affect school performance within Brooklyn School?”

To answer this question, we collected data by creating a survey and included 103 participating students from Brooklyn High School.

We found that the biggest reason for missing assignments was the lack of motivation. In addition, of the three different times of day, students felt motivated during noon. Students also reported that mental health had a greater impact on students’ ability to work in school. Because of these findings, we recommend that WIN block changes to include a reward system that brings in free time if students do not have missing assignments to add an extra motivation for students.

We hope this action will lead to a solution towards more motivation at our school and ultimately higher grades and assignments completed at our school.



Brooklyn High School Leaders:

Left to right:

- Front: Grace Paul, Katie Estrella
- Middle Row: Miss Cramer (Advisor), Ryan Howard, Mariam Al-Baghdadi, Kaylee McKissick
- Back: Gianna Kos, Jayden Drummond, Ryan Hilcu, Amin Elouardighi, Ben Lowers, Mr. Urig (Advisor)

Not pictured: Malak Chafki, Yousseff Elouardighi, Selena Gomez, Samadhi Holton, Angel Torres



SECTION II – YEAR 1

Cleveland Heights-University Heights City Schools

Does School Spirit Matter?

At Cleveland Heights High School, a lot of students come and go every day – but not everyone feels connected to our school community. We wanted to find out what level of school spirit we currently have. Why school spirit feels strong for some students but missing for others, and what we can do as a school community to change that. We created and shared surveys with students and staff to learn how people feel about school spirit, connection, communication, and involvement at CHHS. Our findings showed that most students feel more connected to school through sports and clubs, 72% of respondents said better communication would increase school spirit, and 57% said attending more school events would improve their connection to the school.

Based on these results, we recommend that CHHS hold an activities fair at the beginning of the school year, create one school-wide social media account to promote events and activities, and start an incentive program to encourage students to attend sports games and school events. To begin taking action, we plan to meet with the principal by May 15, 2026, meet with the PBIS team, and begin planning the activities fair for Fall 2026. We will measure success by giving the survey again in the future and tracking attendance at school events to see if school spirit improves.



Cleveland Heights High School Leaders:

Left to right:
Back: Phoenix Robinson, Braxton Dedino-Saddler, Skiye Westbrooks-Dantzler, Eddie Martin, Brittany Mosgo (Advisor)
Front: Skyla Starr, Ryley Williams, Noah Mattox, Ocean Leverette, Diana Ninsiima-Mafigiri

Cuyahoga Heights Local Schools

Student Experience Enhancement

Cuyahoga Heights is a very old school that has been around since the 1940s. Many things like our bathrooms, floors, and stairs can be renovated and improved. This may make students uncomfortable in our building. Our group wanted to find a way to make students more comfortable in our school. We considered several things to make this possible. These things were buying vending machines, forming a study hall lounge, or just renovating the school bathrooms. From our survey, we found that 53.7% of the surveyed students and faculty members would like vending machines. 25.5% wanted updated bathrooms and 20.8% wanted a study hall lounge. In the written portion of our survey we learned that so many students at our school would have liked to see certain improvements to our school like newer bathrooms, or updated stadium railings. This wasn't achievable as we don't have the funds at the moment to focus on these endeavors. We decided on purchasing vending machines because they were the most attainable. These would enhance student life by allowing students to get adequate nourishment during the school day or before sports if they forget to pack things. As a group we thought buying vending machines would be the best plan to combat these problems, as food can make students more comfortable. There is also an opportunity for long-term revenue.



Cuyahoga Heights School Leaders

Skyla Starr, Arianna Wittinger, Caleigh Rusch, Drayden Whitlow, Joee Cichocki, Jordan D'Orazio (Advisor)



SECTION II – YEAR 1

East Cleveland City Schools

How Behavior Impacts Discipline

The bell rings, and the hallways instantly fill up with energy, people laughing, talking, and sometimes a little tension in the air. As the day goes on, it becomes clear that student behavior doesn't just affect one person, it affects everyone. One student's actions can easily change the mood of a whole class or even the whole day.

