The Ohio Appalachian Collaborative:

Paving a New Path for Rural Education

They came seeking land, freedom, and increased opportunity. Because the coastal areas were over-populated, the Appalachian people started moving farther west and settled in the Appalachian Mountains. The term "Appalachian" came from the word Appalachee, inherited from the Appalachee Indians, who inhabited the region for well over 1,000 years prior to the arrival of the Europeans from across the ocean. Appalachia encompasses a portion of the eastern United States, defined by the Appalachian Mountains and encompassing the states of Ohio, Kentucky, West Virginia, Virginia, North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia, Alabama, Mississippi, and Tennessee. The region stretches from the southeastern tip of Canada, and ends in central Alabama, covering almost 1,500 miles.

The Appalachian region embodies a unique culture—a culture rooted in community, family, and embracing the Appalachian roots. While many Appalachian communities experience challenges with economic conditions, education, and family livelihood, the Appalachian spirit of perseverance and determination remains strong.

This is the story of the **Ohio Appalachian Collaborative (OAC)**, a collaborative formed out of this determination to transform rural education and ensure all students graduate ready to succeed in college and careers; ready to succeed in creating a livelihood for themselves that is better than the prior generation; and ready to succeed in contributing to the future prosperity of the region. **The OAC has truly paved a new path for rural education, creating a road that has led to increased student success in rural Ohio.**
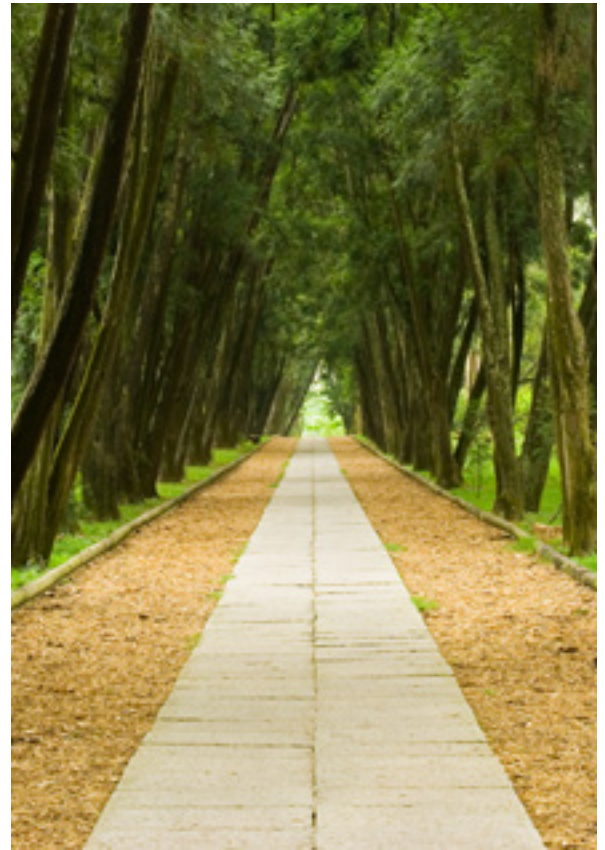
Cultural Gems
The Ohio Appalachian culture is proud and rich, with a history of American leaders, strong work ethic, and emphasis on family and friendship. Look for "cultural gems" from OAC districts and communities woven throughout our story.

MOTIVATION—TRANSFORMING RURAL EDUCATION FOR STUDENT SUCCESS

Our Focus

Educators are motivated by their unwavering commitment to helping prepare all students for success in college, careers, and in life. For educators in the OAC, this motivation is further driven by the unique regional culture and the challenges faced by many rural districts to provide students with opportunities. **There is a strong motivation to expand rural education transformation and enhance student success.**

The Need: Enhancing Education in Appalachia
Overcoming Challenges: Building Trust and Engaging the Community

While all schools want to prepare students for future success and ensure they graduate prepared for college and careers, there are unique challenges that rural schools face that differ from schools in more suburban and urban areas. These challenges include:

1. **Educational attainmen**t—According to the Appalachian Regional Commission (2010), Ohio's Appalachian region has historically lower college-completion rates than of the rest of the nation.

2. **Access to rigorous curriculum**—Due to district size and lack of access to higher education institutions, access to AP and dual enrollment coursework is limited in the Appalachian region.

3. **College-going and readiness rates**—According to the Ohio Board of Regents (2003-2007), college remediation rates for Ohio's Appalachian region are 46 percent, with state averages of 39 percent.

4. **Employment implications**—Based on labor market information from the Ohio Department of Job and Family Services (Nov. 2013), unemployment rates in 28 out of Ohio's 32 Appalachian counties exceeded Ohio's average unemployment rate of 7.1 percent (not seasonally adjusted), and seven of these counties had unemployment rates more than 10 percent.

