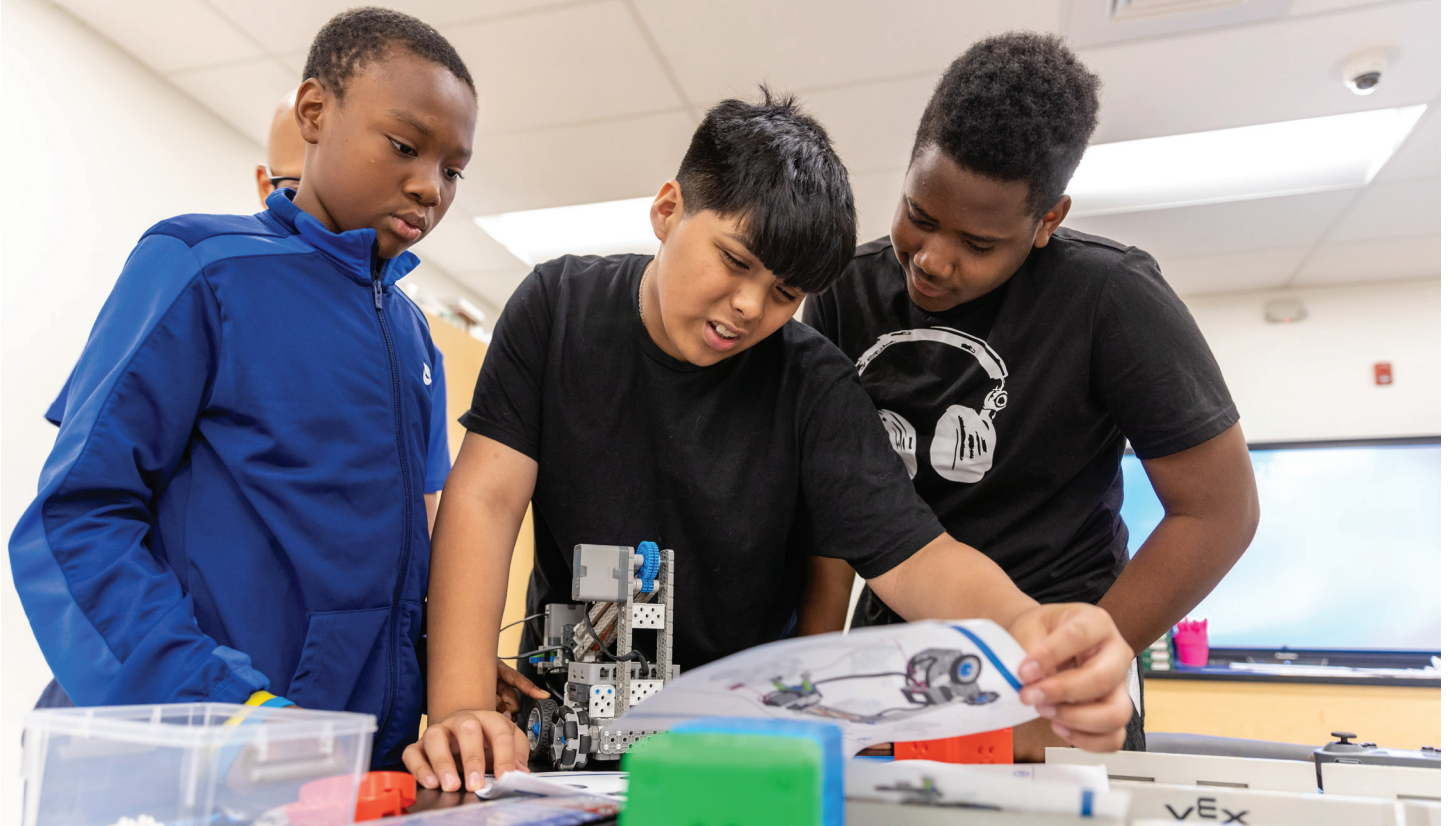




THE WOLVERINE

A regular publication from the Woodland Hills School District



READY FOR LAUNCH: OPPORTUNITY CAMP PREPS STUDENTS FOR 2023-24 SCHOOL YEAR

Woodland Hills' Opportunity Camp was created in response to the pandemic as a way to address learning loss amongst students. Under the direction of camp coordinator Ms. Tamika McGee and camp director Ms. Julie Scarberry, this year's camp ran from June 20 to July 28 and served students in kindergarten through eighth grade.