Based on a survey of 114 students, 47.4% said they are sometimes affected by other students' behavior, and 22.8% said they've actually gotten in trouble because of someone else. Most students agree that misbehavior is a serious issue, with 61.4% calling it moderately serious and 29.8% calling it very serious. A lot of this behavior stems from boredom (71.1%), stress or mental health struggles (62.3%), feeling disrespected (64%), and conflicts with other students (61.4%).

Even though this is a problem, students also have ideas for fixing it. Many think classes should be more engaging (43%) and that there should be more opportunities to get involved in things like clubs (54.4%). Others say clearer expectations (34.2%) and fair consequences (40.4%) would help a lot. If schools focus on these areas, they can create a better environment where students feel more respected, less stressed, and more motivated—leading to less negative behavior overall



Shaw High School Leaders:

Left to right: Shandora Stokes (Advisor), Cloude Penzi, Jermaine Evans, Da'vynn Garrison, Quazon Golsby, Anthony Reid, Aurielle Arrington, Aequila Oliver, Tishawn Benson (Advisor)

Not pictured: Sarah Igiranza, Rebecca Ishimwe

Euclid City Schools

Student Experiences of Fighting at Euclid High School

First Ring called us to our first meeting at CSU in 2025, and ever since that scary, new, and exciting first day, we at Euclid High School have made it our mission to not only get to the bottom of an issue that plagued our school, but fix it. We recognized that fighting was a prominent issue that encapsulated our day-to-day lives in school, and we didn't want it to be that way. Using a data collection tool that we created, we found that over a quarter of our school's population felt the same way. We obtained over 260 responses from students across our campus, and an overwhelming majority of students found the leading causes of fighting to be lack of communication skills and lack of conflict resolution skills. We also found that an overwhelming number of students do not feel compelled to do anything about it themselves. That's why we are recommending programming for conflict resolution skills in middle school, training high schoolers to become peer mediators, and an anonymous platform for students to report issues as they arise.



Euclid High School Leaders:

Left to Right:

Front: Jamari Mason, Sara Mattinson (Advisor), Dawn Avery, Chazlyn Johnson, Adriana McKenzie-Upshaw, Damon Stephens, Phil Gasper, (Advisor)

Back: Tyra Harrison

Not pictured: Tyson Horhn, Jaden Cooper, Tamia Norris



SECTION II – YEAR 1

Fairview Park City Schools

College and Career Readiness

There are many students at Fairview Park High School that are unsure about their future, and are unsure if they are ready to tackle the next steps of their life. Fairview Park High School offers many opportunities in helping students identify what they want to do with their lives. Programs such as CCP, AP classes, and the Polaris Career program are offered to students as well. This mixture can cover a wide base of classes. In our research we surveyed the student body, and received 132 responses. In our responses we found that 40% of our student body feels unprepared for the next stage of their life and career. We also measured if there are staff members whom our students can talk to about these stages. 70% of our students have less than 2 outlets they felt comfortable talking to about their careers. After data collection we want to change our “mentoring period” into a college and career group session, with some of our identified outlets hosting these periods.



Fairview High School Leaders:

Left to right: Ryan Eckert (Advisor), Veronica Ramunno, Sadie Shugrue, Mia Gargiulo, Nathan Clark, Kenny Lowe, Liam Howatt (Advisor)



Garfield Heights City Schools

Increasing Student and Staff Engagement at Garfield Hts High School

Student engagement in high school is about how involved, interested, and motivated students are in their learning and school environment. It's strongly linked to academic success, attendance, and overall well-being. Engagement isn't just paying attention in class—it includes emotional connection, active participation, and a sense of belonging. It goes beyond just students though. Student and staff engagement in high school aren't separate issues—they reinforce each other. When both groups are engaged, schools function better academically, socially, and emotionally. When either side is disengaged, it tends to ripple across the entire environment. At Garfield Heights High School we find that most teachers and students just come to school because they 'have to' but aren't really engaged or immersed in the day-to-day activities or lessons. We sent out student and staff Google surveys and received responses from 47 people. Many students would like their voices to be included in the incentive and spirit week process. They would also like to have time in the day to be able to work with teachers in classes they are struggling with.



