



# VITAL SOURCE

SUMMER 2014



**Lenny Schafer, M.Ed., PCC-S**  
*Executive Director*

**A**fter 15 years in the charter school movement – 10 of which have been with the Ohio Council of Community Schools – I am thrilled to be leading the organization as its next Executive Director. For as long as I can remember, OCCS has truly delivered on its commitment to quality, innovation, and collaboration with all of you out in the field working on behalf of kids.

Over the past several years, OCCS has retooled many of its processes for new school applications, reauthorization, intervention, and more, and has taken on a larger role in advocating for the movement as a whole and serving as a voice for quality in Ohio and nationally. We owe much of this to the leadership of Dr. Darlene Chambers, who is now serving as the President and CEO of the Ohio Alliance for Public Charter Schools. We look forward to continued collaboration with Dr. Chambers and with the Alliance.

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## OCCS reauthorization process featured by NACSA

**T**he Ohio Council of Community Schools (OCCS) was featured in the National Association of Charter School Authorizers’ (NACSA) campaign, “One Million Lives in Action,” in March for its updated reauthorization process which launched in the fall of 2013. One Million Lives in Action “highlights stories of authorizing work across the country that is advancing smarter growth and stronger accountability, consistent with the mission and goals of the One Million Lives campaign.”

NACSA’s feature, “A Renewed Focus on Quality in Ohio,” outlined OCCS’ improved reauthorization process, which aims to be rigorous, meaningful and transparent, reviewing the accomplishments of each school throughout the terms of the charter contract against objective criteria before granting a new contract. The new process has a detailed timeline and draws from various sources for data on school outcomes, including qualitative interviews and academic performance and growth data.



Aligned with NACSA’s Principles & Standards for Quality Charter School Authorizing, our updated reauthorization process is more user-friendly, and has served as a catalyst for contract revisions that placed heightened expectations in the areas of performance and accountability.

OCCS is proud to be featured for our new reauthorization process and looks forward to using the new tool with upcoming contract renewals.



I also owe my gratitude to our current boards – both the OCCS Board of Trustees and The University of Toledo Board of Trustees – and to our current staff for their tremendous effort, creativity, leadership, and commitment to serving our schools and students. Collectively, we are proud of the work we’ve accomplished, and excited for several new initiatives that will be unrolled this year to our schools and partnering governing boards.

I am very excited to announce the launch of a Performance, Innovation, and Improvement Grant application for schools that make a compelling case for specific initiatives meant to boost learning. OCCS will also offer its governing board partners two different platforms to receive vital training: a members-only section of the OCCS website that will offer podcasts from charter school board training specialist Brian Carpenter, and four regional board trainings around the state.

This coming fall you can expect two other initiatives that will improve communication to governing board members, school leaders, and management company partners, and provide more information and data all around with which to continue collaborating and having discussions about how to continually meet the needs of all students.

The first is a progress report for each of our 47 schools outlining how each school is performing in the areas of academics, compliance, governance, special education, and more. The report will also pinpoint areas where schools are exceeding contract goals and/or needing improvement. The reports will be annual, and provide a benchmark for schools and their boards each fall and when each school is up for

reauthorization. OCCS is proud to design tailored technical assistance for each school, and the reports will help us drill down even further to know exactly what each school needs in the way of support.

The second initiative is similar and will be a platform on our website that school leaders and governing board members can log into to receive information on trainings, workshops, events, FAQs, performance data, and more. We are excited to roll this out to you and further differentiate our technical assistance offerings to enhance the already-amazing work the schools and boards are doing.

These new initiatives will be launched alongside our existing ones: postsecondary student scholarships, teacher of the year awards, technology grants for start-up schools, and performance grants for all schools. OCCS is proud to be able to give back to our partners wherever possible, and to continue to fund innovative ideas from our schools to help them succeed.

I look forward to seeing many of you at our inaugural conference in July, the “Next Generation of Accountability” to discuss key topics impacting the Ohio charter school landscape and help school staff and stakeholders feel equipped to handle the new era of accountability. The keynote speaker, Tom Vander Ark, authored “Getting Smart: How Digital Learning is Changing the World,” and is the CEO of Getting Smart, a learning advocacy firm.