5. **The brain drain**—Schools often inadvertently feed the brain drain of rural areas, as many talented rural students leave their respective Appalachian communities in search of better opportunities, not realizing the opportunities available in their own area.

6. **Focus on 9-14 education**—In the 21st century, the framework for a high school education has become a 9-14 framework and not simply a 9-12 framework, with a specific eye to helping students transition into their postsecondary lives. This has led to schools shifting the focus from "college for all" to "careers for all."

7. **College education costs and payoff**—In today's reality of climbing college tuition costs, parents and students must weigh the costs of college versus the potential for a lifetime earning that comes with attending college.

These realities create unique challenges for school districts in Ohio's Appalachian region to overcome. There are factors of generational poverty, unemployment, and lack of economic development in the area. However, 21 districts in the OAC have joined together to change this reality and help ensure all students graduate from high school prepared for college and careers. By coming together with a common motivation and focus, the OAC has a powerful story to tell about the approach to building a collaborative, the major strategies used to grow student achievement, and the major outcomes attained over the course of the initial project.

"There are a lot of smart kids in the Appalachian region of Ohio. The kids are wholesome and capable. But they don't always have the tools, they don't always have the options, and sometimes other obstacles get in the way."
                    —Jill Grubb, Superintendent, Batavia Local Schools

Establishing the OAC

The mission of the OAC is to strengthen and leverage educator effectiveness to accelerate college and career readiness (CCR) for every student and ensure they have access to future opportunities to enhance their quality of life. Through the OAC, 21 districts, with Battelle for Kids as a not-for-profit partner, have worked together to implement innovative school improvement strategies and sound educational best practices to transform rural education across Ohio, and ultimately the nation.

21 PIONEERING RURAL SCHOOL DISTRICTS

1. Batavia Local
2. Belpre City
3. Bloom Vernon Local
4. Coshocton City
5. Crooksville EVSD
6. East Muskingum Local
7. Franklin Local
8. Georgetown EVSD
9. Marietta City
10. Maysville Local
11. Mid-East Career & Technology Centers
12. Morgan Local
13. New Boston Local
14. Noble Local
15. Northern Local
16. River View Local
17. Rolling Hills Local
18. Southern Local
19. Warren Local
20. West Muskingum Local
21. Wolf Creek Local

Working together, OAC districts have been able to receive generous funding to support rural education. The OAC received initial funding from the Ohio Department of Education Race to the Top grant. Other contributing organizations include the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, The American Electric Power Foundation, The AT&T Foundation, and EnerVest, LTD.
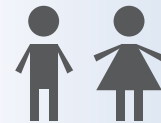
THE OAC REPRESENTS:

21 DISTRICTS **74 SCHOOLS** **2,066 TEACHERS** **MORE THAN 34,000 STUDENTS**

A key value in establishing the OAC was creating a replicable, expandable model for rural education collaboration. Since the OAC was established, affiliated districts in initiatives including Ohio TIF and the Personalized Learning Network have participated with core OAC districts in common professional development.

What's in a Name?

Many OAC districts have mascots that reflect tradition, local culture, and historical tributes to the area. Among the unique mascot names in the OAC are the Shenandoah Zeps, the South Webster High School Jeeps, the Crooksville Ceramics, the Philo Electrics, and the Sheridan Generals.

Our Rural Education Transformation Approach

The work of the OAC was designed around the **Rural Education Transformation Approach**, which focuses on six major areas of change to enhance educator effectiveness and accelerate college and career readiness for all students. Through this approach, OAC districts focus on the following work:

1. Enhancing Teacher Quality
2. Enhancing Leadership Quality
3. Engaging the Community
4. Redesigning Learning Opportunities
5. Recognizing Excellence
6. Using Data to Inform Practice
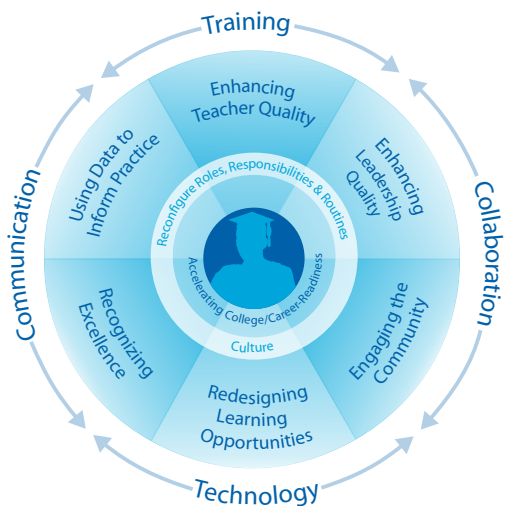
Rural Education Transformation Approach
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The Value We Have Created Together

While the *motivation* for establishing the OAC was grounded in joining together to enhance opportunities for students in Appalachia, the *values* that have emerged from the OAC are powerful. Below are five values the OAC provides its districts, as told by OAC educators:

- **Staying ahead of the curve:** Being in the OAC helps districts know what's coming in the educational landscape, and how to prepare.
- **Learning and sharing:** The OAC fosters a collaborative network for OAC educators to learn from each other to enhance rural education.
- **Joining forces to generate resources:** Districts in the OAC have joined together to secure, share, and save resources for rural education.
- **Influencing:** The OAC creates an influential platform for districts to strengthen support for the work.
- **Building a community:** Educators in the OAC have opportunities to collaborate, communicate, and work together to solve common challenges.

