



VITAL SOURCE

WINTER 2013

OCCS UPDATES

- 1 Toledo school choice event garners over 300 supporters
- 6 Dr. Darlene Chambers appointed to Cleveland Transformation Alliance

LEGISLATIVE

- 4 HB 555: What do charter schools need to know?

FROM OUR SCHOOLS

- 6 South Scioto Academy starts first area chapter of "Girls on the Run"
- 7 Congratulations to Emily Wallace, OCCS Teacher of the Year

- 7 CASSA and Northpointe Academy "achieving very high growth" according to Battelle for Kids
- 8 OCCS-sponsored charter schools highlighted by state and national media



Darlene Chambers, Ph.D.,
Executive Director

It's common to be reflective around the holidays and new year, and this year was no different. Here at Ohio Council of Community Schools (OCCS), we reflected back on what a full, blessed, and busy year we had. In 2012, we:

- Renewed our partnership with the University of Toledo (of which OCCS is a designee), signing a 10-year contract. With this growing collaboration, we have created two endowed leadership scholars - one for virtual education and one for charter school leadership;
- Announced our first ever OCCS Teacher of the Year competition;
- Had several of our sponsored schools featured by state and national media outlets, such as the *Cleveland Plain Dealer*, *Canton Repository*, and *Education Week*;
- Saw significant gains among our charter schools, with 4 out of 5 students in OCCS-sponsored schools attending a school rated Continuous Improvement or better;

continued on page 2

Toledo school choice event garners over 300 supporters

OCCS was a proud planning partner for Toledo's National School Choice Week event on January 31, which brought out over 300 supporters of school choice from Northwest Ohio and surrounding regions. Joining OCCS in planning the event was School Choice Ohio, Ohio Virtual Academy, the Friedman Foundation for Educational Choice, the Northwest Ohio Scholarship Fund, and Agudath Israel of America.

National School Choice Week, a non-profit whose mission is to spotlight school choice in its many forms – charter schools, online schooling, home-schooling, magnet schools and other forms of district choice, and private schools – chartered an historic railcar and led a cross-country, whistle-stop train tour from Los Angeles to New York City from January 27 to February 2. Toledo was the eighth stop along the way.



Many OCCS affiliated schools and students were involved in the event. Students from Toledo Preparatory and Fitness Academy performed a martial arts demonstration for the crowd, while Clay Avenue Community School's student drum and drill corps also performed.

The event also drew an impressive line-up of speakers, including:

- Toledo Mayor Michael Bell,
- John Jones, former president of the Greater Toledo Urban League and board member at Ohio Council of Community Schools,
- Marty Porter (emcee), Director of Toledo School for the Arts,
- Ruthanne Johnson, student at Toledo School for the Arts, and founder of her own anti-bullying foundation,

continued on page 3



continued from page 1

- Were proud that two school leaders and one teacher from OCCS-affiliated schools were nominated for the Ohio Alliance for Public Charter Schools' (OAPCS) Teacher and School Leader of the Year awards (and one of our school leaders was the overall winner);
- Hosted a timely breakout session at the annual OAPCS conference, titled "Excelling in the 21st Century: Classrooms of Tomorrow" and had three staffers present at the conference;
- Hosted a pre-release screening of the film, "Won't Back Down," with 250 educational and civic leaders in attendance;
- Launched new quarterly newsletters, a new website and blog, as well as Facebook and Twitter pages;
- Announced that one of our schools won a federal Public Charter School Program Grant;
- Supported several of our schools' partnerships with the prestigious Teach For America program;
- Shared good news about several students, who won scholarships and other awards, were featured in the *New York Times*, got accepted into Juilliard, got to attend a Cleveland Cavaliers game, traveled abroad, and had work featured by the Rock 'N' Roll Hall of Fame;
- Granted our 5th round of post-secondary scholarships to charter school students;
- Announced our first ever technology awards for start-up charter schools;
- Hosted our first ever new school orientation for our eight new charter school start-ups; and
- Congratulated several of our charter schools for receiving clean audit awards from the Auditor of State.

None of this would have been possible without our valued partners and supporters around the state.

