

Focus North News



OUR PURPOSE

Focus Schools provide safe, caring learning environments with self-paced, flexible, four-day weekly class schedules. These unique schools provide opportunities for students from all walks of life to earn their high school diplomas and industry recognized credentials, opening the door to fulfilling careers, college and post-secondary education opportunities.

OUR MOTTO

Believe Bigger,
Aim Higher

SEE YOU IN 2024!

Enjoy the year-end holiday break

Focus North High School will close Wednesday, December 20 and welcome students back on January 3, 2024. As always, Focus is here to support students even when school is not in session. If you need help, reach out to Ms. DeLong by text, chat or email – we’re still connected and willing to help.

SUPPORT THE FOCUS BASKETBALL TEAM!

Focus participates in charter school basketball league

Students from the three Focus schools – East, West and North – are leaving it all on the court as members of the Red and White teams participating in Central Ohio Play, a charter school basketball league.

The teams are comprised of about 17 Focus students who practice together at various locations through the City of Columbus’ Parks and Recreation Department.

“Our students are excited about playing,” said Focus Head Athletic Director Adrian Robinson. “Participation is about more than having fun ... students must be leaders, have good attitudes, maintain strong attendance and be committed to academics. Having the opportunity to participate also serves to build relationships and a sense of brotherhood.”

Mr. Robinson is unable to coach the teams, as he is pledged to attend Westerville South High School’s girls’ basketball games to watch his own daughter play. So, he shares responsibilities with the Red and White Team coaches, West’s Mr. Clarence Smith and East’s Mr. Anthony Nolen.

The Focus Cheer Team, coached by East’s Miss Yvonne Mundell, attends the games, supporting both the Red and White Teams.

There are no fees associated with participation and Focus provides both players and cheer leaders with uniforms.

In addition to Focus’ flag football and basketball programs, Mr. Robinson hopes to offer students the opportunity to participate in co-ed soccer in the Spring.



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FOCUS NORTH HIGH SCHOOL

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Columbus, Ohio
43229
614-310-0430

web:
www.focuslearn.org

Facebook &
Instagram:
focusnortheast

FOCUS NORTH NEWS TEAM

FACILITATOR:

Marlaine
Browning,
ELA teacher

22+ EDUCATION PROGRAM

In addition to educating traditional-age students up to 22 years old, Focus North offers an adult education programs for students 22+ years.

BASKETBALL — continued

Remainder of the Focus 2023-24 basketball schedule

RED TEAM

Vs. CCHS – Mon., **Dec. 11, 6:15 p.m.** at New Covenant Believers Church
Vs. FHS – Thurs., **Dec. 14, 8 p.m.** at Mount Hermon MBC
Vs. PROBE-HS – Mon., **Dec. 18, 7:20 p.m.** at New Covenant Believers Church
Vs. CCK-HS – Fri., **Jan. 5, 6:15 p.m.** at Mount Hermon MBC
Vs. ECA – Mon., **Jan. 8, 8:35 p.m.** at New Covenant Believers Church
Vs. HSA-Dayton – Wed., **Jan. 10, 6:30 p.m.** at HS Dayton High School
Vs. PROBE-HS – Mon., **Jan. 15, 8:40 p.m.** at New Covenant Believers Church
Vs. DAVA – Fri., **Feb. 9, 8:45 p.m.** at Mount Hermon MBC
Vs. YBCCS – Mon., **Feb. 12, 8:40 p.m.** at New Covenant Believers Church
Vs. CATA-HS – Fri., **Feb. 16, 7:15 p.m.** at Mount Hermon MBC
Vs. ECA – Mon., **Feb. 19, 8:30 p.m.** at New Covenant Believers Church
Vs. ACHS – Mon., **Feb. 26, 8:30 p.m.** at New Covenant Believers Church
Vs. Focus (White) – **Feb. 27, 8:30 p.m.** at Mount Hermon MBC
Tournament – Fri., **Mar. 1, 6 p.m.** & Sat., **Mar. 23, 10 p.m.** – TBD
League Championships – Sun., **Mar. 24, 10 a.m. & 10 p.m.** – TBD

