



# FIRST RING LEADERSHIP ACADEMY

## 2023–2024 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, 14 district leaders participated in the program. Participants are able to earn up to five credit hours through Cleveland State University.

### What District Leaders have to say about the program

“

The FRLA has led to a greater realization and understanding of the unique challenges and benefits of our First Ring suburb schools.

“

Being around leaders from other school districts on a monthly basis and hearing their thoughts and opinions on a variety of subjects has been very beneficial to my own continued development as a leader.

“

This program has emphasized that perceptual self-betterment, introspection, and cultivating empathy are cornerstones of impactful leadership.

## 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





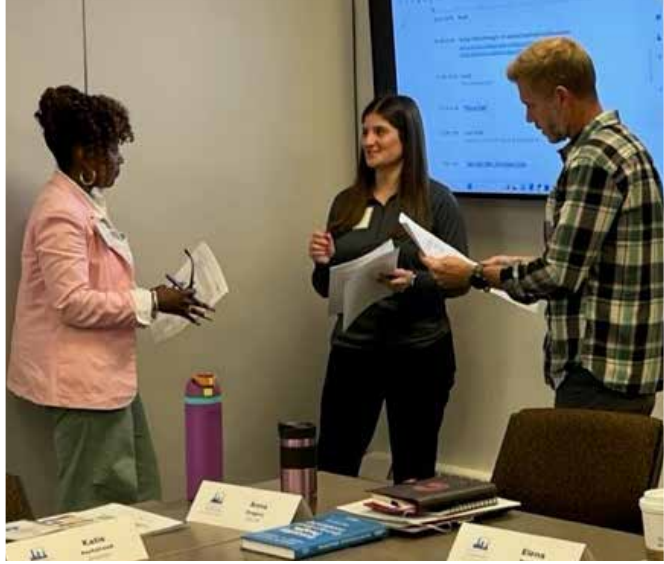


# THE YEAR IN PHOTOS

## DISTRICT LEADERS IN ACTION



## DISTRICT LEADERS IN ACTION





2023–2024

FIRST RING LEADERSHIP ACADEMY  
COHORT BIOGRAPHIES

**Bedford City Schools - Brenna McNamara**

*Location:* Heskett Middle School  
*Role:* 7th Grade ELA Teacher  
*Supplemental Duties:* Newspaper Advisor; Cross Country Coach; Yearbook Advisor; Yoga Club Founder; Breath/Movement for Nervous System Regulation for ATS/ISS; HERstory Mentor; SEL Advisory Committee; ELA Curriculum Adoption Committee  
*Master’s Degree* - John Carroll University  
*Bachelor’s Degree* - Kent State University  
*Other credentials* - TEFL Certification  
Years in the District: 5  
Years in Education: 12

**Project Summary:**

My Capstone Project focuses on nervous-system regulation through movement and mindfulness as part of an after-school club and for students in ISR/ATS, aiming to aid students’ self-determination and provide de-escalation tools. As a 500-hour certified yoga instructor, I feel passionately about school-based yoga as a trauma-informed and evidence-based practice. The project aligns with Bedford’s goal of using evidence-based practices to self-regulate behaviors.

The project originated as an expansion of Movement and Mindfulness Club that I founded last year in order to offer a non-sport exercise. It is important to note that yoga goes beyond physical movement and was approached secularly. Students explored breath, meditation, bodily awareness, kindness toward oneself/others, self-reflection, interconnectedness, and service.

A key motivation was minority representation in yoga. As scholar Sheena Sood discusses, it is paramount to center marginalized “bodies, voices, and groups...in accessing healing and the healer within” and to decolonize and remove barriers to the beneficial practice.

The project evolved into providing voluntary weekly ATS/ISR sessions. Collaborating with our SEL Interventionist who began sessions with a restorative circle, the group discussed the body’s signals of escalation. I then selected specific stretching/breathing techniques that quickly move the body into the parasympathetic nervous system and were suitable for discreet use in school beyond our sessions.

