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INDEPENDENCE LOCAL SCHOOLS WORKS ON ALIGNING GRADING PRACTICES AND PRIMARY ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS MATERIALS

By Jamie Smith and Ike Holzapfel, Teaching and Learning Consultants, ESC of Northeast Ohio

Building on the momentum built by Independence Primary School with standards-based reporting, Independence Middle School's fifth and sixth-grade teachers began looking at their grading practices. Teaching and Learning Consultants Jamie Smith and James "Ike" Holzapfel from the Educational Service Center of Northeast Ohio, facilitate discussion and calibration of the fifth and sixth-grade teachers' grading practices. After analyzing Ohio's Learning Standards and the expectations associated with each standard, the teachers began discussing current practices associated with grading and historical trends in grading practices. These practices include the averaging of scores over time, including elements in grading other than content understanding, and the 100-point grading scale.

- **Averaging scores over time** - Everyone learns at a different pace. As students learn and grow in the content by reducing the impact of early attempts in learning, parents get a clearer measure of their student's level of understanding. In short, students are not penalized for not learning something yet.
- **Including elements in grading other than content understanding** - A student's grade should reflect mastery as it relates to the content standard

rather than behaviors such as homework completion, participation and work habits. These characteristics can be reported in other ways outside of the academic grade.

- **The 100-point grading scale** - What does an "A" mean? What specific skills does an "A" tell about a student's level of mastery of a standard? Traditional reporting practices of A, B, C, D, and F, do not provide specific feedback on student performance on an equal grading scale.

Additionally, Independence Primary School has begun reviewing its K-4 curriculum materials for English language arts. In order to align with Ohio Department of Education Dyslexia legislation and recent recommendations of the governor on the science of reading, K-4 teachers will begin the process of ensuring their curricular materials meet those expectations. Jamie Smith will facilitate the exploration of those materials and their implementation within the instructional block with students.



NEW ONLINE VERSION OF 2023 Summer and Beyond DIRECTORY IS NOW AVAILABLE!

State Support Team-Region 3 (SST3) offers the 2023 Summer and Beyond Directory as a resource to parents, family members, and school district/community school personnel about extended opportunities around the Cuyahoga County area. Each school year, SST3 collaborates with local agencies, camps, and community partners around summer activities for students with disabilities. Many of those agencies and organizations offer continued academic skill-building, therapeutic and social-emotional supports throughout the year to assist students with disabilities to become independent and self-sufficient.

To view the 2023 directory, go to <https://sites.google.com/escneo.org/2023summerandbeyond/home>.



Pictures taken from our local agencies, camps and community partners website.

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CUYAHOGA HEIGHTS AND RICHMOND HEIGHTS STUDENTS PARTICIPATE IN FIRST RING STUDENT LEADERSHIP INSTITUTE

The First Ring Student Leadership Institute (FRSLI) is a two-year program that empowers northeast Ohio high school students to lead change in their schools and communities. FRSLI uses Youth Participatory Action Research (YPAR) that recognizes students as experts in their own experiences and emphasizes student-adult collaboration in effecting change.

Participants build leadership skills and broaden their awareness of community issues while engaging in student-driven activities and student-centered experiences. This year, the Institute brought together 103 high school sophomores, 16 First Ring districts, and 31 district leaders. Participants attended six working sessions held remotely and at both Cleveland State University and Ohio State university. Sophomores from both Cuyahoga Heights High School and Richmond Heights Secondary School participated.

Each district team worked to complete a YPAR project of their choosing guided by experts from Cleveland State University's Center for Urban Education and with the help of an adult collaborator who represented their district in the First Ring Leadership Academy. The teams identified a pressing issue in their school and then conducted original research to better understand the issue's nature and potential solutions. Cuyahoga Heights students addressed school spirit and the Richmond Heights students addressed academic achievement.



Cuyahoga Heights students looked at the recent decline in school spirit they noticed in their school. They conducted a survey and received responses from 25% of the student population. The responses indicated that the students wanted a stronger voice in the school and the activities that take place. After researching and brainstorming, the Cuyahoga Heights FRSLI students recommended more spirit days, arranging a vote to determine what the spirit days would entail, and finding ways to make sporting events more appealing to non-athlete students. They received the following suggestions in their surveys: clap outs, ESPN tables, newsletter videos, cow bells and other additional things for games, staff activities during pep rallies, and a bulletin board to spread information about activities and sporting events. The participating students were: Erin Dekka, Nick Dabrowski, Tamir Julius, Arushi Shinde and Emilee Sanicky guided by District Leader Kelsey Mason.

