

FIRST RING LEADERSHIP ACADEMY 2024-2025 YEARBOOK



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First Ring Schools Collaborative

Leadership

A C A D E M Y

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 over 50,000 students, pre-K through grade 12, and serves as the sponsor of the Leadership Academy. The FRSC was 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 Leadership Academy (FRLA) and the First Ring Student Leadership Institute (FRSLI), the FRSC has 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, including administrators in Career Development, Curriculum, Early Childhood, EMIS, Equity, Family and Community Engagement, High School Principals, Public Relations and Communications, Pupil Services, Safety and Security, and Treasurers.

FRSC collaborates closely with the Cleveland Metropolitan School District as it 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 Leadership Academy

A Professional Development Program for District Leaders



The First Ring Leadership Academy (FRLA) is a year-long professional development and leadership training program for new and emerging leaders in the 16 districts contiguous to the Cleveland Metropolitan School District. Participants are nominated by their superintendents in the beginning of each school year to become part of the cohort. The FRLA provides participants with an expanded knowledge base and skill set foundation to prepare them to assume additional leadership roles within

their districts and continue improving district and individual outcomes to serve all levels of students within Cuyahoga County.

The Academy meets for nine sessions throughout the academic year with a focus on building leadership skills and district capacity to address the unique challenges of first ring, urban schools. Participants engage in a variety of learning activities including leadership trait analyses, case studies, readings and reflections. Sessions are held at either the ESC of Northeast Ohio or First Ring districts. The FRLA is a key “build from within” system of educational excellence and leadership development that supports and benefits the entire First Ring regional area.

This year, there are 21 participants in the program from across the 16 districts.

What District Leaders have to say about the program



My participation in FRLA has strengthened my leadership skills by teaching me how to communicate effectively, work well with others, and take initiative.



The most enjoyable part of the cohort was being able to collaborate and learn from different leaders from the First Ring schools.



I enjoyed the opportunity to collaborate with the other members of the FRLA. I loved going to other districts and seeing what was taking place. I feel that this program helped me grow as a leader.

OUR PARTNERS

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
- The Cleveland Foundation

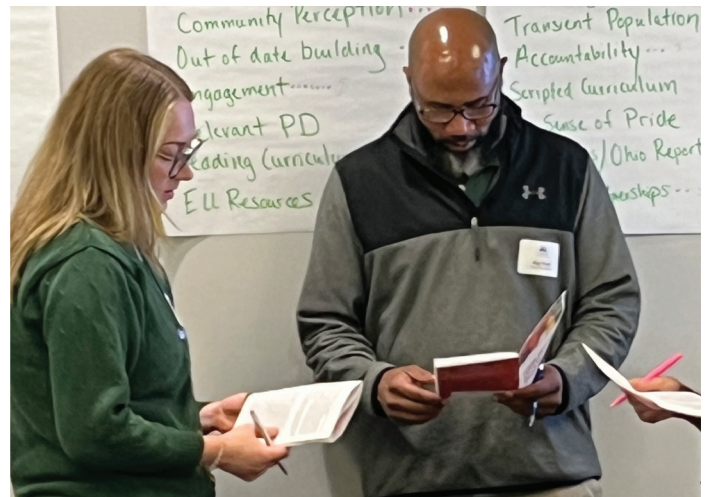


**MARTHA HOLDEN
JENNINGS FOUNDATION**

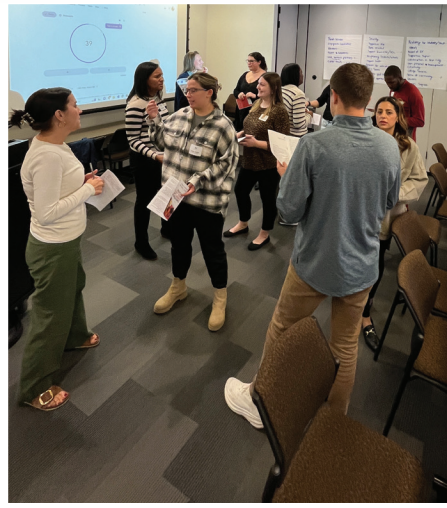


THE YEAR IN PHOTOS

DISTRICT LEADERS IN ACTION



DISTRICT LEADERS IN ACTION



2024–2025

FIRST RING LEADERSHIP ACADEMY COHORT BIOGRAPHIES

Bedford City Schools

Faith Gordon

Role: Social-Emotional Learning Supervisor

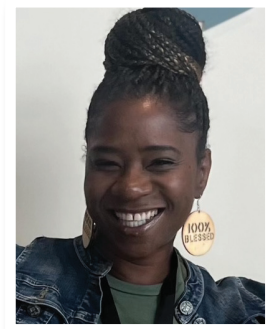
Bachelor's Degree - Cleveland State University

Master's Degree - Case Western Reserve Mandel School of Applied Social Sciences

Other credentials - Pupil Services License in School Social Work, Alternative Administrative Specialist License

Years in the District: 6

Years in Education: 18



Bakara Robinson

Role: 6th - 8th Grade Health/Physical Education Teacher

Location: Heskett Middle School

Supplemental Duties: Academic Pursuit Advisor, Healthcare Committee member, BEA Building Rep, Sunshine Committee Chairperson, Black History Month Program and Soul Food Fest Committee Co-Chair, Culture Committee member

Bachelor's Degree - University of Michigan

Years in the District: 23

Years in Education: 23



Project Summary:

"Together We Can" is a Bedford City School District (BCSD) initiative to strengthen our community connections and enhance the support we provide to our students. Under this initiative, we are organizing and implementing the return of the BCSD Pancake Breakfast along with a 2K Walk/Run and 5K Run. This event will involve students, staff, parents, and community members to promote physical, mental/emotional, and social well-being throughout our district.

Our students thrive when there is strong collaboration between schools, families, and the broader community. Through this community event and others, we seek to create a safe, supportive, and welcoming environment that nurtures students' social-emotional and academic well-being. Ultimately, this event will promote a culture that aids in the lifelong success of our students and the four communities that make up the Bedford City School District.

Berea City Schools

Madison Carlton

Role: 7th-Grade ELA Teacher

Location: Berea Midpark Middle School

Supplemental Duties: Team Leader, PBIS Tier 1 Committee Member ,
District Deeper Learning Design Team Member

Bachelor's Degree: Baldwin Wallace University

Years in the District: 3

Years in Education: 3



Project Summary:

My capstone project, “Spotlight on Strategies”, focuses on identifying, highlighting, and celebrating innovative teaching strategies that align with Berea City Schools building and district goals to deepen student learning. The project emphasizes celebrating teacher efforts and highlighting student engagement.

