



VITAL SOURCE

SUMMER 2013



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Darlene Chambers, Ph.D.,
Executive Director

In the world of public education, we hear the word “quality” a lot, and rightly so. All students, regardless of background or zip code, deserve high-quality educational choices.

Their futures depend on it, as do the prosperity of our communities and the vitality of our state. The charge to achieve quality is one that we at OCCS take seriously. And it’s one that I’ve been reflecting on a lot lately.

Today, with over 360 public charter schools serving 120,000+ students, the community school movement in Ohio is well-established. As we continue to sustain and expand this community, we must also garner improvements among existing schools and set rigorous expectations for our schools, our partners, and ourselves. I’d like to share a few ways that OCCS is currently pursuing ongoing improvements to quality, as a sponsor and as an advocate for charter schools across Ohio and nationally.

Dr. Darlene Chambers selected for national NACSA Leaders Program

OCCS is pleased to share that Dr. Darlene Chambers was selected for the second National Association of Charter School Authorizers (NACSA) Leaders Program cohort.



In addition to Dr. Chambers, leaders of authorizing offices around the nation selected include:

- José Cole-Gutierrez, Los Angeles Unified School District
- Claire Fiddian-Green, Indiana Charter School Board
- Ethan Hemming, Colorado Charter School Institute
- Natasha Howard, SUNY Charter Schools Institute
- Robert Kimball, Grand Valley State University
- Daree Lewis, New York City Department of Education
- Jennifer Lopez, Sacramento City Unified School District
- Nora Meah, Rhode Island Department of Education
- Kisha Verdusco, Detroit Public Schools
- Adrienne Woods, Milwaukee Public Schools

This unique, year-long professional development program includes intensive in-person sessions, ongoing virtual conversations, coaching and mentoring. It is an opportunity for OCCS, via Dr. Chambers, to learn more about best practices in authorizing happening around the country as well as to offer insight into our own best practices and unique challenges when it comes to overseeing schools.

Dr. Chambers said of her selection, “My goal in the Leaders Program is the same objective I had when taking the helm of OCCS back in 2010: to help shape

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All of these experiences – learning, collaborating, and sharing, but also reflecting and seeking self-improvements – directly impact the work we do as an authorizer.

At the state level, there is a steady call for the improvement of all schools – especially those serving disadvantaged students. This charge is nothing new, but is cropping up in new ways as it relates to the way school systems are governed and managed. In Cleveland, the call for quality manifested in the “Cleveland Plan,” which tasks an independent group of stakeholders (the Transformation Alliance) with making recommendations about who should sponsor charter schools there (among many other things). It’s been an honor to serve as one of only a few charter school stakeholders – and the representative for the Ohio Association of Charter School Authorizers (OACSA) – on the Transformation Alliance.

Advocates in Columbus are currently seeking their own reform plan and looking to share dollars with high-performing charter schools in the city through HB 167. It is my hope that OCCS and OACSA can be valuable partners in this effort as well, especially if the mayor’s office takes on the challenging (but rewarding!) work of sponsorship.

At the state level, the Ohio Department of Education (ODE) has been tasked with reviewing sponsors and evaluating quality based on more than just our sponsored schools’ aggregate Performance Index scores. ODE recently conducted a two-pronged review of sponsors, evaluating them based on both compliance and quality. OCCS is proud to have volunteered to serve as one of the pilot sponsors to undergo both portions of the evaluation, not only to help shape the process but to also learn more about ourselves and possible weaknesses, and make improvements that can only benefit our schools and students.

At the national level, I am honored to be part of the 2013 NACSA (National Association of Charter School Authorizers) Leaders Program. This program presents an incredible opportunity to learn best practices from other leading authorizers around the country, and to share unique challenges and strengths learned from our work here in the Buckeye State.

All of these experiences – learning, collaborating, and sharing, but also reflecting and seeking self-improvements – directly impact the work we do as an authorizer. As the bar for quality is pushed ever higher for schools, we want to empower our schools and partners to be able to reach that bar. And this also means setting heightened expectations for ourselves.

The road to quality is a long one, indeed, filled with many hurdles. One could complain about changing expectations – changes in the accountability system, state assessments, the difficult transition to the Common Core, policy that seems to nearly always be in flux – but this is the nature of *reform*. If you believe in the concept of continuous improvement, there is never a point at which you reach the end goal and stop striving. All of us – state leaders, community leaders and heads of local school systems, sponsors, and schools – have more work to do and higher levels of quality to reach. This will be true for as long as there are students to be served.