The Richmond Heights FRSLI team included: Autumn Perry, Cedvion Thornton, Angel Dinh, Penelope Zoldak, Tiffany Kilbane and District Leader Jasmine King. Their research question was "How do we improve academic achievement for



Richmond Heights Secondary School?" They picked this topic because they felt it impacted students' mental and physical health as well as their futures. Their survey showed that in the 24 of 57 responses, those 24 students had received either a D or an F in at least one subject. Through their research, they found their peers believed teachers' explanations in math, feeling unmotivated to complete assignments, time management, and mental health were the biggest causes for low academic achievement.

Each district team gathered their data on the nature, scope, and impact of their issue and then analyzed their data for key themes and findings. They collaborated with the other FRSLI teams to identify possible solutions. On May 12, all teams shared their findings and pitched their recommendations to First Ring superintendents and high school principals at an end-of-year meeting and celebration.

The FRSLI students had the exciting opportunity to collaborate with students from our sister program, the Ohio State University Student Leadership Research Collaborative (OSUSLRC). Serving students in the Columbus area. OSUSLRC is similarly focused on youth empowerment and teaching leadership skills. FRSLI and OSUSLRC held joint sessions at both Cleveland State University and Ohio State University.

Having completed their first year, students attending the 2022-23 Institute will be invited to return next year to continue their leadership training. As "Year 2" students they will focus on putting their recommendations into action, acting as peer mentors to the incoming cohort of students and assisting in the decision-making and operation of the program.



Recognizing STUDENTS, PEERS & EDUCATORS

EXCELLENCE IN EDUCATION

On May 12, students, family members and staff gathered for the 44th Annual Excellence in Education Awards. This awards ceremony recognizes students with special needs, peers and educators. It was held at Corporate College East in Warrensville Heights. Each year, the event is planned by the State Support Team Region 3. Cuyahoga Heights Schools recognized several individuals.



Outstanding Student Achievement Award William Watts

The Outstanding Student Achievement Award acknowledges achievements of school-age children and youth with special needs in Northeast Ohio. William Watts, a student at Cuyahoga Heights Middle School was the recipient.

William is a dedicated and motivated student who consistently demonstrates strong academic performance and a commitment to learning. He actively participates in class, prepares for assignments and assessments, and advocates for himself when he needs assistance. William is also well-rounded, engaging in extracurricular activities such as the Board Game Club, where he exhibits appropriate behavior and competitiveness. He is independent and capable, traveling between classes and before/after school. William's ability to interact appropriately with peers and build positive relationships further demonstrates his strong social skills. Overall, William's academic achievement, self-advocacy, independence, and social skills make him an excellent candidate for the Outstanding Student Achievement Award.

Outstanding Educator Achievement Award Kelly Cummins

The Outstanding Educator Achievement Award honors educators who are the exemplars in designing instructional strategies and programs. Kelly Cummins, speech and language therapist, with Cuyahoga Heights Schools was the recipient.

Kelly is an outstanding educator who is highly knowledgeable, passionate, and driven to help her students succeed. She has a bubbly personality and a unique ability to relate to students of all ages and personalities. Kelly is an excellent leader who is always thinking of each of her students as a whole child and works tirelessly to ensure that their needs are met. She is highly respected by colleagues and parents for her expertise in speech and language services, PBIS behavior support, and the MTSS process. Kelly's dedication to education and social-emotional learning is palpable, and she is always thinking of innovative ways to improve efficiency and support for students.



Outstanding Peer Achievement Award Vaya Pumphrey

The Outstanding Peer Achievement Award recognizes students without disabilities who have established positive relationships and who have assisted other students with disabilities, serving as exemplary role models. Vaya Pumphrey, a student from Cuyahoga Heights Middle School was the recipient.

Vaya's exceptional character is evident through her consistent acts of kindness, inclusiveness, and empathy toward her peers. Vaya's commitment to helping her peers with special needs demonstrates her exceptional character and her commitment to creating a supportive and positive school community. Her emotional intelligence is notable as she recognizes and responds to the emotional needs of her peers, creating a caring and supportive environment. Vaya's unpretentious nature and her willingness to show concern for her classmates make her a role model for other students, promoting a culture of kindness, inclusiveness, and empathy in the classroom. Overall, Vaya's exceptional character and commitment to creating a positive and supportive school community make her a highly deserving recipient of the Outstanding Peer Achievement Award.