Each day, over 400 students gathered at Dickson Preparatory STEAM Academy for a blend of a structured curriculum with fun and engaging enrichment activities. Students were able to extend their reading, writing and math learning, develop their social-emotional skills, and expand their knowledge base by interacting with a number of community providers.

Some of the highlights this year included creating stop motion short films, creative movement with Attack Theater, lessons about the natural world through the Carnegie Museum of Natural History, cooking healthy snacks through Common Threads, forest life with Communitopia, learning the Brazilian samba through Pearl Arts, African drumming with Kuumba, Inc, how to make water rockets with Venture Outdoors, and much more.

Field trips included the Heinz History Center, the Carnegie Science Center, the Carnegie Museum of Natural History, the Trolley Museum, and more.

The district is grateful to all of the partners who helped make Opportunity Camp possible.

WELCOME BACK WOODLAND HILLS STUDENTS

A SPECIAL WELCOME BACK MESSAGE FROM SUPERINTENDENT DR. DANIEL CASTAGNA

The cool weather mornings these last couple of days sure made it feel like fall is in the air. We all know that's the signal that it is time to get back to school. The summer months have been extremely busy in our administrative offices as we plan for the 2023–2024 school year. We feel confident that this will be the smoothest start that this District has experienced in years.

As we begin the year, we remain committed to our goal of sustaining long established, successful programs while creating new learning opportunities for all. We will do this through a dedication to innovation and continuous improvement. In this edition of our newsletter, you will get introduced to our new staff in several departments. Please feel free to reach out to them with any questions or concerns you may have. You'll see a diverse group of dedicated educators with local connections, excited to get started.

This year, we will continue to build one of the safest school campuses in the area. Last fall we made improvements and upgrades to cameras and locks and added a security booth and special software to our exterior doors. This hardware, along with continual trainings, sets the tone that all staff plays a role in keeping our students safe.

We made huge strides last year with our commitment to anti-violence. This year, we will continue to open up communication with violence prevention activists and community leaders so that we can work together to get in front of possible issues. The success of our resiliency room in the high school has now grown to where we are adding a second room in our middle school. This will be a safe space for students to de-escalate, when feeling the effects of past trauma.

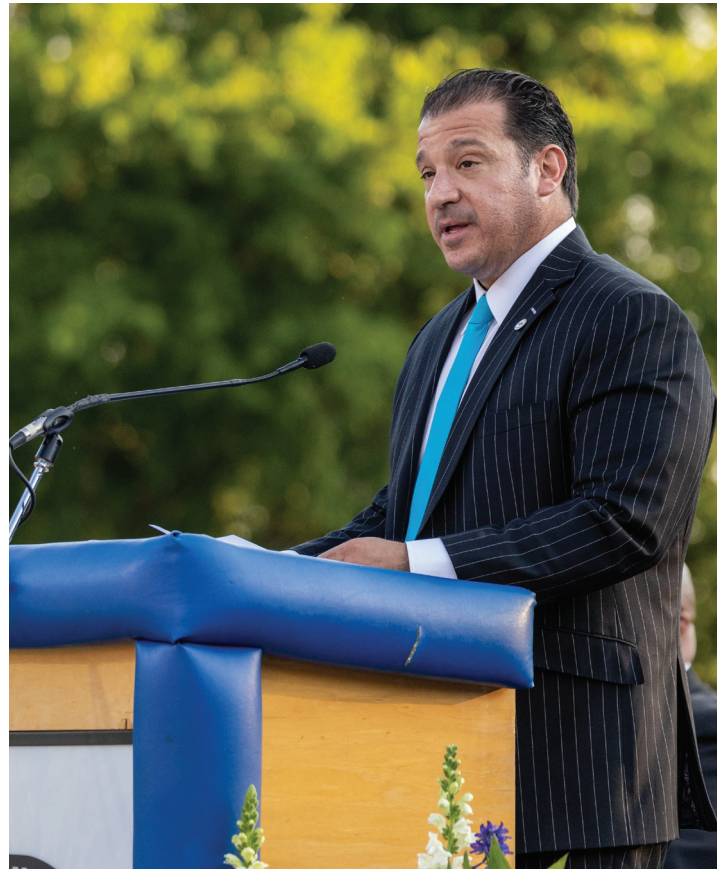
Last, but certainly not least, the plan to reopen the former Rankin School as a community center is set. We are holding firm to an October 1, 2023 opening day. If you have the chance to visit the school now, you will see the upgraded lighting, landscaping, and paving work that have already been completed.

I'm extremely excited to open our doors to our students and families and look forward to the first day of school on Wednesday, August 23rd. Twelve communities, one school, one focus...creating opportunities for our children!

