

FIRST RING LEADERSHIP ACADEMY 2025-2026 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 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

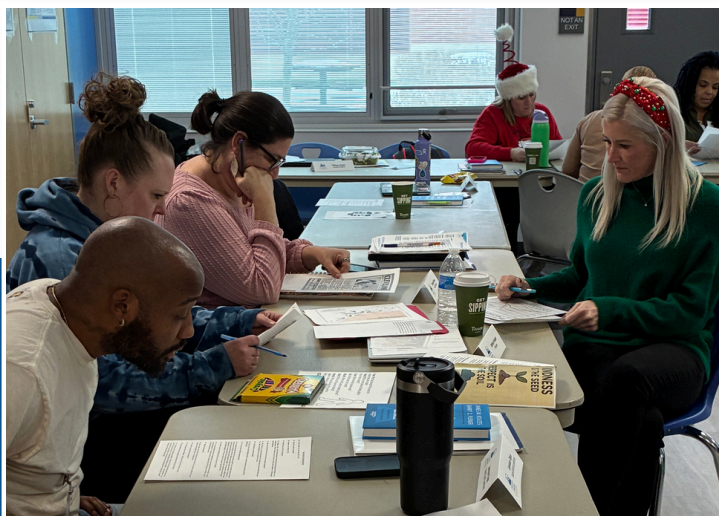
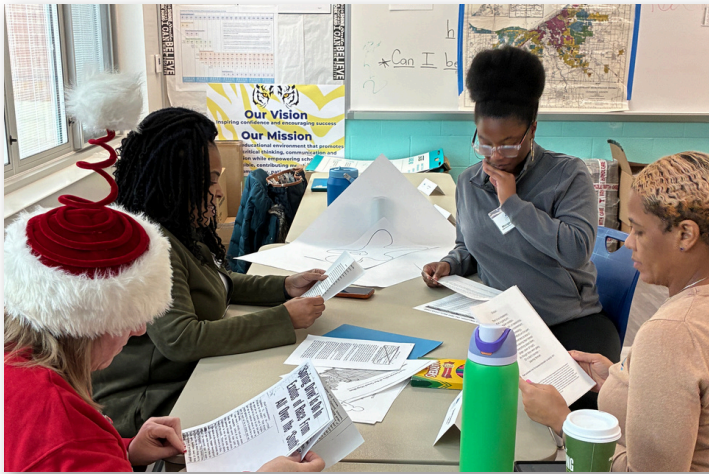


MARTHA HOLDEN
JENNINGS FOUNDATION

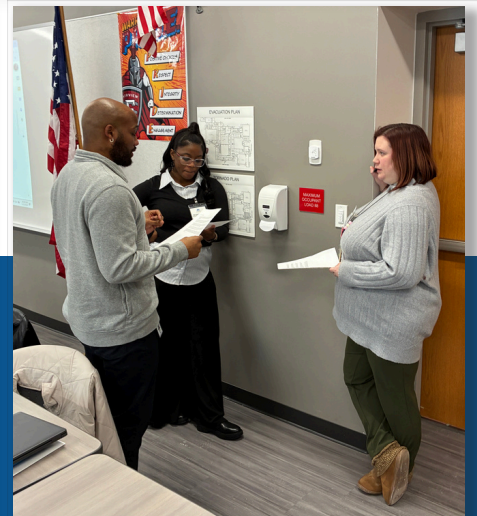
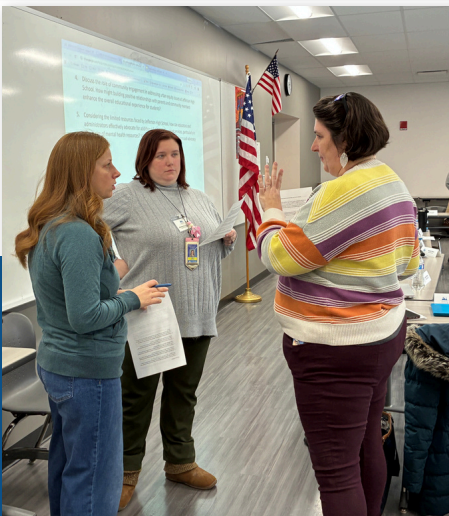


THE YEAR IN PHOTOS

DISTRICT LEADERS IN ACTION



DISTRICT LEADERS IN ACTION



2025–2026

FIRST RING LEADERSHIP ACADEMY COHORT BIOGRAPHIES

Bedford City Schools

Shawn Harrold

Role: ASL Teacher

Location: Bedford High School

Supplemental Duties: ASL Performance Group

Bachelor's Degree: Northern Arizona University

Other Credentials: Licensed ASL Interpreter K-12

Years in the District: 6

Years in Education: 23



Project Summary:

My capstone project focused on promoting positivity and spreading kindness throughout our school community. The goal was to demonstrate that even small gestures can have a meaningful impact on someone's day. As part of this initiative, we wrote letters and notes to both staff and students, sharing messages of encouragement and support. We also created treat bags for substitute teachers to show appreciation for their time and dedication, helping to give regular staff a much-needed break. On scheduling day, we provided donuts for the school counselors in recognition of the long hours and stress they experience. Additionally, we placed uplifting notes on lockers and desks to remind others that they are valued and cared for. Recognizing that people may be facing unseen challenges, especially during a year marked by unexpected difficulties and low morale, our project aimed to foster a more supportive and compassionate environment. Ultimately, these small acts of kindness proved to have a significant and positive effect on the school community.