2012 was also a busy year for public charter schools and all public schools when it comes to policy. Several pieces of legislation were passed that make significant changes to accountability, our grading system, expectations for third graders reading on grade level, and many other provisions impacting the day-to-day lives of school leaders, teachers, and students.

The last of these laws – HB 555 – was passed just before the holidays. So, even though it was an "off" budget year, OCCS and its partners were busy at the Statehouse throughout the year, and are gearing up for an even busier season with this year's biennial budget and proposed changes to school funding.

And there were somber times as well. As we were reflecting back on what a blessed year it was in 2012, we heard the news of the tragedy in Newtown, Connecticut. For all of us working in education, it was a humbling, sobering, and heart-breaking few weeks. Since that time, OCCS has re-engaged partner schools around safety plans, reminding them to make sure plans are up to date, and connecting them with resources where necessary.

As we make our way into 2013 – and prepare for all of the exciting challenges and opportunities it will undoubtedly provide – three words come to mind: hope, optimism, and choice. This is a tagline from National School Choice Week, a group that organized over 3600 events across the country from January 27 to February 2, including our very own event here in Toledo.

I have **hope** that this year will be just as dynamic as last year, if not more so. I have hope that charter school supporters and advocates will make their voices heard at the Statehouse during the budget cycle, and that important advances will be made toward ensuring that charter schools and school choice will continue to thrive in Ohio. I am optimistic about expanding high-quality educational

options. Five new e-schools will be allowed to open this year, and all public schools are being held to higher standards under the new accountability framework recently put in place. I have faith that they will rise to the occasion. And I am confident that advocates for school choice – like the 300+ people who gathered in Toledo a few weeks ago to demonstrate their support – will continue to grow in number, that more parents, families, students, and community members will realize their fundamental right to quality school choice and recognize that every child learns and thrives differently.

For 2013, which is already shaping up to be action-packed and full of policy and legislative changes for schools, my hope is that we remember to look beyond bricks, buildings, and bureaucracy, and bring our focus back to the life of students. If we do this, none of us can lose.

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John Jones, board member at OCCS and former president of the Greater Toledo Urban League



OCCS Director of School Fiscal Services Adrienne Shreve, Toledo Mayor Mike Bell, Ruthanne Johnson, and Virginia Walden Ford



OCCS Executive Director Dr. Darlene Chambers, Andrew Campanella, President of National School Choice Week, and OCCS Assistant Director of Special Education Heidi Isaacs

continued from page 1

- Andrew Campanella, National School Choice Week President,
- Virginia Walden Ford, member of the board of directors of the Black Alliance for Educational Options and director of D.C. Parents for School Choice,
- Rochelle Gould, proud choice advocate and grandmother of three boys – each of whom uses/has used a different type of school (traditional public, charter, and private),

Andrew Campanella, President of School Choice Week, told the crowd, “We do not stand as Democrats or Republicans, as people from big cities or small towns, those in need or those with much to give. Today and this week [National School Choice Week] we stand as one city, one state, one nation united for school choice.” National School Choice week hosted over 3600 events across the country to spotlight the need for choice for all families. The group emphasizes the reality that parents know their children best and are best equipped to choose the school that’s right for them.

Virginia Walden Ford, president of the Black Alliance for Educational Options’ Washington, DC Chapter, described her own son’s experience in school. He was doing poorly until receiving a choice scholarship and attending a different school – which “turned his life around.” Ms. Ford, who was among the second group of kids to integrate the infamous Little Rock High School, told the crowd powerfully, “When I forget why I fight, I just look at my own children and my own grandchildren and I know that they did well because we were willing to fight for them. We have to continue to stand shoulder to shoulder and to do all we can to ensure that children are educated in a quality environment.”

Ruthanne Johnson, an eighth grader at the Toledo School for the Arts and founder of the Be You Foundation – an anti-bullying/youth empowerment non-profit, talked about the choice she was given in fifth grade to attend a charter school. Finding her voice through school choice, she believes, led her to feel empowered to later start her foundation, which was featured by Oprah Winfrey and Lady Gaga (at the launch of her “Born this Way” Foundation).

John Jones, former president of the Greater Toledo Urban League and member of the OCCS Board of Trustees, said that he “understands what it’s like to live in poverty.” But poverty must not limit students’ ability to receive a high-quality education. He rallied the crowd, insisting that “every teacher, every parent, every community that is concerned with the status quo gets empowered.”