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the charter school movement, in Ohio and nationally, so that more students have high-quality learning opportunities. This can only happen through a unique combination of leadership, shared accountability by sponsors and schools, a laser focus on results, and a willingness to learn from the examples of others and continue to evolve, adapt, and always improve. I am beyond thrilled to join a cohort of respected leaders that represent authorizing offices of all backgrounds, including those similar

to our own (higher education institutions). I look forward to contributing insights from our long history in the movement, and absorbing new insights and knowledge from national leaders that will help not only OCCS but the charter community in Ohio broadly.”

OCCS is incredibly proud of Dr. Chambers for her selection and looks forward to networking and learning from other authorizing leaders across the US.



Senator Hite visits OCCS office and Toledo charter school

Senator Hite visits Toledo Preparatory and Fitness Academy

This spring, OCCS was pleased to have Sen. Cliff Hite (R - Findlay) visit one of our sponsored charter schools and meet with our staff to learn more about the vital work of sponsors in Ohio. The day began at Toledo Preparatory and Fitness Academy, a K-8 school run by EdVantages with a focus on strong academics and fitness programming. Sen. Hite, who is a former teacher and football coach, visited several classrooms, spoke with School Leader Stephanie Widner, and watched a martial arts demonstration by students. CEO of EdVantages, Myrrha Satow, also shared stories and data about TPFA (and other schools) and highlighted recent successes. Sen. Hite remarked that TPFA,

which is rated Excellent by the state of Ohio, is an example of a school that’s “doing it right.”

After the school visit, Sen. Hite came back to OCCS’ office in Toledo, and met with OCCS Board Chair Patrick Kriner and Board Member Carroll Ashley, along with other OCCS staff members. Dr. Darlene Chambers led the group through a presentation outlining the vital work that sponsors in Ohio do, and OCCS’ history as a designee of the University of Toledo – the only such sponsor in the Buckeye State. OCCS would like to extend our thanks to the senator for supporting school choice and seeking to learn more about the day-to-day work of schools and charter school sponsors in Ohio.



Senate Bill 21 broadens eligibility for third-grade reading teachers

OCCS has been carefully following Senate Bill 21, which was proposed and passed by the Ohio Senate in February. This bill revises requirements for teachers under the third-grade reading guarantee to make it less burdensome for them to qualify as appropriately credentialed in reading.

The third-grade reading guarantee was put into place by SB 316 and later modified in HB 555. SB 21 was intended as a clean-up of the original legislation, which initially required teachers to “be actively engaged in the reading instruction of students for the previous three years” in order to serve students with reading deficiencies. This was a roadblock for charter schools – and all public schools – wishing to hire new teachers. In fact, only 4,200 of the state’s 34,000 K-3 teachers (12%) were qualified to provide intervention services under the original legislation.

In mid-May, the Ohio House passed a substitute version of the bill, further altering requirements for reading teachers and adding in new requirements for schools.

The changes are summarized below.

Teacher qualifications

Teachers must possess adequate qualifications in order to provide reading instruction to students who have been retained or identified as having a reading deficiency under the third-grade reading guarantee.

Teachers providing reading guarantee services must have at least one year of teaching experience, **and** satisfy at least one of the legislation’s criteria to provide services. Those criteria are:

- Rated “most effective” for reading instruction for the two most recent (consecutive) years, based on assessments of student growth developed by a vendor on a list of assessments approved by the State Board of Education.
- Holds a reading endorsement on the teacher’s license and has attained a passing score on the corresponding assessment for that endorsement, as applicable.
- Rated “above expected value-added” for reading, as determined by criteria established by the Department, for two most recent years.
- Has completed a master’s degree program with a major in reading,
- Holds an educator license for teaching grades pre-K through 3, or 4-9, issued on or after July 1, 2017.

Teachers with less than one year of teaching experience may deliver reading guarantee services if the teacher meets one of the above qualifications and is assigned to a mentor teacher who meets the qualifications. Also worth noting is the fact

that teachers who qualify, but who are not a student’s “teacher of record,” may provide that student with reading guarantee services.

Any district or charter school that cannot assign an adequate number of teachers necessary to meet the third-grade reading guarantee teacher requirements for the 2013-14 school year must submit a plan to the Ohio Department of Education by June 30, 2013. The plan must outline how the school will meet the requirements of the law in subsequent years, criteria that will be used to assign a student with a reading improvement plan to a teacher, and credentials or training held by current teachers.

