



Pro Excellentia



Shaker's First Class

Shaker Heights Schools opens its doors to two preschool classes in an effort to offer a rigorous, district-based early childhood experience to children of all backgrounds in the diverse community it serves. (see story pgs. 12-13)



Martha Holden Jennings Foundation

PRO EXCELLENTIA • FALL 2017

*Dedicated to fostering
Excellent Teaching and Deep Learning
in Ohio's secular schools.*

The purpose of the Martha Holden Jennings Foundation is "to foster the development of individual capabilities of young people to the maximum extent through improving the quality of teaching in secular primary and secondary schools" and "to provide a means for greater accomplishment on the part of Ohio's teachers by encouraging creativity in teaching and bringing greater recognition to the teaching profession."

Pro Excellentia is published to describe a sampling of those efforts.

We ask that you please share this copy with colleagues who may gain valuable information and ideas from articles covered in this publication.

Mary Kay Binder, Editor



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Jennings Outstanding Educator Awards

Each year, the Martha Holden Jennings Foundation recognizes and rewards a group of Ohio's most effective educators by presenting individuals with top educator awards. The honors are bestowed at the Foundation's annual Educators Retreat. These professionals are admired by their colleagues, active in their communities, and have made long-standing achievements in their field. Candidates are nominated by their school administrators, or in the case of the outstanding superintendents, by their school boards, and submit an extensive application. They are selected by a panel of leading educators. The honorees receive cash awards to be used for educational projects of their choice.



The 2017 awardees are (l. to r.): **Martha Halemba, Master Teacher Award**, Hudson High School, Hudson City Schools; **James Reding, Arthur S. Holden Teacher Award for Excellence in Science Education**, Granville High School, Granville Exempted Village Schools; **Peter Petto, George B. Chapman, Jr. Teacher Award for Excellence in Mathematics Education**, Lakewood High School, Lakewood City Schools; **Claire Browne and Kathleen McAndrews, Team Teaching Award**, Berry Intermediate School, Lebanon City Schools; and **David James, Ohio Superintendent Outstanding Performance Award**, Akron City Schools.



Mrs. Arlene Holden continues to support the efforts of her late husband, Chairman Emeritus Arthur S. Holden, by attending Foundation events.

*educator
excellence*



Educator Retreat speaker Ron Berger encourages teachers to discuss what they value in the samples of student writing he brought to the retreat.



Jennings Educators Retreat

The Foundation sponsors the Educators Retreat each summer to give educational leaders throughout the state an opportunity to discuss critical issues in education today.

This past July, retreat speaker Ron Berger, from The Center for High Quality Student Work, Harvard Graduate School of Education and Chief Academic Officer of EL Education, explained how educators can evaluate the quality of student work.

Growing Citizen Scientists

Toledo Area Schools/Toledo Zoo



Mrs. Boros and her class of 6th grade students plant milkweed seeds in what will grow into a micro prairie on their school grounds.

Amy Boros admits she does not *have* to teach her students about endangered monarch butterflies, the declining bumblebee population, or the native grasses and wildflowers that will fill a prairie beginning to take root outside her classroom doors.

"I fit this in because to me this is *good science*," says Mrs. Boros, a sixth grade teacher at Hull Prairie Intermediate School in Perrysburg.

Through Project PRAIRIE, Mrs. Boros will use the newly established prairie habitat on school grounds to engage students in inquiry-based projects—all designed to help them conserve the natural world. Over time, students will gather data on native plants and wildlife connected to the prairie and will contribute to a larger body of real scientific global research online. The projects align with a key cognitive demand in the Ohio Science Standards: designing solutions to real world problems.

Perrysburg is one of three school districts in northwest Ohio to partner with the Toledo Zoo on this project. The zoo received a grant from the Environmental Protective Agency to establish urban prairies on school grounds. The sites are

located at Hull Prairie Intermediate as well as Chase STEM Academy in Toledo and Gateway Middle School in Maumee. Personnel from the zoo graded and planted the three sites within the past year and will continue to maintain each as time goes on.

A Resource for PBL

With prairies growing in their backyards, Mrs. Boros thought teachers at all three schools would benefit from professional development that would teach them how to effectively use the areas as a resource for project-based learning. With funding from the Martha Holden Jennings Foundation, she partnered with Mitch Magditch, Curator of Education at the Toledo Zoo, who designed a hands-on educational experience for them. Twenty teachers from the three schools attended the day long session, which took place on-site at the zoo in September.

Within her own building, Mrs. Boros invited seven other science teachers to attend the training. "I didn't want this to just be my prairie," she explains. "I wanted every teacher in the building to recognize the prairie and use it for educational purposes.

"This was a natural fit for the science teachers. They all jumped on board and were interested in getting trained at the zoo. They are super excited about the prairie itself because they see the value in preserving the natural land and getting students to see the value in that as well."

Mrs. Boros explains that educators from all three schools attended the zoo's professional development session together. They learned about the different varieties of butterflies; captured bumble bees in vials; and tagged monarch butterflies. They also learned how to contribute to a database of scientific knowledge by uploading photos of plants and animals they sight on their prairies to a website managed and monitored by real scientists.

