COLLEGE OF EDUCATION AND HEALTH PROFESSIONS

CHRONICLES

COLUMBUS STATE UNIVERSITY

SPRING/SUMMER 2026

Celebrating History...

COLLEGE OF EDUCATION AND HEALTH PROFESSIONS
COLUMBUS STATE UNIVERSITY



Celebrating 30 Years of CSU's Coca-Cola Space Science Center

Expanding Horizons

CONNECTING...WITH THE EDITOR

Dear Friends of COEHP:

Do you feel a connection to the College of Education and Health Professions or to Columbus State University or perhaps even to me? If not, I fear you may opt to stop reading. I encourage you to continue. Maybe you will find a connection here after all.

After six years of retirement, I agreed to edit the Chronicles…to be helpful, but also because I missed connecting with faculty and staff and the many exciting things happening on our main and uptown campuses. Many of you may not yet know what a special institution CSU is, but local and regional employers are seeing it through hiring our outstanding graduates. The rest of the state is beginning to see it, too, including members of the Board of Regents and the leadership of other institutions of higher learning. They see our beautiful campus, learn of the quality of our excellent programs of study, hear about the generous donors who support us, and witness the amazing things happening through excellent leadership, innovative thinking, and quality partnerships. From my admittedly biased perspective, the College of Education and Health Professions leads the way.

This issue of COEHP Chronicles continues to embrace the theme "Celebrating History- Expanding Horizons." You will see that theme embodied in the work of CSU's Coca-Cola Space Science Center, whose programs are ever expanding as it reaches its 30th year and prepares to move to a new facility on main campus. See more about their amazing work and partnerships, the success of its graduates, and CCSSC's impact on the community in the feature article that begins on page 22.

Faculty excellence is evidenced in articles on COEHP's academic departments: Teacher Education, Counseling, and Leadership (p. 4); the School of Nursing (p. 8); and Kinesiology and Health Sciences (p. 12). Faculty deliver quality, accredited programs of study, while engaging in meaningful research and relevant outreach programs. Also featured is CSU's large doctoral program, the Ed.D. in Curriculum and Leadership, whose graduates provide academic leadership at many levels throughout the region.

Also included in this issue are a donor spotlight, articles about specific outreach events, the Professional Development Lab School, COEHP outreach center updates, and more.

I hope you feel connected to COEHP and all its successes, whether as a student, graduate, member of the faculty or staff, donor, retiree, COEHP partner, or interested friend. Thank you for what you have contributed. In the interest of staying connected, we'd love to hear from you!

Gratefully,

Ellen

Dr. Ellen Roberts

Retired Associate Provost



COEHP

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Teacher Education, Leadership, and Counseling Department

Preparing Professionals and Community Partnerships

BY DR. DENIZ PEKER, DEPARTMENT CHAIR

The Teacher Education, Leadership, and Counseling (TLC) Department represents one of Columbus State University's most dynamic engines for educational impact in the region. Established in 2018 through the merger of two strong academic units, the Teacher Education Department and Counseling, Foundations, and Leadership Department, TLC has rapidly grown into one of the university's largest departments in enrollment, faculty expertise, and program reach. In Fall 2025, enrollment reached a record 901 students, nearly two-thirds at the graduate level, reflecting the department's critical role in preparing the next generation of educators, leaders, and counselors.



Teacher Education programs are built around a mission of access, excellence, and community impact. Candidates from diverse backgrounds prepare for meaningful careers in P–12 education through rigorous academic study paired with immersive field experiences. Undergraduate students engage primarily in face-to-face instruction enhanced by online options, while all graduate certification programs are delivered fully online using best practices in digital learning. These flexible delivery models expand access for working professionals and strengthen the educator pipeline across the state. Every candidate graduates with substantial classroom experience, ensuring they are confident, effective, and classroom-ready from day one.





Preparation for Employment

The TLC Department's deep partnerships with Muscogee County School District (MCSD), Harris County, and other regional school systems demonstrate the university's direct investment in the community. These partnerships create a seamless pathway from preparation to employment. Through a unique agreement with MCSD, CSU graduates who earn a teaching certificate are guaranteed employment opportunities within the district — a powerful testament to the trust placed in TLC's preparation model.

The department prepares professionals who address critical educational and community needs through programs in Educational Leadership, Counseling, and Special Education. Fully online Tier I and Tier II Educational Leadership pathways prepare educators for roles from assistant principal to superintendent, with an additional Higher Education track for leadership in colleges and universities. The department is especially proud to house CSU's only doctoral program with tracks in Curriculum and Instruction, Educational Leadership, and Higher Education. All educator preparation programs are approved by the Georgia Professional Standards Commission (GaPSC), ensuring high professional standards. The TLC Department offers CACREP-accredited master's programs in School Counseling and Clinical Mental Health Counseling, combining flexible coursework with intensive practicum and internship experiences to prepare graduates to support the academic, emotional, and psychological well-being of individuals and families. Innovation is further supported through the Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA) track within the M.Ed. in Special Education, which prepares professionals to design evidence-based interventions for individuals with diverse learning and behavioral needs.



Investing in TLC is an investment in the region's future. Through strategic partnerships, innovative delivery models, and a deep commitment to service, the TLC Department continues to elevate educational practice and strengthen the workforce pipeline across Georgia. Philanthropic support enables the department to expand scholarships, enhance field experiences, invest in research and technology, and recruit exceptional faculty, multiplying its impact for generations to come.

CHIPS and MakerSpace

By Dr. Basil Conway, Dr. Margie Yates, and Dr. Jessica Banks



In 2024, Columbus State University was awarded a collaborative college grant to improve its curriculum towards semiconductors. In 2025, The College of Education and Health Professions Chattahoochee Hub for Innovation and Production of Semiconductors (COEHP CHIPS) team ensured a coordinated and strategic response to regional workforce needs in advanced manufacturing by aligning universities, community colleges, K–12 systems, and industry partners. The team has guided curriculum modifications, incorporated employer input, supported faculty development, and embedded interdisciplinary, hands-on learning to maintain relevance to workforce and accreditation standards. By overseeing measurable objectives and fostering cross-sector collaboration, the committee promoted accountability, continuous improvement, and long-term alignment with regional economic priorities and national goals.

The COEHP CHIPS team in collaboration with the Columbus Regional Mathematics Collaborative is planning to create and operate a MakerSpace in Frank Brown Hall for CSU students and faculty along with MCSD students and teachers to develop their STEM knowledge. The MakerSpace will have hours available for use and provide assistance in learning many of these new technologies. The team plans to include basic classroom materials, crafting tools, electronics components, robotics kits, 3D printing and laser cutting equipment, sewing and e-textile resources, woodworking tools, media production technology, and essential safety gear. Together, these items support hands-on learning in engineering, advanced manufacturing, digital fabrication, robotics, electronics, design, and multimedia production while ensuring proper organization, maintenance, and safety.

Counseling Faculty and Students Partner with Dimon Elementary School
Dr. Anya Lainas and Dr. Steven Wright

Beginning in Fall 2025, counseling faculty and graduate students from Columbus State University's Counseling Department began a collaborative partnership with Dimon Elementary Magnet Academy and the professional development lab school to support the school's students and staff success through a wellness-centered approach to education. In addition, the partnership has provided CSU graduate-level counseling students additional opportunities for professional growth and development. In response to observations and conversations with staff, the Counseling Department offered a professional development workshop titled Classroom Interventions from a Trauma-Informed Lens, which emphasized understanding how stress and overwhelming emotions can impact children's behavior, focus, and executive functioning in school settings. The training encouraged teachers to consider what students may be communicating through their actions and to respond in ways that promote regulation, connection, and resilience. Counseling faculty facilitated meetings with each grade level. These conversations created space for staff to reflect on strategies that work well, discuss challenges, and collaboratively identify areas where continued support would be helpful.



Intern to Teacher Program
Roger Hatcher, Dr. Saoussan Maarouf, Dr. Sarah Sharpe, and Debby Whatley



Columbus State University's strong Partner School Network and the Center for Quality Teaching and Learning's Advisory Board collaborated to establish the Intern to Teacher Program, a strategic initiative designed to address the ongoing teacher shortage in the Muscogee County School District. This innovative, yearlong program begins each fall in elementary schools and provides CSU undergraduate teacher candidates with a fully immersive, highly supported pathway into the teaching profession. Students in the program are given the opportunity to teach in their own classrooms while completing certification coursework. The candidates are supported by a full-time teaching mentor and receive a stipend while in the program. At its core, the Intern to Teacher Program is about impact. Its purpose is to equip future educators with the knowledge, skills, and professional identity necessary to lead classrooms with integrity and excellence. As we continue to grow and refine the program, we remain focused on a single goal: preparing teachers who are ready to serve, inspire, and transform learning from their very first day in the classroom.

Program to Program Partnerships for Student Success!
Dr. Dana Griggs

The Educational Leadership Program partners with the Teacher Education and Special Education programs to support student success through a Mock Interview Night, held each Fall and Spring semester. Designed to prepare undergraduate teacher candidates for their first professional interviews with Georgia schools, the event offers a realistic and supportive interview experience. Graduate students, many of whom are current or aspiring principals, assistant principals, district leaders, and teacher leaders, serve as interviewers. During scheduled half-hour sessions, candidates participate in a simulated interview and receive individualized, constructive feedback on their responses, professionalism, and interview presence. With an emphasis on growth and encouragement, Mock Interview Night is a valuable learning opportunity that helps future educators enter the job market with confidence and preparation.

The Educational Leadership Program's second partnership initiative, the Special Education Project, immerses aspiring leaders in authentic instructional leadership and collaborative coaching. Working as a unified leadership team, graduate students observe special education teachers, engage in structured team debriefs, and collaboratively develop actionable feedback for teachers. This process emphasizes recognizing effective instructional practices, supporting diverse learner needs, and fostering safe, inclusive learning environments. Aspiring leaders practice coaching that builds teacher confidence, promotes professional growth, and strengthens positive school culture. By mirroring real-world leadership teamwork, the project prepares future administrators to support, retain, and empower special education teachers while driving instructional improvement.

2025-2026 Teacher Education Scholarships and Allocations
By Dr. Patricia Patrick and Talley Dentzau

Incoming Freshmen
- **Paula and Miriam Witt Family Scholarship – $2,133**
- **George and Norma Roberts First Generation Undergraduate Scholarship – $1,000**

Undergraduate Students
- **Anne Dougherty Pergl Altrusa Teacher Education Scholarship – $2,200**
- **Dr. Kimberly Scott Teacher Education Scholarship – $500**
- **Mildred H. Hollinshead Teacher Education Scholarship – $1,300**
- **Purcell Teacher Education Scholarship – $1,900**
- **Paula and Miriam Witt Family Scholarship – $2,133**
- **College of Education Endowment Scholarship $300–$500 (up to 10 available)**

Undergraduate or Graduate Students
- **Aflac Teacher Education Scholarship – $625**
- **Dr. Frances M. Duncan and Richard L. Duncan Scholarship for the Physically Disabled – $1,200**
- **Ophelia Fleming Alsobrook Teacher Education Scholarship – $2,080**
- **Tina Jones Teacher Education Memorial Scholarship – $1,000**
- **Virginia Pekor Culpepper Teacher Education Scholarship – $1,000**
- **Georgia Power Teachers for Georgia Scholarship – $1,000**
- **Caroline Lawson Ivey Memorial Foundation Scholarship – $2,100**

Graduate Students
- **Kinetic Credit Union–LB Hickson Memorial Teacher Education Scholarship – $1,000**
- **Dr. Ellen L. Roberts Graduate Scholarship in Education – $1,500**
- **Carrol D. Weldy Graduate Scholarship for Teacher Education – $1,000**

****Note: Scholarship amounts vary based on available endowment earnings and donor allocations**

SCHOOL OF NURSING YEAR IN REVIEW: GROWTH, CELEBRATION, AND EXCELLENCE!

