

Invisible resource

ESC provides support to school districts

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Fact Box

ESC Facts & Figures

- established in 1914 as Columbiana County Board of Education, changed name in early 90's
- 232 employees, with 132 full-time, including 35 teachers
- other personnel include classroom assistants, nurses, interpreters (sign language), psychologists, occupational therapists, physical therapists, speech, and language specialists, gifted and talented coordinators, technologists, consultants, paraeducators (one-on-one with students), transportation personnel, clerical personnel and administrators
- 478 students participate in programs
- \$9,588,971 annual budget, with 66 percent local funding from service fees, 12 percent federal funding from grants and 22 percent state funding
- \$4,887,341 annual payroll, with \$581,105 paid in federal taxes, \$109,965 paid in state taxes and \$129,026 paid in local taxes
- 42 professional development activities hosted/provided last year, with 1,880 attendees
- provide special education services, including classrooms, autism programs and services, preschool special education, school psychology, OT, PT, speech, audiology & visually impaired services
- provide student programs for gifted/talented, dual credit, seniors to sophomores, Destination Imagination, spelling bee, Academic Challenge, Opportunity School
- assist with bus driver certification/physicals for Local districts, teacher licensure, substitute teachers, home schooling, background checks

(Source: Columbiana County Educational Service Center)

LISBON - An invisible resource - that's how Superintendent Anna Marie Vaughn described the Educational Service Center.

"Part of our work is to be invisible," she said after admitting she's heard that some people have no idea what the Columbiana County ESC is or what it does. She recalled, though, that one man who learned about the ESC after knowing nothing found out later that some of his relatives and neighbors already knew about the ESC - their children had received services.

"We provide support to the school districts in Columbiana County so that all students are provided the best opportunities to thrive, and to help increase student achievements." Vaughn said.

The Ohio general assembly established county boards of education in 1914 with the task of elevating the state system of public education to a proper standard, she said, noting there were 2,700 school districts in the state at one time, with many one-room school houses constituting a district. The number of districts now is 679, according to the Ohio Department of Education Web site.

All 88 counties had their own county board, but the number of ESCs (the new name came in the 90's) is down to 56, with some counties joined together under one ESC. In the early years, the job of the county board was to standardize the curriculum and standardize teacher professional development.

In 1975, when the act requiring education of the handicapped was passed, the county started setting up classrooms for students with disabilities in the districts and the ESC continues to serve those students. When asked if there was duplication of services with what's provided by the Columbiana County Board of Developmental Disabilities, which operates Robert Bycroft School, she said the CCBDD isn't required by law to provide school-age special education services.

The ESC also took the lead in bringing technology to the classrooms, establishing distance learning in the 90's so that students in one district could learn from a teacher in another district via video conferencing. The change opened up the world to students in Columbiana County, with electronic field trips and partnerships with schools in other countries.

The ESC still provides a lot of professional development opportunities for teachers, but the roles have changed a little, with the ESC having a service center/client relationship with the districts. The county boards used to have to sign off on the hiring of any superintendents at the Local districts, but that's no longer the case. School districts are divided between city districts, exempted village districts and local districts, such as United Local or Crestview Local. The Locals were born by the combining of all the tiny districts.

Vaughn said the ESC still plays a supervisory role in some areas, such as substitute teacher licensing and bus driver physicals for the locals.

Some of the services provided by ESCs include classrooms for students with emotional disabilities, classrooms for students with multiple disabilities, autism programs, preschool special education, occupational and physical therapy, services for speech, audiology and visually impaired, school psychology, gifted & talented programs such as Academic Challenge and Destination Imagination and the spelling bee, dual credit programs with Kent State University and the Seniors to Sophomores program dealing with college credit.

The ESC also operates the Opportunity School at the Juvenile Court Center, helping to educate at-risk students.

Vaughn said it's now obvious that the future for students means they'll need a higher degree of education ever thought necessary before in order to achieve, especially with technology driving so many occupations.

"It's imperative that we set expectations high for our students. Many jobs today will require skills that we just did not expect. A higher level of education attainment is necessary to be successfully employed," she said.

In that regard, she said the ESC can be a resource for the school districts, community, students and parents.

ESCs receive no local property tax funds on their own. They charge the school districts for services and that's where the majority of their funding comes from, with some from federal grants for specific programs and some from the state. Statewide, according to an Ohio Educational Service Center Association brochure, "for every \$1 in state support ESCs provide \$26 in services."