Mayor Michael Bell was impressed with the “unity” in the room, noting “I can’t ever remember walking into a room with this much unity in education.” He reminded the crowd that Toledo’s economic future is dependent on the quality of education today. The event was picked up by Toledo WSPD’s Morning News with Fred LeFebvre, who hosted Dr. Darlene Chambers and OCCS Director of School Fiscal Services, Adrienne Shreve, on the show to discuss school choice and the purpose of the event. The *Toledo Free Press* also posted an article about it in late January.

OCCS wants to extend its heartfelt thanks to all who came out to show their support for school choice, and all of those in our community who are working hard to fight for and provide excellent educational options to all children, regardless of their zip code. As Ruthanne Johnson pointed out in the closing of her speech, “change takes courage.” Those in the room who rallied together in support of school choice have demonstrated and continue to demonstrate the power of courage.

To view more photos and videos of the event, go to our Facebook page: www.facebook.com/OhioCouncilofCommunitySchools.



Clay Avenue Community School drum and drill corps



HB 555: What do charter schools need to know?

After several months of review, HB 555 – the legislation overhauling Ohio’s report card and accountability system – was finalized in late December.

Many of these changes will impact charter schools and we’ve outlined the most significant three of them here: 1) how the rating system for charter schools will change, and what schools can expect for the next several years; 2) how charter school closure will work under the new accountability system and during the transition years; and, 3) how dropout recovery charter schools will be evaluated (including standards for closure).

Note, HB 555 makes several other changes affecting charters, including requiring all fiscal officers of charter schools to be licensed as a school treasurer, changing the grades during which social studies assessments must be administered, establishing requirements around the opening of new e-schools, evaluating charter school sponsors, and making changes related to the location of start-up charters and multiple-facility charter schools.

To view the full document, “HB 555: Analysis of provisions affecting charter schools,” go to www.ohioschools.org/sites/default/files/hb_555_analysis_-_charters.pdf.

1). Academic performance ratings

HB 555 outlines a new performance rating system for schools and districts. Current designations (Excellent, Effective, Continuous Improvement, Academic Watch, and Academic Emergency) will be replaced by letter grades (A, B, C, D, and F). A variety of measures (many of which are new) will be graded and comprise an overall letter grade for the school. This new performance rating system will be rolled out over the next four school years (commencing at the end of our current school year, 2012-13).

For the 2012-13 and 2013-14 school years, ODE will assign letter grades only to *specified* metrics (those that are “graded” in the 2012-13 and the 2013-14 columns according to the chart below). Starting in 2014-15, ODE must assign an *overall letter grade*, and will also develop and incorporate a high school student academic progress measure (to be graded and included in the overall grade in 2015-16).

The chart below shows which metrics will be graded and when. Note that items with an asterisk (*) are new to the interactive Local Report Cards.

Performance Measure	2012-2013 School Year	2013-2014 School Year	2014-2015 School Year and Thereafter
Annual Measurable Objectives (AMOs)*	Graded	Graded	Graded
Performance Index Scores (PIS)	Graded	Graded	Graded
Performance indicators met	Graded	Graded	Graded
Four- and five-year* adjusted cohort graduation rates	Graded	Graded	Graded
Overall value-added progress dimension	Graded	Graded	Graded
Value-added progress dimension disaggregated for certain student subgroups*	Graded	Graded	Graded
Kindergarten through third-grade literacy rate*	None	Graded	Graded
National standardized test participation rate and remediation-free percentage*	None	Reported	Reported
Advanced Placement (AP) participation rate and test scores*	None	Reported	Reported
Dual enrollment program participation rate*	None	Reported	Reported
Honors diploma*	None	Reported	Reported
Industry credentials*	None	Reported	Reported
International Baccalaureate (IB) participation rate and test scores*	None	Reported	Reported
College and career-ready assessment results*	None	None	Reported

Source: LSC (Legislative Service Commission) analysis document.



2). Accountability/closure criteria for charter schools

HB 555 amends current charter school closure criteria to align with the bill's phase-in of the new rating system. The first schools for which the new criteria apply are those subject to closure at the end of 2013-14. The law maintains exemptions from closure for dropout recovery schools (only until July 1, 2014), and for schools serving a majority of students with disabilities (permanent exemption). Below is a chart that describes the new closure criteria as well as the timing of it.

