

Foxfire Center for Student Success

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Zanesville, Ohio 43701
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The Foxfire Center for Student Success in Zanesville, Ohio, grew out of the Maysville School District's need to provide an alternative setting for those students who disrupted the learning environment at the district's only high school. Foxfire began as an alternative to suspension for eight students in 1999. In fall 2003, the school had grown to 50 students, but only 64 percent of seniors graduated that year.

- ◆ High (serving students ages 16-22)
- ◆ 76% White
- ◆ 15% Multi-racial
- ◆ 9% Black
- ◆ 73% Free or Reduced-Price Lunch
- ◆ 31% Special Education
- ◆ 0% English Language Learners

Four years later, in spring 2008, Foxfire served 150 students and achieved a 97 percent graduation rate. Foxfire continued to grow: in fall 2008, 230-240 students were enrolled in the school. Designed as a dropout recovery school, Foxfire serves students 16 to 22 years old who wish to return after dropping out, who have been involved with either the juvenile or adult court systems, or who have been referred to the school through a community agency. Foxfire is considered a community school because it has an integrated focus and emphasis on academic, health and social services, youth and community development, and community engagement. Although the school is located within the Maysville Local School District, students from 11 surrounding school districts can attend Foxfire. The school is governed by the Maysville Local School District's School Board and the Foxfire Board of Directors.

Establishing the Learning Environment

Conditions for Learning

Foxfire strives to provide a safe and emotionally supportive environment that addresses both the social and academic needs of its students, thereby creating conditions that support learning.

The learning environment at Foxfire is built on the principle of "developing the whole culture," which is graphically demonstrated through the school's "Pyramid of Success." At the base of this "pyramid," the vision statement emphasizes a diverse, flexible atmosphere that meets the needs of the students academically, socially, and, emotionally. Foxfire also seeks to provide options for learning and multiple opportunities for students to demonstrate success.

Core Values

Building on the vision, the school's mission is to impact students' lives in a positive and productive manner and to help students reach their maximum potential. The school follows a set of core values. Caring, honesty, teamwork, discipline, character, work ethic, accountability, respect, and loyalty are embedded into all aspects of the school's

program from classroom behavior, instruction, faculty and student interactions, to community service. The core values guide the work of both staff and students.

Student and Teacher Recognition

The students and staff are recognized for displaying the core values through the Student Honor Roll and the Staff Honor Roll. Teachers award stickers on the honor roll board to students when they display the core values. The school also recognizes individual accomplishments by naming a Student and Teacher of the Month.

Small Learning Community

To keep classes small and to provide options for students, the school day is organized into a morning shift and an afternoon shift; each shift is three hours. Each class is 30 minutes. Since the school is small, it offers few electives. All elective classes are on Fridays. Often, community members come to the school to teach an elective such as a weekly karate class.

Instructional Leadership, Professional Learning and Collaboration

The principal leads the professional learning community at the school. Before school each day, teachers meet for 30 minutes of professional learning and sharing. Each weekday's session has a different focus: curriculum mapping, assessment mapping, differentiated instruction/project-based learning, wellness, and intervention. Each Thursday, administrators, teachers, and support staff such as the nurse and social worker gather to focus on interventions.

Data-driven Decision Making That Shapes Instruction

Teachers at Foxfire review data on student progress in all areas—emotional, social, physical, and academic—to monitor student growth and to make changes in the interventions for each student as needed. Interventions are individualized and include academic instruction in core content, credit recovery options, social-emotional support programs and services, and community support and parent engagement.

Providing Core Academics and Credit-Recovery Options

When students enroll in Foxfire, the staff do a comprehensive assessment of academic progress, social-emotional well-being, and physical wellness. Many new students enter with few if any high school credits. The school designs an individualized plan based on credits earned and mastery of core skills. First and foremost, students who have not earned credits in the core subject areas (English, mathematics, science, and social studies) and have not passed one or more of the Ohio Graduation Tests (OGT) in those core areas are enrolled in the core OGT classes. Instruction in these classes focuses on the standards that students must meet to pass the OGTs.

Once a student passes one or more OGTs, the student is enrolled in project-based learning classes, which offer credit-recovery options to earn elective credit or additional credits required for graduation in core subjects. Students work on projects individually and at their own pace with teacher support. Some students are able to complete a project in a few weeks and earn ½ to 1 credit towards graduation requirements. In this way, students can make up for lost time and credit deficiencies and progress quickly to shorten the time to graduation.

The Foxfire teachers have developed a variety of engaging projects, such as The History of Rock 'n Roll. Each project's learning objectives, content, and activities are aligned to state standards. The projects have been approved by the district as credit-bearing coursework. Teachers determine exactly how much and what type of credit can be earned for each project. Students may choose projects but also rely on teacher's guidance to ensure the project supports their credit needs. Additional examples of topics are Sports Math and R U Still Down, a course about rapper Tupac Shakur. Students engage in a range of activities and incorporate extensive use of technology to complete the projects. Each project has a rubric by which the student's work is evaluated to ensure it meets the standard to earn the credit.