Dr. Daniel Castagna

Superintendent

Woodland Hills School District



WELCOME BACK WOODLAND HILLS STUDENTS

PERSONAL CONNECTIONS GUIDE LEAH SYLVIS AS DIRECTOR OF SPECIAL EDUCATION

From an early age, Leah Sylvis understood the importance of compassion and empathy in special education.

"I come from a long line of teachers. My dad was a special ed teacher. My grandma was a music teacher and my aunt was a math teacher, all in West Mifflin," she said. "My dad is my idol. He advocated a lot for kids with special needs."

Sylvis was hired as Woodland Hills' Director of Special Education over the summer. A West Mifflin and Bethany (WV) College graduate, Sylvis began her teaching career in Maryland before working for Goodwill's adult education program. She returned to West Mifflin to teach in 2006 and spent the last 17 years working with special education students at her alma mater.

"Seeing and interacting with students with special needs really tugged at my heartstrings," Sylvis said. "I wanted to help however I could and be an advocate in this role for the students."

There is a deep, personal connection behind Sylvis' passion for special education, too.

"My son has autism. So, I understand it from a parent side, as well," she said. "These are somebody's babies. Would I want my child treated in whatever kind of way? It's easy for me to relate and empathize."

Much of her initial focus in the special education department will be on the various internal processes and procedures, as well as enhancing communication throughout the department.

She is also seeking ways to integrate special education students into general education learning environments as much as possible within a given student's IEP. As much as she'd like to see change overnight, any substantive change in a special education department takes time.



"As much as I would love to come in and make all of these changes, I'm looking at a good three-year process," she said. "Slow, with fidelity, having everybody involved who should be involved, and really focusing on supporting the teachers to help best support the students."

Sylvis believes that is imperative for teachers to forge lasting relationships with parents and their students.

"Relationships with the parents and their students is number one - relationships, rigor and relevance, I feel like are three important Rs," she said.

"I want to create a culture of acceptance and accountability. I want the parents to hold me accountable. And, in turn, that will be trickled down to the principals and the case managers to have thoughtful, well written IEPs so that the kids are able to be successful."

SAVE THE DATE!

These are just some of the dates to keep in mind as the school year gets started:

- Aug. 23 - First day for all students
- Aug. 29 - Elementary Open House
- Aug. 30 - High School Open House
- Aug. 31 - Dickson Prep Open House
- Sept. 4 - Labor Day (no school)
- Sept. 22 - Homecoming vs. Norwin
- Sept. 25 - In-Service Day (no school)
- Oct. 9 - In-Service Day (no school)
- Oct. 30 - No School

WELCOME BACK WOODLAND HILLS STUDENTS

BUILDING A CULTURE OF LEARNING AND POSITIVITY AT DICKSON PREP

Josh Manning has been in the shoes of some of his students. He knows how it feels to struggle in school, to not even want to be in the building.

"I was a deplorable student. I couldn't read up to like third grade," Manning said. "My mom taught me at home, using an at-home curriculum. I didn't do really well in high school either. I wasn't into academics, but I was really good with children."

That ability to connect with children led him to education. The Baldwin High School and Clarion University graduate began working in the charter school system in Philadelphia while his wife was in the armed services. When she shifted to reserve duty, they moved back to Pittsburgh.



After working at Propel Hazelwood and Propel McKeesport, Manning followed Kristin Scott to Dickson Preparatory STEAM Academy last year. He took over as principal this summer.

"I want kids to come to school and I want it to be a culture of learning," Manning said. "You really make them feel like this is a place where they come where they're valued and where these people are invested in their lives."

Dean of Students Rashawnda Randolph, who was previously an assistant principal at McKeesport Area High School, has joined the Dickson team for this year. A Gateway High School and Carlow University graduate who earned her master's degree at Point Park University, Randolph has a

background in positive behavior programs and restorative practices. She will lead the formation of a student leadership group that can impact changes inside and outside of the school.

"I want students to be happy to come to school. I want them to be excited about coming to school," she said. "So, I'm hoping with all of the new programs and just the overall environment that this is somewhere that they want to be."



Manning and Randolph plan to build on some of the foundations created last year, including dedicated homeroom time for restorative circles.

"I feel it does a lot to defuse situations when kids are escalated because they know that teacher on a different level as opposed to somebody who's just standing in the room," Manning said.

The team is also going to enhance the positive behavior support system, expanding it from monthly incentives to more frequent ones. The after school tutoring program will also continue this year, as will a youth mentorship program during the school day.