"This is called Citizen Science," explains Mrs. Boros, "where average people do real scientific research."

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Citizen Scientists continued from p. 4

Teachers from three school districts in northwest Ohio attended a professional development session at the Toledo Zoo to learn how to monitor monarch butterfly populations and contribute to global scientific research.



Connecting to Learning

Back in the classroom, Mrs. Boros is developing inquiry-based lessons to keep her students interested in these topics while the prairie on their school property begins to grow. During the fall, her students raised five monarch caterpillars, which they tagged and released once they had turned into adult butterflies. In the following weeks, they monitored the butterflies' journey to Mexico through Monarch Watch online. Before the weather turned, the class ventured outside to separate seeds from milkweed

pod and collected samples in tiny vials. They planted some seeds the same day in a "micro prairie" they can see from their classroom windows. Establishing the new plants is significant to preserving the monarch population, explains Mrs. Boros, because monarch caterpillars only eat milkweed plants. Pesticides have eradicated the supply of plants, which once was common to the area.

Come spring, the students will plant more of the milkweed seeds they separated in the fall and test different growing conditions. Educators from the zoo will also teach them about *Lupinus Perennis*, a wild lupine plant native to prairies in northwest Ohio that attracts the blue Karner butterfly, which is on the endangered species list.

To ensure deep learning, students need to be connected to their learning, explains Mrs. Boros, describing why she believes the project is educationally deep.

"They have internalized their learning about these butterflies and they are curious—they want to know more. They have taken ownership, and that's when deep learning takes place. And they love it. The 'ohh' and 'ahh' factor of it—it just helps them to be really engaged!"

Looking ahead, Mrs. Boros envisions many educational opportunities emerging as the prairie grows. She plans to install trail cams so classes can track wildlife—such as fox and coyote—coming into the prairie. Bird feeders will draw robins, sparrows, and other birds. Students will create signs with QR codes that identify trees and other plant species.

"This project goes so much further than the standards," she remarks. "I can tell them they have to learn about atoms or about bugs, but when they take ownership of the prairies and of the butterflies and of the bees—and they take that information home with them—they have internalized it. It will be lifelong learning for them."

Anticipating the long term results of this experience, Mrs. Boros says, typical middle school students wonder what they can actually do to have some kind of impact on the environment. "I want my students to become 'citizen scientists' and realize that they really can make a difference in the world."

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Printing Personal Stories

Zygote Press/Thomas Jefferson Newcomers International Academy

The students in Jamie Lindahl's art class at Thomas Jefferson International Newcomers Academy in Cleveland are not lacking for topics to write about for their "struggle stories." For example: there is the struggle to learn English, to make new friends, to adapt to unfamiliar customs, to move forward in a foreign country while having left many family members behind.

Newcomers Academy serves refugees and immigrants from countries around the globe who have arrived in Cleveland during the past two years. The 850 PreK-12 students hail from 40 different countries, speak 26 different languages, and most likely have endured extraordinary events that landed them in Cleveland in the first place.

The 11th and 12th graders in Ms. Lindahl's art room had written "struggle stories" in English class and recently were in the process of illustrating those accounts under the guidance of a visiting artist from Taiwan, Yu-Chen Chen.

"Their stories and their ideas are very interesting," remarks Ms. Chen, one of two international artists working with students at the school this year through Zygote Press' *Global Arts Initiative*.

Zygote Press is a collaborative print shop in Cleveland that promotes contemporary, fine-art print making. It facilitates several educational arts initiatives throughout the year, and with a grant from the Jennings Foundation, it is able to offer the arts enrichment experience at Newcomers Academy.

Due to a lack of resources, many students at Newcomers Academy are not scheduled for art, explains Stephanie Kluk, Director of Operations, Zygote Press. The *Global Arts Initiative* gives them that creative opportunity.

With grant funds, Zygote Press purchased equipment to teach students the versatile print making techniques of

intaglio (a design engraved into a material) and screen printing. With these methods students are able to create books, pamphlets, posters, masks, maps, and a variety of other pieces. Once mastered, these techniques can be integrated into many subjects, including geography, history, writing, and math. When the grant is complete, the equipment will remain in the school art room to be used by Ms. Lindahl with future classes.

"This allows students a chance to use materials they wouldn't otherwise get to explore," says Ms. Lindahl as she helped her high school class complete their "struggle story" booklets. "These assignments are open ended so they have multiple ways they can go with their projects. They really like being able to experiment and create their own designs."

"Art is another way of communicating; it is the universal language," explains Abby Cali, Education Coordinator at Zygote Press, who along with Ms. Chen and Ms. Lindahl, work with students in the classroom.

"This is so important when students are struggling with language. If we can't understand all the words they are saying, we can understand the emotions and feelings they are trying to express in their stories through the images they create."

An important aspect to the *Global Arts Initiative* is the relationship that develops between the students and visiting international artists. "I am honored to have a chance to be teaching here; the experience has been very good," says Ms. Chen, who completed her residency in the fall and will be replaced by an artist from South Africa in the spring.

