

**Governing Board**

SUMMER 2022



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**ESC COMMUNITY CONNECTION**

**INDEPENDENCE PRIMARY SCHOOL'S STUDENTS INSPIRED AND EDUCATED DURING MENTAL WELLNESS DAY**

On Friday, April 8, Independence Primary School students learned to maintain positive mental health during the school's first-ever "Mental Wellness Day." Yoga, healthy eating, social wellness, sensory and equine therapy were all part of the students' experiences throughout the day. The school has been mindful all school year of providing social emotional learning opportunities to their students.



the healthy eating demonstration. Staff from the City of Independence focused on teaching positive communication skills at the social wellness station.

In addition, retired school guidance counselor Mary Dolejs walked the school campus throughout the day with her trained therapy dog, Ghost.

While grade levels rotated through the stations, third and fourth-grade students participated in equine therapy provided by Hope Meadows. This nonprofit provides equine assisted psychotherapy for children, adolescents, adults, groups, and families to experience healing in mind, body, and spirit. Hope Meadows brought donkeys and miniature ponies to the school campus for students to meet while they learned about equine therapy and mindful grooming.

Independence Primary School Principal TJ Ebert said, "Our hope is that our students, coming out of this stressful pandemic, can celebrate having learned new strategies to take care of their emotional health, which is just as important as their physical health."



Each grade level from kindergarten through fourth grade rotated through four stations led by school and city leaders, Independence High School students, and parent volunteers.

At the yoga meditation station in the gym, certified instructors taught students yoga. The sensory exploration/mindfulness station included coloring and other activities in several classrooms that included soft lighting and peaceful music, led by the school district's occupational therapist, Jessica Klonk.

Independence High School health/physical education teacher Jessica Crooks, along with high school students, taught students about nutrition and healthy eating in the cafeteria. Discount DrugMart donated the food, drink and supplies for

**NEW ONLINE VERSION OF 2022 SUMMER AND BEYOND DIRECTORY IS NOW AVAILABLE!**

State Support Team—Region 3 (SST3) offers the 2022 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 2022 directory, go to <https://sites.google.com/escneo.org/2022summerandbeyond/home>.



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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 multi-year program that empowers 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 75 high school sophomores from across the First Ring Districts. Participants attended six working sessions held remotely and on university campuses. Students from both Cuyahoga Heights High School and Richmond Heights Secondary School participated.

Students in each district worked as a team to complete a YPAR project 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 "Would a Tutoring Program Benefit our School" and Richmond Heights students addressed "Student and Staff Relationships and Communications."



Cuyahoga Heights student leaders looked at the impact of COVID-19 and the academic stressors that are impacting them as a result. They identified that while they had access to the curriculum,

some opportunities for questions, enrichment, and overall support were reduced during remote and hybrid instruction during the pandemic. The student leaders conducted a survey of staff and students which demonstrated that across the grades 6-12, the majority of students and staff were feeling the impact as well. To support this, the team looked into creating a tutoring program that will be all-inclusive to support the needs of all their students. Student leaders included Henry Clay, Ava Galek, Charles Lakus, Braylan McClardy and Maecy Voytek. The district leader was Mike Janotovich.



Richmond Heights student leaders worked together to find common themes within their ideas and noticed that many of them were focused on school spirit, communication, activities, and the like. They worked together to coin a term that



encompassed all of their points of view and decided that exploring school culture was the best fit. Within that exploration, they uncovered how other students felt about school culture, including their relationships with staff, all the way to feelings of belonging in the building. Their work is inspired by their personal observations, experiences, and the input of their peers. These students are striving to improve the school culture in our high school and make students feel a part of Spartan Nation. Student leaders included Kyla Bowling, Tae Boze, Tasean Gross, Alexandria Jackson, and Taelynn Lassiter. The district leader was Alicia Trescott.

Each team analyzed their data for key themes and findings and collaborated with peers from other districts to identify possible solutions. Finally, teams shared their findings and pitched their recommendations to First Ring superintendents and high school principals at an end-of-year meeting and celebration in May.



This year, students also had the 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 two joint sessions virtually and a third was held on the campus of Columbus State Community College. Having completed their first year, students attending the 2021-22 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.



# EXCELLENCE IN EDUCATION

## Recognizing students, peers & educators

The ESC of Northeast Ohio and State Support Team-Region 3 recognize students with disabilities, peers, and educators with the annual Excellence in Education Awards. A video was created to celebrate these incredible individuals, along with the great things happening in special education in Northeast Ohio. The Outstanding Student Achievement Award acknowledges achievements of school-age children and youth with disabilities. The Outstanding Peer Achievement Award recognizes students who serve as exemplary role models by assisting students with disabilities and establishing positive relationships with them. The Outstanding Educator Achievement Award honors educators who are the exemplars in designing instructional strategies and programs.

"This event gives us a chance to pause amidst all of the hecticness of a school year and truly just be thankful for special people in this world," said Superintendent Bob Mengerink, ESC of Northeast Ohio. "I know that in my 51 years as an educator, it is students and staff, such as those recognized here today, that have made me not only a better educator or administrator, but also a better person. They have forced me to reflect on how I might lead or inspire, but also how I treat others. How I can show compassion. How I should never give up on myself or others, even when it's hard." Congratulations to these individuals.