BY DESTINEE ROUSE

The 2025–2026 academic year marked a period of remarkable progress for the Columbus State University School of Nursing, defined by student achievement, strengthened traditions, and expanding community partnerships. Under the leadership of Director Dr. Tamara Condrey, the School continued to elevate academic excellence while nurturing the next generation of nurses.

Welcoming the Next Generation of Nurses



The year began with one of the school's most distinguished traditions: the White Coat Ceremony, first held in September 2025, to welcome the BSN Class of December 2026 into the profession. A second ceremony was held in February 2026, for the Class of 2027, and continued this commitment to reinforcing professionalism early in students' academic journeys. With the launch of the Spring 2026 semester, the SON reached a major milestone: housing four BSN cohorts, a total of 182 students, reflecting sustained program growth and increasing demand for nursing careers.

Celebrating Distinguished Alumni and Empowering Students

At the annual COEHP Hall of Fame Ceremony on October 21, 2025, alumni Dara Crouch and Wanda Jones were inducted for their professional excellence and community impact (see p. 32 for more on Hall of Fame recipients). Student support remained a top priority. During the Scholarship Reception on November 13, 2025, more than $120,000 in scholarships were awarded to approximately 40 BSN students—an event that highlights both donor generosity and student achievement.

Advancing Academic Excellence

The SON celebrated its third consecutive year of National Council of Licensure Examination (NCLEX) pass rates above 95%, reaffirming its rigorous curriculum and student preparedness. Undergraduate research thrived during the Evidence-Based Practice Poster Presentations on November 6, 2025, where senior BSN students shared clinical guidelines with internal and external stakeholders. Graduate Family Nurse Practitioner (FNP) students also deepened their engagement in healthcare policy during Georgia's annual Legislative Luncheon, meeting with legislators to discuss issues shaping advanced practice nursing. This event helps future APRNs build the relationships and confidence needed to advocate effectively for their profession.

Expanding Simulation and Community Impact

A continued partnership with the Miracle Riders transformed hands-on learning throughout the year. The School of Nursing celebrated the opening of the NICU Simulation Lab on November 14, 2025, honoring neonatologist Dr. David H. Levine and expanding opportunities for neonatal-care training. On January 28, 2026, the Miracle Riders were recognized during a CSU basketball game, with BSN students joining a motorcycle ride through Lumpkin Gym. The Miracle Riders have contributed over $1 million toward the School of Nursing Simulation Lab.

The academic year concluded on May 14, 2026, with two ceremonies leading up to graduation: the BSN Pinning Ceremony, honoring graduates entering the nursing workforce, and the Graduate Hooding Ceremony, celebrating MSN and FNP students completing their advanced degrees. From exceptional NCLEX performance to expanded simulation capacity and cherished academic traditions, the 2025–2026 year reflects a School of Nursing committed to excellence, innovation, and community impact.

ACCREDITATION AFFIRMS EXCELLENCE IN NURSING EDUCATION

BY DR. CHERYL M. SMITH

CCNE COMMISSION ON COLLEGIATE NURSING EDUCATION

Accreditation serves as a critical benchmark of quality in nursing education, providing students, faculty, employers, and the public with assurance that academic programs meet established standards of excellence. For Bachelor of Science in Nursing (BSN) and Master of Science in Nursing (MSN) programs, accreditation by the Commission on Collegiate Nursing Education (CCNE) represents one of the most respected validations of academic rigor and professional preparation. As a nationally recognized accrediting body, CCNE evaluates nursing programs using comprehensive criteria—ranging from curriculum design and faculty qualifications to student outcomes, resource allocation, and ongoing quality improvement. When BSN and MSN programs achieve or pursue CCNE accreditation, they demonstrate a strong commitment to preparing nurses at all levels to meet the complex and evolving demands of today's healthcare environment.

Following its recent comprehensive onsite evaluation, the Bachelor of Science in Nursing (BSN) program received official CCNE accreditation, marking a significant milestone in its ongoing commitment to high quality nursing education. During the visit, CCNE reviewers conducted an in-depth assessment of curriculum quality, faculty expertise, student support services, clinical partnerships, and program outcomes—ultimately confirming that the BSN program meets the rigorous national standards established for professional nursing preparation. This achievement not only highlights the program's strengths and dedication to continuous improvement, but also reinforces its mission to graduate highly competent, practice-ready nurses who are prepared to serve diverse healthcare communities.

The Master of Science in Nursing (MSN) program also recently hosted its CCNE site visit, representing another important step in the college's pursuit of excellence across all levels of nursing education. During the review, evaluators examined the depth and rigor of the graduate curriculum, the qualifications of faculty, and the support provided to students pursuing advanced nursing roles. The program now awaits the official accreditation decision, a process that typically follows a detailed review of the site visit report and supporting documentation. This period of anticipation reflects the program's confidence in the quality of its offerings and its commitment to maintaining the highest standards in preparing advanced practice and leadership-focused nursing professionals.

In conclusion, the CCNE accreditation process underscores a program's dedication to maintaining the highest standards in nursing education. With accreditation occurring on a ten-year cycle, nursing programs must demonstrate sustained excellence, rigorous evaluation, and continuous improvement to remain in good standing. The BSN program's recent accreditation and the MSN program's successful completion of its site visit reflect the institution's strong commitment to quality at every level of nursing preparation. As both programs continue to evolve to meet the growing demands of the healthcare environment, their engagement in the CCNE review process ensures that students receive an education rooted in integrity, innovation, and evidence-based practice.

ADVOCACY IN MOTION: ADVANCING NURSING IMPACT

BY CHANDLER PADGETT, DNP, APRN, FNP-C, JULIE MORRIS, EMILY ROBINSON, AND RENEKIA MERCER

Engaging in healthcare policy helps students move from understanding current policies to taking action that brings about positive change. Through creative innovations, Columbus State University nursing students have actively participated in legislative advocacy within the college and across local, state, and national settings. Locally, undergraduate and graduate nursing students attended the Elected Official Luncheon. At the state level, undergraduate students attended the Georgia Nurses Association (GNA) Nurses Day at the Capitol, while graduate nursing students attended the American Academy of Nurse Practitioners (AANP) Health Policy Conference. These opportunities have helped students build confidence and prepare for continued advocacy beyond graduation.

Elected Official Luncheon

In Fall 2025, United Advanced Practice Registered Nurses (UAPRN) of West Georgia held an Elected Official Luncheon at the Chattahoochee River Club in Columbus, Georgia. A discussion was led on current and upcoming legislation directly impacting APRNs. In attendance at the luncheon were elected officials from Columbus and the surrounding areas who are currently serving at the local, state, and national levels. A total of 93 CSU nursing students were in attendance, both in person and virtually.



State Representatives, Columbus City Council Members, CSU Faculty & Students, and UAPRN leadership at the Elected Official Luncheon.

This opportunity facilitated the understanding and importance of legislative advocacy, thus improving retention as well as supporting continued legislative advocacy prior to and after graduation.

College of Education and Health Professions Legislative Initiatives (COEHP LI)

COEHP LI is a student-led organization that promotes the implementation of effective advocacy skills among students who are studying Kinesiology, Nursing, Counseling, and Education.

In Spring 2025, Dr. Padgett worked alongside the board members of COEHP LI to submit and receive a $1,500 grant, which allowed COEHP LI members to attended Georgia Nurses Association's 2025 Nurses Day at the Capitol.



COEHP LI members, Dr. Teresa Peterson, Dr. Chandler Padgett, Representative Vance Smith, and GNA Representative Tim Davis at the Georgia State Capitol.

American Academy of Nurse Practitioners (AANP) Health Policy Conference

Dr. Padgett spearheaded graduate faculty collaborating with graduate nursing students to attend the 2025 AANP Health Policy Conference in Washington, D.C. In addition to attending the conference, graduate student Sadie Tollberg, Dr. Gwendolyn Miller, and Dr. Chandler Padgett, attended Capitol Hill Day. At this event, they had the opportunity to legislatively advocate directly to congressionally elected officials. This opportunity allowed students in the graduate nursing program to sharpen confidence in grant writing and legislative advocacy at the federal level.



"The GNA Day made advocacy feel less like an abstract concept, and more like an action that nurses, students, and other healthcare professionals can take for the betterment of their respective fields. We met representatives from our own county along with leaders from the Georgia Nurses Association."

- Julie Morris, COEHP LI President



Representative Sanford Bishop alongside APRN constituents, FNP students, and FNP graduate faculty at the United States Capitol.



Senator Raphael Warnock alongside APRN constituents and FNP students.

Department of Kinesiology and Health Sciences: 2025-2026 Highlights

BY DR. CLAY NICKS, CHAIR



The Department of Kinesiology and Health Sciences continued to thrive during the 2025–2026 academic year. Serving approximately 700 students, the department offers B.S. degrees in Health Science and Kinesiology, with concentrations in Exercise Science and Health & Physical Education, along with graduate programs including the M.A.T. in Health and Physical Education, the M.S. in Kinesiology, and the Master of Public Health. Faculty remained active in scholarship, service, and community engagement, reflecting the department's continued commitment to academic excellence and regional impact.

Meeting Academic Needs

The Department of Kinesiology and Health Sciences has worked to meet the academic needs of its students in the following ways:

- Dr. Carlene Robinson joined the Public Health faculty after having served as a senior epidemiologist with the Alabama Department of Health.
- The online M.S. in Kinesiology launched in Fall 2025, helping meet the needs of students seeking to advance their knowledge and skills in the field through a flexible format. This program replaces the M.Ed. in Health and Physical Education and the M.S. in Exercise Science, providing a flexible, streamlined pathway for students.
- The Master of Public Health program, led by Dr. Patricia Anafi, continued to grow in Fall 2025, while faculty worked toward accreditation through the Council on Education for Public Health.
- Faculty in Health and Physical Education also supported continued growth in the M.A.T. in Health and Physical Education as increasing numbers of students pursued initial licensure in the field.
- The B.S. in Kinesiology (Exercise Science) was approved and recognized through the National Strength and Conditioning Association's Education Recognition Program.
- Dr. Erick Richman won the Columbus State University 2025 Creative Endeavors Award for his efforts in teaching.



Scholarly Endeavors

Faculty continued to share their expertise through presentations at professional meetings such as the Southeast Chapter of the American College of Sports Medicine, the Alabama Public Health Association, the Alabama State Association for Health, Physical Education, Recreation, and Dance, and the University System of Georgia Teaching and Learning Conference.