"We like to bring international artists into the school because often these students don't interact people who look like



Students and artists create designs and learn to use the etching press, which applies the immense pressure needed to transfer an inked image from a flat plate onto a piece of paper.

them, talk like them, come from different countries, or have had such different experiences," Ms. Cali explains.

Artists such as Yu-Chen Chen face similar issues, she continues, and working together they are learning to communicate and connect through art.

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Environmental Stewards

Rural Action, Inc. Southeastern Ohio Schools

A small group of students at Huntington High School hopes to make a lasting change within their community. After attending a workshop sponsored by Rural Action Inc. last year, they returned to school to educate adults and students about choices the district could make to reduce its energy footprint. Top on their list was investigating ways to install permanent recycling containers in the school cafeteria. This year they are discussing ways to replace the cafeteria's disposable Styrofoam trays with reusable plastic models and are investigating how to compost food waste.

"When I first came here I knew little to nothing about these topics," explains one of the Huntington group members, referring to the lessons learned last year during workshops held at Camp Oty'Okwa in Hocking Hills. The workshops were designed for teens interested in environmental issues from rural southeastern Ohio schools. "We talked about energy audits and waste audits, and I realized how big an issue this is. We just weren't aware of any of it before."

Spreading that awareness is the objective of Rural Action Inc., a non-profit regional sustainable development organization that has been working in Appalachian Ohio since 1991. Through the *Appalachian Green Teachers Project* (AGTP), which is funded by a grant from the Jennings Foundation, its environmental educators engage students and teachers from Appalachian districts in a variety of projects that promote environmental stewardship. The high school experience is just one component of a broader program that reaches students in grades K-12.

According to Joe Brehm, Rural Action's environmental education director, AGTP takes learning beyond the classroom and encourages students to apply knowledge to real environmental issues. For instance, through *Appalachian Stewards*, 5th and 6th grade students learn about life cycles, habitats, and food webs by studying forest herbs native to their area. Then, they plant and monitor herbs in their own

school land labs. In the *Acid Mine Drainage* project, middle school students investigate the impact of mining on the region's water quality. Through the *Wind Turbine* project, middle and high school students design and build model wind turbines and study the region's energy sources and their impact on the environment.

The capstone experience within AGTP is the one that brings high school students together at Camp Oty'Okwa in a retreat-like atmosphere where they are immersed in scientific studies related to climate change. During two overnight sessions, students learn from experts and exchange ideas. They also work in school teams with adult mentors to develop "action plans" that address an environmental concern within their school. They can choose a topic that interests them, but they are required to create a service type project and work with elementary students in some capacity.

For example, students might create a recycling program for the high school and teach second graders how they, too, can help. Or they might perform an energy audit of the high school and visit fifth and sixth grader classrooms to teach about climate change. Many of the projects require the students to interact with school

administrators and local officials, which builds leadership and communication skills in the process.

Through these projects, Mr. Brehm emphasizes, "Students have the opportunity to act on their knowledge and to make an impact on an issue—even though it's huge and complicated. They are creating something with their knowledge; and to me that's the epitome of learning."

"This is an amazing opportunity for young people," adds Al Marietta, environmental education director at Camp Oty'Okwa, which partners with Rural Action on this project. "It's a wonderful way for students to get a lot of real world experience. It's also a great way for them to see that there are other passionate teenagers and adults who are working toward the same goals."

"One of the benefits of a project like this is that it is not just about the content," Mr. Brehm remarks. "It is about sparking curiosity and a passion for learning about something and making a difference in the world."

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Students work in teams to design action plans to bring attention to environmental concerns in their communities.



Playing with Math

Sauder Elementary School

grants-to-
educators



Mrs. Preising says small group math lessons, which take place daily with the variety of games purchased with grant funds, have made her a better teacher and her students more engaged learners.

Heidi Preising had successfully implemented small group literacy instruction in her kindergarten classroom when her curriculum director presented her with a new challenge: trying the same technique to teach math.

"I love small group instruction, but this idea overwhelmed me," explains Mrs. Preising, who has taught kindergarten at Sauder Elementary School in Massillon for eight years. "It takes a lot of planning to teach small groups, especially in kindergarten because they are less able to work independently."

Mrs. Preising was willing to accept the challenge because she is always looking for ways to improve her mathematics instruction. She was determined to design hands-on activities that would be fun and engage her students, but she was leery of the time-consuming prospect of

creating her own materials. "I started looking through catalogs and realized there are so many math games available that would make small groups doable," she says; yet the cost was substantial. That led her to take on an additional task: applying for her first Grant-to-Educators from the Jennings Foundation.

"I was very nervous to write my first grant proposal," she remarks, explaining that the application process was fairly involved. "But sometimes you just have to go for it; what do you have to lose?"

On the proposal, Mrs. Preising itemized more than three dozen games that met multiple kindergarten mathematics standards: comparing numbers; constructing two and three dimensional shapes; adding, subtracting, and measuring. She expected to share the resources with four additional Sauder kindergarten

teachers reaching more than 100 children on a daily basis. The school's principal, J. R. Reindel, added that the resources would empower students to become self-directed learners and strong problem solvers. He was confident the project would be used effectively to impact student achievement.

