On February 10th, the Explore the Arts Workshop was held at the Beck Center for the Arts in Lakewood. Students from Richmond Heights, Cuyahoga Heights, Independence, and other surrounding districts attended. The annual event, organized by the Educational Service Center (ESC) of Cuyahoga County, allows middle school students to express themselves in several forms of artistic expression. Whether it was improv, mime, drumming, clay, or sculpture, professional artists helped students explore their passions.

Students from Cuyahoga Heights, Independence and Richmond Heights Schools “Explore the Arts”

On March 15th, educators from Independence Local Schools attended a training session, “Youth Mental Health First Aid Training.” They learned how to become a First Aid Responder and learned skills to identify, understand and respond to youth with signs of behavioral/mental health concerns or crisis and develop an action plan for next steps. They will join the National Council of Behavior Health in their goal to increase First Aid Responders to one million citizens across the country this year. Attendees learned that they should: assess for risk of suicide or harm; listen nonjudgmentally; give reassurance and information; encourage appropriate professional help; and encourage self-help and other support strategies.

These eight-hour training sessions, held throughout the school year, are fully funded through the Ohio Department of Education Project AWARE grant. There is no cost to the district for attending. Cuyahoga Heights Local Schools has had educators trained as well. Richmond Heights Local Schools will be trained in the fall.

Local Educators Trained in Youth Mental Health
In the classrooms of Cuyahoga Heights Local Schools, there is a new, centralized place for teachers and students to communicate, collaborate, explore, and work on assignments, as well as have interactive discussions. This classroom can be accessed anywhere and on any device that has Internet, making learning available beyond a classroom wall.

With the assistance of the technology specialists at Northern Ohio Research and Training Technology Hub (NORT2H), who work with the Educational Service Center (ESC) of Cuyahoga County and its local school districts, Cuyahoga Heights Local Schools welcomed Google Classroom into the district at the start of the school year. Also readily available resources on the school websites was Dave Wallis, technology coordinator for Cuyahoga Heights Local Schools.

Much thought, research and planning went into the decision to utilize this new learning platform, as well as the creation of an overall digital and technology plan for the district. “Any process we were going to implement had to emphasize the latest tools for teachers, resulting in enhanced learning for our students,” said Dave Caleris, director of administrative services for Cuyahoga Heights Local Schools. “We are always looking to build our resources and create activities for our teachers to excel.”

Teachers and administrators participated in professional development workshops, switched to Google Mail and Calendar, and are now utilizing Google Classroom applications from preschool through 12th grade.

“The transformation over the past several months has been amazing,” said Tom Evans, Superintendent, Cuyahoga Heights Local Schools. “To see both our students and teachers taking learning to a higher level through the Google platform is rewarding.”

Many people view Google only as a search engine and have never had the opportunity to understand what Google Classroom offers. To stay competitive with classrooms throughout the world, it has become increasingly more important for schools to find new ways of teaching that incorporate digital learning with Chromebooks, iPads, and laptops to acquire those skills necessary for higher education and the workplace. These are skills like collaboration, innovation, and teamwork that one can’t learn from a textbook, Google Classroom and all of its various applications allow this to happen. Not only can learning take place in the classroom, but on any mobile device outside the classroom as well. It is a tool that has abundant educational applications and it is completely free.

Currently, Cuyahoga Heights Local Schools has 17 Chromebook carts throughout the district that total approximately 450 Chromebooks.