Before graduation, each student is required to complete a Senior Project. The project has several components: career exploration/goal setting, personal reflections, community participation, postsecondary planning, and final statement of postsecondary plans. The specific requirements help the students prepare for independence through such activities as preparing a resume, registering to vote, setting goals, serving the community, exploring different career paths, and preparing a postsecondary plan.

Embedding Wrap-Around Services in the School

To fulfill the mission statement, school vision, and core values, the school offers mental and physical health and counseling services for students within the school day, as well as a range of community resources to support students. The school employs a nurse and social worker and has a full-time law enforcement officer on-site. Both the nurse and social worker have the authority to offer such services as providing information on family planning, parenting, nutrition, violence, and alcohol and drug abuse. The school's staff continues to provide both social-emotional services and academic support for students who are temporarily taken out of school and placed in residential treatment programs. In all aspect of school and life, the school seeks to promote healthy choices and avoidance of risky behaviors.

The school strongly emphasizes wellness through a healthy lifestyle. All entering students undergo a health and wellness screening. The school has wellness teams that participate in fitness challenges. During one fitness challenge, the wellness teams collectively lost 242 pounds and engaged in 730 hours of exercise.

Teachers also engage in "Invisible Mentoring." Students' names are posted on the wall and staff place a sticker beside students' names if they have established a strong relationship with the student. The teacher then becomes an invisible mentor through a variety of ways including journaling. All students must have an invisible mentor. When adversity arises, the school then looks at the student's invisible mentors and calls them to the table to discuss potential interventions. Community members also serve as mentors through student referrals from the health department and other social service agencies. Muskingum County provides training for the community mentors.

Building Community and Family Relationships

Foxfire focuses on building community partnerships by engaging the community in the school's efforts and by embedding community service into the school's academic plan. All students are required to engage in one community service activity each month through the Pay It Forward program. Fifteen different community agencies partner with the school to engage the students in service projects, which have included such

activities as cleaning up parks, raking leaves, restoring furniture, and fixing bikes to donate to the Salvation Army.

Students also have the opportunity to work through the YouthBuild program. This program employs students for 15 hours a week to build subsidized housing in the community. Students in the YouthBuild program are required to attend school 15 hours a week as well in order to be paid for their work time. This work-study opportunity provides hands-on learning for students in the construction field and credit-earning potential towards graduation. Students also receive technology-based employability skills training.

The school also draws extensively on non-academic support from the health department, Juvenile Court, Muskingum County Health/Behavior Services, the Appalachian Food Network, the Care Team, and other community groups. The Muskingum County Health/Behavior Services provides individual counseling, crisis intervention services, drug screening, and group sessions on anger and stress management and smoking cessation. The Appalachian Food Network works with the school to ensure healthy meals and snacks for students living at or below poverty level. Juvenile Court partners with the school to facilitate school activities that take place on weekends such as community service project, provides informational presentations to the students and staff, assists in crafting behavior plans for students, partners in community service projects, and assists in crisis interventions. Foxfire participates in the Muskingum County Care Team Collaborative. As such, the community Care Team works closely with Foxfire to support student development and to work with the students and their families to remove non-academic barriers to success. For example, the Care Team may meet with families to help connect them to community resources

Foxfire highly values family engagement and plans a number of different activities to integrate the family into the life of the school. Whether the day is sunny and warm or frosty cold, all teachers and staff stand outside before the morning and the afternoon sessions to greet students and their parents who drop them off. When the school wants to provide information to parents about the monthly special event, staff serves “Curbside Coffee,” delivering a snack and an invitation to parents as they drop off their children. Family events include such activities as Student-Parent Orientation, Family Fun Night, Family Holiday Traditions Dinner, Father’s Day Fishing Tournament, Mom’s Night Out, and presentations by college representatives on postsecondary options and technical training opportunities.

Looking to the Future

Since the Maysville School District first recognized the need for an alternative education setting for some of its students, Foxfire has grown and experienced a number of successes. The community’s perception of the school has evolved; people no longer consider Foxfire the school for “losers.” The Ohio Department of Education recognized Foxfire as a School of Promise in 2007-2008.

The Foxfire principal noted two areas of future growth. The school is working with the district to develop a standards-based Core Values Assessment. Students would be assessed according to a set of standards related to the school’s core values. Given the large number of non-academic barriers that students at Foxfire face, the administration feels it is critical to develop values that will lead the students to emotional, physical, and mental wellness along with social and academic success.

Teachers also want to increase the range of projects available to students. They have developed several interdisciplinary projects; students can complete a project and apply the credit to one of several credit requirements. Teachers are continuing to develop these types of projects to provide increased options for credit recovery.

Nonetheless, Foxfire still faces challenges. The school cannot accommodate the number of students that are referred to the school. After extended school vacations, some students do not come back to school; in response, school personnel work relentlessly to bring the students back to school. The principal noted, “We are the student’s last, best hope.” As such, the school offers an individualized education, believes strongly in relationship building, and provides relevant and rigorous curricula aligned to state standards.

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