Garfield Heights High School Leaders:

Left to right: Laila Harper, Rosalie Toney, Ta'leah Jackson, Ryleigh, Poindexter, Peyton Kettel, Layla Payne



SECTION II – YEAR 1

Lakewood City Schools

School Lunch

A survey of the student population on the quality, quantity, and cost of school lunches revealed that over half of students are dissatisfied, primarily due to portions that are not filling, limited variety, and food that lacks overall quality and freshness. Many students also expressed concerns about the value of the meals compared to their cost. To address these issues, several improvements are proposed, including implementing alternating A/B day menus to increase variety and reduce repetition, adding a spice or toppings bar to allow for greater customization and student choice, and providing fresher fruit with the help of culinary students to enhance both quality and presentation. Additionally, gathering ongoing student feedback and making gradual menu adjustments could help ensure that changes better meet student preferences and improve overall satisfaction.



Lakewood High School Leaders:

Left to right:

Back: Owen Mondt, Landon Vincel, Tye Taylor, Mrs. Drost (Advisor), Dom Sgambellone, Mrs. Gentry (Advisor)

Front: Ciara Brown, Bipraviyani Thapa Chhetri, Claire Carson, Cora Barcelona, Shontavia Newson, Abigail Peck, Maya Trempe

Not pictured: Josie Willis



Maple Heights City Schools

Student Engagement

One of the most exciting parts of being a high school student is the ability to engage with the school community by joining clubs, sports, and other activities that interest you. Maple Heights High School offers a variety of after-school activities, but many students struggle to find information about them. This has led to low membership in school clubs and sports and decreased student engagement in the MHHS community. We sought to figure out how to improve student engagement so all students can feel pride and belonging in our school.

We collected data by surveying students, which included 102 participants from MHHS. We found that 19% of the students do not feel engaged and 38% of students feel somewhat engaged, while 43% said they feel engaged. In addition, on a scale of 1 to 5 (1 being the hardest and 5 being the easiest) on how easy it is to find clubs/sports, the average score was 3.16. Because of these findings, we recommend that MHHS should do more student engagement activities so that students feel more connected to school and engage with school culture. In addition, working with the Media Arts CTE program, we recommend advertising clubs/sports more effectively. We hope this action will lead to more accurate information spreading and ultimately improve engagement at our school.



Maple Heights High School Leaders:

Left to right: Ms. Panzero (Advisor), Jazaray McSwain, Kavonna Reddick, Makayla Moore, Cayla Joiner, Braelynn Shepard, Chance Kirksey

Not Pictured: Ms. McCay (Advisor), Ramone Pernell, Stephen Tillis, Brayden Holifield, James Colbert, Sincere'lei Leonard, Curtis Watkins



SECTION II – YEAR 1

Parma City Schools

How Social Emotional Wellness Impacts Peer Relationships

Students at Normandy High School often express difficulties dealing with stress, both in school and out of school. Stressors from home life, academics, athletics, and other factors often lead to students who are in fight or flight mode on a daily basis. This not only impacts how students interact with each other on a daily basis, but also impacts how conflicts are resolved amongst peers. Our study found that a majority of Normandy students would rate their comfort level with peers at a 3 out of 5 rating, indicating that, while not inherently negative, a good majority of students at Normandy high school see room for improvement when it comes to peer relationships. The main factors that we found leads to uncomfortable peer relationships is stress and overall struggles with emotional wellness. Lastly, we found that students feel they would benefit from a safe space to talk to other peers about stress. Based on these findings we are recommending that a student-led emotional support group be created at Normandy, which can advocate for student emotional wellness as well as provide opportunities for students to talk to other students about Normandy High School.



Normandy High School Leaders:

Left to right:

Back: Pedro Vargas, Jessie Norris, Rajanard Brown, Lily Fertelli, Lindsay Meriwether, Jensen Vargo, Landon Hardy
Front: Lynn Monaco, Heaven Higgins, Madeline Camacho.