Dr. Kate Early published two papers during the year: "Fluid Balance and Electrolyte Losses in Collegiate Men's Soccer Players in Practice and Game Under Different Environments" in Scientific Reports and "Applying the Jigsaw Learning Method to Structural Kinesiology" in Advances in Physiology Education.



Dr. Carlene Robinson published "How Health Literacy Affects Data and the Community" in the Journal of Public Health Issues and Practices.

Community Outreach

Faculty also remained engaged in meaningful outreach efforts. Dr. Lori Favoretto Hill continued her work with ACEing Autism by offering a three-week tennis camp for children with autism during the fall term. More than 25 CSU students assisted in implementing the program, gaining valuable hands-on experience while serving local families. (See program article on p. 40.)

Health Science faculty organized two community events—Autism Awareness in the spring and Opioid Awareness in the fall—both of which provided students with experiential learning opportunities while addressing important community health topics.

Dr. Kate Early led efforts to begin community health and performance testing using state-of-the-art equipment in the exercise science laboratory. Initial testing was completed with the local fire department, with plans to expand the program to other populations in the future.



Dr. Natasha Hourel led the MPH program's first Maternal and Child Health Leadership Symposium during the fall term.

These highlights represent just a few examples of the outstanding work being carried out by the faculty in Kinesiology and Health Sciences.

A WORD FROM KHS FACULTY...

COEHP Chronicles solicited responses from full-time faculty in the Department of Kinesiology and Health Sciences about their programs of study and work in either research or outreach. The questions asked were:

1. Identify one thing about your program of study, faculty, or students that you see as a particular strength.

2. In what important research or outreach have you been involved? Why is it important?

Following are their enlightening responses to our questions.

Dr. Kate Early, Program Coordinator, Exercise Science



A particular strength I would say is we have a strong connection between students and faculty. Our advisement and mentorship of students help them to prepare for their individual career goals.

Personally, I have continuously included undergrad and grad students in research projects to give them experiential learning opportunities. We partner with community, athletics, and local practitioners to give students practical health and fitness information that is mutually beneficial.

Dr. Loriane Favoretto Hill, Health & Physical Education

Without a doubt, the hands-on experience we provide our students is one of our greatest strengths. Students are consistently engaged in local public schools, where they learn directly from K–12 students experiences that truly prepare them for real-world practice. They also gain valuable exposure through working in adapted sports programs for children with disabilities. In addition, students have opportunities to collaborate across different areas within our department, allowing them to broaden their knowledge and develop into well-rounded professionals.

I serve as the director of ACEing Autism, a tennis program designed for children with Autism Spectrum Disorder. Throughout the program, we systematically collect valuable feedback from parents, CSU students, and staff. In addition, we evaluate program quality by examining the impact of adapted behavioral supports on participants' time on task and skill progression. This is a critical area of focus, as there remains a significant gap in the literature indicating that many sports programs are not adequately modified to meet the skill levels and needs of individuals with disabilities. (See more about ACEing Autism on p. 40.)

Dr. Rebecca Toland, Program Coordinator, Health Science



The strength of the Health Science program comes from its students. The program is very diverse and includes traditional and non-traditional students. Many are athletes or in the military, and some are moms and dads working to earn a degree that will improve their lives or fulfill an academic goal. They work in tandem, bringing real-world experience and technical expertise to discussions and assessments. For example, Health Science students worked in groups to conduct secondary research on a health-related topic of their choice. They worked diligently, drawing from each person's strengths. Nine groups of three from two separate courses were accepted to present at the Columbus State University Tower Day.

Health Science and MPH faculty are actively involved in both research and community outreach focused on current health issues in the population, to include such topics as vaccine hesitance, STIs in seniors, and obesity. A recent focus has been on opioid awareness, overdose prevention, and stigma reduction. One of the most significant initiatives was the "Remove the Stigma" opioid awareness campaign, a collaborative effort involving Columbus State University, the College of Education and Health Professions, the Department of Kinesiology and Health Sciences, and multiple community partners. (See article on p. 38.)

This work is important because opioid overdoses remain a major public health crisis in the United States and because many overdose deaths are preventable. Through research and outreach, faculty and partners contributed to improving public knowledge, promoting evidence-based prevention strategies, and fostering stronger partnerships between universities and community organizations. These efforts demonstrate how academic institutions can play a critical role in addressing urgent health challenges and saving lives.

Dr. Patricia Anafi, Program Coordinator, Master of Public Health (MPH)

The MPH with a concentration in maternal and child health is a fully online graduate degree open to students with health and non-health backgrounds, and with a flexible degree plan suitable for both full-time and part-time workers. The program offers every student an internship opportunity to gain hands-on public health training and experience in a public health practice setting.

My research involves examining socio-economic aspects of maternal care-seeking behavior, preconception health behavior and education, and challenges caregivers face in raising children with developmental disabilities. These are important maternal and child health issues relevant to the MPH program's concentration courses.

Dr. Carlene Robinson – Health Science and MPH



The B.S. in Health Science and Master of Public Health (MPH) programs center around interdisciplinary health care teams. Our students graduate and work in environmental sectors, medicine, health departments, veterinary care, pharmaceutical companies, and governmental policy. One of the best things our program continuously does is bring the people of the greater Chattahoochee Valley quality care and resources. From Albany to LaGrange, from Alabama to Middle Georgia, we adapt our practice-based learning to identify and connect them to their most urgent healthcare needs.

Ever wondered where people discharged out of the ER go? Ever wondered what the bundle of paperwork in your doctor's office means? My research group examines healthcare system "overwhelm" and navigation over the lifespan. I have two graduate students assessing the impact of declining birthing centers and disability providers in Southwest Georgia. In a recently developed class, students are making health promotion videos about how to overcome health initiation hesitance (e.g., how to start the healthy behavior a doctor is recommending). These findings are delivered to outpatient facilities and assessed for their effectiveness. We hope that in our research we will help hospitals and providers' offices become more accessible for all.

Want to share your opinions or ideas with the Chronicles?
Connect by providing an update on Alumni or Retiree information?
Email COEHP Chronicles Users at:
mesg_coehp_chronicles@columbusstate.edu

THE SCHOLAR-LEADER NEXT DOOR:

A LOOK INSIDE COLUMBUS STATE UNIVERSITY'S ONLINE DOCTOR OF EDUCATION DEGREE IN CURRICULUM AND LEADERSHIP

DR. JENNIFER LOVELACE



Where our Students
Learn, Lead, and Live.

Across the nation, P-12 schools and universities are seeking leaders who can translate evidence into everyday practice – professionals who can pinpoint local needs, makes sense of data, and design solutions that improve student outcomes. Columbus State University (CSU) has leaned into this mandate with a distinctive Doctor of Education (Ed.D.) in curriculum and leadership that blends research rigor with practical, career-advancing application.

Housed in CSU's College of Education and Health Professions, the Ed.D. is designed for educators who want to influence their schools and communities – whether in the P-12 classroom, district offices, or in colleges and universities. The overarching mission of the program is clear: cultivate scholar-practitioners who can diagnose problems of practice, synthesize empirical literature, and implement policies and practices that positively impact performance and expand opportunities for their schools and communities. This mission sits within the broader graduate ecosystem known for one-to-one faculty engagement, mentoring, and professional development – elements that help the modern working adult complete the doctorate while balancing academics, families, and careers.

WHAT "100% ONLINE" LOOKS LIKE AT CSU

CSU's Ed.D. blends real-time class meetings (synchronous) aimed at building community and sharpening discourse with flexible modules (asynchronous) completed on your schedule. This approach respects the realities of school calendars, campus cycles, and the busy, working adult.

Program History

In the Spring of 2010, CSU's new Ed.D. in Curriculum and Leadership welcomed its first 22 aspiring doctoral students in three distinct program tracks: Curriculum and Instruction, Educational Leadership, and Higher Education Administration. Since that time, the Ed.D. program has admitted over 500 doctoral students, graduated more than 200 students, and currently enrolls more than 150 students at any given time.

The Doctoral Program began as a hybrid, cohort model. Students in both the Educational Leadership and Curriculum and Instruction tracks would experience coursework in a blended format of face-to-face and online environments. Many CSU faculty would travel to areas outside of Columbus to meet with cohorts of students weekly. The Henry County, Lee County, and Warner Robins Cohorts made up the majority of the students in the first several years of the program. The Higher Education Administration track of the program was created as a 100% online program aimed at helping higher education professionals advance in their current fields.

Due in part to the impact of the 2020 Covid-19 pandemic, all three tracks of the doctoral program are now offered completely online with no face-to-face requirements. The move to a 100% online program for all three tracks has also helped CSU expand recruitment efforts and reach a larger number of students across the state of Georgia and beyond.

Three Pathways – One Purpose

The Ed.D. program creates a unique space for doctoral students at CSU. Each fall, CSU enrolls a new cohort that moves through milestones together, forging networks that last far beyond their experience at CSU. The cohort design is intentional: shared pacing, shared norms, and shared experiences in three distinct tracks.

The **Curriculum and Instruction Track** of the Ed.D. program at CSU is designed for P-12 educators who want to lead instructional improvement within a classroom environment. This track deepens a student's expertise in curriculum analysis, pedagogy, and implementation. After meeting additional PSC requirements, students in this track are allowed to add Curriculum and Instruction S-7 certification to their teaching certificates, positioning them for roles that bridge the classroom and district-level strategy.

The **Educational Leadership Track** of the Ed.D. program at CSU is ideal for current and aspiring principals, central-office leaders, and superintendents. This track focuses on system-level leadership, organizational change, and performance management. For students who already hold their Tier I and Tier II Educational Leadership certificates, the Ed.D. in Educational Leadership can lead, upon completion, to an L-7 upgrade to their teaching certificates. The Ed.D. in Educational Leadership partners closely with the Master's and Educational Specialist programs in Educational Leadership to ensure that all students can obtain Tier I and Tier II certification before completing the Ed.D. program. The L-7 credential is a tangible differentiator in the state's leadership pipeline.

The **Higher Education Administration Track** of the Ed.D. program at CSU is designed for professionals working in colleges and universities or organizations that work closely with postsecondary institutions. The Higher Education track marries organizational leadership with the unique governance, enrollment, and student-success challenges of postsecondary education. This track prepares graduates for roles across enrollment services, academic affairs, and student affairs.

Scholar-Leader Mindset

Regardless of their track, all doctoral students engage in a rigorous research course sequence that includes instruction in qualitative and quantitative research methods. Students select advanced research methods courses that best fit their intended dissertation design that has been carefully developed through scaffolding seminars and dissertation writing coursework. This common foundation and targeted scaffolding structure helps students move from "idea" to "final defense."

Designed for the Working Professional – Admission through Graduation

CSU uses a holistic lens in the admission process. Applicants enter the program with a minimum of a master's degree and evidence of professional impact through recommendations, resumes, professional statements, and writing samples. A committee of faculty conduct interviews to help gauge the applicant's readiness for the rigor and commitment of doctoral-level scholarship. The goal is to assemble strong cohorts that have the right mix of experience, motivation, and scholarly potential.

A Rhythm that Fits Real Life

New cohorts start each Fall semester and, once enrolled, doctoral students can expect transparency and accountability in their advising and progression through the program. As a cohort style program, students receive a full schedule of their expected progression (and completion). Cohorts are more than a schedule – they are a support system that sustains students from their first seminar to their final defense.