2025–2026

FIRST RING LEADERSHIP ACADEMY COHORT BIOGRAPHIES

Bedford City Schools

Katie Kennedy

Role: 5th Grade Math and Social Studies Teacher

Location: Carylwood Intermediate School

Supplemental Duties: BLT, DLT, PBIS

Bachelor's Degree: University of Mount Union

Master's Degree: University of Mount Union

Other Credentials: Tournament softball coach, volunteer assistant coach for Aurora High School

Years in the District: 5

Years in Education: 5



Project Summary:

My Capstone project centered around improving math achievement across all three grade levels (3-5). With extensive diverse needs, as well as mathematic achievement gaps, maintaining the rigor of grade-level content while differentiating to meet needs can feel overwhelming for teachers. For this project, teachers were given a series of mini-Professional Development opportunities, led by me, surround the explicit instruction of the state-identified Math Practice Standards and peer-led small group instruction. The identification of peer tutors within the classrooms allow for teachers to execute differentiated small groups while peers assist with maintaining the rigor of tier one grade-level content.

Brooklyn City Schools

Brittany Hubbell

Role: Early Childhood Intervention Specialist & Preschool Coordinator

Location: Brooklyn Early Childhood Center

Supplemental Duties: Preschool Team Leader, PBIS Building Coordinator, Action Team Coordinator

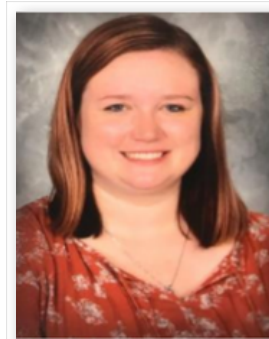
Bachelor's Degree: Baldwin Wallace University

Master's Degree: Baldwin Wallace University

Other Credentials: Attend Cleveland State University for Principal Licensure (expected May 2027)

Years in the District: 13

Years in Education: 13



Project Summary:

My capstone project included the planning, organizing and implementing of the first Brooklyn Early Childhood Center (BECC) Resource Fair the evening of February 19, 2026. This project was important to me, as I have been working with preschoolers and their families for 13 years and I have noticed I am constantly searching for and providing non-academic resources for families on a variety of important or essential topics (special education, child care, food assistance, parenting, etc.) The fair provided a great way to get a multitude of resources to families in need, as well as proactively educate families of resources they may need to access in the future. In collaboration with our BECC Family Action team, we contacted and brought in 14 organizations from Brooklyn and the surrounding Northeast Ohio area that provided hands-on resource, took follow-up contact information and provided immediate assistance. Families were incentivized to participate in the fair through giveaways (every attending family was given a hands-on learning game to take home), raffles for grocery store gift cards and free dinner. Over 30 families were in attendance, which exceeded my goal for a first time, after hours event. Participants and organizations were surveyed after their fair on their experience and feedback for future events. 100% of responders agreed that the Resource Fair was beneficial and event that should continue in our community.

Cleveland Heights - University Heights

Lisa Husain

Role: Instructional Specialist- Culture and Climate

Location: Board of Education

Supplemental Duties: Summer School Administrator and Member of District Leadership Team

Bachelor's Degree: Cleveland State University

Master's Degree: Cleveland State University

Other Credentials: Administrative license and K-12 Gifted Endorsement

Years in the District: 19

Years in Education: 20



Project Summary:

Positive Pathways Project: Character Strong Supports for Student Success This project integrates the Character Strong curriculum into all Alternative Learning Centers (ALCs) to provide consistent, skill-building interventions for students assigned to in-school suspension. ALC ancillary staff in every building will use Character Strong resources and practices to deliver restorative justice strategies, develop executive functioning and self-regulation skills, and reinforce Tier 2 behavior supports. The goal is to ensure that time spent in ALC is not merely punitive, but productive—helping students understand behaviors, build new skills, and reconnect with their school community. To ensure fidelity and impact, the project includes (re)training ALC staff in Character Strong, Tier 1 behavior supports, and de-escalation techniques. Parent awareness and communication will also be strengthened so families understand the purpose and benefits of the ALC experience.

Schools need more than consequences to change behavior—students need structured opportunities to learn, reflect, and practice new skills. By transforming ALCs into restorative, skill-building spaces, this project aims to reduce repeat behavior incidents, improve student engagement, and positively influence attendance and academic performance. This approach shifts ALC from a place of exclusion to a meaningful intervention that supports whole-child growth, strengthens relationships, and contributes to a healthier school climate.

Cuyahoga Heights Local Schools

Nate Bryk

Role: 6th Grade ELA/Social Studies Teacher

Location: Cuyahoga Heights Middle School

Supplemental Duties: Head Middle School Football Coach and Varsity Assistant; Head Middle School Basketball Coach and Varsity Assistant

Bachelor's Degree: Cleveland State University

Master's Degree: Grand Canyon University

Years in the District: 5

Years in Education: 7



Project Summary:

My capstone project was aimed at enhancing the project-based learning experiences I provide for my students. Throughout the year, I was able to create meaningful experiences for my students such as our Egyptian Museum experience, and our King Ashoka symbolism project. In the process, however, I gained much more than I bargained for. Ironically, my attendance at this leadership academy began around the same time I was presented with new leadership responsibilities at the beginning of the school year.