Teachers will implement strategies in their classrooms, and students will share their perspectives on what made learning enjoyable and effective through peer interviews. Students from our 7th and 8th-grade video announcements class conducted short interviews with teachers and students to showcase these strategies.

This project seeks to strengthen teacher morale, build professional connections, and encourage the adoption of effective teaching strategies that enhance student learning. The goal is to help foster a thriving school community where both teachers and students feel valued and empowered, while also building a culture of recognition, collaboration, and authentic student feedback.

Brooklyn City Schools

Marcello DeAngelis

Role: Pk-7 Assistant Principal

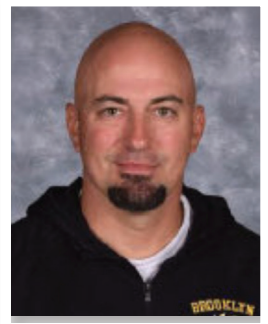
Bachelor's Degree: University of Mount Union

Master's Degree: Graceland University

Other credentials - OHIO Educational Leadership license from University of Dayton

Years in the District: 1.5

Years in Education: 18



Project Summary:

My project focuses on a mentorship program involving our older students interacting with our elementary students. At Brooklyn, we have a unique campus as all of our students are on a single campus. I decided to take advantage of our situation by creating opportunities for our oldest students to interact with our younger students in the elementary building.

One of my main duties is supervision during morning arrival. We have a lot of students who get dropped off early and eat breakfast. Managing that large group of students can present challenges. In conjunction with our high school campus, we have a large group of high school students that come down to our campus to interact with our elementary students during morning arrival. The high school students do a variety of activities with our students such as play board games and read books. This has had a major positive impact in multiple ways. Behaviorally, this provides structure for our students as well as allows them to build positive relationships with older students who they view as role models.

Cleveland Heights - University Heights

Katie Buettner

Role: High School Science Teacher

Location: Heights High School

Supplemental Duties: Co-Department Science Chair, Summer School Administrator, Member of Building and District Leadership Teams.

Bachelor's Degree: Cleveland State University

Master's Degree: Ursuline College

Other credentials: Diversity and Inclusion certificate from Cornell University, Author of Three Children's Books

Years in the District: 6

Years in Education: 10



Project Summary:

My capstone project focuses on identifying and implementing strategies to increase student achievement on the Ohio State Test (OST) in Biology. Our school, like many others in urban and inner-ring districts, has struggled with consistently low performance in this area. To address this challenge, I am exploring both structural and instructional changes that could have a meaningful impact on student outcomes.

One key area of focus is the timing of the course. Currently, Biology is taught in 9th grade, but research and local comparisons suggest that students may be more developmentally and academically prepared for this tested subject in 10th grade, after a foundational year in high school. Moving the course to 10th grade may also allow for more alignment with students' math readiness and science literacy.

In addition, I am proposing that Biology class sizes be capped at 24 students to ensure a more manageable learning environment and to allow for individualized instruction. Another component includes assigning an intervention specialist to the Biology team to support diverse learners and ensure accommodations are implemented effectively.

To strengthen this proposal, I plan to collaborate with neighboring First Ring districts to learn what supports and strategies they have successfully implemented. Their insights will inform best practices and offer comparative data that can help guide local decision-making.

Ultimately, the goal of this capstone is to remove systemic barriers, provide more equitable access to high-quality biology instruction, and improve overall student performance on the OST in Biology. Through intentional structural changes and collaboration, I hope to support students in developing a deeper understanding of science and increase their chances for academic success.

Cuyahoga Heights Local Schools

Kelly Cummins

Role: Speech Language Pathologist/ Preschool Coordinator

Supplemental Duties: Elementary School's MTSS program

Bachelor's Degree - Hiram College

Master's Degree: Cleveland State University

Years in the District: 7

Years in Education: 12



Project Summary:

For my leadership capstone project, I compiled and submitted the documentation required to apply for the Governor's Science of Reading Recognition. This rigorous process required me to reflect on and capture our school's four-year journey toward becoming a model site for Science of Reading implementation. Throughout this process, I had the privilege of taking a leadership role in every step of this transformation, and the experience contributed significantly to my own growth.

I played a key role in developing our Multi-Tiered Systems of Support (MTSS) framework, ensuring that every student received differentiated literacy instruction based on data-driven decision-making. Additionally, I authored the first draft of our building literacy plan, which set clear, measurable goals aligned with the Science of Reading and guided our instructional priorities.

Perhaps most importantly, I worked collaboratively with teachers, support staff, and administration to coordinate this multi-year transformation. The success of this effort relied on cooperative leadership — facilitating communication, problem-solving, and capacity-building at every level of the organization.

Gathering evidence for the application — including professional development records, assessment procedures, team structures, and data on student progress — allowed me to reflect on how far we have come and how much collective effort it required. In March, we received news that Cuyahoga Height Elementary School was one of only 47 in Ohio to receive this recognition, validating both our hard work and the strength of our collaborative leadership model.

This project not only highlighted my growth as a leader but reinforced my belief in the power of shared vision, data driven decision making, and fostering relationships to drive meaningful change.

East Cleveland City Schools

Anthony DiPio

Role: 2nd-Grade Teacher

Location: Caledonia Elementary School

Supplemental Duties: PBIS Team, District Design Team

Bachelor's Degree: Walsh University

Years in the District: 2

Years in Education: 4



Tishawn Benson

Role: Title 1 Teacher 3rd-5th

Location: Mayfair Elementary School

Supplemental Duties: Member of the MTSS Team, Student District Discipline/Supportive Environments Committee, PBIS and BLT.

Bachelor's Degree: University of Akron

Master's Degree: Cleveland State University

Other credentials: Wilson Certified Teacher and RAP 95 Certified Teacher

Years in the District: 26

Years in Education: 26



Project Summary:

During the 2024-2025 school year, we chose to work closely with Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) with Caledonia and Mayfair Elementary Schools. The project aimed to implement strategies and activities that lowered the number of major behavior incidents in the buildings. During the school year, the main goal was to bridge the gap between two school buildings by attempting to implement similar activities and supports that both PBIS teams do. At Caledonia Elementary School, we have started implementing monthly refreshers for the expected behaviors in the building. At Mayfair Elementary School, they have already implemented weekly meetings to acknowledge the students following the expected behaviors.