Staying Ahead of the Curve	Learning & Sharing	Joining Forces to Generate Resources	Influencing	Building a Community

> *Because we are part of the OAC, we have access to educators outside our district. We have connections to people who are like us, and we can learn from what they are doing and apply it in our district.*
> —Christi Fauver, Collaborative Learning Practitioner, Coshocton City Schools

COLLABORATION—A 'FORCE MULTIPLIER' IN RURAL EDUCATION REFORM

" If we're going to really improve as a profession, we need collaboration. "
—Dave Hire, Superintendent, Coshocton City Schools.

The 21 school districts in the OAC have embraced the culture of collaboration that is rich in the Appalachian region to share ideas, leverage strengths, and work together toward a shared vision.

WHAT MAKES A "COLLABORATIVE" A COLLABORATIVE?

The collaborative work of the OAC is supported by research by Kania and Kramer (2011), and Hanleybrown, Kania, and Kramer (2012). This research outlines five conditions for collective success, which are demonstrated in the OAC and described in further detail below:

1. **Common Agenda:** Collaboratives must have a common agenda in order to remain focused and productive. In the OAC, this is embodied by the OAC Rural Education Transformation Approach and focusing on four Pillars of Strength: value-added data, formative instructional practices, college and career readiness, and change leadership.

2. **Shared Measurement Systems:** This common agenda should be measured in common systems. The OAC's performance metrics goals are focused on college and career readiness metrics, highly effective teacher metrics, and metrics around increasing student growth and student achievement.

3. **Mutually Reinforcing Activities:** Running a solid calendar of events and expected meeting times are activities that drive ongoing collaboration. The OAC has developed a System of Support that regularly brings together teachers, principals, superintendents, and district leaders to work toward shared goals.

4. **Continuous Communication:** Collaboratives must have a seamless method of communication and operation. In the OAC, this is driven by the System of Support and the teams within districts who are charged with guiding and leading change.

5. **Backbone Support Organization:** It is helpful for collaboratives to have a third-party support to help guide the organization—one that can make decisions, guide meetings, and gather constituents around the cause. In the OAC, this third party is Battelle for Kids, a not-for-profit organization that focuses on school improvement.

Building Capacity: Our System of Support

OAC relies on highly effective teams of teachers and principals to work together on an inter- and intra-district collaborative structure. This structure is known as the System of Support.

Launched in 2011-2012, the OAC System of Support has built purposeful communities of educators, focused on **Collaborative Learning Practitioners (CLPs), District Transformation Teams,** and **Network Teams** to help transform rural educational cultures to best maximize student achievement.

The System of Support was designed to build district capacity around four Pillars of Strength: **value-added data, formative instructional practices, college and career readiness, and change leadership.**

Each of these district-based structures is supported by a Collaborative Learning Leader (CLL) at Battelle for Kids who works to share knowledge and deepen best practices in school reform.

Internal District Transformation Team

GROWING SUCCESS

District-based Collaborative Learning Practitioners (CLPs)

District Collaborative Learning Networks
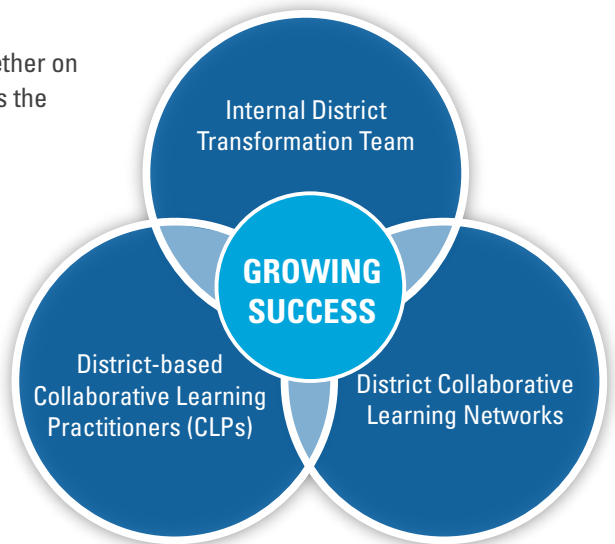
The OAC System of Support
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A Culture of Collaboration

Built into the OAC model is the assumption that distributed leadership in school districts is a process, and that shared leadership builds a strong foundation for school improvement. Simply put, there is a leadership role and responsibility for everyone in the school district, not simply principals and superintendents.