Thanks to all of you for the work you do each day on behalf of students. I am humbled and honored to work alongside you, and look forward to your continued support and collaboration. Our successes would not be possible without you!

“Collectively, we are proud of the work we’ve accomplished, and excited for several new initiatives that will be unrolled this year to our schools and partnering governing boards.”



## OCCS welcomes new Director of Academics and School Improvement



**V**allrey Crump joined OCCS in May as our new Director of Academics and School Improvement. Vallrey has over 26 years of experience in education in Ohio, having served as a charter school principal, superintendent, special education coordinator, school social worker, consultant, and more. She is a founder and former board president for a Cincinnati-based charter school, and has served on several education and community boards and assisted in the development and implementation of Cincinnati Public Schools' first discipline school, Project Succeed Academy. Vallrey received her master's degree in education administration with an emphasis in charter school leadership from Central Michigan University. Vallrey previously worked as a regional representative and special education coordinator for OCCS from 2003-2008. In her new role, she looks forward to partnering with our schools to champion innovation and help guide them toward high-quality academic outcomes.

## OCCS donates bicycles to commemorate staff member



**I**n remembrance of Heather Abrighach, OCCS's special education coordinator, OCCS recently donated four bicycles to Central Academy of Ohio (CAO) to distribute to its students. Staff members at OCCS built the bicycles, coordinated a safety check with a local mechanic, and donated them to the school.

Heather passed away unexpectedly on January 19, 2014 after a brief illness. She was an avid adventure enthusiast and traveler, and rode her bicycle across Ireland with a tent on her backpack. CAO had an awards assembly to raffle off the bikes, and invited Heather's family to the event.

OCCS was pleased to honor Heather by giving four students the opportunity to find a new adventure while riding their bikes, something Heather thoroughly enjoyed. She was full of life and so much love for education and for children. Her passion inspired so many of us to work harder on behalf of students, and continues to push staff to make a difference for the kids in our schools.



# OCCS awards SEVENTH ANNUAL POSTSECONDARY

**T**his July, OCCS awarded over \$75,000 to 37 students attending charter schools in Ohio as part of its seventh annual postsecondary scholarship cycle. All students in Ohio who have attended a charter school were eligible, not just students among OCCS' portfolio schools. Recipients were chosen based on achievements in academics, leadership and service.

Dr. Chambers, former Executive Director of OCCS, said of the scholarships, "We are pleased to be able to help students and parents offset the rising costs of education. All students deserve access to a high-quality education, and OCCS aims to help students wishing to pursue higher education after high school obtain their dreams."

## Congratulations to this year's scholarship winners!

### OCCS Continuing Education Scholarship

*For students attending a two-year college in Ohio*

- Amanda Callicoat – Virtual Community School of Ohio
- Shanelle Evans – Life Skills Center of Toledo
- James Gray – Ohio Virtual Academy
- Cailyn Hess – Nexus Academy of Cleveland
- Anne Renouf – Ohio Virtual Academy
- Aminah Sharrieff – Ohio Virtual Academy
- Tyrell Trammell – Ohio Connections Academy



James Gray



Aminah Sharrieff

### OCCS/UT College Scholarship

*For students attending The University of Toledo*

- Amy Bader – Toledo School for the Arts
- Chris DeRaedt – Ohio Virtual Academy
- Jarrett Haddix – The Knight Academy
- David Jones – The Knight Academy
- Robert Nunnally, II – The Knight Academy
- Jane Piaskowski – Ohio Virtual Academy
- Andrew Taylor – Ohio Virtual Academy

OCCS looks forward to continuing its postsecondary scholarship program in support of Ohio charter school students. For information about next year's scholarship competition, check our website over the coming months.