The First Ring Leadership Academy helped to keep me inspired and feel a sense of purpose as I adjusted to my new roles. It also helped me reflect on the true meaning of leadership. In many ways, I see these unexpected lessons as the most important part of my capstone project.

East Cleveland City Schools

LaKeisha Greer

Role: School Social Worker

Location: W.H.Kirk Middle School

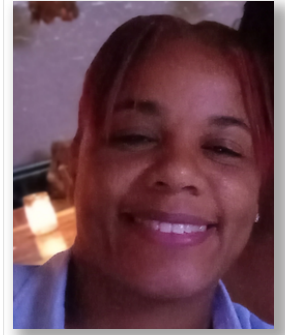
Supplemental Duties: Student Council Advisor

Bachelor's Degree: The Ohio State University

Master's Degree: The Ohio State University

Years in the District: 8

Years in Education: 8



Project Summary: Integrated Behavioral Support

Behavioral support infused in the school day at the beginning and end of the week can improve engagement, behavior, and overall success for students.

Set-up: Group-based, skill-building, guided conversation session, action-based activities, and real-world experiences.

East Cleveland City Schools

Michelle Reese

Role: 3/4 ELA Teacher

Location: Superior School for the Performing Arts

Supplemental Duties: Mentor, Bulding Leadership Team and Curriculum Council

Bachelor's Degree: Cleveland State University

Master's Degree: Cleveland State University

Years in the District: 26

Years in Education: 26



Project Summary:

I chose to plan a Family Literacy Night as a meaningful step toward strengthening family engagement at Superior School for the Performing Arts (SSPA). This decision was inspired by my experience at a recent leadership conference, which powerfully reinforced a shared commitment among our team: we must be intentional and strategic in fostering parental involvement. Meaningful family engagement is not optional—it is essential to student success.

At SSPA, we recognize that families play a critical role in shaping students' academic growth and long-term achievement. Our goal is to empower parents and caregivers to see themselves as valued partners in their child's education. When families feel welcomed, informed, and supported, they are more likely to actively collaborate with educators, reinforcing learning beyond the classroom.

The Family Literacy Night is designed to create an inclusive and engaging environment where families can connect with teachers, explore literacy strategies, and gain practical tools to support reading and learning at home. By offering interactive activities, resources, and opportunities for open dialogue, we aim to build confidence in families and strengthen the home-school connection.

This event is not a standalone effort but part of a broader commitment to creating a culture of partnership at SSPA. Through ongoing initiatives like this, we want to remove barriers to involvement, celebrate diverse family experiences, and ensure that every parent feels equipped to contribute to their child's success.

Ultimately, Family Literacy Night represents one of many intentional steps we are taking to deepen parental involvement and create a strong, collaborative community focused on student growth, achievement, and lifelong learning.

Euclid City Schools

Jessica Chmura

Role: Lead Intervention Specialist

Location: Bluestone Elementary

Supplemental Duties: District Leadership Team, Building Leadership Team, PTA, Math Curriculum Committee, Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS), Building Testing Team

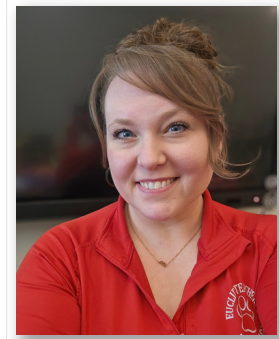
Bachelor's Degree: University of Mount Union:

Master's Degree: Notre Dame College

Other Credentials: k-12 Reading Endorsement, 7-12 English Language Arts, k-12 Special Education, k-12 Administration License

Years in the District: 15

Years in Education: 17



Aly Pulice

Role: 4th Grade Teacher

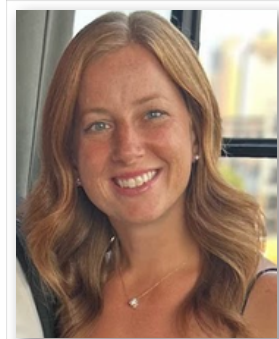
Location: Bluestone Elementary

Bachelor's Degree: Marietta College

Master's Degree: George Mason University

Years in the District: 9

Years in Education: 16



Project Summary:

There are many great students at Bluestone who work hard everyday, but remain quiet in class and at times can be overshadowed by their peers. These students deserve an opportunity to have their voices heard, show off their skills, and build their confidence all while having fun in hands-on activities. Four students were selected from grades two through five. Jessica Chmura worked with students in second and third grade while Aly Pulice worked with students in grades four and five. Weekly sessions held during lunch included team building activities, projects centered around STEM activities, and working together to problem solve. Our goal with Building Student Leaders was to help students grow into confident, responsible, and engaged learners in the classroom and beyond. Great student leaders are shaped through experiences, challenges, and continuous learning. When students learn to lead they develop social-emotional skills such as problem solving, collaboration with peers, and empathy for others. These students looked forward to our weekly sessions and began to become more self-confident, which their teachers began to see in the classroom.

