



First Book's dynamic partnership with the Foundation for Appalachian Ohio has already connected hundreds of educators, librarians, school administrators, after school programs, childcare providers, and others, with online resources to break down educational barriers. These educators are actively working with First Book and FAO to shape additional tools that specifically address challenges in our region.

## Local Town Hall Meetings

In Pomeroy and Cambridge last November, close to 80 education professionals, social workers, and health care providers from the region met over two nights to participate in Town Hall meetings. As they compared experiences and brainstormed ideas related to their students' poverty, isolation, and overall academic achievement, trauma was a recurring theme. Issues ranged from students coping strategies, the impact on fellow classmates and teachers, and tools to make learning environments more effective for students experiencing chronic trauma.

*"We need more support for these professionals who are working with kids that have been through this trauma, because while we're strong for them during the day, you go home and you take those things with you,"* one educator said at the Pomeroy gathering.

While stories of students ill-prepared to begin school, whether delayed in social-emotional development or lacking any experience with books at home, were often linked with notably unstable living situations, there was also a sense of gratitude and pride around community organizations collaborating with schools to support children and families, and the adults who serve them.

***"Sometimes it's hard to distinguish learning disabilities from [gaps in] social emotional development. Dysregulated students often don't know how to express their emotions in a healthy way."***

## Virtual Focus Group Meetings

Following the Town Hall meetings, we built on the information and feedback we received about local challenges and successes to conduct online focus groups in December. Several critical issues were surfaced during these discussions, including:

- Students living with family members other than their parents, which creates unforeseen challenges for everyone. Children are grieving the loss of parents, and grandparents are grieving the fate of grown children. This emotional strain is often compounded by the stress of fixed incomes, differing expectations, and lack of needed support.



- While some schools have full-time social workers or counselors, many must share the schedule of mental health providers, or rely on community resources.
- All educators were eager for connections to expert advice and training and expounded on the need for resources not only for children experiencing trauma, but for the individuals impacted by secondary trauma, including peers and educators themselves.
- Driven by time concerns, teachers said they liked the idea of ready-made toolkits, handbooks, and other material they could print and use in their classrooms – although many were skeptical that outside resources could be truly sensitive to local needs.

***“If we look at Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs -- and if those basic needs aren't met -- they're not going to be able to learn other things, and we know it.”***

With questions designed from the synthesis of all the data we've collected, educators and service providers across Appalachian Ohio have now completed a survey to identify the type(s) of resources and/or support that will be developed as a result of this in-depth landscape analysis. Together, First Book and FAO are committed to ensuring the creation of the highest quality, locally-focused actionable solutions to lift up the already rich culture, and to offer needed support to the region. We're excited at the prospect that these resources will not only be of value to educators and providers in Appalachian Ohio, but valuable to all educators and providers working in environments where poverty and generational trauma create reverberating challenges in local communities.