



# A Service Center-driven Approach to Teacher Development & Advancement

Through a partnership with BloomBoard, two Educational Service Centers in Ohio co-create a multi-district model for on-the-job teacher advancement

## The Power of Service Centers in Addressing Current Challenges

In the midst of a nationwide teacher shortage, the state of Ohio has its own challenges. According to the Ohio Education Association, there are 17,000 fewer people<sup>1</sup> working in public education in the state now compared to before the pandemic.

Ohio's Educational Service Centers (ESCs), which were created to elevate the state's education system through curriculum, teacher training, and classroom instruction, have become increasingly involved creating opportunities for teacher retention and advancement within their partner districts. In some cases, ESCs in the same region are opting to work smarter, collaborating with each other to offer programming and professional development to their schools and teachers that they would not be able to provide on their own.

That is the story of Brown County ESC (BCESC) and Southern Ohio ESC (SOESC). The two ESCs, in partnership with BloomBoard—co-created a teacher development and advancement solution that not only saves them time in developing professional development programming but is already reaping incredible benefits for their teachers and staff.



## A Broad Need for Skill Building, Career Advancement, and Licensure Support

Together, BCESC and SOESC offer support for 18 partner districts, more than 2,500 teachers, and nearly 34,500 students. The two ESCs have worked together through the years. Recently, BCESC Director of Professional Learning Jackie Miller and SOESC Assistant Superintendent Curt Bradshaw have noticed two recurring trends:

- Teachers and paraprofessionals want to further advance their careers, but
- They are looking for high-quality, on-the-job professional advancement opportunities to build skills and move forward.

*“We’ve had more and more alternatively licensed individuals,” says Miller, “and those individuals need additional support. They’re also in need of additional hours for licensure renewal. At the same time, we’re living in a world where job-embedded professional development is necessary to better help teachers continually grow.”*

## A Multi-District, On-the-Job Solution Offering Graduate Credit

Miller began looking into solutions for a professional learning program that could satisfy both needs and ensure the learning is relevant.

*“The idea of having embedded training, using your own students, creating artifacts that you’re actually going to use in your classroom with your kids as a way to grow and develop—that was very appealing to me,” she says.*

Miller soon found BloomBoard, a talent development provider offering turnkey solutions to help school systems with educator pipeline development, advancement, and retention. BloomBoard connects school districts to certification and degree-based professional learning. The company’s one-of-a-kind, on-the-job instructional model can be customized based on the unique needs and goals of a particular district or service center.

Miller knew this would be a fantastic way for the teachers and paraprofessionals within her partner districts to not only renew their credentials, but also use the coursework to advance their careers. She took the idea to Bradshaw, who was immediately on board to bring the solution to his partner districts. They decided to pilot a program within their ESCs, securing grant money through the Ohio Department of Education and federal COVID relief money to support it.

Today, BCESC and SOESC offer their member districts the chance to enroll educators in a trio of specialized, on-the-job courses—paid for entirely by the ESCs. Teachers earn graduate credit for completing the courses. A portion of the enrolled teachers are planning to continue to work towards a Master’s Degree in Curriculum and Instruction.

The courses, Foundations of Addressing Learning Recovery; Foundations of Addressing Student Well-Being; and Foundations of Attending to Equity, cover topics educators are clamoring to learn about and may not have been a focus when they first went into the profession.

## A Scalable Partnership for Educator Growth and Advancement

The partnership between BloomBoard, BCESC, and SOESC is now in its second year. To date, 115 educators—42 from BCESC and 73 from SOESC—have been served by the program. Of those, 19 educators are currently active in the program, 27 have earned at least one credit, and 15 educators have completed at least three credits.

The fact that the coursework that complements the on-the-job instruction is entirely online and self-paced has also been a big motivator for teachers.

*“All of the teachers I’ve spoken with say they’re extremely grateful to have had this opportunity,” Miller says. “They were grateful they were getting this professional learning free of charge, and they’re making the most of it.”*

*“They like that they can work on it Saturday mornings or Wednesday nights, when they get their kids to bed and they have a bit of time,” Bradshaw says. “That’s been the biggest selling point.”*

Miller and Bradshaw both see a bright future for the partnership.

*“When I think about what success looks like with this partnership, I think about teachers completing these on-the-job courses and feeling like they’ve grown as professional educators and that their practice has improved—and then carrying the message forward and bringing other educators into this network.” Bradshaw says.*

He adds that his goal is building a BloomBoard community, where educators of varying levels, subjects and specialties can grow and learn together.

Miller agrees, and says she would love for the community to be the first place where teachers and paraprofessionals come when they need professional development for advancing their careers. Whether they are struggling in a part of their practice and need additional support, they have a specific goal within their professional growth plan, or they want to begin a master’s program for an advanced role, she hopes educators start with this group before they go another route that is not as all-encompassing. “When you say BloomBoard to our teachers, they know what we’re talking about now—even if they haven’t been a part of it,” Miller says.



## Better Teachers Better Serve Their Students

The promise of professional learning for educators is that it helps them improve and deepen teaching practices, and Miller says the BloomBoard partnership provides that. The combination of developing artifacts in the classroom and getting to work with their own students during the coursework has helped participants think about and reflect on their practice in the moment.

She has also noticed that teachers appreciate the application of real tasks in the classroom because they are tangible and relevant. “It wasn’t just about what the theorists or researchers were saying is the best thing to do—it was doing what’s authentic for their classrooms,” she says.

Miller also says the coursework has increased freedom and independence among district teachers. “They’ve become more autonomous in their own teaching practices, and that’s definitely what we want to see in educators as they grow.” She points to the student well-being course as an example. “A lot of our educators say it really helped them identify those needs—and advocate for them. That’s fantastic.”

Perhaps the biggest learning of the pilot and the BloomBoard partnership—which both Miller and Bradshaw say they hope will continue through its current slate of courses as well as an eventual teacher’s apprenticeship style pathway and a master’s degree program they are planning with BloomBoard—has been that student needs and the needs of teachers and paraprofessionals are not so different. Ultimately, it is all about centering the learner in their own education.

*“This coursework is what our educators needed. They’re thriving in it. They want more of it,” Miller says. “And that’s what happens with students, too. We need to give choices and options and let everyone move at their own pace.”*



Through their partnership with BloomBoard, BCESC and SOESC not only give teachers options that help them develop the skills they need to feel prepared and empowered in the classroom, but also make it easier for their districts to honor, advance and retain their teachers through meaningful and much-needed professional development.

BloomBoard is a talent development provider that enables K-12 school districts to grow, advance and retain educators by making professional education a benefit of employment. Our platform connects districts to higher education institutions that offer certification and degree programs.

[Learn more at bloomboard.com](https://bloomboard.com)

<sup>1</sup> <https://spectrumnews1.com/oh/columbus/news/2022/09/30/oea-make-recommendations-to-help-close-the-teacher-shortage-gap->