Fairview Park City Schools

Heather Kaminski

Role: Associate Principal

Location: Lewis F. Mayer Middle School

Bachelor's Degree: Mount Union College

Master's Degree: Bowling Green State University

Years in the District: 5

Years in Education: 20



Project Summary:

My Capstone project has been centralized around our 6-12 campus' MTSS process. The focus of the project has evolved over the course of the year from instituting data meetings and providing training to the staff, up to a full rework of our MTSS process. The goal of the rework is to align practices 6-12 and ensure alignment with the districts One Plan. The rebuilding of this program is being completed with our grade level leaders, school counselors, district psychologists, and building administrators. As a team, we are re-evaluating each step of the work flow and began the process by defining categories in which students would enter MTSS. Some of the areas that we are working on include: entry points for all students, defining roles, solidifying documentation and how the information can flow from one grade level to the next, determining an MTSS calendar issued at the beginning of the year, to name a few.

The need for this rework has been driven by the changes that have occurred in the building over time. Historically we have been fortunate to have true grade level teams for grade 6-9, however the landscape is changing, resulting in almost all teachers in the building teaching multiple grade levels, thus changing how we can conduct our grade level meetings. Our goal is to be intentional about how we plan our meetings to ensure all grade levels have the opportunity to discuss student needs.

Garfield Heights City Schools

Tiffinee Jasper

Role: Assistant Principal

Location: Garfield Heights Middle School

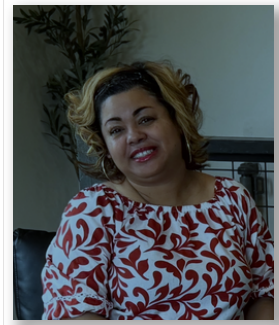
Bachelor's Degree: Kent State University

Master's Degree: Cleveland State University

Other Credentials: Post-Masters Degree = Administration License

Years in the District: 2

Years in Education: 20



Project Summary:

This capstone project focuses on empowering middle school girls by developing leadership skills, designed to provide a safe, supportive space for students to build confidence, manage emotions, develop leadership skills, and grow together. The purpose of the project is to address the critical developmental period in which girls often experience a decline in self-esteem, participation, lack etiquettes and leadership engagement.

Includes but not limited to:

- Fun team-building activities and games
- Leadership development lessons
- Group discussions (sharing is always optional)
- Journaling and creative projects
- Tools to help with stress management, friendships, and school success

This project highlights the importance of intentional leadership development for girls at the middle school level and supports the need for continued programming that fosters equity, empowerment, and student voice. Future recommendations include expanding mentorship opportunities, field trips and partnering with other girls leadership groups.

Lakewood City Schools

Kristin Clark

Role: Elementary Coordinator of Teaching and Learning

Location: Taft Center for Innovation

Supplemental Duties: Member of District DEIB, DLT, Professional Learning Advisory Committee, Attendance Team

Bachelor's Degree: Ohio University

Master's Degree: The Ohio State University

Other Credentials: Doctor of Education in Interprofessional Leadership with a specialization in Curriculum and Instruction from Kent State University

Years in the District: 4

Years in Education: 22



Casey Squires

Role: Coordinator of Secondary Education

Location: Lakewood City School District

Supplemental Duties: District Test Coordinator

Bachelor's Degree: Millersville University

Master's Degree: Cleveland State University

Other Credentials: Currently in my 3rd year of my PhD studies at Cleveland State University in Urban Education with a Specialization in Policy Studies, EdReports Klawe Fellow Cohort 5, Ohio Education Policy Leadership Project Current Fellow, Graduate Assistant at Cleveland State University School of Education and Counseling

Years in the District: 16

Years in Education: 16



Project Summary:

This project aims to develop a comprehensive, district-wide K-12 mathematics vision including a structure for intervention and enrichment (IE) aligned to Ohio's Plan for Mathematics. The work seeks to create a consistent vision for high-quality math instruction, establish clear expectations, analyze student performance data, supporting high quality tier 1 instruction, and determine intervention structures and resources appropriate for each grade band (K-5, 6-8, 9-12).

We selected this project for various reasons, including the new Ohio Plan for Mathematics being released, new IE time at the middle schools, desire to add math intervention and enrichment being added into our structures at the elementary level and a new ISGI position at the high school to support mathematics tutoring. The project aligns with district improvement goals and supports equitable learning opportunities for all students. Through collaboration with teachers and administrators, and by applying leadership skills developed through FRLA, we will design structures that strengthen Tier 1 instruction, target data-driven intervention, and provide meaningful enrichment.