WHITE TEAM

Vs. ECA – Fri., **Dec. 8, 8:30 p.m.** at Mount Hermon MBC
Vs. DAVA – Wed., **Dec. 20, 6:30 p.m.** at Dakota Center
Vs. CCHS – Fri., **Dec., 22, 8:30 p.m.** at Mount Hermon MBC
Vs. FHS – Thu., **Dec. 28, 8 p.m.** at Mount Hermon MBC
Vs. CCK-HS – Fri., **Jan 12, 8:30 p.m.** at Mount Hermon MBC
Vs. ACHS – Tue., **Jan. 23, 8 p.m.** at Mount Hermon MBC
Vs. YBCCS – Fri., **Jan. 26, 8:45 p.m.** at Mount Hermon MBC
Vs. PROBE-HS – Mon., **Jan. 29, 7:20 p.m.** at New Covenant Believers Church
Vs. ACHS – Fri., **Feb. 2, 6:15 p.m.** at Mount Hermon MBC
Vs. HSA-DAYTON – Sat., **Feb. 3, 5:15 p.m.** at Mount Hermon MBC
Vs. AUS – Sat., **Feb. 10, 5:30 p.m.** at Mount Hermon MBC
Vs. FHS – Mon., **Feb. 26, 8:35 p.m.** at New Covenant Believers Church
Vs. Focus (Red) – Tue., **Feb. 27, 8:30 p.m.** at Mount Hermon MBC
Tournament – Fri., **Mar. 1, 6 p.m.** & Sat., **Mar. 23, 10 p.m.** – TBD
League Championships – Sun., **Mar. 24, 10 a.m. & 10 p.m.** – TBD

New Covenant Believers Church:
3400 Kohr Blvd, Columbus, OH 43224
Mount Hermon MBC:
2283 Sunbury Rd, Columbus, OH 43219
Horizon Science Academy Dayton High School:
250 Shoup Mill Rd, Dayton, OH 45415
Dakota Center:
33 Barnett St., Dayton, OH 45402



A SPACE WHERE STUDENTS ARE HEARD

New “Eloquence Exchange” student club created

It all started with just four students who find the cafeteria a bit too loud and often choose to eat lunch in Ms. Browning’s classroom. A debate occurred around Arelis Calzadilla Najera’s phone screen background, with others suggesting she make a change.

It was just a casual conversation that served as a catalyst for a new Focus North High School club – Eloquence Exchange – that meets weekly to discuss a variety of thought-provoking topics.

“I loved how every student had a voice and a seat at the table,” said Darnell, who approached Ms. Browning about forming the new club and now serves as its president. “It felt so right to give students with different perspectives an opportunity to share their thoughts. It felt like something I would be interested in doing on a regular basis.”

“It’s really an opportunity for students to get to know one another better, and to understand different perspectives from our diverse student population,” said Arelis, who serves as vice president. “Focus is about more than earning credits toward graduation ... it’s also a place for personal growth and expression.”

Students choose a weekly topic from a list of more than 300 argumentative prompts put together by the New York Times Learning Network. The group has discussed a number of interesting topics including: how technology impacts relationships and other aspects of life; whether the fashion industry should move beyond featuring underweight models; whether Daylight Savings Time has outlived its usefulness; and, whether medicating children under the age of 13 is appropriate in addressing their mental health needs.

“We want every voice to be heard, so we limit the group to 10 students,” Darnell explained. “And we review the ground rules at the beginning of each meeting to make sure that it’s a good experience for everyone who participates.”

The ground rules are simple: no speaking over others; no talking without use of the “talking stick” (a Transformer serves as the mic); no disrespect of others; and, no use of phones.

“Everyone brings a unique perspective to our discussions,” Arelis said. “It’s fun, but it’s also educational. Those who participate can weigh in on topics for discussion the following week.”

A sign-up sheet is posted each week, inviting students outside the core group that generally participates. Teachers are starting to join the group, offering adult perspectives when invited to do so.

“What this really represents is an opportunity for students to be heard,” Darnell said. “Our voices matter, and the Eloquence Exchange roundtable provides opportunities for self-expression.”



Ms. Browning and Darnell
PHOTO CREDIT: Arelis Calzadilla Najera

FOCUS WELCOMES NEW CTE TEACHER

Mr. Umland shares real-world experience with Focus students

Focus North High School welcomes the addition of Mr. John Umland to the Career-Technical Education team, teaching two CTE business courses offered to students interested in that career path – one introducing the fundamentals of business and the other entrepreneurial ventures.