Having received the funds at the start of the 2016-2017 school year, Mrs. Preising immediately purchased the games and has been supplementing large group instruction with these activities ever since. She usually selects which games students play, allowing her to differentiate instruction to meet the varying abilities of her young learners. While the students work independently, she moves among the groups to assess how well individual children understand the concepts.

"Small groups help so much to get to know the students," she says, remarking on what she likes about the program. "Even if I am sitting at a table for just a few minutes, I can tell who really gets a concept and who needs more practice."

Well into her second year of small group mathematics instruction, Mrs. Preising believes her kindergartners are much more excited about math: "They like small groups; they like hands-on activities. Over the years I have learned that if kindergartners can move things around—not just use paper and pencil on a worksheet—it engages them longer. The action and the activity brings [the concepts] home to their little brains. It just sticks with them better."

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An Education in Business

Willoughby South High School

grants-to-educators

Students at Willoughby South High School are learning how to run a business by operating a school store. Currently they sell custom-designed T-shirts, hoodies, and crewneck sweatshirts, but they have plans to expand their products to include sweatpants, hats, book bags, and jackets.

The store opened in September, and in just the first semester, the students totaled \$7,000 in sales. Today, it operates out of an unused concession stand in the high school cafeteria, but it will move to a permanent location in a new high school building currently under construction.

Among the many lessons the students have learned in the past couple months is that running a business is a lot of hard work.

“They are learning that business owners have to be 110 percent dedicated to running and making a business successful and that it just doesn’t happen overnight,” remarks Daneen Baller.

It was Ms. Baller, the Business Education teacher, who convinced the superintendent and curriculum director to create a dedicated two semester “school store” class to teach business skills in a real world way.

The process started last year, when a group of students in her entrepreneurship class began selling the school’s spirit wear. Through market research, the class learned their customers preferred custom-designed T-shirts and sweatshirts over the stock items currently offered. Eventually, they wrote a business plan that described their desire to invest in a heat press machine to make and sell individualized products during lunch hours. The plan was approved and Ms. Baller and the students sought start-up funding from several sources, including a Grant-to-Educators from the Jennings Foundation.

“No business starts off having all the money they need. They have to work for it, set goals, and prioritize,” says Ms. Baller, who worked as an accountant in business and industry for 12 years before becoming a teacher. Funding allowed her to purchase the heat press machine, an equipment cart, and supplies.

The business lab class meets five days a week in Ms. Baller’s classroom, but students put in additional hours selling merchandise when the store is open. While in the classroom, they tackle concepts related to operating any business: market research, merchandising, selecting and reviewing vendors, and pricing. Next semester they will study accounting, marketing/promotion, and management. Ms. Baller refers to a textbook but many of the lessons are learned best through experience.

Even with her business background, Ms. Baller admits she is learning along with the students. “I am figuring this out too—we are all learning as we go, just like a business does,” she says. “I tell them all the time, ‘This is a true business; and businesses learn as they go. If you are the CEO, or the president, or the manager, you don’t have all the answers.’ In class, they may ask me for the answer. Well in this setting, I don’t have the answer. We are just going to try something and see how it goes.”

With expansion plans in mind, the students will apply to the board of education for a small business loan next semester—another lesson in how the business world really operates. She expects they will repay it as time goes on and sales increase with additional products.

“What I love most about this project is the fact that my district and school have

Students learn real world business skills by developing and operating all aspects of a school store that sells custom-made spirit wear to their classmates.



“This is so real world,” Ms. Baller claims very excitedly. “They aren’t only imagining something on paper; they can actually see it. And they amaze me everyday because they have so many good ideas. We take the best of the best and apply it to our actual business. And then we carry it out.”

allowed me to give kids this amazing opportunity,” she remarks. “And it really is providing real world experience. I’ve been out there; I know.”

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Book Marks Deepen Learning

grants-to-educators

Perry High School

There is hardly a reader who doesn't think it is taboo to write in a book. Yet in Rachele Mielke's American literature classes, it's just the thing to do. Rather than scold students for marking in the margins, she encourages them to share their views, react to what they've read, or even draw all over the pages.

"This promotes close analytical reading," says Mrs. Mielke, who teaches honors and college prep English classes at Perry High School in Lake County. "It creates deep learning opportunities because students actually have to pause, think about what they are reading, reflect on it, question it, and add comments to what others have written before them."

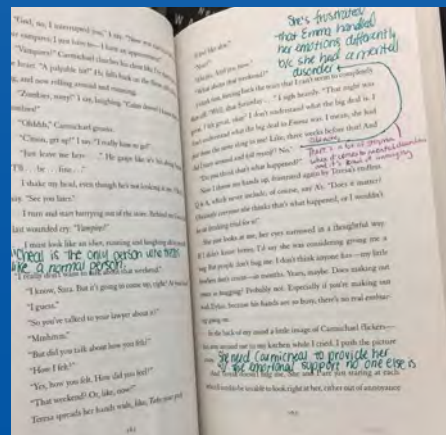
Mrs. Mielke received a Grant-to-Educators from the Jennings Foundation to purchase dozens of young adult books, which she designates "graffiti books." The collection of "high interest" titles is stacked on a cart in her classroom and students are encouraged to pick one up to read during the 15 minutes she allows for personal reading each day. Those who select one of these books also grab a colored pen they will use to jot down thoughts as they read. Mrs. Mielke expects that as several students read the same book, they will build upon and react to previous readers' comments, creating a discussion on the page.