Maple Heights City Schools

Maggie Klem

Role: 6th grade school counselor

Location: Milkovich Middle School

Bachelor's Degree: John Carroll University

Master's Degree: John Carroll University

Years in the District: 2

Years in Education: 5



Project Summary:

I chose to focus my capstone project around a need that is very prevalent at Milkovich Middle School and this need is giving students the tools to manage conflicts and support others. I created a peer mediation and leadership group to empower 6th grade students to find the leadership qualities in themselves and use those qualities to support peers in solving conflicts. The students that were selected for the group were nominated by their teachers and other staff members and students who either show great leadership qualities now or students that have great potential to be leaders in the future. The group met and discussed topics each week ranging from self-reflections, case studies, role playing and identifying strengths in themselves and others. The goal of the group is to give students the skills and confidence to make a positive change in their school communities and friend circles by leading by example, helping others solve conflict and modeling emotional regulation skills that were supported in the group. The group of students act as our schools student ambassadors who support new students and lead orientation tours. Another goal of the group for the long term is that they will gain the confidence to go into classes with the school counselor and lead classroom lessons. Students tend to pick up on skills when they are modeled by their peers and students that they can relate to. The curriculum created for this group will be kept in a binder so that the school can use it for years to come.

Parma City School District

Allison Kokely

Role: Dean of Students

Location: Pleasant Valley Elementary & STEM Education

Supplemental Duties: Elementary Lead-District Attendance Taskforce, District Resident Educator Committee

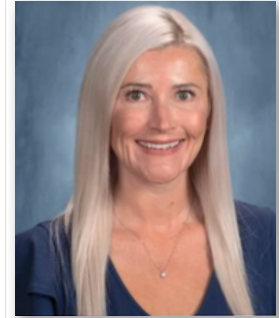
Bachelor's Degree: Baldwin-Wallace University

Master's Degree: Baldwin-Wallace University

Other Credentials: OTES 2.0 Evaluator and Ohio Resident Educator Mentor

Years in the District: 14

Years in Education: 16



Project Summary:

The Walking School Bus initiative is designed to help students and families build a sense of community within their neighborhoods while ensuring children feel safe and comfortable walking or biking to school. My goal with this project was not only to increase regular and on-time attendance, but also to improve dismissal safety by reducing traffic behind our building and throughout the surrounding neighborhood.

Richmond Heights Local Schools

Karla Smith

Role: ELA/Social Studies 5th Grade Teacher

Location: Richmond Heights Elementary School

Supplemental Duties: I actively collaborate with a team of teachers to support school-wide initiatives that enrich student experiences. This includes helping to reestablish the Scholastic Book Fair, promoting literacy and student engagement, as well as planning and organizing Career Day to expose students to a variety of future pathways and opportunities.

Bachelor's Degree: Central State University

Master's Degree: Cleveland State University

Other Credentials: Currently completing my Reading Endorsement at Baldwin Wallace

Years in the District: 14

Years in Education: 26



Project Summary: The BLITZ

The BLITZ is a school-wide initiative at Richmond Heights Elementary designed to move the school from isolated efforts to a cohesive instructional system. Rather than focusing only on test scores, the work centers on ensuring consistent, rigorous instruction in every classroom, every day by aligning data, teaching practices, and student support.

Through the BLITZ framework—Benchmarking, Learning Continuum, Instructional Walkthroughs, Targeted Interventions, and Zone of Proximal Development—teachers use data to set goals, differentiate instruction, and provide timely support. Leadership reinforces this work through ongoing feedback and coaching, creating consistency across classrooms.

Together, this approach builds a sustainable system focused on continuous improvement, strengthening both student achievement and the overall quality of teaching and learning.

Shaker Heights Schools

Courtney Starr

Role: Campus Assessment and Activities Coordinator

Location: Shaker Heights High School

Bachelor's Degree: John Carroll University

Master's Degree: Notre Dame College and Concordia University - Chicago

Years in the District: 2

Years in Education: 18



Project Summary:

This capstone project focused on designing and implementing an Algebra 1 bootcamp to support students who had not yet passed the state end-of-course exam at Shaker Heights High School. The initiative addressed a clear need: a group of students struggled with foundational algebraic concepts critical for graduation readiness and future math success. Students in this group had previously attempted to pass this exam at least once and had not received a passing score of 684.

This intervention bootcamp was structured as a targeted intervention program, combining small-group instruction, skill-based workshops, and individualized learning plans. Instruction emphasized core Algebra 1 competencies such as solving linear equations, working with functions, and interpreting graphs, while also reinforcing problem-solving strategies and mathematical confidence. Teachers used diagnostic data to identify specific skill gaps and tailored lessons accordingly, ensuring that each student received focused support. In total, students attended eight sessions where math instructors from the high school worked on the skills mentioned above.

In addition to direct instruction, the program incorporated frequent formative assessments, immediate feedback, and opportunities for practice in a low-stakes environment. The bootcamp also fostered a supportive and motivating atmosphere, helping students rebuild confidence in their math abilities and develop persistence when tackling challenging problems.

Preliminary outcomes showed improved student engagement, increased mastery of key algebra skills, and increased confidence in foundational algebra skills. The team sees the increased confidence in the students as one of the most beneficial outcomes of this experience. Students who have taken this exam several times, lose confidence and begin to see the task as one that is too difficult to overcome. This project demonstrates that intentional, data-driven interventions, paired with strong instructional support, can significantly improve student outcomes in high-stakes mathematics assessments.