The System of Support was purposefully developed to encourage widespread involvement of district leaders and teachers in the work of the OAC.

- Nearly 200 district administrators and teachers are engaged in leading district reform efforts through **Internal District Transformation Teams.**

- More than 300 administrators and teachers have received deep-dive professional learning through **District-Based Network Teams**. These teams are drivers in their district to embed positive practices around the four **OAC Pillars of Strength.**

In addition to these teams, perhaps the most critical component of the System of Support has been the **CLP**. Each OAC district has one or two CLPs, or "coaches" to help lead change and facilitate district improvement. These district-nominated coaches are responsible for connecting network teams to the district at-large in order to facilitate school improvement.

The CLP position is unique, because this coach can be a teacher, a curriculum director, or a principal with a strong instructional background and the ability to connect with teams in their respective districts. Most importantly, the CLP serves as an excellent example of distributed leadership to help facilitate school improvement.

Getting the System of Support in Place
In 2011, Battelle for Kids staff traveled around the region meeting with OAC superintendents to explain the components of the System of Support. Conversations in these meetings focused on the importance of the District Transformation Team, the selection of principals and teachers to make up the Network Teams, and the roles and responsibilities of a carefully-nominated district-based CLP coach. Superintendents then completed a nomination form for the CLP, with the expectation that the CLP would serve in that role for at least two years.

CLPs receive intensive training to build capacity to initiate, plan, and support collaborative learning in professional practice in each of their respective districts. Specifically, CLPs focus on:

Learning & Sharing

LEARNING & SHARING
CLPs receive intensive training around value-added data, formative instructional practices, college and career readiness and change leadership. From this training, CLPs initiate, plan, and support collaborative learning around these pillars in their districts.

Building a Community

BUILDING A COMMUNITY
CLPs are focused on collaboration both within their districts and with other CLPS and educators from around the OAC.

In their own districts, CLPs work with many people to make connections and build relationships among peers. CLPs are members of many different district teams and must make connections between these teams to help their district work effectively.

CLPs collaborate with CLPs from other districts in the OAC through regular peer-to-peer sharing, peer observations, and CLP "swaps" to assist in professional development. CLPs also have regular face-to-face meetings and use online collaboration tools and social media to collaborate in-person and virtually.

It's really quite a privilege to be a CLP, because we have the opportunity to meet regularly with 21 other top-notch educators. Every time we get together we're learning from one another, hearing different perspectives, and capitalizing on each other's strengths.

—Amanda Pierce, CLP, Morgan Local

INNOVATION—EXTENDING THE REACH OF HIGHLY EFFECTIVE PRACTICES, EDUCATORS, AND PROFESSIONAL LEARNING SYSTEMS

The research and data are clear: effective teaching matters. High quality educators are one of the most important resources for improving outcomes for students.

Being part of the OAC has had a tremendous impact on the way districts support and develop their educators.

BEFORE THE OAC

Professional development in OAC districts was often focused on a specific initiative, and led by an outside expert coming in for a one-day session. And while there was great excitement and motivation after the session, by the end of the year the enthusiasm had dwindled, and there was no way to monitor the impact of the learning on classroom practices.

AFTER BEING PART OF THE OAC

Districts have enjoyed a more focused and comprehensive approach to professional development. For the first time, many OAC districts have professional development opportunities available for all teachers in grades K-12, and professional development has become much more teacher-led. The focus brought by the OAC has also helped districts be ahead of the curve with federal and state policy changes.

> " The most important thing we can do is put good teachers in front of kids. That's how we're going to change education, is by changing teaching practices...and the only way to change teaching practices is to have good professional development. "
>
> —Steve Brooks, Principal, John Glenn High School

Professional Development: By Teachers, for Teachers

Professional development in the OAC is built around the **OAC System of Support**, which is designed to encourage collaboration among district staff and engage them in high-quality professional development to enhance instructional practice and improve student growth and achievement.

What makes the System of Support approach to professional development unique is its focus on peer-to-peer sharing, integrated and distributed leadership, and building trust and relationships among staff from all levels of the district. **Essentially, the System of Support provides OAC districts with professional development by teachers, for teachers.**

> " With CLPs and Network teams becoming leaders, they are bringing that professional development back to our teachers. And our teachers love to learn from each other. "
>
> —Barb Funk, Mid-East Career Center

Focusing Professional Development: Capacity, Connectivity, and Influence

The OAC's System of Support is built around beliefs in shared, integrated leadership, and the OAC has focused professional development on CLPs, Network Teams, and District Transformation Teams to enhance the values of the OAC.