Late in May, students from Caledonia will visit Mayfair. During this visit, students will be assigned to a house team. House Teams are being implemented at Mayfair to foster a sense of community, belonging, and school pride by dividing students into smaller, mixed-grade groups that participate in activities and competitions, promoting teamwork, leadership, and positive relationships. By having students participate in this activity, they will get a sense of what is expected at Mayfair next year.

Euclid City Schools

Tracy Kondrit

Role: 6th-Grade ELA Teacher

Location: Euclid Middle School

Supplemental Duties: PBIS Committee, Swim Teach Coach

Bachelor's Degree: Ohio University

Master's Degree: American College of Education

Years in the District: 3

Years in Education: 5



Dylan Sullivan

Role: 2nd-Grade Teacher

Location: Arbor Elementary School

Bachelor's Degree: University of Nebraska – Lincoln

Master's Degree: University of Cincinnati

Years in the District: 4

Years in Education: 8



Ray Ford

Role: 8th-Grade ELA Teacher

Location: Euclid Middle School

Supplemental Duties: Co-Athletic Director

Bachelor's Degree: The Ohio State University

Master's Degree: Tiffin University, Webster University

Other credentials: Vice President of Euclid Public Library Board of Trustees, Treasurer of Euclid Band, Orchestra, Parent

Years in the District: 4

Years in Education: 4



Project Summary:

Our project is aimed at transforming the media centers within our district, specifically Euclid High School and Euclid Middle School. We were able to revitalize these spaces into vibrant, student-centered learning hubs. We enhanced resources by adding relevant and more up to date titles to the collection, began improving the overall aesthetic, and fostered partnerships that have and will continue to inspire both students and teachers to engage more deeply with the media center as a research hub, as a place of exploration, and as a place to simply enjoy reading. This project was all about creating an environment that supports and encourages active learning and collaboration.

Fairview Park City Schools

Jill Davis

Role: 3rd-Grade Intervention Specialist

Location: Gilles-Sweet Elementary

Supplemental Duties: Grade Level Leader, Building Leadership Team, PBIS Committee

Bachelor's Degree: Bowling Green State University

Master's Degree: Grand Canyon University

Other credentials: Wilson Reading System Practitioner

Years in the District: 28

Years in Education: 32



Project Summary:

In today's education, Social Emotional Learning (SEL) programs are increasingly important due to the growing challenges students face, such as trauma, anxiety, and social communication difficulties. To address this, Jill's Capstone Project focuses on organizing and simplifying the Everyday Speech curriculum—a web-based SEL and social communication resource used at Gilles-Sweet Elementary in the Fairview Park school district. This curriculum, developed by licensed Speech-Language Pathologists, school psychologists, and special educators, uses video modeling to teach social skills through real-life scenarios.

Despite its effectiveness, the curriculum's extensive materials, including lessons, videos, and games, can overwhelm teachers. To solve this, Jill plans to create a streamlined Google Site that serves as a digital binder. The site will offer easy access to Everyday Speech content by including:

- Direct hyperlinks to lessons, organized by topic.
- Scope and sequence charts to outline the lesson flow.
- Lesson plans with clear instructions for teachers.
- Sample journal pages for student reflection.
- Social stories with scripts for common social situations.
- Suggested videos and games to reinforce learning.
- Strategies and accommodations for diverse learners.
- IEP goals linked to specific lessons, supporting individualized education plans.

By creating this Google Site, Jill aims to make the Everyday Speech curriculum more accessible and practical for teachers, reducing navigation issues and maximizing the program's effectiveness. This project will enhance SEL and social communication instruction in the district, particularly benefiting Tier 2 and Tier 3 students with behavior or communication challenges. Ultimately, the streamlined resource will empower teachers and help students develop essential social and emotional skills for success in school and beyond.

Garfield Heights City Schools

Abigail Klamer

Role: Curriculum Instruction Specialist

Bachelor's Degree: Miami University

Master's Degree: Cleveland State University

Other credentials: Principal License

Years in the District: 18

Years in Education: 20



Project Summary:

The purpose of this project is to provide our students with learning opportunities that will allow them to gain background knowledge on topics that they will be studying in their Language Arts classes. In our k-5 grades, Garfield Heights uses Wit and Wisdom (k-3) and EL Education (4-5). Each program has the year divided into four modules. Each module covers a different topic. To make these modules more meaningful and to allow for better comprehension, Garfield Heights wants to expose our students to experiences that correlate with the topics covered in the modules. An example of this would be in Wit and Wisdom, the kindergarten course has a module entitled "Once Upon a Farm." To allow for background knowledge prior to starting the module, students had the opportunity to attend Hale Farm. Students were able to see various animals on the farm and the workings of a farm. This allowed them to make better connections and comprehend the lessons in the module more because they had gained the background knowledge.

The reason why I chose this as my project is because it will impact all elementary school students. I feel that it is important to give our students the best learning opportunities possible. The district is aware that our students may not also come to use all the background knowledge needed to make reading meaningful to them. I believe that by giving our students these opportunities, we will make them more successful in reading.

Lakewood City Schools

Hadeel Nimeh

Role: Assistant Principal

Location: Harding Middle School

Supplemental Duties: Summer School Administrator

Bachelor's Degree: Cleveland State University

Master's Degree: Cleveland State University

Other credentials: Currently pursuing a PhD in Urban Education (school admin track) from Cleveland State University

Years in the District: 4

Years in Education: 8



Ouimet Smith

Role: Assistant Principal

Location: Garfield Middle School

Bachelor's Degree: University of Michigan

Master's Degree: Cleveland State University

Years in the District: 7

Years in Education: 32



Project Summary:

Lakewood City School District takes pride in its diverse community, with over 300 families speaking 30 different languages. The diverse backgrounds and cultural perspectives these families bring are invaluable to our schools and the community. It is our goal that all families and students feel truly welcomed and valued.

To celebrate this diversity and create an inclusive environment, we are creating a flag display at both Garfield and Harding Middle Schools. This display will feature the flags of all nations representing our student body and beyond, serving as a visual celebration of the cultures that make our district so unique.