The goal is for a supportive, positive environment to continue to improve Dickson's progressing academic performance. "We really just want to push the rigor," Manning said. "We want to challenge the kids in the classroom. Our MAP data shows that they're making some steady progress, but we need to make it more."

WELCOME BACK WOODLAND HILLS STUDENTS

NEW ATHLETIC DEPARTMENT LEADERSHIP FOCUSED ON SERVICE TO STUDENTS

Ty Brown spent the better part of the past decade working in college athletic departments, helping to fundraise and support major Division I programs. But as he worked in the community with younger, aspiring student-athletes, he felt a pull toward the high school ranks.

"I felt like there was more of an impact I could make at the high school level," Brown said.

Brown was hired over the summer as Woodland Hills' Director of Activities, Athletics and Sponsorships. Joining him in the revamped athletics and activities office is assistant Jullian Turner and academic liaison Brian Tarrant, who is also entering his first year as the Wolverines' head football coach.

Brown said the department's primary responsibility is service to the students – providing them with the support and resources to be successful in and out of the classroom.

"This needs to be one place where they can feel safe at, a place where they can be comfortable and continue to live and thrive," Turner added.

Tarrant will help aspiring student-athletes understand the complex process to be eligible to play college sports. He noted that being in the building on a daily basis as a coach creates a direct line of communication to every student-athlete.

"You can stay on these kids a lot more when you're in the building," he said. "You can walk with them from class to class, talk to their teachers, talk with their counselors, make sure you're abreast of what's going on with the entire student body."

The trio will also focus on enhancing alumni relations, increasing fundraising efforts to support unique opportunities for student-athletes, and, of course, to win championships.

"We're at Woodland Hills. That's what we want to do," Brown said. "This brand is known nationally. It's not something that you walk into and you think you're just going to go through the motions."



GET INVOLVED!

Woodland Hills offers 18 sports and over 30 activities for students to join. Stop by the athletics and activities office to get more information.

ATHLETICS

- Baseball
- Basketball
- Bowling
- Cheerleading
- Cross Country
- Flag football
- Football
- Golf
- Rifle
- Soccer
- Softball
- Swimming
- Tennis
- Track & Field
- Volleyball
- Wrestling

ACTIVITIES/CLUBS

- Student Summit
- 12 Deep
- Climate Action
- Art
- Autistic Support Club
- Black Student Union
- Symphonic Band
- Jazz Band
- 9th Grade Band
- Class Officers
- Concert Band
- Choir
- Coding Club
- Engineering & Tech
- Expect Respect
- FBLA
- Finance Club
- French
- Green Team
- Interact
- Jr. Musical
- NHS
- Orchestra
- Performing Arts
- Spanish
- Student Council
- Student Leadership
- Yearbook
- Musical/Stage Crew
- International Studies
- Marching Band & Images
- Students Against Violence
- Genders & Sexualities Alliance

WELCOME BACK WOODLAND HILLS STUDENTS

A HOMECOMING FOR MARGARET MONROE IN CENTRAL ADMINISTRATION

Margaret Monroe officially started her job as the executive administrative assistant to central administration over the summer, but the truth is she's been part of Woodland Hills from the start.

"I was actually the Class of '82, which was the first year of the merger," Monroe said.

In that first year of the court-mandated merger Woodland Hills operated three high schools. Monroe graduated from Swissvale High and began working for local accounting firms. She shifted into education and did her student teaching at her alma mater, which had become West Junior High.

Monroe began teaching at the former Bradford School and at the Community College of Allegheny County. With her experience in the corporate world, Monroe taught courses in accounting, office administration, marketing, computer fundamentals and applications, keyboarding and more.

When the Bradford School closed, Monroe joined the University of Pittsburgh's College of Business Administration as a student services coordinator and academic advisor. At times, she advised 250 to 300 students on scheduling, study abroad opportunities, career development, and more.

"I'm a better listener because of being an advisor," she said. "As a teacher, you're providing all of that information. But as an advisor, when you're sitting across from that student, you're trying to get all

ALL ABOARD! BUS INFO FOR THIS YEAR

The Woodland Hills School District has several services that it will be using to keep parents and guardians up to date about transportation during the 2023-24 year.

Your child's bus route information is available via PowerSchool, which also includes a link to the Traversa Ride 360 App. This app is brand new for Woodland Hills this school year. It features all of your child's bus information.



that feedback from them as to what they want."

She enjoyed the work, and this past spring she was recognized with the staff Student Impact Award at commencement. But the pace was intense, and she was ready for a change.

"You just know where you belong, especially in education," Monroe said. "I considered running for council or school board. I've played with all of those ideas and this just felt right."