Parma City Schools

Student Attendance at Valley Forge High School

Imagine waking up for school and deciding whether it's worth going, not because of academics, but because you don't feel safe, connected, or included. For many students at Valley Forge High School, attendance is influenced by more than just responsibility; it's shaped by their daily experiences within the building. What if improving attendance wasn't just about policies, but about creating an environment where students want to show up? This project explores how school culture and safety impact attendance and what can be done to improve it.

Our study surveyed 931 students to better understand the factors influencing attendance. Our findings revealed that 70% of students are motivated to attend school because of their friends, emphasizing the importance of social connections. Additionally, 33% of students reported feeling unsafe in areas such as hallways, bathrooms, and the cafeteria, while nearly one-third of freshmen expressed a lack of belonging in their new environment. Based on these insights, our team proposed several solutions, including increasing adult supervision in high-traffic areas, incorporating more collaborative group work into classrooms, and creating a dedicated freshman transition day to build connections and inclusion. By addressing safety, belonging, and peer engagement, these changes aim to create a more supportive school environment and ultimately improve student attendance.



Valley Forge High School Leaders:

Left to right:
Kyle Hronek (Advisor), Nolan French, Nicholas Maron, Delaney Kercher, Ella Fale, Timothy Claypoole (Advisor)

Not pictured: Brooklyn Doehring



SECTION II – YEAR 1

Richmond Heights Local Schools

Richmond Heights Middle School: Student & Teacher Relationships

Our research question is, “How do Richmond Heights Middle School students perceive their relationships with their teachers and their peers?” We learned that relationships in middle school are very important. Students who have close, positive, and supportive relationships with their teachers will attain higher levels of achievement than students who experience more conflict in their relationships. Fifty-two students completed our survey, and it was noted that 88.5% of students feel respected by their teachers, but only 65.4% of students feel respected by their peers. Conclusions from our research show that these relationships, both with teachers and peers, do cause stress for 53% of Richmond Heights Middle School students. Suggestions for improvement include more student/staff community-building activities, including check-ins, Restorative Circles, icebreakers, and assigned group/partner projects.

Richmond Heights High School: Bullying

Research has shown that over 19% of students nationwide report being bullied. This bullying can affect both mental health and academic success. “Is Bullying a Challenge at Richmond Heights Upper School?” Through our research, we wanted to identify whether our peers felt that bullying was a challenge at our school. Fifty students completed our survey. Results showed that most students (62%) reported seeing bullying, but 66% of students surveyed did not see bullying as a major challenge at our school. This, along with suggestions for stopping bullying, alerts us to the fact that many students are not aware of our bullying policy and the consequences associated with bullying. We suggest that the bullying policy be reviewed with students, that an anonymous reporting system be created to report bullying, and that activities continue to be hosted to build school culture so students can get to know each other better.



Richmond Heights High School and Middle School Leaders:

Left to right:

Front: Chaynae Eubanks, Ethan Phoumyyoth
Back: Mariah Avak, Micah Pettus-Brooks, Nevaeh Walker, Dr. Jasmine King (Advisor)
Not pictured: A'Zareah Eatmon, Dream Williams, Frank Rodgers, Isaiah Stadford, Rayanah Lee, Amiyah Posey, De'loreon McDaniel, Justin Rivera, Lydia Brown-Sowah, Breanna Kern, Kingston Jackson, Zahirrah Bowden, Mr. Brandon Hanna (Advisor)



Shaker Heights Local Schools

Peer Power = Promise

Have you ever needed help in a class, but did not feel comfortable asking the teacher? Would you be willing to ask a peer for help instead? Many of the students at our high school have trouble being successful in their core classes. Our school had over 1500 failing grades for the fall semester of 2025. We knew we needed to do something about this concern.