The sympathetic nervous system governs our necessary fight and flight, but can hinder children’s success in the school environment when triggered, eliciting common negative behaviors. Activating the parasympathetic nervous system physically evokes feeling collected, connected and safe– critical for learning and rational brain function.

All participating students reported increased calmness immediately after practicing. Further, they mentioned utilizing the techniques independently in school and finding it easier to self-regulate. Though the programs are in their infancy, I am eager to witness their growth and positive impact on empowering students.

**Berea City Schools - Shannon Chrnko**

*Location:* Berea-Midpark High School  
*Role:* Intervention Specialist  
*Supplemental Duties:* Pod Leader; District Senate Member; Building Committee Member; UDL Mentor for High School  
*Master’s Degree:* American College of Education  
*Bachelor’s Degree:* Youngstown State University  
Years in the District: 4  
Years in Education: 6

**Project Summary:**

Berea City Schools became involved with Stay in the Game-an initiative to promote and support attendance in Ohio schools. For quarter 1 of the 2023-2024 school year for BMHS, only 61.35% of students had satisfactory attendance, 19.47% were considered at risk, 12.37% of students were considered moderate chronic, 5.68% were severe chronic, and 1.14% fell into the extreme chronic category. According to our 2022-2023 report card for our high school, our Hispanic population accounts for 161 students, the Black population is 87 students, and our Multiracial population is 86 students. Our English Learner population is 39 students. Our average attendance rate was 90.2%, however, our Hispanic and Multiracial students fell below that average. During our most recent parent/teacher conferences, we had 8 Black, 9 Hispanic, and 5 Multiracial students attend with their parent or guardian. Overall, we have seen a decrease in attendance at parent/teacher conferences compared to the 2021 and 2022 school years.

To address the declining numbers, a survey was sent out to the community regarding conferences. In an attempt to address the community’s concerns and improve the attendance of our minority students and parents, we are incorporating a celebration of the following holidays to include ethnic foods and a presentation created by the students to create a welcoming environment and the opportunity for students to showcase their culture:

Conference 1 - Hispanic Heritage Month  
Conference 2 - Black History Month  
Conference 3 - Islamic Holidays

Through the celebration of holidays, presentation of students’ cultures, providing childcare through NHS, and a help desk through the counseling department, the hope is to provide a foundation to build relationships with our families during conferences.

**Brooklyn City Schools - Katie Harkelroad**

*Location:* Brooklyn High School  
*Role:* High School Assistant Principal  
*Master’s Degree:* John Carroll University  
*Bachelor’s Degree:* The Ohio State University  
Years in the District: 1  
Years in Education: 13

**Project Summary:**

The focus of my capstone project is on building cultural awareness and student leadership through educational opportunities for students and staff and through collaboration with community partners.

**Cleveland Heights - University Heights - Anna Gregory**

*Location:* Roxboro Middle School

*Role:* Title I Literacy Lead

*Supplemental Duties:* Minority Student Achievement Network (MSAN) Advisor; National Junior Honor Society (NHJS) Advisor; Member of Building Leadership Team, Member of District Equity Task Force; District Student Goal Setting committee member; Past member of the District Leadership Team.

*Master’s Degree:* Baldwin Wallace University

*Bachelor’s Degree:* Cleveland State University

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

Years in the District: 20

Years in Education: 25

**Project Summary:**

Create a district-wide literacy committee or Literacy Leadership Team (LLT) who will create a literacy initiative action plan for Middle School. The detailed and well-planned phased execution will expand teachers’ ability to systematically bridge reading and writing, better understand the science of reading, while using best practices in implementation and progress monitoring. Ten years ago, our district had an active district-wide literacy committee that worked collectively on literacy initiatives. It was solely comprised of ELA teachers. Therefore, I would like to create a similar group containing a variety of voices along with content area teachers who strive to expand their knowledge and ability to bridge the reading and writing gap. This work also aligns with House Bill 33 requiring all teachers trained in The Science of Reading.