South Euclid-Lyndhurst City Schools

Jamison Days

Role: Assistant Principal

Location: Brush High School

Bachelor's Degree: Ohio University

Master's Degree: Cleveland State University

Years in the District: 3

Years in Education: 8



Project Summary:

This school year, I led the way of implementing a House Teams System at Brush High School. The goal was to increase engagement of students and cultivate a level of competition and pride amongst students and staff. All students and staff were dividing into 8 teams. Students earned points for a variety of things that they do throughout the day i.e. getting to class on time, work completion, acts of kindness, and attending extra-curricular activities. Points were kept using LiveSchool, a platform that allowed everyone to see live updates of score tallies.

Warrensville Heights City Schools

Morgan Rodgers

Role: Kindergarten Teacher

Location: Early Childhood Center

Supplemental Duties: Member of the Building Leadership Team

Member of the Recruitment and Retention Team

Bachelor's Degree: Wright State University

Master's Degree: John Carroll University

Years in the District: 10

Years in Education: 10



Project Summary:

My capstone project focused on creating a night for kindergarten students and families to increase engagement in literacy. This night provided families more opportunities to speak with teachers/specialists to answer any outstanding questions about RIMPS and upcoming state testing. Students and parents rotated to different table stations of activities to gain helpful tips and resources to build literacy skills at home. Our public library partners were also present to showcase upcoming free programs they offer.

Warrensville Heights City Schools

Demetrius Williams

Role: Assistant Principal

Location: Elementary School

Bachelor's Degree: Cleveland State University

Master's Degree: Concordia University

Years in the District: 1

Years in Education: 10



Project Summary:

My capstone project dives into an assignment I have been charged with at work which is student attendance. This work is important as we all know due to the time spent in school being directly correlated to student achievement. Working with chronically absent students will help the district better understand some of the obstacles students face just trying to get to school. Also, we will find out what resources are necessary for us to better support chronically absent families. I will be developing a plan of action for the upcoming school that will also help address parent involvement in the school but hopefully better our student attendance as well.

WORDS FROM OUR 2025-26 FRLA DISTRICT LEADERS



My participation in First Ring Leadership Academy has strengthened my leadership skills as a Lead Intervention Specialist, where I am responsible for supporting my peers both academically and personally. In this role and through FRLA, I developed stronger methods of communication and problem-solving skills by working one-on-one and in small groups to address challenges and help my fellow teachers improve their skills and special education knowledge. I learned how to lead with empathy, stay patient under pressure, and adapt my approach to meet different needs. Being in a leadership position also taught me how to take initiative, stay organized, and serve as a reliable role model to both students and staff members.

What I enjoyed most about First Ring Leadership Academy was the opportunity to make direct contact with other professionals from various local school districts while building meaningful connections. I found it especially rewarding to see the programs offered at different districts and the various impacts they had on staff and students. I also enjoyed collaborating with other members and sharing ideas. Participating in the Teaching Cleveland sessions allowed me to develop a deeper understanding about the history of Cleveland and the surrounding first ring cities that have impacted my entire life. It provided me with a stronger meaning and appreciation for the history that has developed not just Cleveland, but Euclid where I grew up and still teach. Overall, FRLA gave me a greater sense of purpose and helped me grow into a more confident, compassionate leader who is determined to foster change and make an impact on the students and community of Euclid City Schools.

**- Jessica Chmura
Euclid City Schools**

I enjoyed the collaboration with school leaders from the other first ring districts. We were able to discuss similar issues and successes which were often times similar to those experienced in our home districts.



**- Courtney Starr
Shaker Heights City Schools**



My participation in FRLA gave me the confidence to know that I am in the right field. I enjoyed hearing and seeing from different districts.

**- Jamison Days
South Euclid-Lyndhurst City School District**

My participation in FRLA has strengthened my leadership skills because it has allowed me to reflect on what a true leader can look like. The words elevate, empower, and forgive are three words that come to mind.



Through this process, I have learned to elevate my own life in terms of health, mindfulness, and rest. I now understand that I can only be an effective servant leader if I first take care of myself. I also learned that I need to trust and empower the people around me. My job as a leader is to empower those around me to use their passions and talents to move toward our collective goals. Last, I have learned the power of forgiving myself for mistakes. Leadership of any kind requires mental toughness and the ability to learn from mistakes without losing confidence.

My favorite part of this leadership academy was learning from the other professionals within the group. It is nice to know that we have such a strong group of collaborative educators to work with across the area. I learned so much from them..

**- Nate Bryk
Cuyahoga Heights Schools**



Participation in the First Ring Leadership Academy strengthened my leadership by expanding my systems thinking, deepening my use of data to guide decisions, and improving my ability to lead collaborative, cross-district work. I especially valued the opportunity to learn alongside colleagues from other districts and engage in site visits, which provided practical insights and new perspectives. Seeing how other educators approach similar challenges was the most impactful part of the experience.

**- Cassandra Squires
Lakewood City Schools**

I enjoyed learning about the different school districts and the history of Cleveland.



**- LaKeisha Greer
East Cleveland City School District**



I enjoyed learning the history of Cleveland the most.

**- Michelle Reese
East Cleveland City School District**



My participation in FRLA has strengthened my leadership skills by providing the opportunity to collaborate with professionals in surrounding districts. I have gained valuable knowledge and perspectives from colleagues in surrounding districts, and being able to brainstorm ideas and what other districts do has influenced my day to day work.