Our study surveyed students from all grade levels to determine the supports students currently use and might use in the future to help them be successful in their classes. We wanted to know if having a peer tutoring program would be a useful tool to the students. 373 students participated in our study. In addition, we interviewed previous leaders of peer tutoring programs and leaders of our school's writing center to hear their advice. We learned that 45% of our participants use conferences (after school support from teachers) and 43% of our participants were interested in a peer tutoring program. We met with our school administrators to understand which academic areas require the most support to increase student success.

Our students recommend that we establish a peer tutoring program after school. We hope to continue examining the feasibility of this program as we plan for the academic year 2026-2027.



Shaker Heights High School Leaders:

Left to right:
Reine Hinton, Tianna Fields, Annika Hudson, Joey Friguglietti, Jonathan Fogerty, Amy Fogerty (Advisor)

Not pictured: Sarah Davis (Advisor)



SECTION II – YEAR 1

South Euclid Lyndhurst Schools

Key Factors That Influence Student Actions and School Involvement

Many students have expressed their lack of interest in classes and motivation to attend extracurricular activities. Some students want to be involved but don't know where to start.

Brush students did a survey of 151 people to explore the barriers that influence student actions and involvement. Our survey was sent out to all staff and students at Brush, and we asked if teachers could find time to have their students fill out the survey. Our survey included both closed and open-ended questions that we used to gather information to come up with our recommendations to help better the school. Based on the survey, we collected data that students are impacted by their teachers' teaching style and the environment they are in. First Ring came up with the idea to introduce more student spirit! We could start having assemblies after mentally exhausting events, as well as celebrating and acknowledging more students to make them feel welcomed and want to attend Brush High School.



Charles F. Brush High School Leaders:

Left to right:
Front: AutumnRae Scott,
Kourtnee Taylor, Dalilah Farley,
Kameryn Clark
Back: Jack Rhine (Advisor),
Ke'Shawn Blakemore, Phillip
Alexander, Alijah Dinkins, Aden
Albach, Meia Christian (Advisor)



Warrensville Heights City Schools

Improving Mental Wellness

Imagine that the night before State Testing begins, you find out that you are being evicted from your home. In a flash, your mother calls your aunt and asks if she can house you and your two small siblings so that you won't have to go to a shelter. Your aunt says yes and you move into a 3 bedroom apartment where 5 other people are already living. You make your way to a bedroom with two bunk beds that sleep four kids, and you and your two younger siblings make your bed on top of a comforter on the floor between the two bunk beds. It's midnight, and the test that determines if you graduate begins at 8:30 am, but instead of preparing to take it, you're left lying awake, wondering about your uncertain future.

Traumatic situations can take place in the blink of an eye and those situations can easily affect how we function in school. We believe that mental health and wellness directly affect the learning environment and the school community. Factors at home tend to influence how students and teachers respond to the world around us and the people around us.

Our team conducted research using surveys in Google Forms to ask teachers and students if they believed that their mental health and wellness affected their performance at school. We surveyed a total of 160 respondents and discovered that 60% of students agreed that factors at home influence their mental health and behavior at school, while 46% of teachers surveyed felt neutral.

As a result, we would like to implement calming spaces for students and teachers to provide stress breaks before returning to the learning environment. We would also like to suggest implementing a staff retreat that focuses on helping teachers cope mentally in the classroom be implemented as a yearly event in addition to the mental health and wellness events that are promoted to our staff.



Warrensville Heights High School Leaders:

Left to right:
Front: Shawn Chisholm (Advisor), Jaleah Lattimore, Aniyah Wison-Williams
Back: Alexander Chisholm, Kobe Smith, Milee Batson, Taniyah Lewis-Gaines, Kennady Nelson, Olivia Walker, Dion Hudnall (Advisor)



SECTION III – YEAR 2 & 3

STATE RESEARCH PROJECT 2025–2026

Student Perceptions on the Use of Artificial Intelligence in Schools

The FRSLI and SLRC Year 2/3 students spent the 2025–2026 school year conducting a large-scale student research project focused on artificial intelligence in schools. As Ohio school districts prepare to adopt AI policies by July 2026, students recognized that many important decisions about AI use were being made without meaningful student input. In response, students from districts across Northeast, Central, and Southern Ohio worked together to design and distribute a statewide survey examining how AI is currently being used in schools and what students think responsible AI policies should include.