Through working with district-based individuals and teams, three components have been vital in the OAC's pursuit of excellence through building a strong rural collaborative: **Capacity, Connectivity,** and **Influence.**

Staying Ahead of the Curve

Learning & Sharing

CAPACITY

Building capacity helps reinforce the values of OAC educators to stay ahead of the curve and learn and share around the four Pillars of Strength:

1. **Student growth measures and value-added data:** OAC Value-Added Network Teams received training on how to plan district-wide implementation for teachers and principals for using data to improve instructional practice.

2. **Formative instructional practices (FIP):** FIP Network Teams worked with District Transformation Teams to plan district-wide implementation of using FIP principles of clear learning targets, evidence of learning, student ownership, and effective feedback to improve data-driven instruction.

3. **College and career readiness (CCR):** CCR Network Teams developed district-wide strategic plans for college and career readiness around three pillars: Academic Preparation, Accessibility, and Aspiration.

4. **Change leadership:** OAC superintendents, principals, and leadership teams have worked together to develop their effectiveness in managing change and empowering distributed leadership in their districts and schools.

Learning & Sharing

Joining Forces to Generate Resources

CONNECTIVITY

In addition to building capacity through strong, ongoing professional learning, the strength of the collaborative also rests in districts building intra- and inter-district connectivity, which reinforces the OAC values of learning and sharing and building a community.

Intra-district connectivity refers to the connections educators make in their home districts and communities. Such connectivity helps embed and spread the capacity built from CLPs and Network Team learning sessions.

Inter-district connectivity refers to the extent to which districts have connected with one another.

It was important at the beginning of the OAC to bring educators together in face-to-face meetings to build relationships and establish trust among transformation team members, network team members, CLPs, district leaders, and educators. Once the foundation was established, leaders and educators from across the OAC have continued the collaboration that takes place at face-to-face meetings using platforms including a custom collaboration space, blogging, and social media.

Additionally, OAC districts have planned "CLP Swaps" to share the knowledge of all CLPs across districts. Districts that take full advantage of the OAC utilize such inter-district collaboration on a regular basis. This is especially important in rural districts, as it utilizes expertise and resource knowledge in a more efficient and effective manner.

INFLUENCE

Influencing is the third vital component of the OAC's focused professional development model. The idea of influence is particularly beneficial to rural districts who normally are too small to influence legislation, policy, or practice in many instances. However, when 21 rural districts collaborate, their voices on the local, state, and national levels become increasingly powerful.

Joining Forces to Generate Resources

Influencing

Building a Community

Through influencing, districts enhance the OAC's values of joining forces to generate resources and strengthening support for the work at the local, state, and national levels.

- On the **local** level, districts are better able to influence internal staff and community leaders in the implementation of best practices and district-wide initiatives. The weight of 21 districts helps build support for the work and encourages buy-in from groups and individuals.

- On the **state** level, rural districts become a greater player in influencing policy and legislation. Many OAC districts have been asked to testify on proposed legislation and discuss the impact of such policies on rural districts in Ohio.

- On the **national** level, the OAC has attracted national attention from the U.S. Department of Education and other national education leaders. The OAC is currently influencing other state collaboratives and serves as a model for rural collaboration across the nation.

Lessons Learned: Ten Key Strategic Steps on the Path to Rural Transformation

OAC CLPs have worked to highlight a variety of best practices that have contributed to the transformation in their districts, educationally and culturally. These strategies and trends have continued to push OAC educators towards meeting the goals of excellence and enhancing classroom practices.

Listed below are 10 strategic practices for rural transformation, as told by OAC CLPs, leaders, and educators.

1. Analyzing Student Growth and Achievement Data

OAC districts have changed the ways in which they view and analyze data. Districts have assembled data teams and more systemic ways to view both student growth and student achievement data. OAC teachers view teacher-level value-added data, which demonstrates how much their low, middle, and high achieving students are growing. Further, districts are able to see student projection data to help best intervene with students who are struggling and create better building-wide intervention systems.

> *Our teachers are using data in their teacher-based teams to identify strengths and areas of need.*
>
> —*Christy Dever, CLP, New Boston Local*

2. Creating a Systematic Approach to Learning Communities

One of the great gains in the OAC has revolved around districts changing their culture and approach to professional growth and learning. Teacher-Based Teams (TBT), Building-Level Teams (BLT), and District-Level Teams (DLT) using a Professional Learning Communities (PLC) approach are now commonplace in the OAC as a method of achieving a true systematic approach to professional learning.

> *Prior to our experience in Race to the Top, our building was a friendly place to work, but we were rarely working outside of the close proximity of our room if at all with colleagues. Through the establishment and embedding Professional Learning Communities, vertical meetings, shared leadership, and peer observations, our building has become much more of a community or family. We see the learning of our students as a common goal and a desire we all share in all subjects, not just our own.*
>
> —*Molly Kaplet, CLP, Rolling Hills Local*

3. Aligning Curriculum to Common Core and Ohio's New Learning Standards

OAC districts have begun comprehensive alignment to the new Common Core State Standards and Ohio's New Learning Standards. Much of the teacher-led professional development time and teacher-based team time has been focused around alignment, building curriculum maps, common assessments, and performance assessments that are rigorous and relevant to students.