The flags will be arranged in a central location in each building for all guests, community members, students and staff to see on a daily basis to recognize and honor the variety of people within the Lakewood City School District and the City of Lakewood.

Maple Heights City Schools

Romie Graham

Role: 6 - 8 Social Emotional Learning Teacher

Location: Milkovich Middle School

Supplemental Duties: Boys Leadership Academy Advisor; Football Coach (HS)

Bachelor's Degree: Muskingum University

Master's Degree: Otterbein University

Years in the District: 2

Years in Education: 8



Project Summary:

The Leadership Academy is a school-based initiative that empowers male students by encouraging, engaging, and highlighting their positive contributions. The program is designed to foster academic, social, and emotional growth through structured mentorship and leadership development opportunities. Participants will be guided by mentors who will provide consistent support and motivation, helping them build confidence and resilience. Through various activities, workshops, and collaborative projects, the Leadership Academy aims to cultivate critical life skills, such as communication, responsibility, and goal setting. This program creates a safe and supportive environment where young men can express themselves, learn from positive role models, and develop leadership qualities that will benefit them both in and outside of school. Ultimately, the Leadership Academy seeks to inspire young men to achieve their full potential, contribute positively to their school community, and prepare for future success academically and beyond.

Parma City School District

Emily Gladish

Role: Nutrition Services Supervisor

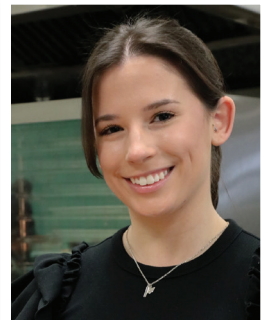
Location: Administration Building

Bachelor's Degree: The University of Akron

Other credentials: Registered Dietitian (RD)

Years in the District: 4

Years in Education: 4



Project Summary:

The Online Production Record Project aims to modernize record-keeping in the Parma City Schools Nutrition Services Department by replacing the current paper-based system used for the National School Lunch, Breakfast, and Snack Programs. The existing process is inefficient, making data retrieval difficult, reducing accuracy, and contributing to environmental waste. Transitioning to a digital system will streamline data entry, enhance record management, and promote sustainability by cutting paper use. This capstone examines the project's planning, implementation, and anticipated benefits, such as cost savings, improved accessibility, and better data analysis. Ultimately, the project seeks to boost efficiency while supporting environmental responsibility.

Richmond Heights Local Schools

Curtis Boykins

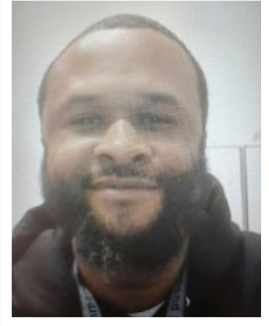
Role: Dean of Students

Location: Upper School

Bachelor's Degree: Cleveland State University

Years in the District: 15

Years in Education: 15



Project Summary:

My Capstone project will focus on me leading my district team in a collective effort to improve our attendance (tardies/absences) in the district. I have assembled a team as follows: High School Secretary, she will formulate my excessive tardy lists on a weekly basis, send out mass email, texts, all calls for detentions, and will send out letters to addresses of students who are consistently late. She will be the most knowledgeable of who is tardy and absent because she inputs attendance into the database on a daily basis. Students with more than 5 tardies will serve a Wednesday detention from 1:40p-2:40p (Wed. is early release 1:30p). The secretary will provide me with this list every Tuesday.

Security will be involved hosting the detentions each week. Students will sign in, turn in their phones and work on assignments/homework for the full hour. Students who refuse or do not show will be given another opportunity to make-up or attend the following week. Failure to do so will result in a one day O.S.S. issued by myself.

Along with detentions, we will be doing residency checks for students who are consistently late on a daily/ weekly basis. This will involve our Director of Education/Head of Registration Department and our District Wraparound Coordinator. He will receive a list of names to go out and do residency checks for students that are tardy and have outdated leases. Once he confirms that there is no residency at their listed addresses, then our D.O.E will notify the parent and give them a timeline to become compliant or withdrawn from the district.

With the due diligence of my team, we will be expecting to see a decrease in the amount of tardies/absences, resulting in an increase in our attendance percentage and more successful students in the classrooms.

Shaker Heights Schools

Anne Scott

Role: Assistant Principal

Location: Shaker Heights High School Innovative Center for Personalized Learning

Supplemental Duties: Science Teacher

Bachelor's Degree: Ohio University

Master's Degree: University of Illinois

Years in the District: 4

Years in Education: 4



Project Summary:

The Innovative Center for Personalized Learning (IC) offers students dynamic, flexible learning experiences tailored to their individual needs, interests, and goals. However, misconceptions about the IC have limited its reach and impact. This project seeks to expand awareness, increase enrollment, and reshape the narrative surrounding the IC, ensuring that more students and families understand its value as a space for innovative, student-driven learning.

While the IC operates separately from traditional classrooms, its approach can inform and enhance broader educational practices. This initiative will highlight the IC's role in providing opportunities for students to engage in non-traditional, interest-based learning while also offering strategies that traditional classroom teachers can use to incorporate elements of personalization into their instruction. By fostering collaboration between innovative and conventional approaches, the project promotes a more flexible and student-centered school culture.

To achieve these goals, the project will use multiple communication channels to increase visibility and engagement. By showcasing student success stories and demonstrating the IC's impact, the initiative aims to attract more students seeking a customized learning experience while also encouraging educators to explore new ways of supporting learners.

Ultimately, this project emphasizes the importance of expanding innovative learning opportunities while bridging connections across educational models. By dispelling misconceptions and positioning the IC as a vital part of the school's learning ecosystem, the initiative supports the evolution of a more dynamic, responsive, and inclusive approach to education.

South Euclid-Lyndhurst City Schools

Amber Berkobein

Role: Library Media Specialist

Location: Charles F. Brush High School & Memorial Junior High School

Supplemental Duties: LPDC Committee Member, Assistant Lead Mentor for the Resident Educator Program, Brush High School Library Department Coordinator, SEL K-12 District Library Coordinator

Bachelor's Degree: Kent State University

Master's Degree: Cleveland State University & Kent State University

Other credentials: Principal License grades 4-9, Principal License grades 5-12, Principal License grades PK-6, Computer/Technology (PreK-12)

Years in the District: 16

Years in Education: 18



Project Summary:

My capstone project focuses on helping lead the AI Initiative at South Euclid-Lyndhurst (SEL) Schools, a district-wide effort to thoughtfully integrate artificial intelligence into education. Launched in the Fall of 2024, under Superintendent Dominick Kaple's vision, this initiative focuses on three strategic pillars: empowering educators, preparing future-ready students, and strengthening our school community.

