



# CHARTER SCHOOL RESOURCES NEWSLETTER

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Community Schools*

## MISSION

Richland Academy of the Arts' authorizing mission is to provide the oversight, monitoring, technical assistance, resources and leadership needed and wanted by its sponsored schools for them to provide their students with superior academic opportunities while maintaining sound financial viability without violating their autonomy.

## VISION

Our authorizing vision is to be the sponsor of choice for community schools in Ohio. By not limiting imagination, we will honor developmental abilities and the growth of the whole child. We will cultivate communities who believe children need to grow up experiencing the arts and contributing back to their families and communities.

## ***Congratulations, Momentum Award honorees!***

Richland Academy of the Arts is pleased to announce that three of its sponsored schools – Columbus Bilingual Academy—North, Lorain Bilingual Preparatory Academy and Northside Preparatory Academy – are recipients of the Ohio Department of Education and Workforce's Momentum Award for the 2024-2025 school year.

The Momentum Award is for districts and schools that demonstrate outstanding improvement in achievement while also continuing to show growth. Honorees must improve their performance index by three or more points over the previous school year and receive a value-added progress rating of four or more stars.

K-12 education stakeholders all wish there was a special secret sauce that when added to the mix would consistently produce great academic outcomes. But that simply isn't the case. Each school and groups of students are unique, as are individual leadership styles.

Exploring different approaches to achieving academic success is a useful exercise for all schools committed to continuous improvement. Here's what the leaders of the Momentum Award recipient schools shared about how their schools have achieved success.

Michael Mora Brenes, principal at **Columbus Bilingual Academy—North (CBAN)**, understands the importance of school culture and the need to create an environment in which both students and staff feel safe and seen.

"It starts with the school leader," he said, "but it's a collective effort. Everyone needs to be focused on the same mission. I tell my teachers that if they are happy, their classrooms will be happy, too."

Mora Brenes truly understands the challenges each member of the CBAN team faces, as he's worn many hats since starting out at the school in 2017, fresh out of college, as an aide. He then taught second grade before assuming primary responsibility for family and community engagement. In 2019, he became the assistant principal and later interim principal. In 2023, he became the school's principal.

What makes the school's academic performance so impressive is that so many of its students are English learners. More than 90 percent of students are Hispanic, speaking different variations of Spanish. All but four Latin American countries are represented in the student population.

Understanding and honoring students' unique cultures is important, Mora Brenes said. Something as simple as saying "good morning" has meaning, as it's a sign of respect and mutual good will toward one another.

"We give grace," he said. "Everyone has good intentions and it's important to keep that in mind."

Like other K-8 schools across the Buckeye State, CBAN implemented a new curriculum to comply with the required Science of Reading approach to literacy. It's been a challenge, but positive results can already be seen.



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**Schools encouraged to join United States of Kindness project for America 250**

As the nation celebrates the 250<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the United States, the Ohio Department of Education and Workforce (DEW) invites schools to join the United States of Kindness led by the Values-in-Action Foundation and its Kindland initiative.

The campaign highlights opportunities to be kind every day and build a connected and uplifted culture. Individuals, schools and other organizations are encouraged to implement 250 acts of kindness this year. At the national level, the campaign aims to inspire and document 250 million acts of kindness in 2026.

Kindland provides ideas and resources for everything from acts of kindness to family outreach and support.

[Click here](#) to learn more.



**Momentum Awards – continued**

Mora Brenes is justifiably proud that the school has earned the Momentum Award for the second consecutive year and is aiming for a three-peat with the current school year.

Jay Saez, principal at **Lorain Bilingual Preparatory Academy**, credits a very deliberate focus on improving students' writing skills as key to positive student academic outcomes.

More than two-thirds of the school's students are Hispanic, most of whom are English learners. It's generally recognized that it's easier to speak a second language than to read and write it, so the emphasis on literacy and writing is an effective strategy.

"Helping students grow their English language arts skills is a critically important goal," Saez said. "We started by encouraging students to just put words in the box, later shifting the focus to the quality of those words. We're transparent about how the assessments and scoring work, helping students understand that they can't perform well without strong writing skills."

Recognizing that stamina decreases over test periods, Saez visits classrooms to talk about the importance of writing prior to high-stakes assessments.

"When you sit down at the dinner table and mom puts a plate in front of you with steak, potatoes and green beans, you naturally want to eat the steak and potatoes first," he said. "But I tell students they should eat the veggies first – tackle the hardest thing first! It's the same thing with testing – do the hardest part first by skipping ahead to the sections that require writing. 'Eat the green beans first!' became our mantra."

He clearly understands the connections between school culture, classroom behavior and academic outcomes, and is proud of the school's atmosphere of respect, empathy, caring and looking out for one another. That culture has also contributed to the school's award-winning performance.

Yolanda Clark, principal at **Northside Preparatory Academy**, also credits much of her school's success to its positive "family" culture. She knew when the school started – in 2020 at the height of the COVID pandemic – that it would take at least five years to see the level of success she sought to achieve.