The team will create a framework that can easily be followed and used across content areas. Implementation would begin at the 6th grade level with phased vertical training and support which would include trackable milestone student practice. This structured plan would help frame how we speak and think about literacy which in turn will lead to greater gains in reading and writing. Our team will establish and review monthly literacy initiatives and share activities implemented.

Another goal is to grow our capacity to improve how reading and writing are taught together. We will identify and map out curriculum connections that amplify reading and writing skills. By empowering teacher voice via the Literacy team and newly emerged teacher leaders, literacy knowledge will effectively bridge the reading and writing gap. Using curriculum alignment, instructional coaching, progress monitoring, and partnering with ThinkCerca for continued implementation with instruments to build the bridge. Beginning with one building and hopefully phasing to other buildings over time, will allow for expanding district leadership for literacy growth.

**Cuyahoga Heights Local Schools - Elena Scotton**

*Location:* Middle/High School

*Role:* 6-12 Intervention Specialist

*Supplemental Duties:* CHS District Literacy Committee Member; CHS Professional Development Committee Member

*Master’s Degree:* Cleveland State University

*Bachelor’s Degree* - Baldwin Wallace University

*Other credentials:* Adjunct Professor at Baldwin Wallace University; Cooperating Teacher and Mentor-Baldwin Wallace University Education Department; Doctoral Candidate at American College of Education;

Years in the District: 5

Years in Education: 5

**Project Summary:**

On March 7, 2024, the Cuyahoga Heights School District hosted an Inclusion Day awareness event to re-center the district around our core mission of “Empowering Students to Reach New Heights.” This unified campaign promoted continuing inclusiveness and acceptance of all individuals, especially those with intellectual and developmental disabilities.

This project aimed to rally staff, students, families, and the broader community to support an increasingly inclusive culture. We “Spread the Word for Inclusion” through a student-produced video, social media engagement, and a unified t-shirt initiative for all staff. As a show of support, each staff member wore a specially designed t-shirt with the words “To the Heights of Inclusion” and greeted students as they entered the building to begin the school day. Students were invited to sign a large banner that the cheerleaders made to pledge to be inclusive of their peers. Students were also presented with inspirational stickers.

High school students in the Creative Productions class and students from the Middle/High School Resource Room produced a video in which staff members shared how they help their students “reach new heights” and reflected on why they chose to work at Cuyahoga Heights. The video was shared with all students and staff in the high school auditorium.

The district’s celebration captured the attention of the local media, including the Neighborhood News, TV5, TV19, TV3, Telemundo Cleveland TV, and Ideastream’s News Depth program where the students were featured in its weekly A+ segment.

Our school community re-ignited our shared purpose of empowering each student. By highlighting diverse perspectives on why we foster inclusion and how we help students reach new heights, we reconnected to our “why.” This collective reflection inspired renewed passion for lifting all learners.

Ultimately, Inclusion Day sought to re-energize our school around the mission of meeting every student where they are and providing the support they need to gain confidence, skills, knowledge, and strength of character. When we embrace everyone’s humanity, abilities, and potential, we empower them to soar to new heights. This event reminded us of our role in becoming a more inclusive community of growth and excellence.

**East Cleveland City Schools - Nicole Culliver**

*Location:* Shaw High School  
*Role:* Early Childhood Instructor  
*Master's Degree:* Cleveland State University  
*Bachelor's Degree:* Lincoln University  
*Other credentials:* PhD Early Childhood Education from Walden University  
Years in the District: 25  
Years in Education: 30

**Project Summary:**

My project is the implementation of a mental health fair at the district high school to promote and springboard integrated mental health treatment into the academic setting. I chose this topic because student mental health and wellness is a critical issue within my district. According to the Office of the Surgeon General (2021), this problem spans the United States and directly impacts a student's academic success and overall well-being. When students are struggling with mental health issues, it can negatively affect their ability to learn, concentrate, and perform well in school. By providing access to mental health services and resources within the academic setting, students can receive the support they need to address any mental health issues and ultimately achieve their full potential. Additionally, promoting mental health awareness and wellness can help reduce the stigma surrounding mental health issues within the black community and create a more positive and supportive environment for all students. I chose this topic because my students live in an environment of high poverty. Living in poverty can have a significant impact on a person's mental health and ability to learn. Individuals living in poverty may experience chronic stress due to financial instability, lack of access to essential resources, and exposure to violence or crime. This chronic stress can lead to a range of mental health issues, such as anxiety, depression, and post-traumatic stress disorder.