As a member of the SEL Schools AI Committee, I have collaborated with teachers and administrators to achieve this year's primary goal: building staff knowledge and confidence in AI-enhanced teaching practices. This foundation supports our broader mission of developing students who approach AI with ethical awareness, technical proficiency, and creative problem-solving skills, which are essential skills for academic success and future careers.

A highlight of our efforts this school year was our February Continuous Improvement Day (CID) AI morning sessions, where we reimaged professional development through hands-on AI workshops. Educators selected specialized training aligned with their instructional needs, choosing from ChatGPT, MagicSchool, or Brisk. To further enhance this experience, we partnered with the ESC of the Western Reserve to provide K-12 math teachers with AI applications tailored to their enVision curriculum. The morning culminated in facilitated roundtable discussions, generating implementation strategies and collaborative solutions.

Our initiative continues to evolve as we develop district-wide AI policies, evaluate tools for adoption, and design advanced training sessions for future Continuous Improvement Days. We are also expanding our efforts beyond the classroom by creating community workshops, recognizing that meaningful digital transformation requires community-wide engagement. Through collaboration among educators, students, families, and community stakeholders, we are building a sustainable framework for AI integration, positioning SEL Schools as a leader in educational innovation.

Warrensville Heights City Schools

Arnita Washington

Role: Pre-K Classroom Teacher

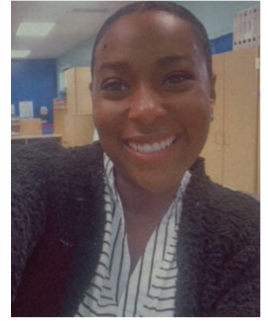
Location: Early Childhood Center

Bachelor's Degree: John Carroll University

Master's Degree: Baldwin Wallace University

Years in the District: 8

Years in Education: 8



Project Summary:

The district's overall attendance goal is to improve attendance every year by 3%. Last year's attendance rating for the early childhood center was low. For Warrensville's state report card, the early childhood center is only rated on attendance. While attendance is improving this year the goal is to keep it progressing.

The goal is to create concrete systems that work toward improving and sustaining student daily attendance. The goal is to create parent buy-in and improve school climate. This project would involve parents, community members, and district reps in solving the attendance problem. The population we serve are younger students who unfortunately do not drive themselves, so the goal is to identify parent needs and motivate parents to buy into attendance practices. The first step is to create a parent survey and determine the barriers that affect attendance. Then, bring in community partnerships to help address parents' needs that often affect student attendance. Finally, create opportunities and bring community resources directly to parents in hopes to eliminate barriers, create partnerships, and boost attendance.

WORDS FROM OUR 2024-25 FRLA DISTRICT LEADERS



As a product of the First Ring, I was truly honored to participate in the First Ring Leadership Academy (FRLA). This experience has significantly strengthened my leadership skills, broadened my understanding of local challenges and opportunities, and offered invaluable opportunities for collaboration with educators. I have dedicated my career to serving First Ring students, and through FRLA, I have gained new insights into effective leadership, which have enhanced my ability to spearhead efforts like the AI Initiative at SEL Schools. My personal and professional connection to the community fuels my commitment to supporting the students and educators who call the First Ring home.

A pivotal moment in FRLA was the professional development led by Teaching Cleveland, which deepened my understanding of the community I serve. By exploring its history and dynamics, I gained valuable insights into the factors that shape the community today.

My leadership approach has been profoundly influenced by Kouzes and Posner's "Everyday People, Extraordinary Leadership." The book emphasizes that leadership isn't about titles, it's about actions that inspire and empower others. The principles of "Model the Way," "Inspire a Shared Vision," and "Enable Others to Act" have been instrumental in guiding my work with the AI Initiative.

FRLA also introduced me to the CliftonStrengths framework, which gave me a clearer South Euclid-Lyndhurst City Schools understanding of my leadership style. It helped me recognize my strengths while also highlighting areas for growth.

Overall, my experiences with FRLA, Teaching Cleveland, Kouzes and Posner, and CliftonStrengths have empowered me to lead with authenticity and purpose, continuously growing and empowering others along the way.

- Amber Berkobein
South Euclid-Lyndhurst City Schools

I enjoyed the opportunity to collaborate with the other members of the FRLA. I loved going to other districts and seeing what was taking place. I feel that this program helped me grow as a leader.



- Abigail Klammer
Garfield Heights City Schools



My participation in FRLA has strengthened my leadership skills by allowing me to collaborate with professionals from Ohio's First Ring districts, gaining diverse perspectives and insights. The monthly sessions have helped refine my communication, problem-solving, and decision-making skills while building confidence in leading discussions. I've enjoyed connecting with other passionate leaders. The shared experiences and meaningful conversations have been incredibly inspiring and have broadened my understanding of leadership across different communities.

- Emily Gladish
Parma City School District

My participation in the First Ring Leadership Academy (FRLA) has significantly strengthened my leadership skills by providing me with invaluable insights and practical tools to address the unique challenges faced by First Ring Districts. The program's comprehensive approach has deepened my understanding of effective leadership strategies, particularly in areas like communication, change management, and group dynamics. This opportunity has empowered me to refine my leadership style, allowing me to be more strategic, adaptable, and focused on driving positive transformation within my district.



The experiential learning opportunities, such as district visitations and interactions with educational thought leaders, have been particularly impactful. These experiences have broadened my perspective on leadership and equipped me with strategies that I can apply directly to my work.

What I enjoyed most about FRLA was the chance to engage in deep, reflective discussions on critical issues. These sessions not only challenged me to think critically about the needs of my district but also encouraged me to approach leadership with a more inclusive and forward-thinking mindset. The opportunity to learn from local and experts in education, combined with the program's focus on practical, job-embedded learning, has been incredibly rewarding and has reinforced my commitment to driving change in education.

- Anne Scott
Shaker Heights Schools



This year, I've learned many things at the First Ring Leadership Academy. I gained valuable insights into effective leadership and personal growth. The academy also emphasized the importance of emotional intelligence, team building, and fostering a positive, inclusive environment. Through various exercises and discussions, I discovered how to inspire and motivate others, while also improving my own leadership style. Overall, the experience helped me develop a deeper understanding of leadership principles and how to apply them in both professional and personal settings.