Ramifications for schools failing in reading

Districts and charter schools that receive a “D” or “F” on the K-3 literacy progress measure (a new, yet-to-be seen metric required by HB 555) **and** fail to get at least 60% of students to attain a proficient score on the third-grade reading guarantee must submit a reading achievement improvement plan to ODE. If the district or school receives a grade of “C” or higher on the K-3 literacy progress measure or at least 60% of students taking the third-grade reading assessment achieve a proficient score or better, the reading improvement plan will be lifted.

Note, the State Board of Education will adopt rules prescribing the content of and deadlines for the improvement plan by December 31, 2014. School improvement plan requirements don’t go into effect for a few more years (schools’ first improvement plans would be due by December 31, 2016).

Other changes

SB 21 also eases requirements for Limited English proficient (LEP) students. LEP students who have been enrolled in US schools for less than three years (instead of two years, as under current law) and who have had less than three years of reading instruction (instead of two, under current law) are exempt from the third-grade reading guarantee. Also, students with “significant cognitive disabilities” or other disabilities authorized by the Department (on a case-by-case basis) are exempt from the requirement to take the annual diagnostic assessment of reading skills.

To view a more detailed and thorough summary of the legislation, please visit our website: www.ohioschools.org



Teachers IN THE SPOTLIGHT

OCCS is proud of all of the teachers working in our sponsored charter schools. As the 2012-13 school year draws to a close, we would like to recognize a few of them who have made a tremendous and innovative impact on students.



Dan Wakefield

Ohio Connections Academy U.S. history teacher Dan Wakefield was recently selected as one of three national runners-up in PublicSchoolOptions.org's American Pioneer of Teaching competition. According to the *Wall Street Journal*, which wrote a story about Mr. Wakefield and the other finalists, PublicSchoolOptions.org is a "national alliance of parents that supports and defends parents' rights to access the best public school options for their children."

2013 AMERICAN PIONEER OF TEACHING AWARD

The American Pioneer of Teaching Award recognizes top-performing K-12 teachers who work in nontraditional public schools, including virtual charter schools. Hundreds of teachers across the nation were nominated and 10 finalists were selected, based on innovative teaching methods, ability to meet the needs of individual students and create mentoring relationships with students, and overall dedication.

In other news, the *Toledo Blade* recently published an article featuring Laura Schetter, a third-grade teacher at Wildwood Environmental Academy, whose environmental efforts in the classroom are nothing short of spectacular.

Co-leader of the school's Eco Club, Schetter was named the Conservation Educator of 2012 by the Lucas Soil and Water Conservation District. She and her students manage gardens at school that range 25-by-5 feet and 20-by-6 feet, and include a rain garden, a native-plants garden, and a greenhouse.

This year, Schetter's students raised endangered lupine plants for a conservation project with the Toledo Zoo, which will plant them in the threatened ecosystem of the Oak Openings habitat.



Photo courtesy: The Blade/Jetta Fraser

CONGRATULATIONS TO
MR. WAKEFIELD, MS. SCHETTER,
AND ALL OF THE HARD-WORKING
TEACHERS IN OUR SCHOOLS FOR
THE COMPLETION OF ANOTHER
SUCCESSFUL SCHOOL YEAR!





OCCS Partners IN THE SPOTLIGHT

OCCS has the pleasure of collaborating with so many dedicated, innovative, and effective partners – whether management companies, governing board members, or other co-leaders in advocating for charter schools and choice in Ohio and nationally. Recently, two of our partnering management companies received deserved recognition via prominent national awards.



Dr. Dawn Eidelman

The United States Distance Learning Association (USDLA) recently announced its 2013 International Distance Learning Awards and we're pleased to share that Dr. Dawn Eidelman, co-founder and Chief Education Officer of Mosaica Education and designer for the interdisciplinary concept of Mosaica's Paragon curriculum, was awarded with the prestigious award for "Outstanding Leadership by an Individual in the Field of Distance Learning."

The USDLA International Awards are presented each year to organizations and individuals who are "engaged in the development of and delivery of distance learning programs." Awards are given for best practices in 21st century learning, distance learning programming and teaching, and outstanding leadership.

Ohio Council of Community Schools is incredibly proud of Dr. Eidelman and Mosaica for this honor. We currently partner with five Mosaica-operated schools in Ohio, a number which will likely expand next school year. We are thrilled to see Dr. Eidelman receiving the recognition she deserves.