**Fairview Park City Schools - Matt Dunlap**

*Location:* High School/Middle School  
*Role:* Technology Coordinator  
*Master's Degree:* Ashland University  
*Bachelor's Degree:* Baldwin Wallace University  
*Other credentials:* Ed.S. in Educational Technology from Nova Southeastern University  
Years in the District: 29  
Years in Education: 29

**Project Summary:**

My capstone project involves the process of researching, planning, collaborating, and implementing a new Learning Management System at our High School and Middle School (Grades 6-12). We currently have two different LMS systems in use (Summit Learning and Google Classroom), and our goal will be to have all courses transitioned to Canvas by the start of the 2024-25 school year.

**Fairview Park City Schools - Ryan Graff**

*Location:* Fairview High School  
*Role:* Art Teacher  
*Supplemental Duties:* Cross Country Coach(MS); Track & Field Asst. Coach (HS)  
*Master's Degree:* Marygrove College  
*Bachelor's Degree:* Baldwin Wallace University  
Years in the District: 24  
Years in Education: 24

**Project Summary:**

"Creativity in the Community" is the design and implementation of a new art elective course at Fairview High School. Art has long served as a connection among people within a community and this course will further enable students to integrate art education with service learning, and shared experiences of the community of Fairview Park as well as with the city of Cleveland, and surrounding First Ring communities.

**Lakewood City Schools - Brenda Budzar**

*Location:* Lincoln Elementary  
*Role:* Principal  
*Master's Degree:* Masters in Curriculum and Instruction, Cleveland State University; Masters in Educational Leadership, Concordia University Chicago  
*Bachelor's Degree:* Miami University  
*Other credentials:* K-8 Teaching License + Reading Endorsement, PK-6 Admin License  
Years in the District: 16  
Years in Education: 25+

**Project Summary:**

Lincoln Elementary is seeking the Anti-Defamation League's No Place for Hate designation. This is a student-led school climate improvement program that is designed to address schools' unique cultures and needs. It involves forming a committee, introducing the No Place for Hate pledge, accessing the school climate, and implementing activities inspired to make students and staff more effective allies. Through school-wide, discussion-based and active-learning activities, students and staff will examine identities, reflect on biased behavior and learn new ways to challenge bias and bullying in themselves, others and society.



**Maple Heights City Schools - Crystle McCrystal**

*Location:* Milkovich Middle School  
*Role:* 7th Grade Mathematics Teacher  
*Supplemental Duties:* Schlechty Leadership Academy, Milkovich Middle School Design Team, BLT Team Member, PBIS Team Member, and FRLA Participant  
*Master’s Degree:* Ursuline College  
*Bachelor’s Degree:* Southern Connecticut State University  
Years in the District: 1  
Years in Education: 6

**Project Summary:**

The purpose of this project is to create a formal process to enroll students in math lab with specific criteria, align the math lab curriculum to the core math classes to increase student achievement on iReady/OST, and meet the individual math needs of each student enrolled in math lab. In essence, the goal of this project is to better align the math lab curriculum with grade level standards and power standards. This project was achieved in collaboration with teachers in the mathematics department, building administrators, and district administrators to ensure at least 70% of the students enrolled in math lab will increase at least one grade level by the spring iReady diagnostic.