> *As a member of the OAC we have been part of cutting edge initiatives related to the Common Core, Ohio's New Learning Standards, and the Next Generation Assessments. This exposure has focused our teachers' academic instruction, which is leading to higher levels of learning for all students. What an exciting time in education!*
>
> —*Anne Troendly, CLP, East Muskingum Local*

4. Embedding Formative Instructional Practices through Peer Coaching

OAC districts continue to work on embedding formative instructional practices (FIP) into their classrooms across the district. To do so, teachers are leading district-wide professional development on FIP, and districts are using peer coaching and observation models to embed FIP in classroom practices.

> *Watching our colleagues in action has really opened our eyes. Every teacher needs to observe another teacher in action.*
> —*Faith Ecker, CLP, Georgetown Exempted Village*

5. Building a Learning Community and Collaborative Teams

OAC districts have instituted daily collaboration time for teachers to encourage peer-to-peer sharing and distributed leadership. OAC districts have utilized this time to align to the Common Core, share formative instructional practices, and create common assessments that are more vertically aligned.

Our daily professional development has allowed teachers to do many things. I have been able to collaborate with one of our ELA teachers to do a cross-curricular project, and it has allowed me to help with the many initiatives that our district is involved with.

—Nellie Leach, CLP, Noble Local

6. Focusing on Teacher-Led Professional Development

The face of professional learning has changed in the OAC. Professional learning is now teacher-led and peer-led, as opposed to bringing in outside presenters to help districts and building staffs move forward. As a result, professional development is much more differentiated in OAC districts, allowing teachers to have the choice of professional development sessions. This approach has been able to gain traction because district staff have a vested interest in the same goals, and work within a similar context in their school district.

By capitalizing on our own 'in the field' experts, we've personalized our professional development in our district. We are creating focused professional development FOR Northern Local and BY Northern Local.

—Angie Gussler, CLP, Northern Local

7. Engaging in Cross-District Collaboration and Community Engagement

The OAC has achieved significant gains due to the simple concept that by working together, districts can accomplish more than they could working on their own. OAC districts have utilized cross-district collaboration in a variety of ways, including facilitating and sharing resources for professional development; joining forces to generate resources and influence education issues at the local, state, and national levels; and leveraging community partners to work together toward a shared vision for transforming education and community prosperity.

Building Bridges to Careers

The community engagement efforts in Marietta through the Building Bridges to Careers program have created an opportunity for conversations to be had that otherwise would not have been had. It is opening the doors, and breaking down walls to allow our community and our schools to focus on college and career readiness for our students.

—Tasha Werry, CLP, Marietta City

8. Focusing

In 2012-2013, each OAC district formed a College and Career Readiness (CCR) Network Team, focused on building a holistic, district and community College and Career Readiness Strategic Plan. These plans encompassed **three pillars of CCR**:

- **Academic Preparation** identifies the academic knowledge and preparation students need for success in college and careers.
- **Accessibility** includes many logistical aspects around college and career readiness which include preparation, financial considerations, and degree/career attainment.
- **Aspiration** addresses how postsecondary education and workforce training opportunities are presented to students to ensure they are making appropriate and informed choices for opportunities beyond high school.

Our Early College and college and career readiness initiatives in Crooksville have meant a new elevation of community, school district, and student expectations. It has given our students an equalizing and enabling opportunity to further their education both during and after high school.

—Alea Barker, CLP, Crooksville Exempted Village

9. Embracing Change Leadership and Extended Distributed Leadership

A key focus of the OAC has been changing the leadership paradigm, moving from a distributed leadership approach to a more collaborative leadership approach. From this work, OAC districts have become much more "flat" in their leadership structures. No longer are instructional initiatives led in a "top-down" manner. Rather, they are led by teams of experts from within the district.

> *Leadership is crucial—it's so reflective. If you have a great leader, people will reflect that.*
>
> *—Dana Kilgore, CLP, Batavia Local*

10. Increasing Student Ownership and Personalized Learning

OAC districts are moving towards a more personalized approach to learning, rather than a "one-size-fits-all" method of teaching. OAC districts are focusing on student ownership of learning, as well as approaches for personalized learning. With this approach students are involved in the decision of content and methods by co-constructing with the teacher, move at their own pace, gain deeper mastery of the material, and better engage with and own their learning.