Another OCCS partnering management company, EdVantages, was among just over two dozen such groups nationwide that were considered for the 2013 Broad Prize for Public Charter Schools. For the second year in a row, EdVantages was recognized among a highly esteemed group of peers, including

Uncommon Schools, Green Dot Public Schools, Achievement First, and KIPP Schools – all of which are known nationally for operating some of the highest performing charter schools in the country. EdVantages manages schools in Ohio, Michigan, and Florida, many of which are among the highest performers in their respective districts/regions.

The Broad Prize for Public Charter Schools "honors the public charter management organization that has demonstrated the most outstanding overall student performance and improvement among the country's largest urban charter management organizations in recent years while reducing achievement

gaps for poor and minority students." It mirrors the Broad Prize for Urban Education that is awarded to traditional districts. EdVantages and all of its partner schools deserve a huge round of applause for their recognition as finalists.

For the second year in a row, EdVantages was recognized among a highly esteemed group of peers ... for operating some of the highest performing charter schools in the country.





Students IN THE SPOTLIGHT

OCCS is always excited to hear about all of the successes accomplished by students in the schools we sponsor. We are proud to showcase a few students who are thriving in no small part due to the special attention and alternative teaching methods employed by schools under our direction and oversight.



Lauren Misel. Photo courtesy the Newark Advocate.

Congratulations to Ohio Virtual Academy (OHVA) senior, Lauren Misel, who graduated with honors from the Central Ohio Technical College with her associate degree in science more than a month before she graduated from high school and three months before she can earn her driver's license. The flexibility in attending high school at the OHVA enabled Lauren to enjoy dual enrollment in both high school and college level courses.

The 15-year-old Newark, Ohio native will attend Miami University in Oxford, Ohio this fall with a junior status and a full-ride scholarship. Lauren said the decision to take classes at COTC while working on her high school diploma through the OHVA was a crucial decision for her future, where she envisions herself completing medical school and becoming a neurologist. Lauren will transfer 75 credits to Miami, where she will major in microbiology with a minor in neuroscience. She will start right away with work in her major, thanks to the head start on general science classes at COTC. Congratulations, Lauren!

OCCS is also proud of Whitehall Preparatory and Fitness Academy students Armani Wooden (8th grade) and Jess Johnson (7th grade) – the first two EdVantages students ever to be tested for – and receive – their junior black belts in Tae Kwon Do.

Armani and Jess have trained (while at EdVantages) for six years and have absorbed a tremendous amount of material. This aligns with the symbolism of the black belt, whose history lies partly in legend that says martial arts students would wear a plain belt to train (there was no color system when it first originated). Only after many, many years of practice, the belt would become so worn and tattered it would turn black, a symbol of discipline, hard work, and persistence.



Armani Wooden, Master Romano, and Jess Johnson stand together proudly after the students receive their junior black belts

Congratulations to all of the students attending OCCS-sponsored schools for your hard work this past school year.



OCCS welcomes new Communications Associate

OCCS hired a new Communications Associate, Brittany McClaskey, in June. Brittany has several years of experience working with non-profit organizations in the realms of writing, social media and event planning. She graduated from the E.W. Scripps School of Journalism at Ohio University with a degree in public relations. While at Nationwide Insurance, Brittany wrote news-letters, planned corporate events and ghost-wrote for several top-management staff. She specializes in strategic communications and will be a valuable addition to OCCS' communications and policy divisions.

OCCS HONOR ROLL

OCCS-sponsored schools are making great strides in their communities! Here's a look at what some of our schools have accomplished this past quarter:

- Central Academy of Ohio in Toledo was awarded candidacy for the International Baccalaureate Primary Years Programme beginning September 1, 2013. There are only nine other authorized schools in Ohio for the Primary Years Programme.
- Nexus Academy of Toledo, a "blended" learning charter high school that is among the first of its kind in the state of Ohio, was featured by Toledo's Channel 13 (WTVG).
- Ohio Connections Academy, Northpointe Academy, and Wildwood Environmental Academy received Honor Roll awards from the Ohio Coalition for Quality Education for achievement and growth.
- Three OCCS-sponsored schools were named "High Progress Schools of Honor" by the Ohio Department of Education: Columbus Arts & Technology Academy, Columbus Preparatory Academy, and Springfield Preparatory and Fitness Academy.
- Columbus Preparatory was also chosen as one of only five charters named as a School of Promise by the Ohio Department of Education. This award recognizes those schools serving "traditionally underachieving" students but helping them realize impressive performance gains, despite the odds.



According to the most recent data, OCCS schools on the whole outperformed seven of the eight largest urban Ohio districts in terms of the percentage of students exceeding a year's worth of growth.



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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