For students who may be intimidated by the assignment, Mrs. Mielke says: "We give them a bookmark with a bunch of ideas as to what they can write—there's really no right or wrong way to do it! Any comment is a 'win' when they are working through these books."

As an English teacher, Mrs. Mielke always encourages students to look for connections between what is happening in their own lives and what they are reading. "It makes reading more relevant to them," she says. "When they are rooting



"When we present this to the students we say, 'We really do want you to write in your book—all over it.'"



for a character, or write, 'I can't believe this happened,' I know they are engaged and invested in what they are reading. And the results will benefit everything else they do in class."

A published author herself, Mrs. Mielke formed a graffiti writing habit while meeting with fellow writers to review and critique each other's work. "We annotate our own books," explains Mrs. Mielke, who has a half dozen middle school/young adult novels in print. "We'll write where we got the idea for a plot or 'behind-the-scenes' type comments. It makes reading a little more social."

Mrs. Mielke does not assess what students write in graffiti books; the process is meant to be very casual without the pressure of being evaluated. Yet, when she pages through a marked up book she learns a lot about how her students think.

"It's a different way to see into a student's brain to see how they think or view something," she says. "It's something teachers don't normally get to see."

To expand the project beyond her classroom, Mrs. Mielke partnered with the district's library media specialist Jodi Rzeszotarski, who has stocked graffiti books in the high school library for any student to borrow. Ms. Rzeszotarski has also passed copies down to the middle school and partnered with Perry's Public Library to encourage members of community to take part. "Any time you can create excitement and engage students around a book it's a win-win," she remarks. "Any time you tell somebody they can write in a book (and who doesn't want to do that?), it's fun. Once you get started it's kind of cool. There's not a right or wrong thing to say in a book!"

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Finding Success in Failure

Great Lakes Science Center/Cleveland Schools

In a hands-on workshop held at the Great Lakes Museum of Science, Environment, and Technology (GLSC), 7th graders from the Cleveland Municipal Schools learn a very important lesson: *It's OK to fail.*

Yet, even that is a hard lesson to learn and comes about as the students work through trial and error to design and build an operable flashlight.

"This is real hands-on deep learning," says Karyn Torigoe, GLSC's Schools Program Manager. "They are making something; they are playing with something; and they are discovering how something works by building it themselves.

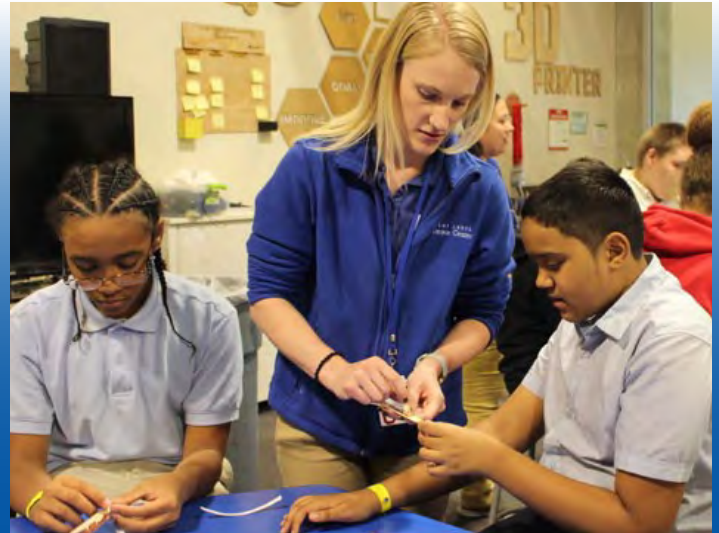
"If it doesn't work," she adds, "we are constantly urging them on, reinforcing the fact that they are learning from their mistakes and figuring out how to do it on their own."

Each year, 2,700 CMSD 7th graders take part in a district-wide program called *Cleveland Creates 7* in partnership with GLSC. The standards-based program is funded in part by a grant from the Jennings Foundation. Through an on-site experience, GLSC educators presents students with challenges associated with engineering and design.

Five Steps of the Engineering Design Process

- **ASK** *Identify the challenge, investigate what others have done, and learn the constraints of their own design*
- **IMAGINE** *Explore possible solutions, brainstorm, choose a prototype*
- **PLAN** *Diagram a design and make a list of materials*
- **CREATE** *Follow the plan, create, and test a solution*
- **IMPROVE** *Refine the initial solution*

Great Lakes Science Center educators use project-based learning to help students learn vital STEM science concepts and develop resilience and critical thinking skills.



They encourage critical thinking, innovation, and creativity. Ultimately they hope to inspire students to use these skills to make decisions and solve real-world problems.