- Arnita Washington
Warrensville Heights City School District

My participation in FRLA has strengthened my leadership skills by teaching me how to communicate effectively, work well with others, and take initiative. I have learned how to set goals, stay organized, and support my peers when they need encouragement. The program helped me gain confidence in speaking up and making decisions, which will help me in future opportunities. What I enjoyed the most was meeting new people, working as part of a team, and learning from peers who challenged me to do my best and become a better leader.



- Romie Graham
Maple Heights City Schools



My participation in FRLA has had a profound impact on me as both a teacher and a person. I gained a deeper understanding of how ordinary individuals can lead with authenticity and a little bit of courage! I enjoyed meeting other leaders and expanding my perspective on different leadership styles. I was able to make connections between my work and our novel study of “Everyday People, Extraordinary Leadership”. The book’s emphasis on modeling the way and encouraging the heart resonated with me because it reinforced the idea that leadership isn’t reserved for those with titles or positions of power—it’s about the choices we make every day to inspire, support, and uplift others.

**- Madison Carlton
Berea City Schools**

The FRLA cohort has taught me that leadership is displayed in many different ways. During my time participating in FRLA I have learned how to take a leadership role in the committees I am part of in my district. In those roles I have taken steps to lead by example by taking on more responsibilities and projects to support the rest of the team members. The most enjoyable part of the cohort was being able to collaborate and learn from different leaders from the First Ring Schools.



**- Anthony DiPio
East Cleveland City Schools**



Participation in FRLA has taught me that each leader possesses different strengths and qualities. The program also expanded my knowledge and skills on how to be a more effective leader. What I most enjoyed about FRLA was collaborating with other leaders in the cohort and visiting each district. Each member came with a different perspective and experience, which added to the sessions.

**- Tishawn Benson
East Cleveland City Schools**

My participation in the First Ring Leadership Academy has strengthened my leadership skills by broadening my understanding of the challenges and strengths within urban and inner-ring districts. I especially valued the Teaching Cleveland presentations, which deepened my knowledge of the city’s history—particularly around segregation and systemic inequality since the 1940s—and helped me better understand the context in which our students and schools operate. Connecting with educators from other districts was incredibly valuable; it gave me new perspectives, allowed me to hear what’s working elsewhere, and reminded me that we’re not alone in our challenges. The site visits were one of my favorite parts of the program—seeing different schools in action sparked new ideas and inspired me to think creatively about what could be possible in my own building. Overall, this experience has made me a more reflective, collaborative, and equity-minded leader.



**- Katie Buettner
Cleveland Heights University Heights School District**



My participation in FRLA has helped me learn how to empower and encourage fellow colleagues to be leaders in their respective areas. Leaders are needed in every capacity in every area, and I have been challenged to stretch myself to be a better leader. In learning about the practices of exemplary leadership, I have been more intentional about building relationships with students and staff members, as I have a greater understanding that leadership is a relationship, not a title. I enjoyed meeting representatives from the surrounding inner ring communities and learning more about their experiences and perspectives in the various districts. I also enjoyed visiting various school districts that provided inspiration, great ideas, and best practices. The discussions surrounding our book study of “Everyday People, Extraordinary Leadership,” by Kouzes and Posner will have a long-lasting impact.

**-Bakara Robinson
Bedford City Schools**



When I entered the First Ring Leadership Academy, I knew I possessed some of the skills to be a leader in my district. As I reflect on this experience, I can now see how it has given me the confidence and confirmation that leadership is a true passion for me—something I am driven to continually grow and work toward. I’ve gained perspective on the aspects of leadership where I already thrive and those in which I still need to grow. I now have a better understanding of how my role in my district fits into the larger ecosystem of the First Ring Schools. This experience reaffirmed the importance of collaboration, shared vision, capacity building, and relationships in leadership. I also have a clearer perspective on the type of leadership style I find most effective and hope to emulate in my own work. The personal reflection and connection to all of the topics and activities allowed me to develop a deeper understanding of how I can best lead my peers and students, no matter what role I may hold in the district.

**- Kelly Cummins
Cuyahoga Heights Schools**



My participation in FRLA has significantly strengthened my leadership skills by deepening my self-awareness, enhancing my ability to leverage team strengths, and expanding my perspective on educational equity. “Everyday People, Extraordinary Leadership” and the Gallup Clifton Strengths Assessment provided a framework for self-reflection, helping me refine my leadership approach and build on my strengths and those of my team. This self-awareness has allowed me to lead with confidence, balancing challenges with encouragement to drive meaningful change.

Collaborating with First Ring district leaders offered invaluable insights into shared challenges and successes, broadening my understanding of effective leadership practices. Visiting schools was especially inspiring, as I witnessed innovative initiatives that enrich students’ academic experiences.

One of the most impactful aspects of FRLA was Teach Cleveland, which provided a deeper understanding of how economic shifts, community divisions, and systemic inequities affect education. These discussions reinforced the importance of intentional, forward-thinking leadership in advocating for equity and supporting all students.

**- Faith Gordon
Bedford City School District**



FRLA significantly strengthened my leadership skills by enhancing the very qualities that led me into leadership in the first place. It improved my ability to build meaningful relationships with staff and students, sharpened my communication skills, and reinforced my commitment to helping others reach their fullest potential.

One of the most impactful aspects of the program was the site visits, where I had the opportunity to hear diverse perspectives on leadership from superintendents across various districts. Their insights highlighted the challenges of leadership while also emphasizing the deep sense of purpose that comes with it. Leadership is no easy task, but seeing the passion these administrators bring to their work reaffirmed that the challenges are well worth the reward.

**- Hadeel Nimeh
Lakewood City Schools**

FRLA has allowed me to reflect on what actions I take as a member of a team that are characteristic of a leader. I have enjoyed coming together with members of First Ring Districts from around the Greater Cleveland area to discuss the qualities that leaders possess.



**- Ouimet Smith
Lakewood City Schools**



Participating in the First Ring Leadership Academy pushed me to consider my role as a leader in my school, regardless of title. Being exposed to so many other school leaders helped broaden my thinking and my own expectations of myself. I particularly enjoyed the Teaching Cleveland lessons and the site visits. Both of these expanded my understanding of the unique challenges and assets of the first ring, as well as provided important context that will push me to be a better educator at my own school.

