

THE EDUCATOR

at Breakthrough

ISSUE 23 • JANUARY 2026

CEO NOTE

Dear Breakthrough Team,

January is where all the talk must turn into action. We've reflected on the fall, recovered from the holidays, and now we have a unique opportunity to see our mission move from intention to reality.

January is when we build new habits. We reflect honestly on the first semester and take deliberate steps in the right direction to improve our schools and our community. It is also the moment when our mission begins to meet measurement. It is when we ask ourselves: Are we truly having an impact, or are we just talking about it? Are we walking our talk?

This work requires doing the difficult things, even when they are hard, because what we are trying to accomplish is bigger than any one of us. It means creating room for reflection. It means putting up a mirror before picking up a magnifying glass. It means ensuring our commitments don't fade, but live with us every day in our actions and decisions.

And it means trusting that, even on the hardest days, the energy, effort, and focus we put into learning and growing will pay off for our students. We never say this work will be easy, but we always say it will be worth it.

With gratitude,
Andrew McRae | Chief Executive Officer



Swag Store Launch

Strategic Readiness

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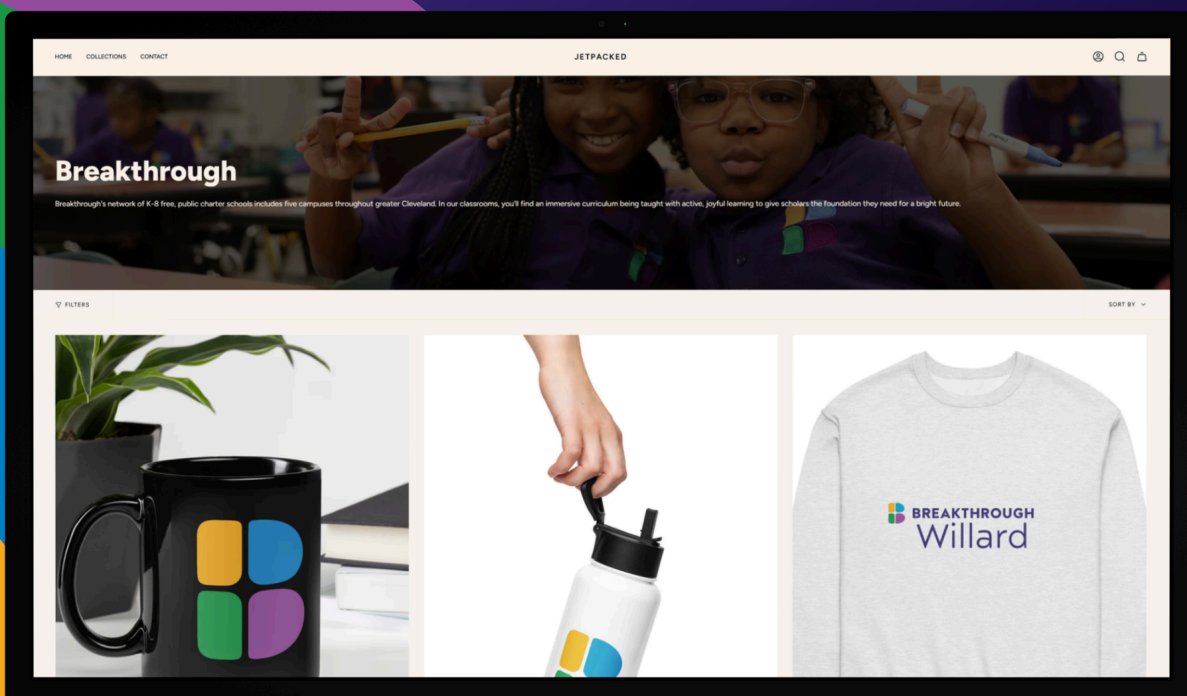
Core Value Superlatives

Swag Store Launch

We are thrilled to announce the launch of our new SWAG store!