The key take away from both FRLA and “Everyday People, Extraordinary Leadership” is that relationships matter most, whether it is with neighboring colleagues, building staff, students, parents, and community members.

**- Heather Kaminski
Fairview Park City Schools**

I feel FRLA has strengthened my leadership skill by providing the opportunity to meet with other individuals in this field to connect, visit and engage in their school buildings. Reading Everyday People, Extraordinary Leadership helped bring understanding of traits and actions of a quality leader.



I really enjoyed each Teaching Cleveland Session! They brought many resourceful information about our own history of the city and connecting it to education.

**- Morgan Rodgers
Warrensville Height City Schools**



It helped me to network and listen to other districts’ processes and procedures, mission and vision, culture and climate, and implementation of new ideas. It allowed me to meet new people with similar aspirations and dedication to our youth. I thoroughly enjoyed the conversations that were had about our day-to-day experiences, as well as the History of Cleveland from the TeachCLE series, to better improve my building and district.

**- Kathryn Kennedy
Bedford City School District**

It is difficult to narrow it down to one thing. I enjoyed the getting to know leaders from other First Ring Districts and learning about their work through our visits and conversations. I also appreciated the book study and the activities aligned with it as it relates to our leadership both present and future. I have been a part of many leadership cohorts and educational experiences and every time, I learn more about myself as a leader.



Leadership is limitless and there will always be more I can learn in order to be better. Thank you for this opportunity to continue to grow in my leadership and learn from you. I have thoroughly enjoyed every session.

**- Kristin Clark
Lakewood City Schools**



The FRLA was a unique experience that has allowed me to grow significantly as a leader. From collaborating with aspiring leaders, diving deeper into essential components of successful leadership, touring facilities and learning about the history of the communities surrounding us.

feel more equipped to continue the leadership work in my district. This experience has both strengthened my confidence as a leader and given me a network of forward-thinking colleagues to continue to connect with.

-Brittany Hubbell Brooklyn City Schools

I greatly valued the opportunity to collaborate with other districts and gain insight into the qualities that define effective leadership. Engaging with diverse perspectives allowed us to reflect on our own strengths and better understand what makes us strong leaders. This experience also reinforced the importance of applying our knowledge and skills in ways that support and empower others to grow in their own leadership roles.



- Shawn Harrold Bedford City School District



Participating in FRLA has been an incredibly valuable experience that has strengthened my leadership skills in meaningful ways. It challenged me to reflect on and leverage my strengths, while also becoming more aware of areas for growth. Through this process, I've grown more intentional in how I support, encourage, and empower those around me.

One of the most rewarding aspects was the opportunity to collaborate with other First Ring district leaders. Learning alongside such a diverse group allowed me to gain new perspectives and practical ideas that I was able to bring back and implement in my own school. Hearing about the unique challenges and strengths across different districts broadened my understanding of what effective leadership looks like in varied contexts.

Overall, this experience was unlike anything I've participated in before. It has not only expanded my skill set, but also sharpened my focus and vision for the next steps in my leadership journey.

- Aly Pulice Euclid City Schools



Participating in the First Ring Leadership Academy has been an honor. I truly valued the opportunity to connect and collaborate with educators from other districts. While we engaged in meaningful discussions about the challenges our districts face, this experience also allowed each of us to highlight strengths and share why we are proud of the communities we serve.

As someone committed to maintaining a growth mindset, the opportunity to engage in and reflect on the Clifton Strengths Assessment was especially impactful. It encouraged me to take a deeper look at my leadership strengths while also identifying areas for continued growth as I move forward in my administrative journey.

**- Allison Kokely
Parma City School District**



Through FRLA I have a better understanding of the things it takes to be a leader at each level. I understand better that we all have our struggles and responsibilities and that in my role as a building leader I need to understand my staff. FRLA has also helped me reflect and set my own goals for the upcoming school year.

**- Demetrius Williams
Warrensville Heights City School Districts**



My capstone project reinforced that meaningful change takes time and that true leadership is about influencing and empowering others, not holding a title. I strengthened key skills in communication, collaboration, and inspiring a shared vision, while recognizing the need to break large projects into smaller, manageable steps. Challenges—including personal loss, funding delays, and balancing multiple responsibilities—required preparation, transparency, and reliance on my team, ultimately affirming that leadership is a collective effort. I enjoyed visiting other districts and observing effective practices that could be applied to my own district.

**- Lisa Husain
Cleveland Heights-University Heights City Schools**



Through FRLA I have a better understanding of the things it takes to be a leader at each level. I understand better that we all have our struggles and responsibilities and that in my role as a building leader I need to understand my staff. FRLA has also helped me reflect and set my own goals for the upcoming school year.

**-Demetrius Williams
Warrensville Heights City School District**

Participating in First Ring Leadership strengthened my skills by helping me become more reflective and intentional in my teaching. It encouraged me to collaborate with others, share ideas, and listen to different perspectives, which has improved how I support my students.



What I enjoyed the most was the opportunity to connect and learn from other educators. Hearing different ideas and strategies inspired me and gave me new ways to approach challenges in my classroom.