In the run-up to the start of the school year, she had her hands in the planning for Community Day as well as the administrative retreat, opening day, new teacher orientation, and more. She couldn't be happier to be back home.

"I'm a Swissvale girl. I wasn't for a little while," she said with a laugh. "But I'm back and I just want to be part of the district, continue to grow, and see things get better for our children."

The district will also be using the FirstView app, which will provide live tracking of bus locations, helping you keep track when a bus might be delayed because of heavy traffic or road incidents.

The transportation department will also issue updates via social media. The new, official transportation page on Facebook is titled WHSD Transportation. Simply searching for WHSD Transportation will lead you to the page. Parents can also continue to contact the transportation department via email at bus@whsd.us.

WELCOME BACK WOODLAND HILLS STUDENTS

SENIOR ISAIAH TEETS TAKES LEADERSHIP ROLE WITH SCHOOLS THAT CAN

Senior Isaiah Teets has been named a Student Board Delegate for Schools That Can, a national non-profit organization dedicated to career readiness programming. As a student delegate, Isaiah will help provide insight and feedback on the effectiveness and relevance of Schools That Can's programming. He'll also be a liaison between the board and students, allowing students to have a voice in the opportunities made available to them.

Isaiah just completed a stint over the summer as one of Schools That Can's first class of national interns. He helped provide written and video content for the organization's website and social media platforms. He was also recently awarded the 2023 RFK Education Award in the student category. The award is co-sponsored by Schools That Can and the Robert F. Kennedy Human Rights organization. It recognizes students and educators who embody a different quote from the late Robert F. Kennedy each year. This year's

AFTER STRONG FIRST YEAR, VEX ROBOTICS CURRICULUM TO EXPAND

When the VEX Robotics curriculum was first introduced to teachers and students at the beginning of the 2022-23 school year, no one knew what to expect. The hope was that the curriculum would not only engage students, but that it would also have relevance across subjects.

The programming ended up being a massive hit, with teachers utilizing the age-appropriate kits to reinforce learning in their math, science, and even reading curriculums. There were tangible improvements in test scores and in behavior.



quote that nominees were asked to embody was, "Education is not only important to understanding the world and each other—it is the key to the future."

Along with his work in the community, Isaiah has been a member of the Woodland Hills boys soccer team and recently served as a leader in the annual Student Summit.

Tina Dietrich, a 25-year veteran of the district, has taken on a new role as the district's Director of STEAM and Innovation. She will direct the expansion of the VEX curriculum throughout the district, including the increased use of VEX at the middle school level.

As part of her role, she is also hoping to connect with alumni in STEM fields. If you are a Woodland Hills alum who would like to share your STEM experience with our students, please reach out to Tina Dietrich at dietti@whsd.us.



HISTORY WITH DISTRICT GIVES NEW BUILDINGS AND GROUNDS TEAM A LEG UP

Their roles may be new, but Daniel Bridge and Brian Johnson have ample familiarity with the work that lies ahead of them. The longtime Woodland Hills employees are now in charge of buildings and grounds. Johnson, a 2001 Woodland Hills graduate, is the supervisor of custodial services. Bridge, a 1989 graduate, is the supervisor of maintenance and construction. Combined, they have over four decades of experience in the district.

"It's a huge benefit that we've been around and we're from the area and we not only know the buildings, we know the communities and the people in the communities," Johnson said. They had a to-do list ready to go and began working on it from the moment they landed their new gigs.

"We have a lot of things started," Bridge added. "So many sticks in the fire right now. The day goes by so quickly, you don't even notice you're working." Projects include renovations to the former Rankin Elementary building to transform it into a community center, air conditioning for Edgewood Elementary STEAM Academy, new rooftop HVAC units for Turtle Creek Elementary STEAM Academy and Wilkins Elementary STEAM Academy. Those projects are underway, but they will take time.

"We've had quite a few projects going on through the summer," Johnson said. "They're going to continue on, more than likely, for these next few years." Two projects that will be complete as students return to school are a new scoreboard at the Wolvarena and a new marquee outside of Woodland Hills High School. Several renovation projects of athletic facilities are also underway. Many of these projects will utilize local contractors and supply companies, as well as help the district provide resources to community organizations in need of facilities. "We really want to patronize people that have businesses in the district because they're paying district taxes," Bridge said.

"I think the biggest thing is, is we're not here just to clean we're not here just to repair or do preventive maintenance," Johnson said. "We're here to make a better environment for learning for our students, and for our community to be able to come in and say they're proud of the Woodland Hills School District."