Grab swag for yourself or your team! Purchase branded posters for your school!

SWAG STORE



Strategic Readiness

This winter, Breakthrough is beginning a strategic readiness process to help prepare for upcoming strategic planning and to ensure our future direction is grounded in the experiences of those closest to our scholars.

As part of this work, we are creating opportunities for families and staff to share perspectives, insights, and ideas. There will be small focus groups and a survey coming out next week.

Next Monday, all school staff will receive a survey organized by our planning partner, Lumen Impact Group. This survey is designed to capture feedback not reflected in other staff surveys.

Your voice matters deeply in this process, and we want to make sure our planning reflects what's happening in classrooms across our schools!





ON THE GROUND

Operations Corner

Woodland Hills Gym Project Complete!

Students at Woodland Hills returned from winter break to find the construction of their new gymnasium, offices, restrooms, and multipurpose room complete!

The completion marks a years long journey from acquiring the former Gaines Funeral Home, demolishing it, developing a plan to build new, obtaining approvals and funding, to constructing a new facility. Marous Brothers Construction served as Breakthrough's design/build partner on the project, helping turn our vision into a reality. The new space will not allow for Woodland Hills to host basketball and volleyball games and use the space as a permanent gymnasium, but it also facilitates the opening the former space for a cafeteria, permits the school to host community events and serve as a voting location, and provides for auxiliary spaces to be utilized for additional programming. The new space is a literal game changer for the scholars and families of Woodland Hills!

Compliance Update

At the December board meeting, our board voted to legally change our school names to our unified branding which includes "Breakthrough" in each school name. This means that you should start using the new names when setting up contracts and agreements. For more information on setting up contracts and agreements, including what legal entity to use, please [click here](#).

Our board members also recently voted to update our policies which included revisions to existing guidelines. You can review the latest changes by clicking [here](#) (<http://bit.ly/4qMkmwF>). As a reminder, you can access all of our policies on the InfoHub's Operations Resources page.



WOODLAND HILLS GYM EXTERIOR



WOODLAND HILLS GYM INTERIOR



CYBER SMART IT Corner

CYBER SMART USER OF THE MONTH

Rachel Yarcusko

Rachel demonstrated exactly what it means to be CyberSMART. Upon receiving a suspicious email, she didn't click or dismiss it, she took action. Rachel quickly identified the message as a potential threat and collaborated with the IT department to confirm it was a sophisticated phishing attempt. Her quick thinking stopped a serious security breach before it could start.

Thank you, Rachel, for your vigilance and for helping keep our organization's data safe!

Rachel's success is a great reminder for all of us. Phishing attempts are becoming more convincing every day. If you receive an email that feels off, asks for urgent action, or comes from an unexpected sender:

- Don't click links or open attachments.
- Use the "Orange Hook": Use the KnowBe4 Phish Alert button in your Gmail to report the message.
- Let IT handle it: Reporting the email allows our team to safely scan the contents and block the sender for the entire organization.

UPDATE YOUR DUO MOBILE APP

To ensure the continued security of our systems, Duo has released **new security enhancements** that are now going into effect. These updates are designed to stay ahead of evolving digital threats and provide a smoother, more secure authentication experience.

What you need to do: Please visit the Apple App Store or Google Play Store on your mobile device as soon as possible to ensure you are running the latest version of the **Duo Mobile** application.

Important: Failure to update your application may result in service disruptions or the inability to log in to your computer. Keeping your app current is the easiest way to avoid any access denied messages during your workday.

GOOGLE PASSWORD RESET

As a reminder, to maintain account security, Google passwords are required to be updated every six months. Since the majority of users last refreshed their credentials in August, you should expect an automated prompt to reset your password starting next month. Updating your password regularly is a key step in protecting your data.



BY THE NUMBERS

Finance Corner

BUDGET SEASON: WHAT TO KNOW

We're beginning our annual budget process and want to share a clear, high-level update.