For the past three years, GLSC educators have used the flashlight building task to teach students the five steps of the engineering design process (see box). They provide the materials and guidance, but make it clear the students have to find a solution on their own. Some accept the challenge readily; others struggle, get frustrated, and ask for instructions on how to proceed.

"We make a point of saying, 'We are not telling you how to do this. We are not doing it for you. You are building this on your own,'" remarks Ms. Torigoe. "But we are giving them hints, and within the hints we are giving them the information they need to succeed."

Traci Mickler, a 10-year veteran teacher from Denison School, explains that the process is frustrating for some students because they don't like to fail: "I want them to realize that they just have to keep trying and shouldn't give up," she remarks.

Even while setting out to teach students it's okay not to get something right on the first try, Ms. Torigoe explains another important point: "The only rea-

son it is okay is if they learn not to give up. When they give up, they don't get the answer and they don't get to complete something that's really cool."

Through *Cleveland Creates 7*, GLSC personnel also teach middle school teachers how to incorporate the design process into classroom lessons. Ms. Torigoe organizes at least one district-wide professional development session each year, which focuses on inquiry-based teaching. She also sends pre-visit curriculum materials to schools to help teachers prepare students for the on-site experience.

Ms. Mickler likes the experience because it also teaches students there are many ways to learn.

"Learning is not just about, 'Here's the book; read it; take the test; and here's your grade,'" says Ms. Mickler. "I think this is a great opportunity for students to see that everyone can do something differently—have the same goal but have a different way to get there."

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Shaker's First Class

Shaker Heights City Schools



Shaker's youngest learners take part in a full day preschool program that offers inquiry-based IB lessons combined with standards-based content prescribed by the Ohio Department of Education.

On a recent visit to a preschool classroom at Onaway Elementary School in Shaker Heights the group of four-year-olds was reciting a rhyme. The children were totally engaged in the words and actions that emphasized the sounds associated with each letter of the alphabet. When they reached the letter "j", they stopped for a short lesson on "jacks", "Jack-o-lantern", and "jets"—perfect examples of the sound made by "j".

The tiny learners are inaugural members of Shaker's First Class, a preschool program launched by Shaker Heights School District in the fall of 2016 to serve its youngest scholars. The children have been learning together for the past year-and-a-half in a program that meets for a full day, five days a week. They come from a variety of socioeconomic, racial, and religious backgrounds, reflecting the rich diversity of the community in which they live. Across town, a similar class meets at Mercer Elementary School.

Because the children will spend two years immersed in the Shaker school system as three- and four-years-old, educators believe they will be very well-prepared for what comes in kindergarten.

The vision for Shaker's First Class began to take shape in fall, 2014. The "idea" was central to the district's improvement plan and was supported by the superintendent and school board. Educators in the district convened a task force at that time to discuss the preschool needs and opportunities within the community. Among the group were teachers, administrators, parents, a pediatrician, psychologists, librarians, preschool teachers, and other representatives from organizations that serve families in Shaker.

"As a district we looked at our kindergarten population and asked: 'Are they ready to learn when they come to kindergarten?' And surprisingly, they were not as ready to learn as we thought," says Terri Breeden, assistant superintendent of the Shaker Heights City Schools.

While a variety of private preschool options were available in the area, many parents were not aware of the importance of an early childhood education and did not enroll their children in a program.

"We decided we needed to have our own preschool program that would be IB-infused and *very Shaker*," Dr. Breeden adds. The intent, she explains, was to offer *all* children in the district (30 percent of whom are economically disadvantaged) an opportunity to attend a high-quality, rigorous preschool experience that currently was unaffordable to some. While those with the means would pay tuition, others would receive need-based scholarships funded by private donors and foundations.

After months of discussion, the district developed Shaker's First Class: two, full-day Pre-K classes that serve a total of 32 children. Students begin the program at age three and commit to attending for two years. Classes are based at Mercer and Onaway elementary schools (16 students at each building), two of the five elementary schools in the district, but serve families district-wide. In keeping with the district's commitment to the inquiry-based International Baccalaureate educational philosophy, the classes incorporate the IB Primary Years Programme.

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The first cohort of students began the program as three-year-olds in August, 2016. The second cohort is forming now and will start school next fall.

Challenges to Overcome

Getting Shaker's First Class off the ground was challenging. It was expensive to plan, develop, hire and train a teaching staff, and purchase appropriate sized tables, chairs and other preschool materials. A commitment from the district, the community, and private funders, including a grant from the Jennings Foundation, made it possible. Onaway and Mercer schools were chosen as program sites because both had adequate space needed to set up the new classrooms.

Recruitment was also not easy. Brochures, word-of-mouth, information nights, play dates, even yard signs advertised the new preschool option just months before the classes were to begin. Because the program did not yet exist, there was no opportunity for parents to observe a class in session. This would make it more difficult to sell, especially to those whom the district would ask to pay tuition. Parents would also have to provide transportation and would be required to attend family field trips and experiences in the community.