**Parma City Schools - Loren Allison**

*Location:* Valley Forge High School  
*Role:* Math Teacher  
*Master’s Degree:* Cleveland State University  
*Bachelor’s Degree:* Baldwin Wallace University  
*Other credentials:* Administrative License  
Years in the District: 21  
Years in Education: 21

**Project Summary:**

Updating and Rewriting our District Math Pathways. This project was focused on creating and implementing new courses into our high school math pathways based on the new courses created by ODE. The first stage was creating an Algebra 1 support class. The course will be focused on helping ninth grade students be successful in Algebra 1 and on the OST. The second stage will be on offering a MMR course for the 25-26 school year.

**South Euclid Lyndhurst City Schools - Rebecca Shotliff**

*Location:* Greenview Upper Elementary  
*Role:* Teacher  
*Supplemental Duties:* ELA Content Leader  
*Master’s Degree:* American College of Education  
*Bachelor’s Degree:* Cleveland State University  
Years in the District: 2  
Years in Education: 6

**Project Summary:**

In response to the evolving educational landscape, a guide was developed to serve as a resource for educators seeking help with using technology in their classrooms. It offers a selection of essential resources such as EdPuzzle, Writable, Nearpod, Canva, Kami, and more, accompanied by practical tutorials and troubleshooting tips to facilitate seamless integration into teaching methodologies. By empowering educators to navigate these tools with confidence, fostering a culture of continuous professional growth, and emphasizing the transformative impact of technology on student engagement and learning outcomes, this guide equips staff with the knowledge and skills to embrace innovation and elevate their instructional practices to new heights.

**Shaker Heights City Schools - Ali Royal**

*Location:* Fernway Elementary School  
*Role:* International Baccalaureate Coordinator  
*Supplemental Duties:* Building Equity Liaison, PBIS Team Member  
*Master’s Degree:* Cleveland State University  
*Bachelor’s Degree:* Cleveland State University  
*Other credentials:* K-12 Reading Endorsement, LETRS Certification  
Years in the District: 8  
Years in Education: 18

**Project Summary:**

My capstone encompasses the implementation of experiences to enhance the sense of belonging felt by both our students and staff. Arranging artist-in-residence experiences for our students, integrating student and staff acknowledgements into our recorded announcements, and seeking feedback from grade level leaders and our building equity leadership team regarding how to support staff are some of the initiatives I have worked on this year. The artist-in-residence experiences include artists from diverse backgrounds who are working with the students to write poetry, conduct a podcast, create sculptures, and learn dance. These experiences all promote student agency which has consistently been proven to be an effective research-based strategy that enhance one’s sense of belonging.



**Warrensville Heights City Schools - Jessica Grimes**

*Location:* Warrensville Heights Middle School

*Role:* 8th Grade Teacher

*Supplemental Duties:* Newspaper Club Advisor, Yearbook Advisor, Softball Coach

*Master's Degree:* John Carroll University

*Bachelor's Degree:* Baldwin Wallace University

Years in the District: 11

Years in Education: 12

**Project Summary:**

Over the past few months, students who are members of the newspaper staff and I have interviewed students, staff, and parents to give them space to share how the school can become a better place. We offered questions asked about what's working and going well; overall, we wanted to focus on to positively change our school's culture. Being part of the school's PR committee, I also used this platform to push positive activities happening in our school. It's a small start, but I hope I gave those who participated a voice and the opportunity to show them that they have the chance to impact our school's culture. Overall, I hope to spark hope and change in whoever I come in contact with. I would like to see people become a little more invested within the school's community.

**WORDS FROM OUR 2023-24 FRLA DISTRICT LEADERS**

“

The discussions and collaboration with the cohort's talented participants from each First Ring district provided invaluable insights, prompting self-reflection into my practices and highlighting avenues to effect change within Northeast Ohio's education systems.

By studying Cleveland and its surrounding districts' extensive history, policies, and mobility, I have gained a greater context to understand the communities and students I serve. The purposeful case studies, analysis of historical events/patterns, and reflection questions sparked authentic, important, and forward-thinking discussions around equity, the achievement gap, representation, and best practices. After every session, the dynamic and nuanced, yet practical, lenses we studied about Cleveland and its education systems, left me with an amplified drive to deepen and continue my work advocating for Cleveland-area students and engaging with our special communities.