Cohorts are more than a schedule – they are a support system that sustains students from their first seminar to their final defense.

People Matter: Program and Faculty Leadership

One of the hallmarks of CSU's Ed.D. culture is the open access to faculty who teach, advise, and mentor within the program. With clear points of contact for leadership and student services, students can ensure their academic and administrative needs are met. The Doctoral Program offers several opportunities for students to participate in workshops and seminars as well as in research conferences throughout their programs.

Multilevel Mentoring Framework



Another hallmark of CSU's Ed.D. program culture is the implementation of a multilevel mentoring framework. Before new students begin their first course, they are assigned at least two faculty mentors. The cohort mentor exists to help new students bond with one another and develop lasting connections that will sustain them through the entire doctoral program. The faculty mentor exists to help individual students talk through topic development, career-related questions, and generally navigate the complexities of being in a doctoral program for the first time. Throughout their time in the program, students are offered opportunities to work with peer mentors, accountability mentors, alumni mentors, dissertation mentors, and scholarly writing mentors as well.

Outcomes that Matter

Graduates of CSU's doctoral program step into roles where evidence-based strategies and leadership skills intersect: curriculum specialist, principals, superintendents, chief academic officers, researchers, and faculty. In higher education, program alumni pursue leadership in enrollment services, academic affairs, and student affairs – spaces where data-informed strategy directly shapes student success.

A Regional Engine for Talent

Because many graduates remain in Georgia, CSU's Ed.D. compounds its impact: districts gain instructional leaders who can redesign professional learning; colleges gain administrators who can align resources to retention and completion goals; and communities gain partners who can steward change with transparency and evidence. CSU's doctoral program underscores the university mission with competitive tuition, assistantships, and scholarships that expand access to advanced study.

The Dissertation, Reimagined as a Change Project

At CSU, the dissertation is not just an abstract exercise – it is an applied investigation into a current problem of practice. With research courses front-loading methodological breadth and doctoral seminars and milestone pacing, doctoral students move from tentative topics to a defended project that can be implemented, measured, and refined in authentic settings. The scaffolded structure of the dissertation coursework keeps the work focused and feasible without sacrificing scholarly depth.

Alumni Spotlight

Since 2010, CSU's doctoral program has been developing community leaders throughout Georgia. Program Alumni have been consistently recognized in their schools for their leadership and innovation.

- Dr. Megan Jones (2025) was named Veterans High 2025 Teacher of the Year.
- Dr. Michael Poll (2022) is serving as the Vice Provost for Enrollment Management at University of Alabama, Huntsville.
- Dr. Melissa Young (2021) serves as the Assistant Vice President for Student Success at Columbus State University.
- Dr. Dawn Troung (2019) is the Director for Campus Health and Wellness at Fayetteville State University.
- Dr. Kendall Forde (2024) is the Director of Bands at Rains High School in Mobile, Alabama.
- Dr. Valerie Richardson (2022) is the Director of Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act in Columbus, Georgia.
- Drs. Sabrina Stephens (2022), Brooks Robinson (2018), and Kenyatta Aldridge (2021) were all named as new assistant principals in Sumter County beginning in 2025.

This is just a small snapshot of the impact our graduates have on their schools and communities. If you are a program alum or know of a program alum, we encourage you to send us an update so we can highlight you as well!



For more information, to apply, or to connect, please reach out to edd@columbusstate.edu!

COEHP OUTREACH CENTERS: EXPANDING IMPACT ACROSS THE CHATTAHOOCHEE VALLEY

BY DESTINEE ROUSE

At the College of Education and Health Professions, learning extends far beyond the classroom. Through the vibrant network of outreach centers, COEHP continues to strengthen partnerships, support educators, inspire future professionals, and serve the broader Chattahoochee Valley community. During Spring and Summer 2026, these centers have remained active hubs of innovation, professional learning, and student engagement—each contributing uniquely to CSU's mission of access, excellence, and community impact.



Center for Quality Teaching and Learning (CQTL)

The Center for Quality Teaching and Learning continues to play a vital role in recruiting, preparing, and supporting educators across the region. Through strong partnerships with Muscogee County School District, Harris County Schools, and other local systems, CQTL supports teacher candidates throughout their journey from early field experiences and practicums to student teaching and induction. In February, CQTL partnered with PAGE to host Future Georgia Educators Day, welcoming approximately 200 high school students for a morning of workshops, networking, and motivational speakers. The event encouraged students to pursue careers in education and provided lunch at the Cougar Den to give them a small taste of college life.

Spring 2026 programming highlighted CQTL's ongoing commitment to educator development and community engagement. Harvard Fellows visited CSU in March 2026, sharing innovative strategies and real-world insights with undergraduate education students. These award-winning educators offered inspiration while reinforcing best practices that teacher candidates can carry into their own classrooms.



March also brought the annual Middle School and High School Teaching Competition, which engaged students from Go2 Teach clubs and Teaching as a Profession course across multiple districts. Participants served as teacher assistants, ambassadors, and emerging professionals, culminating in a day of competition, collaboration, and campus exploration.

In April CQTL hosted its second annual "Come Get the Scoop" event, connecting education majors with CSU student teachers currently in the field. These peer-to-peer conversations offer valuable insights into classroom realities, student teaching expectations, and professional growth, along with a welcoming, community focused atmosphere.

Columbus Regional Mathematics Collaborative (CRMC)



The Columbus Regional Mathematics Collaborative continues its longstanding mission of promoting high-quality mathematics education across the Chattahoochee Valley. Serving educators, students, and families for more than three decades, CRMC remains a trusted resource for professional learning, instructional support, and community engagement. A highlight of Spring 2026 was the Math Masters Tournament, an academic competition that brought together middle school students from across the region. Hosted at Frank Brown Hall, the event celebrated problem-solving, teamwork, perseverance, and sportsmanship. Students competed both individually and collaboratively, showcasing their mathematical reasoning in a supportive and energetic environment. The success of the tournament was made possible through the dedication of volunteers and community partners, reinforcing the collaborative spirit that defines CRMC.

CRMC also continued to offer many professional development opportunities during the spring and summer months. Sessions included Data Science and Common Online Data Analysis Platform (CODAP), Functions and Desmos (a free graphing calculator), and Triangulating Improvement for High Stakes Testing Results. These offerings provided educators with practical tools to analyze data, refine instruction, and improve student outcomes. Flexible scheduling options allowed schools to tailor professional learning to their specific needs, ensuring accessibility and relevance.

Oxbow Meadows Environmental Learning Center

Oxbow Meadows Environmental Learning Center hosts a variety of programs and events over the spring and summer. This summer, Oxbow has two summer camps for ages 6-9 and 7-11. Animal Antics camp is from June 8th-12th and Frogwarts camp is from June 22-26th. Campers may "leave a bit muddy but filled with wonder and excitement for the natural world!" Campers learn about their local environment and the wildlife that lives there through crafts, animal encounters, and outdoor adventures.





Oxbow presents the annual Honey Harvest event on July 11th in partnership with the Chattahoochee Valley Beekeepers Association. Visitors will learn about beekeeping and the process of extracting and bottling honey from the honeybees housed at Oxbow. Honey Harvest will feature extraction demonstrations, honey sales, animal interactions, crafts, story time, and more! Events like Honey Harvest provide CSU and local high school students with volunteer service opportunities to engage with and support their community.

In addition to summer camps and events, Oxbow frequently offers family programming Tuesday through Saturday in June and July for learners of all ages. Families can participate in hands-on investigations or enjoy an animal or science show taught by CSU students.



VISIT OXBOW THIS SUMMER!

From the Editor: As a point of privilege, I am stepping in to introduce the feature article celebrating the work of CSU's Coca-Cola Space Science Center. You see, I was the girl who as a senior in high school took Physics with 19 boys. I was the girl whose vocational aptitude test indicated that I was best suited for a career in science and mathematics. I just didn't have a vision for what I wanted to do with that.

I applaud the work of the CCSSC because I see that, among other things, it creates a love for science in both boys and girls. It creates in their minds the desire to learn more and a vision for career opportunities. CCSSC teaches with enthusiasm, engages people of all ages in hands-on learning, and literally and figuratively opens eyes and minds and hearts to whole new worlds. Please read on to learn more about this amazing outreach center.

CELEBRATING 30 YEARS OF COLUMBUS STATE UNIVERSITY'S COCA-COLA SPACE SCIENCE CENTER

The Beginning

The Coca-Cola Space Science Center (CCSSC) in Columbus, Georgia is a division of Columbus State University (CSU) and serves as an academic enrichment center for the university and a regional tourist destination for the public. Established in 1996 as a partnership between CSU, Uptown Columbus, the Muscogee County School District (MCSD), and other community partners, the CCSSC is Georgia's only science center and museum facility uniquely dedicated to providing experiences for students and public visitors in astronomy and space science. It is housed administratively in the College of Education and Health Professions (COEHP). The CCSSC serves more than 35,000 patrons and students annually with on-site activities for groups from as far as Florida and Tennessee. The facility has five major components: the Omnisphere Theater planetarium, the Falcon Moon-based Adventure, the Robotics Laboratory, the WestRock Observatory (formerly the Mead Observatory), and the exhibit gallery featuring over $20 million in NASA artifacts from the Apollo and Space Shuttle eras. The Center also serves many more people through mobile programs and online outreach.



Yet the CCSSC story has revealed again and again that it is about far more than buildings and exhibits. Consider the scope of its contributions to the lives of school children and college interns.

What the Numbers Say…

In its years of operation, Coca-Cola Space Science Center programs and initiatives have served more than one million people! More than 85,000 students have flown simulated voyages into space. The CCSSC has collaborated with the Muscogee County School District to serve local students throughout all 30 years, having grown so that it now offers annual programming for every MCSD student from kindergarten through 6th Grade – over 17,000 students per year.



At the college level, CCSSC engages in workforce development, equipping its student interns with 21st-century job skills. Over 90 students who have had internship experiences at the Coca-Cola Space Science Center have chosen to pursue careers in fields such as aerospace and propulsion engineering, astrophysics, planetary science, computer science, environmental science, and science and math education.

The mission of the CCSSC is: "To inspire and educate the next generation of scientists, engineers, science educators, and communicators; to foster the public's appreciation for science and technology; and to advance scientific literacy throughout our community."

Such a mission statement is worthy of further consideration. It has three distinct components to be achieved:

- ◊ To inspire and educate the next generation of scientists, engineers, science educators, and communicators;
- ◊ To foster the public's appreciation for science and technology; and
- ◊ To advance scientific literacy throughout the community.



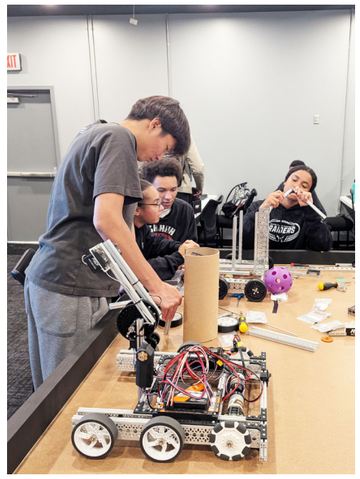
The accomplishment of such a mission requires the hard work of dedicated, knowledgeable, passionate, and creative individuals supported by partners who also believe in the importance of the mission. Under the leadership of Executive Director Shawn Cruzen and a talented staff, the CCSSC has developed and grown programs for school children, university students, and the broader community.

COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

The CCSSC has consistently played a significant role in a variety of outreach and learning experiences that enrich the community and provide excitement, knowledge, and appreciation of science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) fields, which leads to life-long learning. See examples of the outreach and learning experiences that follow:



- **Academic Partnerships:** The CCSSC has developed a comprehensive robotics educational program that extends beyond the longstanding partnership with the Muscogee County School District to include educators across the state of Georgia (at the request of the Georgia Department of Education) as well as the College of Education and Health Professions pre-service teachers. The program provides professional development focused on both robotics competitions and classroom integration aligned with the Georgia Standards of Excellence. Participants engage in activities such as building Spike Prime, Spike Essential, and REV robots, programming robots, and exploring their educational applications. Students from MCSD elementary, middle, and high schools participate in robotics activities designed to reinforce instruction delivered by CCSSC-trained educators.



- **Robotics and Drone Technology:** Through academic partnerships, the CCSSC recognized that expanding robot instruction across the county would require schools to have direct access to the necessary

equipment and resources. As a result, the CCSSC provides robotics kits, instructional materials, and related technology resources to school programs requesting support, in addition to offering ongoing professional development for educators. To further these initiatives, two CCSSC staff members are Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) certified, while a third is currently completing the certification process.

- **Annual STEM Day:** The Georgia Department of Education (GaDOE) annually contracts with CSU's CCSSC to host a STEM career exploration day. The event is free to the public, and this year's STEM Day attracted 811 participants. The target audience is middle and high school students, with the purpose of encouraging individuals to pursue STEM careers. The objective is to provide an exciting, interactive opportunity for students to engage with professionals while exploring a wide range of STEM careers.

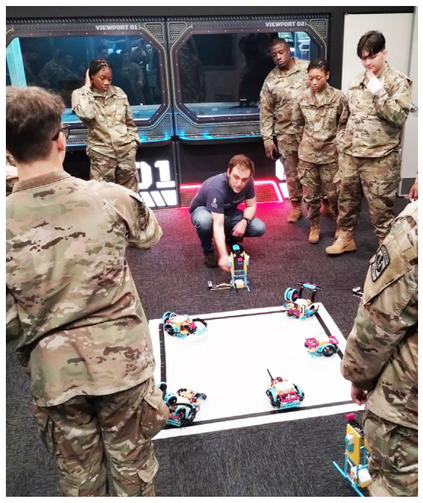
- **Art Exhibits:** From June 2, 2025, through August 3, 2025, CSU's Bo Bartlett Center hosted American Legend: Images from Space that Fire the Imagination, an exhibition featuring photographs from the collection of astronaut David Scott presented to the CCSSC. Showcasing images from Gemini 8, Apollo 9, and Apollo 15, the exhibit drew hundreds of visitors and included several photographs that had not previously been available for public viewing.



- **Astronomy Nights:** Each year, CCSSC astronomers and student interns host approximately 17 Astronomy Nights at locations including the CCSSC, FDR State Park, and Providence Canyon. Events hosted at the CCSSC feature activities such as planetarium star tours, telescope and observatory tours, and live viewing of celestial events through outdoor telescopes. Off-site Astronomy Nights include a brief presentation about the CCSSC and its programs, followed by observations of deep-sky objects such as nebulae and galaxies, as well as planets and bright stars.



- ***Made of Stars* Podcast:** The weekly podcast, hosted by Mr. Wes Carroll and featuring CCSSC Executive Director Dr. Shawn Cruzen, provides insight into all aspects of space exploration, from Earth-based programs and vehicles to discoveries extending beyond our atmosphere and into deep space. **The podcast website earned the 2022 Georgia Association of Broadcasters award for Best Podcast Series** and is available on major podcast platforms.



- **Military and JROTC Collaborations:** Recently, the CCSSC began partnering with Fort Benning robotics specialists and regional JROTC units to provide instruction in the construction, programming, implementation, and repair of various types of robots. Through this instruction, participants develop skills with robotics, drones, and 3D design technologies while also preparing to participate in robotics competitions.

- **Music Under the Dome Concert Series:** The concert series is a unique and innovative collaboration between CSU's Schwob School of Music and Coca-Cola Space Science Center. As the world-class faculty and student musicians from the Schwob School perform in the immersive technological venue of the Omnisphere Theater planetarium, captivating full-dome video is integrated into the performance, creating an impressive artistic visual interpretation of the live music.

- **Theatre Productions:** Through a partnership with the Springer Opera House, students and families have experienced productions from the Theatre for the Very Young series, including performances such as Twinkle, Twinkle Little-est Star and A Superhero for All Seasons.

Grant Awards

To assist in implementation of instructional activities, the CCSSC applied for and was awarded multiple grants. Those grants include the following:

- **A U.S. Department of Education grant in the amount of $636,000:** These funds allowed for the construction of a robotics laboratory at the CCSSC site, delivery of the previously mentioned robots to be used in the MCSD schools, and funding for all professional development activities.

- **A two-year NASA grant:** Used to upgrade the CCSSC's 0.61 m Wave telescope, the grant allows for observation of both Blazar Variability and Asteroid Tracking. CSU students majoring in Earth and Space Science will serve as undergraduate researchers guided by faculty, staff, and collaborators. This opportunity will provide valuable new knowledge about those topics as well as practical research experience for CCSSC interns.

- **Annual Space Grants:** Received annually for over 20 years, the Space Grants are designed to allow the Center to provide students with real-world research experience.

The National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) presented the CCSSC with a Group Achievement Award from the NASA Community Day Team. The award was the result of an extremely successful Columbus Goes to Mars Day that included the CCSSC, the Columbus Museum, and Fort Benning, GA. This was the first time that a Space Day had been hosted outside the state of Florida.



CCSSC "STARS"

In 2025, former CCSSC interns (part-time employees while CSU students), were invited to participate in a study to identify their later fields of employment. Their responses fell into four categories: 1) Science, Engineering, and Technology professionals; 2) Science teachers; 3) Graduates employed at NASA, Marshall Space Center, and other space-related companies; and 4) non-STEM related professions.

After a thorough search, the CCSSC was able to locate 136 former and present interns, some who have since retired. The following table presents the findings.

Table 1: CCSSC Former Interns Fields of Employment

Fields of Employment	Number of interns located	% of Total Professionals
Scientists/Engineers/Technologists	95	69.85%
Science Teachers	22	16.18%
NASA/Marshall Space Center/ Teledyne, Axiom, Blue Origin, etc.	13	9.56%
Total STEM professionals	**130**	**95.59%**
Non-STEM professionals	**6**	**4.41%**
Grand Total	**136**	**100.00%**

The data indicate that a significant percentage of the interns who participated in the survey obtained employment in STEM-related fields. The case can be made that their choices were due at least in part to the impact of their internship experiences with the CCSSC. That impact is demonstrated in the statements of Cam McCarty and John Hood.



Cameron McCarty is the Payload Operations Director at NASA. He commented: "The CCSSC has been an ever-present feature of my life, but I think it's one of the main reasons my interests have shifted so heavily into the space industry. Even in my current job, I still think about how I would explain what I do during a telescope night or to someone visiting the lobby. It's always in the back of my mind. I see my experience as a CCSSC Star preparing me to contribute to my community and profession because the CCSSC really teaches all the skills you need to succeed in your field. As a civil servant with NASA, I see it as my responsibility to educate my community about what we do, how we spend taxpayer dollars, and why it matters. The CCSSC gave me the confidence and knowledge to discuss that with anyone—whether an elected representative or a third grader."

John Hood is currently completing a post-doctoral position, sponsored by the National Science Foundation, at the University of Chicago. He is a CSU and CCSSC alumnus and

was selected by the Office of Polar Programs to participate in the installation of new telescope components at the South Pole Telescope in Antarctica.



He stated: "My time at the CCSSC prepared me to talk with people from all kinds of backgrounds and education levels. It also helped me explain my research more clearly when presenting at conferences. It taught me not to assume everyone in the room knows the same things I know, but instead to make sure everyone leaves understanding on a fundamental or high level."

Coca-Cola Space Science Center Economic Impact Study: Butler Center for Research and Economic Development

In 2026, CSU's Butler Center for Research and Economic Development conducted a research study on the impact of the CCSSC. The Butler Center states: "This study provides a comprehensive assessment of the Coca-Cola Space Science Center's role within the Columbus region and the broader educational ecosystem by integrating economic, educational, and contextual evidence. Through a conservative analytical approach, the findings demonstrate that the CCSSC generates measurable economic value through its ongoing operations while also contributing to educational outcomes that extend beyond short-term engagement."

From an **economic perspective**, the monetary impact analysis indicates that the CCSSC supports approximately 22.8 jobs across the Columbus economy and generates an estimated $1.3 million in annual value added, contributing directly to regional gross domestic product. Total economic activity associated with the CCSSC's operations is estimated at $2.6 million annually, alongside approximately $259,000 in combined local, state, and federal tax revenues. By intentionally excluding visitor-related tourism spending, these estimates reflect a conservative assessment and should be interpreted as a lower bound of the CCSSC's overall economic contribution.



The **educational analyses** further indicate that the CCSSC plays a meaningful role in fostering student engagement with science and space-related topics. Quantitative survey results from MCSD fourth-, fifth-, and sixth-grade students show consistently high levels of interest, excitement, and willingness to participate in future STEM activities. At the same time, teacher feedback confirms strong alignment with the Georgia Standards of Excellence. These short-term outcomes are consistent with a substantial body of research emphasizing the importance of early, applied STEM exposure in sustaining student interest and supporting longer-term educational pathways.

Qualitative testimonies from educators, community leaders, and former participants further illustrate how early exposure to hands-on space and science programming can shape educational mindsets, instructional practices, and career awareness over time. While these narratives do not establish causal attribution, they reinforce the quantitative evidence and research literature by highlighting plausible pathways through which early engagement contributes to academic persistence and entry into space-, science-, and technology-related fields.

The Butler Center's research study on the impact of the CCSSC stated, "Within this ecosystem of innovation and partnership, the CCSSC has emerged as one of CSU's most distinctive and impactful assets." It further states:

"In conclusion, the findings suggest that the Coca-Cola Space Science Center contributes not only to the local economy but also to the foundational conditions required for long-term national competitiveness and security. Sustaining U.S. leadership in aerospace, defense, and advanced technologies depends on a robust domestic STEM pipeline, beginning with early interest formation and continued engagement through education and training. By sparking curiosity in space, science, and engineering at early stages of learning, the CCSSC supports workforce development priorities that are closely aligned with national security objectives, while simultaneously strengthening the regional educational and economic ecosystem."