> *Personalized learning means determining a student's current and future needs, and assisting them with each as they work to reach their adult goals. For me, personalized learning is essential because it recognizes that all children do not learn in the same way or on the same day, and this focus helps us make adjustments to ensure success for all students.*
>
> *—Suellen Coleman, CLP, Wolf Creek Local*

> *Personalized learning is the structuring of learning opportunities to meet the needs and aspiration of each child. When this is accomplished in a classroom, growth in each student as well as optimal achievement will occur. And that is what learning is all about.*
>
> *—Tracey Herron, CLP, River View Local*

INSPIRATION—CONNECTING EDUCATION AND REGIONAL PROSPERITY

Students in OAC districts have big dreams: attending college, joining the military, pursuing careers in fields as diverse as medicine, cosmetology, science, sports medicine, and engineering.

There is a unique challenge in Appalachia to overcome, as many students and their families believe that the only way to pursue high-paying jobs is to go to college and leave the community. However, OAC districts are working together to overcome this "brain drain," and help students see that they can be part of influencing change in the Appalachian region and help bring jobs and economic development to their own local communities.

> **Role of Rivers**
> Rivers have long played an important role in the expansion of America and in American folklore. OAC districts are connected by three major rivers: the Ohio River, the Scioto River, and the Muskingum River. These rivers, which once served as a practical connection for the Ohio Appalachian region, symbolize the current collaborative connection these school districts have made to work toward one major goal—accelerating college and career readiness for all students.

Our CCR Approach: Academic Preparation, Accessibility, Aspiration

OAC districts are developing comprehensive, holistic approaches to college and career readiness focused on three pillars: **Academic Preparation, Accessibility,** and **Aspiration**.

The OAC's focus on building local capacity, enhancing district connections, and influencing to build support for the work is evident in this inclusive "team-based" approach to college and career readiness for all students.
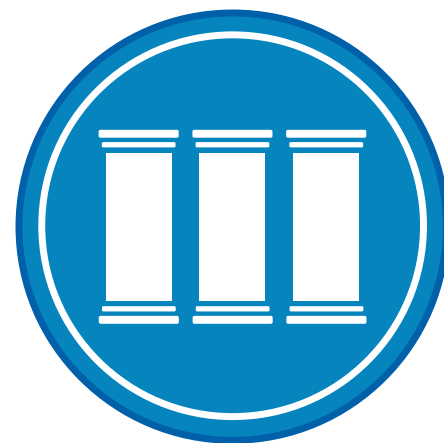
The OAC's CCR work has engaged district-based teams, community partners, and business partners to enhance college and career readiness and provide students access to post-secondary education while still in high school.

District Network Teams and CLPs

After developing the initial OAC College and Career Readiness Strategic Plan, OAC District Network Teams, made up of CLPs, teachers, administrators, superintendents, and community members, participated in three collaborative training sessions throughout the 2012-2013 school year. The goal of these trainings was to develop unique district college and career readiness strategic plans, which are being used to guide their work over the next three to five years.

The CCR Think Tank

The OAC's College and Career Readiness Strategic Plan was developed as a collaborative process in a Think Tank comprised of OAC district representatives, community members, higher education partners, and outside experts. This Think Tank discussed the unique needs and wants of college and career preparation programs in Appalachia Ohio, and used research studies to develop a definition of college and career readiness for the OAC as well as the pillars of Academic Preparation, Aspiration, and Accessibility, which must all be addressed in order to fully prepare students for success in college, careers, and life.

Focus on Dual Enrollment

Dual enrollment and early college courses are important strategies for OAC districts to not only prepare students for college, but decrease the cost of higher education for students and their families by providing students opportunities to earn both high school and college credit while remaining in their home high schools.

Building upon the Rural Ohio College High School (ROCHS), established in 2011 by four OAC districts, an additional 15 OAC districts are now able to increase early college high school opportunities through Ready-Set-College!, thanks to support from the AT&T Foundation. This initiative has helped districts and other higher education partners form strong partnerships, but has also helped districts implement effective dual enrollment programs and increase these opportunities for students.

READY-SET COLLEGE!

Ohio's Colleges and Universities
A major focus of the OAC is college and career readiness and preparing students for success. Ohio has a rich history of colleges and universities. The OAC has worked closely with higher education institutions in the Appalachian region to prepare students for success, including Ohio University, Shawnee State University, Muskingum University, and Marietta College.

OUR OUTCOMES

The ultimate goal of the OAC is college and career readiness for all students. Below is a story about our outcomes, and what we have accomplished related to our five values.

STAYING AHEAD OF THE CURVE: Getting focused on what really matters.
As a result of also participating in the Ohio TIF initiative, 18 of 21 OAC districts implemented the Ohio Teacher Evaluation System a year ahead of the state. Thanks to the focus provided through staying ahead of the curve, more than 80 percent of Ohio TIF district principals surveyed indicated that the teacher evaluation system supports professional growth, and support their district's use of the new state teacher evaluation system.