**- Tracy Kondrit
Euclid City Schools**

Attending the First Ring Leadership Academy was an incredibly valuable experience that deepened my understanding of leadership in education. I appreciated the opportunity to collaborate with other leaders in the First Ring schools, exchanging ideas, learning from their experiences, and gaining fresh perspectives to bring back to my own work. Exploring our CliftonStrengths helped me better understand my leadership style and how to leverage my strengths to support both students and colleagues. Additionally, connecting our learning to Everyday People, Extraordinary Leadership by James M. Kouzes and Barry Z. Posner provided powerful insights into how leadership is not about titles but about everyday actions that inspire and empower others. I also loved learning from Teaching Cleveland about the rich history of Cleveland and how our past shapes the present challenges and opportunities in education. Getting to connect with great nonprofits in Cleveland that address inequities was especially meaningful, reinforcing the importance of collaboration and community engagement in creating lasting change. This academy has strengthened my confidence as a leader and reinforced the importance of relationships, reflection, and continuous learning in making a lasting impact.



**- Dylan Sullivan
Euclid City Schools**



My participation in FLRA has strengthened my leadership skills by confirming that my brand of and approach to leadership is valid. Dr. Wagner's method of introducing us to the beautiful complexities of who leaders are versus the roles attributed to leadership has helped me build my own foundation of what type of leader I want to be moving forward.

-Ray Ford
Euclid City Schools

Taught me that leadership is knowing how to effectively work with the people around you. Being a leader isn't a one man show. It's understanding the thoughts and interests of others and using a team to put the best interest and decision forward.



- Curtis Boykins
Richmond Heights Local Schools



Through FRLA, I enjoyed the opportunity to collaborate with my fellow leaders and educators.

- Marcello DeAngelis
Brooklyn City Local Schools

Participating in this year's FRLA has strengthened my leadership skills by enhancing my ability to collaborate effectively with other professionals who care about their communities, students, and the families who live there, and to think strategically about issues as well as solutions that are currently affecting our schools. FRLA has been a very impactful experience. Finally, the program gave me new leadership tools and a broader network of peers that has inspired me to include positive change as I take on more leadership responsibilities in my district.



Over the course of the school year, I enjoyed the discussions and the opportunity to visit other campuses and walk through their schools and hear from the superintendents and principals. There was so much to learn from my fellow FR schools!

- Jill Davis
Fairview Park City Local Schools

FIRST RING LEADERSHIP ACADEMY ALUMNI 2018–2024

2023-2024

DISTRICT	FULL NAME	ROLE	ASSIGNMENT
Bedford	Brenna McNamara	7th Grade ELA Teacher	Heskett Middle School
Berea	Shannon Chrnko	Intervention Specialist	Berea Midpark High School
Brooklyn	Katie Harkelroad	Assistant Principal	Brooklyn High School
CH-UH	Anna Gregory	Title 1 Lead Teacher	Roxboro Middle School
Cuyahoga Hts	Elena Scotton	Intervention Specialist	Middle/High School
East Cleveland	Dr. Nicole Culliver	CTE Early Childhood Instructor	Shaw High School
Fairview Park	Ryan Graff	Art Teacher	Fairview High School
Fairview Park	Matt Dunlap	Director of Technology	Fairview Park City Schools
Lakewood	Brenda Budzar	Principal	Lincoln Elementary School
Maple Hts	Crystle McCrystal	7th Grade Math	Milkovich Middle School
Parma	Loren Allison	High School Math Teacher	Valley Forge High School
South Euclid- Lyndhurst	Rebecca Shotliff	4th Grade Teacher	Greenview Elementary
Shaker Hts	Ali Royal	IB PYP Coordinator	Fernway Elementary School
Warrensville Hts	Jessica Grimes	8th grade ELA	WHMS

2022-2023

DISTRICT	FULL NAME	ROLE	ASSIGNMENT
Bedford	Darnise Stephens	5th Math & Social Studies Teacher	Columbus Intermediate School
Bedford	Amy Hujarski	Science teacher	Bedford High School
Berea	Patrick Meyer	English Teacher	Berea-Midpark HS
Brooklyn	Scott Urig	9th Social Studies Teacher	Brooklyn High School
Brooklyn	Kimberly Cramer	8th Social Studies Teacher	Brooklyn High School
CH-UH	Toni White	Title 1 Lead	Noble Elementary School
CH-UH	Karen Hansen	Dean of Students	Cleveland Heights High School
Cuyahoga Hts	Kelsey Mason	High School Math Teacher	Cuyahoga Heights High School
East Cleveland	Tishawn Benson	Title I Teacher	Mayfair Elementary School
East Cleveland	Ralph Murphy II	Assistant Principal	Shaw High School
Euclid	Phil Gasper	ELA Teacher	Euclid Middle School/District
Euclid	Amber Quigley	Attendance and Truancy Liaison	Euclid High School
Fairview Park	Ryan Barry	PE/ Health Teacher	Fairview Middle/High School
Fairview Park	Andrew Slack	8/9th Intervention Specialist	Fairview Middle/High School
Garfield Hts	Jennifer Corrado	TSL Lead Teacher	Garfield Hts Middle/High School
Lakewood	April Patton	Assistant Principal	Harding Middle School
Lakewood	Tony Chiaravalle	House Principal	Lakewood High School
Maple Hts	Amelia Johnson	Dean of Students	JFK Elementary School
Maple Hts	Thomas Meyer	11th Grade Assistant Principal	Maple Heights High School
Parma	Zuraya Abdalla	School Counselor	Normandy High School
Richmond Hts	Jasmine King	AVID Teacher	Richmond Hts. Upper School
Richmond Hts	Tiffany Kilbane	K/1 Educator	Richmond Hts. Elementary School

South Euclid-Lyndhurst	Latricia Jethrow	Assistant Principal	Brush High School
Shaker Hts	Amy Fogerty	Spanish Teacher	Shaker Heights High School
Shaker Hts	Shaunna Bonner	School Counselor	Shaker Heights High School
Warrensville Hts	Sarah McCrea	Spanish Teacher	Warrensville Hts High School