The student-created survey explored topics such as academic integrity, classroom expectations, teacher use of AI, AI literacy, privacy, stress and mental health, and preparation for college and careers. The project ultimately collected 3,467 responses from students across Ohio, making it one of the largest student-led studies on AI in schools in the state.



Students found that AI use among students was generally lower than many adults assume, with the most common use occurring in math and English/language arts courses. Students reported that they generally understand the difference between appropriate and inappropriate AI use, but also described widespread confusion caused by inconsistent expectations across classrooms and schools. Many students emphasized that schools should focus on teaching responsible AI use rather than simply banning AI tools.

Based on their findings, students developed recommendations for school districts, including clearer AI expectations, AI literacy instruction for students, professional development for teachers, syllabus-level AI guidance, and ongoing student involvement in AI policy discussions. Throughout the project, students presented their findings to school and district leaders, demonstrating the power of student voice and youth-led research to inform important educational decisions.



Many students emphasized that schools should focus on teaching responsible AI use rather than simply banning AI tools.

SECTION IV – OUR GRADUATES

CLASS OF 2025–2026

This year, 35 Seniors participated in FRSLI. In their Sophomore year they completed district research projects with their Year 1 teams. As Juniors they collaborated with students from other districts on the “Ohio’s Teacher Pipeline” state-wide research project. This year as seniors, they completed a state-wide research project on “Student Perceptions on the Use of Artificial Intelligence in Schools” alongside their Year 2 peers.

Over the course of the last three years, these outstanding students attended 26 FRSLI sessions, mentored numerous Year 1 teams in Northeast and Central Ohio, and delivered as many as 5 research presentations to adult decision-makers. They dedicated countless hours between sessions to make their work and that of their team successful. Through it all, these seniors have shown a passion for making their voices heard, commitment to bringing about meaningful change, and persistence in advocating for students across the state.

Congratulations to our 36 graduating students on an amazing three years and their many, many achievements yet to come!

Berea-Midpark High School

Caprice Brennan
Emersyn Fleming
Grace Trella
Devin Voloschuk

Lakewood High School

Cora Barcelona
Abigail Peck
Maya Trempe

Richmond Heights High School

Zahirrah Bowden
Kingston Jackson
Breanna Kern

Brooklyn High School

Malak Chafki
Youssef Elouardighi
Ryan Hilcu
Samadhi Holton
Angel Torres

Maple Heights High School

Cayla Joiner
Chance Kirksey
Ramone Pernell
Braelynn Shepard
Stephen Tillis

Shaker Heights High School

Cora Bissett
Cailah Fountain
Nathaniel Price
Korei Thomas

Brush High School

Reggie Rucker

Normandy High School

Rajanard Brown
Madeline Camacho
Lily Fertelli
Heaven Higgins

Shaw High School

Jaylee Hannah (YR 2)
Sarah Igiraneza

Euclid High School

Jamari Mason
Adriana McKenzie-Upshaw
Tamia Norris

Warrensville Heights High School

Aliya Cochran
Olivia Price

Congratulations!

SECTION V

THE YEAR IN PHOTOS



THE YEAR IN PHOTOS



SECTION VI

STUDENT REFLECTIONS



GROWTH AND CONFIDENCE

FRSLI has taught me how to be assertive and how to collect data to back up and support my ideas.

I used to really struggle with public speaking, but I have found this new confidence over the past 3 years. Not only that, but I also never really thought I could make a difference with just my voice.

I gained the ability and confidence to speak in front of larger crowds, and know my voice can be heard.

FRSLI has changed the way I talk to my peers, leading me to be more welcoming and talkative, even with people I have just met.

STUDENT VOICE AND LEADERSHIP

The most important thing I learned over the past 3 years in FRSLI is how important the voice of the youth is.

The outcome won't always be what you expect, but that makes it all the more valuable.

Research is not just fun to do, but you can make a huge change in the world doing so.