The Future of the CCSSC

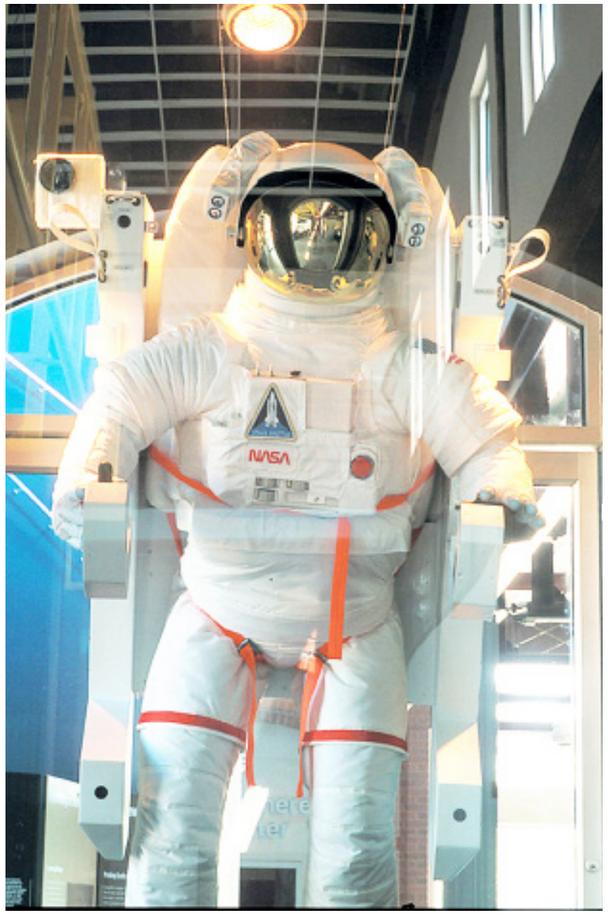
Funding has been obtained for a new facility that will house the CCSSC, CSU's Robotics Engineering Program, and MCSD robotics activities. The facility will include a new display space for CCSSC's signature artifact, the quarter-scale engineering prototype of NASA's Space Shuttle (pictured below). The artifact is the largest subscale prototype of the Space Shuttle ever created and was vital for testing and verification for the launches of America's Space Shuttles. The display of this iconic artifact will open an exciting new chapter in the life of the CCSSC.



During the summer of 2026, the Coca-Cola Space Science Center will host its 30-year anniversary celebration. The celebration will allow Columbus State University and the community to commemorate the successes of CCSSC, its students, and graduates as well as to provide a glimpse into the Center's plans for the future.

As it has done for 30 years, the CCSSC will continue to create new exhibits, new programs, and new opportunities to inspire and educate children and the next generation of scientists, engineers, and science educators. It will continue to remind the community that science is not distant and unreachable. It is seen in the eyes of school children seeing Saturn through the lens of a telescope. It is young people and interns choosing careers in fields of science and science education. It is teachers discovering new ways to inspire children in their classrooms. It is literally and figuratively opening eyes and minds and hearts to whole new worlds.

Who knows what lies ahead over the next 30 years? Just use your imagination.







THANKS TO THESE GREAT LEADERS OF THE COCA-COLA SPACE SCIENCE CENTER



Back Row: Dr. Shawn Cruzen, Chris Johnson, Mike Johnson, Griffin McElroy, Clay Miller, Ross Hodge, & Lance Tankersly
Front Row: Dr. Rosa Williams, Dr. Tina Cross, Cole Downey, & Bridgett Oliver

Momentum with Purpose:

CSU's Professional Development Lab School at Dimon Magnet Academy

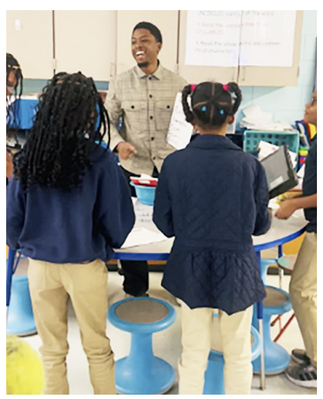
"What We've Accomplished Since the Launch in July 2025 and What's to Come"

BY DR. PAM WETHERINGTON

At the start of the 2025–26 academic year, the College of Education and Health Professions launched the first-ever Professional Development Lab School (PDLS) at Dimon Magnet Academy, marking a significant milestone for the Chattahoochee Valley Region. Grounded in a bold, collaborative partnership, the PDLS is designed to equip and empower a community so that every student thrives, a model truly built by the community, for the community.

In just one year, that commitment has turned into meaningful action across Dimon Magnet Academy's students, families, and community. Here's a look at what we've accomplished since the launch and what's ahead.







Dimon's LitLab, After-School Tutoring & Mentoring Program for 3rd – 5th Graders

Led weekly by CSU students, Dimon's LitLab provides engaging literacy support to more than 30 students who benefit from extended learning opportunities. Aligned to the science of reading, the program strengthens fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension through small-group, data-informed instruction.

What sets LitLab apart from a traditional after-school program is its intentional focus on social-emotional growth, cultivating confidence, goal-setting, perseverance, self-reflection, and positive relationships.

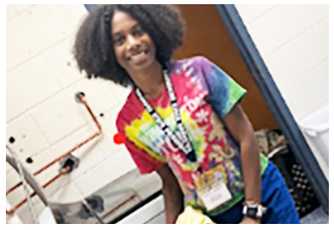
CSU Students in Action at the PDLS

Throughout the 2025–26 academic year, more than 100 CSU students, across a variety of disciplines, have contributed in meaningful ways: providing one-on-one academic support and mentorship, facilitating small group literacy instruction, establishing Dimon's Uniform Closet, and supporting signature experiences like Planting Day and Maker Space Fridays. Through this work, Dimon's students get excited about their learning, while CSU students sharpen the critical skills today's workforce demands (e.g., collaboration, communication, problem-solving, adaptability, and cultural competence). The result is creating a win/win for the school community and future professionals!











Partnership with CSU's Bo Bartlett Center



Dimon's fifth grade students collaborated with acclaimed artist Bo Bartlett to create original works inspired by his vision, "Let your roots be your crown." Blending art and literacy, students drafted and refined personal narratives to align with their artwork—using storytelling and self-expression to reflect on identity, heritage, and growth.



Want to get involved at the PDLS?

Please fill out the ***Get Involved Form*** by selecting https://forms.office.com/r/thmSgCyGhH, or help by making a donation by selecting https://www.givecampus.com/campaigns/75997/donations/new.

What's To Come at the PDLS

Coming in Summer 2026

Summer Spectacular, a Career Exploration and Enrichment Program for Dimon Students in Kindergarten – 5th Grades

Coming in 2027

Health & Wellness Services for Dimon's Students, Families, and Community Members

COEHP HALL OF FAME INDUCTEES

BY DR. JAN BURCHAM

The College of Education and Health Professions Hall of Fame, established in 2005, honors individuals who have an academic connection to Columbus State University and who have made extraordinary contributions to education or health professions. Selection criteria include having earned a degree, certification, or endorsement from CSU, been active in their chosen field for a minimum of 15 years, and made remarkable contributions to the profession. Nominations are accepted throughout the year and are reviewed by a committee of current and former faculty and community leaders. Inductees are honored annually at a ceremony where they are presented with a plaque and their accomplishments are shared. Each inductee's name is included on a Hall of Fame wall display in Frank Brown Hall.

The Class of 2025 honorees included:

Dara Alizabeth Crouch '10
Health Professions, Pine Mountain, Georgia
A labor and delivery nurse for more than 15 years, 2010 graduate Dara Crouch has cared for thousands of newborns and mothers in the greater Columbus area while mentoring hundreds of nursing students and new nurses. She helped establish the labor and delivery unit at St. Francis-Emory Healthcare and played a key role in earning National Silver Certified Safe Sleep Facility status through the Cribs for Kids National Safe Sleep Hospital Certification Program. Committed to education and advocacy, she also works throughout the community to promote infant safe sleep awareness for parents and caregivers.



Wanda S. Jones, FNP-BC '86, '94
Health Professions, Atlanta, Georgia
A dedicated clinician, leader, and health advocate, 1994 BSN graduate Wanda Jones has devoted her career to nursing, beginning with a decade in Labor & Delivery at The Medical Center and later serving as a family nurse practitioner in acute care at U.S. Army Fort Benning, where she cared for soldiers and military families. She has extended her impact through international medical mission trips, service as a church camp nurse and longtime Girl Scout leader, and leadership roles with the Georgia Nurses Association and Georgia Nurses Foundation, where she currently serves as president of the Board of Trustees. Her many honors include the GNA Distinguished Service Award, awards from the United Advanced Practice Registered Nurses of Georgia, and induction into Sigma Theta Tau International Honor Society of Nurses.



Jennifer N. Robinson '03
Education, Midland, Georgia
With more than 20 years of experience teaching and coaching at the high school level, Jennifer Robinson has leveraged her CSU bachelor's degree in French to teach courses ranging from introductory French to Advanced Placement. Since 2019, she has led the Career Technical Agricultural Education (CTAE) "Teaching as a Profession" Pathway at Harris County High School, inspiring many graduates to pursue careers in education. She has advised numerous student organizations, founded charter chapters of Future Georgia Educators and Family, Career and Community Leaders of America, contributed to statewide curriculum development, and presented frequently at state and national conferences. She also holds a master's degree in second-language instruction from Troy University.



Michael Seckinger, Jr. '01, '06, '08
Education, Midland, Georgia
Dr. Michael Seckinger, Jr., a three-time CSU graduate, has dedicated over two decades to the Muscogee County School District serving as a teacher, instructional leader, and administrator. After teaching science and mathematics, he served as a regional academic coach, district teacher quality specialist, and district science content specialist before becoming assistant principal and now principal of Double Churches Middle School. He actively supports CSU's outreach centers such as the Coca-Cola Space Science Center and Oxbow Meadows Environmental Learning Center, mentors students as they pursue the Eagle Scout rank, and guides doctoral candidates toward degree completion.



Margie Yates '88
Education, Columbus, Georgia
Dr. Margie Yates has helped shape education at Columbus State and across the region through more than a decade of service and leadership, serving since 2012 and becoming dean of the College of Education & Health Professions in 2024 after first serving as interim dean beginning in 2022. A former K–8 teacher for 14 years, she previously served seven years on the faculty at LaGrange College, chairing its Education Department, before advancing at Columbus State to professor, dean of Research and Graduate Studies, and ultimately dean of the college. Throughout her career, she has mentored students and strengthened community partnerships to support regional education and health initiatives with the most recent work centered on the COEHP's leadership and engagement in the Professional Development Lab School at Dimon Elementary.



Click on the link in the QR code to nominate an outstanding education or health professional for this year's class of the COEHP Hall of Fame.

Scan me!

CAMPUS CULTURE CHAMPIONS OF COEHP

BY ASHLEY HERBOLICH

Considerable efforts across Columbus State University have been made during the past year to create the university's ideal culture. The culture is intentionally focused on practicing servant leadership, building community, empowering others, seeking efficiency, innovating, practicing accountability, and connecting with others.