- The Breakthrough Network remains **financially stable**, with strong reserves and all schools meeting required fiscal benchmarks.
- Like many public education systems, we're navigating financial pressures related to state funding changes and enrollment trends.
- Our budgeting approach is grounded in **fiscal sustainability**, ensuring we can support students and staff not just this year, but over the long term.

What this means for educators:

- **Classrooms, staffing, and academic supports remain top priorities.**
- A portion of our budget intentionally supports **evidence-based, value-added programs** (such as co-teaching, tutoring, and extended learning). These investments are purposeful and aligned to improving student outcomes.

Breakthrough is in a position of strength: our core operations are financially sound, and our reserves allow us to be thoughtful about when and how we invest in programs that accelerate student learning. Budget season is about making sure those investments remain **strategic, mission-aligned, and sustainable.**

This is an ongoing process. We'll share more as planning continues, and school and network leaders will be involved throughout.

W-2 INFORMATION

- **2025 W-2 forms will be mailed by January 31st to the address listed in Frontline.**
- Please allow until mid-February for delivery.
- If you have not received your W-2 by then, contact the People team through JitBit to request a copy.



TEAM & TALENT

People Corner

STAFF INTENT TO RETURN

A huge thank you to all school-based staff for completing your Intent to Return forms! We are so grateful for your hard work and truly hope you continue your journey with us into the 2025-26 school year.

What's next? Offer letters will be heading to your inboxes later this spring. Stay tuned!

A new year also means a new benefits plan year. Please review the important updates below to ensure you're prepared and have uninterrupted access to your benefits.

MEDICAL PLAN UPDATE (UMR)

Effective January 1, Breakthrough is under a new policy/group number for all participating UMR medical plan members.

- Group Name: Breakthrough Public Schools
- Group Number: 76417936

This updated group number will appear on your new medical ID cards, which were mailed on January 1. Please expect delivery 7–15 business days after the start of the new plan year.

Need access sooner?

You can download the UMR mobile app to view and use your electronic ID card immediately.

Important: Please begin using your new UMR medical ID card for all 2026 medical services once received. Do not use prior-year cards for new services, as this may result in claim delays or denials.

FSA & HSA UPDATES FOR THE 2026 PLAN YEAR

Staff members who elected to participate in a Flexible Spending Account (FSA) and/or Health Savings Account (HSA) for the 2026 plan year will receive a welcome letter and debit card from Inspira, our new FSA and HSA vendor.

- Welcome materials will arrive 7–15 business days after the start of the new plan year.
- Once received, the letter will include instructions for setting up your Inspira online profile, where you can:
 - View account balances
 - Submit and track claims (FSA)
 - Manage contributions and investments (HSA)

Quick reminder:

- FSA: Funds must be used according to plan-year rules.
- HSA: Funds roll over year to year and remain yours.

Please use your Inspira FSA/HSA card for all 2026 eligible expenses once received.

ACCESSING PRIOR-YEAR FSA & HSA ACCOUNTS (HEALTHEQUITY)

HealthEquity remains the administrator for prior plan year accounts.

- 2025 FSA:
 - You may continue to submit eligible 2025 expenses through HealthEquity during the applicable run-out period.
- HSA Accounts:
 - Any HSA funds previously held with HealthEquity remain accessible through HealthEquity's platform.

WHAT YOU NEED TO DO

- Watch for your new UMR medical ID card
- Download the UMR app for immediate access
- Look out for Inspira welcome materials if enrolled in FSA/HSA
- Set up your Inspira account once materials arrive
- Use HealthEquity only for prior-year (2025) expenses

If you have not received your cards or welcome materials after 15 business days, or if you experience any issues, please contact the People Operations Team for support. Thank you, and we're excited to kick off a great year ahead!



Family Experience

SIBLING ENROLLMENT & EARLY ENROLLMENT

Applications have launched for the 2026-27 school year.