Furthermore, the book study of "Everyday People, Extraordinary Leadership" and Gallup Clifton Strengths Assessment analysis sparked a new angle of self-reflection on my leadership style. Understanding my attributes provided me with a fresh perspective on what I can contribute to any team's collection of various strengths working together to collaborate effectively. The book study solidified a deeper confidence in leading in ways that I may not have considered as "traditional leadership," and heightened my understanding of the necessity of relationships/collaboration, trust, consistency, vision/values, and risk-taking involved in impactful change.

**- Brenna McNamara  
Bedford City Schools**

FRLA gave me the opportunity to learn. I was able to learn about the FR schools - how they operate, what they offer and the issues that face their educators, students and communities. FRLA gave me the opportunity to experience different perspectives and listen and learn from amazingly intelligent and talented individuals. I enjoyed learning about the history of Cleveland and how the history still impacts our schools today. I enjoyed listening and learning from colleagues that offer a variety of insights on a variety of topics.

**- Loren Allison  
Parma City Schools**

“

My participation in the First Ring Leadership Academy has strengthened my leadership skills by helping me understand all the levels of leadership in the district and how they all fit together to achieve a common goal. As I developed and implemented my capstone project, I had to effectively communicate with various district leaders and departments to ensure the project not only met the goals of my capstone objectives but also adhered to the standards of each of the departments of the district. This helped me to understand the inner workings of the district such as funding, permissions, hierarchy protocol, and the things needed to create and implement programs. What was most rewarding in the FRLA was the course seminars from Teaching Cleveland that candidly presented the racial inequities rooted in the history of the Cleveland school system, the inception of the outer ring suburbs, and how this history permeates through the present. While I had some knowledge of this history, I felt this monthly seminar gave an abundance of information and an opportunity for each district leader to be able to now explicitly name the elephant in the room and give baseline data for those in the academy to make better decisions for students and the community in our districts.

**- Nicole Culliver  
East Cleveland City Schools**

Participation in FRLA has taught me that each leader possesses different strengths. A good leader embraces and builds upon their unique strengths, however, to be a truly effective, one must cultivate a team that brings varied strengths and perspectives to the table.

What I most enjoyed about FRLA is meeting and learning from the members of my FRLA cohort. Each member was so talented and kind. I hope we continue to keep in touch and share ideas with one another. I also loved the professional development series from Teaching Cleveland - so much so that I hope to bring it to my District during the 2024 - 2025 school year.

**- Katie Harkelroad  
Brooklyn City Schools**

“

My participation in FRLA has strengthened my leadership skills by opening my eyes to the needs of others around me. On a daily basis I think I've become more observant and even more empathetic to leaders around me. Being a leader takes guts, but with the right skills and mindset and I realized that it's a title to grow into. I enjoyed the discussions and the opportunity to walk through other schools and hear from the superintendents and principals. There was so much to learn; I'm grateful for the opportunity to have been chosen to participate.

**- Jessica Grimes  
Warrensville Heights City Schools**

“

FRLA has strengthened my leadership skills by taking, initiating, and cultivating change to ensure equitable access to high-quality instruction in the mathematics field. To complete this project, I had to model the way through delegating, empowering others, managing conflict, and collaborating. By strengthening these skills, I was able to obtain success for the project.

I thoroughly enjoyed the “Teaching Cleveland” sessions by Greg Deegan. It has been impactful to learn about the historical issues that Cleveland has faced and analyzing its influence on current challenges. The sessions allowed for open dialogue on effective ways to problem solve within our local communities.