Note, the law provides a “safe harbor” provision for all schools and districts in the first year after the administration of new Common Core (PARCC) assessments. Any school/district that sees a decline in its Performance Index Score that is “within two standard errors of measure” below Ohio’s statewide average decline in Performance Index Score would be eligible for a one-year exemption from any penalties or sanctions. For charters, this means an exemption from closure.

Community School Closure Criteria		
Type of school	Current law (until July 1, 2013)	The bill (to begin July 1, 2013)
A school that does not offer a grade higher than three.	Has been in Academic Emergency for two of the three most recent school years.	For two of the three most recent school years, any of the following: (1) Has been in Academic Emergency; (2) Has received an “F” in the kindergarten through 3rd-grade literacy measure; or (3) Has received an overall grade of “F.”
A school that offers any of grades four to eight but no grade higher than nine.	(1) Has been in Academic Emergency for two of the three most recent school years and (2) showed less than one standard year of academic growth in reading or math for two of the three most recent school years.	For two of the three most recent school years, any of the following: (1) Has been in Academic Emergency; (2) Has received an “F” for the Performance Index Score and for the overall value-added progress dimension; or (3) Has received an overall grade of “F” and an “F” for the value-added progress dimension.
A school that offers any of grades 10 to 12.	Has been in Academic Emergency for two of the three most recent school years.	For two of the three most recent school years, any of the following: (1) Has been in Academic Emergency; (2) Has received an “F” for the Performance Index Score and has not met its Annual Measurable Objectives (AMOs); or (3) Has received an overall grade of “F” and an “F” for the overall value-added progress dimension.

Source: LSC analysis document

3). Academic performance criteria for dropout recovery schools, and closure criteria

For charter schools that primarily serve students enrolled in a dropout recovery and prevention program, a new performance rating system and report card will be phased in – starting in 2012-13 and completed in 2014-15. A dropout recovery school will be rated on the following performance indicators:

- Four-, five-, six-, seven-, and eight-year adjusted cohort graduation rates (30% weight);
- Percentage of 12th grade students, and other students within three months of their 22nd birthday, who attain a passing score on state achievement assessments for graduation (30% weight);
- Annual Measurable Objectives (AMOs) (20% weight);
- Growth in student achievement, in reading or math (or both), as measured by separate nationally norm-referenced assessments that have been adopted/approved by the State Board (20% weight).

Dropout recovery schools will receive overall ratings of “exceeds standards,” “meets standards,” or “does not meet standards.” If a school improves both its graduation rates and percentage of 12th graders or other students passing the graduation assessment (by 10% each), it must receive a rating of “meets standards.” Beyond that, the bill does not spell out performance levels or benchmarks but leaves it up to the State Board (by June 30, 2013) to specify rules for graduation rates, percentage of students attaining a passing score, and AMO. No later than December 31, 2014, the State Board must specify rules for the expected performance levels and benchmarks for student achievement growth in reading and math, and adopt standards for overall ratings. The law also specifies that if available, certain “student outcome” data be reported (but not graded) on the report card: postsecondary credit earned, nationally recognized career or technical certification, military enlistment, job placement, and attendance rate.

To view the full analysis, go here: www.ohioschools.org/sites/default/files/hb_555_analysis_-_charters.pdf.



Dr. Darlene Chambers appointed to Cleveland Transformation Alliance

OCSS was pleased to announce late in 2012 that Executive Director Dr. Darlene Chambers was appointed by Cleveland Mayor Frank Jackson to serve on the city's "Transformation Alliance" as a representative of the Ohio Association of Charter School Authorizers (OACSA). The Transformation Alliance was established by law in 2012 through House Bill 525 (the "Cleveland Plan") and is, as the Mayor's Office describes it, a "public-private partnership charged with ensuring accountability for district and charter schools in the city, communicating with parents about quality school choices, and serving as a watchdog for charter sector growth.