Maintaining consistency in teaching staff is a "big deal" in terms of academic outcomes, according to Clark, who is pleased that the school has little staff turnover. Supporting teachers is an important priority and a contributing factor in the school's success.

"Providing a positive culture – for both students and staff – is so important," she said. "Structure is a big part of that. Our increased focus on PBIS (Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports) has also contributed to improved academic outcomes."

Clark and the school's full-time intervention specialist work closely with teachers in PBIS processes, helping them understand the appropriate responses to inappropriate behaviors. Their recent focus has been on students, but will expand to include helping parents understand the school's approach and how it can be implemented at home.

"Social emotional learning is another important priority," Clark said. "Every day, every student is exposed to SEL. We've made the SEL slides, which are built around our students' needs, fun. We know that it has a direct impact on their academic achievement."

Clark works closely with the school's director of academics to analyze data on a weekly basis which is reviewed and discussed with classroom teachers. Monitoring short cycle assessment data and providing structured planning time for teachers is another factor in the school's success.

"We're a family," Clark said. "We keep that in the forefront of teachers' minds. It's all about commitment and dedication, and knowing your why."

**An important reminder!**

All school administrators and board members must complete annual public records and open meetings training by the end of each school year. Certificates of completion must be sent to school legal counsel or to [shughes@richlandacademy.com](mailto:shughes@richlandacademy.com).

## **K-3 reading reminders**

As required under a new Ohio law, the Department of Education and Workforce (DEW) must adopt a K-3 reading diagnostic and revise its current list of K-3 reading diagnostic assessments to include no more than five.

Teachers and administrators hired after July 1, 2025 are not required to complete the DEW introduction to the Science of Reading professional development course if the individual completed the appropriate coursework in the Science of Reading as part of an educator or licensure preparation program within five years prior to the date of hire. Individuals qualifying for this exemption must still complete DEW's refresher course in the Science of Reading within five years of their hire date and every five years thereafter.



## **Report shows that suspensions, expulsions hit record low**

The Children's Defense Fund-Ohio recently released an analysis of student suspensions and expulsions for the 2024-2025 school year which reveals that the number of students removed from the classroom as punishment dropped to a record low of 10.2 incidents per 100 students in Ohio's public schools – down from 11.7 the previous school year.

“Some of the decline in Ohio's exclusionary discipline rates can be attributed to the 2018 SAFE Act, particularly its restrictions on the use of out-of-school suspensions and expulsions for students in Pre-K through grade 3,” the report states. “In the years prior to the Act's enactment, there were regularly more than 30,000 incidents of exclusionary discipline imposed on students in these early grades.”

The report also reveals differences in suspension rates between students based on race.

“The 2024-25 discipline data indicate that exclusionary discipline is applied unevenly, with the largest disparities along racial and ethnic lines,” the report states. “Black, non-Hispanic students, who constitute 17% of enrollment, were four and a half times more likely to face exclusionary discipline than their White peers, who represent approximately two-thirds of the student body.

Economically disadvantaged students account for 62 percent of enrollment but 90 percent of suspension and expulsions. Students with disabilities account for about 17 percent of enrollment and 30 percent of exclusionary discipline.

Expulsion and suspension rates were highest in grades 7-9 at 19.4 per 100 students, followed by grades 4-6 at 12.3/100 and 10-12 at 10.1/100. The lowest rates occurred in pre-K-3 at 1.6/100.

## **Bills differ in approach to addressing children's social media access**

The Senate Financial Institutions, Insurance and Technology Committee recently held a hearing on two pieces of legislation addressing social media age verification and parental control.

Key provisions of S.B. 167 would require developers to determine if their applications are likely to be used by children and, if so, to inform the app stores in which it will be distributed. It would also require device manufacturers to take commercially reasonable and technically feasible steps to determine or estimate the age of a device's primary user.

App store manufacturers would be required to take steps related to parental consent and notice including providing a mechanism for app developers to provide notice that children may access the app, and obtaining parental consent before allowing certain underage users to downloading the app.

Key provisions of S.B. 175 would require application distribution providers to request a user's age at the time they create an account and to give developers of covered applications the ability to request an age signal, prevent account holders who are not adults from acquiring a covered app, and view relevant parental controls through a centralized interface.

Application developers would be required to use commercially reasonable efforts to estimate whether a user is a minor or an adult and make a reasonable effort to ensure that minor account holders cannot engage in any activity that is restricted to adults. Operating system providers would be required to request an account holder's age upon account creation and to enable parents of minor account holders to activate a control filter setting that prevents access to obscene materials.

Meta supports S.B. 167 which it says appropriately shares responsibility between parents and app stores. The bill is also supported by the Republican Catholic Coalition and the Center for Christian Virtue. Legislation similar to S.B. 167 has been challenged in court in other states.

Google supports S.B. 175 which it says appropriately involves everyone working as a team to protect kids, pointing out that it should “not fall on the shoulders of parents alone.” The Developers Alliance supports the bill as well.