Mr. Umland brings about 16 years of real-world experience to his new teaching position, having worked for two non-profit organizations: as vice president of business and finance for Gateway Film Center and operations manager for Otherworld.

“This is my first year teaching,” Mr. Umland said. “I wanted to make a career change, and as I’ve always enjoyed training and professional development in previous jobs, teaching seemed like a great fit. I’m passionate about helping students better understand the fundamentals of how businesses operate. Ultimately, I hope it will help them better navigate their jobs in business or advance their positions.”

Mr. Umland holds a bachelor’s degree in English from The Ohio State University, which he thought made him a strong candidate for a literacy coach position at Focus North. But when he applied, School Director Ms. Tiffany Kocher suggested that the CTE business position might be a better fit and he stepped into his new role at the beginning of the 2023-2024 school year.

“I feel very good about Focus and my new career path” Mr. Umland said. “I’ve become passionate about helping students ... I’ve found them to be cool, with interesting ideas and questions. I really hope to make a positive impact here.”

“Students have the aptitude to be successful in business, but not necessarily the knowledge,” he continued. “They understand the concepts but can be somewhat intimidated by the vocabulary. I tell them it’s just a matter of learning the words they need to know.”

Outside the classroom, Mr. Umland is an avid reader and dog dad to a Pomeranian-mix, Baby Bear. His wife is a school therapist and is involved in equine assisted therapy working with their horse, Myer. He is also a musician, previously performing in a band that toured in the U.S. and Canada. He’s not currently performing, but still enjoys writing music and playing for his own personal enjoyment.



EDITOR’S NOTE

I have the honor and pleasure of engaging with Focus students, staff and board members, and I am treated like a welcome guest when I visit each of the three schools. I’m beyond impressed. Academics may be the top priority, but the atmosphere of kindness and caring is what really sets Focus apart from so many other schools. I am proud to be associated with Focus and hope all members of the “family” are as well. Each and every student has the capacity to achieve success in life, and every member of the Focus team is totally committed to providing support and opportunities for students to realize their full potential. Enjoy the holiday break – it’s well deserved!

CAREER EDUCATOR FINDS ROLE AT FOCUS REWARDING

Ms. Hancock supports all readers, including English language learners

As a young woman, Ms. Linda Hancock – who recently served as interim English language learner lab manager – never aspired to teach. That was until she served as a substitute teacher after being laid off from her job. She met a student who refused to test and asked him what was wrong. He hadn't seen his mother in two days and was caring for his little sister. He needed help. That's why she decided to devote herself to teaching.

"If I can teach people to read, they can do anything," she said. "It starts with building relationships of trust – that's essential. The importance of literacy goes beyond simply reading words on a page ... it's about comprehension. Reading skills are foundational to all learning, regardless of subject."

English has always been Ms. Hancock's area of focus, serving during her career as a professor at Columbus State Community College, Bliss Business College and several local career centers. She has a passion for reading and for helping others develop their literacy skills.

After retiring from a fulfilling career, she thought about returning to the work force and stopped by Ashland University to see if there were any interesting job postings. She found and pursued a position with a school quite similar to Focus where she taught for five years.

Ms. Hancock's first connection with Focus was serving as a board member on and off for a number of years. She's also connected through Mr. Johnny Nolan, who is her neighbor. January 2023 she accepted a teaching position at Focus North – work she finds both challenging and rewarding.

"Our students are so engaged," Ms. Hancock said. "It impresses me so much! Many of our students speak their first language at home, and of course learning is more difficult for those learning a second language."

As is the case for most people learning a second language, Focus students generally advance in reading and understanding more quickly than in speaking. Ms. Hancock provides both instruction and encouragement, celebrating student success.

"Ms. Hancock was recognized as Focus North's November Employee of the Month for her commitment to students and her exceptional work with our English language learners," Director Ms. Tiffany Kocher said. "It's all part of her work ethic and dedication to educating the next generation in skills they will use for life."

Ms. Hancock is a self-described "praying women." She is a dog lover and has logged lots of volunteer hours at the local shelter. In her personal time, she enjoys golf, bowling, playing cards, working in her yard and being active in her church.



Students who attend school regularly are nine times more likely to graduate high school on time. That's why the Cleveland Browns Foundation supports the *Stay in the Game!* Attendance Network encouraging students to make school attendance a priority! Make a New Year's resolution to make school attendance a priority in 2024!