FRSLI has changed the way I handle conflicts in school or professional settings, as well as how I conduct myself in front of adults.

CONNECTION AND COMMUNITY

FRSLI has changed the way I talk to my peers, leading me to be more welcoming and talkative, even with people I have just met

The most important thing I learned over the past 3 years in FRSLI is struggle looks different in many places, so be open minded and learn to adapt.

My favorite memory is constantly being grouped with unfamiliar people and seeing how similar we are though we come from different places. It gave me the opportunity to interact and gain relationships from people I assumed were completely different than me.

SECTION VIII

FIRST RING STUDENT LEADERSHIP INSTITUTE STAFF BIOS



Dr. Bill Wagner is Director of the First Ring Schools Collaborative (FRSC) at the Educational Service Center of Northeast Ohio. He coordinates the FRSC's activities across its many networks and programs, facilitates the First Ring Leadership Academy and assists with regional and state political advocacy efforts. Prior to joining the ESC, Dr. Wagner served as Superintendent of the Fairview Park City Schools. He earned his Ed.D. in Educational Leadership from Ashland University.



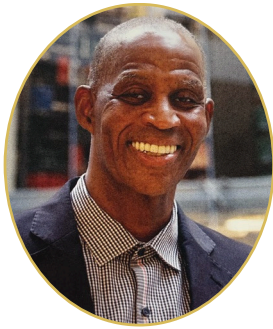
Stephanie Denham is the Coordinator of Operations at the Educational Service Center of Northeast Ohio, where she focuses on improving operational efficiencies, advancing cross-department initiatives, and supporting executive leadership in organizational decision-making and business development. Prior to joining the ESC, Stephanie worked for Chicago Public Schools in multiple roles and most recently worked as an Educational Consultant for State Support Team Region 3.



Dr. Adam Voight is Director of the Center for Urban Education at Cleveland State University where he partners with urban schools, communities, and youth to create environments conducive to the learning and well-being of young people, particularly those affected by poverty and racism. Adam's community-engaged research and action has been supported by organizations such as the U.S. Department of Education and Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Adam has a Ph.D. in Community Psychology from Peabody College of Education and Human Development at Vanderbilt University.



Donald Wayne McLeod is a professional speaker and consultant on the topic of interpersonal communication and the founder of Perceptionology, LLC. At his sessions and seminars in schools, businesses and community organizations, Donald Wayne covers topics such as the keys to effective communication, understanding how others perceive us, and building 21st century skills. His publications include two books titled Perceptionology® 101 and Lunch Matters. Donald Wayne began working with FRSLI & FRLA participants this year on personal presentation and public speaking.



Dr. Keith Bell, Sr. is a Director of Leadership Services at the Educational Service Center (ESC) of Northeast Ohio. Currently, he is assisting with initiatives for the college and transition for underrepresented students to graduate school at Ohio State University. Prior to joining the ESC, Dr. Bell served as Superintendent of the Euclid City School District. He earned his Ed.D. in Educational Administration from Ohio State University.



Dr. Rosalinda Godinez is a postdoctoral research fellow at the Center for Urban Education. Her work centers on immigration, action research, and Chicana feminism, with a focus on how communities generate knowledge and advocate for change. She applies participatory and feminist methodologies to support teachers and students in engaging with Youth Participatory Action Research (YPAR) as a tool for educational and social transformation. Rosalinda earned her Ph.D. in Social and Cultural Studies from the University of California, Berkeley.