# SCHOLARSHIPS WINNERS



## OCCS University Scholarship

*For students attending a four-year college in Ohio*

Christian Burns – Ohio Virtual Academy

Zhane Cervantes – The Charles School

Rita DeRaedt – Ohio Virtual Academy

Hannah Fenton – Ohio Virtual Academy

Knautika Grubbs – Ohio Virtual Academy

Erica Heath – Toledo School for the Arts

Tyler Honaker – Summit Academy Transition  
High School

Zachary Kreuz – Ohio Virtual Academy

Erin Mathews – Ohio Virtual Academy

Janel Mathews – Ohio Virtual Academy

Justin Mathews – Ohio Virtual Academy

Jesse Sockman – Ohio Virtual Academy

Dakota Stieglmeyer – Ohio Virtual Academy

Benjamin Straiton – Ohio Virtual Academy

Benjamin Taylor – Ohio Virtual Academy

Tobechi Titus – The Charles School

Harry Trabue – Ohio Virtual Academy

Caleb Vahcic – Ohio Virtual Academy

Carmen Watson-Stuckey – Middletown  
Preparatory and Fitness Academy

Rosalyn Whickum – Englewood Peace Academy

Megan Wittman – Ohio Virtual Academy

Olivia Wnek – Ohio Virtual Academy

Pearline Young – Horizon Science Academy  
of Toledo



Christian Burns



Zhane Cervantes



Rita DeRaedt



Erica Heath



Tyler Honaker



Erin Mathews



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Caleb Vahcic



Olivia Wnek



# Education policy changes from the mid-biennium review

**HB 487** which contained the K-12 policy provisions of the mid-biennium review (MBR), passed and was signed by the governor in mid-June. Over the coming months, our regional representatives and other key staff will work with our partners – school leaders, governing board members, and management company leaders and stakeholders – to help ensure that all parties understand the implications of the legislation and the impact it will have on areas of compliance, academics, and more. Here is a brief summary of the most pertinent changes:

- **Delay of online assessments.** For the 2014-15 school year, no district or school will be required to administer assessments in an online format. Schools may use any combination of paper/online format, and the Ohio Department of Education must furnish all assessments, regardless of format, free of charge.
- **Safe harbor for 2014-15.** Report card ratings issued for the 2014-15 school year cannot be considered when determining whether a school is subject to sanctions or penalties (the most relevant of which is closure for community schools). 2014-15 will essentially be a “bye” year; automatic closure laws will resume in 2016-17 and the two of three consecutive rule still counts, with 2013-14 and 2015-16 being treated as two consecutive years. These changes attempt to delay “high stakes” consequences as a result of student performance on the new tests.
- **Re-opening of a closed community school.** All charter schools that are permanently closed under Ohio’s automatic closure laws are prohibited from reopening under another name if any of these conditions apply: the school has the same sponsor, the school has the same chief administrator, the governing authority consists of any of the same members, 50% or more of the teaching staff remains the same, 50% or more of the administrative staff remains the same, the performance standards and accountability plan prescribed by the sponsor contract are the same.
- **Graduation requirements; end-of-course exams will replace Ohio Graduation Test.** Beginning with the class of 2018, students can graduate in one of three ways. First, students must pass exams in English I and II, algebra, geometry or integrated math, American history, American government, and physical science. (Students could count tests through Advanced Placement, International Baccalaureate or dual-enrollment courses in lieu of exams in physical science, American history and/or American government.) Alternatively, students could graduate by getting a “remediation-free” score on a college admission exam (a 18 on the English ACT, 21 on reading sub-test and a 22 in math). All juniors will be able to take the ACT at no cost. Finally, students will be able to earn an official credential or license in a particular vocation and graduate according to the new “workforce readiness and employability” score.
- **PARCC/third-grade reading guarantee.** Third graders who achieve a passing score on the Ohio Achievement Assessment in the fall of 2014 must take the new PARCC exam in reading in the spring (2015) as part of the third-grade reading guarantee.
- **New value-added score for high-mobility schools.** For those school districts/schools that have a student mobility rate of at least 25% (as defined by percentage of enrollment of students attending that school for less than one school year), a new “high-mobility” value-added measure will appear on their report card. The measure will come from data from the most recent school year. This additional value-added progress grade will not be calculated into the aggregate letter grade for the school.
- **Extracurricular programming.** Students enrolled in charter schools will be allowed to participate in extracurricular activities at the school of the student’s resident school district to which that student would be assigned.



## Nexus Academy students receive real-world career experience

**C**ongratulations to 12 Nexus Academy of Cleveland students, who received student scholarships in early spring from Youth Opportunities Unlimited (YOU), an education-oriented nonprofit organization, to explore career paths and gain hands-on work experience. The students are interning with the City of Euclid Animal Protection League, the City of Cleveland Fire Department, the Cleveland-Marshall College of Law, and Northeast Ohio Neighborhood Health Services.