The Transformation Alliance is an independent entity comprised of members from the Cleveland Metropolitan School District (CMSD), parents, teachers, community members, and representatives from the charter school community – such as Dr. Chambers. Members of the Transformation Alliance will make recommendations to the Ohio Department of Education as it relates to criteria for opening new charter schools in the Cleveland area, approving sponsors to open new schools there, and communicating to the public about the performance of all schools in Cleveland.

Since December, the Alliance and its various committees have made much progress. Dr. Chambers is on the Sponsor Criteria and Review Process committee, which is tasked with developing a review process for new sponsors who seek approval by the Ohio Department of Education to open new charter schools in Cleveland. The committee is in the midst of establishing criteria for sponsors wishing to open in Cleveland.

Dr. Chambers said of her nomination, "My appointment to the Transformation Alliance underscores the importance of the district and charter community working together toward improving outcomes for all students. The Mayor's inclusion of representatives from the charter school community, and the sponsor community specifically, shows how important it is to have a broad range of expertise at the table. I am honored to be a part of it, and look forward to working with the other members of the Alliance."

OCSS is proud of Dr. Chambers for her appointment, and looks forward to contributing OCSS' collective expertise in charter school sponsorship for the good of the Alliance and the education of Cleveland's students.

South Scioto Academy starts first area chapter of "Girls on the Run"



South Scioto Academy, an OCSS-sponsored charter school serving students in grades K-6 in Columbus, is the first charter school in Franklin County to partner with the national non-profit, Girls on the Run.

Girls on the Run describes itself as a "transformational learning program for 8 to 13 year-old girls that teaches life skills through dynamic, conversation-based lessons and running games. The program culminates with the girls being physically and emotionally prepared to complete a celebratory 5k running event. The goal of the program is to unleash confidence

through accomplishment while establishing a lifetime appreciation of health and fitness."

At South Scioto Academy, Instructional Coach Judy Shelton was instrumental in starting the program. She told us about how the program got started:

"I am a runner and I hang all of my triathlon, half-marathon and marathon finisher's medals in my office at the school. Students come in all the time and comment on them and say they want one. They always ask if I won and I explain to them that I will never win, but it's not about that. It's about working hard for something and finishing what you started the best you can, no matter how hard it is. Most of them would ask how far I ran and then would say that they could never do that. I would tell them they can do anything they put their mind to."

Because of the interest in running demonstrated by her students, and the resulting conversations about the importance of perseverance and what it means to "win," Ms. Shelton contacted Girls on the Run and started a chapter at the school. Thanks to sponsors, the program was nearly free for

19 girls. The club started in September, with the runners practicing two times per week. At first, the girls complained, said they were tired, and doubted they could do it. But Ms. Shelton reported that "we kept at it." By the last practice of the season, the girls could run the entire time without stopping.

The culminating event was a county-wide 5K (3.10 miles) that took place in mid-November. Eighteen of the 19 club members showed up to the event supported by their parents and family members. Many families walked alongside their daughters. The students received race shirts and finisher's medals, just like the ones hanging in Ms. Shelton's office. She shared with us one particularly moving part of the day's event:

"There was probably a good half hour time difference between when SSA's first runner came in and our last runner came in. As I was running in with my last runner, I saw our girls on the side of the course, with parents, cheering their teammates on. They didn't just get their medal and leave. I was SO proud of them for finishing what they started AND for being such great teammates."

"I was SO proud of them for finishing what they started AND for being such great teammates."



CONGRATULATIONS TO **Emily Wallace**, OCCS TEACHER OF THE YEAR

The Ohio Council of Community Schools recently announced its first annual Teacher of the Year award. The purpose of the award is to recognize teachers at OCCS-sponsored schools who demonstrate leadership and a strong commitment to student achievement gains. We asked our sponsored charter schools to nominate teachers who possess strong content area expertise; deliver content in an engaging manner; align with the school's mission and values; incorporate innovative materials, curriculum and strategies into the classroom; utilize data to maximize student success; engage in ongoing development/learning; and, engage parents as partners in their students' education.

After narrowing it down to five finalists, OCCS selected Emily Wallace, an intervention specialist at Ohio Connections Academy (OCA), as the 2012 winner.