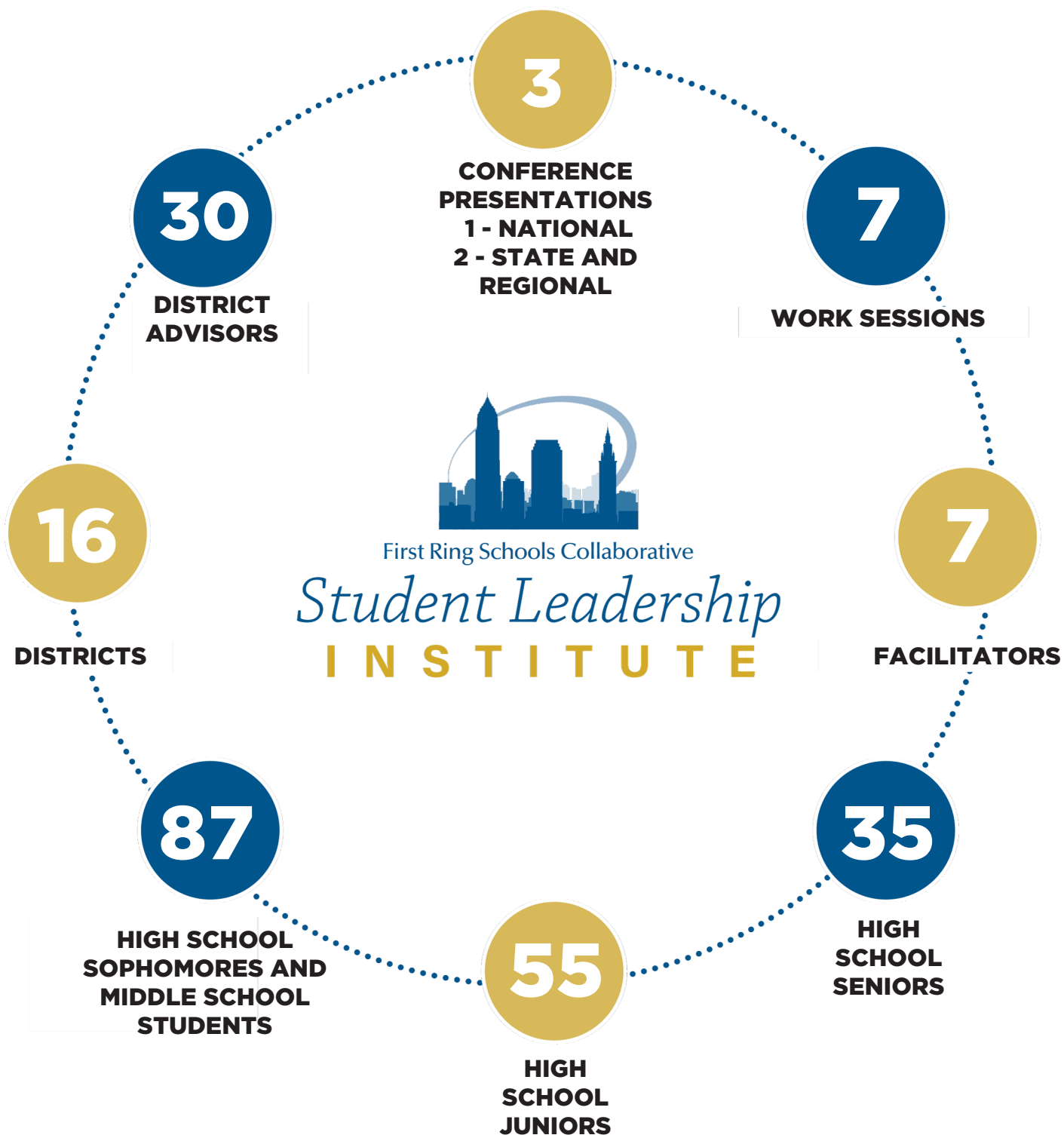


Marquan Jones is a third year doctoral student at Cleveland State University, pursuing his PhD in Urban Education with a specialization in learning and development. Marquan is also a former high school Algebra teacher as well as former assistant principal. As a Cleveland native and former teacher, facilitating the YPAR process with FRSLI has been one of the standout highlights from this academic year.



Barb Pritschau is an Administrative Assistant for the Educational Service Center (ESC) of Northeast Ohio. Prior to joining the ESC, Barb was an Administrative Assistant with Brunswick City Schools for 16 years assisting the Director of Business Affairs and the Personnel Director. Prior to entering the education sector, Barb worked in manufacturing as a Mechanical Designer.

FRSLI BY THE NUMBERS . . .





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