## Three OCCS schools recognized by KidsOhio for reading success

**K**idsOhio, a nonpartisan research and advocacy organization focusing on improving education in Ohio, released a brief in March about Ohio's third-grade reading assessment. KidsOhio's report, "Understanding Ohio's third-grade reading guarantee," evaluates how Columbus-based public schools, both traditional and charter, performed on the 2013 third-grade reading assessment and gives a sample of the test.

Three OCCS-sponsored schools were featured in the report for their reading scores. Columbus Humanities Arts & Technology Academy (CHATA), Columbus Preparatory Academy (CPA), and Performance Academy of Eastland had the highest percentages of third graders who scored at the advanced level on the 2013 statewide reading assessment among all Columbus-based charter schools.

## Senator Lehner visits CPA to see a "great school in Columbus"

Congratulations to Columbus Preparatory Academy (CPA) for being featured in the Ohio Coalition for Quality Education's (OCQE) new program, "Visiting Great Schools in Columbus," an initiative in which OCQE invites legislators and their staff to visit great public charter, district, private and parochial schools in Columbus to witness schools that are making a difference.

Ohio Senator Peggy Lehner (chair of the Senate education committee), along with many other education leaders, visited CPA to observe a school that is excelling despite having a large percentage of economically disadvantaged students. Last year CPA achieved the state rating of "Excellence with Distinction" and scored an impressive 112.9 on the state's performance index score, receiving the highest score among all charter schools in Ohio. After the school's tour, Senator Lehner sat down with CPA's principal, Chad Carr, and the education leaders in attendance and discussed the school's best practices. Principal Carr told Senator Lehner, "We are highly focused on data and track every student on a continual basis which allows us to immediately provide help where needed. Our long-term goal is to do what no other school in the nation has done — score a perfect 120 on the Performance Index."

OCCS is proud of CPA for continuing to prove that all children deserve a high-quality education, and when given the chance, can exceed expectations at high levels.



"We are highly focused on data and track every student on a continual basis which allows us to immediately provide help where needed. Our long-term goal is to do what no other school in the nation has done — score a perfect 120 on the Performance Index."

*Columbus Preparatory Academy Principal, Chad Carr*





**CPFA recognized as Touchdown School for commitment to health**

Congratulations to Columbus Preparatory and Fitness Academy for being recognized as a “Touchdown School” by Fuel Up to Play 60, a national movement that encourages youth to eat healthy and move more while having fun. In order to receive the Touchdown School award, CPFA had to complete six required steps, showing an active commitment to health and exercise.

**OHVA and OCA students collectively win \$4.45 million in scholarships**

OCCS is proud of Ohio Virtual Academy’s (OHVA) 2014 graduating class for securing more than \$1.65 million in college scholarships. The school’s senior class graduated on June 7, at World Harvest Church.

We also congratulate Ohio Connections Academy’s (OCA) graduating class for receiving more than \$2.8 million in college scholarship monies. More than 200 graduates earned their diplomas on June 1, at the Columbus Convention Center.



**STEAM of Dayton celebrates Earth Day with neighborhood cleanup**

OCCS is proud of students and teachers at STEAM Academy of Dayton who conducted a campus and neighborhood cleanup and beautification to recognize Earth Day. Students in grades K-8 picked up trash, pulled weeds, and planted flowers around the school, the neighboring church and on the school’s street.

**WEA partners with Girls on the Run**

Wildwood Environmental Academy (WEA) partnered with Girls on the Run, a non-profit organization that promotes transformational physical activity-based positive youth development for girls in grades 3-8 to teach students about living a healthy lifestyle. To celebrate the hard work the students put into running this year, they competed in a 5k run on May 31st.

**CAO students featured in commercial**

Students at Central Academy of Ohio (CAO) were featured in a commercial promoting the city of Toledo and the WTVG Channel 13-TV news station. The commercial, touting the station’s slogan, “This is Home,” shows CAO’s students in class, as well as other happenings in the city. Congratulations to CAO for being featured by the local news!



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**If you have school or student success stories you’d like to feature in an upcoming OCCS newsletter, please email them to [jamie@ohioschools.org](mailto:jamie@ohioschools.org)**