**- Karla Smith
Richmond Heights Local Schools**



Overall, the First Ring Leadership Professional Development Cohort strengthens leadership by blending theory with practice, encouraging reflection, and building a strong community of leaders committed to continuous improvement.

I enjoyed visiting the different districts and schools throughout the cohort and the last session was the most impactful. The different vendors provided an array of knowledge and perspective of resources and tools available to schools and the community.

**- Tiffinee Jasper
Garfield Heights City Schools**

I really enjoyed the discussions. I loved meeting individuals from different districts who may face similar challenges and share best practices. I enjoyed this program because it felt like we were all on one team and we are working together to support a common goal and doing what is best for our students. I learned a lot about myself and my own strengths throughout this program and it gave me time to reflect as I was reading the book and I had many "aha" moments when I realized that there are some ways that I could improve on my leadership skills.



I will not forget the conversation that we had on one of the first months session when Bill shared about how you can have a checklist and knock off everything and work through it throughout the day, but then still not feel fulfilled when the day ends because you can miss out on the meaningful relationships and moments that occur unplanned throughout a day. This will stick with me. Thank you!

**- Margaret Klem
Maple Heights City School District**

FIRST RING LEADERSHIP ACADEMY

ALUMNI 2018–2025

2024-2025

DISTRICT	FULL NAME	ROLE	ASSIGNMENT
Bedford	Faith Gordon Bakara Robinson	Social-Emotional Learning Supervisor 6th - 8th Grade Health/PE	Administrative Heskett Middle School
Berea	Madison Carlton	7th Grade ELA	Berea Midpark Middle School
Brooklyn	Marcello DeAngelis	Pk-7 Assistant Principal	Brooklyn School
CH-UH	Katie Buettner	High School Science	Heights High
Cuyahoga Hts	Kelly Cummins	Speech Language Pathologist/ Preschool Coordinator	District
East Cleveland	Anthony DiPio Tishawn Benson	2nd Grade Title 1 Teacher 3rd-5th	Caledonia Elementary School Mayfair Elementary School
Euclid	Ray Ford Tracy Kondrit Dylan Sullivan	8th Grade ELA 6th Grade ELA 2nd Grade	Euclid Middle School Euclid Middle School Arbor Elementary
Fairview Park	Jill Davis	3rd Grade Intervention Specialist	Gilles-Sweet Elementary
Garfield Hts	Abigail Klamer	Curriculum Instruction Specialist	District
Lakewood	Hadeel Nimeh Ouimet Smith	Assistant Principal Assistant Principal	Harding Middle School Garfield Middle School
Maple Hts	Romie Graham	6 - 8 Social Emotional Learning	Milkovich Middle School
Parma	Emily Gladish	Nutrition Services Supervisor	Administration Building
Richmond Hts	Curtis Boykins	Dean of Students	Upper School
Shaker Hts	Anne Scott	Assistant Principal	Shaker Hts High School Innovative Center for Personalized Learning
South Euclid- Lyndhurst	Amber Berkobein	Library Media Specialist	Charles F. Brush High School & Memorial Junior High School
Warrensville Hts	Arnita Washington	Pre-K Classroom Teacher	Early Childhood Center

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
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 Matt Dunlap	Art Teacher Director of Technology	Fairview High School 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
Shaker Hts	Ali Royal	IB PYP Coordinator	Fernway Elementary School
South Euclid- Lyndhurst	Rebecca Shotliff	4th Grade Teacher	Greenview Elementary
Warrensville Hts	Jessica Grimes	8th grade ELA	WHMS

2022-2023

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

2021-2022

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

2019-2020

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

2018-2019

DISTRICT	FULL NAME	ROLE	ASSIGNMENT
Bedford	Timothy K. Kallay	Intervention Specialist (K - 12)	Central Primary School
Berea	Nicholas Hall Georgia Karageorgos	Intervention Specialist 5th Grade Math	Midpark Middle School Midpark Middle School
Brooklyn	Lisa Kubinski	7th Grade Science	Brooklyn School
CH-UH	Jennifer Thomas	General Education, 5th Grade	Roxboro Elementary School
Cuyahoga Hts	Gary Miller	PreK - 5 Technology	Cuyahoga Hts Elementary School
East Cleveland	Jennifer Bill	Grades 10 - 12 STEM Lab	Shaw High School
Fairview Park	Janice Frygier	8th Grade ELA	Lewis F. Mayer Middle School
Garfield Hts	Jowell Gray	School Counselor	William Foster
Lakewood	Gray Cooper Aimee Guzowski	English Intervention Specialist (English Dept.)	Lakewood High School Lakewood High School
Maple Hts	Courtney Starr	Special Education Coordinator, PK - 7	John F. Kennedy Elementary School
Parma	Alexandra Baczkowski Maria Gingo	Intervention Specialist 8 - 9th Gr English II/Honors, Grade 10	Valley Forge High School Normandy High School
Richmond Hts	Josh Patty	9th Grade World History 10th Grade American	Richmond Hts Secondary School
South Euclid-Lyndhurst	John Bottar	Stem Lab Teacher K - 3	Adrian Elementary
Warrensville Hts	Rachel Bruce	1st Grade, General Education	John Dewey Elementary School

FIRST RING LEADERSHIP ACADEMY ALUMNI





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