A campus-wide Culture Work Crew, comprised of 15 staff, faculty, and student employees, selected individuals based on the embodiment of those values. The College of Education and Health Professions (COEHP) champions include the following six individuals (pictured, in order, to the right):



- **Nanci Wood, Senior Administrative Coordinator COEHP Dean's Office**
- **Destinee Rouse, Coordinator, School of Nursing**
- **Dr. Margie Yates, Dean College of Education and Health Professions**
- **Victoria Neundorfer Hall, Environmental Educator & Media Specialist, Oxbow Meadows Environmental Learning Center**
- **Ashley Herbolich, Environmental Educator & Public Programs Specialist, Oxbow Meadows Environmental Learning Center**
- **Dr. Mary Beth Hendricks, Professor of Special Education Department of Teacher Education, Leadership, and Counseling**



Creating CSU's ideal culture is focused on making a difference for colleagues, students, and the wider community, using the motto "Say it. Mean it. Do it." COEHP has been saying, meaning, and doing it by living these values and









recognizing others. COEHP faculty and staff comprise a significant portion of the Culture Champions. These Champions "inspire others by focusing on people, building community, and modeling servant leadership" while leading through ethical empowerment and service and cultivating strong relationships built on trust and respect.

COEHP Culture Champions have "exemplifie[d] the values of servant leadership, connection, and efficiency" while being friendly, positive, and supportive of a wide audience, including students, colleagues within the college, and those beyond COEHP. Culture Champions from COEHP have demonstrated outstanding leadership and commitment and fostered strong partnerships with community organizations to further the connections CSU has with businesses and organizations. Such partnerships are integral to CSU's impact on Columbus and the Chattahoochee Valley and to students being prepared to enter the workforce.

The Culture Champions of COEHP have empowered and helped build confidence in others, and have encouraged faculty, staff, and students to challenge themselves to grow personally and professionally. They have dedicated their efforts to making CSU "a better place to work."

HALL OF FAME INDUCTEES, 2005 TO 2025

Dr. Susan Andrews, 2007 (Education)
Jerry "Pops" Barnes, 2024 (Health Professions)
Matt Bell, 2017 (Education)
Jeff Branham, 2015 (Education)
Jessica Burnett, 2019 (Education)
Stacey M. Carlisle, 2021 (Education)
Pamela Carter, 2013 (Education)
Kim Cason, 2013 (Education)
Rebecca Claiborne, 2011 (Education)
Lt. Col. Brandy Clayton, 2022 (Health Professions)
Ronie Collins, 2010 (Education)
Dr. Dorothy Lee Coverson, 2020 (Health Professions)
Emory Christopher Cox, 2015 (Education)
Dara Alizabeth Crouch, 2025 (Health Professions)
Dr. Marvin J. Crumbs Sr., 2019 (Education)
Beverly M. Davis, 2009 (Education)
Lucy Davis, 2009 (Education)
Owen Ditchfield, 2008 (Education)
Dr. Susan Elder, 2022 (Education)
Dr. Michael Edmondson, 2013 (Education)
Dr. Justin Finney, 2023 (Education)
Craig Jackson Fitts, 2017 (Education)
Dr. Jacqueline Flakes, 2022 (Education)
Dr. Spencer Garrard, 2012 (Education)
Coy Richard Green, 2020 (Education)
Dr. Deirdre C. Greer, 2014 (Education)
Dr. Paul T. Hackett, 2006 (Education)
Aleta Cochrane Henderson, 2018 (Health Professions)
Elizabeth Holmes, 2007 (Education)
Christine Hull, 2022 (Education)
Peggy Jan Hyatt, 2006 (Education)
Carla Ingalls Hubbard, 2016 (Education)
Dr. Terry Irvin, 2012 (Education)
Wanda S. Jones, 2025 (Health Professions)
Marianne Jordan, 2024 (Education)
Jessie Dawn Jenkins, 2017 (Education)
Dr. Wendi Jenkins, 2021 (Education)
Tina Jones, 2010 (Education)
Margaret Beusse Koger, 2015 (Education)
Dr. Tommy Lee, 2012 (Education)
Dr. Kimberly Shepherd Lester, 2024 (Education)
Adele Lindsey, 2014 (Education)
Katherine Gemes Lopes, 2024 (Education)
Ann R. McDuffie, 2008 (Education)
Dr. Dell W. McMullen, 2005 (Education)
Tom Meltzer, 2009 (Education)
Dr. Gwendolyn Miller, 2024 (Health Professions)
Dr. Dell Miller, 2022 (Health Professions)
Nancy E. Mims, 2020 (Education)
Sheri Reynolds Noviello, 2019 (Health Professions)
Hope E. Phillips, 2020 (Education)
Mike Regnier, 2011 (Education)
Marty Richburg, 2021 (Education)
Leslie Robertson, 2006 (Education)
Jennifer N. Robinson, 2025 (Education)
Victoria Roebuck, 2023 (Health Professions)
Dr. Carole Rutland, 2011 (Education)
Dr. Kimberly M. Scott, 2019 (Education)
Dr. Michael Seckinger, Jr. 2025 (Education)
Keith M. Seifert, 2016 (Education)
Stanley Shivley, 2023 (Education)
Deana Singletary, 2021 (Health Professions)
Dr. Cheryl Mixon Smith, 2020 (Health Professions)
Raymechia Smith, 2005 (Education)
Dr. James Sparrow, 2018 (Education)
J. Mike Stephens, 2016 (Education)
Penny L. Thornton, 2014 (Education)
Louise Tolbert, 2007 (Education)
Dan Trotter, 2008 (Education)
Dr. Aimee Vael, 2023 (Health Professions)
Dr. Carol VanderGheynst, 2010 (Education)
Debby Whatley, 2018 (Education)
James Wilson, 2018 (Education)
Dr. Margie Yates, 2025 (Education)

DONOR SPOTLIGHT:
AN INTERVIEW WITH DR. DAVID LEVINE

BY DESTINEE ROUSE

In November 2025, The School of Nursing marked a new era of hands-on pediatric training, as it unveiled its state-of-the-art Neonatal Intensive Care Unit (NICU) simulation lab at Frank D. Brown Hall on the RiverPark Campus. The achievement marks the latest milestone in a multiyear partnership between CSU's School of Nursing and the Miracle Riders—a group of philanthropic motorcyclists whose dedication continues to transform healthcare education throughout the region.



The new NICU lab is the third major project funded by the Miracle Riders, who have been working toward a $1 million commitment to strengthen pediatric nursing education at CSU. With proceeds from their most recent cross-country ride, the Riders have now surpassed their $1 million goal.

The NICU sim lab bears the name of someone whose life's work reflects the lab's mission: Dr. David H. Levine, a respected neonatologist who has cared for hundreds of Columbus-area infants throughout his decadeslong career with Neonatology Associates P.C. Dr. Levine has spent more than 20 years specializing in neonatal perinatal medicine, guiding families through some of their most vulnerable moments and shaping the standard of care for premature and critically ill newborns across the region. His impact on the Columbus community bridges the partnership with the CSU School of Nursing for future nurses.

Destinee Rouse, a member of the Chronicles Editorial Board, had the pleasure of speaking with the lab's dedicatee, Dr. Levine, who was observing CSU nursing students during their clinical lab simulations in the NICU at the time of the interview.

Destinee: Dr. Levine, thank you for attending this interview. What originally drew you to neonatology?

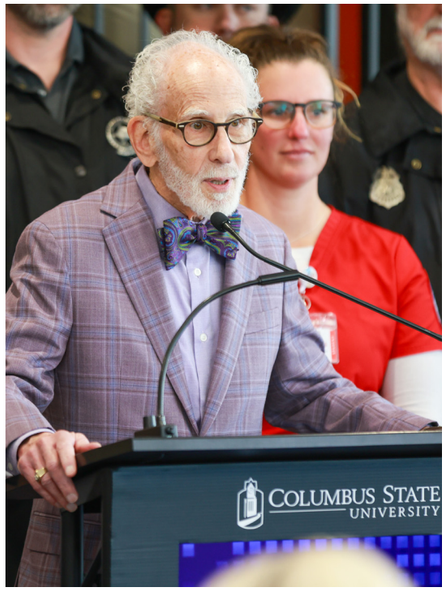
Dr. Levine: My very first month as an intern was in the NICU. And I realized that it was a physiology lab, and I could learn so much. And have so much fun learning and understanding the physiology of newborn babies. That's what initially drew me, and I had some wonderful mentors, who just made it fascinating and exciting. And then other reasons came later.

Destinee: Neonatology can be both emotionally demanding and deeply rewarding. What has sustained you over the years?



Dr. Levine: Neonatology is the best job in the world. Because I get to take a tiny little baby, who might be on death's doorstep, and with God's help—or my help to God— help him survive. And then months later, we've gone through this whole ordeal with the family. Months later, I get to hand the baby to the family, and they get to take them home. What could be better?

Destinee: Absolutely, very rewarding indeed. What does this recognition of the new simulation lab being named in your honor mean to you personally and professionally?



Dr. Levine: I'm humbled. So many people played important roles in getting this together. I'm humbled; I'm honored. It's one of the greatest honors I've ever received, I think, to have this named in my honor, and to know that for decades to come, it's going to help prepare nurses to take care of the most vulnerable babies.

Destinee: The School of Nursing is glad to have this new addition in your honor. And lastly, what future goals and vision do you have for the simulation lab?

Dr. Levine: Well, you know, we're already... We have a big vision, but we're already moving at a fairly rapid pace, because the students are using it. The Piedmont nurses are going to use it, both NICU nurses and pediatric nurses. We'll have first responders using it; medical students, and residents will be using it. Anybody who might have contact with a baby who needs extra help, they're going to be trained to do this.

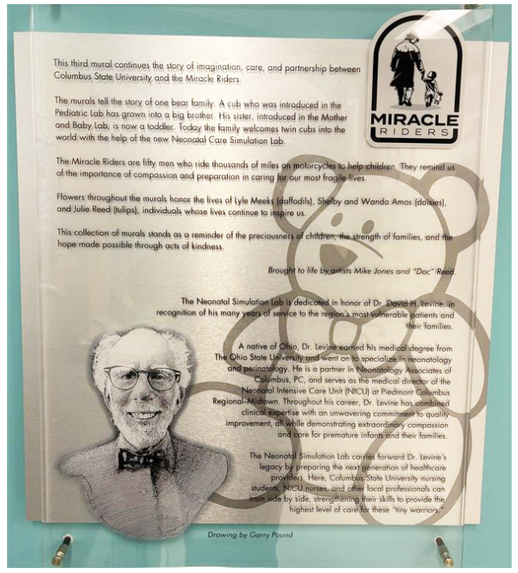
Destinee: We look forward to providing this opportunity and community outreach in the Columbus area. Thank you again, Dr. Levine, for taking this time to share with us.



As the School of Nursing steps confidently into this new chapter, the NICU simulation lab stands as a symbol of collaboration, compassion, and community impact. It reflects the vision of dedicated healthcare professionals like Dr. Levine, the generosity and determination of the Miracle Riders, and CSU's unwavering commitment to preparing the next generation of nurses.

The Miracle Riders took their final ride in the $1 million commitment to the CSU School of Nursing on the Pony Express Ride in May 2026. The School of Nursing owes a great debt to the Miracle Riders and to Dr. David Levine.





REMOVING THE STIGMA

BY DR. REBECCA TOLAND

The Remove the Stigma Event created a welcoming, stigma-free space for open conversations about opioid misuse and fentanyl poisoning on campus.