Work with your families to encourage siblings to apply to secure their seats!

Seats are limited, and siblings get offers first!

Learn.
Belong.
Lead.



SCHOLAR INTENT TO RETURN

Scholar Intent to Return has launched for the 2026-2027 school year!

WHO: All current K-7th grade Breakthrough scholars must complete Intent to Return.

WHY: Seats are limited, families completing the form by the deadline secures their child's seats.

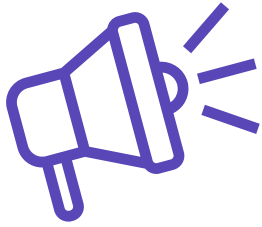
HOW: Families can fill out a form in PowerSchool Parent Portal

HOW YOU CAN HELP: Encourage your families to complete ITR by the February 6 deadline.

THE FAMILY CONNECTION



Read the January
Family Connection Newsletter!



Breakthrough Shoutouts!

Shoutout to Dennis Hill!

Since starting at Breakthrough, one person in particular has had a meaningful impact on my sense of belonging and inclusivity: Dennis Hill. He was one of the first people to introduce himself to me, and it felt intentional, not only in his role in Safety and Security, but also as someone genuinely interested in building connection and collaboration with me as I stepped into a new role. Since then, Dennis has consistently made a conscious effort to greet me. That may seem small, but it truly isn't. In moments when others may seem too busy or absorbed in conversation to acknowledge someone passing by, Dennis always pauses to say hello, and by name. In doing so, he often prompts others to do the same. These small but powerful gestures speak volumes about who he is and why he was chosen as the new Director of Safety and Security. So, to Dennis Hill: thank you for seeing me, including me, and helping foster a true sense of community.

Shoutout to Ronald Brownrigg!

From the moment I stepped into my role, Principal Ronald Brownrigg has been intentional about fostering open communication and collaboration. Knowing that one of us will always pick up the phone or send a quick call or text, to address a question or resolve an issue brings a great sense of comfort and trust. That level of accessibility and partnership makes all the difference in our work. I truly value this collaborative approach and look forward to continuing to strengthen our partnership as we move forward together.

[SUBMIT A SHOUTOUT](#)





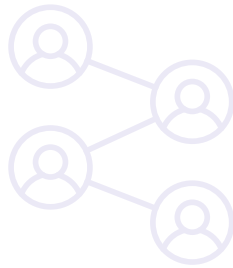
Beyond Breakthrough

DID YOU KNOW?

Beyond Breakthrough is available to talk about high school as early as 5th grade?

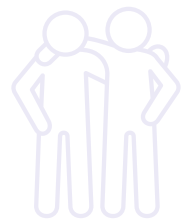
Last year

365



high schoolers connected multiple times with a member of the Beyond Team

91%



of alumni would recommend Beyond Breakthrough events to their friends

In 2024

95%



of 8th graders were placed at their best fit high school

Over

\$100,000



in direct support has been provided to alumni by Beyond

ALUMNI SPOTLIGHT

Jada Johnson

Middle School, Class of
Breakthrough Southeast
(formerly Citizen's Southeast), 2023

High School
Cleveland Early College High School

Current Grade
Junior, Class of 2027



Q: Tell us a little about your high school experience.

A: It's a lot of work. I've started my college this fall. And I already finished AP testing.

Q: What's advice you would give current 8th graders?

A: Don't play with that GPA. You should try and go to tutoring and ask questions. That will make your life a lot easier.

Q: Why is Beyond Breakthrough special?

A: It helped me with a lot, like finding colleges that I like and looking for stuff that interests me. Also going on a trip and seeing a real college campus - going outside of the city and seeing new stuff, that also helps.

Q: What is something that surprised you about high school?

A: Back in like middle school and elementary school I was really close with my teachers, and now I only have one or 2 teachers that I'm close with. I'm used to being close with all of them.