"It has been a few years since we have been able to celebrate this wonderful occasion together in person. I have missed this event, which is by far my favorite event each year. While we've been apart, I have reflected a lot about perseverance throughout all the challenges we have faced over these last few years. Those of you that we are honoring this year truly embody the meaning of perseverance. This perseverance seen in those we honor today comes from their deeply held belief that they can do and be anything they can dream. I want to encourage all of you to keep on dreaming, keep on believing and keep on going. Do not stop. Use your gifts to make the world a better place. And most importantly, don't forget that we believe in you, too."

- Superintendent Bob Mengerink, ESC of Northeast Ohio



HUMANITARIAN AWARD RECIPIENTS RECOGNIZED

The ESC of Northeast Ohio named several students as recipients of their annual Humanitarian Awards. Recipients were nominated by administrators in their schools for showing leadership and community service as well as possessing great character during the 2022-23 school year. One student from each middle and high school in the communities of **Cuyahoga Heights**, **Independence**, and **Richmond Heights Local Schools** received scholarships and awards. In addition to a cash award, students receive a personalized plaque, starfish pin, and starfish bookmark. The starfish is the symbol of a story of the impact one person can make in a community.



Cuyahoga Heights Middle School Sean Strahan, 8th grade

Sean Strahan is an unassuming young person who strives to do his best in the classroom. He is an authentic, kind, and dependable young man. Sean is thoughtful and funny while chatting with his peers and is a positive partner while working on a group project. Easy going and humble, he is receptive when receiving feedback. Sean is a coachable young person who "shows up" for practice, as well as football games, wrestling matches, and track.



Independence Middle School Brayden Palus, 8th grade

Brayden Palus works diligently in his academic classes. He is involved in Sandwich Saturdays at church, Where Everyone Belongs (WEB), wrestling, and basketball. He is kind, compassionate, friendly, caring to everyone, students and teachers alike, and always has a smile on his face. Teachers and students can count on him to be respectful, loyal, and helpful. His conscientious and empathetic nature makes him wise beyond his years. He shows tremendous strength and courage in and out of the classroom.

ESC Board Member George Klepacz presented the award.



Richmond Heights Secondary School Drew McSears, 8th grade

Drew McSears has shown outstanding leadership as Student Council president. He has organized the staff cookies bake-off and bake sales, led the concession stands, is a leader of the track team, participates in community service events, and assists with Jr. Prom and the sports banquet. He is a leader but never one to seek the spotlight; instead, he prefers to stand back and help others excel. Drew excelled academically throughout the year, making the honor roll every quarter. He took three high school courses: Honors Algebra, English 9, and Spanish. Drew is endlessly patient, kind, and encouraging, unknowingly serving as a quiet role model for all of our students.



Cuyahoga Heights High School Bella Williams, Senior

It may be cliché to refer to someone as a ray of sunshine, but that description is the first thing that comes to mind when anyone thinks of Bella Williams. She is a positive person who lifts up those around her. Bella goes out of her way to show kindness. Her smile is contagious, and she is always the first person to walk into her teacher's classroom and ask how they are doing. Even her hobbies center around her love of seeing other people happy. She loves to bake, and it seems the part she enjoys most about experimenting with and perfecting different recipes is sharing the finished product with other people. She's always willing to lend a helping hand to a peer or a teacher.

ESC Human Resource Director Steve Rogaski presented both awards.



Independence High School Drew Straub, Senior

Very few, if any, students have embodied the term "humanitarian" like Drew Straub has while a student at Independence High School. Random acts of kindness are a daily event for Drew. He also has organized and planned some very deliberate acts of kindness that have improved our school culture and climate. A founding member of our school's Genders & Sexualities Alliance (GSA), Drew presented, with a fellow student, to our faculty regarding the issues and difficulties facing today's LGBTQ+ students. He is also the organizer of our "Out of Darkness Walk" to raise awareness for suicide prevention.

ESC Board Member Carol Fortlage presented the award.



Richmond Heights Secondary School Kaleb McSears, Senior

Kaleb McSears is an active member of the National Honors Society, National Technical Honors Society, president of the senior class, graduate of the MAGNET Early College/Early Career Program and is in the top 10 of his class. He is determined, innovative, and willing to accept any challenge. Kaleb is a model student by enrolling in College Credit Plus at Tri-C where he is securing an associate's degree, taking AP & Honors courses at Richmond Heights High School, and completing the Auto Tech program through Excel Tecc Consortium. Kaleb is an intern at Parker Hannifin where he learned that hard work can lead to good things.

ESC Board Vice President Anthony Miceli presented both awards.