

New Horizon North Celebrates One-Year Anniversary

BVIU school fills education and service needs in northern counties



On a recent Monday morning, New Horizon North Principal Zachry Huwar walked through the halls, stopping to check in on students as they sat in small groups with their teachers. The conversations were light—weekend recaps, video games, and what they were looking forward to in the week ahead.

These Monday morning circles have become a tradition—a way to ease students back into the school routine while fostering connection and communication. It’s one of many small but meaningful rituals that have taken root in New Horizon North’s first year—a year defined by growth, challenges, and a deep commitment to helping students thrive.

“We started with two classrooms,” Huwar says. “Now, we’re up to six. The need is definitely here.”

A year ago, specialized education options for students in Lawrence and Mercer counties were slim. Kids who needed emotional support or specialized learning environments either stayed in districts that weren't fully equipped to meet their needs or endured long bus rides to New Horizon's Beaver location. Then, the space in Shenango Township became available, and the calls started coming in — fast.

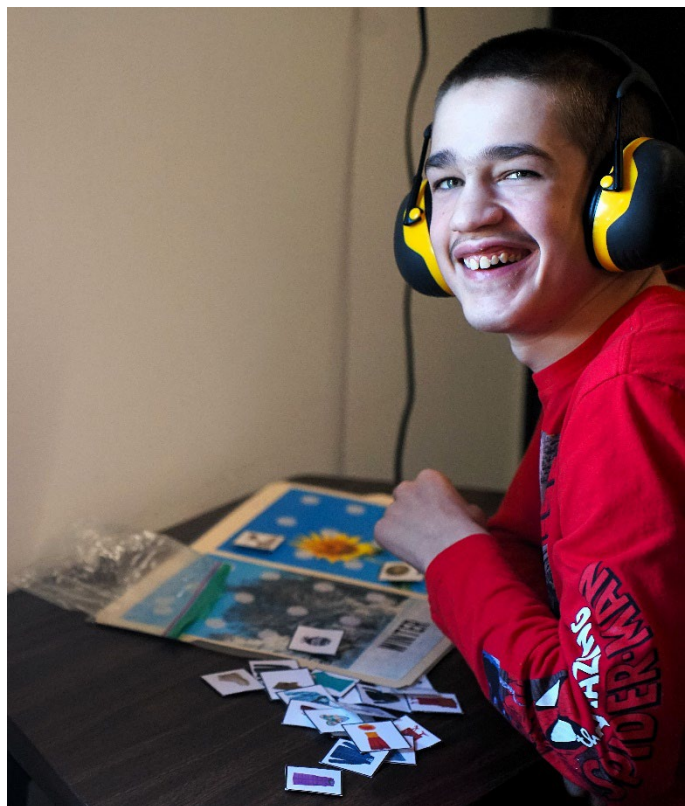
“At first, it was mostly for emotional support students,” Huwar says. “But then, districts started reaching out about multiple disabilities support (MDS). We were able to help, and that felt good. It's not about filling seats; it's about serving kids who didn't have an option before.”

Today, New Horizon North is home to 50 students. With six teachers, a dozen paraprofessionals, a full-time nurse, and in-house speech therapy, the school has quickly become a vital resource in the community. And the calls from districts? They haven't stopped.

“We're at capacity,” Huwar says. “But I'd love to expand and add a few more classrooms. The demand is there.”

Walking through the hallways of New Horizon North, it's easy to see that this isn't a traditional school. In one room, a student sways gently on a sensory swing, working on communication skills. Down the hall, older students sit with independent work folders, practicing vocational skills. The goal isn't only academic progress—it's preparing these kids for the real world.

“There's a misconception that schools like this are just about keeping kids calm and managing behaviors,” Huwar says. “But it's so much more. It's about giving them the skills to be independent, to communicate, and to function in society.”



That's why community involvement is a big part of what New Horizon North does. Last year, they teamed up with Union School District for a football camp. The kids loved it so much that it's becoming a yearly tradition. They've also arranged trips to Living Treasures Animal Park—an experience some students might not otherwise get. Later this spring, they'll be hosting their own carnival day.

"You can work on behaviors in the classroom all day long," Huwar says. "But if they don't know how to function outside of school, what's the point?"

Sports have become another key piece of student life. A basketball tournament with the Beaver campus is coming up, and tomorrow—on the school's one-year anniversary—students will celebrate with a kickball tournament.

"For some of these kids, this is their first real school experience where they feel included," Huwar says. "That's a big deal."



With demand for specialized education growing, New Horizon North is already looking ahead. The school has access to a large downstairs space that could be renovated for more classrooms, a transition program, and even a full-sized swimming pool.

“There’s so much potential here,” Huwar says, his eyes lighting up at the thought. “I’d love to bring everything we have in Beaver up here. It’s going to take time, but it’s doable.”

While expansion is on the horizon, Huwar remains focused on the school’s core mission—helping kids thrive. Over the past year, the school has seen a dramatic decrease in behavioral incidents, something Huwar attributes to the staff’s approach.

“In a traditional district, if a student shuts down and walks out, that’s a problem,” he says. “Here, that’s a win. It means they’re self-regulating instead of escalating. We have the time and resources to help them work through things in a way that isn’t always possible in a regular school setting.”

For students in the emotional support program, the goal is always reintegration into their home districts. It doesn’t happen for everyone, but for those who can make the transition, it’s a major victory.

“One year in, and we’ve already transitioned our first student back to district,” Huwar says. “That’s huge.”

None of this would have been possible without a dedicated team. Huwar credits key figures like BVIU Executive Director Dr. Eric Rosendale, Missy Niedbala, BVIU Director of Special Education, and Dave Rodgers, Assistant Supervisor of Special Services — people who laid the groundwork before he even arrived.

“New Horizon North is a great example of a community partnership,” Dr. Rosendale said. “This school has become a beacon of what is possible when people come together to create a solution to improve the lives of children.”

Huwar took over in July. It wasn’t exactly a smooth transition—there was still so much to put in place. But for him, the chance to build something from the ground up was too good to pass up.

“When’s the next time I’m going to get to help shape a program like this?” Huwar asks. “This is the kind of opportunity you don’t say no to.”

“It’s been an incredible first year. Districts keep calling, and that tells me we’re doing something right. I can’t wait to see what’s next