Katie Brecheisan, Assistant Principal at OCA, said of Emily: "[She] is an amazing part of our team. She is talented, dedicated to her students, supportive of her colleagues, and most of all an asset to our entire program." OCA Assistant Special Education Director, Rekha Manakkal, added, "When you think of using data to drive instruction, Emily Wallace is synonymous with that statement. Emily is an active member of OCA's data team and is committed to using data to make informed decisions."

"[She] is an amazing part of our team. She is talented, dedicated to her students, supportive of her colleagues, and most of all an asset to our entire program."

Congratulations to Emily and to OCA! We also want to congratulate the four other finalists who were nominated by their schools and who made it to the final round:

- Joellen Byerly: 3rd Grade at Ohio Virtual Academy
- Wendy Farrell: 6th Grade at Columbus Preparatory Academy
- Theresa Knox: 3rd Grade at Springfield Preparatory and Fitness Academy
- Kristen Tucker: 4th Grade at Central Academy of Ohio

Thanks to all of our schools who submitted nominations. Stay tuned for next year's award cycle.

**CASSA and
Northpointe
Academy**
**"ACHIEVING
VERY HIGH
GROWTH"**
according to
Battelle for Kids

Battelle for Kids

Congratulations to two OCCS-sponsored schools, Cleveland Arts and Social Sciences Academy (CASSA) and Northpointe Academy of Toledo, for being recognized by Battelle for Kids for receiving "very high growth" school during the 2011-12 school year.

Battelle for Kids is a Columbus-based group that works with districts and schools across Ohio and the country in school improvement, data services, teacher effectiveness, and more.

Battelle informed the schools of this distinction through a congratulatory letter sent in December. CASSA and Northpointe are among the "top two percent of high achievement buildings in the state of Ohio" in terms of student growth. Battelle went on to note that "from [Northpointe's and CASSA's] outstanding accomplishment, schools all over Ohio and the United States can learn and share strategies, best practices, and solutions to help better serve their students."

OCCS is proud of the school leaders, teachers, staff and students of both schools.

TOP
2%



OCCS-sponsored charter schools highlighted by state and national media

In December, *StateImpact Ohio* (a collaboration of NPR and WCPN, WKS, and WOSU) featured an article and an accompanying broadcast (which appeared on NPR’s Weekend Edition) about ODHELA’s unique online chorus.

OHDELA (Ohio Distance and Electronic Learning Academy) is a K-12 virtual charter school sponsored by OCCS, serving students across the state of Ohio.

OHDELA ensures that online environments don’t preclude students from being involved socially with one another through extra-curricular activities. The article points out that even though “other online schools have online clubs and even music appreciation groups, [and field trips and group lessons],” OHDELA has the only all-online school chorus in Ohio, and perhaps in the nation.

Stepstone Academy, a Cleveland charter school serving students in grades K and 1, was featured in the Philanthropy insert of *Cleveland’s Crain’s Business* as a “place of note” in December. The article described the story behind the school’s



Also in December, the *Toledo Blade* published a piece about the role of technology in learning – mentioning Nexus Academy of Toledo. Nexus Academy is a “blended” high school that combines online learning with face-to-face instruction time between students and teachers. It was described by the *Blade*, alongside the University of Toledo, as examples of how technology is transforming “the way teachers teach and students learn.”

The Nexus Academies (OCCS-sponsored schools located in Columbus and Cleveland as well as Toledo) were also featured by *Education Week* in November. According to the piece, Nexus Academy is a “great example” of such programming. Tom Vander Ark, Director of the International Association for K-12 Online Learning and *Ed Week* blogger, described the “flex” high school model as one where “content and instruction are delivered primarily by the Internet, students move on an individually customized, fluid schedule among learning modalities, and the teacher-of-record is on-site. The teacher-of-record or other adults provide face-to-face support on a flexible and adaptive as-needed basis through activities such as small-group instruction, group projects, and individual tutoring.”

Finally, the *Canton Repository* featured the newly opened Believe to Achieve of Canton, in November, as a school that offers families and students choice, structure, and individualized learning.

To read more about the exciting things happening at our schools, including stories that have been highlighted by the local media, go to our blog at www.ohioschools.org/news/news-blog.



beginnings, and its unique relationship with Guidestone, a non-profit offering a wide range of services to families and students served by Stepstone.

Online environments don’t preclude students from being involved socially with one another through extra-curricular activities.



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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