### Independence Local Schools

#### Grant Sears Outstanding Peer Achievement Award

Grant Sears has been working with a preschooler at Independence Primary School since November 2020 to teach him American Sign Language (ASL). This student, who was born profoundly deaf, has cochlear implants but needed assistance in developing ASL skills. Grant met with this preschooler several times a week, accumulating well over 1,500 hours of service. Sears created curriculum, presented new ideas, and updated his peers regarding this student's progress. More importantly, he has filled the language void and has helped to make the preschooler an active participant in his environment.



### Cuyahoga Heights Local Schools



#### Madison Rabant Outstanding Student Achievement Award

Madison Rabant, a fourth grader at Cuyahoga Heights Elementary School, always comes to school with a smile on her face. She has a positive attitude and gives 100% in whatever she does. She is kind to classmates and empathetic to other children's feelings. Sometimes academics are challenging for Madison, but she perseveres and always demonstrates a desire to do great work. She is a great leader within her classroom and of other students in the building. She leads by example, by always putting forth a good attitude and a great work ethic, even when overcoming obstacles that may be challenging for her. She isn't afraid to speak up when she sees something that doesn't seem right. She is friendly, fair, honest, and always follows the school rules. Everyone in the building, staff, and other students, all appreciate her smiles and hugs every day.

#### Kelsey Healy Outstanding Educator Achievement Award

Kelsey Healy is a pre-kindergarten teacher at Cuyahoga Heights Elementary School. She is patient, caring, kind, and consistent. She works as the only intervention specialist in Pre-K and is the case manager for almost every student with disabilities in the program. As an advocate for students with disabilities, she strives to place them in their least restrictive environments, yet still enable them to excel to their full potential. She provides them expanded opportunities by keeping these preschoolers in the general education classroom whenever possible. She teaches the district's youngest students how to navigate the school environment and to interface with their peers. She holds students to high expectations and encourages them to work toward their full potential. An active member of several First Ring, school, and district committees and teams, she shares her knowledge and strategies with her colleagues.



#### Elizabeth Heller Outstanding Peer Achievement Award

Elizabeth Heller is a second grader at Cuyahoga Heights Elementary School. Liz is kind and caring and strives to help all students within her school. She promotes positive relationships in the classroom and school community by making sure all peers are included in activities. She is sensitive to how others are feeling and reaches out to help those in need. If she notices a friend falling behind in line or struggling to complete an academic task, she happily offers assistance. She does a wonderful job during group activities to make sure everyone has a partner or group. If she notices someone is alone, she immediately invites them to join her group. If she sees students playing alone at recess, she finds ways to include them. She does an excellent job of showing others what true friendship and leadership is all about.

# 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 2020-21 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 Anthony Grissman, 8th grade

Anthony is one of those students who always does the right thing. One of Anthony's teachers says it would be hard to pinpoint one example since Anthony is always respectful and kind to everyone he encounters at Cuyahoga Heights Middle School. Anthony is truly a role model for all who exemplify what it means to be a caring person.

ESC Board President Dr. Christine Krol presented the award.



#### Independence Middle School Braden Owen, 8th grade

Braden is a student that shows kindness to those around him through his daily dealings with his teachers and peers. His jovial demeanor spreads throughout the school and never ceases to put a smile on someone's face each day. Braden is a conscientious student who has a part time job and volunteers with ministry work in his spare time.

ESC Board Member George Klepacz presented the award.



#### Richmond Heights Secondary School Christian Tufts, 8th grade

Christian is a contributing member of both Richmond Heights' academic and public service communities. He has shown outstanding leadership as Student Council President. He organized the after-school open gym, led the concession stands during athletic events, participated in community service at the elementary school, and assisted with junior prom. He excelled academically this year and took three high school courses as an eighth grader. Christian is patient, kind, encouraging, unknowingly serving as a quiet role model for all students.

ESC Board Vice President Anthony Miceli presented the award.



#### Cuyahoga Heights High School Reagan Sturgill, Senior

One of Reagan's teachers shared that she is one of the most caring students that they had ever taught. Reagan goes out of her way to think about her fellow classmates. During one of their school dances Reagan noticed another student sitting alone so Reagan invited the student to take photos in a photo booth with her. Throughout the dance, Reagan spent additional time interacting with this student. This is one of many examples of Reagan's caring personality for those around her.

ESC Board President Dr. Christine Krol presented the award.



#### Independence High School Hannah MacRaild, Senior

In addition to being a stellar student-athlete, Hannah has been a leader in the Independence school community. She consistently treats others with kindness and compassion. Hannah organizes events that promote a positive school climate. Along with her fellow student council officers, Hannah has performed countless random acts of kindness throughout the school year. The positive impact of her actions will remain with Independence High School long after she graduates.

ESC Board Member Carol Fortlage presented the award.



#### Richmond Heights Secondary School Chaleyah Buggs, Senior

Chaleyah started at Richmond Heights as a sophomore and became a part of the fabric without hesitation. Chaleyah is an active member of the National Honor Society, Student Council Vice President, and is in the Top 10 of her class. Chaleyah has overcome adversity and has used her life story to be an inspiration to others. She will be attending Baldwin Wallace University majoring in criminal justice with aspirations to enter the legal field. She is a model student by enrolling in College Credit Plus at Tri-C where she is working to secure her associates degree.

ESC Board Vice President Anthony Miceli presented the award.

*Congratulations,* Humanitarian Award Recipients