The Department of Kinesiology and Health Sciences, along with multiple community partners, implemented an initiative titled “Remove the Stigma” to address opioid misuse, fentanyl poisoning, and the associated stigma. The event was designed to engage students, faculty, and staff in open dialogue while providing evidence-based education and prevention resources.



To maximize visibility and accessibility, the event was held at the Clock Tower on Main Campus from 11:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m., allowing students to participate during their breaks between classes. The event was hosted by: Health Science, the Master’s of Public Health faculty, Columbus State University (CSU) Alcohol and Drug Task Force, CSU Counseling, The PORCH Project, Pillars, Morehouse School of Medicine, the Department of Public Health, CSU Police, the Eternal Angels Poster Project, and Eta Sigma Gamma students. Each organization contributed essential, life-saving information.

Educational resources addressing drug use, misuse, and mortality are widely available across colleges and universities, including Columbus State University. However, beyond the availability of educational materials, students need a stigma-free environment in which they feel safe discussing opioid misuse and fentanyl poisoning. Many college students continue to believe, “It will not happen to me,” a perception that can delay prevention efforts and increase vulnerability.





College-aged students are at elevated risk due to experimentation with substances often perceived as less harmful, including marijuana, vaping products, and non-prescribed medications obtained from family members or friends. It is essential to communicate that even a minute amount of synthetic opioids, such as fentanyl, can be fatal. Furthermore, providing comprehensive education to students and faculty on evidence-based harm-reduction strategies is critical to preventing overdose and saving lives.



Increasing the availability of naloxone, commonly known as Narcan, on college campuses can prevent death in cases of opioid overdose or fentanyl poisoning. A persistent misconception among members of the public, healthcare providers, and even emergency responders is that providing naloxone enables or encourages continued or riskier substance use. However, research does not support this assertion.



To effectively address stigma, experts recommend implementing comprehensive public education campaigns, adopting universal naloxone-offer strategies in pharmacies and clinical settings, and providing training programs for key stakeholders. These approaches help normalize naloxone as a life-saving medical intervention, comparable to a fire extinguisher or an automated external defibrillator (AED) and reinforce its role as a critical component of campus and community safety.

The event’s impact was substantial, with 240 units of Narcan distributed after participants reviewed educational materials, viewed the Eternal Angels’ posters, and engaged in discussions with experts. In addition to the on-campus event, funding support from Morehouse School of Medicine (Chandra Edwards), graphic design contributions from Health Science faculty (Tiera Rowan and Dr. Carlene Robinson), and collaboration with the Eternal Angel Project expanded the initiative’s reach. The campaign’s messaging expanded beyond the university campus by placing six billboards across the city. These billboards helped broaden community awareness while reinforcing the importance of reducing stigma and improving access to life-saving interventions.









MORE THAN TENNIS

The Growing Impact of ACEing Autism at Columbus State University

BY DR. LORIANE FAVORETTO HILL

Dr. Loriane Favoretto Hill, an Assistant Professor at Columbus State University (CSU) in the Department of Kinesiology and Health Sciences, has successfully implemented, expanded, and led the university's site of ACEing Autism, a nationally recognized adapted tennis program serving children with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) across all levels of support. With more than 200 programs nationwide and over 6,000 children participating annually, ACEing Autism is one of the largest and most impactful adapted sport initiatives in the United States.

Dr. Hill's partnership with the organization began during her doctoral studies at Auburn University, where she recognized the need for research demonstrating measurable outcomes in adapted sport programming. Through early collaboration with the national team, she helped establish an evidence-based foundation that continues to guide curriculum design, volunteer training, and program structure. Her work strengthened the organization's commitment to research-driven practice and helped shape quality standards now used across the country.

Program Development and Growth at CSU



What began as a small campus initiative in 2023 has grown into a vibrant, community-wide movement built on collaboration and shared purpose. From Auburn, Dr. Lauramarie Pope introduced Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC) strategies, integrating iPads and video-modeled tennis instruction to strengthen children's communication, comprehension, and task completion during sessions.

At CSU, Special Education faculty Dr. Mary Beth Hendricks and Dr. Gregory Blalock embed ACEing Autism directly into their coursework, preparing future educators to implement individualized supports and behavioral strategies while expanding the program's trained volunteer base. In the Department of Psychology, Dr. Stephanie Da Silva contributes her expertise in Board Certified Behavior Analyst (BCBA) therapies, helping adapt sessions to each child's unique behavioral and learning needs to ensure safe, supportive, and meaningful participation. Dr. Hill also engages her own students from the Health and Physical Education program, who are trained in adapted physical activity and play a vital role in each session. Their background in teaching sport and movement across ages and ability levels not only supports participating children but also provides mentorship and guidance to peers and volunteers, demonstrating how essential specialized training is when working with children on the autism spectrum. She also collaborates closely with Dr. Ellen Martin, a professor in the department and one of her former undergraduate mentors at CSU, whose longstanding commitment to quality physical education and inclusive practice continues to shape the program and serves as both a professional partner and a personal inspiration.



Community partnerships further fuel the program's success. The Columbus Regional Tennis Association provides welcoming facilities and outreach support, while the national ACEing Autism organization supplies equipment, training resources, and specialized behavioral expertise.

Together, these collaborations transform classrooms into hands-on learning environments where college students gain real-world experience while delivering individualized support to local children and families.

Meeting Kids Where They Are



For many families, finding the right recreational program isn't simply about scheduling; it's about whether their child will truly be supported and set up to succeed. Over time, families learn to recognize when a program isn't designed with their child in mind. Some are told directly that a program isn't a good fit. Others quietly step away after past experiences have shown them what happens when the right supports aren't in place. Too often, children who could benefit most from sport, friendship, and confidence-building are the ones left watching from the sidelines. That gap is exactly what ACEing Autism was created to address. At its heart, the program is intentionally built around one-to-one support, dedicated volunteer training, and a curriculum designed specifically for children on the autism spectrum. The focus is on encouragement, comfort, and connection, not competition. This thoughtful approach opens the door to participation for children who might otherwise be excluded and ensures that every child who steps onto the court feels supported, capable, and welcome.

Voices from the Court

The program's impact is perhaps best captured through the voices of those who experience it firsthand. A CSU student volunteer reflected: "I loved this program. I learned so much, how to communicate with each child on their level and understand what they need to succeed. Sometimes we have to flip the script and meet them where they are. I enjoyed the children, the volunteers, and the parents. I learned so much about autism and just being around Dr. Hill has taught me even more."

A CSU staff member shared: "It was incredibly rewarding to be part of ACEing Autism and see my athlete's progress. The structured fun and all the supports available to us really made a difference. I hope our efforts gave her parents encouragement to continue her tennis journey."

And one parent expressed simply: "We are so grateful for the ACEing Autism program. Thank you to everyone involved and all the volunteers. My son had such a great time and told us many times how much he loves tennis."

Together, these stories reflect the heart of the program: a place where research meets compassion, learning meets service, and every child is given the opportunity to succeed on the court and beyond. For Dr. Hill, the impact goes far beyond tennis skills or volunteer hours. It is about creating spaces where every child feels valued and every future educator learns the power of inclusion.



A TRADITION OF SERVICE:

COEHP'S ALUMNI AND RETIREES ADVANCING THE PDLS

BY DR. PAM WETHERINGTON

The College of Education & Health Professions' tradition of service continues through the dedication of its retirees and alumni, who volunteer their time and expertise to help advance the mission to equip and empower the community so that every student thrives. Below is a glimpse of their dedication in action!



Patricia Davis, President of Muscogee Retired Educators Association, former MCSD science teacher, and CSU alumna, supports Dimon's 2nd grade students in Dimon's greenhouse as they learn how their gardening help reduce food insecurities in their community.



Ray Lakes, former Executive Director of Alumni Relations for CSU and CSU retiree, participates in Dimon's LitLab – an after-school tutoring and mentoring program for Dimon's 3rd – 5th graders.



Dr. Saoussan Maarouf, COEHP Associate Professor of Elementary Education, Assistant Department Chair for Teacher Education, and CSU alumna, learns from Dimon's 5th grade students as they share how their food pantry advances their STEAM efforts and also supports their community.



Shea Spencer, Business Development Manager with FIS (formerly known as TSYS/Global Payment), Troup County teacher, and CSU alumnus, sponsors and lends a helping hand during Dimon's Family Literacy Nights.



Mary Shocklee, COEHP Doctoral Fellow, PDLS Assistant, and COEHP alumna, works alongside students to create, problem solve, and discover how technology can be leveraged to support STEAM efforts.

A Tradition of Service

In addition to these volunteers, a strong CSU presence can also be seen among Dimon's staff, more than half of whom are proud CSU alumni. Together, this growing network of alumni strengthens the connection between the university and the school, truly representing the PDLS's core belief: *For the Community, By the Community.*

CSU CSI:

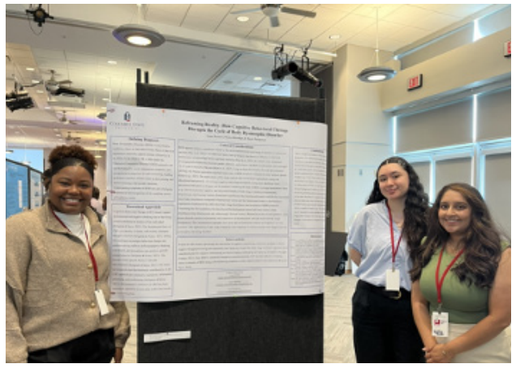
Counseling Honors Society

BY DR. HILLARY ELLERMAN

Chi Sigma Iota (CSI) is the international honor society of professional counseling. The Chi Chi chapter of CSI at Columbus State University held its annual ceremony in February in which 24 students were inducted into this prestigious society. Qualifications for the society include having a cumulative GPA of 3.5, excellence in clinical practice, and demonstration of professional dispositions.



Chi Chi's mission is to promote scholarship, research, professionalism, leadership, and excellence in counseling. Each year, Chi Chi seeks out opportunities to live out this mission. Over the past few years, the chapter has collected items of need for various organizations in the community, hosted study skills workshops for current counseling students, actively engaged in advocacy efforts in the community, and facilitated Wellness Wednesdays. The Wellness events have taught students, clients, and community members how to stay physically and mentally healthy. In 2024, the Chi Chi chapter was awarded first place for the CSI Community Engagement Recognition Award. This award highlights community growth in the training of clinicians.



Research is an important aspect of the counseling field and is prioritized within the Chi Chi's mission. Students engage in research opportunities with counseling faculty and within their coursework in the counseling program. Each year Chi Chi members have the opportunity to present their research at CSU's Tower Day, a university wide conference highlighting student and faculty academic achievements.

THANKS TO THESE COEHP RETIREES

Dutch Cummings, Coordinator of Visitor Service, Coca-Cola Space Science Center
10/10/2001 – 01/01/2026

Talley Dentzau, Academic Support Assistant, Department of Teacher Education, Counseling, and Leadership
8/29/2014 – 3/7/2026

Scott Norman, Education Director, Coca-Cola Space Science Center
9/27/1997 – 01/01/2026

COLLEGE OF EDUCATION
AND HEALTH PROFESSIONS
COLUMBUS STATE UNIVERSITY