"One of the features the community was most excited about was that this was going to be a preschool that was part of the Shaker schools," says Mercer's Prin-

cipal J. Lindsay Florence, explaining that today the youngsters are just as much a part of school-wide programs and activities as those in kindergarten and up. "And being part of the Shaker schools, families were familiar with the quality of education they were going to receive."

Educators behind the venture believe the teachers hired for each class have been critical to the program's success. They have learned to differentiate instruction to meet the many needs of the diverse student population. They work hard to create lessons based on the IB standards and practices but also align with the Ohio Department of Education curriculum. This effort has led to Onaway's five star rating from ODE. (Mercer is currently undergoing a similar evaluation process.)

"Hands down, the curriculum and learning has been incredible for our students," says Mr. Florence. "The combination of the six IB learning units, additional IB character themes, and state of Ohio learning standards is absolutely fabulous.

"Yes, they are coming to preschool," he adds, "but in addition to that they are getting physical education, music, art, library, science—everything [older] students would get in a typical school day. It's fantastic."

"And there are people in the building

who are willing to mentor, nurture, and support what the teachers are doing," adds Sue Starrett, the district's director of development. "I believe that is so huge to the program's success."

Building A Community

Halfway through its second year, the principals at both schools have learned valuable lessons that will help the experience run more smoothly when the second cohort arrives next fall. Some are logistical and involve allowing more time for parents to drop off and pick up children so they can talk with teachers about the school day. They will also hire more aides because preschoolers simply need more help with little things like opening milk cartons and zipping jackets.

Eric Forman, principal of Onaway, believes the relationships formed among the current preschool families have added an important component to the experience. "These families have lived life together for the past year and a half and made connections that otherwise would not have happened," he says, referring to how the program brings together people of diverse backgrounds. "I look forward to seeing these relationships continue as the students get older."

In contemplating the program's greatest assets, he adds, "Families get different things out of this program. Some are getting a high quality program they otherwise couldn't afford. Those who could afford another program are entering our schools earlier and getting connected and committed to Shaker schools. They are building relationships with other families and their kids are interacting with more diversity than they would have in a private program. The fact that the program can provide wins in a number of areas, I think might be unique to our community."

"It is a very safe, warm, child friendly environment with the highest of quality," sums up Dr. Breeden. "It's great, and it's fun to be a part of it."

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photo credit: Angelo Merendino

After-School Entrepreneurs

Open Doors Academy/Cleveland-Area Schools

At 4:00 PM on a Tuesday afternoon, the halls of E Prep Cliffs, a non-profit, public charter school in Cleveland, are bustling with activity. Groups of entrepreneurs are busily writing business plans, discussing product names, creating pitches to present to a loan board, and designing advertising posters—all for businesses they will launch within the next two weeks.

These students are participating in an entrepreneurship experience, one component of an after school enrichment program designed for at-risk youth in Cleveland and its inner ring suburbs. It challenges students to create a business in just eight weeks. During this time, they work in small groups to develop products; build a team within their company; set goals; formulate budgets; and create strategies to market and sell homemade goods.

“Entrepreneurship does such a great job of introducing kids to 21st century learning skills, such as teamwork, leadership, and accountability,” explains Kay Spatafore. “This is experiential, hands-on learning. And it’s all very real, because their businesses are very real.”

Ms. Spatafore is the Director of Programming at Open Doors Academy, the organization coordinating this and other enrichment activities at 13 Cleveland-area sites.

To better understand the entrepreneurship project, it’s important to understand how Open Doors Academy operates: “We are an out of school program that meets every day after school for three hours,” Ms. Spatafore explains. “As opposed to other programs, we are more like an extended school day. We are not a drop-in program; we require 90 per-



The entrepreneurship program also stresses civic-mindedness, encouraging students to donate portions of their business profits to charity.

cent attendance. We do offer some time for homework, but that’s not what we are about. We have our own curriculum, and it deals with four areas of focus: arts and culture; health and wellness; global social; and character development.”

The program operates in 13 partnering middle schools and high schools in Cleveland, Cleveland Heights-University Heights, and Euclid.

Real Business Experience

With a grant from the Jennings Foundation, Open Doors Academy is presenting lessons in entrepreneurship and financial literacy to approximately 500 5th-8th grade students enrolled in the Academy this year. At least two Open Doors staff members present the lessons at each site.

The entrepreneurship curriculum follows the “Lemonade Day” model (a national program that teaches youth how to start, own, and operate their own

lemonade stands). Yet these students come up with their own ideas for homemade products, which they sell at one-day events.

During lesson one, students are divided into small business teams. After agreeing on what they want to produce, teams pitch their ideas in a “Shark Tank” style presentation to a bona fide Loan Board (a group of community members and business owners). They borrow money (about \$50 which they must repay with proceeds from their sales); write a business plan; and develop a marketing program to sell their homemade goods. Most of the products involve snacks and treats, including cupcakes, cookies, candy, and smoothies. They will sell their goods at various locations, such as school sporting events or local libraries.

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Students from E Prep Cliffs in Cleveland, who are enrolled in the after school Open Doors Academy, design posters to advertise products they will create and put up for sale.