Q: Why should alumni work with Beyond Breakthrough?

A: A lot of people don't have any idea where they're going to go for college, or what they want to do, or how they're gonna get there. You guys help a lot with that.



CORE VALUES IN ACTION

In each issue of the Educator, we're celebrating those in our community who embody our core value of the month!

Mission Alignment

Our mission is to provide Cleveland area scholars with an education that empowers them to lead lives full of impact and opportunity.

MIDTOWN

Anna Egbert
APSS

Anna Egbert exemplifies our core value, We Remain Committed, through her unwavering dedication to ensuring continuity of services for scholars with exceptionalities. Anna consistently demonstrates commitment by proactively planning and collaborating across teams to ensure that support, services, and accommodations remain intact and responsive to student needs. During moments that may create risk for service gaps, Anna leads with urgency, precision, and care to ensure scholars continue to receive the support they deserve. Through her follow-through, advocacy, and attention to both compliance and student-centered practice, she ensures well-supported continuations of learning and growth. Her work reflects a deep belief that commitment means showing up consistently for scholars and families—especially when it matters most.

WOODLAND HILLS

Joe Shelton
Lead Dean of Culture

Joseph is a cornerstone of our culture, bringing exceptional analytical capabilities and meticulous attention to detail to everything he touches. Through strategic management of behavioral, attendance, and suspension data, he transforms numbers into meaningful insights that drive real change. His ability to identify patterns and leverage data strategically has been instrumental in shaping a stronger, more responsive school culture.

Matthew Wieczorek

Assistant Principal
5-8 Humanities

Matt's reliability and professionalism have made him a trusted cornerstone of our leadership team. Staff know they can count on him to deliver excellence and elevate everyone around him. Whether facilitating professional development sessions or responding to the daily needs of our school community, Matt consistently upholds the highest standards, setting the bar for what leadership looks like in action.

SOUTHEAST

Staci Dillow

Math Title Teacher

Staci exemplifies our mission alignment core value by actively expanding learning beyond the classroom. By bringing in multiple resources, coordinating meaningful field trips, and connecting K-8 scholars at Southeast to enriching programs. She ensures scholars have access to well-rounded experiences that build exposure, curiosity, and opportunity. Their efforts directly support our mission to empower Cleveland-area scholars to lead lives full of impact and opportunity.

WILLARD

Ashley Brown

SEL Coordinator

Ashley Brown demonstrates strong mission alignment in her role as SEL Coordinator by creating a welcoming, open space where students and families feel supported, seen, and valued. She consistently provides access to meaningful resources, guidance, and care that address both student and family needs, strengthening connections between home and school. Through this intentional support, Ashley helps ensure our scholars are equipped with the social and emotional tools necessary to thrive and to lead lives full of impact and opportunity.

HOME OFFICE

Nga Le

*Project Manager,
Recruitment and Enrollment*

Nga Le exemplifies our mission in every interaction. She brings genuine joy to our team while keeping families and scholars at the center of every decision. Through her positive, welcoming presence, she sets the tone for meaningful family engagement and anchors our enrollment and recruitment work in purpose, care, and impact.

GLENVILLE

Daniel Clark

Dean of Culture

Daniel Clark demonstrates strong mission alignment in his role as Dean of Culture at Glenville through his consistent presence and intentional relationship-building with students, particularly on the second floor. He regularly checks in with students, building trust, offering encouragement, and serving as a positive and steady influence in their daily experience. In addition, Daniel is planning a student group focused on providing meaningful experiences and opportunities for connection and growth, further reinforcing our mission to empower scholars with the relationships and support they need to lead lives full of impact and opportunity.



ONE-STOP SHOP FOR ALL THINGS
BREAKTHROUGH

Share with us! Submit anything relevant to BPS and
our network to The Educator, your input matters!

SUBMIT TO THE EDUCATOR



BREAKTHROUGH
P U B L I C S C H O O L S