2021-2022

DISTRICT	FULL NAME	ROLE	ASSIGNMENT
Bedford	Karla Eberhardt	6th grade Teacher	Heskett Middle School
Berea	Kitty Pinter		Berea-Midpark High School
Brooklyn	Julie McGarey	Intervention Specialist	Brooklyn High School
CH-UH	Nicole Gardner	Alg 1 & MDM IS Teacher	Cleveland Hts High School
Cuyahoga Hts	Michael Janatovich	Middle/High School Principal	Cuy. Hts. MS/HS Principal
East Cleveland	Amanda Stanoszek	Intervention Specialist	Shaw High School
Euclid	Sara Mattinson	School Counselor	Euclid High School
Euclid	Katie Gonakis	Guidance Chair/CTE Director	Euclid High School
Fairview Park	Grant Graves	Social Studies Teacher	Fairview High School
Garfield Hts	Khiara Kimbrough	3rd grade Teacher	William Foster Elem School
Lakewood	Eric Fortuna	Elementary Principal	Hayes Elementary
Lakewood	Meredith Wojtkun	House House Principal	Lakewood High School
Maple Hts	Maria Rodgers	Curriculum Specialist	District
Maple Hts	Mike Hollins	Linkage Coordinator	District (HS)
Parma	Bill Forney	Math Teacher	Normandy High School
Parma	Lynn Monaco	Spanish Teacher	Normandy High School
Richmond Hts	Alicia Trescott	21st Century Program Director	District
South Euclid-Lyndhurst	Raymond Smith-Watkins	Youth Development Specialist	District
Shaker Hts	Nicole Patterson	DEI Learning Specialist	District
Warrensville Hts	James Ranc	World History Teacher	Warrensville Hts High School

2019-2020

DISTRICT	FULL NAME	ROLE	ASSIGNMENT
Parma	Jessica Banks	Science Teacher	Normandy High School
Maple Hts	Regina Bryant	Secondary Math Teacher & Data Manager	Maple Hts High School
Garfield Hts	Joshua L. Chenoweth	Music Teacher	Maple Leaf Elementary School
Lakewood	Megan Eadeh	World & U.S. History, Street Law	Lakewood High School
Warrensville Hts	Aaron Eatman	Intervention Specialist	Warrensville Hts High School
Fairview Park	Sarah Eppler	First Grade Teacher	Gilles-Sweet Elementary School
Euclid	Catherine Gibbons	Intervention Specialist	Euclid High School
CH-UH	Kennie Green	English Teacher	Cleveland Hts High School
Bedford	Jermaine Huff	Dean of Students	Columbus Intermediate School
Brooklyn	Julie McGarey	Intervention Specialist	Brooklyn High School
Berea	Matt McGregor	Government & Advanced Placement Government Teacher	Berea-Midpark High School
South Euclid-Lyndhurst	Satonya Newton	7th Grade English Language Arts Teacher	Memorial Junior High
Shaker Hts	Nathaniel Reese, Jr.	MAC Scholar Advisor & Academic Advisor	Shaker Hts High School
Cuyahoga Hts	Dr. Johnny Roy	Social Studies Teacher	Cuyahoga Hts High School
Euclid	Anthony Rozman	Automotive Service Technology Teacher	Euclid High School
Richmond Hts	Alyssa Thorpe	Middle School Social Studies Teacher	Richmond Hts Secondary School
Parma	John Wessel	Strength & Conditioning Coach	Valley Forge High School

2018-2019

DISTRICT

Parma
East Cleveland
South Euclid-
Lyndhurst
Warrensville Hts
Lakewood
Fairview Park
Parma
Garfield Hts
Lakewood
Berea
Bedford

Berea
Brooklyn
Cuyahoga Hts
Richmond Hts

CH-UH
Maple Hts

FULL NAME

Alexandra Baczkowski
Jennifer Bill
John Bottar

Rachel Bruce
Gray Cooper
Janice Frygier
Maria Gingo
Jowell Gray
Aimee Guzowski
Nicholas Hall
Timothy K. Kallay

Georgia Karageorgos
Lisa Kubinski
Gary Miller
Josh Patty

Jennifer Thomas
Courtney Starr

ROLE

Intervention Specialist 8 - 9th grade
Integrated Social Studies Grades 10 - 12
STEM Lab Teacher K - 3

1st grade, General Education
English Teacher
8th Grade ELA
English II/Honors, Grade 10
School Counselor
Intervention Specialist (English Dept.)
Intervention Specialist
Intervention Specialist (K - 12)

5th Grade Math
7th Grade Science
PreK - 5 Technology
9th Grade World History,
10th Grade American
General Education, 5th Grade
Special Education Coordinator, PK - 7

ASSIGNMENT

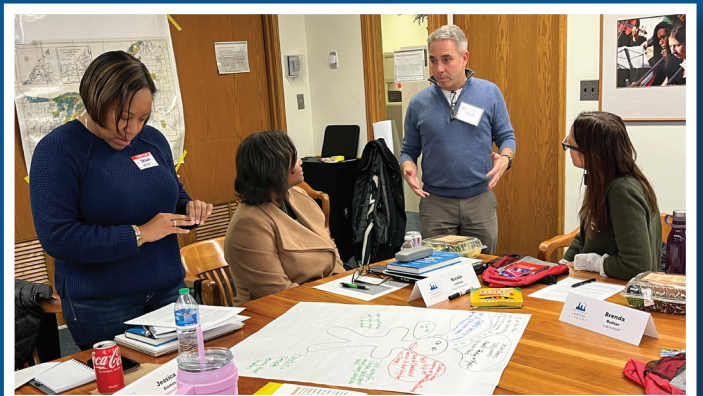
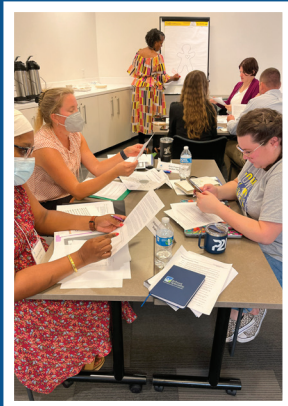
Valley Forge High School
Shaw High School
Adrian Elementary

John Dewey Elementary School
Lakewood High School
Lewis F. Mayer Middle School
Normandy High School
William Foster
Lakewood High School
Midpark Middle School - Grade 8
Central Primary School
(current year in primary k-3)
Midpark Middle School
Brooklyn School
Cuyahoga Hts Elementary School
Richmond Hts Secondary School

Roxboro Elementary School
John F. Kennedy Elementary School



FIRST RING LEADERSHIP ACADEMY ALUMNI





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