**- Crystle McCrystal**  
**Maple Heights City Schools**

The biggest thing I have learned is that being a leader is more than just a job title. This program has emphasized that perpetual self-betterment, introspection, and cultivating empathy as cornerstones of impactful leadership. Through our sessions I’ve come to appreciate the diverse styles of leadership and discern the efficacy of each approach. Personally, I gravitate towards a style centered on inspiration, where I try to motivate and empower others to fulfill their daily responsibilities with purpose and dedication. Among the sessions, what resonated with me most was the opportunity to engage in candid discussions, exchange insights with peers, and tour other schools. I will say that touring other schools definitely pushed me out of my comfort zone but it has become my favorite part of the sessions!

**- Rebecca Shotliff**  
**South Euclid Lyndhurst City Schools**

“

FRLA has strengthened my skills in many ways. It has given me a framework to follow as I lead grade level teams. It has provided tools that I can rely on to establish relationships and build trust with my colleagues. Discussions with the other FRLA members have also given me a lot of insight into how our neighboring schools run. Many of the things we share give me new and fresh ideas that I can easily incorporate into my role. I truly enjoyed the discourse with the other participants, and I have learned a lot from them. Having the opportunity to learn the history of systemic barriers that impact Cleveland suburbs with Teaching Cleveland was also very beneficial.

**- Alexandria Royal**  
**Shaker Heights City Schools**

Through First Ring Leadership Academy, I was able to collaborate with colleagues facing similar challenges in first ring schools. Throughout the program, I was able to look at the rich history of Cleveland and their schools to have a better understanding of the community. Through the reading of “Everyday People, Extraordinary Leadership” and Gallup Clifton Strengths Assessment, I was able to identify my areas of strength and how I can contribute to my team.

**- Shannon Chrnko**  
**Berea City Schools**

“

My participation in FRLA has strengthened my leadership skills in several ways. The year-long program expanded my knowledge and skills to be a more effective leader through the various sessions and activities. I enjoyed connecting with and learning from other leaders in the First Ring districts. Hearing their perspectives and challenges expanded my understanding of leadership in a unique context. The visitations to other districts were also valuable for seeing new approaches and ideas I could take back to my district. The program gave me new leadership tools and a broader network of peers that will help me drive positive change as I take on more leadership responsibilities in my district.

**- Elena Scotton**  
**Cuyahoga Heights City Schools**

The FRLA has led to a greater realization and understanding of the unique challenges and benefits of our First Ring suburb schools. It was beneficial to have meaningful discussions with educators from these districts and to receive the support and encouragement from Dr. Wagner and the entire group.

**- Ryan Graff**  
**Fairview Park City Schools**

“

FRLA has been a very impactful experience. It was thoughtfully planned and very engaging. The leadership book, the historical perspective on Cleveland in particular the study of redlining, and the lively discussions have strengthened my leadership skills in many ways. I am so grateful for the opportunity to participate and make connections with other zealous First Ring educators.

**- Brenda Budzar**  
**Lakewood City Schools**

My participation in FRLA had a far greater impact on me than I could have imagined. Initially, I was excited to be selected and meet other budding leaders from other school districts across greater Cleveland. I had no idea these First Ring “gold mines” were in my backyard. The participants richly enhanced my perspectives with each one’s personal journey bringing value to every academy session. As grace would have it, I received a level of unmatched learning that opened my heart, allowed me to be vulnerable while also expanding my mind as a leader. Over the years in the field of education, I have either volunteered or been selected to take on countless leadership roles and/or opportunities. FRLA has grown my confidence as leader through in depth discussions, robust readings, and genuine camaraderie amongst peer leaders. I especially enjoyed how FRLA allowed me to discover my voice, build shared values, and turn critical incidents into teachable moments. In closing, FRLA has elevated my confidence and laid out my next step of becoming a building principal or district-level leader.

**- Anna Gregory**  
**Cleveland Heights-University Heights City Schools**

“

Being around leaders from other school districts on a monthly basis and hearing their thoughts and opinions on a variety of subjects has been very beneficial to my own continued development as a leader. I enjoyed many things about the FRLA experience, but my favorite would have to be the experience of visiting and touring several schools/districts that I have never been to.

**- Matt Dunlap**  
**Fairview Park City Schools**





**First Ring Schools Collaborative**

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