This year, one group plans to sell bags of chocolate and caramel coated popcorn along with cups of hot cocoa. Customers will be able to select from a variety of toppings for their drinks, including whipped cream, marshmallows, cherries, and nuts. Group members were still calculating what they will charge for small, medium, and large bags of popcorn, and whether to use water or milk to make their hot drinks, just two weeks before they were to go on sale at the Cleveland Public Library.

The team hopes to make a reasonable profit and plans to donate 15 percent to cancer research. They will divide the rest among themselves.

Meeting Customer Needs

This is the third year Open Doors has presented the entrepreneurship curriculum during its after school program, and some students drew upon lessons learned last year to make better products this year.

"It was a good experience to try to make our own money by creating something we liked, because this is something you usually don't get to do," remarks

one entrepreneur, who is expanding on a "hot treats" product her team created last year based on customer feedback. The team is also designing more attractive packaging. "This is fun," she adds, "it gets you prepared for the real world."

"The process never gets old," explains Ms. Spatafore. "Every time there is a new group, there is a different mix, different products, different ideas, different temperaments and relationships within the group. It's fun to listen to them talk about their ideas and watch them go through the process."

"The experience of entrepreneurship also helps those kids who may not be academically oriented," she adds, pointing out a less obvious program benefit. "It helps them gain skills that can improve their academics. And it may be the place where a quiet or shy kid blossoms."

With just a couple weeks to go before their businesses launch, the students are interested in sharing their impressions of the experience. Most are happy to be working with friends and others recognize the lifelong lessons they are learning.

"I love this program," says one student whose team is still refining its popcorn/hot cocoa product line.

"I love the interaction. I can combine an intellectual activity with creativity and being with my friends. When I finish my project, I can become an entrepreneur in real life, because I already am one. I don't have to worry about anyone telling me I can't."

Learning Fiscal Responsibility

Lessons in financial literacy will be presented to these same students shortly after they complete their entrepreneurship experience. They will address several topics: How personal finance relates to your career; introduction to taxes; setting financial goals; smart shopping; and the importance of saving. The intent is to pull back from looking at finance through the big picture lens of running a business to a close-up examination of fiscal responsibility as an individual.

"Everybody needs to know how to make and spend money," emphasizes Ms. Spatafore, "It's such a big part of life."

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news & notes

Jennings Office Relocation

The Martha Holden Jennings Foundation's Distribution Committee office has relocated five floors below its former location in Cleveland's Halle Building to Suite 240. The space holds the offices of Board Chair Ann Juster; Executive Director Daniel Keenan, Grants Manager Kathy Kooyman; and Administrative Assistant Billie Pandy.

New to the Foundation Family

Kyle Rose has joined the Jennings Foundation family as the newest member to the Distribution Committee. Mr. Rose serves as Vice President, Corporate Communications for PolyOne Corporation, a provider of specialty polymer solutions, in Avon Lake, Ohio. In this position he is responsible for internal and external company communications, government relations, and charitable giving for the global organization. Prior to this post, he served Navistar, Inc. in several roles involving corporate communications both in Springfield, Ohio, and Chicago, Illinois.

Mr. Rose is a graduate of The Ohio State University, Fisher College of Business, where he earned a Master of Business Administration. He also holds a Bachelor of Science Degree in journalism from Ohio University, E.W. Scripps School of Journalism. He is involved in several community organizations, including the Greater Cleveland Partnership Government Affairs Council and has received awards for his professional expertise.

Members of the Distribution Committee look forward to working with Mr. Rose and welcome the business insight he will bring to their discussions of various grant proposals.



Executive Director Daniel Keenan settles into the new Jennings office in the Halle Building.

Retirement Wishes

At the close of 2017, the Jennings Foundation recognized two family members who are beginning new life chapters through retirement. **Dr. Yvonne Allen** who served on the Foundation's Distribution Committee since 2004, plans to move to Virginia, outside of Washington, D.C., to spend time closer to her family.

In recognizing Dr. Allen at a recent event, Executive Director Daniel Keenan remarked: "Yvonne, you began your tenure on the Distribution Committee in June of 2004. Your participation and thoughtful contributions over the last 13 and a half years have truly made a difference. I wish you all the best on the next chapter and hope you will always consider yourself a member of the Jennings 'family'."

Also headed for retirement is **Dr. Linda Nusbaum**, who served the Foundation for the past five years as an Evaluator. Dr. Keenan expressed appreciation for her work, noting that it has always been of the highest caliber: "You have provided excellent support for grantees and your evaluations have painted a detailed and thoughtful picture for those seeking to gain a deeper understanding of our work and impact. I extend my sincerest appreciation and wish you all the best in the future."

"It has been professionally rewarding to observe the variety of programs that are being funded by the Foundation and to have been part of a skilled and dedicated team of professionals," Dr. Nusbaum remarked while reflecting on her experiences during the past five years. "The evaluator role provides a rare opportunity to engage with people who care deeply about educating students and are willing to go the extra mile to assure that young people's lives are better. Although I will miss the Jennings family and the Foundation's grantees, I am confident that the Foundation is in good hands and will continue in the tradition of commitment to the education community."