> *We have a staff that is focused on the goal of constantly improving, and that allows us to meet the needs of the students in the way that 21st century learning requires. And I firmly believe that the OAC has guided us in that direction. —Bob Caldwell, Superintendent, Wolf Creek Local Schools*

LEARNING AND SHARING: Making peer-to-peer professional learning common practice.
1,250 OAC teachers and administrators collectively completed more than 4,770 online learning modules that support the awareness, understanding, and implementation of formative instructional practices.

> *Prior to being in the OAC, very seldom did you hear staff talk about formative instructional practices, their value-added scores, or data-driven instruction. And now it is very common language from staff in the different buildings. We have seen huge growth in these areas. —Amanda Pierce, CLP, Morgan Local Schools*

JOINING FORCES TO GENERATE RESOURCES: Leveling the playing field.
- Between 2011 and 2013, the number of dual enrollment courses offered by OAC districts increased from 41 to 142, an increase of 246 percent.
- OAC districts have been able to generate more than $7 million in Race to the Top dollars for the collaborative, as well as more than $1.5 million in philanthropic funds to support rural education reform.

INFLUENCING: Building trust to gain influence.
The influence of the OAC has resulted in eight higher education institutions partnering directly with districts around offering dual enrollment courses to students and credentialing high school teachers to teach dual enrollment classes right at the high school.

> *The OAC started as a group of small districts coming together so that they would have a voice to be represented. And that's what I see now. The OAC has developed into a voice to be reckoned with, demonstrating that even though we are rural and are separated, we can work together and get things accomplished. —Sharon McDermott, Superintendent, Franklin Local Schools*

BUILDING A COMMUNITY: Increasing meaningful connections within and across classrooms, schools, districts, and valued expertise.
Because they are part of the OAC, more than 2,000 leaders and teachers are learning how to be "connected educators," and have access to a collaborative platform and social media networks that allow them to connect with colleagues faster and cheaper.

> *Being connected also allows educators to feel less isolated in their quest for meeting the needs of diverse learners in a country where education seems to be in a constant state of change. Connected educators are able to push through times of change because they know they are not alone in finding solutions to difficult educational issues.—Krissy Machamer, CLP, Maysville Local Schools*

RESULTS FOR STUDENTS:

55%
2009

60%
2012
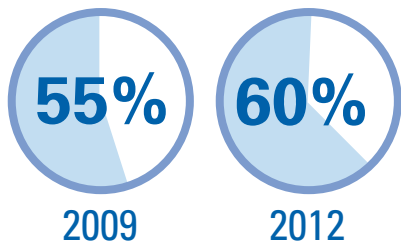
Since 2009, the percentage of OAC students taking the ACT College Entrance Exam increased by five percent.

457
2010

1,308
2013
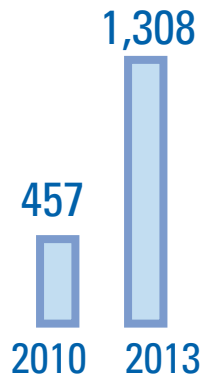
Since 2010, the number of OAC students enrolled in dual enrollment courses increased by 186 percent.

Since 2010, graduation rates for both economically disadvantaged and non-economically disadvantaged students in the OAC have exceeded the statewide graduation rate.

It is stated above that OAC districts are connected geographically by the Ohio, Muskingum, and Scioto Rivers. And just like individual rivers cannot be separated once they have combined, OAC districts have developed a fluid connection based on collaboration and a shared commitment toward excellence in rural education and student outcomes.

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To learn more about the OAC, and watch videos with educators, students, and community members talking about motivation, collaboration, innovation, and inspiration, visit http://portal.battelleforkids.org/OAC.
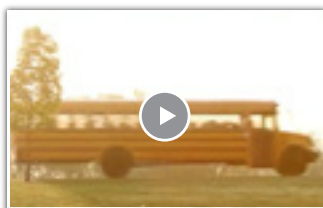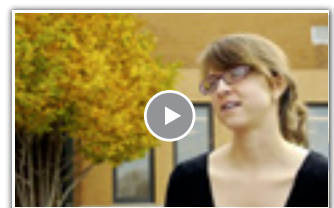
VIDEO: Collaboration: A 'force multiplier' in rural education reform

VIDEO: Motivation: Expanding rural education transformation and student success

VIDEO: Innovation: Extending the reach of highly effective practices, educators, and professional learning

VIDEO: Inspiration: Connecting education and regional prosperity

Battelle for Kids

Bringing clarity to school improvement

Battelle for Kids is a national, not-for-profit organization that provides strategic counsel and innovative solutions for today's complex educational-improvement challenges. Our mission-driven team of education, technology, communications, and business professionals specializes in creating strategies that advance the development of human capital, the implementation of strategic measures, the adoption of powerful practices for educator effectiveness, and communication with all stakeholders in schools. At the heart of this work is an unwavering focus on accelerating student growth.

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